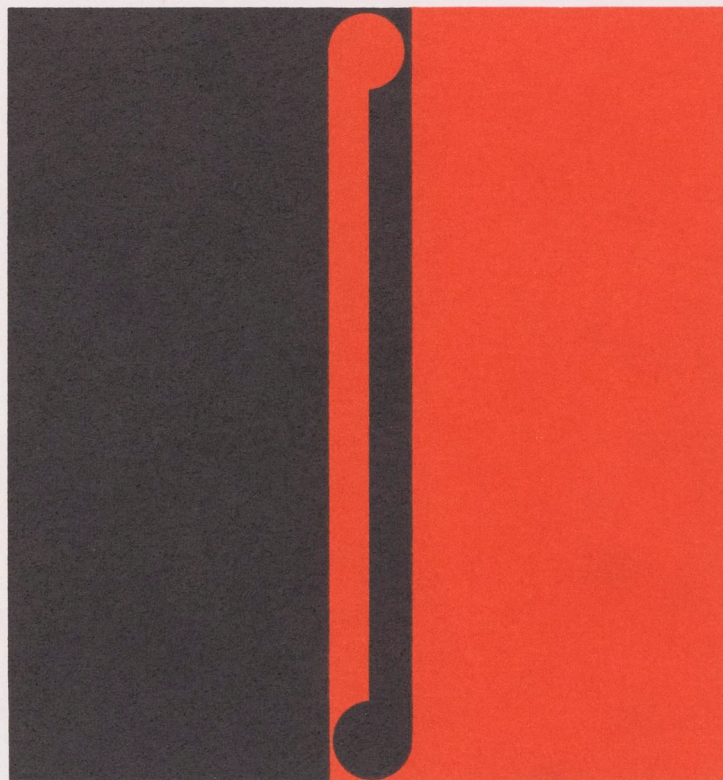
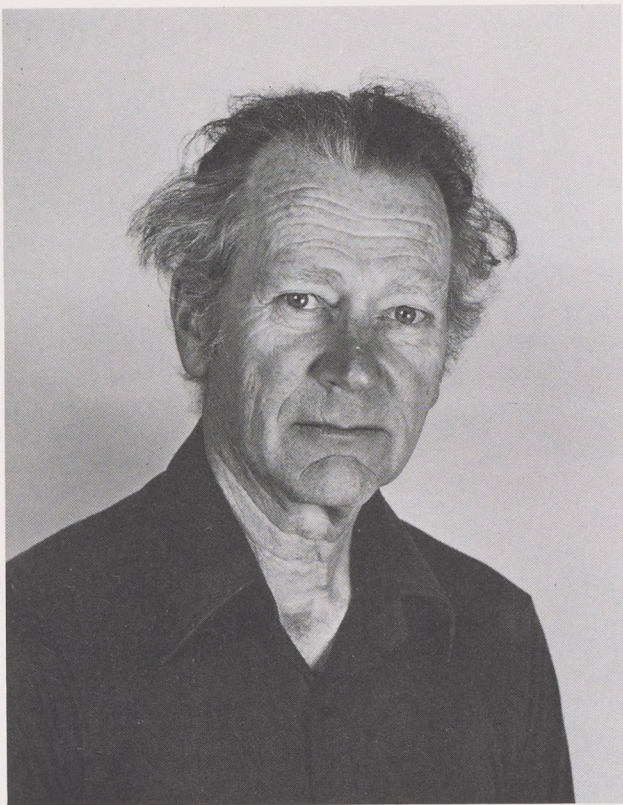


1983



Gordon Walters



Gordon Walters

photograph: Julian Bowron, 1983

Gordon Walters

by Michael Dunn

Auckland City Art Gallery

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Foreword

by T.L. Rodney Wilson, Director
Auckland City Art Gallery

Despite a career stretching back more than four decades and an astounding *oeuvre* developing from pioneer works of New Zealand abstraction to some of the most refined and considered painting to have been produced in this country, Gordon Walters has never previously received the attention of a large public exhibition. That has a great deal more to do with the fragility and vulnerability of Walters' painting than its quality, for few would challenge the exalted position he has come to hold in New Zealand contemporary art. This exhibition shows why he holds that position and allows us, for the first time, to follow the path he took in attaining it.

This exhibition will show in its entirety at the Auckland City Art Gallery and the National Art Gallery, Wellington. It will then be reduced to a substantial selection of the works on paper for a national tour, through the New Zealand Art Gallery Directors Council. This solution, a limited full exhibition and reduced touring component, has been forced upon us by the vulnerability of the paintings. They are so delicate, so easily marked, that any more lengthy tour could easily lead to damage, a possibility we were not prepared to consider.

That this important exhibition has finally happened is thanks to a large number of people. Of these, the artist, who has assisted in every possible way and whose patience and quiet congenial manner have been considerable factors in its smooth preparation, and the guest curator, Michael Dunn, first spring to mind. Michael is a good friend of the Gallery and a scholar as meticulous in his methodology as the painter he has researched is in his. And then there are so many others: Theo Schoon, a valued colleague of Walters during the early years, and Tim and Sherrah Francis, collectors of discernment and friends of the artist, for instance. And there are the owners. Without them there would obviously be no exhibition. Despite the fragility of the works they have each recognised the need for this show and have had the confidence to entrust their works to us. Thank you.

Finally I must thank the 'mechanics' of the show, the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council as sponsors, the New Zealand Art Gallery Directors Council as tour organisers, and the staff of the Auckland City Art Gallery who have assisted the curator, edited, designed and printed the catalogue, assembled, conserved and installed the works.

The Art of Gordon Walters

Introduction

by Michael Dunn

Gordon Walters is pre-eminently the painter of the *koru* series, a painting series of remarkable clarity, control and austerity. These paintings are based on a few formal elements, a band or stripe and the circle, either detached or as a termination to the band. By restricting himself to these elements, Walters reveals a part of his nature which prefers restraint to ostentation, economy to abundance and calculation to spontaneity. His search for simplicity of means links him to a long-standing tradition in the visual arts which includes painters as diverse as Mondrian and David each of whom has sought to purge his art of extraneous detail, of seductive colour and exuberant brushwork.

A painter of uncompromising honesty, Walters defines each individual part of his works with an absolute clarity, none having precedence over another. Unflinchingly his focus addresses the formal language of painting itself: surface, shape, tone and colour. Conscious of his European artistic background but also of his place in New Zealand, a country proud of its Polynesian heritage of visual art, Walters has drawn upon both European and indigenous sources in the evolution of his style. The *koru* series brings the European and Maori cultural traditions into a harmonic unity. A perfectionist in his art, Walters has achieved a distinctive personal style in his mature paintings, works of rare quality and integrity.

Beginnings

No prodigy, Walters did not arrive at his distinctive painting style quickly nor did he come to painting late in life. At the age of 16 he enrolled as a part-time student at Wellington School of Art where he learnt something of the technical side of painting and drawing. His student work, comprising still life, landscape and figure drawing, provided necessary skills but gave no indication of his future development. At this stage, he was avidly reading everything he could find about contemporary painting.

A decisive turning point came in 1941 when he met Theo Schoon, the Indonesian-born Dutch artist then living in Wellington as a result of the war. Schoon, who was conversant with modern European painting, taught Walters much about alternative approaches to art, and introduced him to photography. Responding to this stimulus, Walters began to explore new areas and worked intensively. Soon he dissociated himself from the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts where he had been exhibiting his painting.

After his discovery of Tanguy, Dali and other surrealist painters through magazines such as *Minotaure*, Walters made drawings and paintings in the early 1940s which were strongly influenced by their example. *Waikanae*



Landscape 1944-45 (cat. no. 1), an early conté drawing, evolved from material the artist had collected in drawings and photographs he had made in 1943 at Waikanae, where he found fresh subjects such as driftwood, boulders worn by the tide, sand dunes and dead trees. In this drawing, Walters deliberately introduced fanciful features such as the egg-like rock in the left-hand middle distance. But *Waikanae Landscape* already shows some stylistic characteristics found in the artist's later works. For instance, the drawing is monochrome, the forms of the trees are simplified and crisply defined; also, Walters emphasizes the layout of the shapes on the picture plane. Although he has created an illusionistic space, he counters recession by stressing the outlines around the trees and by flattening land and sky areas with large, simplified tonal areas.

With this drawing and his related works of 1944-45, Gordon Walters broke with the mainstream of New Zealand art. However, Surrealism was not an enduring influence except for the concept of probing the subconscious, of allowing intuition and chance to play their part in artistic creation. These ideas continued in his work for some time and were influential in his drawings of the mid-1940s.

As an aid to experimenting with ideas, he found pencil drawing a flexible medium. Quick and easy to use, pencil did not require lengthy preparation or an ongoing commitment for days or weeks; this was an important consideration when his art was a part-time occupation that had to be fitted into his spare hours after work. Pencil drawing also allowed him a free use of line, an element of spontaneity and experiment which he wanted in his work.

Klee's works, known through reproductions, encouraged him to make paintings based on ideas he had first explored with pencil; *Chrysanthemum* 1944 (cat. no. 2) is a fine example. Basing it only very loosely on the actual form and colour of the flower, Walters was able to develop his interest in line fully with little regard for naturalistic restrictions.

Chrysanthemum was painted with a remarkable degree of abstraction, given his preceding works and the conservative character of most New Zealand painting in the mid-1940s. Walters reduced the background to an almost flat expanse of blue and merely indicated a foreground at the lower right. The colours, pastel blue, yellow and white, were chosen, like the arrangement of lines that evoke the flower, purely for their formal qualities. Although the work appears spontaneous, Walters painted and repainted it many times to arrive at the final image.

During 1945 and 1946, he continued to make pencil studies, attempting to evolve designs from a basis of line and tone without knowing in advance what final form his work would take. In some instances, inspired by André Masson's sand paintings, intuition was uppermost; in others, the use of related shapes and kinds of lines was premeditated and conscious.

Early in 1946, taking his first opportunity to travel after the war, he made a short trip to Sydney with the intention of taking further art classes. Discouraged from this plan, he returned to Wellington with a supply of catalogues and magazines dealing with contemporary art. These resources helped direct his work during that year. Equally important was his introduction to the then almost unknown prehistoric rock art of the South Island.

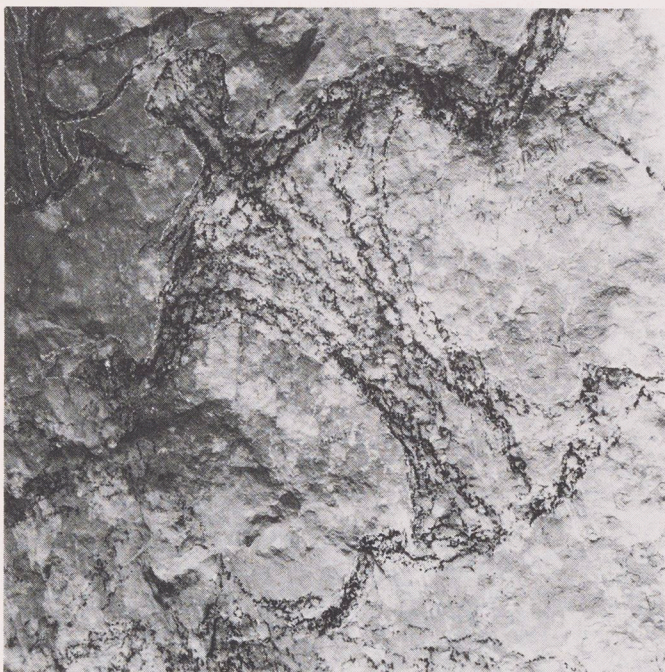
At this time Walters was becoming aware of the value of Maori art as the main indigenous heritage of New Zealand's painters. Among his teachers at the Wellington School of Art, Roland Hipkins was one who had encouraged a study of Maori design and had used it in his own work. Also, some artists and illustrators had looked for inspiration in the wood carving and craft of the Maori in museums throughout this country. In the 1940s, for example, the artist Russell Clark made paintings of the Maori and illustrated their myths and legends. In the process they studied Maori costume, craft, *moko* and wood carving.

But the approach of Russell Clark and his associates, such as E. Mervyn Taylor and George Woods, served an illustrative function. They depicted the *moko* and *taniko* patterns in an illusionistic style without any analysis of the formal basis of the works themselves. Ten years earlier the English painter Christopher Perkins had not succeeded in his attempt to assimilate the basic styles of Maori art into such experimental works as *Small Haka Party* (private collection).

Walters' interest in New Zealand's indigenous art began in the late 1930s when he studied works in the Dominion Museum which, in 1936, had been housed in a new building. Shortly afterwards he was able to look at reproductions of Negro sculpture in a book he had acquired; in particular, he made drawings of African carvings. Once he became aware of the art of Paul Klee, his appreciation of primitive art, especially pictographs, rapidly increased. He was aware, too, that the Surrealists, in their probing of the subconscious as a stimulus for art, had realised that in child art and in the work of primitive peoples there was a fertile source of inspiration. By 1946 Walters was ready to appreciate the qualities of New Zealand rock drawing.

Walters and Rock Art

In the winter of 1946, Gordon Walters made a trip from Wellington to South Canterbury to visit Theo Schoon. While at the Otago Museum, Schoon had seen crude copies of New Zealand rock drawings, the originals of which were located at South Canterbury and North Otago sites. Impressed by these drawings, so full of vigour and strength, Schoon determined to study the works at first hand. He immediately recognised their importance and also the urgent need for a comprehensive record of them before they suffered further damage from vandals and livestock. With the assistance of Roger Duff, the ethnologist at the Canterbury Museum, Schoon managed to persuade the Department of Internal Affairs to give him a small grant enabling him to make copies of each drawing. He was involved in this task when Walters stayed with him near the town of Pleasant Point.



Rock drawing figure,
South Canterbury
photograph: Michael Dunn

With Schoon as his enthusiastic guide, Walters visited shelters on the Opihi River and saw some of the major examples of rock art such as the taniwha frieze on Gould's farm. The timing of his visit could not have been better. He had just familiarized himself further with the work of Klee and Miró with the help of catalogues of their work which he had bought in Sydney. This assisted him in realising ways of using the rock-drawing style in his own (painting.)

The drawings he saw presented subjects such as anthropomorphic figures, birds and fish, and a range of geometric motifs that included spirals, chevrons and concentric circles. These drawings were made on limestone bluffs, often in recesses partly sheltered from the weather. In some cases drawings were located on large boulders detached from nearby bluffs. For Walters, the rock drawings displayed an almost revelatory economy of means; using only one tone of red or black, the artists had drawn directly on to the limestone surface without making corrections. These images have relied on their strength of design to stand up to such a difficult environment.

In the open air, in New Zealand's oldest art galleries, there was no scope for niceties of colour, subtle effects of brushwork or technical trickery. To Walters it seemed like a corrective to the debased aspects of the European tradition as he knew it from paintings in New Zealand's art gallery collections. Here indeed was the *tabula rasa*, painting freed from anything but the most essential ingredients — one tone on a rock surface. Imbued with the atmosphere of this strange landscape of rocks worn into fantastic shapes, Walters proceeded to make drawings, take photographs and re-think his approach to painting.

On his return to Wellington, Walters made pencil studies based on the stylistic example of rock art. Late in December, he again went to South Canterbury with a friend, Detje Andriessse. They made contact with Schoon at Raincliff, an important rock art location which is noted for groups of black figure drawings. Walters made further studies of the drawings and took photographs. Back in Wellington, he kept in touch with Schoon who lent him negatives of other designs as he recorded them. Accordingly, in addition to his first-hand experience of the rock art, he was able to build up a file of prints for later use. Photographs of this vintage are still in Walters' possession.

Two paintings of 1947, *New Zealand Landscape* (cat. no. 3) and *The Poet* (cat. no. 4) show influences from rock drawings merging with ideas derived from Paul Klee. *New Zealand Landscape*, for example, is composed of pictographic signs including recognisable ones derived from Maori art, such as the spiral and the chevron. Walters painted these on to a rather warm ground of ochre and orange, reminiscent of the limestone bluffs of South Canterbury. In this painting he eliminated naturalistic space completely, but in others of this series this is not the case.

In *New Zealand Landscape* each motif is free and is placed, according to the artist's wish, in any position on the picture surface. There is no obvious

hierarchy of motifs; none is more important than another, none more clearly defined or emphasized. Walters has come very close to an all-over treatment and simulates the apparently random positioning of rock art motifs on limestone cliffs. But the premeditated quality of the painting, and the care Walters took with producing the rich and subtle colours of the motifs and the ground they are painted on, recalls the sophisticated surfaces of Klee's art more than the brutal economy of rock drawing. *New Zealand Landscape* owes as much to European abstraction as to the specific influence of rock art.

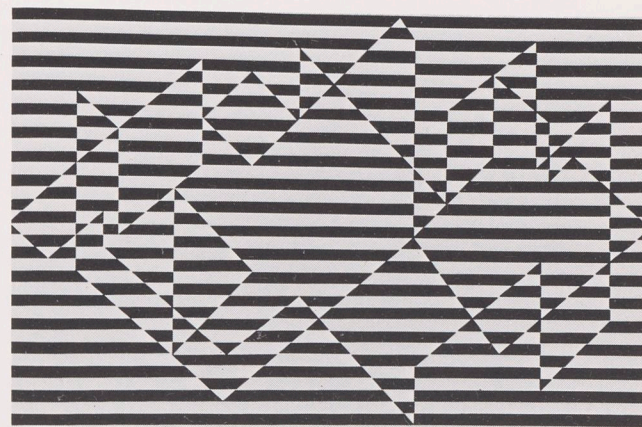
The Poet is an even more extreme statement, with a figure more austere in its execution than the coloured motifs of *New Zealand Landscape*. Walters drew the figure in pencil on a pale cream ground. In pose, *The Poet* echoes a typical rock art presentation of figures in which the legs are drawn up forming a 'W' shape; also, as with much of rock drawing, the body of the figure is shown front-on with legs and arms in profile. Of significance to the construction of this figure is the introduction of the ground into it by the use of openings between the bands of tone; this allows the bonding of figure and ground in a way comparable to that sometimes seen in rock drawings.

The Poet is an important work for a variety of reasons, not the least being its place as an early attempt by Walters at a fusion of indigenous and European sources. Its title, and the undulating Arp-like line representing the figure's inspiration, introduce connotations outside the realm of New Zealand's rock art. Although *The Poet* was reproduced in the 1947 *Year Book of the Arts in New Zealand*, it was placed next to the poetry section of the magazine, being chosen for its literary relevance rather than because of its significance as a work of art.

Development, 1948 – 1955

In December 1947, Walters returned to Australia; living in Sydney for a year, he made contact with a number of Australian painters of whom the most well known today is Charles Blackman. He expanded his knowledge of contemporary painting and, at the same time, studied primitive art, including Aboriginal bark paintings, in Australian museum collections. His works of this time remain figurative and are somewhat eclectic in style. He soon realized that to develop his art further he would have to travel to Europe.

In late February 1949, Walters returned to Wellington with plans to save enough money to travel and was able to sail to Britain in March 1950. Making London his base for the year, he made trips to Holland and France to study modern painting. In Paris, he saw exhibitions by French non-figurative painters such as Auguste Herbin and Victor Vasarely at the Denise René Gallery. In Amsterdam, he looked closely at paintings by such artists as Piet Mondrian and Theo van Doesburg whose works he had known previously only from small reproductions. He did not remain in Europe for long, however, and early in 1951 he returned to Australia where he settled in Melbourne.



Victor Vasarely *Lucon* 1956
oil on canvas
1298 x 1949

Walters gradually assimilated what he had seen in Europe, and by the following year he was painting small oils that were no longer abstracted from nature. *Untitled* (cat. no. 5) is one of these first non-figurative works built up in a constructivist fashion from formal elements of tone, shape and colour. Walters painted *Untitled* in intense, vibrant colour applied with distinct touches of the palette knife. This application creates a tactile surface quality and links process and image in a very clear way.

Divided down the centre into two halves, *Untitled* is animated by ambiguities between figure and ground; the left-hand yellow ground penetrates into the red on the right-hand side and vice versa. For the viewer, it is hard to decide whether one form overlaps another, passes behind it, or is perforated by it. In addition, while the vertical division sets up an expectation of symmetry, the imagery of the two halves is not the same and a final balance is achieved by compensation between slightly different shapes, colours and tones.

Painting no.2 1953 (cat. no. 6), completed after Walters returned to New Zealand that year, operates on a similar system.

When he departed from Melbourne in August 1953, Walters left much of his work behind with the intention of soon returning. Instead, he was to remain in New Zealand from that time onwards, based in Wellington where, in 1954, he obtained a congenial job in the Government Printing Office. During the period from 1953 to 1956, he worked extensively in gouache on paper, a technique he favoured because he could rapidly carry out and develop ideas for painting. In total he made some two hundred works during those years but did not exhibit them until 1974. In retrospect, this seems a puzzling decision but, at the time, Walters felt his work would not be appreciated and he saw little point in exhibiting to an unsympathetic audience. He frequently made one or more gouache studies per day, but later culled them, with the result that many no longer exist and few were recorded. *Untitled* in most cases, the surviving gouaches carry dates in the margins, sometimes accurate to the day when they were painted.

The gouache *Untitled* 1954 (cat. no. 7) indicates one direction in his work at this time. It is painted in a smooth technique with the imagery sharply defined and strongly coloured in green, yellow, red, blue and black without any use of white. This intensity of colour reflects, in particular, his study of the later paintings of Auguste Herbin as do the triangle, circle and square aligned along the top of the painting. Herbin deliberately restricted his late works to the basic geometric shapes which he viewed as a kind of pictorial alphabet-building-blocks for pictures. He combined hard-edge imagery with strong, unmodulated colour in a style unknown to New Zealand until Walters introduced it with these gouaches.

In the gouache *Untitled* 1954, Walters aligned his imagery on strict horizontal and vertical axes so that the shape of the paper and its flatness are stated emphatically. There is no illusionistic space; the work is animated by tonal contrasts, ambiguities between image and ground and by colour interaction.

Contrasting curved and straight lines, he repeated three times the same family shape, a long rectangle penetrated by a curving snake-like form. Like Herbin, Walters made a number of works based on the same formal language.

Composition 1954/55 (cat. no. 8) and *Untitled* March 1955 (cat. no. 10) are two works which use the same basic forms as *Untitled* 1954.

In addition to his gouaches, Walters made small oil paintings of compositions he had tested and resolved on paper. *Untitled* 1955 (cat. no. 11) is an oil on canvas work which is a good example of this period of his painting. He restricted himself to a few colours, white, black, red and grey, and arrived at the final positioning of the meandering line that passes through the picture from top to bottom by dropping a piece of string on to the surface and rearranging it until the desired effect was obtained. He positioned the rectangular shapes in the same way, using cut-out pieces of paper. The final relationships between the elements in the picture were arrived at intuitively, not by set rules. In this example, the images are cropped at the edges of the canvas so that the idea of continuation outside the picture area is implied. Technically, this work is painted with thick pigment, and brushstrokes are visible even though the areas of colour are flat and unmodulated. In this respect, the oils do not feel as sharp and flat as the gouaches.

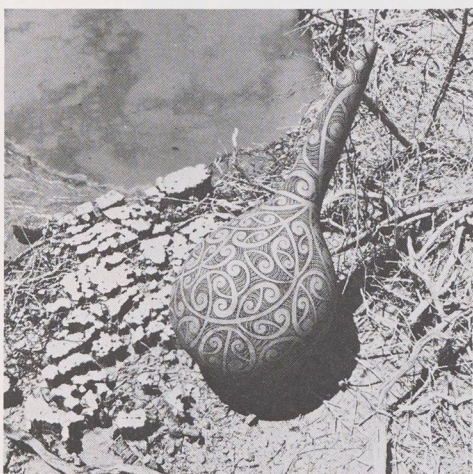
At this time, in addition to assimilating European source materials, Walters also experimented with disintegrating forms and rearranging them into new combinations. A significant influence in this direction were the drawings of a patient at a psychiatric hospital in Auckland. For a time, Schoon had a job as a domestic assistant at the hospital where he discovered the artistic ability of one of the patients. He encouraged the patient's talent by supplying him with paper and paint, an action viewed with dismay by the superintendent of the institution who dismissed Schoon as if he had committed an offence. Fortunately, before his dismissal, Schoon had compiled a collection of the man's drawings which Walters was able to see and copy. These drawings were basically linear and employed networks of coloured lines which entered the picture plane, overlapped and combined, and suggested ways of constructing images of formidable strength and simplicity.

While testing and discarding ideas at a furious pace, Walters started thinking again about using Pacific art sources for his work. Gouaches such as *Untitled* May 1955 (cat. no. 12) reflect a renewed study of rock drawing, in this case of Australian Aboriginal origin. More enduring, though, was his reconsideration of Maori rock drawing based not on a study of the originals but by reference to his photographic files.

The gouache *Untitled* 1955 (cat. no. 15) indicates the second phase of his response to New Zealand rock drawing. He used a modular shape, repeated, with variations, seven times, which was derived from stylized anthropomorphic figures drawn in South Canterbury rock art shelters. In some cases, the rock artists drew rows of such figures linked up like dancers in a chorus line. A photograph of such a group suggested to Walters the idea of constructing



Kowhaiwhai on porch rafters, Rangiaohia whare whakairo, Rangitikei marae, Matata
photography: Gordon Walter's, May 1973



Theo Schoon Gourd c.1962
gelatin silver
collection: Auckland City Art Gallery
presented by the artist, 1982

paintings based on the repetition of stylized figures. As in the rock art, each would be similar but no two identical. A further stylistic derivation in this and related works lies in the hollow central area shaped like a long rectangle: New Zealand rock drawings often have this feature which forms a central part of the figures' construction.

By making his figures more geometric than their models, Walters was able to re-work them into something individual. He also aligned his figures with the vertical edges of the picture, adding a horizontal band of colour at the top to stress the other axis of the paper. In doing so, he rejected the random positioning of the rock drawings on their background wall which had interested him in the 1940s. Also he chose to introduce strong colours not found in the plain black rock drawings. In this case he employed red, pale yellow, dark and light blue and brown, along with the white of the paper. Walters' interest in the work of painters such as Herbin is apparent in the way he consciously varied size, direction, colour and shape so as to animate a study built on the basis of a repeated motif.

Evolution of the *koru* paintings

Walters' greatest achievement as a painter is the *koru* series, named after the most familiar of Maori art motifs. The evolution of this series should not be seen as sudden or inevitable, even though, when Walters first showed a group of *koru* paintings at the New Vision Gallery in 1966, he had made sure that the works were fully resolved. But, prior to 1966, the artist had spent many years testing out ideas for the series.

1956 was the year when he first made serious studies using variations of the curving stem and bulb form of the *koru*. A few of these studies on paper survive; several are in black ink, others in ink and gouache. They are small works painted entirely freehand with clear signs of their manufacture. *Study* 1956 (cat. no. 20), is painted in traditional Maori colours, red ochre, black and white. In this instance, Walters organised his motifs across the page in lines, rather like type, reading from left to right. Instead of being contained by the page, however, the motifs are cropped at both sides so that there is the suggestion of movement and extension beyond the painted area. Unlike Maori usage of the *koru* in *kowhaiwhai* for rafter painting or carving on to gourds, Walters has left a black area in the lower part of the drawing, contrasting busy area with quiet area. There is a sense of top and bottom to the design, helped by the straightening out of the *koru* stems so that they approximate horizontal bands. In addition, Walters painted circles between some of the *koru* motifs, placing them on the same horizontal axis. In this example, there is only a positive presentation of the *koru* motifs; the negative is restricted to a reading of a white rectangle placed above the black one in the lower part of the drawing.

Untitled 1956 (cat. no. 18) is, by comparison, a more developed work. Here the artist arranged the *koru* motifs along horizontal bands of black. He retained the curving stems and bulb terminations of Maori art, but varied the

imagery by painting some motifs in white, others in black. He experimented with figure/ground ambiguities so that, while his starting point was the *koru*, his final imagery was becoming distinctive in appearance.

The ink study *Ranui* (cat. no. 21) is a more severe image and goes further than either *Study* or *Untitled*, also of 1956. In this work Walters made a number of important changes: firstly there is the limitation to black and white, and secondly the close relationship between the imagery in black and in white. In Maori art the *koru* is always the positive image, the background being secondary in importance and different in appearance. By dovetailing the two, Walters made positive and negative motifs of almost equal importance and the change-over from one to the other and back again becomes irresistible. This makes looking at *Ranui* an exacting yet rewarding experience.

In *Ranui* Walters arranged the black motifs so that their bulb terminations line up vertically on each side of the drawing. Contrasting with this, he designed the white ones so that they lead the eye into the picture space to points that he deliberately made irregular and unpredictable. A further element of variation is provided by the one triangular shape introduced in the lower part of the drawing; this was a motif he later felt was unnecessary in the *koru* works and discarded.

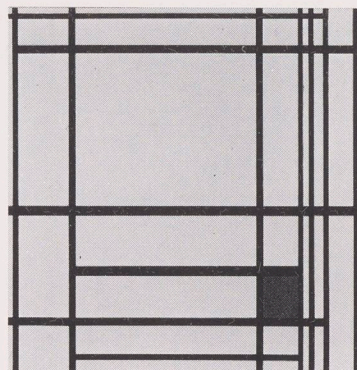
Ranui requires a good deal of the viewer if it is to be understood fully. This is no longer an image of direct and simple accessibility; it has to be read slowly in a number of ways, line by line, from side to side and up and down. Walters has made the relationships between the restricted number of forms the central core of his work. With *Ranui*, Walters knew he had achieved something distinctive.

In choosing to restrict himself to such a narrow range of elements, Walters was aware of the precedent in contemporary European art as well as in Maori and Melanesian sources. About this time, he bought a small book on the Italian painter Capogrossi whose paintings he had seen reproduced in magazines. This book was not readily available in New Zealand so he ordered it from Europe. Late in his career, Capogrossi began a series of paintings titled by number in sequence of execution, *Superficie* 1, etc. These paintings, none of which Walters saw in the original, were based on variations of a few shapes, mainly a variation of the Marquesan claw-like form. By using interchange between positive and negative aspects of these shapes and by varying size, tone and colour, Capogrossi evolved a series of impressive works whose quality gained him a European reputation. Like Walters, Capogrossi had studied primitive art and used it as a basis for his own works. Direct reflections of his painting can be traced in some of Walters' gouaches, such as *Untitled* June 1957 (cat. no. 25).

Walters also admired the paintings of Mondrian, especially those limited to vertical and horizontal divisions of the picture plane by bands of black. Accordingly, the idea of committing himself to painting a series of works, each



Giuseppe Capogrossi *Section 4* 1953
oil on canvas 2181 x 981 mm
collection: Museum of Modern Art, New York
Blanchette Rockefeller Fund



Piet Mondrian *Composition with Blue* 1937
oil on canvas 880 x 770 mm
collection: Haags Gemeentemuseum

using the same vocabulary of formal elements, had a very good precedent in modern European art.

In 1956 the groundwork for the *koru* series was laid but there was still much to do before attempting full-sized paintings. Drawings were small and relatively quick to do, especially at this stage when he made them freehand. To make paintings from these would require solving problems of scale, of materials and of technique. What scale would be best, what kind of paint surface most suitable? In trying to find answers to these questions, Walters was handicapped by the demands of his job in that he had only weekends and evenings to grapple with these issues.

He was used to making rapid studies in ink on paper that were carried out in his spare time. Now, by turning to gouache, he could incorporate colour and enlarge his brush studies, making paintings rather than drawings. He had decided that these works must be painted in a technique which allowed a flat paint surface and a minimum of gestural disturbance to the shapes. Gouache suited these requirements reasonably well.

During the years 1960-1963, Walters painted a number of major colour studies for the later *koru* paintings. These works, a few of which survive, were one quarter of the size that he later settled on for the first paintings. He found that the size and positioning of elements became critically important for maintaining surface tension and cohesion. *Study for no. 2* 1960 (cat. no. 29) is typical of his work at this time. Compared with *Ranui* 1956 (cat. no. 21), the painting of bands and terminations is more controlled, with a less organic feel to the motifs. In *Study for no. 2* Walters still painted the bands freehand, but they are much straighter and more mechanical than those in *Ranui*. Also the bulb terminations are very close to the precise circular shape they acquire in the first paintings. He applied the red, black and blue colours with minimal disturbance of the paint surface.

To help arrive at the precise relationships he wanted, Walters turned to papier collé. By cutting out motifs in paper, he could change their relationships and arrive at the visual fine-tuning he needed for his new works. There are works of the 1959-1962 period entirely carried out in this technique, such as *Papier collé* 1962 (cat. no. 28). But for the gouaches, he could determine the position of circles and terminations of bands by cutting out the shapes in paper and adjusting their relative positions on the page until the desired relationship was achieved.

In 1964, Walters painted *Te Whiti* (cat. no. 30), the first *koru* painting. He chose hardboard for his support, used alkyd enamel as his medium and introduced a new style to New Zealand painting when he exhibited the work at the Hay's Prize Competition, Christchurch, in 1966. To achieve the precision he wanted in the final painting, Walters used compass and ruler to draw the bands and terminations. By doing so, he made the imagery more geometric and removed his style further from its model in Maori art. The imagery is

hard-edge, even in focus, and deliberately impersonal in execution.

In *Te Whiti*, as in his earlier drawing, *Ranui*, Walters contrasted vertical rows of black motifs at the sides of the painting with white ones, including circles, placed irregularly down its centre. In this way, his play on contrasts, black with white, curved with straight, is carried into the structure of the work itself. Furthermore, the whole work is tightened up; compared with *Ranui*, the number of bands is reduced and the size of each band is proportionately larger. In the upper left corner of *Te Whiti* Walters introduced two black circles to induce a directional movement for the eye and to provide a starting point, or way in, to the work.

The following year, 1965, he began a series of works using the same formal elements. He was invited to exhibit his paintings at the New Vision Gallery then about to open in Auckland. The owner, Kees Hos, was a friend of Theo Schoon who introduced him to Walters. It would be his first one-man show since 1949. For the 1965 series, starting with *Painting no. 1* 1965 (cat. no. 33), Walters continued to use hardboard as a support, even though there were problems with it. He began using PVA paints, then becoming available in New Zealand, because they enabled him to achieve a more uniform paint surface.

The New Vision exhibition held in March 1966 was a manifesto; for the first time in contemporary New Zealand art a group of paintings were shown that were built on the basis of a few shared formal elements. In this exhibition Walters showed the range of imagery and effects he could generate from his deliberately restricted range of motifs and austere style. Some paintings, such as *Painting no. 1*, were restricted to black and white; others, such as *Painting no. 7*, 1965 (cat. no. 31) were executed in strong colours: blue, red, black and white. In addition, Walters varied the size of bands, terminations and circles. *Painting no. 1* has narrow bands and black/white contrasts which produce harsh optical effects such as after-images, auras and perceptual colour effects. By contrast, *Painting no. 8* 1965 (private collection) has broad bands and terminations, a large expanse of black and almost no trace of optical shimmer.

Although it was far from a commercial success, the New Vision show of March 1966 was an artistic triumph and vindication of the long years of preparation that went into its creation. Walters emerged, apparently overnight, as a mature painter with an identifiable personal style, something very hard to achieve in the area of non-figurative art.

By 1968, when Walters exhibited again in a one-man show at the New Vision Gallery, his work was selling slowly through a number of outlets, including the new Peter McLeavey Gallery in Wellington. In time, McLeavey became the main dealer in the art of Walters and an enthusiastic promoter of his paintings. Between 1965 and 1968 a number of changes took place in Walters' presentation of the *koru* paintings, the most important being the change of the support from hardboard to canvas. He had found that hardboard tended to work against his desire for a neutral surface. Canvas provided a more

sympathetic surface than hardboard because of its texture, which served to soften the image.

In works such as *Painting no. 2* 1966 (cat. no. 38), for example, the large black area appears to have surface modulation in places, caused by an uneven degree of paint density. Brushmarks are visible despite his attempts to eliminate them. Another problem with the hardboard surface proved to be its vulnerability to surface damage, scratching and indentation being easy to cause but difficult to remedy.

By using canvas with PVA paint, he was able to achieve an even paint surface and close bond between image and support because the paint was absorbed into the canvas to some extent. This technical change did not of itself improve the paintings, but it did allow them to be realised more successfully. At this time, in works such as *Tahi* 1967 (cat. no. 39) he increased the size of his larger paintings to 60 inches, a size that allowed a more direct physical impact on the spectator. Paintings of this size approximate human scale when placed on the wall so that the viewer does not look into the work but at it.

Tahi shows a new assertive use of colour. Painted in yellow and black, *Tahi* retains the strong tonal contrast of the black and white paintings so that there is no loss in visual impact. In fact, Walters allows the colour to register forcibly as a powerful physical identity, undiluted in any way. Colour of such raw intensity had little precedent in New Zealand art. However, there was considerable variation in the way Walters used colour in the late 1960s.

Tamatea 1968 (cat. no. 42) is painted in lime green and blue, but neither colour is as intense as the yellow of *Tahi*. Here Walters was using colour to compensate for a reduced tonal contrast between positive and negative. Because there is a certain amount of optical colour interaction forming perceptual auras of coloured light around the termination of bands and circles the picture is visually animated. In *Tamatea*, colour extends the optical effects Walters had achieved with black and white paintings of 1965, such as *Painting No. 1. Makaro* of 1969 (cat. no. 43) in pale purple/grey is, however, much gentler in effect, subdued and almost elusive. Here the tonal distinction between one colour and the other is minimal, and colour alone helps to articulate the surface.

During the years 1965 to 1970, most of Walters' output consisted mainly of *koru* paintings and drawings. However, he did not dispense entirely with alternative ideas. In 1970, for example, he painted several works, such as *Black and Red* (cat. no. 44) and *Hautana* (cat. no. 45) based on a severely stylized use of a traditional Maori carving pattern. Not as distinctive as the *koru* paintings, these paintings depended on symmetry and repetition of elements for their effect. Because the positive and negative aspects are distinct in these paintings, there was less leeway to animate the painting by interchange between them. Comparatively, these works are more stable and easier to understand.

At this period, too, Walters completed a large grid painting, *Black/White* (private collection) which was based on a Polynesian lashing pattern. It echoes the optical art of Bridget Riley in its emphatic repetition of geometric elements and simulated effects of recession and spatial warping. He was certainly aware of European op art, some examples of which were exhibited in New Zealand. However, the visual trickery of op art did not have an enduring attraction for him, even though he did at this time respond to the movement in the way he exploited the optical potential of his *koru* imagery.

By 1970, Walters was already concerned that he might be repeating himself by working so much with the *koru* motif. He applied rigorous standards to each new painting and was draconian in the rejection of paintings that did not seem to be good enough. Often he could not decide on the success or failure of a work until he had painted it on the full-sized canvas. Considering the time and labour involved in creating works of this type, his self-criticism required great strength of character. Despite his moments of doubt and self-questioning, he knew that the *koru* series was his most personal and important achievement. He continued to focus his energies upon it throughout the next decade.

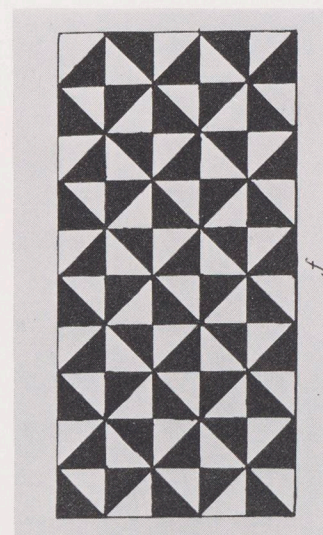
Important at this time is the *Genealogy* group of paintings, the first of which was painted in November 1969. In these paintings, the *koru* motif is arranged in a highly regular and repetitious fashion. Walters stacked the elements in *Genealogy I* November 1969 (cat. no. 49) on vertical/horizontal axes. In this kind of work, the number of change-overs from black to white and back again is frequent, happening line after line. The insistent repetition produces intense dazzle effects, especially where the white, circular terminations almost meet.

It is difficult for the viewer to ignore the imagined perceptual space which is created by the white motifs, seemingly hovering in front of black ones. Only at the bottom right hand of the painting is the repetition pattern broken — one white band has no termination. The black stops near half-way and is followed by a black circle, an emphatic visual full stop. *Genealogy IV* (cat. no. 51) is built from the same basis and is also in black and white. In one of these paintings Walters used a very narrow horizontal format, so that the motifs are repeated sideways across the surface instead of up and down. Walters also used colour in some of the series.

In 1974 and 1975 Walters painted a number of untitled works limited to shades of grey and white and constructed on the basis of rectangular divisions of the picture surface. *Painting* 1974 (cat. no. 59) is representative of these works. Although painted with great control and calculation, these paintings proved to be a short-lived departure from the *koru* series. They explored an impersonal style comparable to that achieved by other artists, most notably the American John McLaughlin. In character, they indicated a search for restraint and stability of the picture surface. Untroubled by abrupt changes of tone or form, these paintings reflected the origins of Walters' art in the European constructivist tradition, especially the work of Mondrian. In retrospect, they



Gordon Walters *Black/White* 1969
acrylic and PVA on canvas
1524 x 1524 mm
private collection, Auckland
photograph: Gordon Walters



Ruth Greiner *Drawing of a Samoan tapa design of all-over triangles* c.1920
collection: Bernice P. Bishop Museum, Honolulu

form a classic phase of Walters' art with considerable importance for the later *koru* paintings.

During 1976 Walters shifted to Christchurch, a move which isolated him to a great extent from the Auckland painters such as Killeen, Scott and Mrkusich, with whom he had had regular contact. He continued with the *koru* series in works which show some changes of style and attitude. Among them are several re-workings of early designs. *Karakia* 1977 (cat. no. 61), for example, is a new painting based on a study done in 1965. In this forceful work the eye is made to shift from the extreme left to the extreme right of the picture surface.

On the left-hand side black is the positive; on the right, white is the positive. Apart from the technical change between 1965 and 1977, there is a definite move towards a more stable imagery. Instead of a vigorous interchange between black and white, as happens with *Painting no. 1* (cat. no. 33), the gap between left and right, black and white, requires two movements of the eye. We scan the work from right to left or vice versa, but have time to register the positive/negative change-over along the way. As a result, the imagery, while still visually powerful, appears more stable. An additional reason for this is that the circular forms are now much closer together. Walters has made the gaps between them very much smaller than they are in the paintings of 1965, where the motifs are freer and more easily dislodged from their position. Even in paintings of 1970 such as *Rongotai* (cat. no. 52), where the circular forms are arranged one above the other, there is not the uniform tautness of *Karakia*.

The *Painting no. 9, 1965: revised version* 1981 (cat. no. 65) also shows this stylistic change. Here Walters has reversed the original black and white composition and made the painting larger. Each element is made proportionately a little bigger and brought closer together, a change which largely eliminates the considerable optical effects generated by the original. The original black and white contrast has been altered to grey and white and the reduced tonal range has helped to stabilize the imagery and prevent the dazzle effects of the original picture. Undoubtedly it gives a subtle harmonic unity to the painting as compared with the early *koru* works where contrast was of paramount concern. In the process the new version gains a beauty of tonal pitch and a unity of appearance which make it unlike the early works of the series.

Maheno 1981 (cat. no. 66) is an important example of the later style of Gordon Walters. Based on a subtle harmony between dark grey and white, *Maheno* is restrained and understated. Walters has calculated the position of each motif to the finest of tolerances so that the interplay between grey and white is not harsh or aggressive. Instead, the assurance of handling and the sheer technical quality of *Maheno* set it apart from the first pictures of the series. This work proves, without a doubt, that Walters has not been content to repeat himself but has refined and enriched his distinctive visual language. His paintings rank among the finest achievements in modern New Zealand art.

Walters' Prints

In the art of Gordon Walters there is to a large extent a separation between the creative process of arriving at an image and its final realization. Because the painting process is reduced to an almost impersonal application of pigment, there is no reason why this task could not be carried out by a technician under Walters' supervision. Indeed, a number of painters whose work had a formative influence on his art, such as Vasarely, have employed assistants for this purpose. But Walters has resisted this apparently logical step, in part because he maintains a personal involvement and control over each image by producing it himself. His self-critical faculty remains active until the final brushstroke.

However, in the past decade, Walters has turned increasingly to print-making as a means of producing limited editions of his imagery for an audience unable to afford his paintings. In the process, he has depended on the skills of a silk-screen printer to realize his designs. Walters produces the original design and specifications, but does not make the screens or print the editions. This task has been carried out, in most cases, by Mervyn Williams, an Auckland artist and printmaker. Before signing an edition the artist has to check that each print measures up to his exacting standards.

Undoubtedly the nature of Walters' art lends itself extremely well to the silk-screen process. Few colours are involved, the imagery is clearly defined and the neutral application of ink is in keeping with Walters' own style. His work loses less than most by interpretation in this way. Furthermore, his knowledge of papers, inks and the process of reproduction enables him to liaise well with his printer. The outcome has been a series of outstanding prints which add a dimension to his total production as an artist and introduces his imagery to a wider audience.

The first Walters print is *Tawa* (cat. no. 69), commissioned by Barry Lett Galleries for publication as one of a set of multiples in 1968. *Tawa* was printed on cheap paper in an unnumbered edition and was not signed by the artist. In 1972 Walters was commissioned to do two further prints for the Zonta Club of Wellington. The larger of these, *Amoka* (cat. no. 70), printed in blue and white, was in a very small edition of twenty-five. It is the rarest of Walters' prints and the largest image. The red and black *Maho* (cat. no. 71), by contrast, is much smaller and was printed in an edition of fifty. The Zonta prints were deliberately contrasted in size, colour and imagery. Both prints employ the *koru* motif, but *Maho* is extremely austere, limited to two *koru* bands and terminations which run vertically through the centre of the paper. *Amoka*, vertical in format, has numerous horizontal bands with terminations and circles placed above a blue rectangular base.

It was not until 1977 that Walters returned to printmaking. Invited by the Print Club of Auckland to design an image, he supplied *Tama* (cat. no. 72), a black and off-white *koru* work in his mature style. Compared with *Tawa* 1968 (cat.

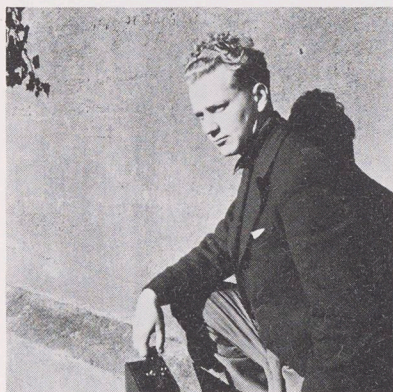
no. 69), the *koru* motifs are proportionately larger, the spaces between terminations and circles much reduced and the whole image tauter and more resolved. From that year on, he has issued prints on a regular basis, one a year in 1978, 1979 and 1980.

In 1982, two new prints, *Arahura* and *Kura*, were issued, both in large editions. *Arahura* (cat. no. 76) was published by the Print Club, but *Kura* (cat. no. 77) was issued by the Landfall Press. The surprising demand for Walters' prints encouraged him to devote more time to this aspect of his production.

With one exception, the prints have featured the *koru* motif. The exception is *Then* 1980 (cat. no. 75), issued in an edition of one hundred and twenty-five. This work, based on a gouache of 1955, introduced the stylized figure motif originally based on rock drawing imagery and used by the artist in recent paintings of the *Parade* series. *Then* points to a widening of the range of ideas available to Walters as a printmaker and indicates the increasing importance of prints in his artistic output.

Chronology

- 1919 September 24, Gordon Frederick Walters born in Wellington; son of Henry Frederick and Ethel Constance Walters. His father was employed by a tailor.
- 1931-1935 Attended Rongotai College. Art was not included in the school's curriculum.
- 1935 October, worked as a trainee commercial artist. Began part-time study at the Art Department, Wellington Technical College. His teachers were F. V. Ellis, Roland Hipkins and T. A. McCormack.
- 1936-1939 Employed as a commercial artist. Part-time studies continue at Technical College. Became familiar with recent art publications, including Herbert Read's *Art Now* and Roger Fry's *Vision and Design*. Interested in developments in contemporary art. Discovered, via book on Negro sculpture, his interest in ethnic art. Studied examples of non-Western art, and Oceanic art in particular, at the Dominion Museum.
- 1940 Exhibited at New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts. Having been rejected for military duties, worked as an illustrator and layout artist for Ministry of Supply.
- 1941 Married Pamela Alexander; separated later that year. Learnt of the Bauhaus through a Museum of Modern Art, New York, catalogue.



Gordon Walters, Wellington, 1944
 photograph: Theo Schoon

July/August, met Theo Schoon, Indonesian-born Dutch artist. Began photography.

- 1942-1944 Studied with Schoon and continued part-time at the Technical College. Began drawing and painting trees, rocks, hills and driftwood. Influenced by Surrealism via reproduction of art works in magazines such as *Minotaure*. Exhibited work at French Maid coffee shop, Wellington, which had become a popular meeting place for artists.
- 1945 Taught art part time at the Wellington Technical College. Began his first abstract works based on his awareness of Klee, Miró, Arp and ethnic art.
- 1946 In January, travelled to Australia; lived in Sydney and visited Melbourne. In April, returned to Wellington; his paintings became increasingly abstract. July/August, visited Theo Schoon, who was recording Maori rock art in South Canterbury. Visited rock art sites along the Opihi River near Pleasant Point. Late December, returned to South Canterbury with Detje Andriesse.
- 1947 Early in January, visited Theo Schoon near Raincliff. Returned to Wellington where he painted *The Poet* and exhibited work at the French Maid coffee shop in July/August. In December, travelled to Sydney.
- 1948 In Sydney for the year. Studied copies of the magazine *Cahiers d'Art* at the State Library. Made friends with several Australian artists, including Charles Blackman.
- 1949 Late in February, returned to Wellington with the intention of saving money for a European trip. Exhibited paintings at the Wellington Public Library which were received with indifference.
- 1950 On March 3, departed by ship for London. Apart from short trips to Paris and Amsterdam, spent the year in London. In Paris, visited the Denise René Gallery where he was impressed by the paintings of Vasarely and Herbin. Also saw works by Mondrian, Pollock and Klee, and an exhibition by Morandi in London.
- 1951 Early in the year, returned to Australia and settled in Melbourne. During July, made a brief visit to Wellington to see his parents.
- 1952 While living in Melbourne, painted his first non-figurative works based, in part, on the example of Vasarely. After a period of experiment, settled into what he has described as "a more geometric style".
- 1953 In August, travelled to Auckland, renewing contact with Theo Schoon. Had intended returning to Melbourne, having left paintings there (now lost). Instead, decided to remain in New Zealand and, at Christmas time, shifted back to Wellington.

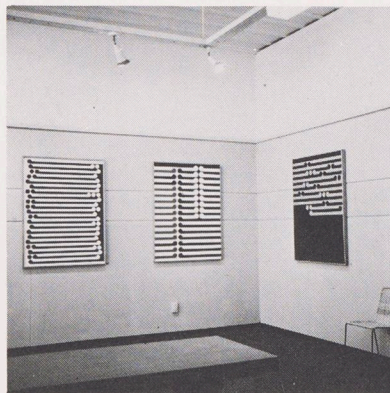
- 1954 Stayed in Wellington for three or four months and then returned to Auckland for six months. The offer of employment at the Government Printing Office required him to return again to Wellington. In his spare time, painted gouaches and small oils based on ideas stimulated by his experience of European non-figurative art and South Canterbury rock drawings, of which he had Schoon's photographs. The magazine *Art d'Aujourd'hui* helped to keep him in touch with contemporary European art developments.
- 1955 John Zambelis, Greek painter then living in Wellington, saw his works on a regular basis. Between 1953 and 1956, travelled to Auckland regularly in order to keep in touch with friends and artists, including Schoon. Schoon was then directing his attention to Maori crafts, especially *moko* (tattoo) and *kowhaiwhai* (rafter painting). Had regular contact with Denis Knight Turner, Peter Webb and Ross Fraser.
- 1956 Made his first studies using the *koru* motif. Following the example of Capogrossi and Vasarely, tried to evolve an artistic language based on the relationship between a few formal elements.
- 1957-1958 Continued experiments using *kowhaiwhai* and *moko* patterns as starting points for drawings. Discontinued the use of gouache and turned to pencil studies and brush drawings. Showed his works to Schoon and other friends, including the artist Ross Crothall.
- 1958-1959 Evolved his own version of the *koru* motif. Straightened out the curving stem and changed the bulb to a circle. In addition to the black and white drawings, made coloured studies on paper. These studies formed the basis of later paintings made in the 1960s.
- 1960-1963 Continued studies on paper and began using PVA and acrylic media for the first time. Made larger works using his studies. Problems of proportion and paint surface persisted. Made papier collé works.
- 1963 May 14, married Margaret Orbell. Address: Tinakori Road, Wellington.
- 1964 Painted several versions of *Te Whiti*, the first mature painting using his personal re-working of the *koru* motif.
- 1965 Painted first series of *koru* paintings in PVA on hardboard. Moved to Rutland Flats, Brougham Street, and established a studio.
- 1966 Exhibited *Te Whiti* in the Hay's Prize Competition, Christchurch. In March, exhibited paintings and drawings at the New Vision Gallery, Auckland. Began painting full time.



Studio, Tinakori Road, Wellington 1963
photograph: Gordon Walters



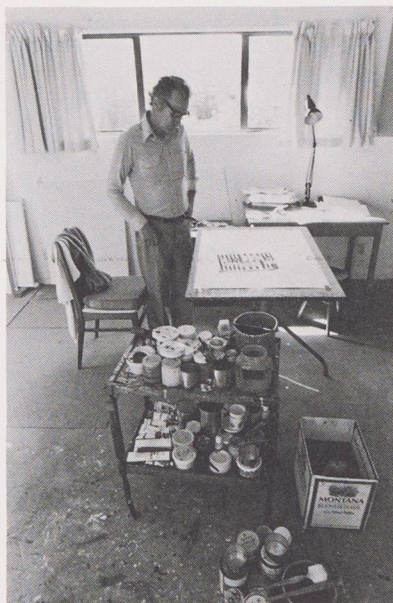
Walters working on *Painting no. 9* 1965
at his Brougham Street studio
photograph: Margaret Orbell



Installation view, New Vision Gallery exhibition 1966
Left hand side: *Black on white* 1965 (cat. no. 32)
photograph: Gordon Walters



Installation view, New Vision Gallery exhibition 1968
Left hand side: *Kahukura* 1968 (cat. no. 41)
photograph: Gordon Walters



Gordon Walters in his studio
photograph: Julian Bowron, 1983

- 1967 Awarded second prize in the Manawatu Competition for Contemporary Art, Palmerston North.
- 1968 Held second exhibition at New Vision Gallery, Auckland. Visited Melbourne to see exhibition of Australian art *The Field*. Began freelance work for School Publications Department.
- 1969 In May, exhibited paintings at Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington. Daughter Anna born.
- 1970 *Blue and Yellow* (private collection) exhibited at Expo Arts of Mankind, Osaka, Japan.
- 1971 Moved to Auckland. Address: 122 Selwyn Avenue, Mission Bay. Awarded Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council Fellowship.
- 1972 Appointed Visiting Lecturer in Painting, Elam School of Art, Auckland. Worked on prints commissioned for Zonta Club exhibition in Wellington.
- 1973 Shifted to 34 Parkhill Road, Glenfield, Auckland. Began several reductive paintings limited to black/white/grey scale.
- 1974 Exhibited gouaches at Auckland and Wellington. Included in group shows at Petar/James Gallery, Auckland.
- 1975 Visited Melbourne and Sydney. In Melbourne, saw the *Modern Masters* exhibition.
- 1976 Moved to Christchurch with temporary address in Konini Road, Riccarton. His wife, Margaret Orbell, appointed Lecturer in Maori, University of Canterbury. In January, son David was born.
- 1977 Built house with studio space at 21A Camrose Place, Ilam, Christchurch. Became interested in printmaking.
- 1978 Awarded grant of \$3000 by the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand.
- 1979 In August, visited Australia to view Bridget Riley *Retrospective* exhibition. In October, visited New York to see contemporary developments in American painting. Stayed with Tim and Sherrah Francis.
- 1980 Exhibited recent paintings at Peter McLeavey Gallery.
- 1981 Worked on prints published by the Print Club.
- 1982 During May, travelled to Sydney to see the Beinnale: *Vision in Disbelief*.

Exhibition History: one-man shows

- 1941/1942 Wellington French Maid coffee shop, December/January
- 1944 Wellington French Maid coffee shop
- 1947 Wellington French Maid coffee shop, July/August
- 1949 Wellington Public Library, November
- 1966 Auckland New Vision Gallery, March 7 – 12
Reviews: *New Zealand Herald*, 5.3.66, 11.3.66
Auckland Star, 9.3.66
- 1968 Auckland New Vision Gallery, May 27 – June 8
Review: *Auckland Star*, 30.5.68
- 1969 Wellington Peter McLeavey Gallery, May 6 – 20
Reviews: *The Dominion*, 6.5.69, 14.5.69
Evening Post, 26.6.69
- 1971 Wellington Peter McLeavey Gallery, August 16 – 31
Review: *Evening Post*, 21.8.71
- Wellington University Library, September 6 – 26
- 1972 Auckland New Vision Gallery, May 8 – 19
Reviews: *Auckland Star*, 13.5.72
- 1974 Auckland Petar/James Gallery, September 4 – 20
Reviews: *Auckland Star*, 7.9.74
New Zealand Herald, 8.9.74
The Sunday Herald, 15.9.74
- Wellington Peter McLeavey Gallery, October 15 – November 1
Review: *The Sunday Herald*, 27.10.74
- 1976 Wellington Peter McLeavey Gallery, April 27 – May 14
Reviews: *Evening Post*, 24.4.78
Salient, 17.5.76

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| 1978 | Auckland | Peter Webb Galleries, April 1 – 14
Reviews: <i>New Zealand Herald</i> , 12.4.78
<i>Auckland Star</i> , 13.4.78
<i>New Zealand Listener</i> , 23.5.78 |
| | Wellington | Peter McLeavey Gallery, July 25 – August 12
Review: <i>Evening Post</i> , 5.8.78 |
| 1980 | Wellington | Peter McLeavey Gallery, July 1 – 18
Review: <i>The Dominion</i> , 4.7.80 |
| 1981 | Wellington | Peter McLeavey Gallery, November 10 – 27
Reviews: <i>The Dominion</i> , 26.11.81
<i>Evening Post</i> , 26.11.81 |

Catalogue of the Exhibition

Notes

All measurements are in millimetres, height before width.

Unless acknowledged otherwise the works in this exhibition are uninscribed and belong to the artist's collection.

Quoted statements in the catalogue were contributed by the artist in November 1982.

1 *Waikanae landscape* 1944/1945

black conté on paper
560 x 381

inscribed in ink, verso, *Gordon Walters* 1944

collection Mr G. H. Brown, Auckland

exhibited Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North,
Gordon H. Brown's Collection,
June 27 – August 9, 1981, cat. no. 44
Waikanui Landscape (sic)

references *Bulletin of New Zealand Art History*,
no. 8, p. 5

Art New Zealand, no. 9, 1978, p. 59

notes One of a series of conté drawings made in
1944 – 1945, based on sketches and
photographs made at Waikanae. A study for
this work, dated 1944, is in the artist's
collection.

2 *Chrysanthemum* 1944

oil on cardboard
647 x 522

inscribed in pencil, verso, *Gordon Walters*, 1944

reference *Islands*, no. 10, 1974, p. 374 illus.

notes "When I painted *Chrysanthemum* . . . I was
struggling to develop a more personal
direction in my work than the highly
finished realism which had occupied
me for the previous three years. It made
a break with my earlier work as a student,
and reached out towards current concerns in
painting. Its debt to Klee is obvious, and
needs no apology. At this time the legacy of
Paul Klee was becoming better known, and
being gripped by his work as I was, I
had no option but to work my way through it.
"In painting *Chrysanthemum* I managed for
the first time to exploit my feeling for

line freely and directly, without being
tied down too much by the subject matter.
The linear pattern of the drawing was
established in a pencil drawing from
nature, a free interpretation of the form
of the flower. Later came the effort to fit
this design to a colour structure. I must have
worked on the canvas on and off for a couple
of weeks, scraping it down from time to time
and making radical changes to form and
colour. Finally the linear pattern imposed
itself afresh, and the work was finished.

"The sense of freedom and pleasure I felt in
painting the picture is still with me. It was
never exhibited; soon after it was finished I
packed up and left for Australia. I haven't
sold it; I keep it stacked out of sight and,
perhaps once or twice a year, take it out and
look at it. It always makes me feel good. I
don't know whether or not it is my favourite
work, but it is certainly one of my happiest,
and the one which, if I find my efforts flagging,
gives me the necessary charge to start again."
Gordon Walters. From "19 Painters and their
Favourite Works," *Islands*, no. 10, 1974,
p. 375

3 *New Zealand Landscape* 1947

oil on cardboard
330 x 426

notes *New Zealand Landscape* is one of a group of
small oil paintings made in 1947 after Walters
had visited South Canterbury rock art sites.
He had sketched in the area and
photographed the limestone formations.
The influence of rock drawings merged with
ideas derived from the art of Paul Klee,
known to Walters at this stage from
reproductions alone.

This painting was probably among those
shown at the French Maid coffee shop in
July – August 1947. The artist cannot recall
the work having had a title; the present
title was given to the painting in recent years.

- 4 *The Poet* 1947
oil and pencil on canvas
410 x 511
- inscribed in pencil, recto, lower right, *Walters 47*;
verso, *The Poet 1947 / Oil and pencil on
canvas / Gordon Walters*
- exhibited French Maid coffee shop, Wellington, 1947
- reference *Year Book of the Arts in New Zealand*, no. 3,
1947, p. 44 illus.
- notes Originally based on a drawing, made in the
life class at Wellington Technical College,
which was simplified and arranged in a
way reminiscent of Maori rock drawing.
The technique of pencil drawing on an
oil paint ground derives in part from
the example of Joan Miró. The
undulating line drawing by the head of the
figure indicates inspiration.
- 5 *Untitled* 1952
oil on canvas
482 x 360
- inscribed in pencil, verso, upper right, *1952
Gordon Walters*
- notes One of a group of small oil paintings made
in Melbourne after Walters had returned from
his trip to Europe. This painting marks the
artist's attempt to construct an image from
non-figurative elements along the lines of
works he had seen in Paris by Vasarely.
He applied the paint with a palette knife in
small touches so that the surface of the picture
has a tactile quality. Although the painting
was not exhibited publicly, Walters did show
it to Schoon and other artists on his return
to New Zealand.
- 6 *Painting no. 2* 1953
oil on canvas
482 x 356
- inscribed in ink, verso, upper centre, *Painting No 2
1953 / Gordon Walters*
- collection National Art Gallery (1982/60/1)
- notes This work was gifted by the artist to an
Auckland art dealer who subsequently sold
it to the National Art Gallery.
"It dates from my last few months in
Melbourne and first few weeks in New
Zealand. I know I did studies for it in
Melbourne in 1953... It was one of the
half-dozen or so I was working
on when I returned home."
- 7 *Untitled* 1954
gouache on paper
464 x 347 paper, 343 x 299 image
- inscribed in ink, recto, lower right, *Gordon Walters 54*
- notes The forceful use of colour and the selection
of triangle, circle and square shapes recall
the paintings of Auguste Herbin. As with
the French artist, the figure/ground ambiguity
is pronounced while the paint is nearly smooth
and the edges of forms crisp.
- 8 *Composition* 1954/1955
gouache on paper
380 x 571 paper, 315 x 439 image
- inscribed in pencil, recto, upper right, *Walters
21-2-54 29-10-55*; lower left,
Gordon Walters 55
- collection Michael Dunn, Auckland
- notes One of four versions based on a repetition
of similar motifs. The small, preliminary

version is dated 23.2.54 (artist's collection), and uses the same motif arrangement in a more muted colouring. The oil version of this composition has not survived.

to establish their final positions. He used string to determine the meandering line.

9 *Untitled* 1955/1956

oil on canvas
461 x 611

inscribed in ink, verso, upper left, *Gordon Walters 1955/56*

notes This work is the last in a series, which includes *Untitled* 1955 (cat. no. 11)

10 *Untitled* March 1955

gouache on paper
248 x 312 paper, 212 x 277 image

inscribed in pencil, recto, upper right, 22.3.55
lower left, *Gordon Walters*

exhibited Petar/James Gallery, Auckland, September 4 – 20, 1974

11 *Untitled* 1955

oil on canvas
510 x 606

inscribed with brush point, upper left,
Gordon Walters / 1955

collection University of Auckland

reference *Art New Zealand*, no. 9, 1978, p.60 illus.
(upside down)

notes Walters executed this small oil with thick paint and visible brushwork. It relates closely to gouaches he made in 1953 – 55. In addition to drawings for the painting, he also cut out the shapes and arranged them on the canvas

12 *Untitled* May 1955

gouache and pencil on paper
248 x 311 paper, 183 x 234 image

inscribed in pencil, recto, upper right, 28.5.55;
lower left, *Gordon Walters 55*

exhibited Petar/James Gallery, Auckland, September 4 – 20, 1974

notes "One of a series inspired by Australian rock drawings. In Australia I had studied rock engravings in the Sydney area and bark paintings in the museums of Melbourne and Sydney."

13 *Untitled* 1955

oil on muslin, mounted on hardboard
510 x 622

notes A gouache study for this work, dated 6.7.54, is in the artist's collection.

"One of several works from 1955 – 1957 using similar ingredients. The use of the linear element was partly inspired by Australian Aboriginal rock paintings."

14 *Untitled* June 1955

gouache on paper
311 x 247 paper, 270 x 205 image

inscribed in pencil, recto, upper right, 11.6.55;
lower left, *Gordon Walters 55*

exhibited Petar/James Gallery, Auckland, September 4 – 20, 1974

notes "Most gouaches were made as studies for paintings and not intended as final works."

15 *Untitled* 1955

gouache on paper
248 x 311 paper, 212 x 292 image

inscribed in pencil, recto, upper margin,
Gordon Walters 1955

exhibited Petar/James Gallery, Auckland,
September 4 – 20, 1974

notes "One of a series of three or four gouaches
built round a simplified figure derived from
a South Canterbury rock drawing."
The repeated motif is based on stylized
human figures found in Maori rock drawing.
These figures have an open or blank centre
which Walters uses in his re-working
of the form.

16 *Study for Blue/Green* 1955

gouache on paper
572 x 391 paper, 392 x 316 image

inscribed in pencil, recto, upper right, 5.11.55;
lower right, *Gordon Walters 55*

notes One of a series of studies based on
rectangular division of the picture surface.
Another almost identical version is in
the artist's collection.

17 *Study for Grey/Pink* 1955

gouache on paper
508 x 428 paper, 435 x 326 image

inscribed in pencil, recto, lower left,
Study for Grey / Pink; lower right,
Gordon Walters 55

notes The composition is based on a rectangular
division of the picture surface, and is a
study for an unfinished oil painting.

18 *Untitled* 1956

gouache on paper
289 x 391 paper, 218 x 280 image

inscribed in pencil, recto, lower left,
Gordon Walters 56

exhibited Petar/James Gallery, Auckland, September
4 – 20, 1974

notes One of several versions of this subject.
Another, unfinished, version is on the
verso (274 x 336).
The central form is based on a figure that is
typical of South Canterbury rock drawing,
known to Walters from a photograph.

19 *Study* September 1973

acrylic on paper
403 x 290 paper, 277 x 203 image

inscribed in pencil, recto, upper margin,
Gordon Walters / No 2 of 3 Versions / 22.9.73

notes "Re-working of 1955 gouache. The original
was destroyed after damage caused by
damp on poor quality paper."

20 *Study* 1956

gouache on paper
311 x 248 paper, 290 x 220 image

collection The Hocken Library, Dunedin (74/194)

exhibited Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington,
October 15 – November 1, 1974, cat. no. 21

reference *Ascent*, Vol. I, no. 4, 1969, p.10 illus.

- 21 *Ranui* 1956
ink on paper
310 x 247 paper, 282 x 220 image
- inscribed in pencil, recto, upper right, 30.10.56;
lower left, *Gordon Walters*; lower right,
Ranui; verso, upper right, *Gordon Walters* 56
- collection Paris family, Wellington
- reference *Quarterly*, Auckland City Art Gallery,
No. 5, 66-67, 1978, p. 7 illus.
- collection Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North
(74/10)
- exhibited Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington,
October 15 – November 1, 1974, cat. no. 15
- 22 *Untitled* October 1956
ink on paper
310 x 247 paper, 285 x 210 image
- inscribed in pencil, recto, upper margin
Gordon Walters 18x24 23.10.56
- collection Hilary and Peter McLeavey
- 25 *Untitled* June 1957
gouache on paper
398 x 315 paper, 318 x 242 image
- inscribed in pencil, recto, upper right, *Gordon Walters*
11.6.57
- 26 *Study for Waitara* 1959
black ink on paper
271 x 374 paper, 250 x 356 image
- inscribed in pencil, verso, upper left,
Gordon Walters 1959
- exhibited Petar/James Gallery, Auckland,
September 4 – 20, 1974
- notes One of a group of ink studies based on the
disposition of vertical bands, having
projections that approximate circles.
The source of this work is with the
kowhaiwhai (rafter painting) at the house
Te Ikaroa a Maui, Waitara.
"These works were drawn in pencil and then
painted with brush and ink wash; a pen was
not used on them."
- 23 *Untitled* November 1956
gouache and ink on paper
310 x 242 paper, 284 x 212 image
- inscribed in pencil, recto, upper left, 3.11.56;
verso, upper centre, *Gordon Walters*
- collection Paris family, Wellington
- reference *Art New Zealand*, no. 9, 1978, p. 60 illus.
- notes "One of the first studies using the *koru*
motif; a small oil (1957) based on this
study has not survived. A photo of it
exists."
- 24 *Untitled* December 1956
gouache on paper
310 x 248 paper, 297 x 234 image
- inscribed in pencil, recto, upper margin 2.12.56
- 27 *Green and Pink* 1967
acrylic on paper
255 x 341 paper, 231 x 305 image
- inscribed in pencil, recto, lower right,
Gordon Walters 67
- notes A later variation of the composition entitled

Black on Yellow 1959 (now destroyed; reproduced in *Ascent* no. 4, 1969, p.11). The preparatory study for *Black on Yellow* (private collection, Wellington) is compositionally almost identical to this work. The design is related to a *kowhaiwhai* panel at the Waitangi *Whare Runanga*, where a common pattern is the *kowhai ngutu kaka* (kaka-beak flower).

28 *Papier collé* 1962

grey and black paper
480 x 335

inscribed in ink, recto, lower right, *Gordon Walters 62*

notes The backing sheet is grey; on it Walters placed a smaller black sheet over which he pasted stripes and circles cut out of grey paper.
"One of a series of pasted paper compositions made between 1958 and 1962. The dismembering and rearrangement of small studies on paper has always been for me a basic method of generating new ideas."

29 *Study for no. 2* 1960

gouache on paper
375 x 272 paper, 330 x 245 image

inscribed in pencil, recto, lower margin, *Study for No 2/1960 Gordon Walters 1960*

notes One of the surviving preliminary colour studies for the 1965 paintings.

30 *Te Whiti* 1964

alkyd enamel on hardboard
1220 x 915

inscribed in ink, verso, *Te Whiti, 1964 / Gordon Walters*

collection private collection, Wellington

exhibited Hays exhibition hall, Christchurch, *Hay's Prize* March 8 – 18, 1966, cat. no. 154 *Painting 1965*, 50 guineas

reference M. Seuphor, *L'Art Abstrait* vol. 4, p.180 illus.

notes *Te Whiti* was the first full-scale painting based on the *koru* motif completed by the artist to survive. He named the painting after the Maori prophet Te Whiti o Rongomai whom he admired. He had also lived for a time in Te Whiti Street, Wellington.

"I cannot remember the exact details of the painting *Te Whiti*. I know I worked on it in 1964 though it may not have been finally completed until early 1965. I did not, at that period, keep a notebook, and details are a bit hazy. I do know, however, that it went through about three versions before it was finished and these were definitely done well before 1965."

31 *Painting no. 7* 1965

PVA on hardboard
1220 x 915

inscribed in ink, verso, *Gordon Walters Paintings No. 7 1965*

collection Paris family, Wellington

exhibited New Vision Gallery, Auckland, March 7 – 12, 1966, 40 guineas; and Pakuranga Community Art Centre, Auckland, April 5 – 11, 1975, cat. no.2 *Painting 1965*, 46 x 72 inches.

notes "Based on a gouache study of 1960."

32 *Black on white* 1965

PVA on hardboard
1216 x 910

inscribed in brushpoint, verso, upper left,
Gordon Walters Black on White 1965;
and in pencil, below, *Gordon Walters*

exhibited New Vision Gallery, Auckland,
March 7 – 12, 1966, as *Painting 1965*

notes "This work was based on a drawing, circa
1957, which was revised in 1964 and the
original destroyed. Painting was realised in
1965 and remains in my collection. The
(revised) drawing was sold circa 1966–1967
by New Vision Gallery. A photograph exists
of the original study."

33 *Painting no. 1* 1965
PVA on hardboard
914 x 1219

inscribed in ink, verso, *Gordon Walters / Painting
No. 1 1965*

collection Auckland City Art Gallery (1966/4)

exhibited New Vision Gallery, Auckland, March 7 – 12
1966, cat. no.1 (reproduced on catalogue
cover)
Auckland City Art Gallery, *Art of the Sixties*,
August 1970, cat. no. 41 *Painting no. 1* 1965

references R. Melville, "A Stranger in New Zealand",
The Architectural Review, vol. XCLIX, no.
862, 1968, p. 445 illus.

P. A. E. Hutchings, "The Hard-Edge
Abstractions of Gordon Walters", *Ascent*,
no.4, 1969, pp.12 – 14

M. Dunn, "Gordon Walters" *Painting no. 1*,
Quarterly, Auckland City Art Gallery,
nos. 66 – 67, 1978, pp. 2 – 9, illus.

E. H. Gombrich, *The Sense of Order*, Oxford,
1979, p.133

notes The preliminary ink study for this work,

circa 1963, is now destroyed, but a pencil
drawing survives (private collection,
Auckland).

This painting has received more
critical attention than any other work
by the artist.

34 *Drawing no. 14* 1965
black ink on paper
635 x 508 paper, 610 x 454 image

collection Colin and Anne McCahon, Auckland

exhibited New Vision Gallery, Auckland, March 7 – 12,
1966, cat. no. 14, *Drawing Number 14, 1965*

reference *Quarterly*, Auckland City Art Gallery,
nos 66 – 67, 1978, p.4 illus.

notes This drawing relates closely to *Painting no. 1*
(cat. no. 33).

35 *Untitled* 1966
black ink on paper
631 x 532 paper, 601 x 407 image

inscribed in ink, verso, *Gordon Walters/July 1966*

collection private collection, Wellington

36 *Untitled* 1966
black ink on paper
700 x 523 paper, 610 x 460 image

collection John Perry, Rotorua

exhibited New Vision Gallery, Auckland, May 27 – June 8,
1968, as *Drawing*, 24 x 18. 20 dollars

notes "Study for painting."

- 37 *Untitled* 1967
black ink on paper
700 x 523 paper, 609 x 456 image
- collection Mr G. H. Brown, Auckland
- exhibited New Vision Gallery, Auckland, May 27 – June 8, 1968, as *Drawing* 24 x 18, 20 dollars
- Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North, *Gordon H. Brown's Collection*, June 27 – August 9, 1981, cat. no. 43, *Untitled Drawing*
- reference *Artis*, Vol. 1, no. 2 1971, p.14 illus. *Catalogue of Original Paintings; Fletcher House*, 1978, cat. no. 97
- notes "Two studies for this work survive (PVA on paper). This was the first all-over work utilising a random disposition of elements. It represents the main development following my first use of the motif in the 1966 exhibition."
- 38 *Painting no. 2* 1966
PVA on hardboard
1220 x 910
- inscribed in ink, verso, *Gordon Walters / Painting No 2, 1966*
- collection University of Auckland
- exhibited Auckland City Art Gallery, *New Zealand Painting*, November – December 1966, cat. no. 46 *Painting No. 2* 1966
- notes An early instance of a small number of elements being placed at the perimeter of the painting, top and bottom. Consequently the black rectangular field becomes a dominant shape and colour in the composition.
- 40 *Mahuika* 1968
PVA and acrylic on canvas
1524 x 1143
- collection private collection, Wellington
- exhibited Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington, May 6 – 20, 1969, cat. no. 3
- notes "Relates to *Tamatea* (cat. no. 42) and was completed about the same time."
- 39 *Tahi* 1967
PVA and acrylic on canvas
1525 x 1140
- inscribed in brushpoint, verso, upper left, *Tahi / Gordon Walters 1967*
- collection Fletcher House collection of Fletcher Challenge Ltd, Auckland
- exhibited *New Vision Gallery, Auckland, May 27 – June 8, 1968*, cat. no. 1
- references *Catalogue of Painting, Pottery, Sculpture; Victoria University, Wellington, 1976* (reproduced on catalogue cover) Capper Press, Christchurch, *Kahukura* reproduction print in colour
- notes "Based on the binary principle: a vertical division with two sides differing slightly but maintaining a balance; my basic approach to picture-making which owes a lot to primitive art in general and Maori art (traditional) in particular."
- 41 *Kahukura* 1968
PVA and acrylic on canvas
1140 x 1520
- collection Victoria University, Wellington
- exhibited Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington, May 6 – 20, 1969, cat. no. 1

42 *Tamatea* 1968

PVA and acrylic on canvas
1524 x 1143

collection Govett Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth
(69/3)

exhibited Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington,
May 6 – 20, 1969, cat. no. 4
Auckland City Art Gallery, *Art of the
Sixties*, August 1970, cat. no. 42,
Tamatea 1969

reference *The Visual Arts*, Brisbane, 1972 and 1980
p. 159 illus.

notes "A development from the earliest works,
utilising a controlled scattering of the
motif down the centre of the canvas."

43 *Makaro* 1969

PVA and acrylic on canvas
1522 x 1143

inscribed in ink, verso, upper left, *Gordon Walters
Makaro 1969*

collection National Art Gallery (1970/21/1)

reference *New Zealand Painting, A Selection of
Recent Acquisitions*, National Art Gallery,
Wellington, 1972

notes "Utilising the centre of the canvas with
close value colour contrast typical of my
approach in the late 1960s."

44 *Black and Red* 1970

PVA and acrylic on canvas
1527 x 1143

exhibited Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington,
August 16 – 30, 1971, cat. no. 1,
with title *Karakia* given by Peter McLeavey

New Vision Gallery, Auckland,
May 8 – 19, 1972, cat. no. 5, with title
Black and Red given by the artist

45 *Hautana* 1970

PVA and acrylic on canvas
1524 x 1142

collection Auckland City Art Gallery (1976/55)

exhibited Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington,
August 16 – 30, 1971, cat. no. 4,
with title *Oriori* given to the painting
by Peter McLeavey
New Vision Gallery, Auckland,
May 8 – 19, 1972, cat. no. 4, *Hautana*
1970, emulsion on canvas, 60 x 45; with
title *Hautana* given to the painting by
the artist

notes The motif used in this picture is based
on the Maori carving pattern *rau-ponga*.

46 *Study* 1970

acrylic on paper
355 x 260 paper, 298 x 230 image

inscribed in ink, recto, lower margin 23.8.70;
and in pencil, *liquitex matt varnish/
off white? / 3 together / v light blue/
AK grey bars*.

notes "Study for unrealised painting."

47 *Untitled* 1969

ink on paper
650 x 530 paper, 576 x 458 image

collection University of Auckland

exhibited New Vision Gallery, Auckland,
May 8 – 19, 1972, cat. no. 10

- notes "Re-working of 1959 ink on paper with some variation."
- 48 *Genealogy* August 1971
ink on paper
704 x 524 paper, 585 x 457 image
- inscribed in pencil, recto, upper right,
GENEALOGY 24.8.71
- collection Auckland City Art Gallery (1972/11)
- exhibited Petar/James Gallery, Auckland, 1972
- reference *Art New Zealand*, no. 2 1976,
p. 15, illus. (upside down)
- notes "Study for unrealised painting."
- 49 *Genealogy I* November 1969
PVA and acrylic on canvas
1217 x 913
- inscribed in ink, verso, upper left, *GORDON WALTERS
GENEALOGY I Nov. 1969*
- collection David and Gail Williams, Auckland
- exhibited New Vision Gallery, Auckland,
September 27 – October 8, 1971, cat. no. 12
- notes "First of the series. Several studies
exist for this work."
- 50 *Genealogy II* 1969/1970
PVA and acrylic on canvas
1524 x 1143
- inscribed in ink, verso, upper left, *GENEALOGY II
1969-70 GORDON WALTERS*
- collection Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North
- exhibited Manawatu Art Gallery, *Centenary Collection
Contemporary New Zealand Painting*, April
1971, cat. no. 14, p. 18, illus.
- notes "Basic unit is stated at the top of the
canvas and repeated throughout."
- 51 *Genealogy IV* 1971
PVA and acrylic on canvas
1525 x 1142
- collection private collection, Auckland
- exhibited New Vision Gallery, Auckland,
May 8 – 19, 1972, cat. no. 8
- notes This painting was one of the first Gordon
Walters executed in Auckland.
- "A variation of *Genealogy I*."
- 52 *Rongotai* 1970
PVA and acrylic on canvas
1520 x 1150
- collection Michael Dunn, Auckland
- exhibited New Vision Gallery, Auckland,
September 27 – October 8, 1971,
cat. no. 15, *Grantham*
- references L. Bell *The Maori in European Art*,
Wellington, 1980, p. 133, illus.
D. and J. Pope *Mobil Illustrated Guide
to New Zealand*, Wellington, 1982, p. 120
illus.
- notes The title *Grantham*, which belonged to an
earlier version now destroyed, was changed
to *Rongotai*, an area in Wellington where
the artist had lived.

- 53 *Tautahi* 1970
PVA and acrylic on canvas
1524 x 1143
- collection Mr T. Beaglehole, Wellington
- notes "Vertical stacking of motifs, a variation on a drawing of the late 1950s."
- 54 *Koru* 1971
PVA and acrylic on canvas
1830 x 1372
- inscribed in ink, verso, upper centre, **GORDON WALTERS**
- collection Hilary and Peter McLeavey, Wellington
- exhibited New Vision Gallery, Auckland, May 8 – 19, 1972, cat. no. 9
- notes "I rate this work as one of the best of the koru series and was intending to keep it for myself." (Letter: G. Walters to P. McLeavey, 30.8.72).
"An all-over random scattering of the motif made by cutting up and rearranging earlier studies."
- 55 *Untitled* 1971
PVA and acrylic on canvas
1525 x 1125
- inscribed in pencil, verso, *Waiata*; and, in ink, **Gordon Walters 1971**
- collection Ian Scott, Auckland
- exhibited Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington, August 16 – 30, 1971, cat. no. 3
- notes Exhibited in 1971 with title supplied by Peter McLeavey.
- 56 *Untitled* 1972
PVA and acrylic on canvas
1219 x 912
- inscribed in brushpoint, verso, **Gordon Walters 72**
- collection private collection, Auckland
- 57 *Tohu* 1973
PVA and acrylic on canvas
1216 x 915
- 58 *Maho* 1973
PVA and acrylic on canvas
1220 x 980
- inscribed in ink, verso, **Gordon Walters 73**
- exhibited Petar/James Gallery, Auckland, April 1974
Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington, April 27 – May 14, 1976, cat. no. 3
- notes Compare the screenprint **Maho 1972** (cat. no 71).
- 59 *Painting* 1974
PVA and acrylic on canvas
1220 x 916
- inscribed in ink, verso, **Gordon Walters 74**
- exhibited Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington, April 27 – May 14, 1976, cat. no. 4
Painting B
- 60 *Mokoia* 1975
PVA and acrylic on canvas
1220 x 982
- inscribed in ink, verso, **Gordon Walters 65 – 75 Mokoia**

- collection Paris family, Wellington
- exhibited Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington,
April 27 – May 14, 1976, cat. no. 9
Painting D
- reference *Art New Zealand* no. 4, 1977, p. 19
- notes This painting had no title when purchased
by the present owner, who requested that the
artist provide a title.
- February 5, 1982, cat. no. 26,
Koru Series 1978
- notes "An arrangement of stacked and random
elements."
- 61 *Karakia* 1977
PVA and acrylic on canvas
1525 x 1140
- inscribed in ink, verso, upper centre of stretcher,
Title 'Karakia' and, central stretcher support,
Gordon Walters 77
- collection National Art Gallery (1978/19/1)
- exhibited Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington,
July 25 – August 12, 1978, cat. no. 1
National Art Gallery, Wellington
August 4 – November 1, 1981
- reference Gordon Walters *Karakia*, National Art Gallery
leaflet, 1981, reproduced on cover
- notes *Karakia* is a re-working of the 1965 painting
Black on White (cat. no. 32).
- 62 *Untitled* 1977
PVA and acrylic on canvas
1220 x 940
- inscribed in ink, verso, *Gordon Walters 77*
- collection Prospect collection, Auckland
- exhibited Peter Webb Galleries, Auckland
April 1 – 14, 1978
Centre Gallery, Hamilton, December 4 –
- 63 *Untitled* 1975
ink on paper
592 x 455
- collection Paris family, Wellington
- exhibited Peter Webb Galleries, Auckland,
April 1 – 14, 1978
- 64 *Apu* 1980
PVA and acrylic on canvas
1217 x 978
- collection private collection, Auckland
- exhibited Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington,
November 10 – 27, 1981, cat. no. 6
- 65 *Painting no. 9, 1965: revised version* 1981
PVA and acrylic on canvas
1220 x 935
- inscribed in brushpoint, verso, lower centre,
Walters 65 – 81
- collection private collection, Auckland
- notes The original version of this work was
painted on hardboard and was exhibited at
the New Vision Gallery in 1966. It was
damaged in transit and was destroyed by
the artist.
This second version follows the general
design of the first but has been transferred
to a canvas support. The image has been
reversed and the colours changed to grey

and white instead of the white and black of the original work. Studies exist for both the original work and the revised version.

66 *Maheno* 1981
PVA and acrylic on canvas
1545 x 1145

inscribed in pencil, verso, 1981

collection Auckland City Art Gallery (1982/8)

67 *Taraki* 1982
PVA and acrylic on canvas
625 x 1825

68 *Aranui* 1982
PVA and acrylic on canvas
1829 x 1371

Prints

69 *Tawa* 1968
screenprint
760 x 560 paper, 533 x 419 image

collection Auckland City Art Gallery (1970/25/1/4)

reference *Quarterly*, Auckland City Art Gallery,
no. 47, 1970, p.8, illus.

notes One of a set of multiples published by
Barry Lett Galleries in 1968.

70 *Amoka* 1972
screenprint
1000 x 510 paper, 837 x 394 image

inscribed in pencil, recto, lower margin, *Artists
Proof 'Amoka' Gordon Walters*

collection Auckland City Art Gallery (1982/53)

notes Edition of 25 prints. Commissioned by the
Zonta Club, Wellington, for their exhibition
in March 1973.

71 *Maho* 1972
screenprint
330 x 220 paper, 101 x 89 image

inscribed in pencil, recto, lower margin, 24/50 '*Maho*'
Gordon Walters

collection Auckland City Gallery (1975/11)

notes Edition of 50 prints. Commissioned by the
Zonta Club, Wellington, for their exhibition
in March 1973.
This print relates to the black and white
painting *Maho* 1973 (cat. no. 58).

72 *Tama* 1977
screenprint
753 x 567 paper, 650 x 468 image

inscribed in pencil, recto, lower left margin,
Tama Artists proof, and lower right,
Gordon Walters 1977

collection Auckland City Art Gallery (1977/26)

notes Edition of 50 prints. Published by the
Print Club, Auckland.
"A final working of a design commenced in
1959/60. A related painting is in the
Palmerston North Gallery."

73 *Kahu* 1978

screenprint
679 x 480 paper, 380 x 285 image

inscribed in pencil, recto, lower margin, '*Kahu*'
Artists proof Gordon Walters 77

collection Auckland City Art Gallery (1982/52)

notes Edition of 75. Published by the Print Club, Auckland.

74 *Karaka* 1979

screenprint
760 x 565 paper, 512 x 406 image

inscribed in pencil, recto, lower margin, 6/50
Karaka Gordon Walters 1979

collection Auckland City Art Gallery (1981/49)

notes Edition of 50 prints. Published by the Print Club, Auckland.

75 *Then* 1980

screenprint
569 x 767 paper, 406 x 536 image

inscribed in pencil, recto, lower margin 1/125 '*Then*'
Gordon Walters 1980

collection Auckland City Art Gallery (1982/36/1)

notes Edition of 125 prints. Published by the Print Club, Auckland.

"Based on a gouache of 1955 in my possession."

76 *Arahura* 1982

screenprint
762 x 565 paper, 507 x 405 image

inscribed in pencil, recto, lower margin, 2/125
'Arahura' Gordon Walters 1982

collection Auckland City Art Gallery (1982/36/2)

notes Edition of 125 prints. Published by the Print Club, Auckland.

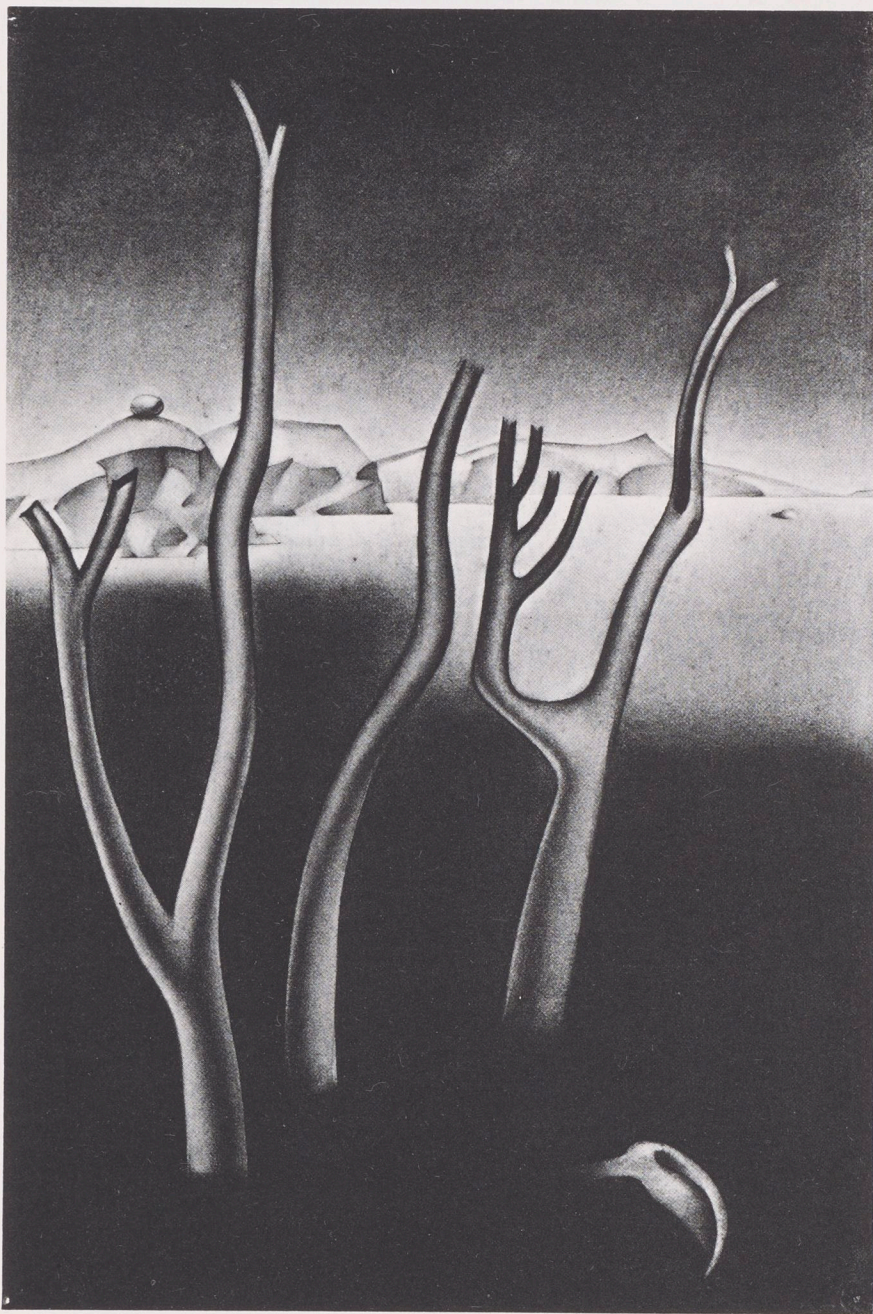
77 *Kura* 1982

screenprint
763 x 568 paper, 555 x 445 image

inscribed in pencil, recto, lower margin, 148/150
'Kura' Gordon Walters 1982

collection Auckland City Art Gallery (1982/51)

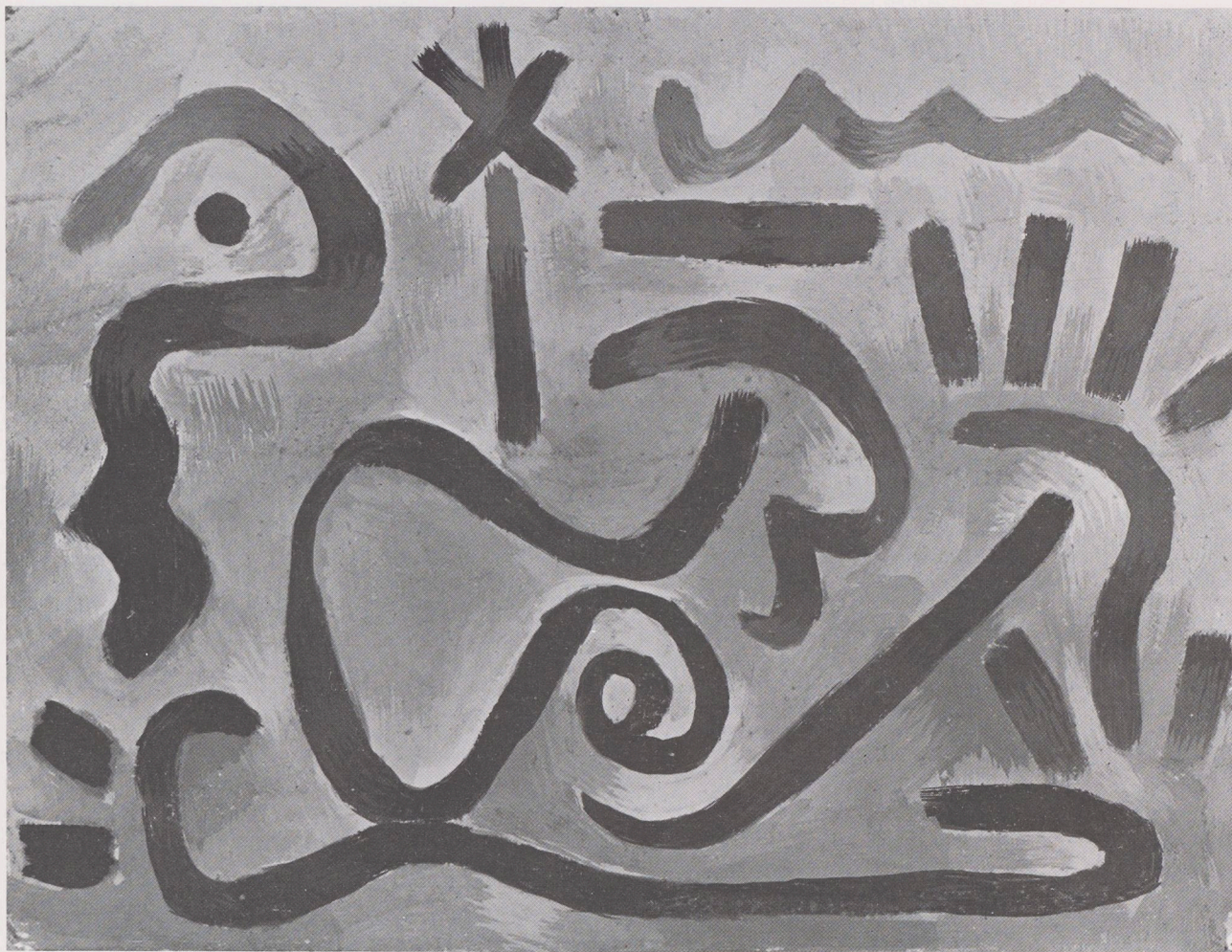
notes Edition of 150 prints. Published by Landfall Press, Auckland.

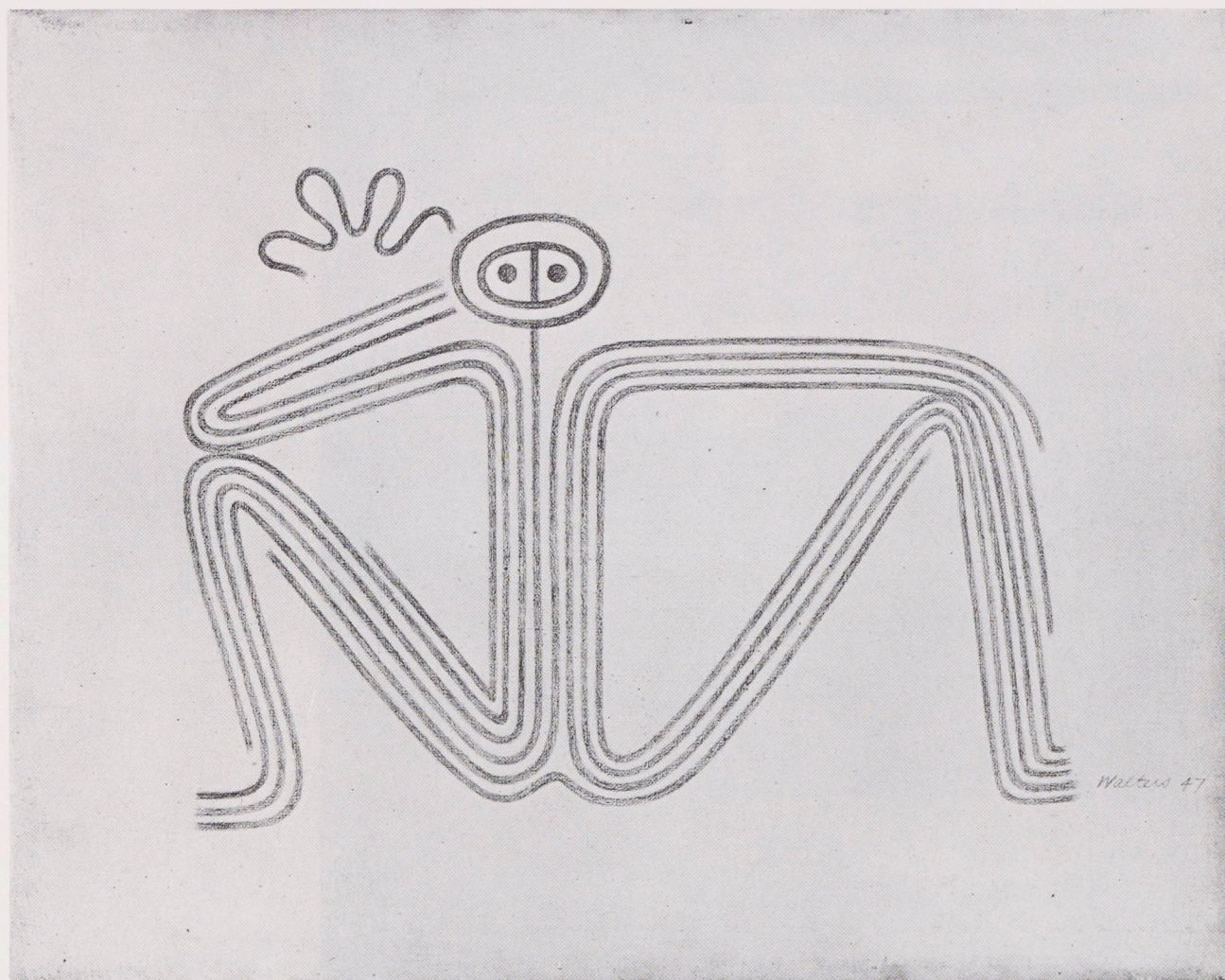


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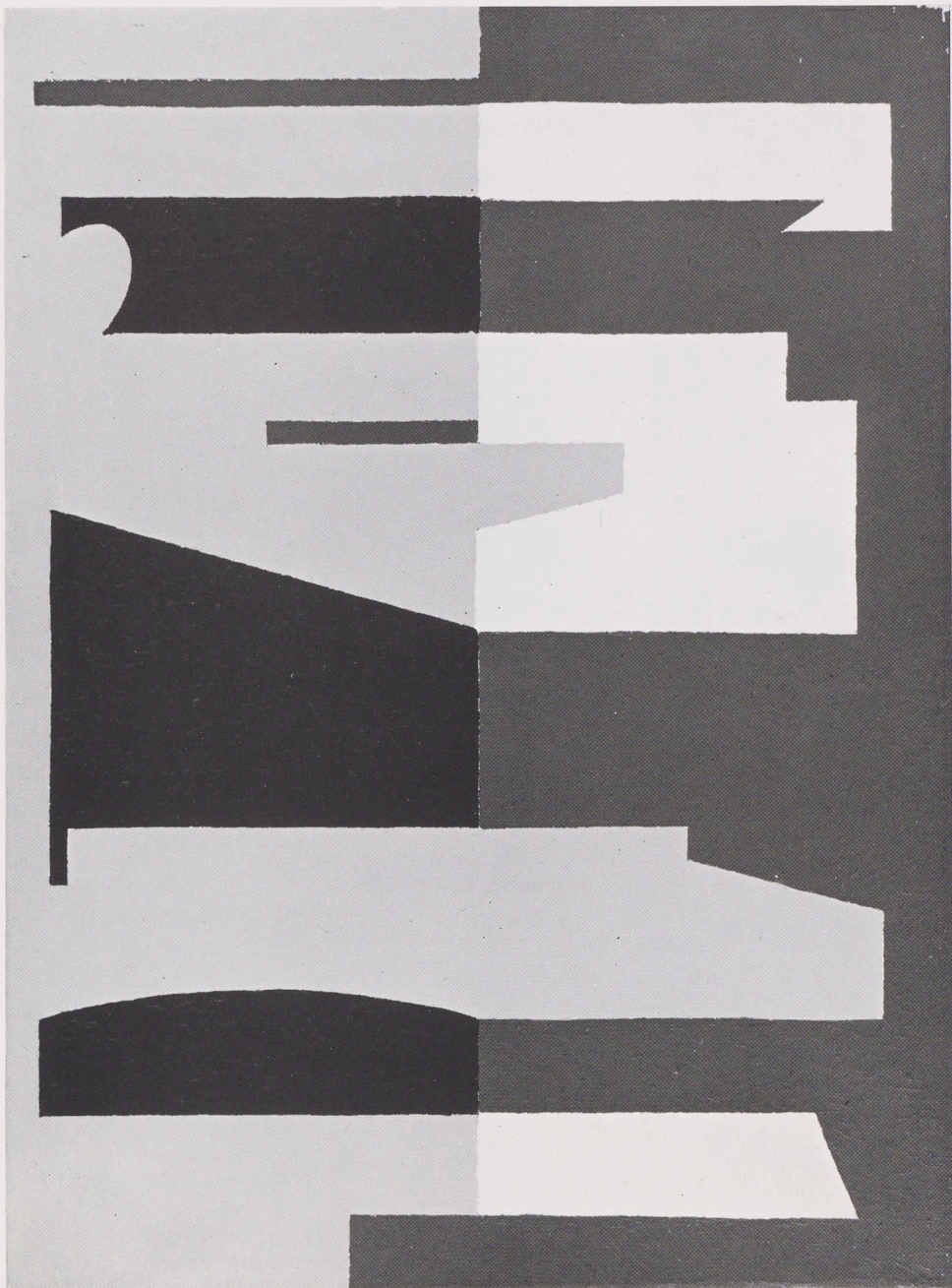


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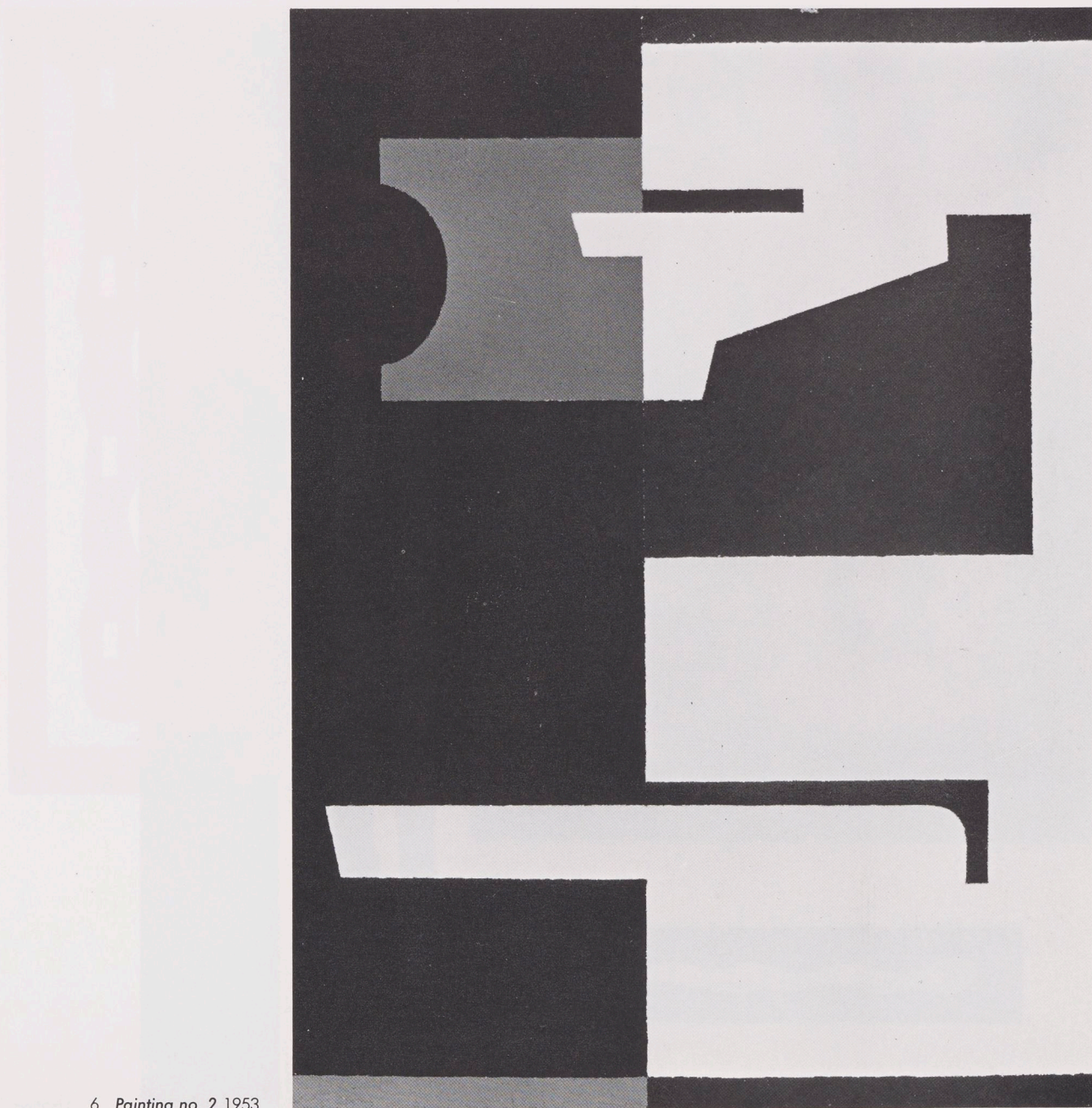




Walters 47

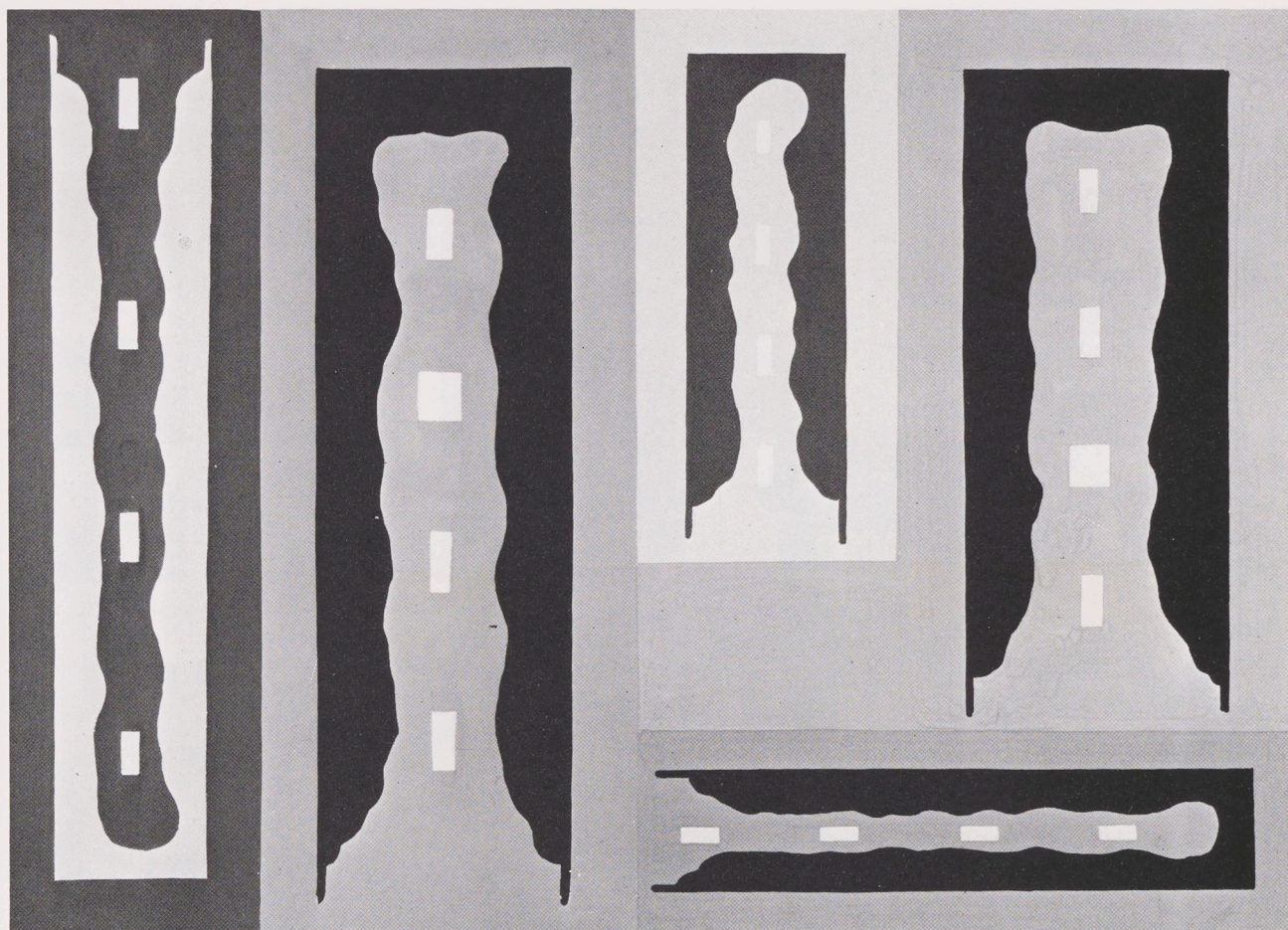


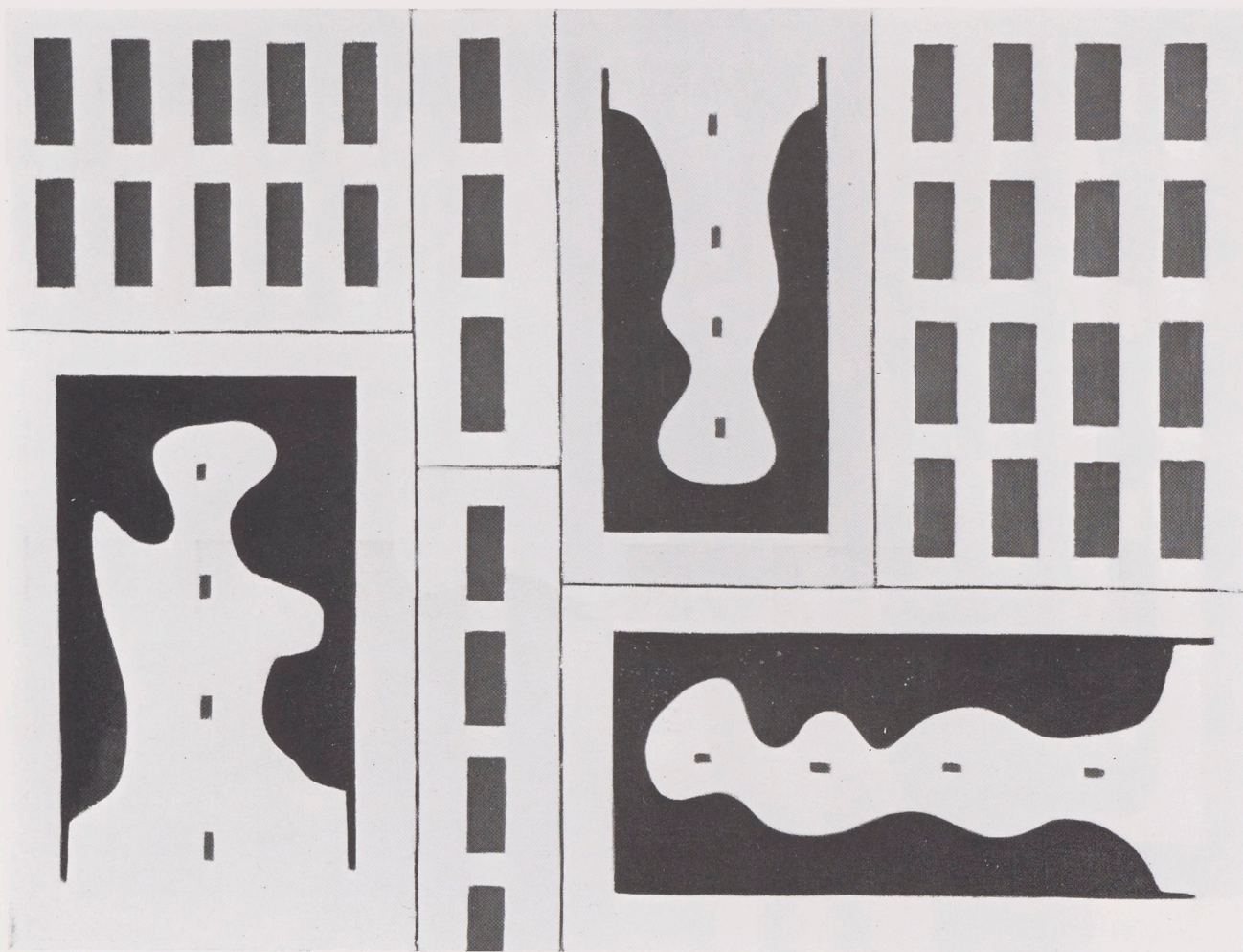
5 *Untitled* 1952

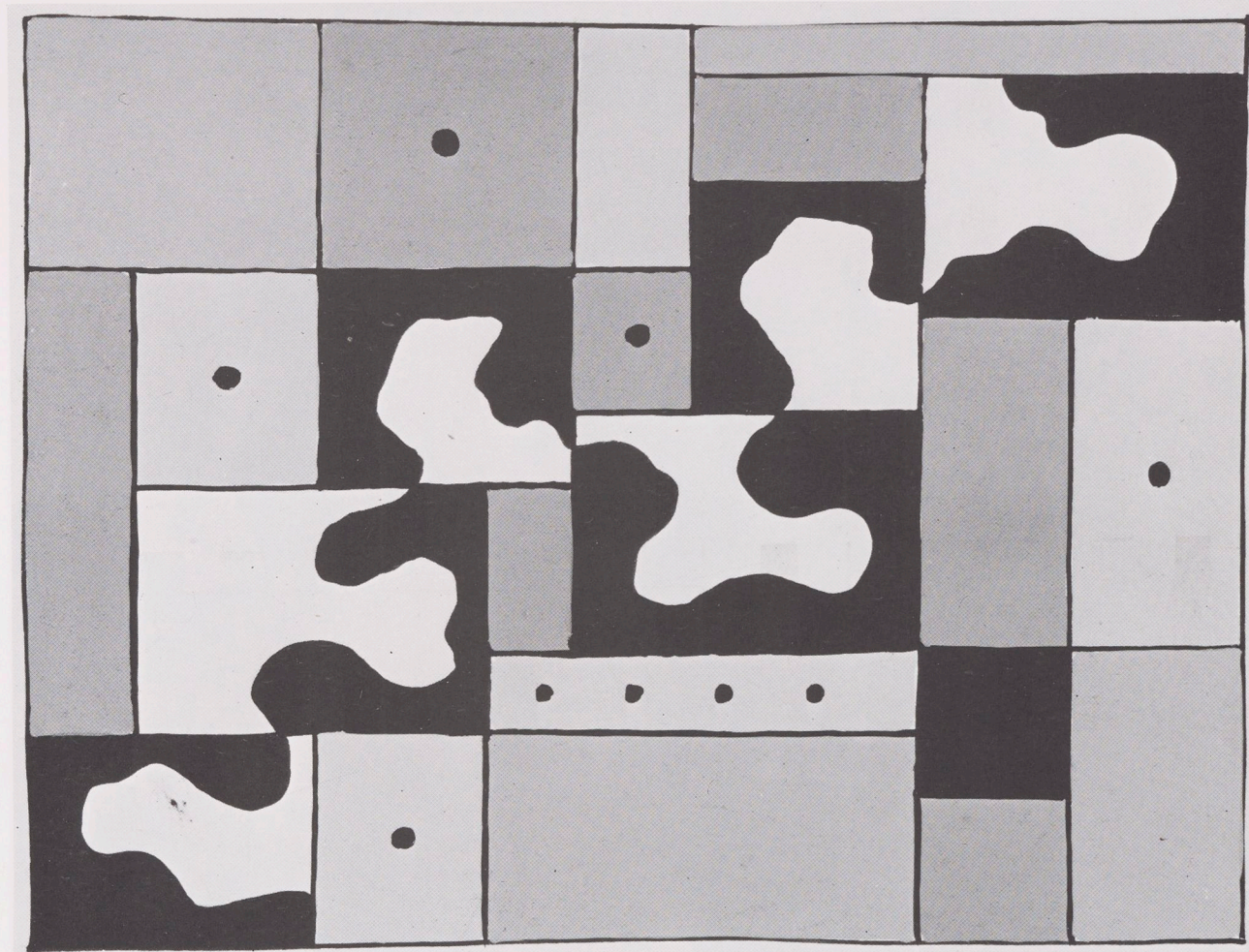


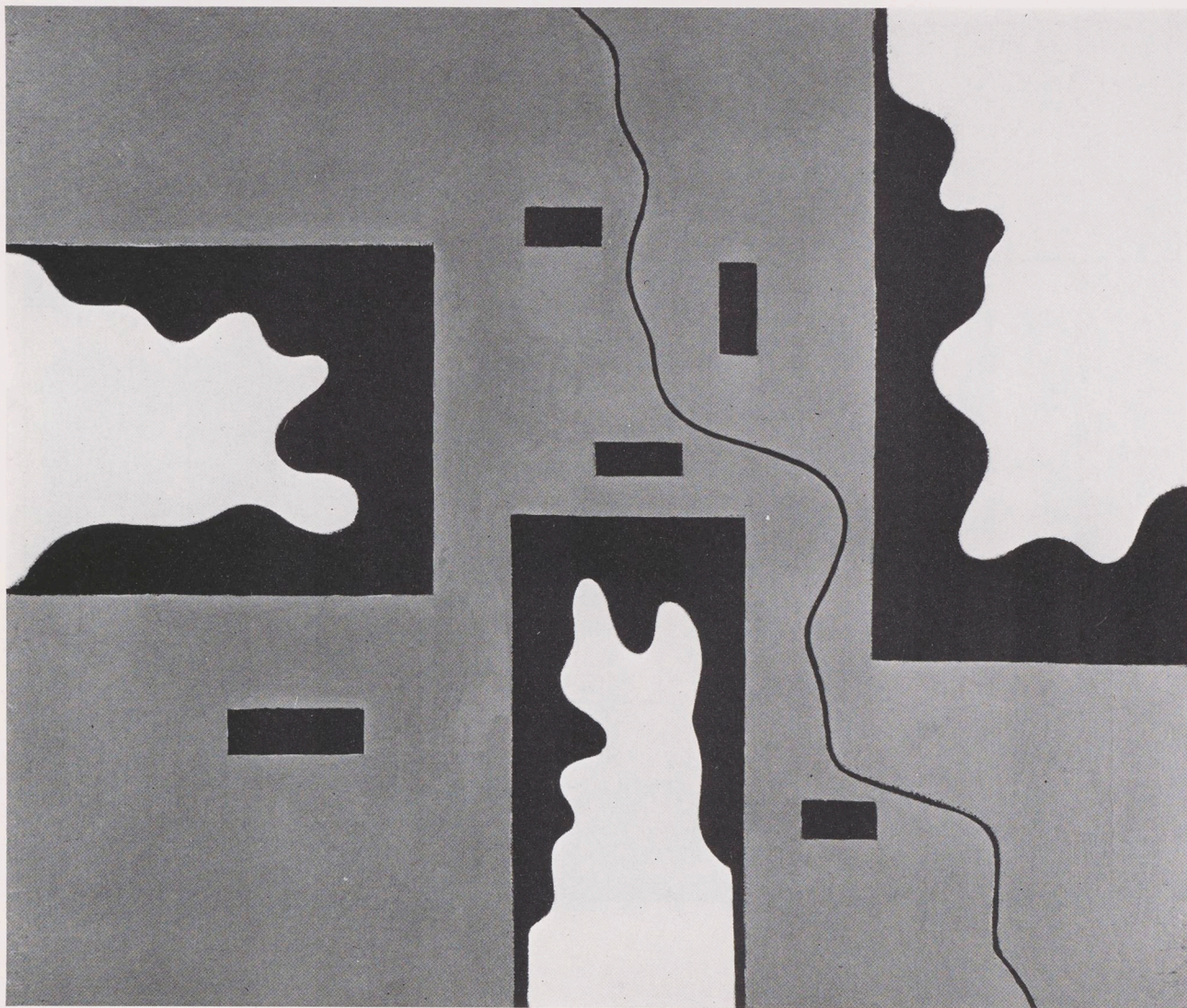
6 *Painting no. 2 1953*

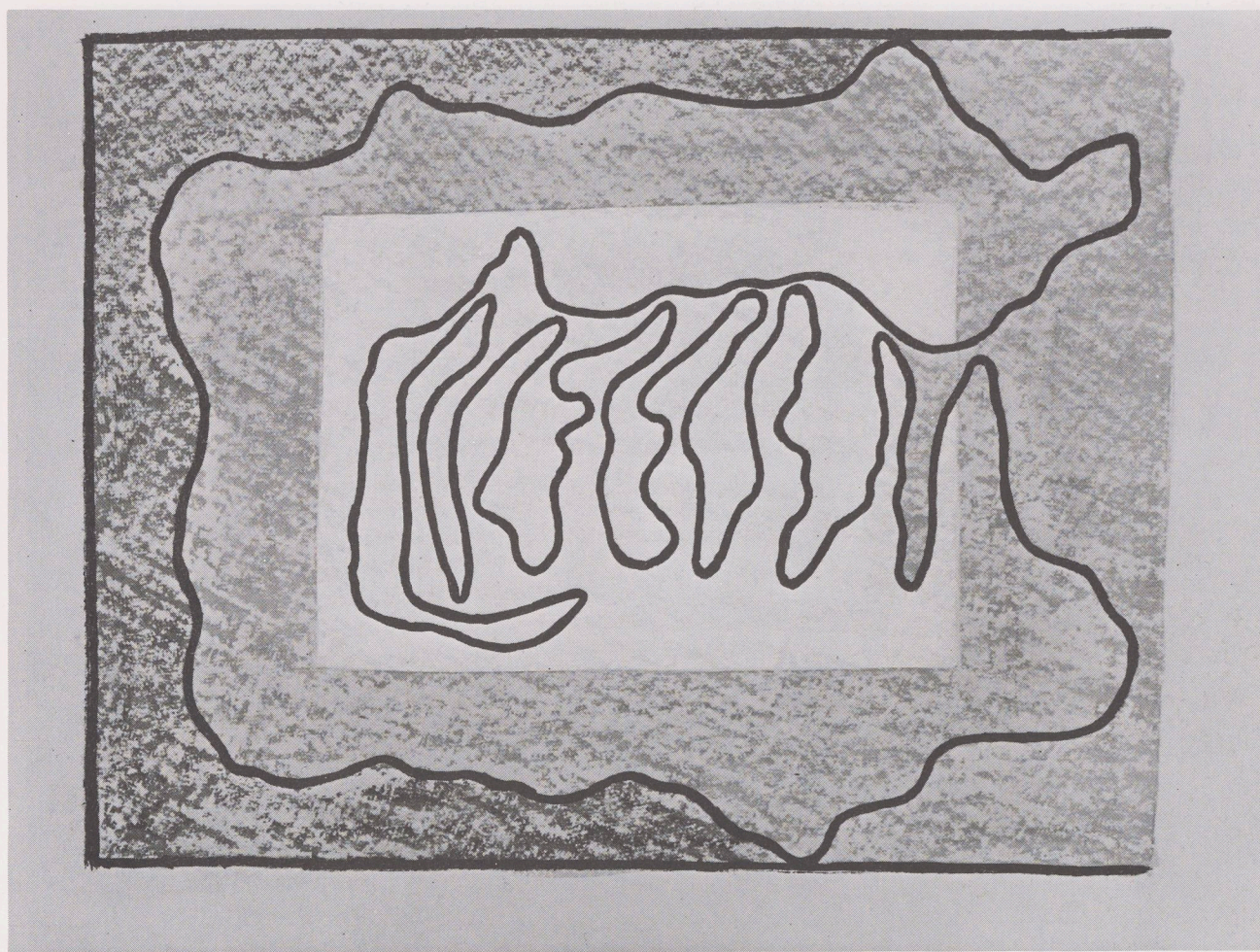


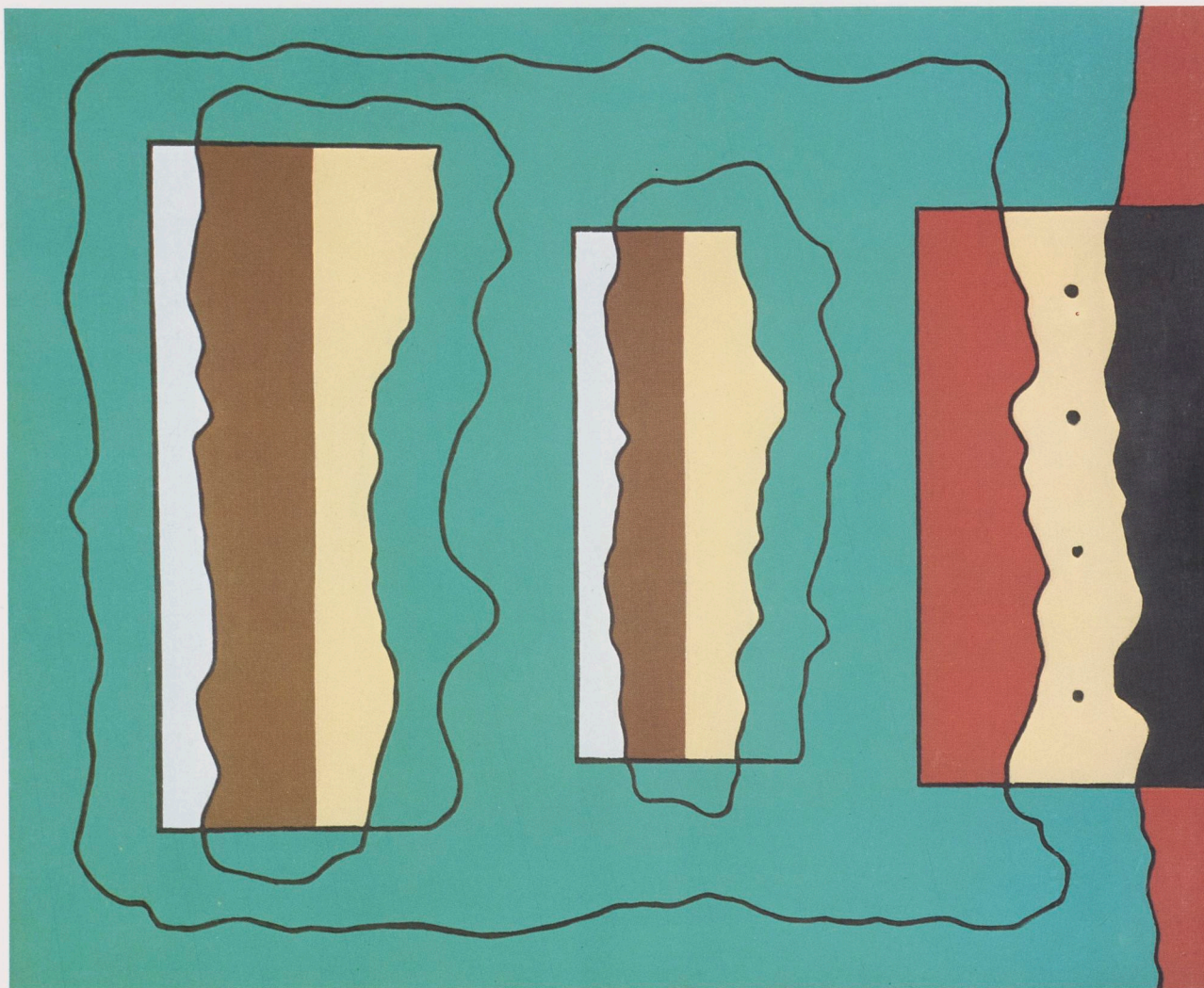


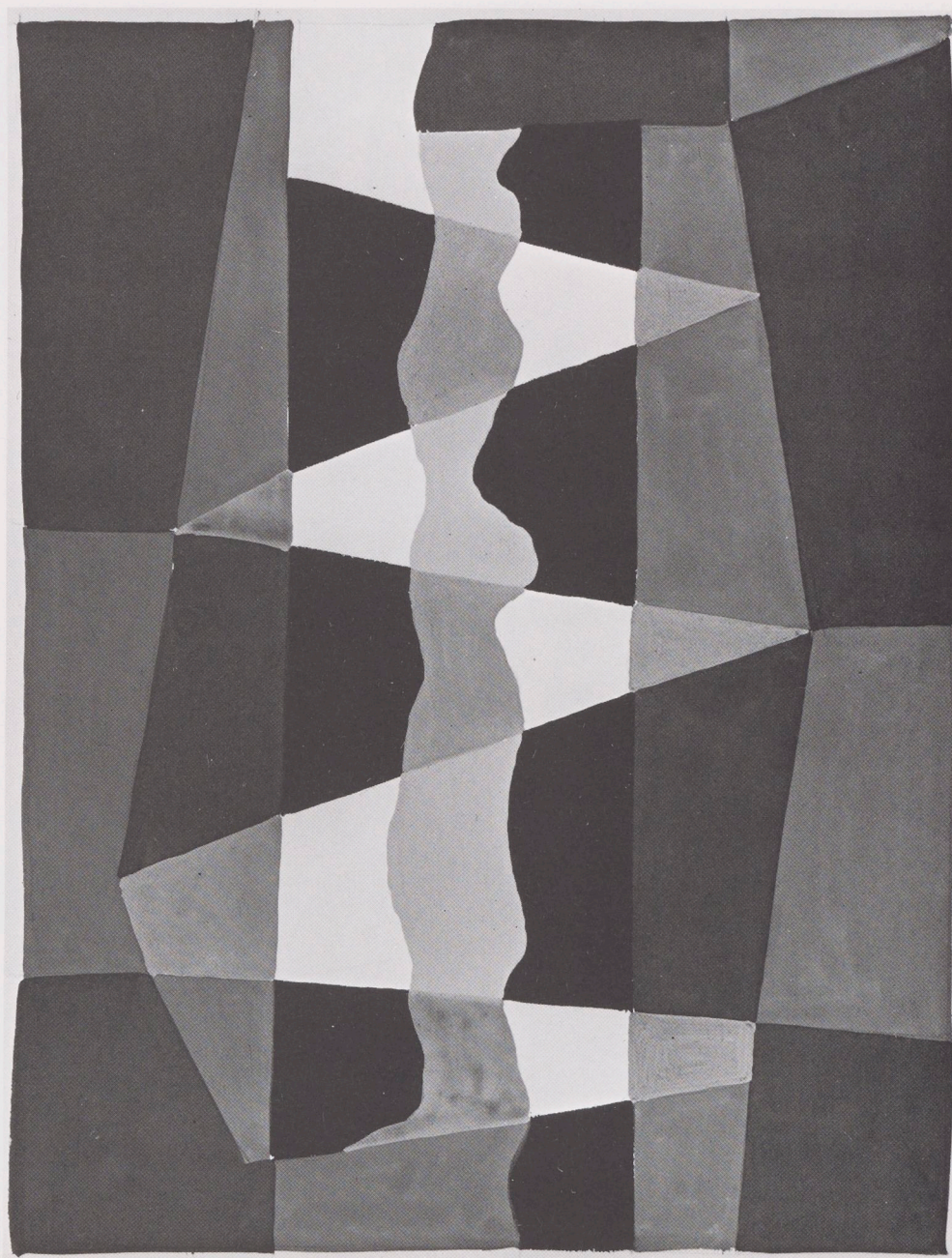


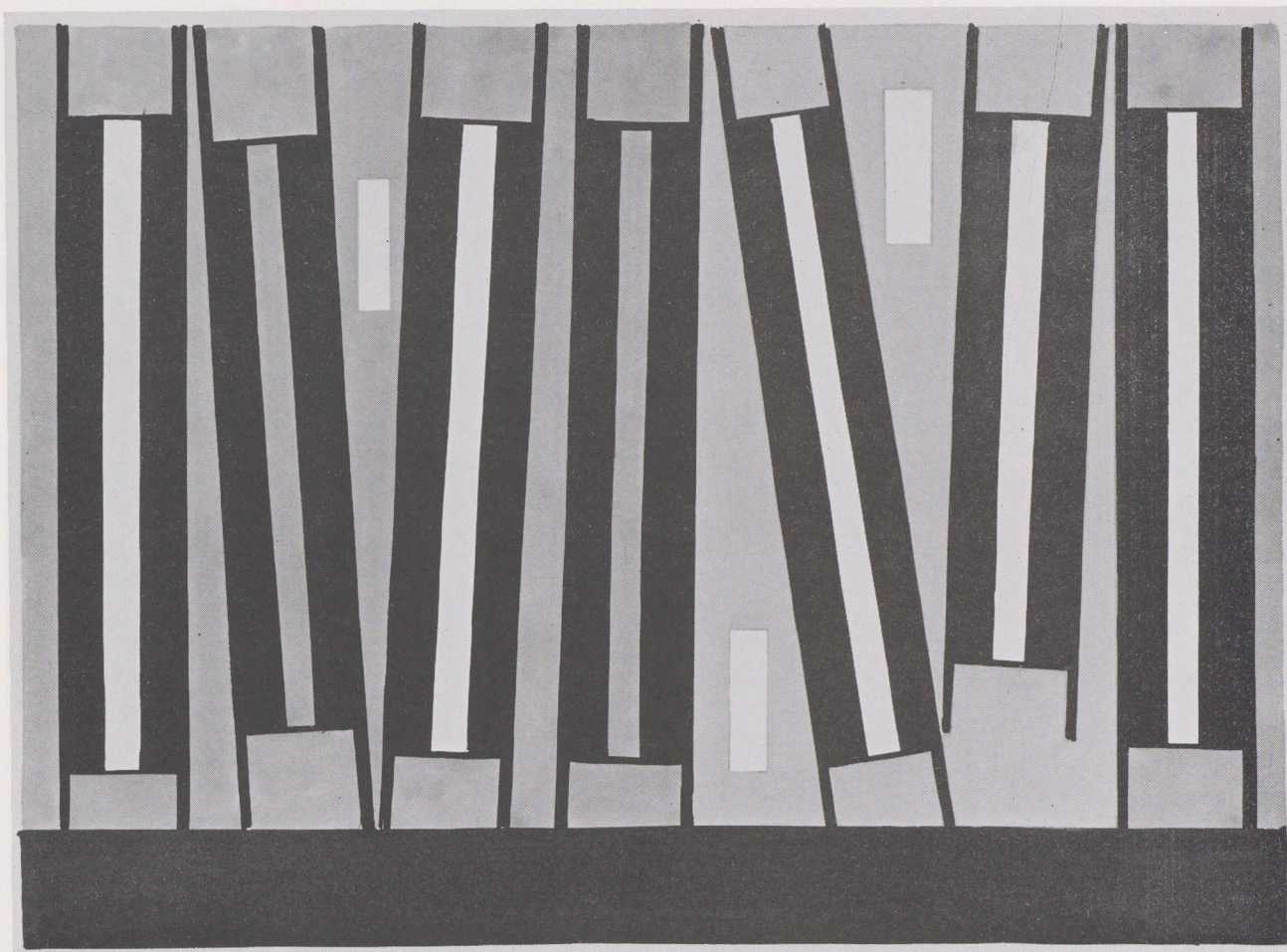


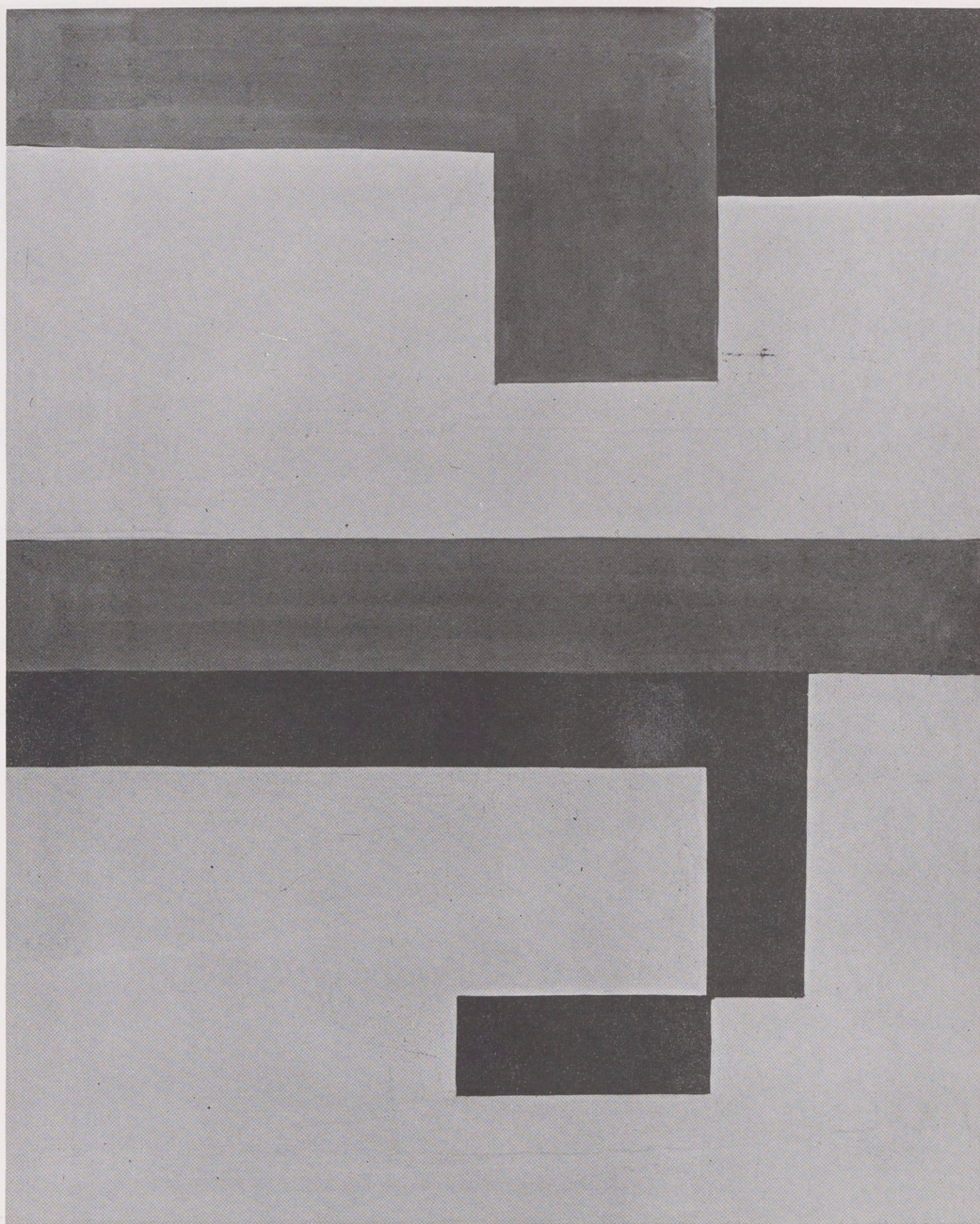


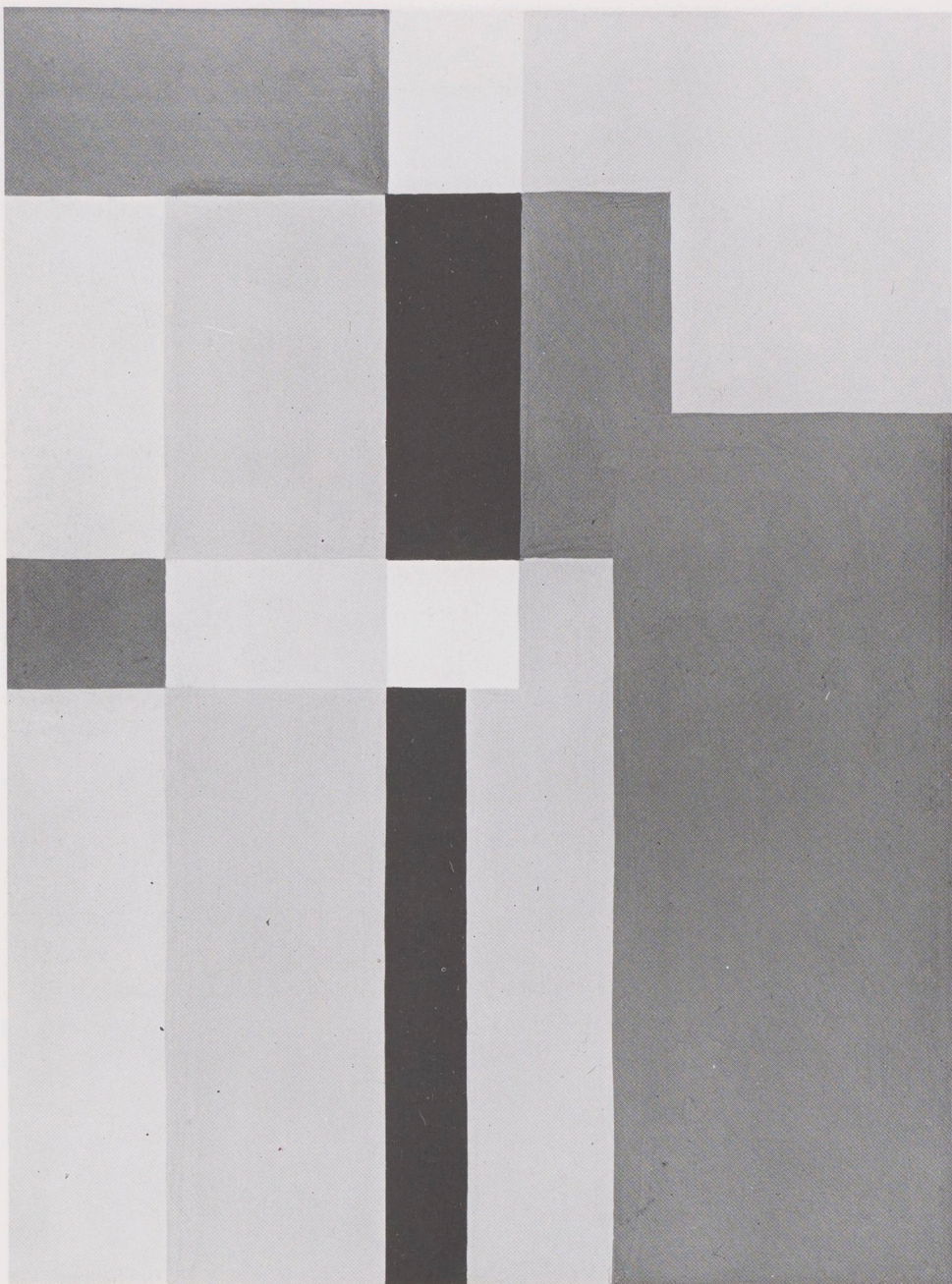


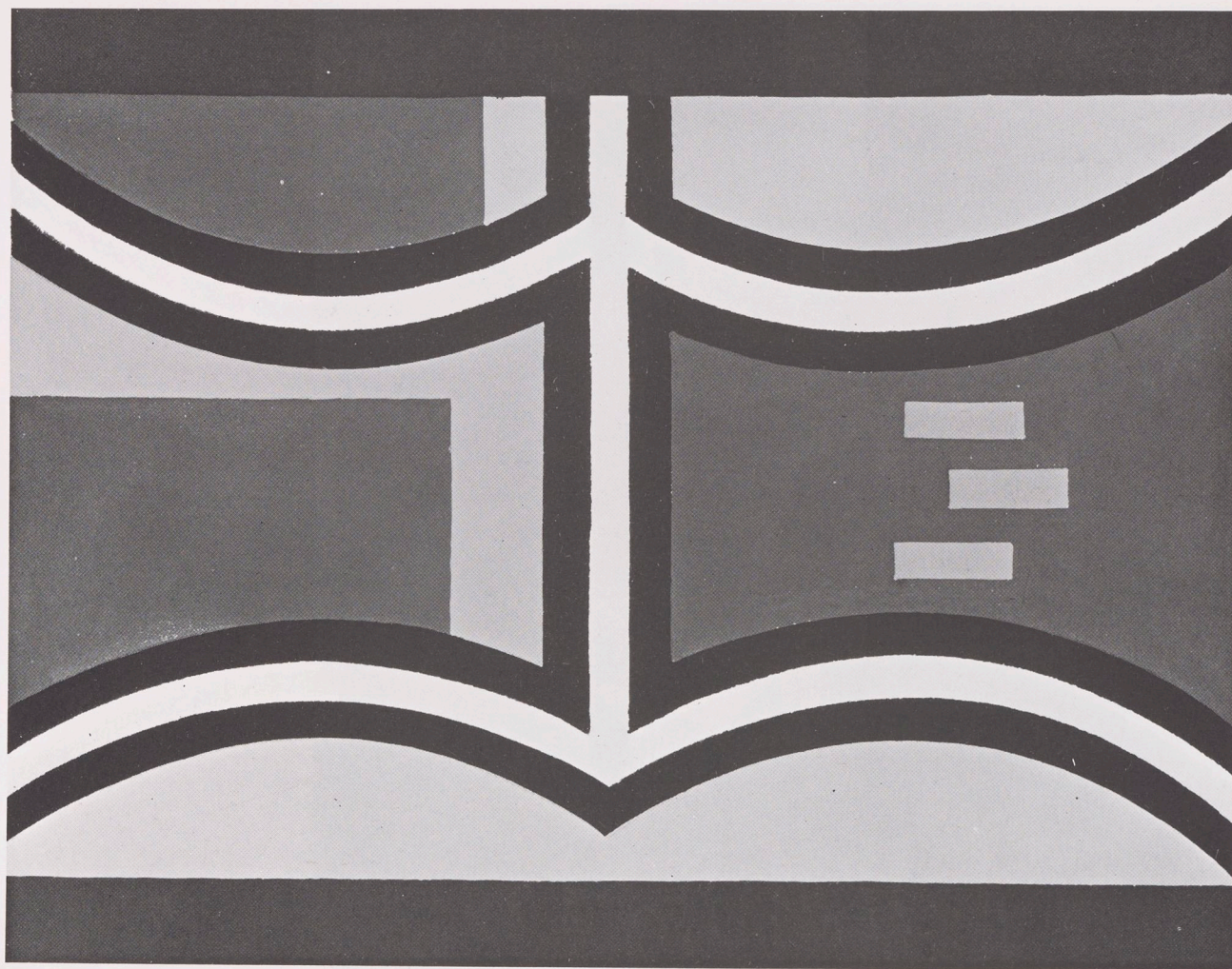


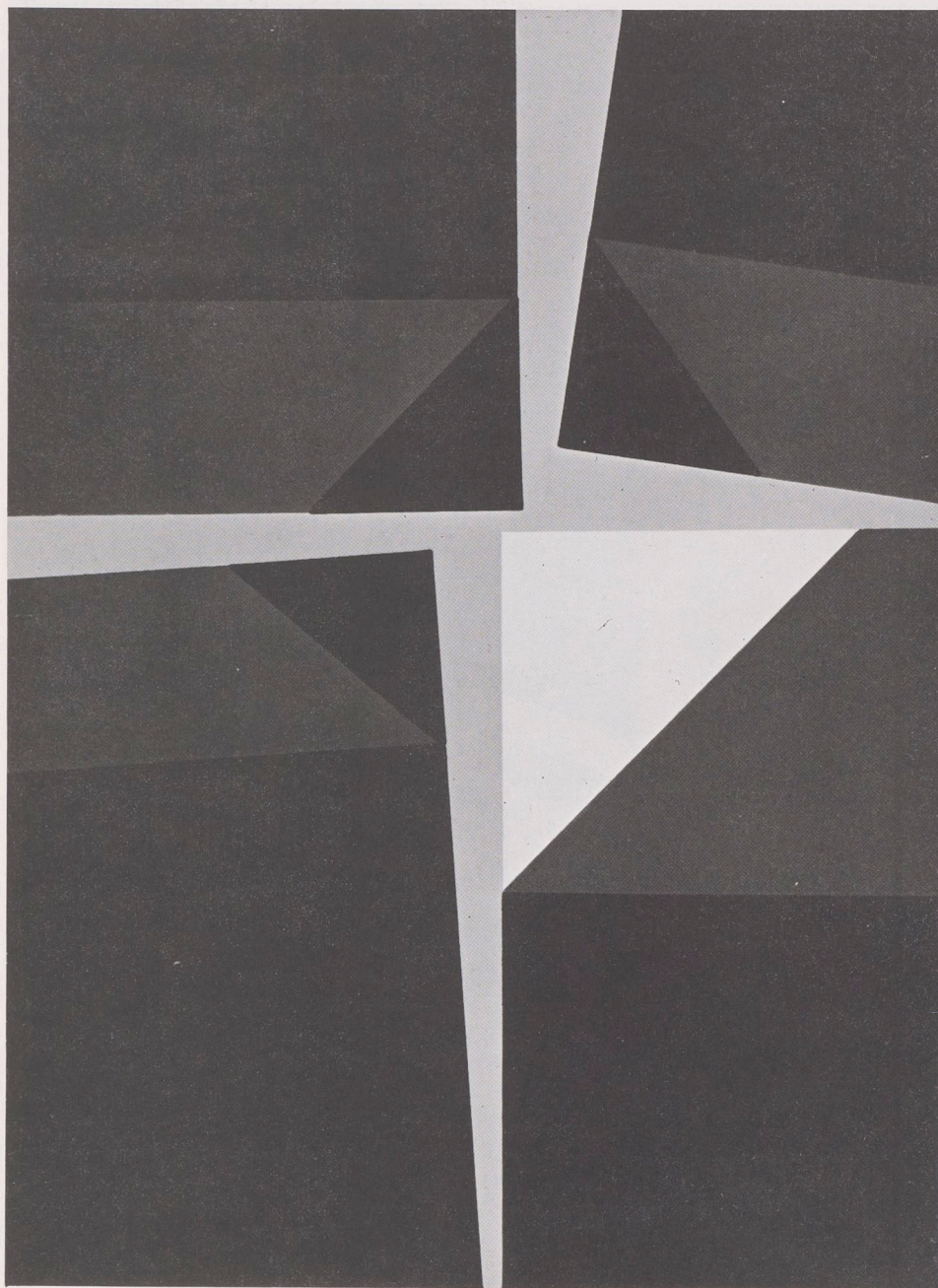


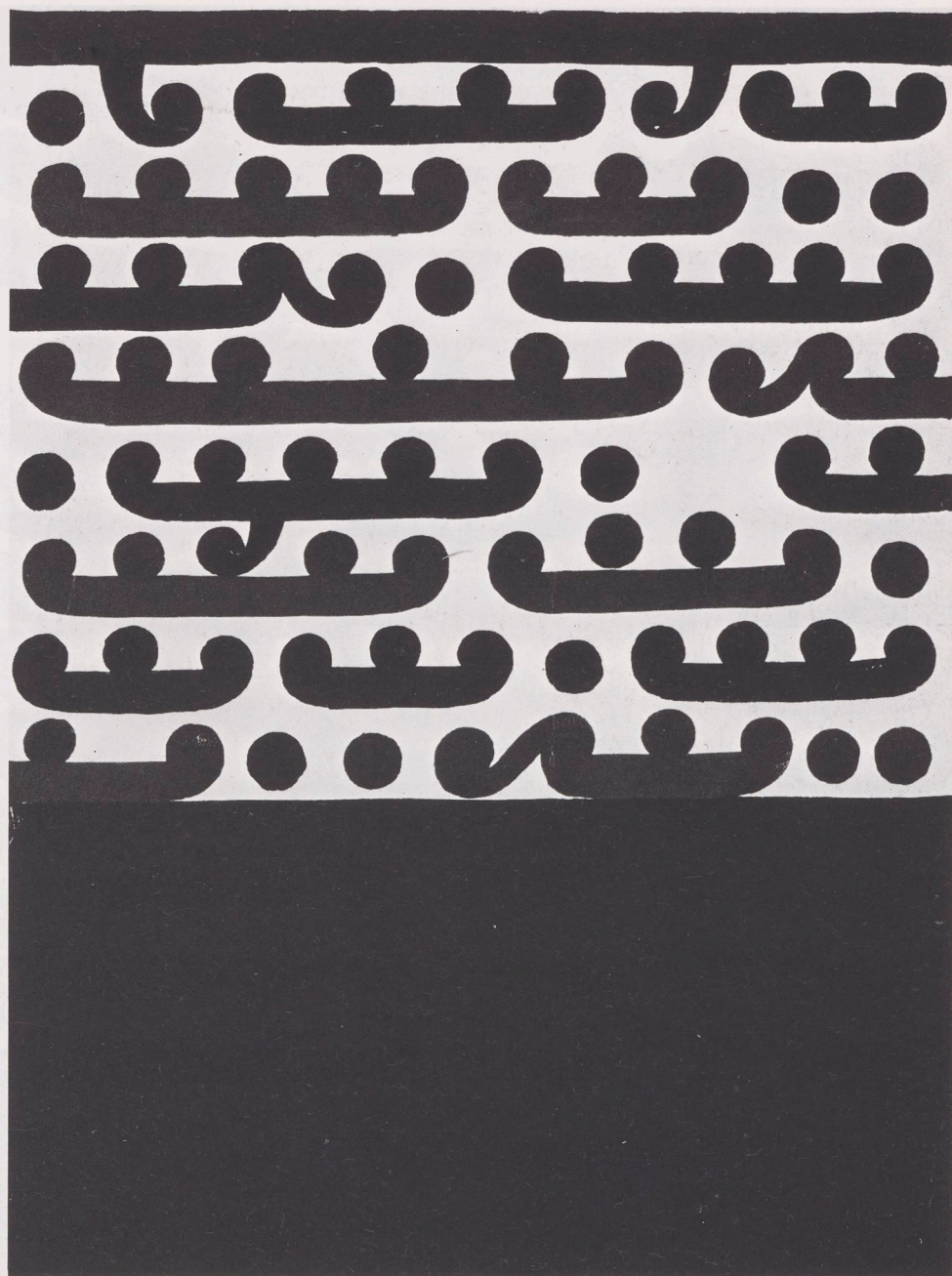


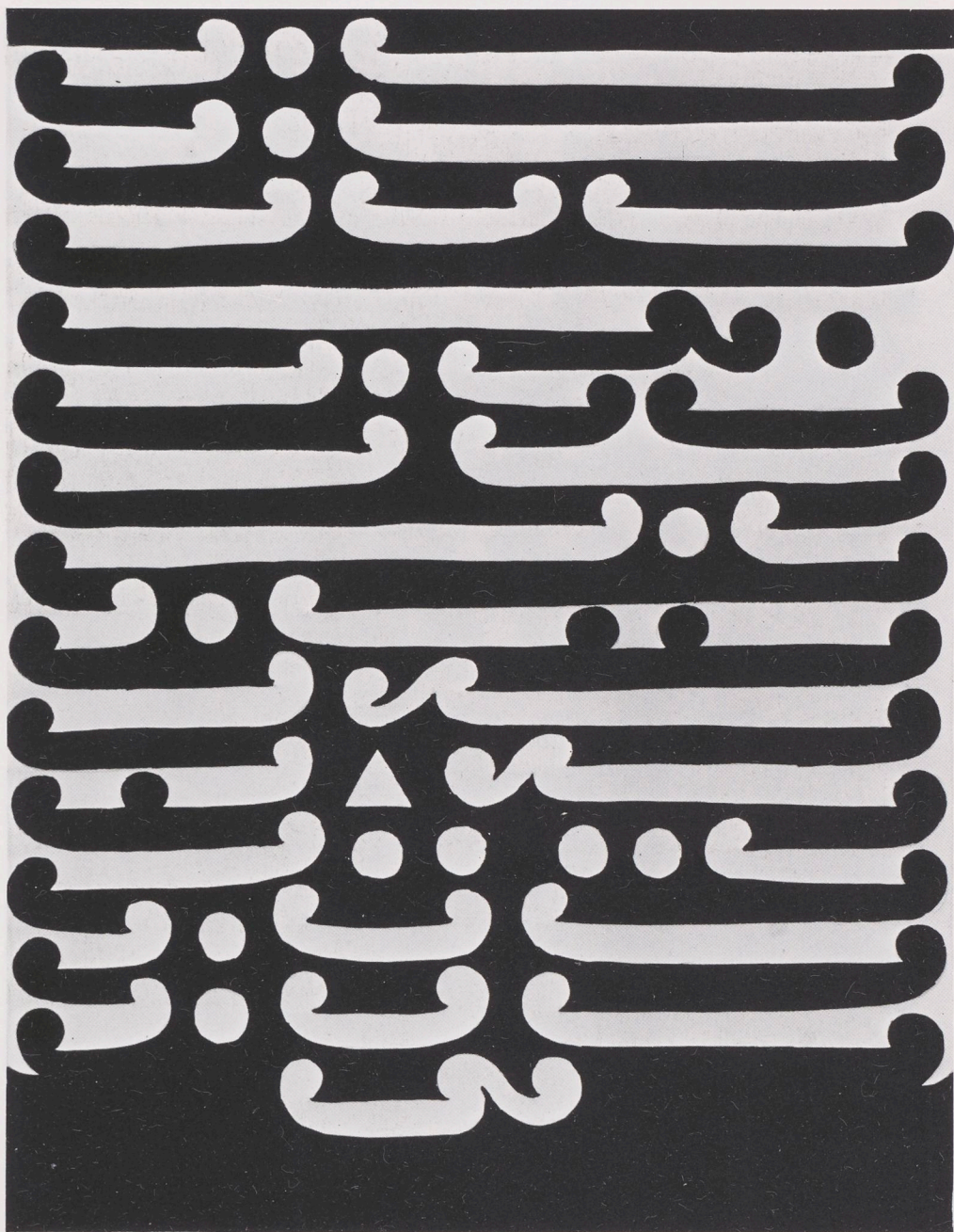


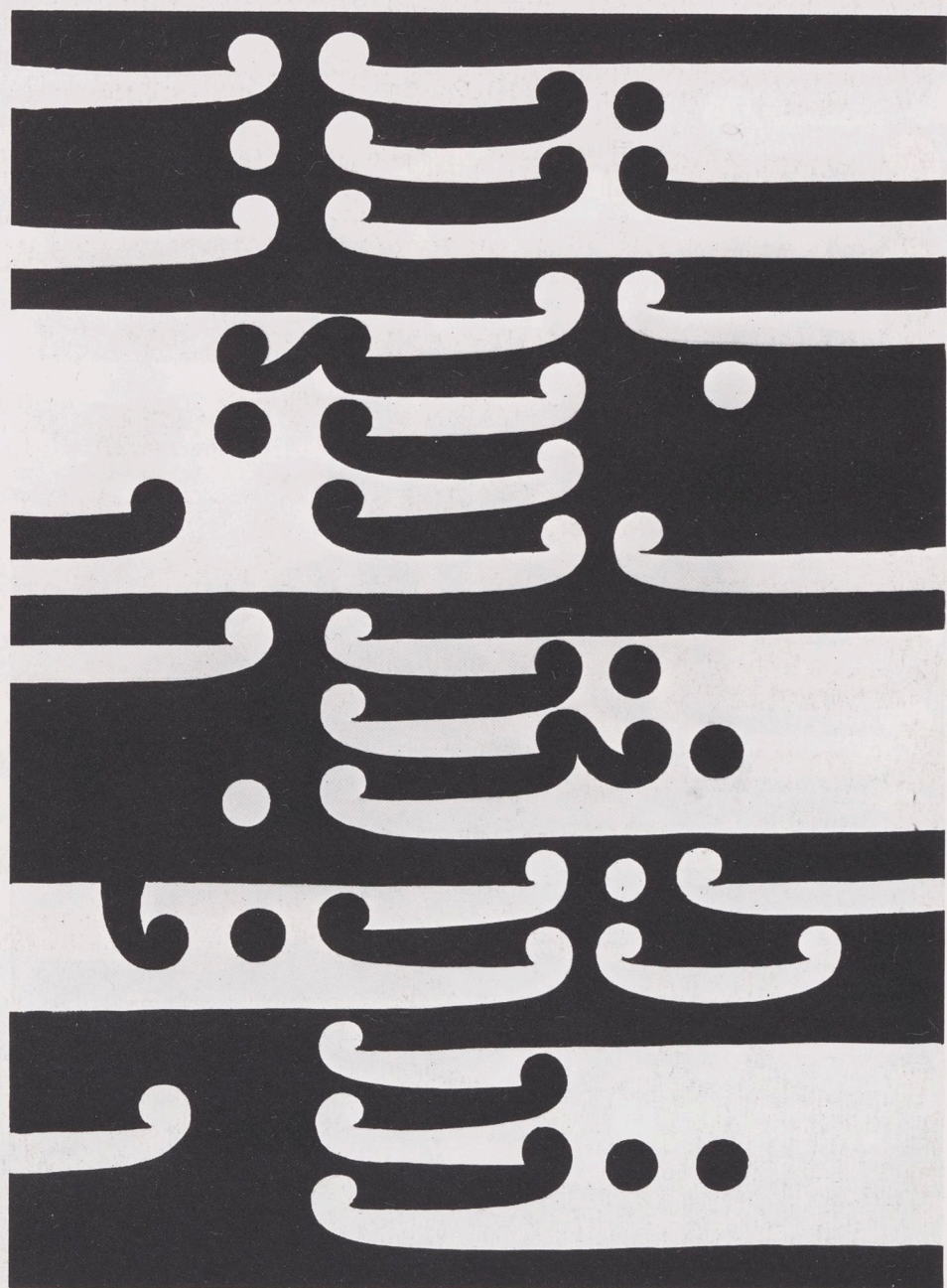


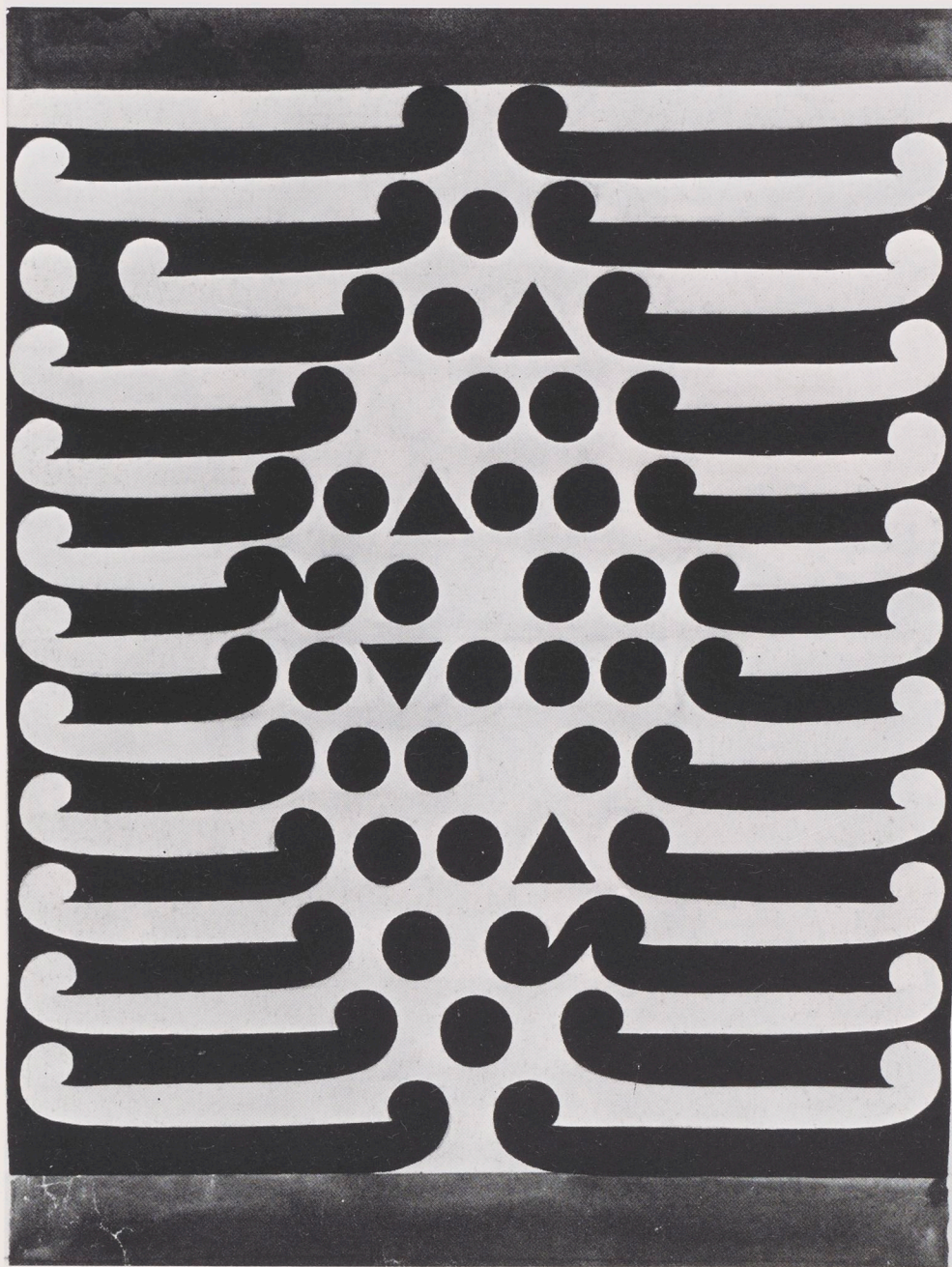






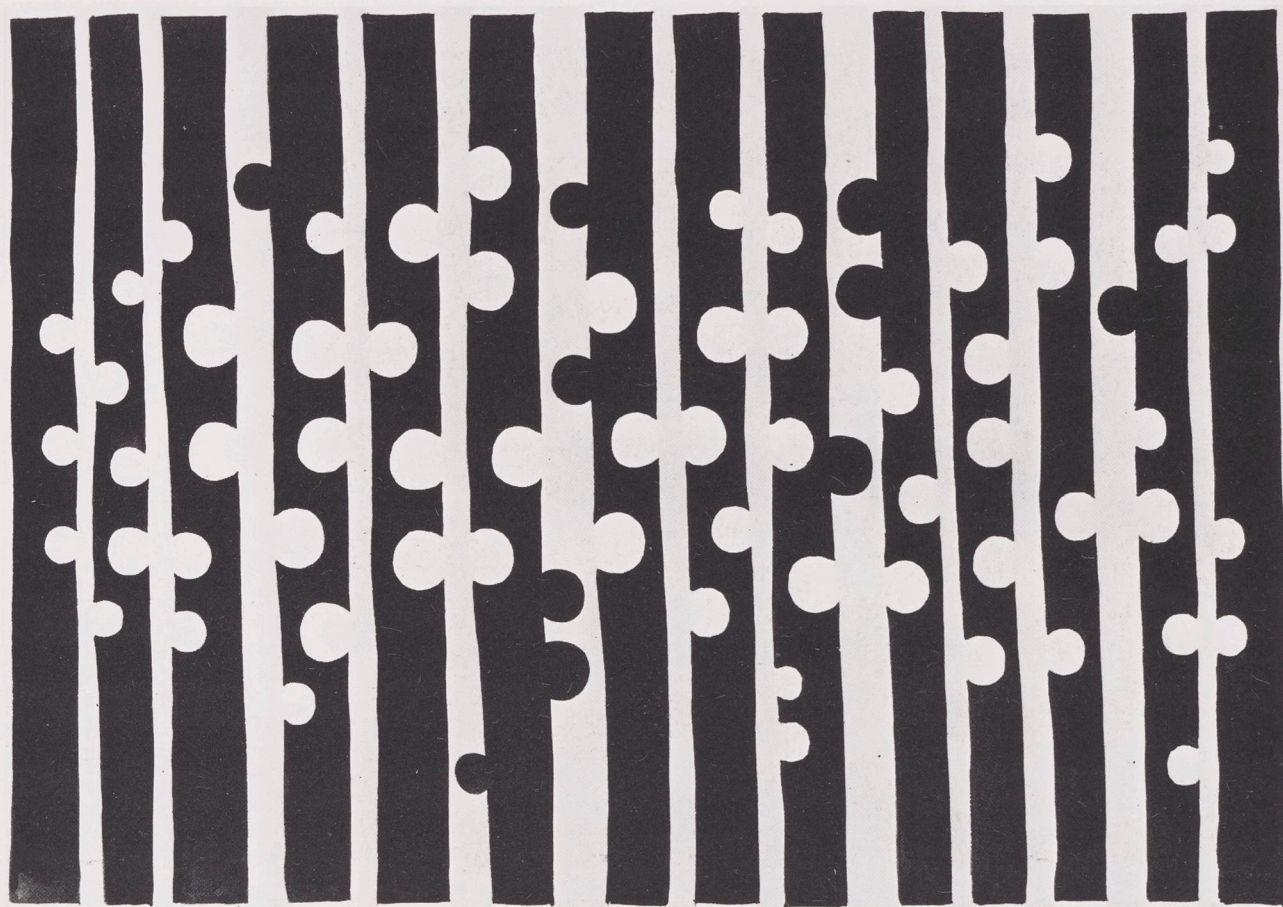


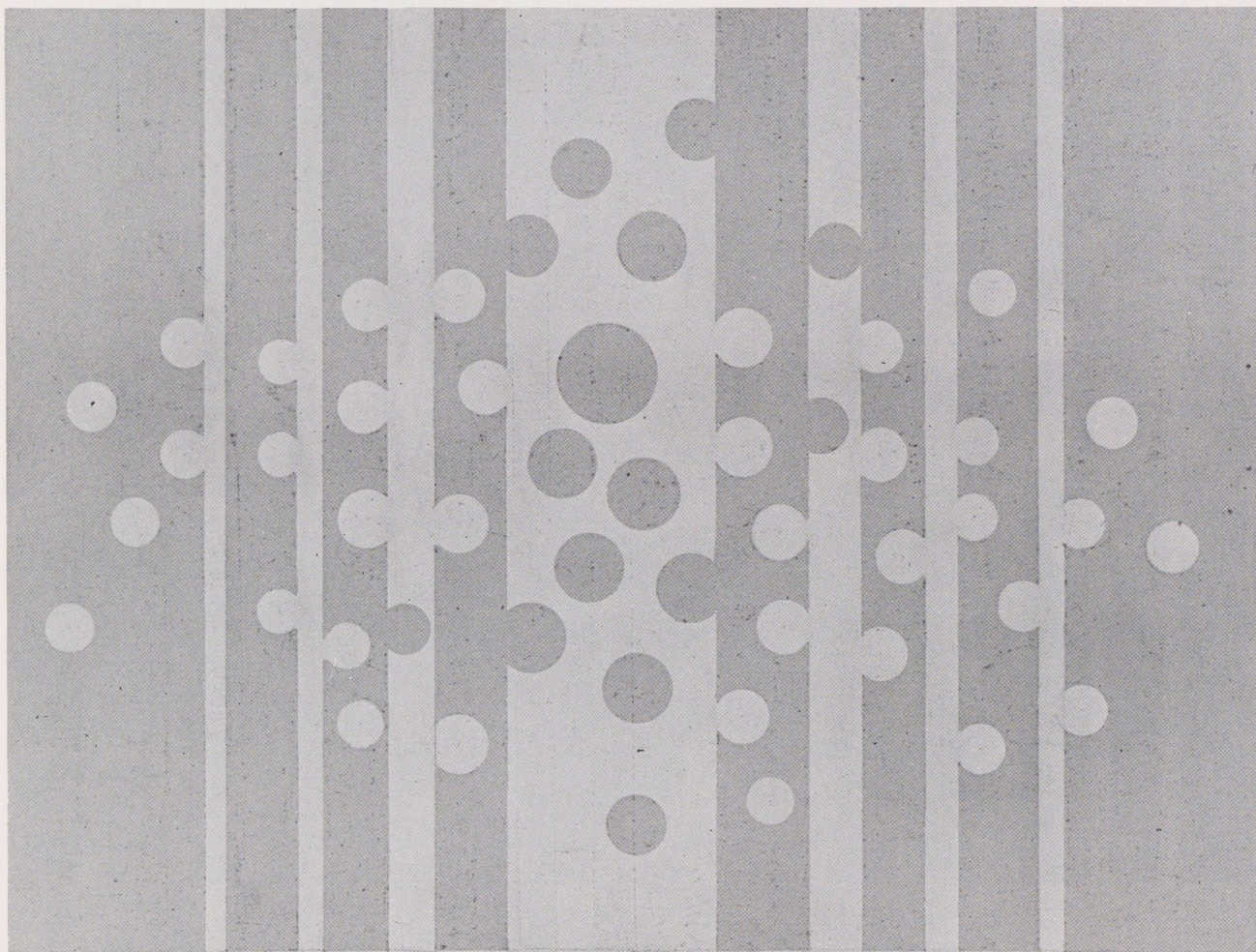


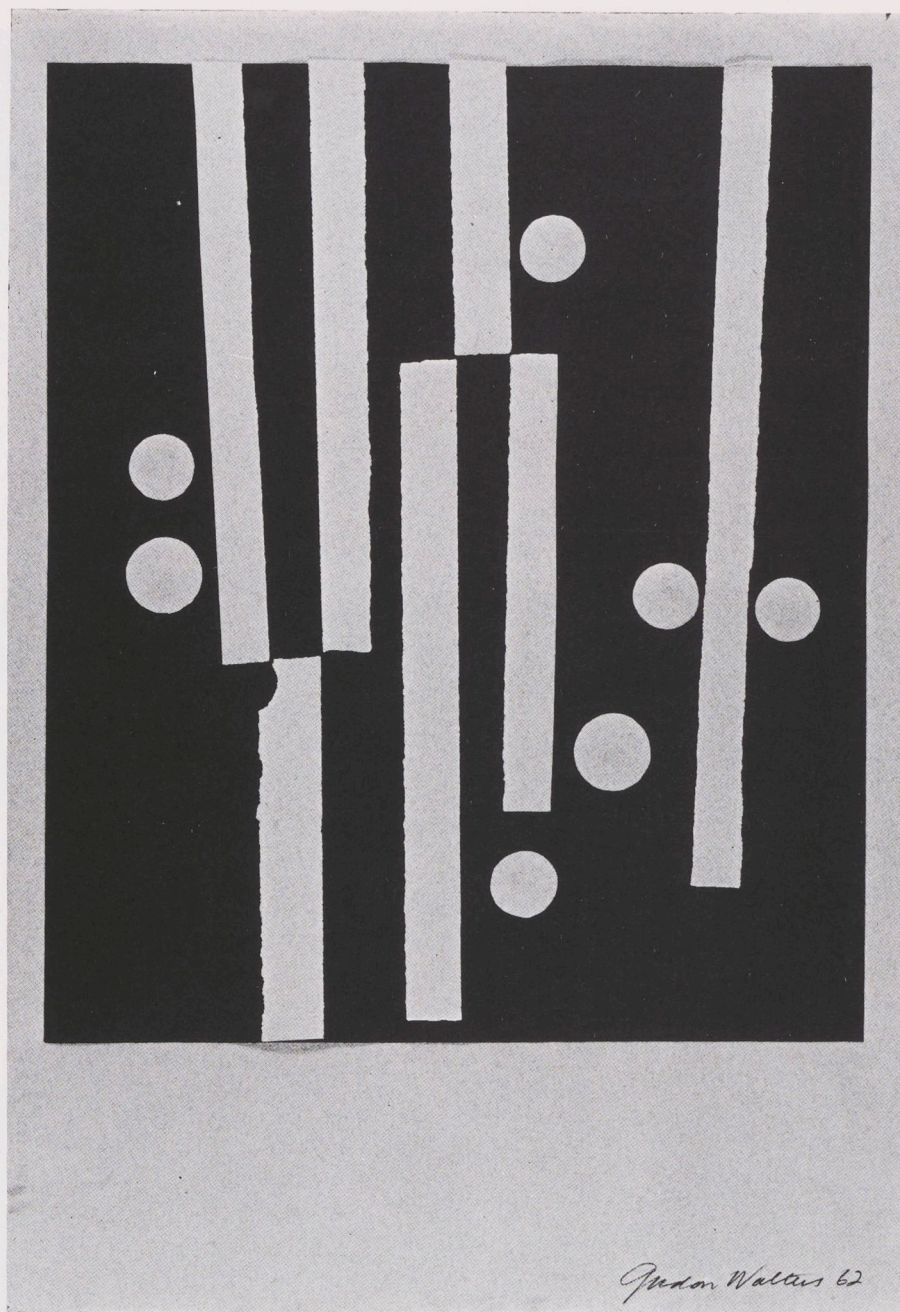


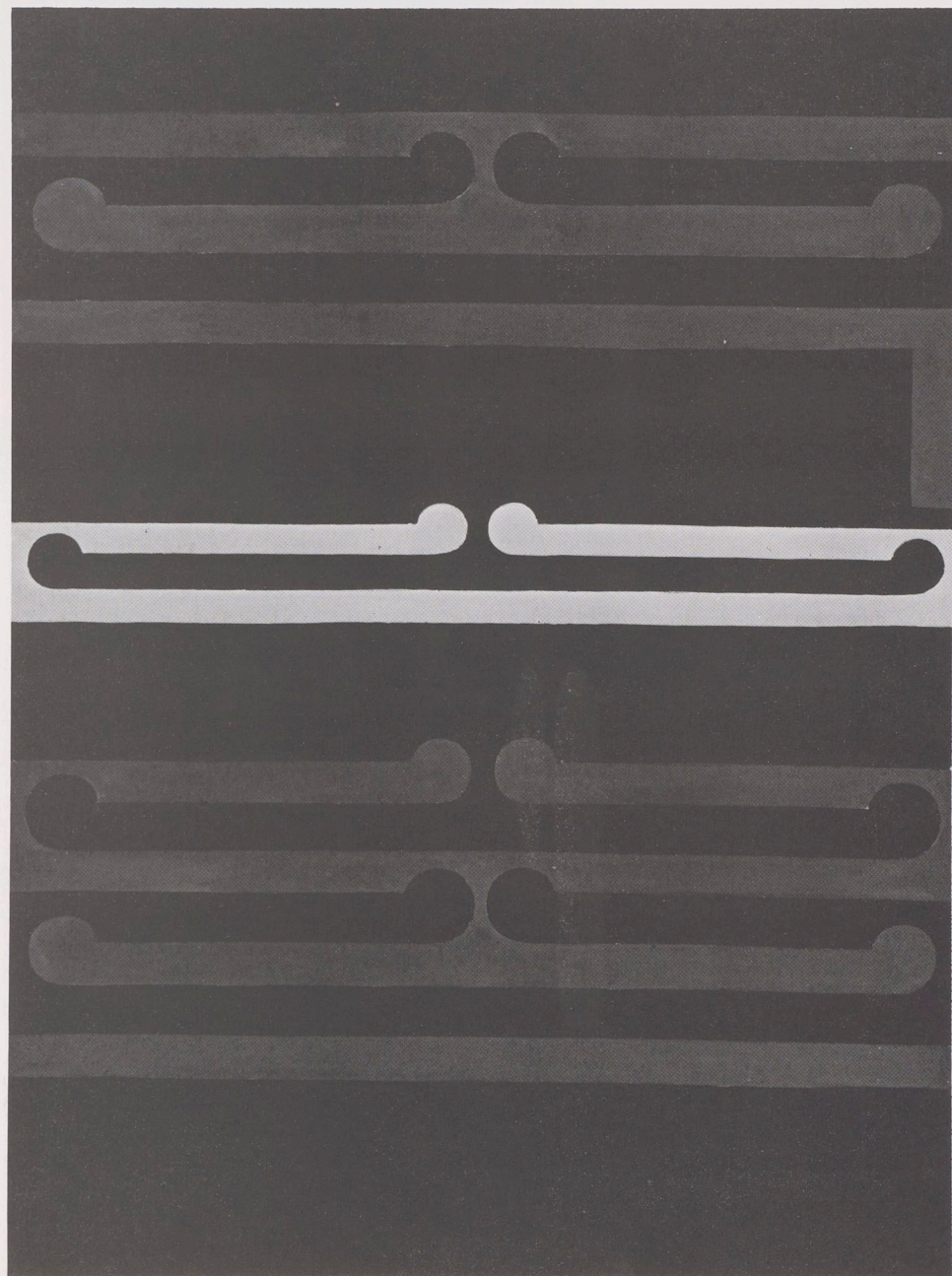


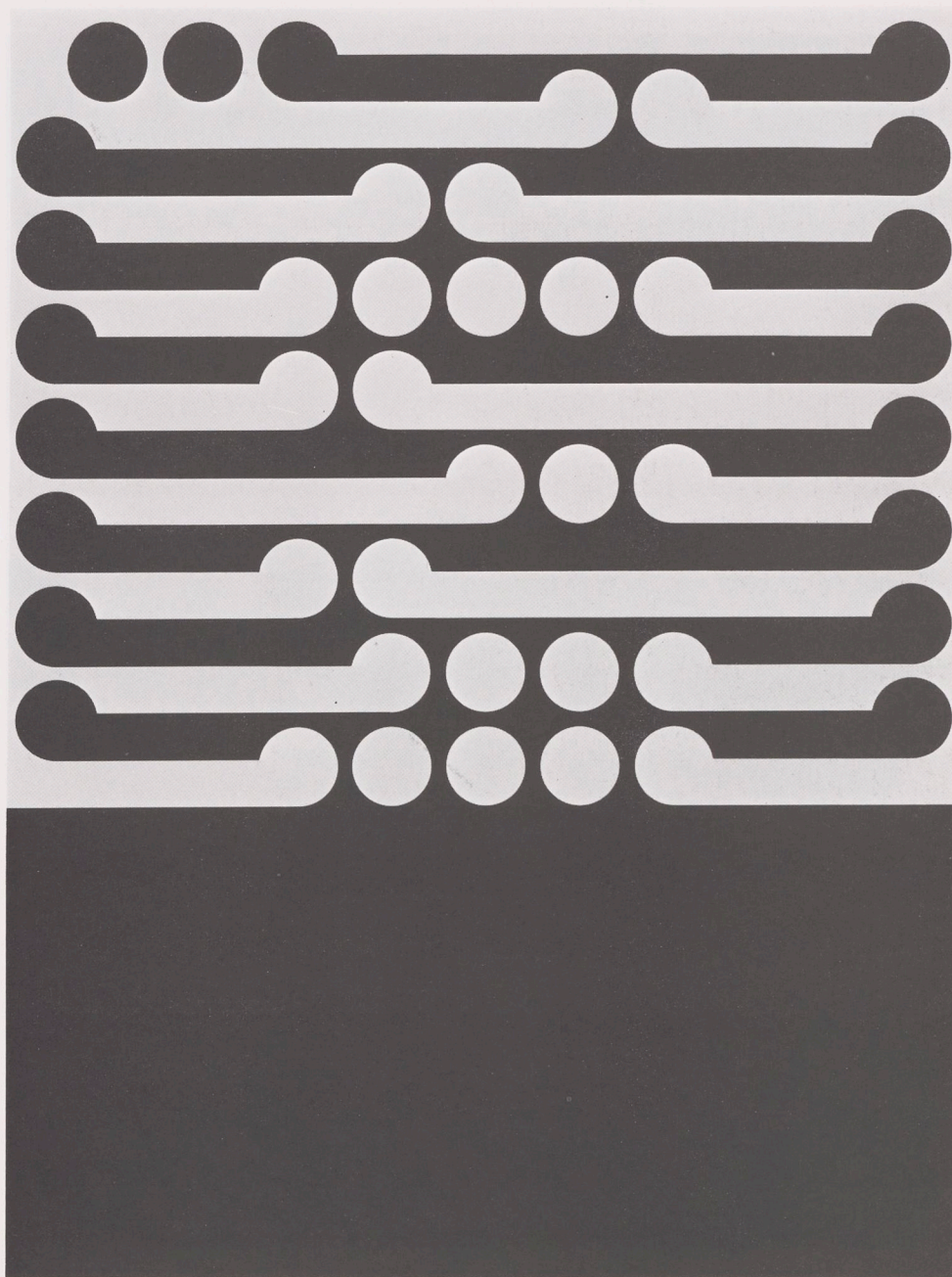


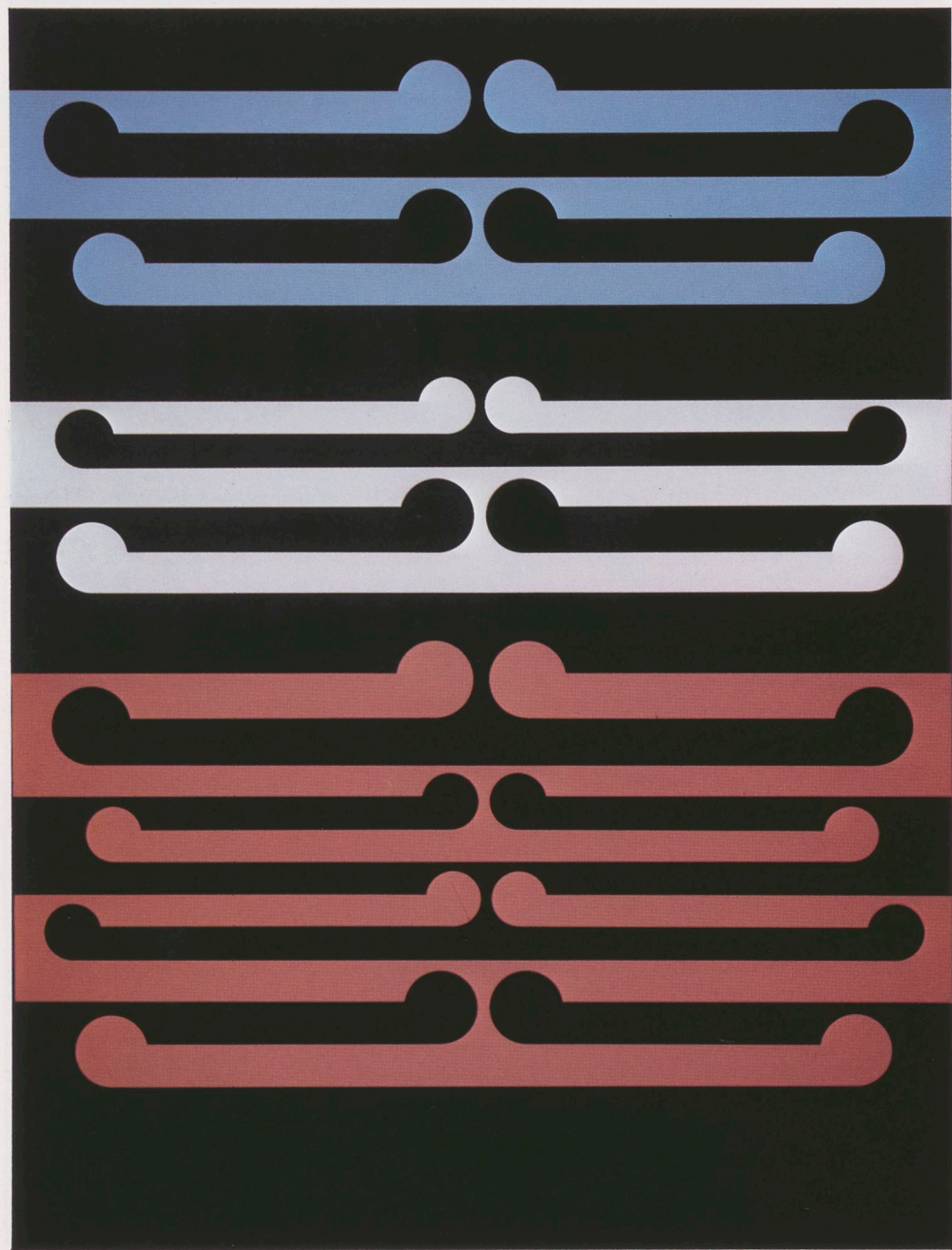


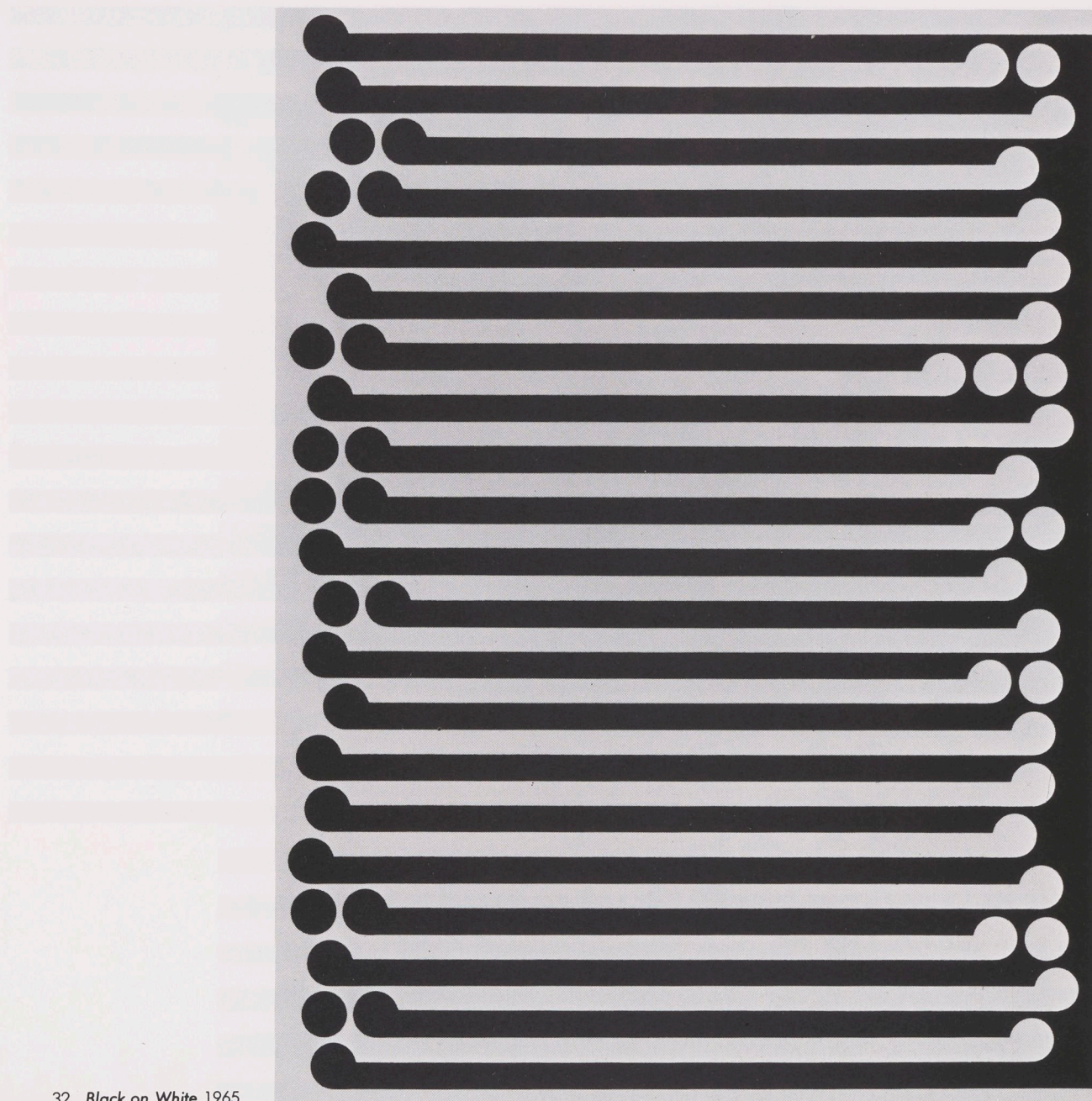


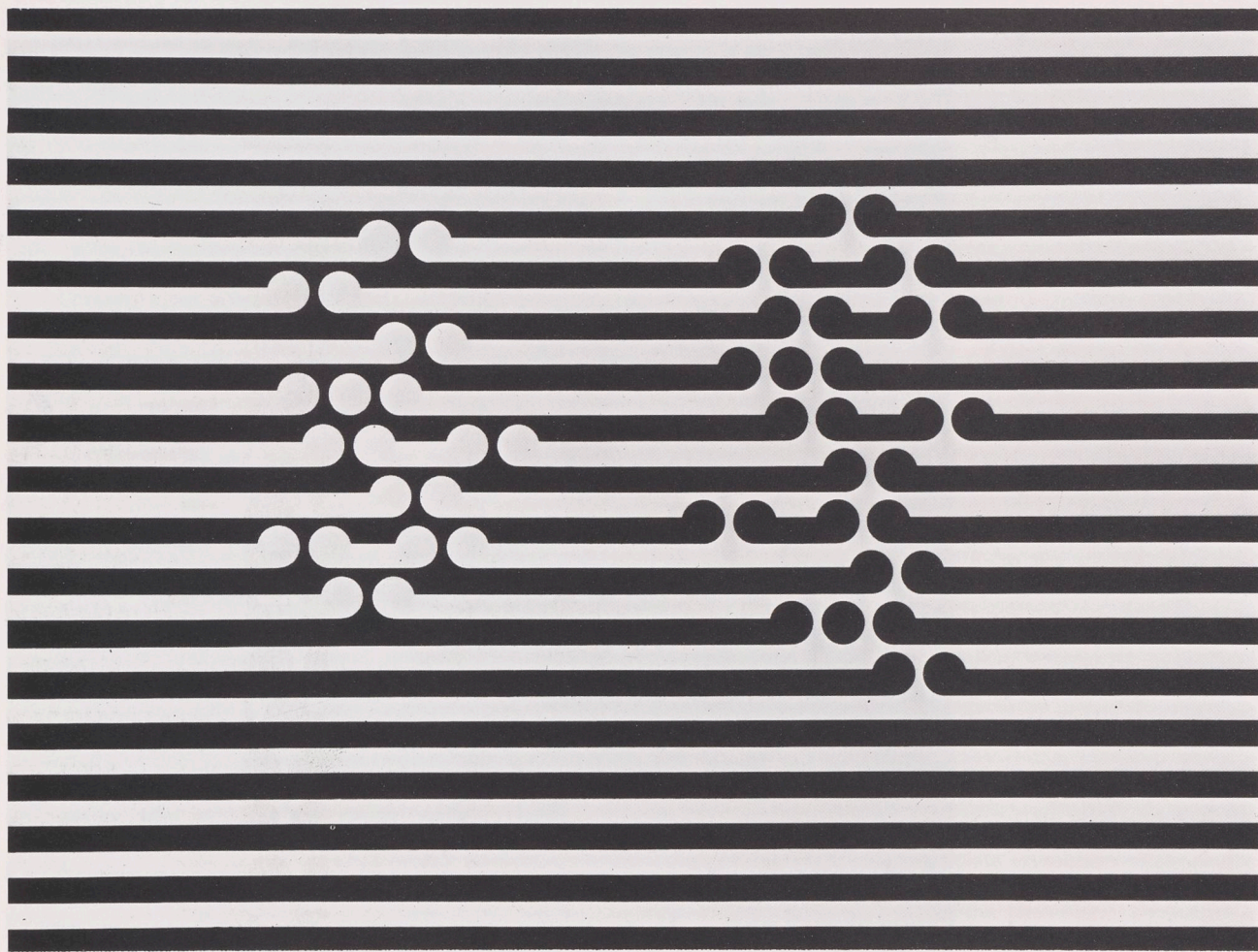


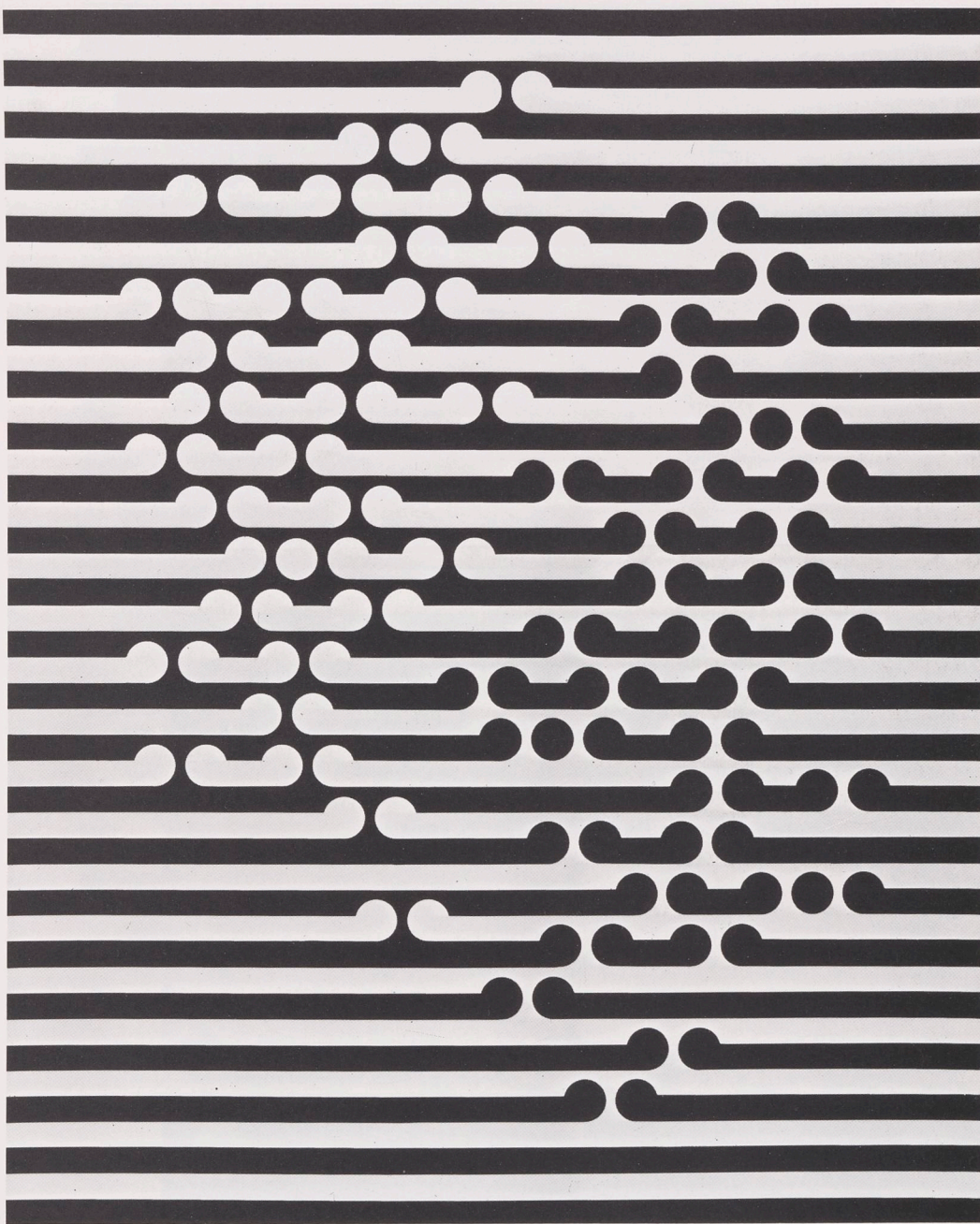


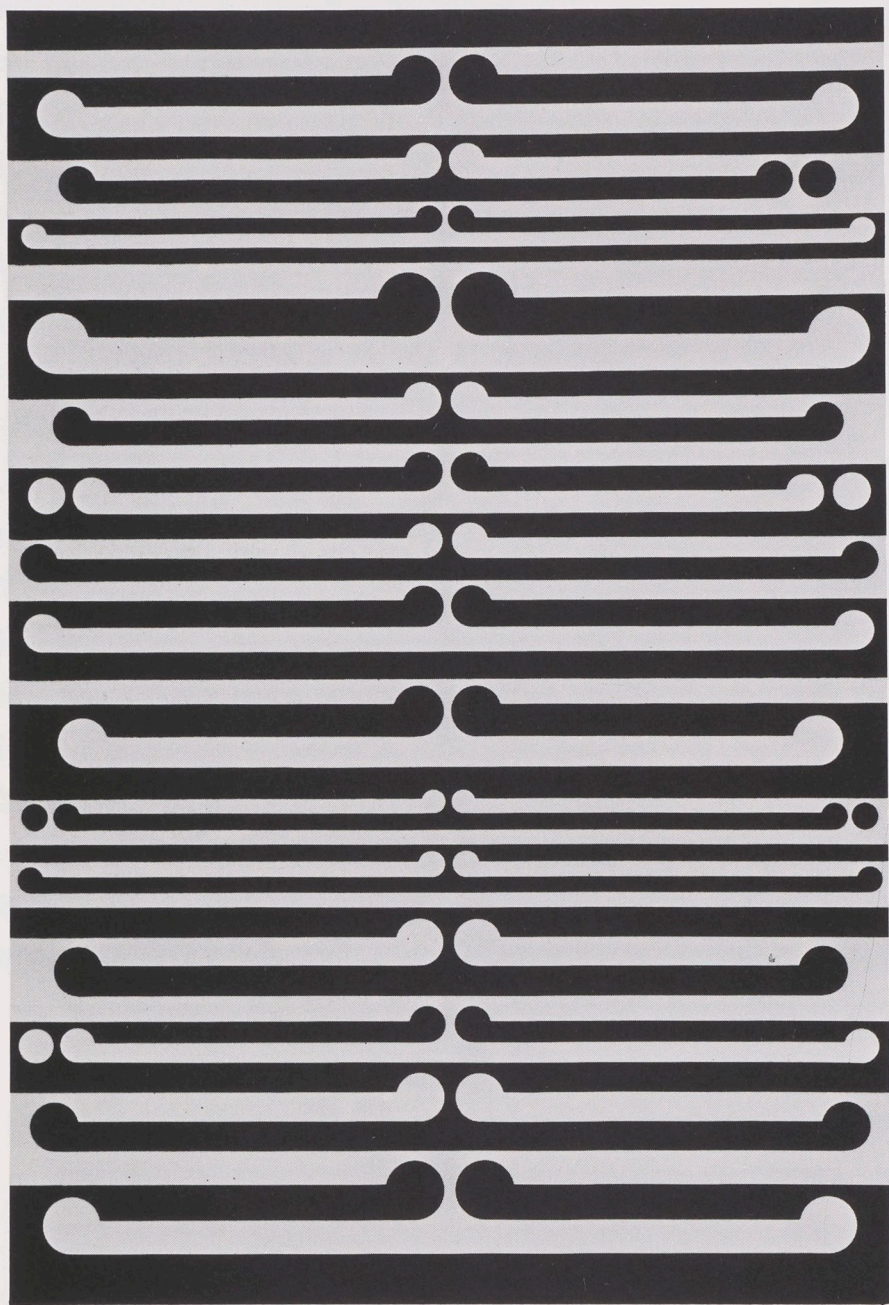


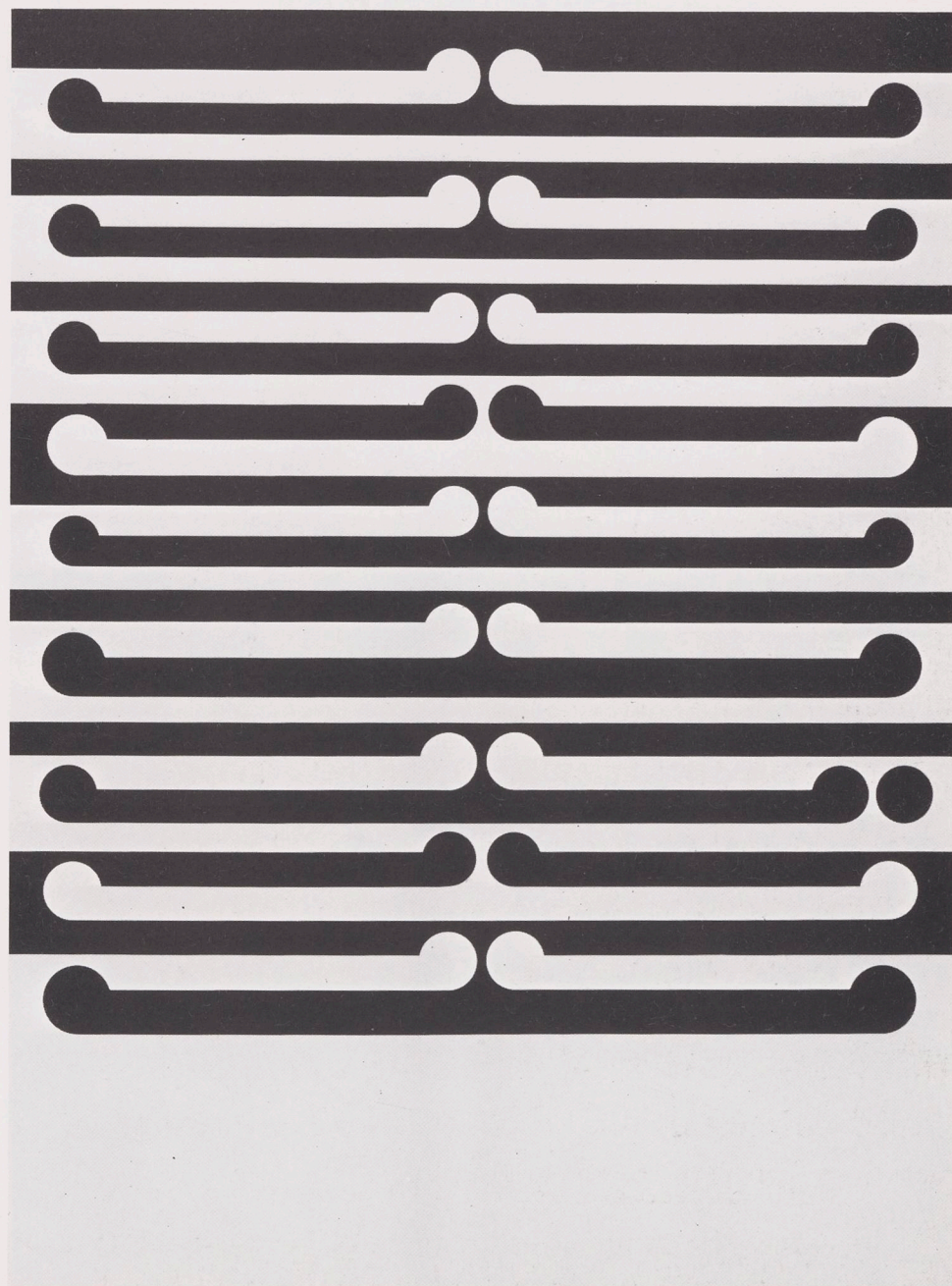


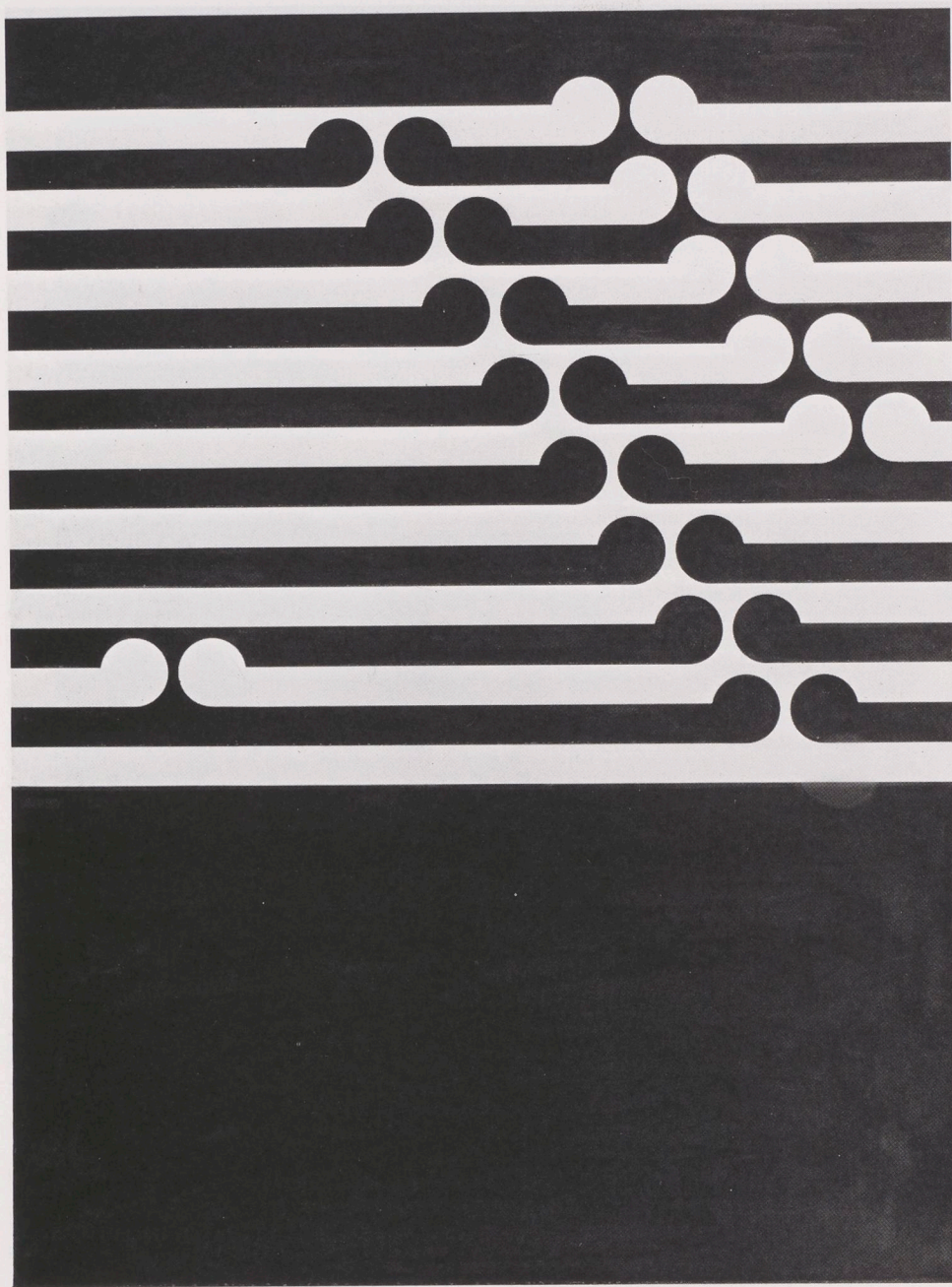


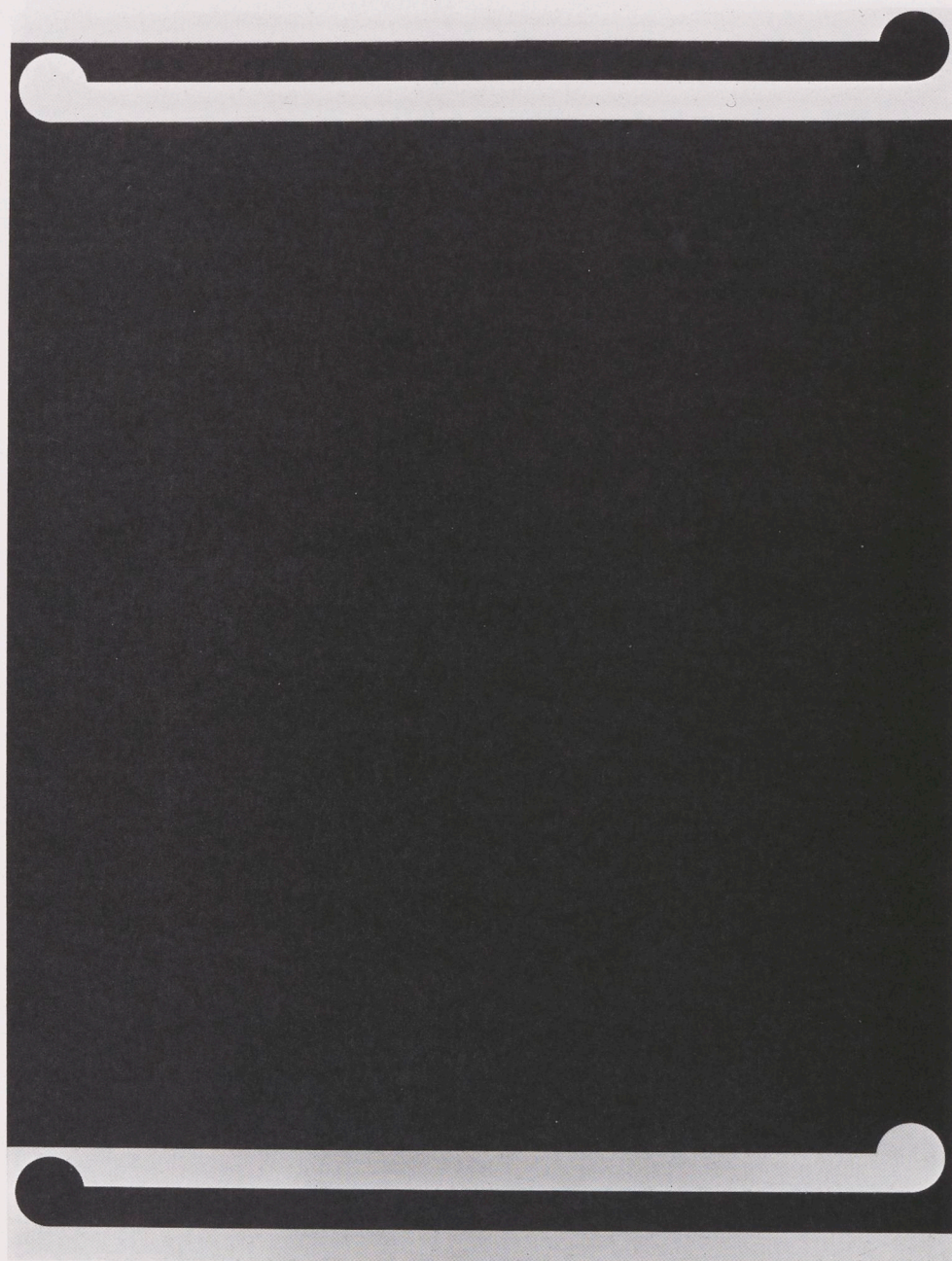


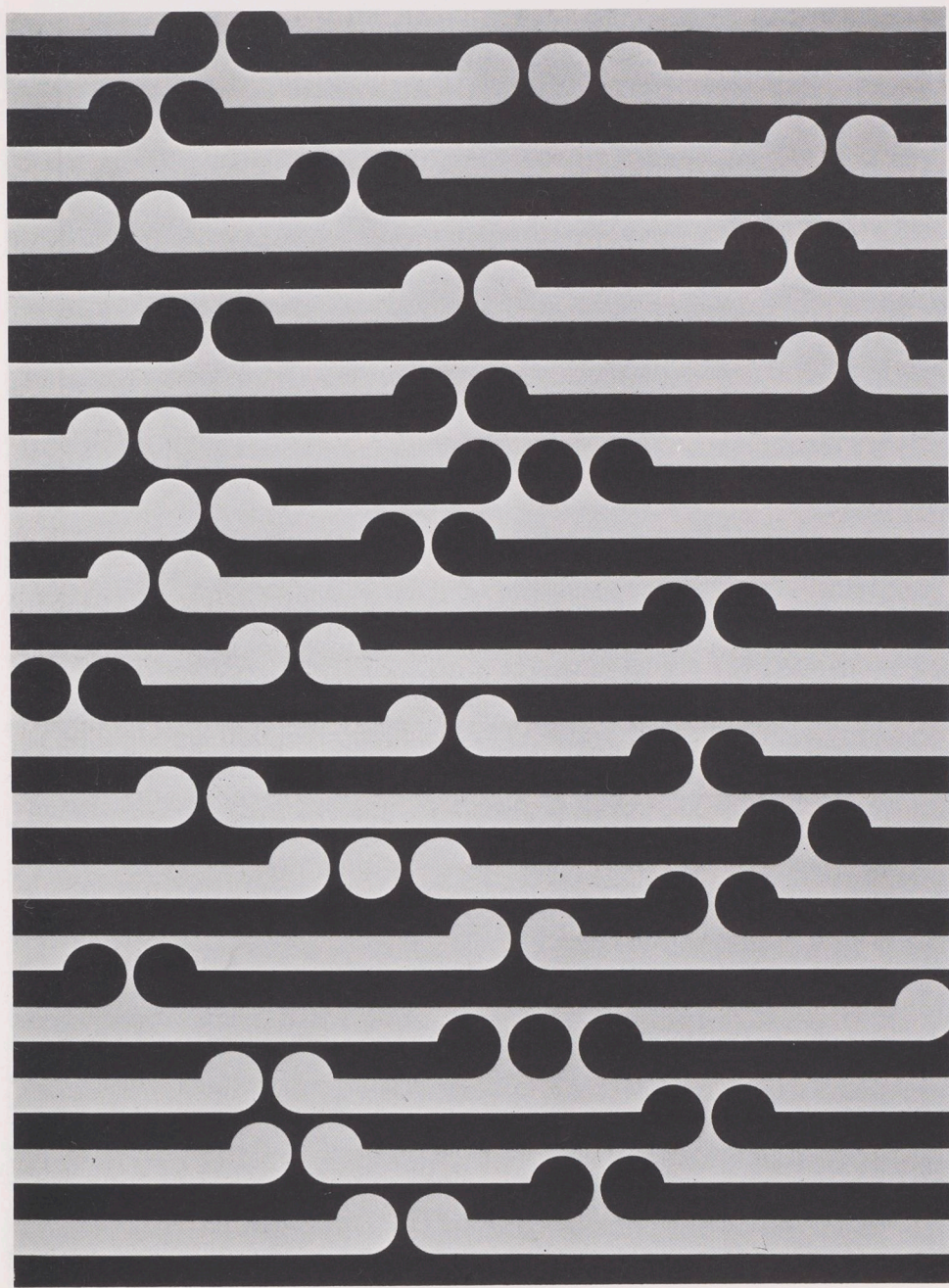


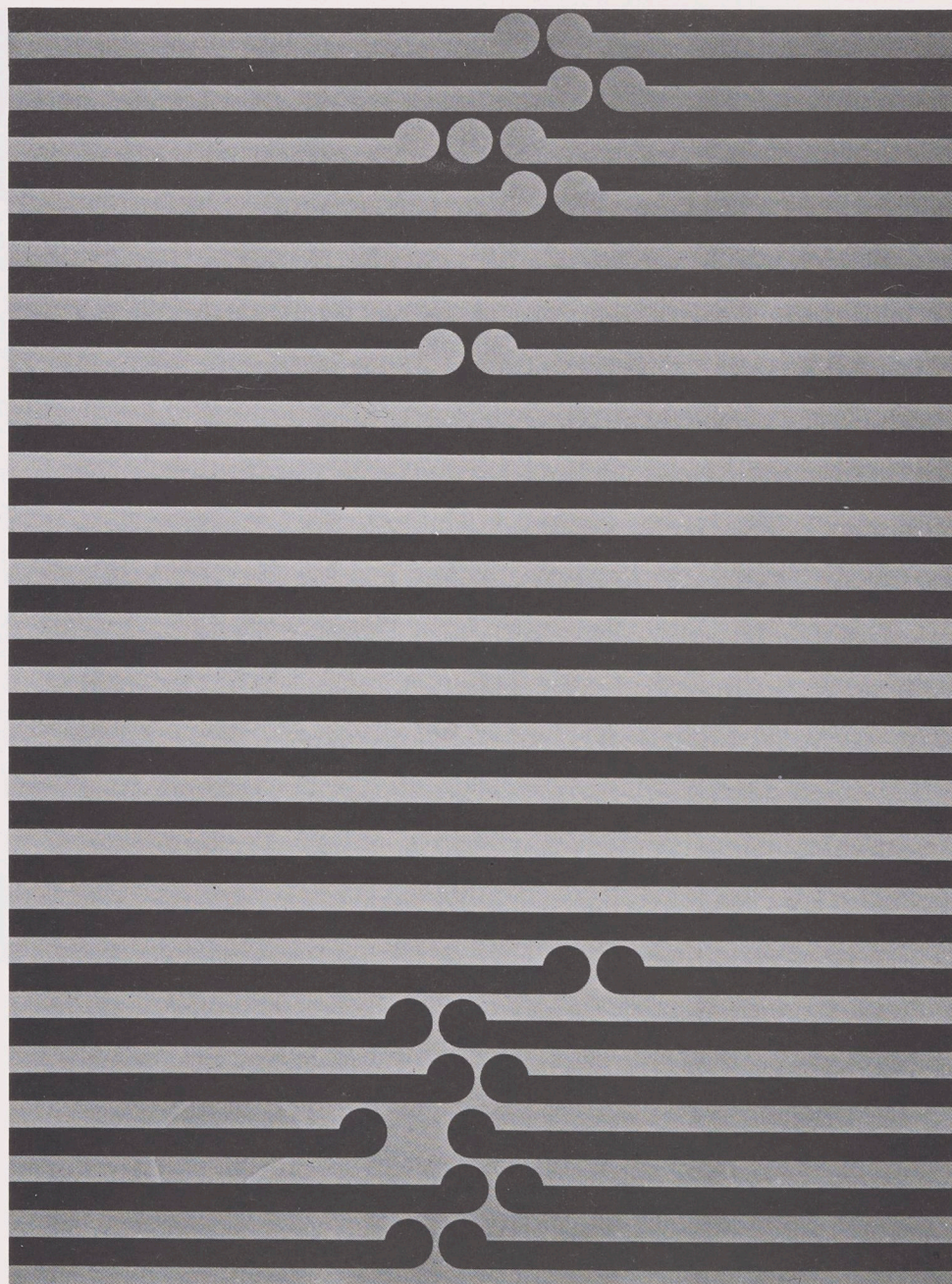


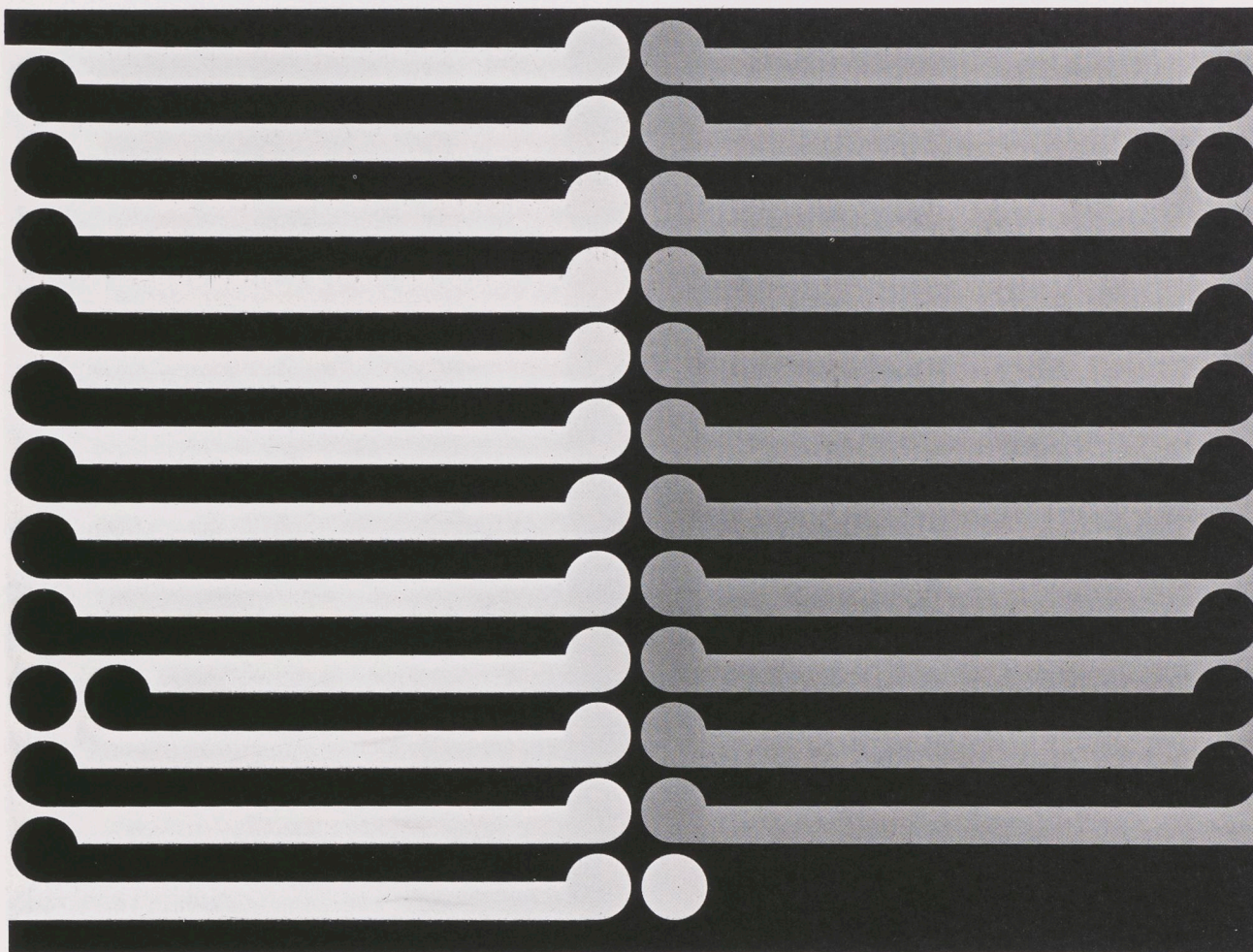


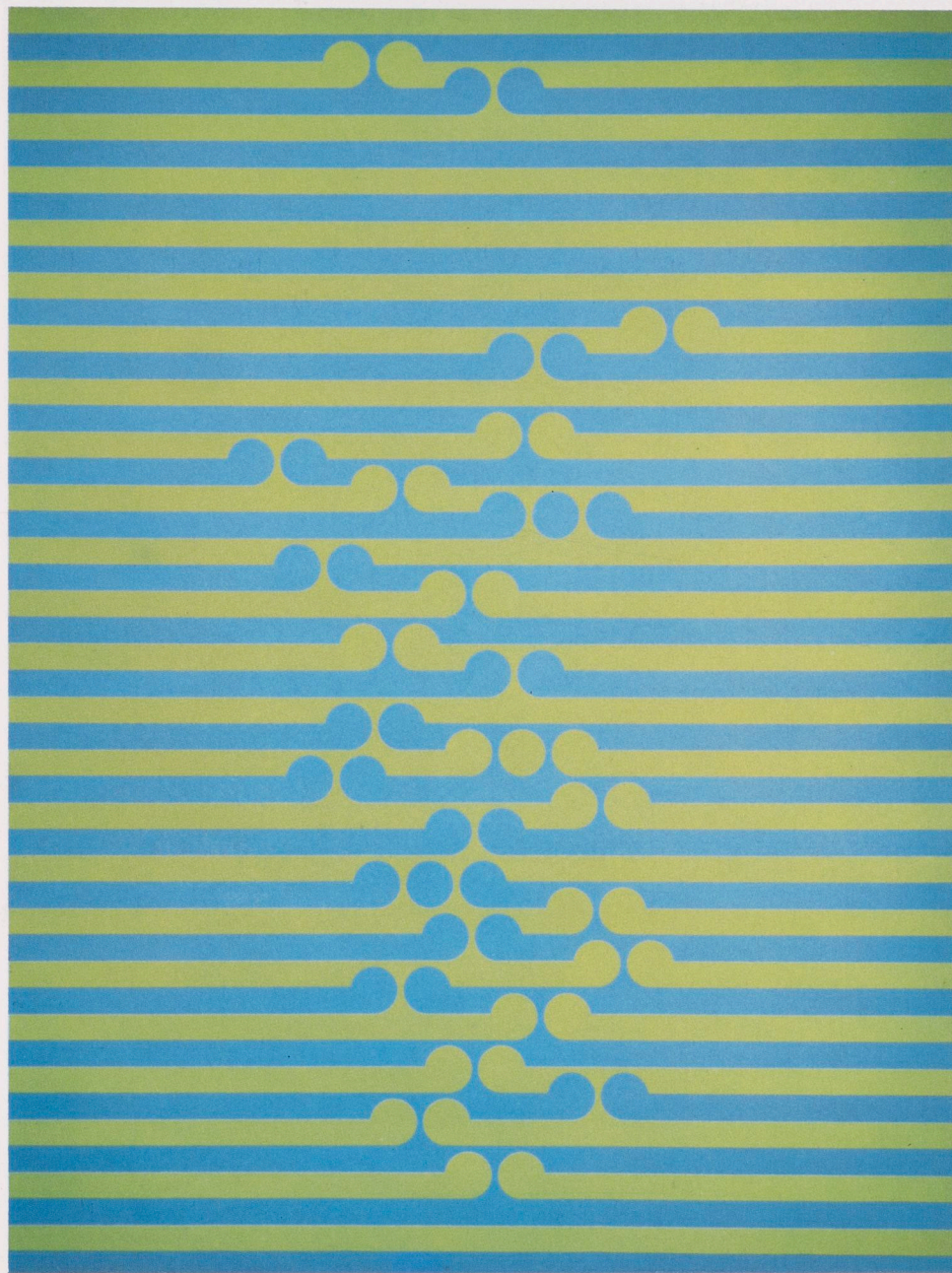


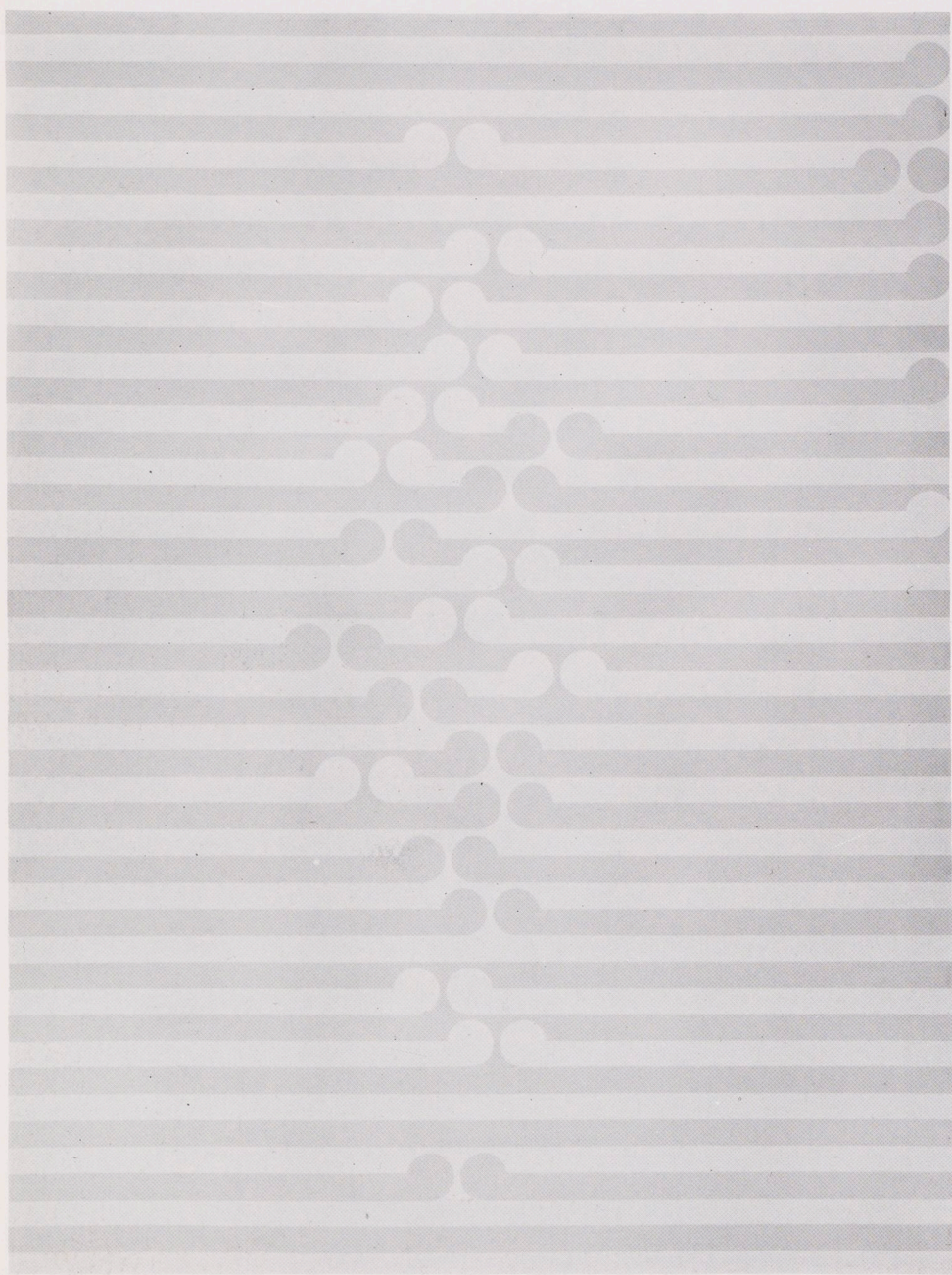


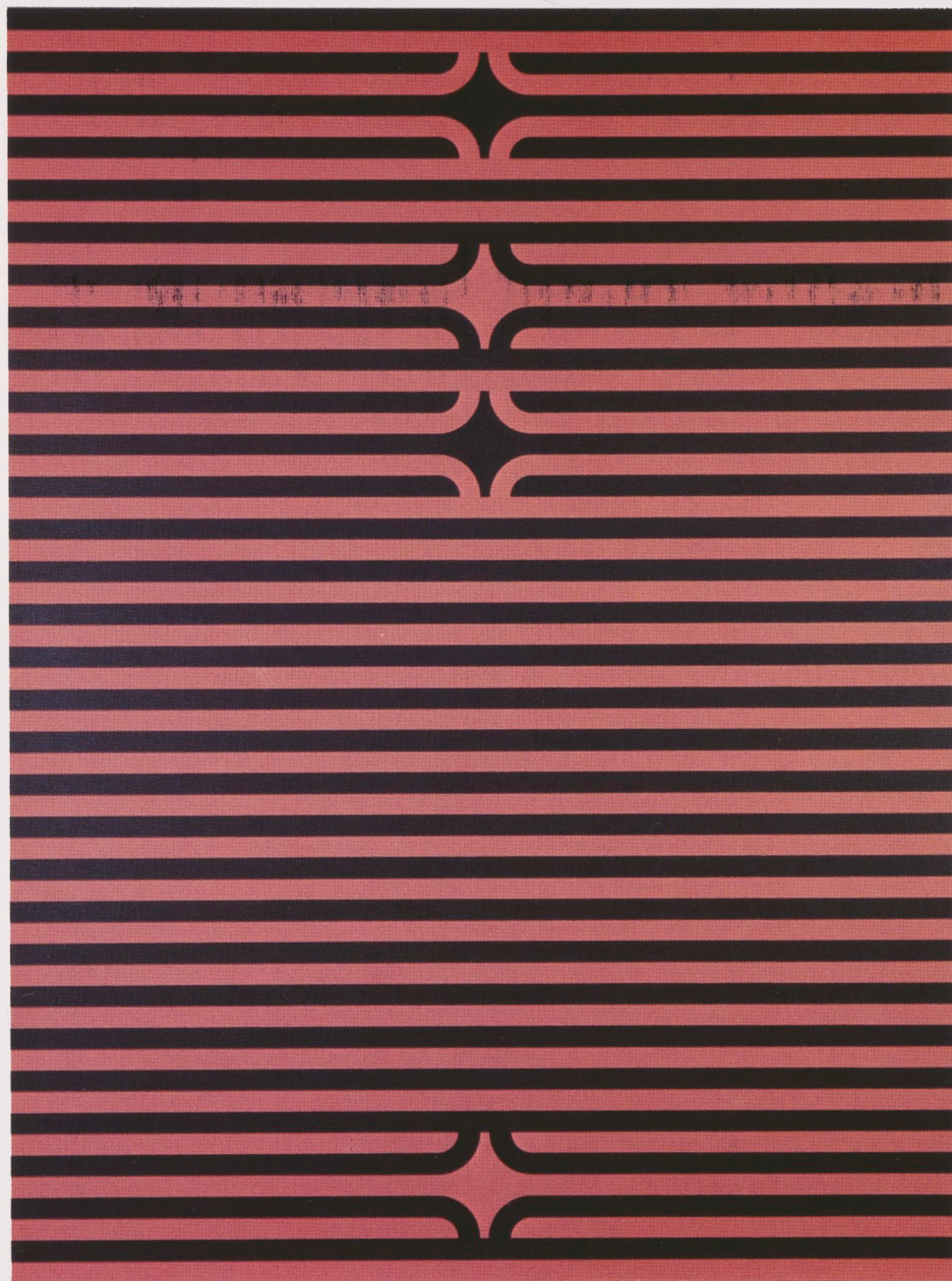


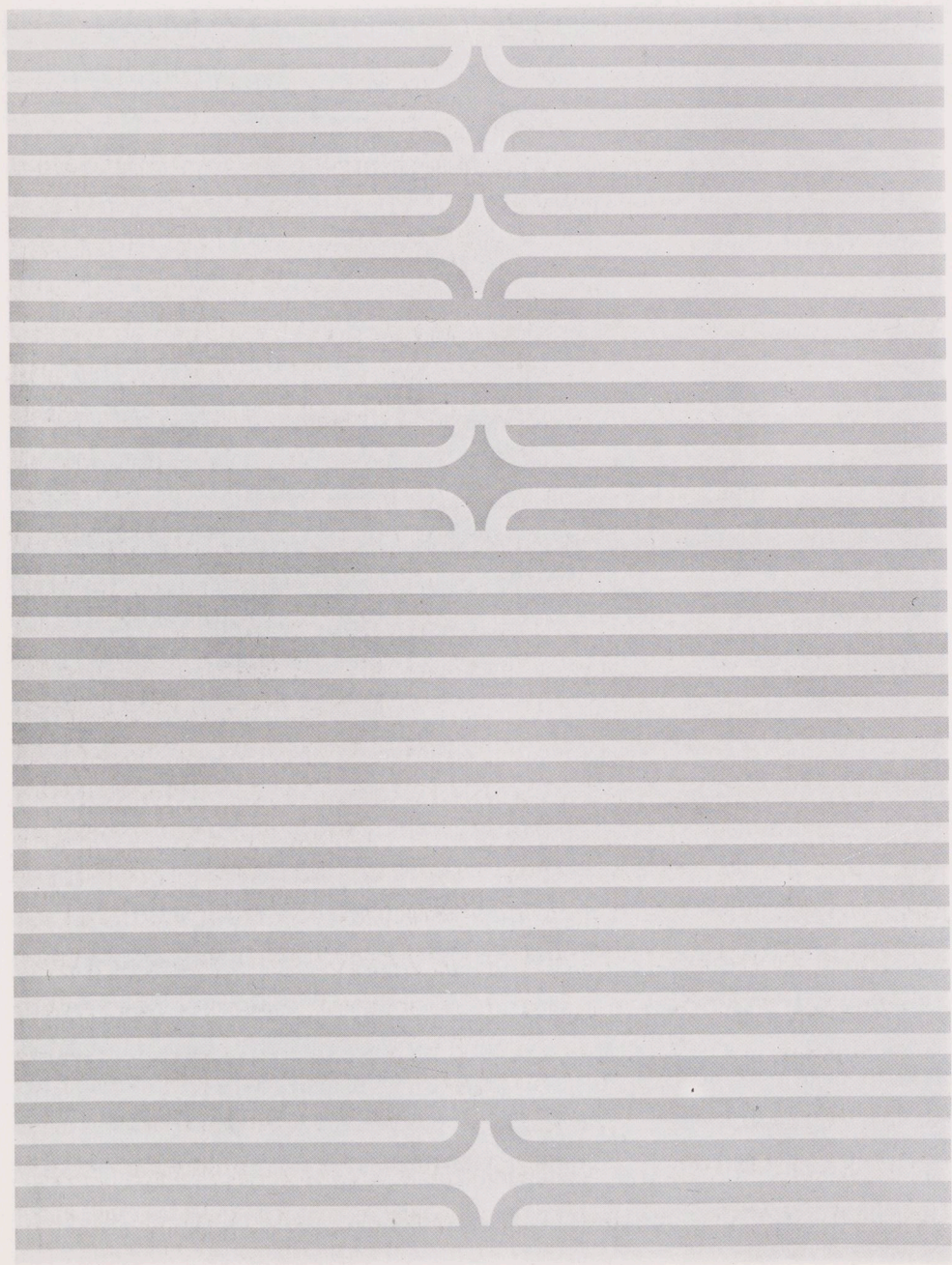


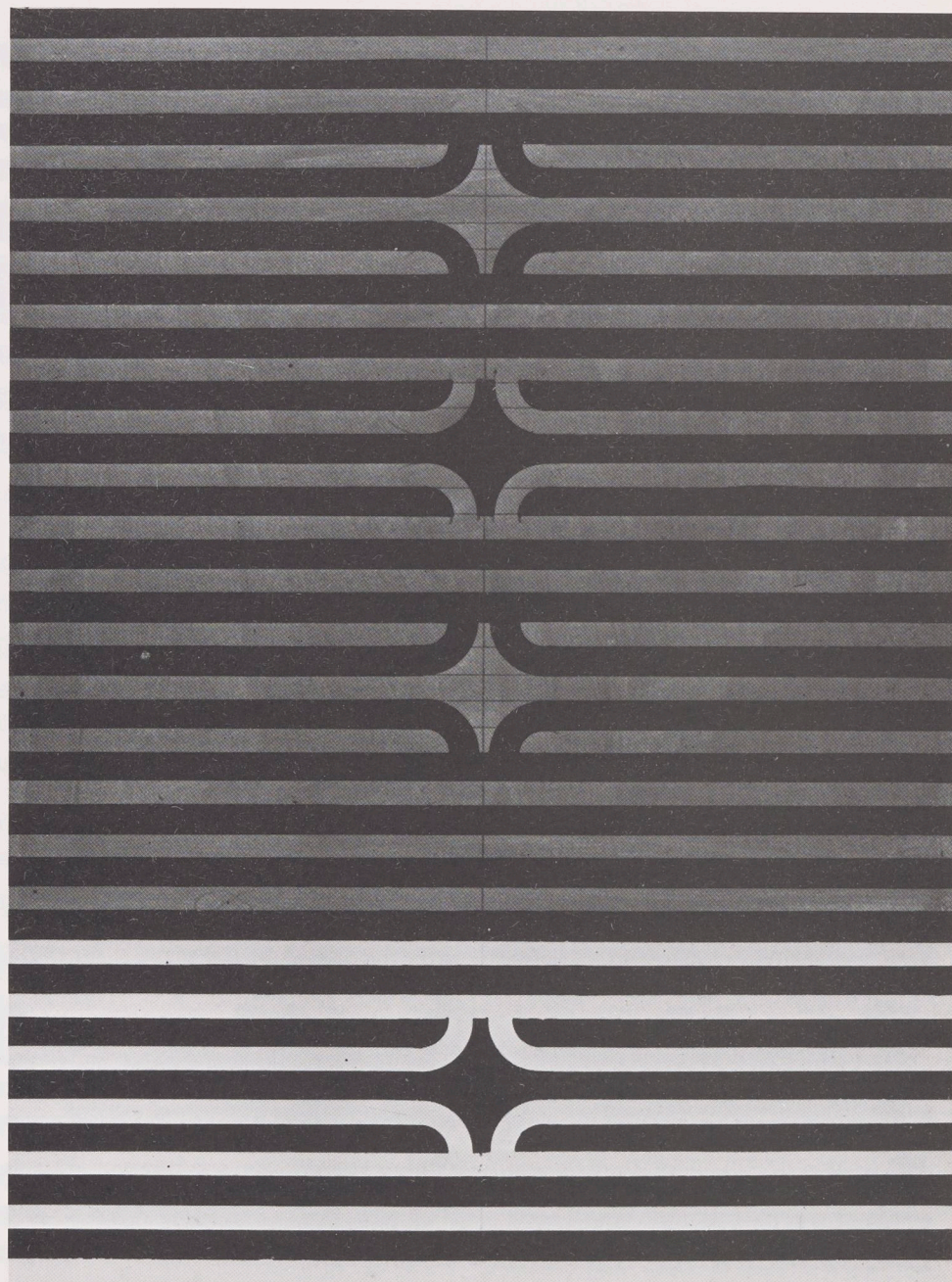


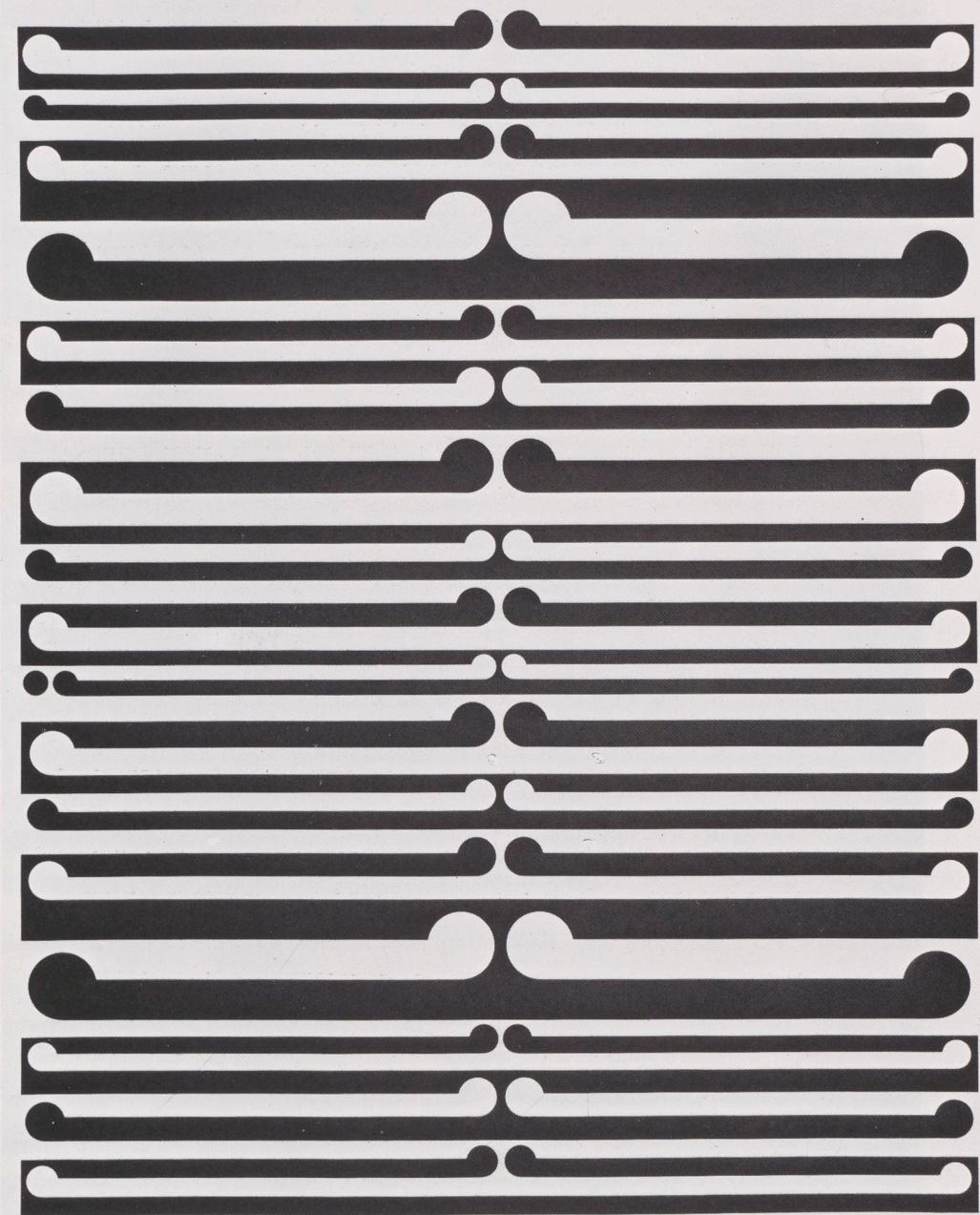


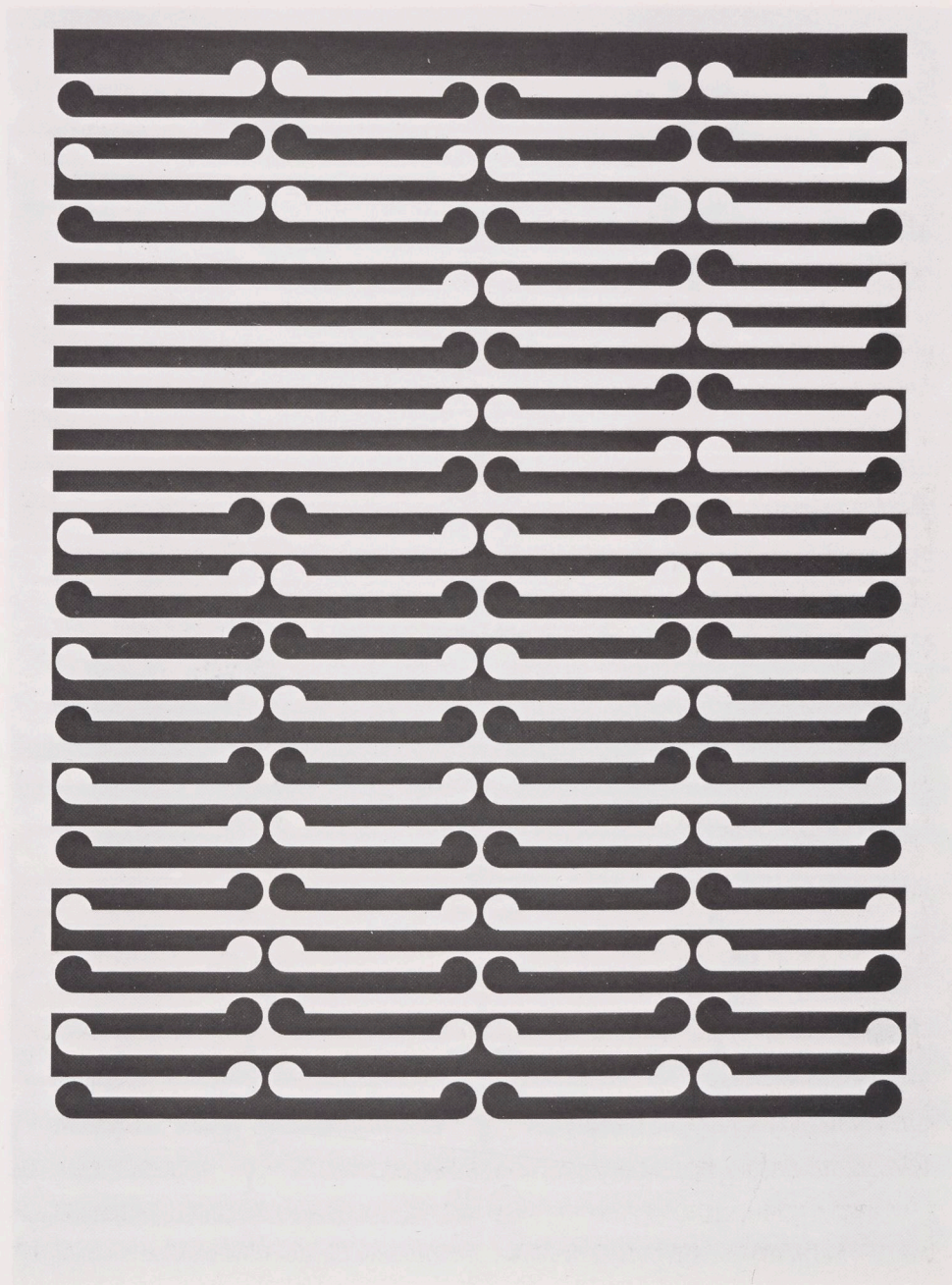


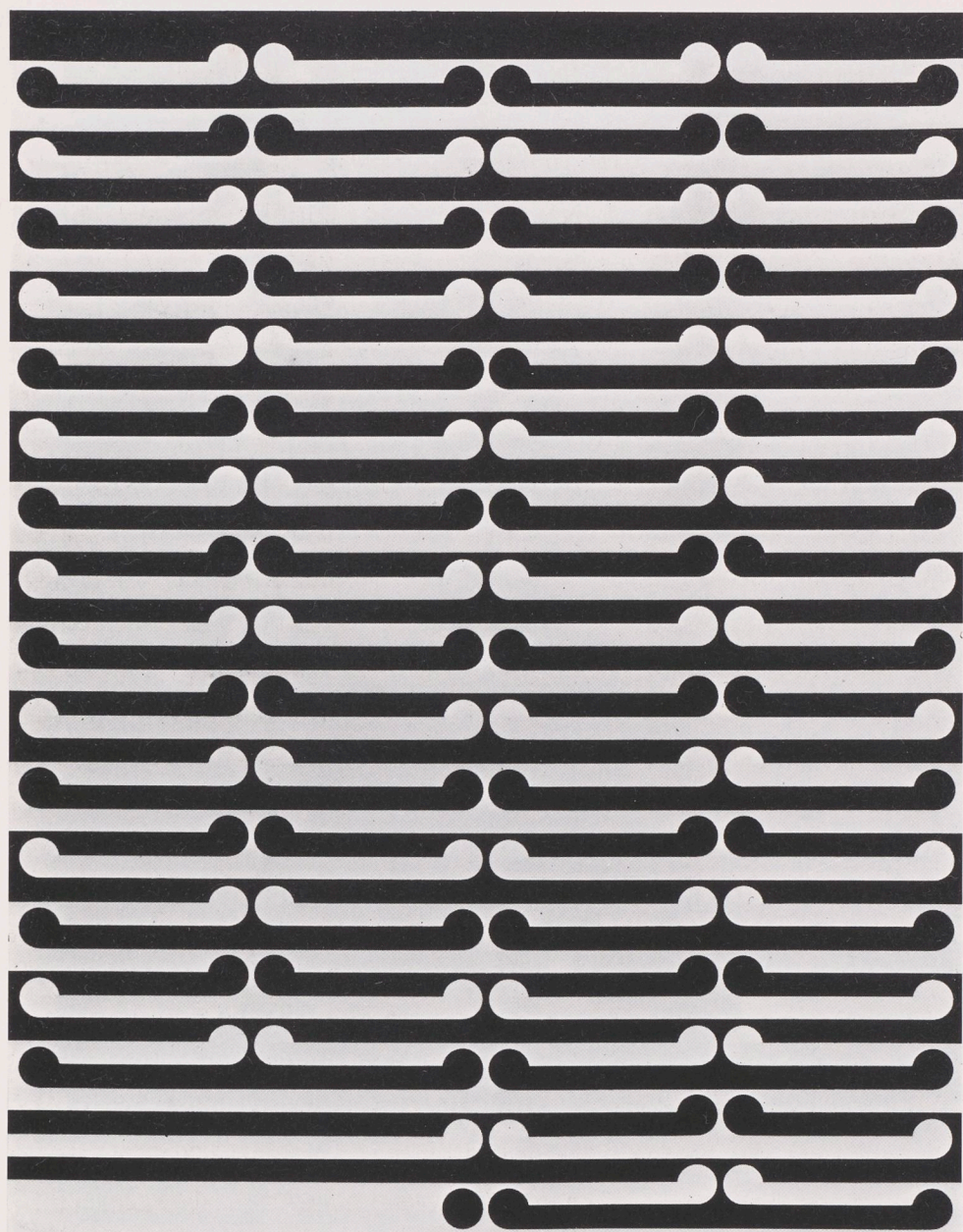


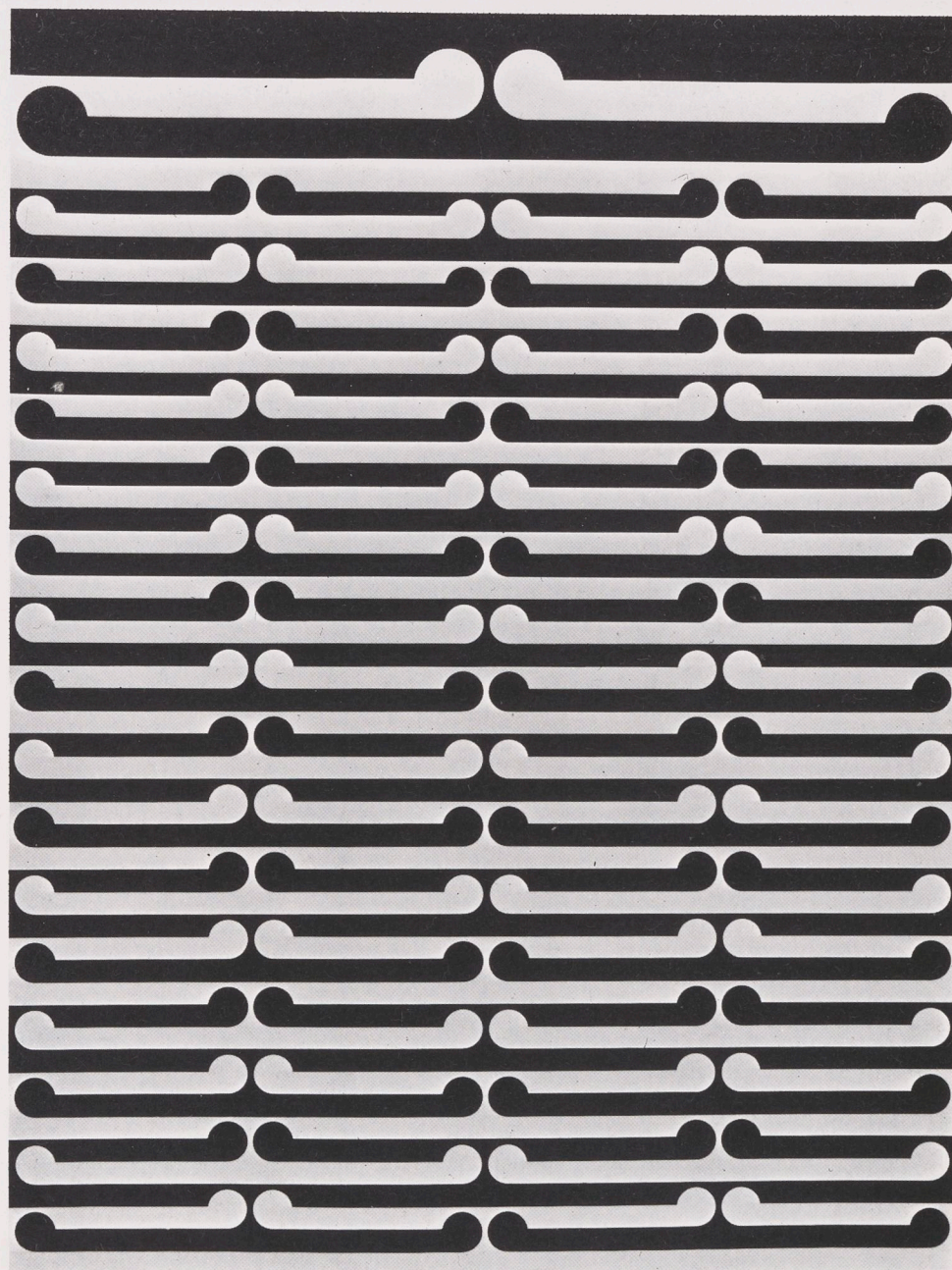


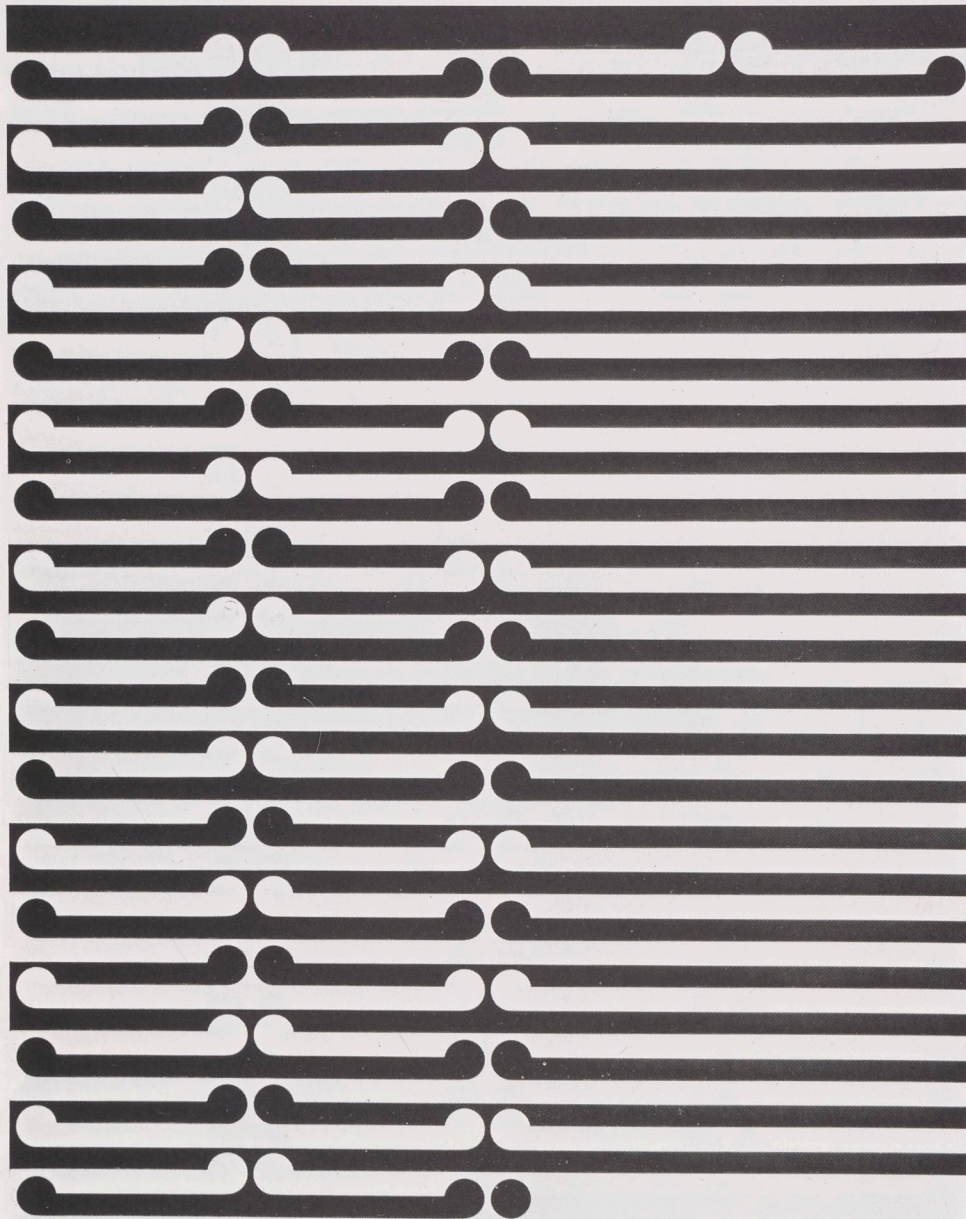


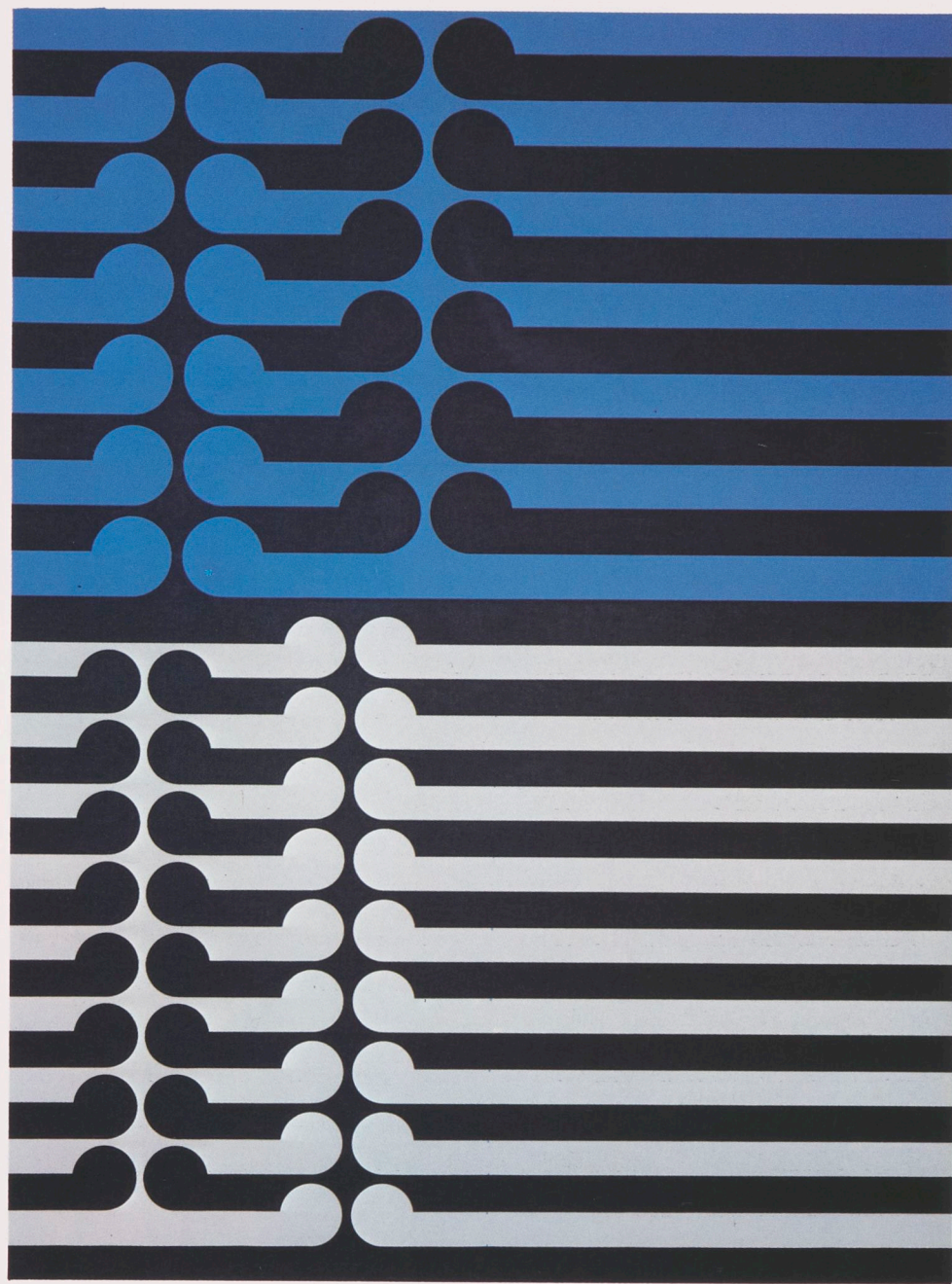


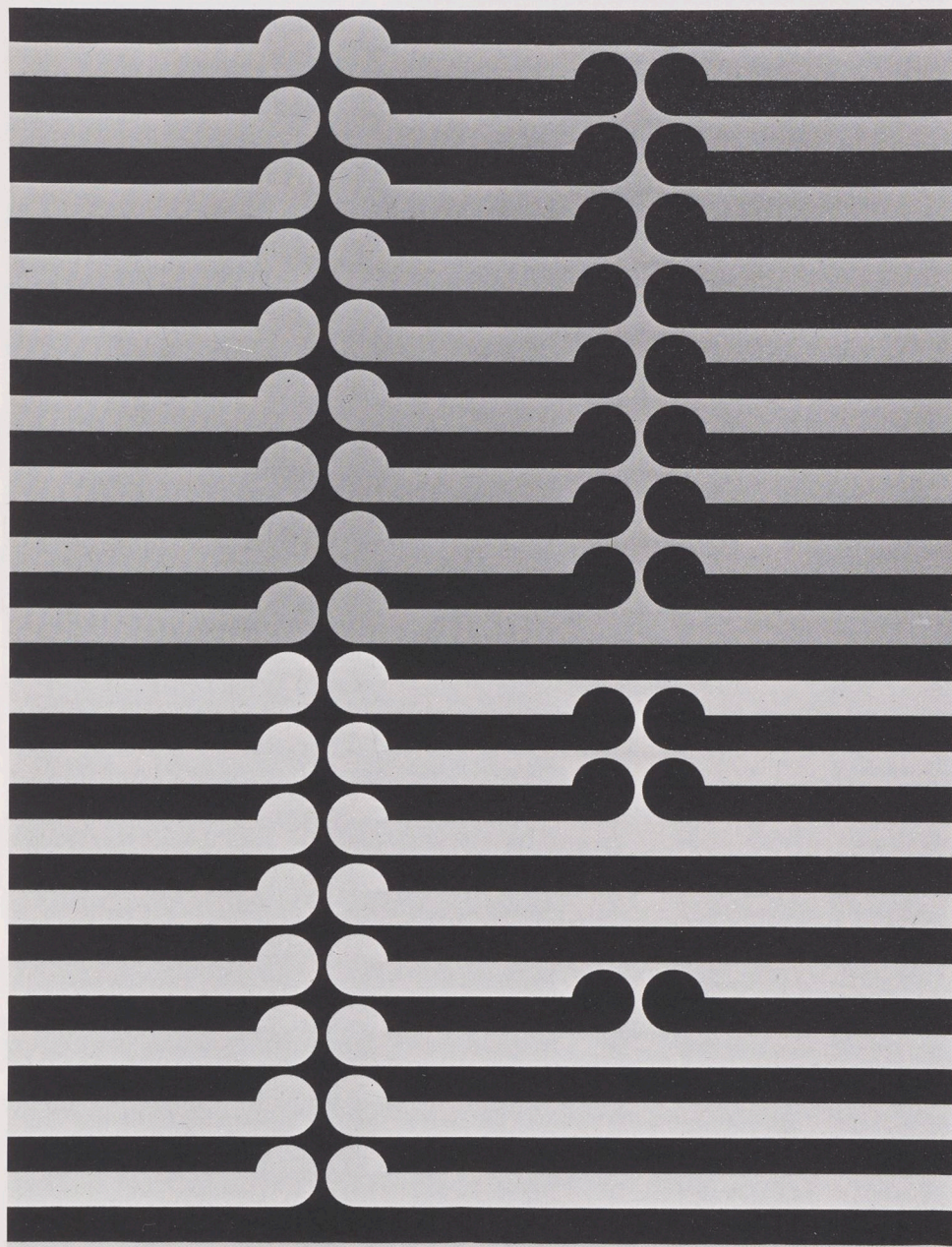


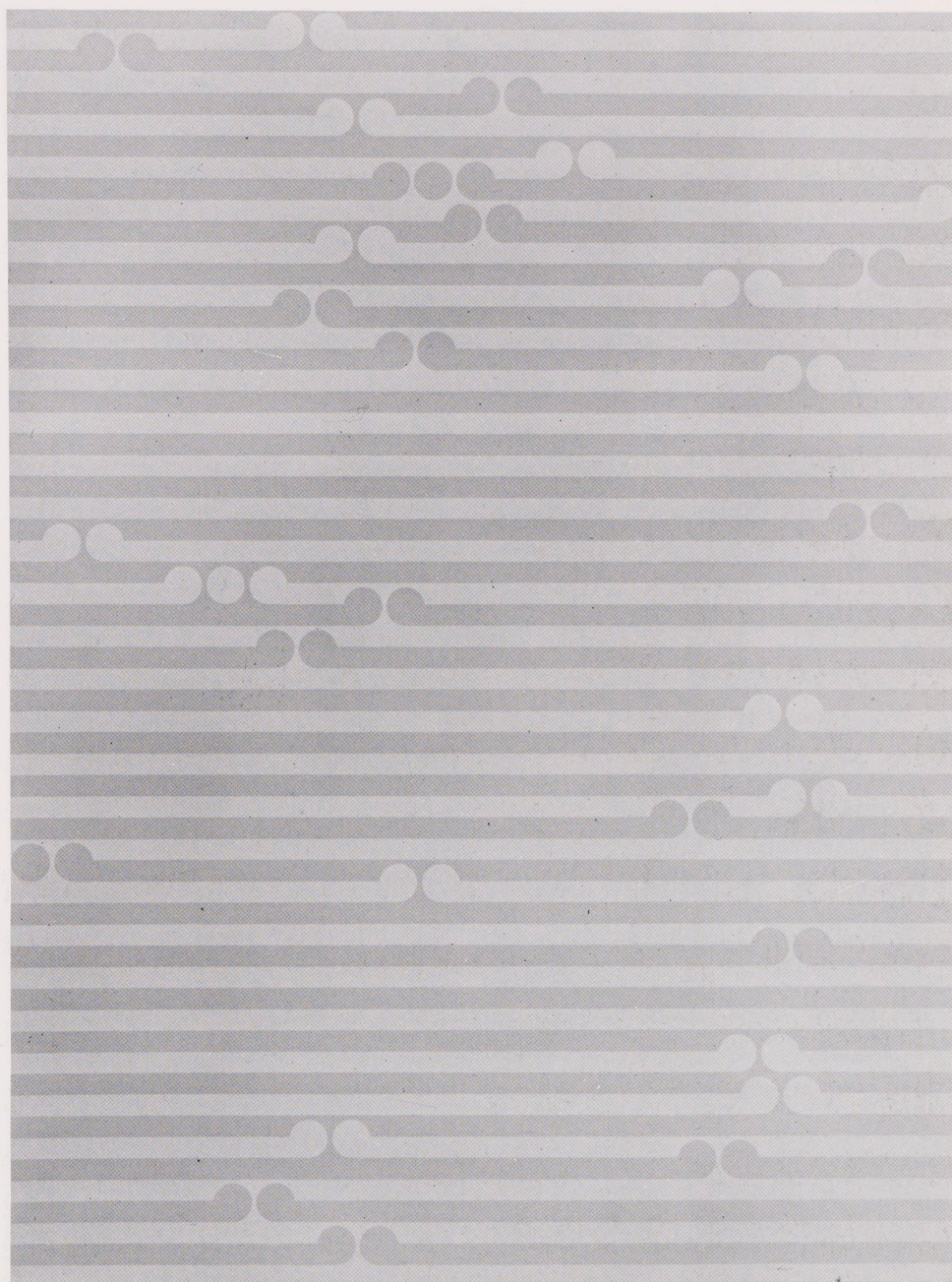


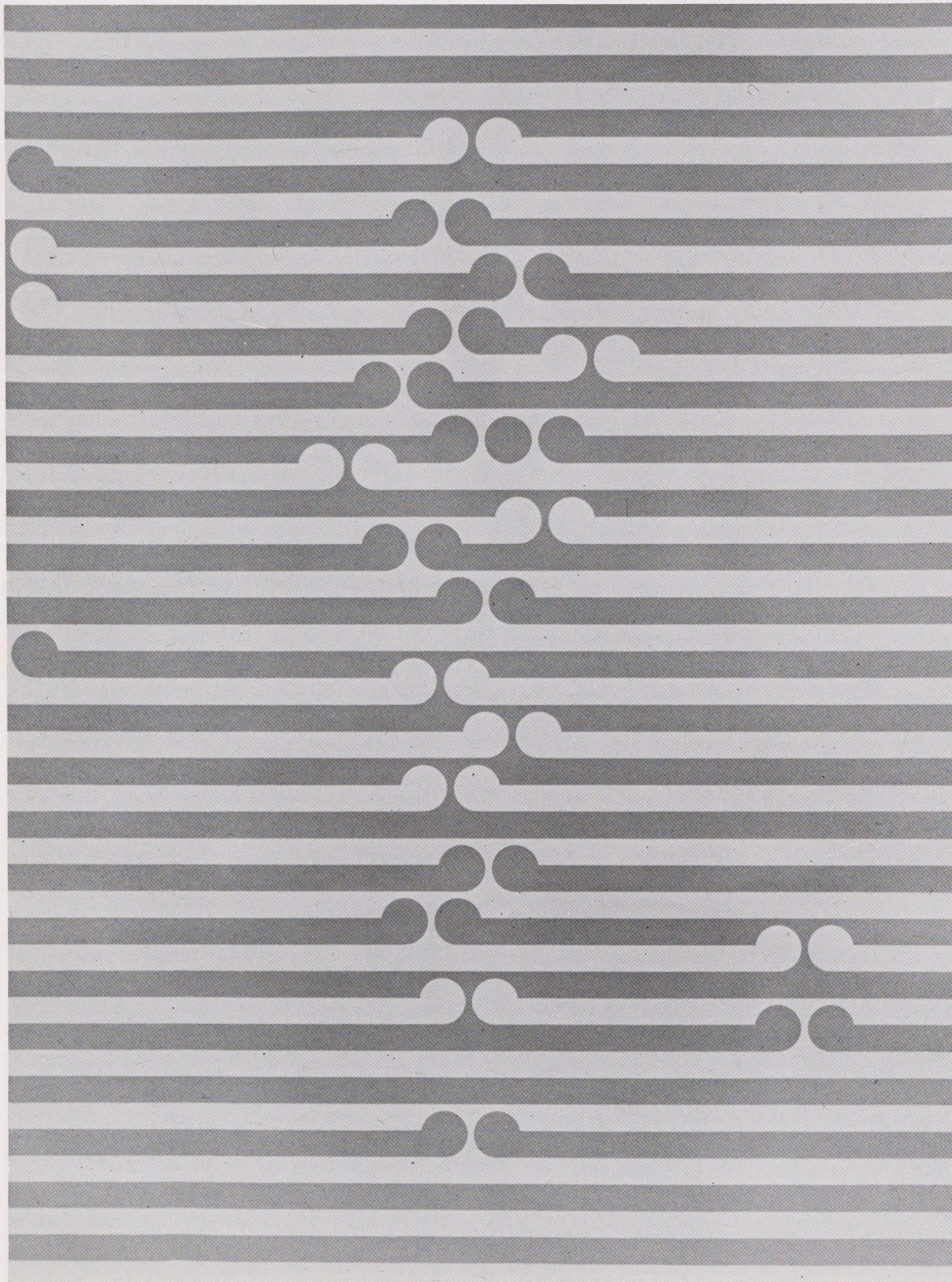


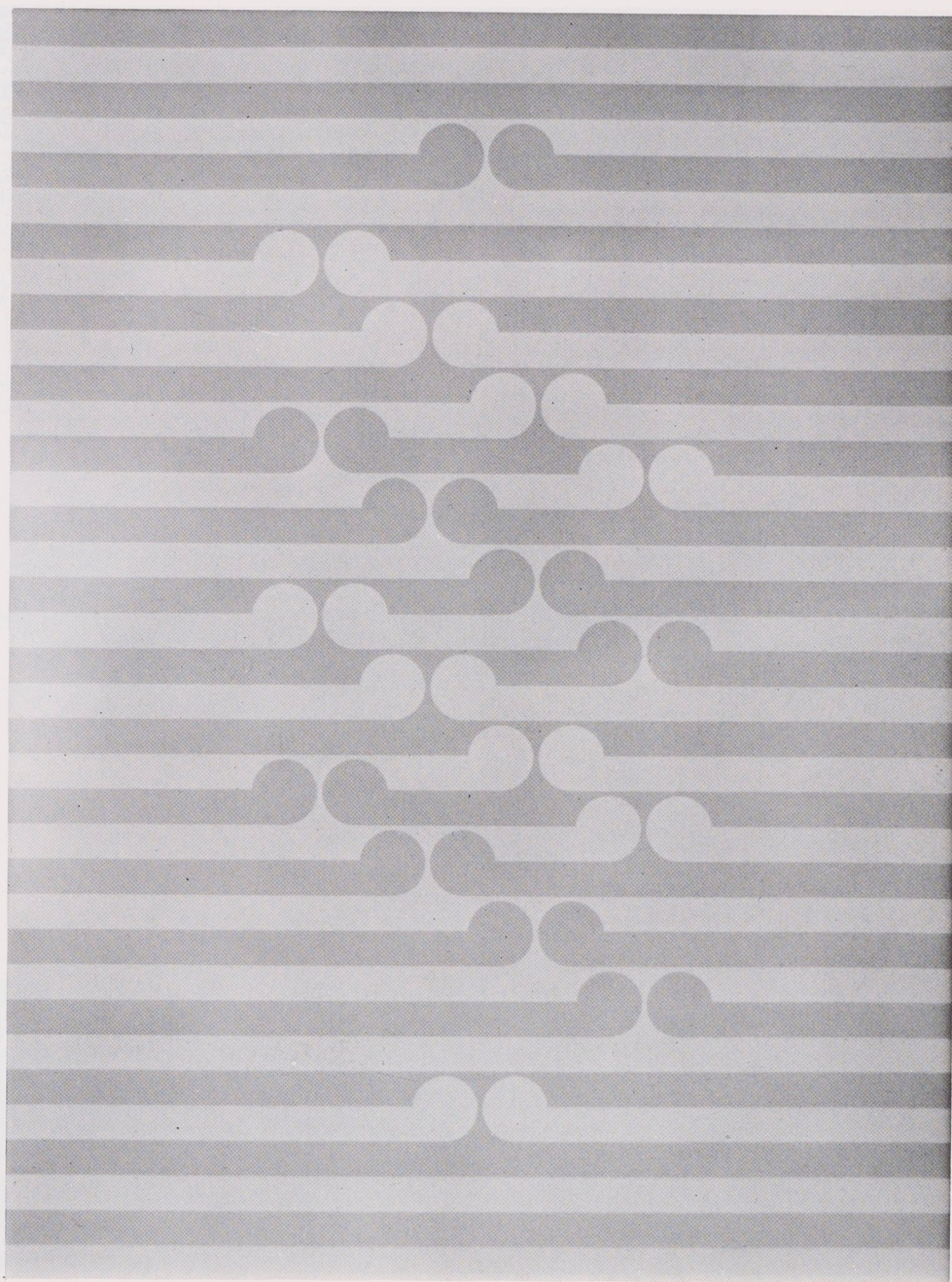


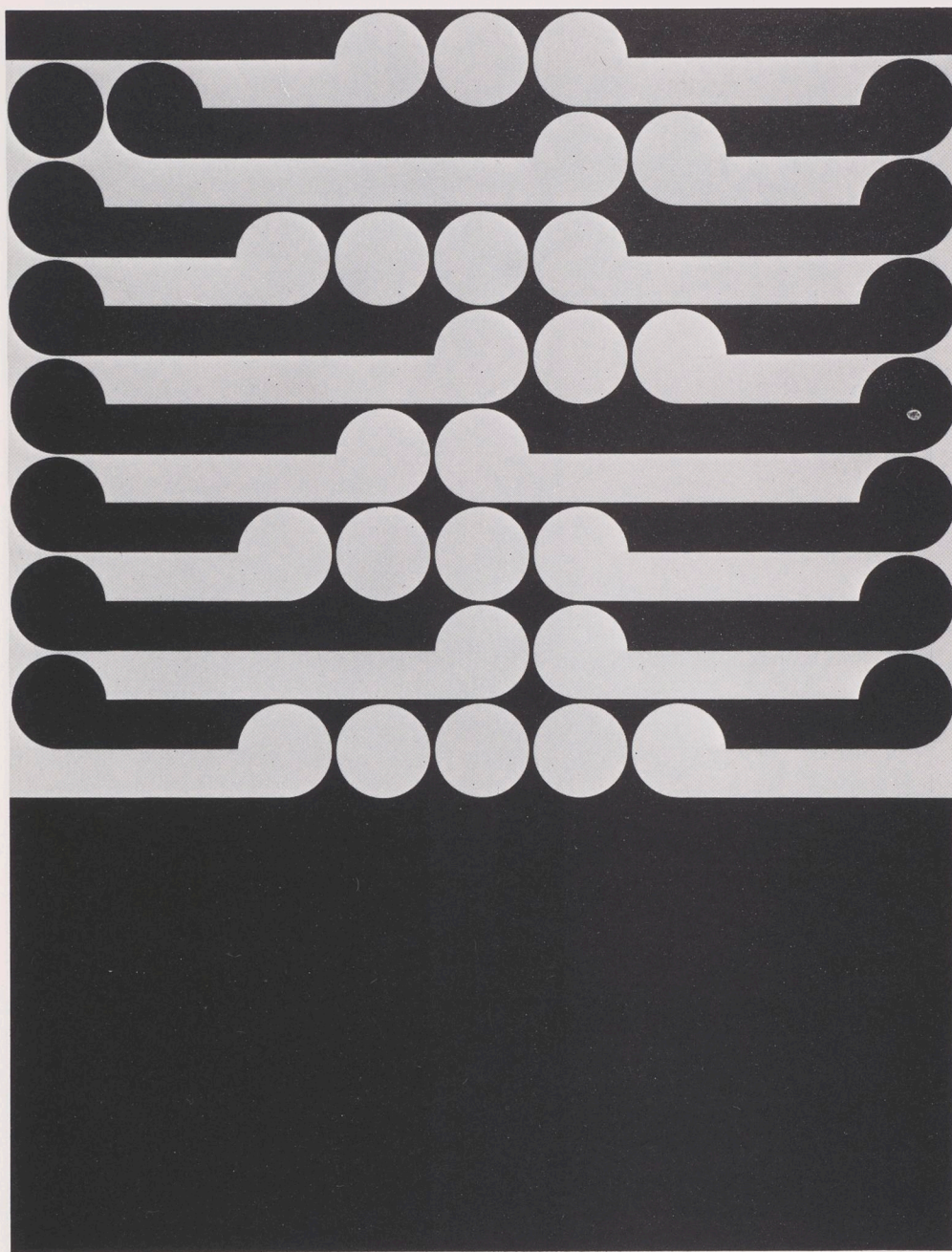


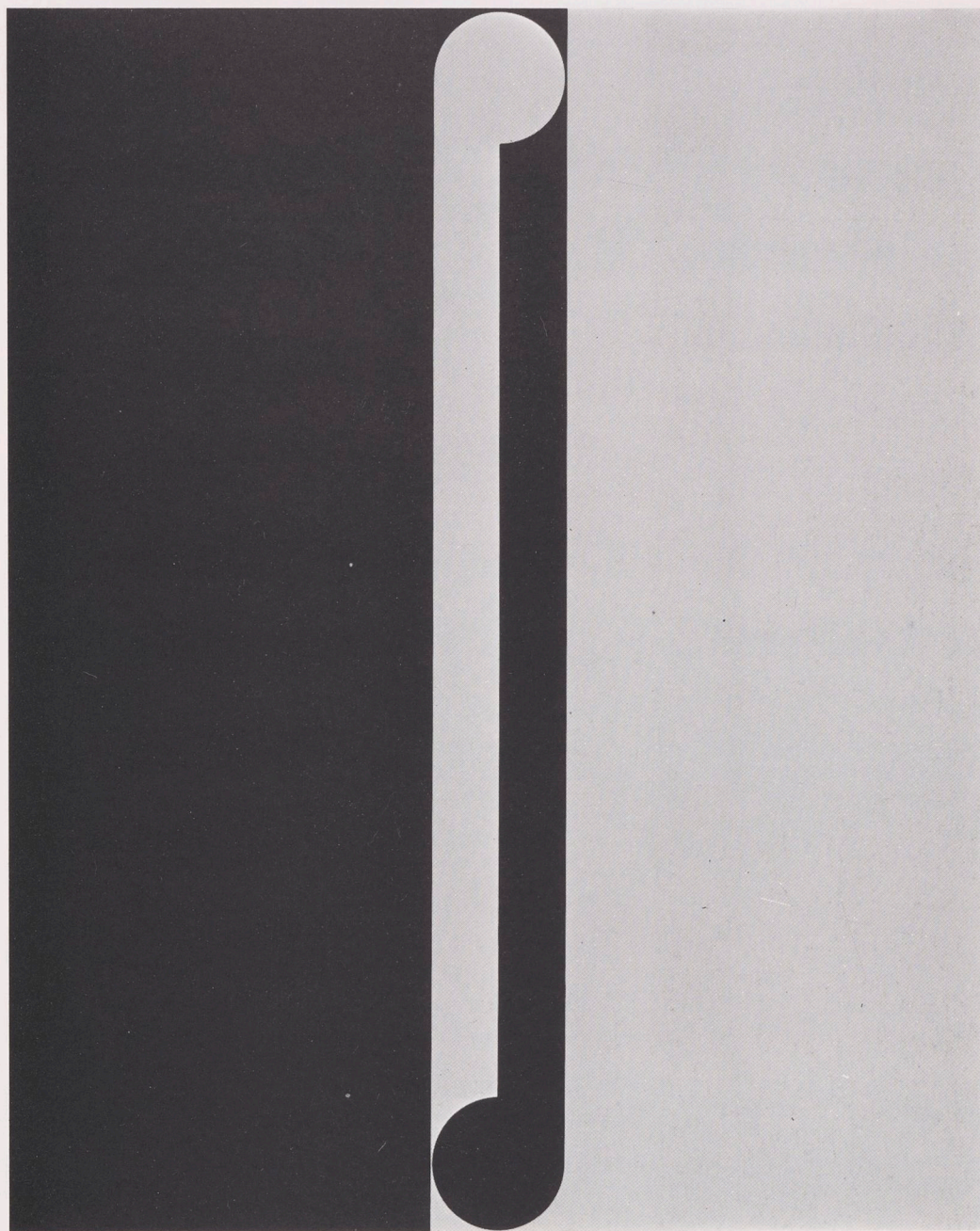


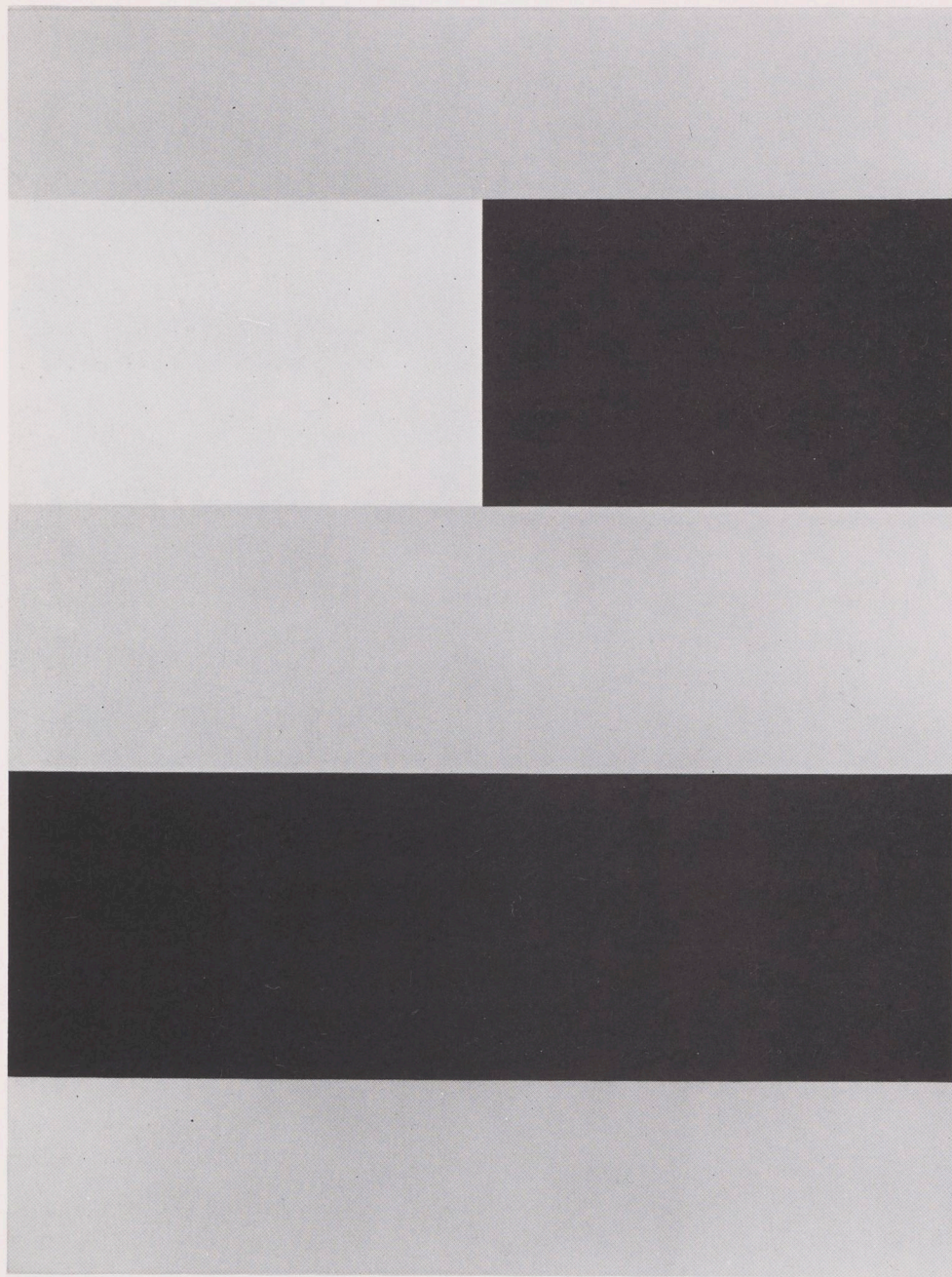


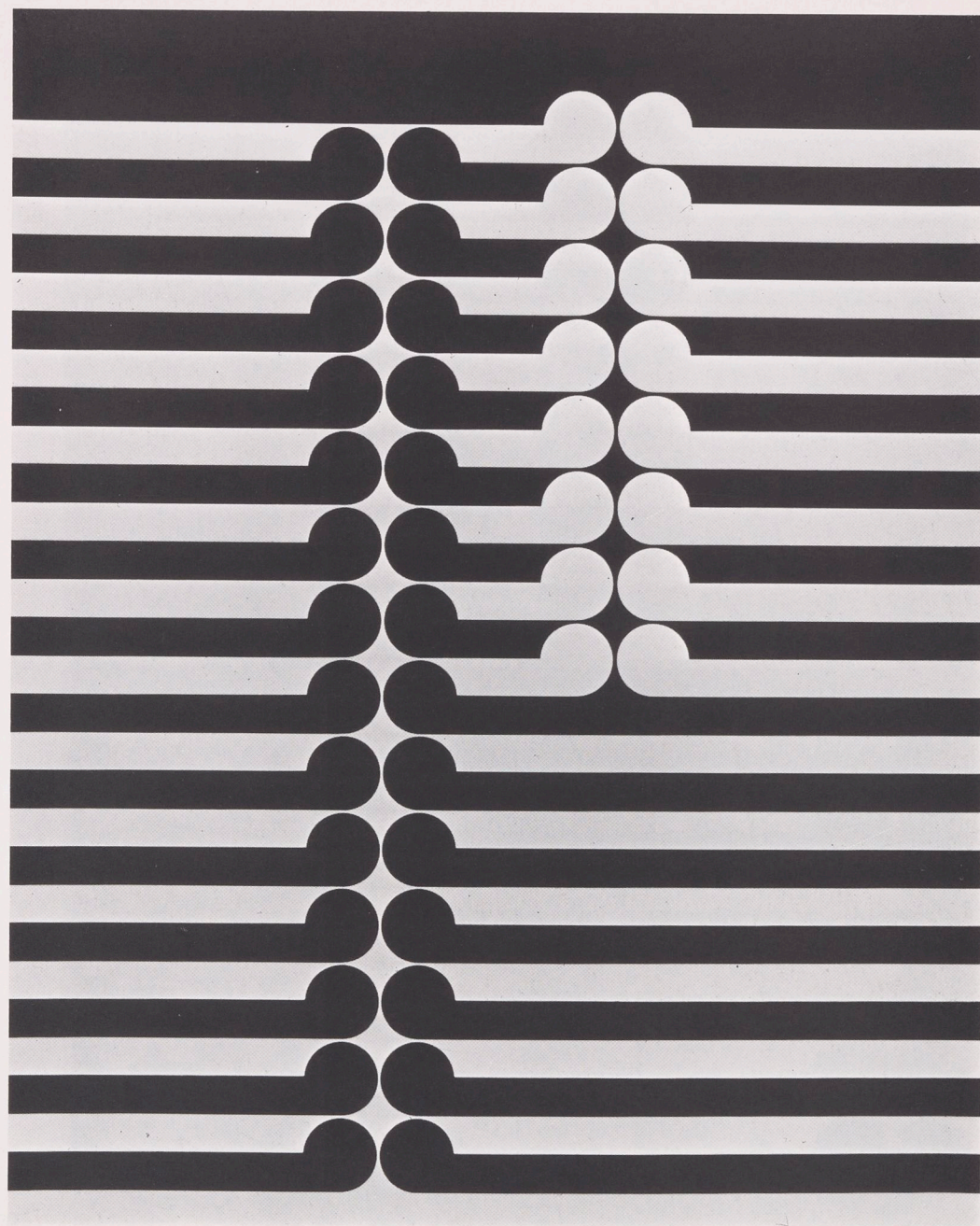


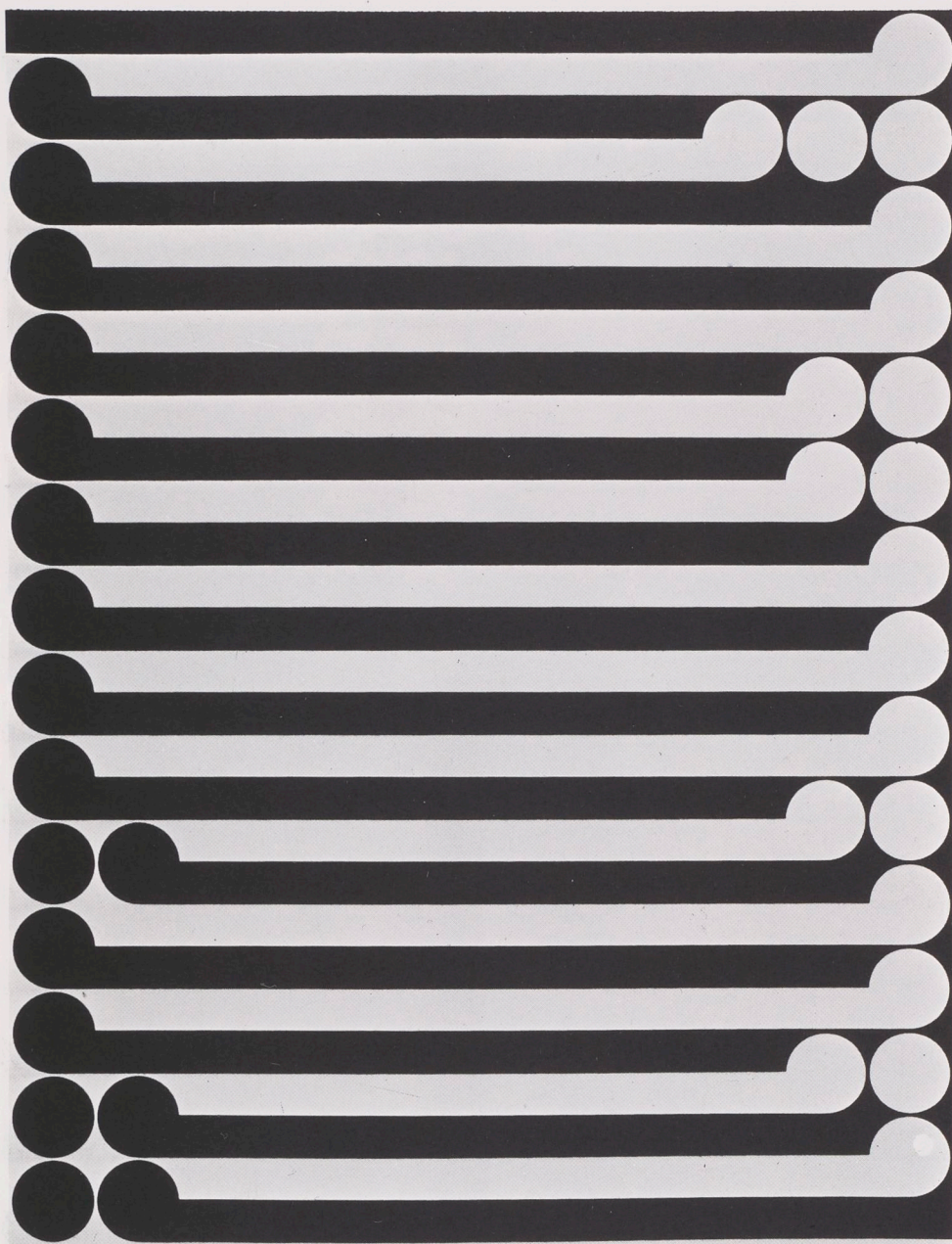


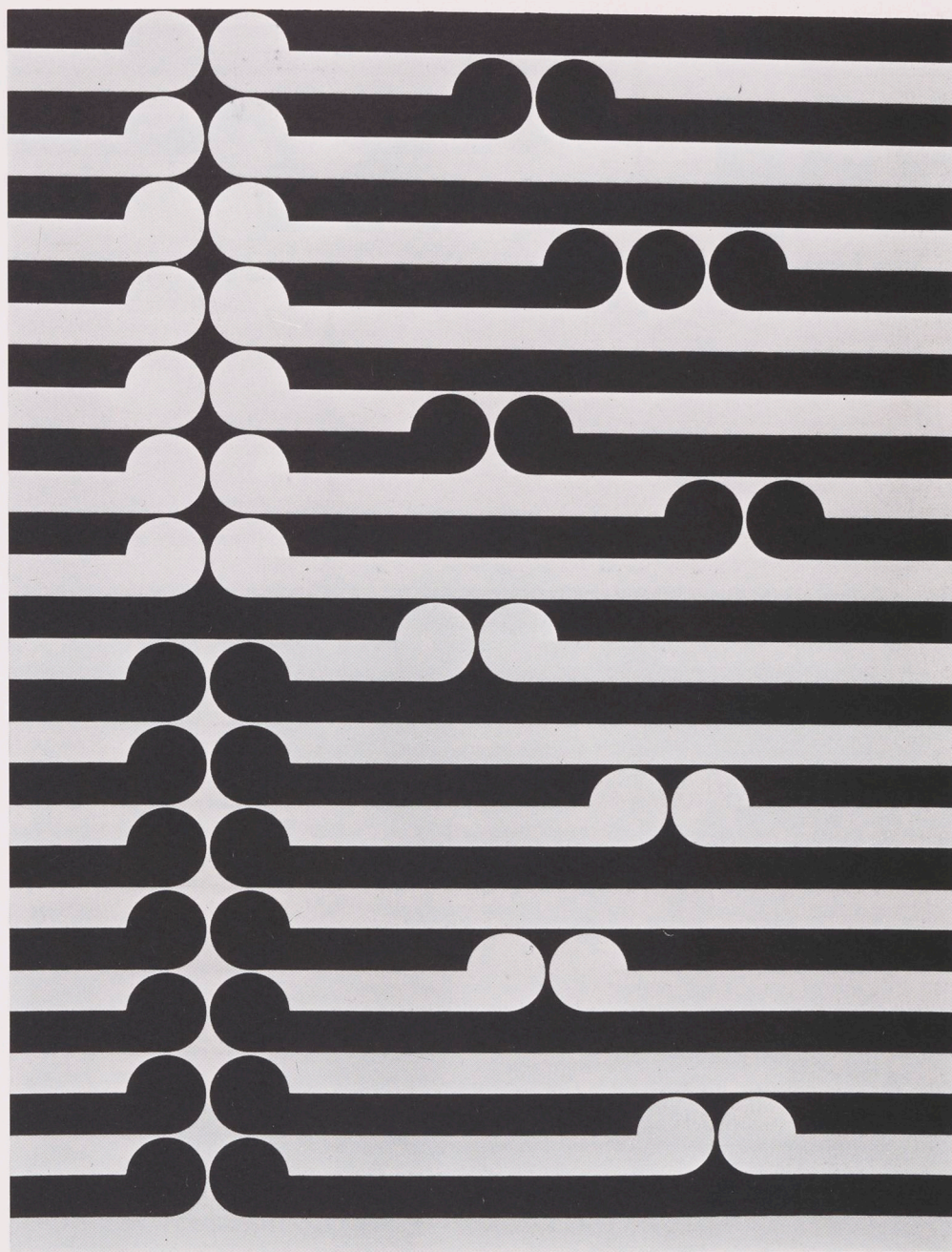


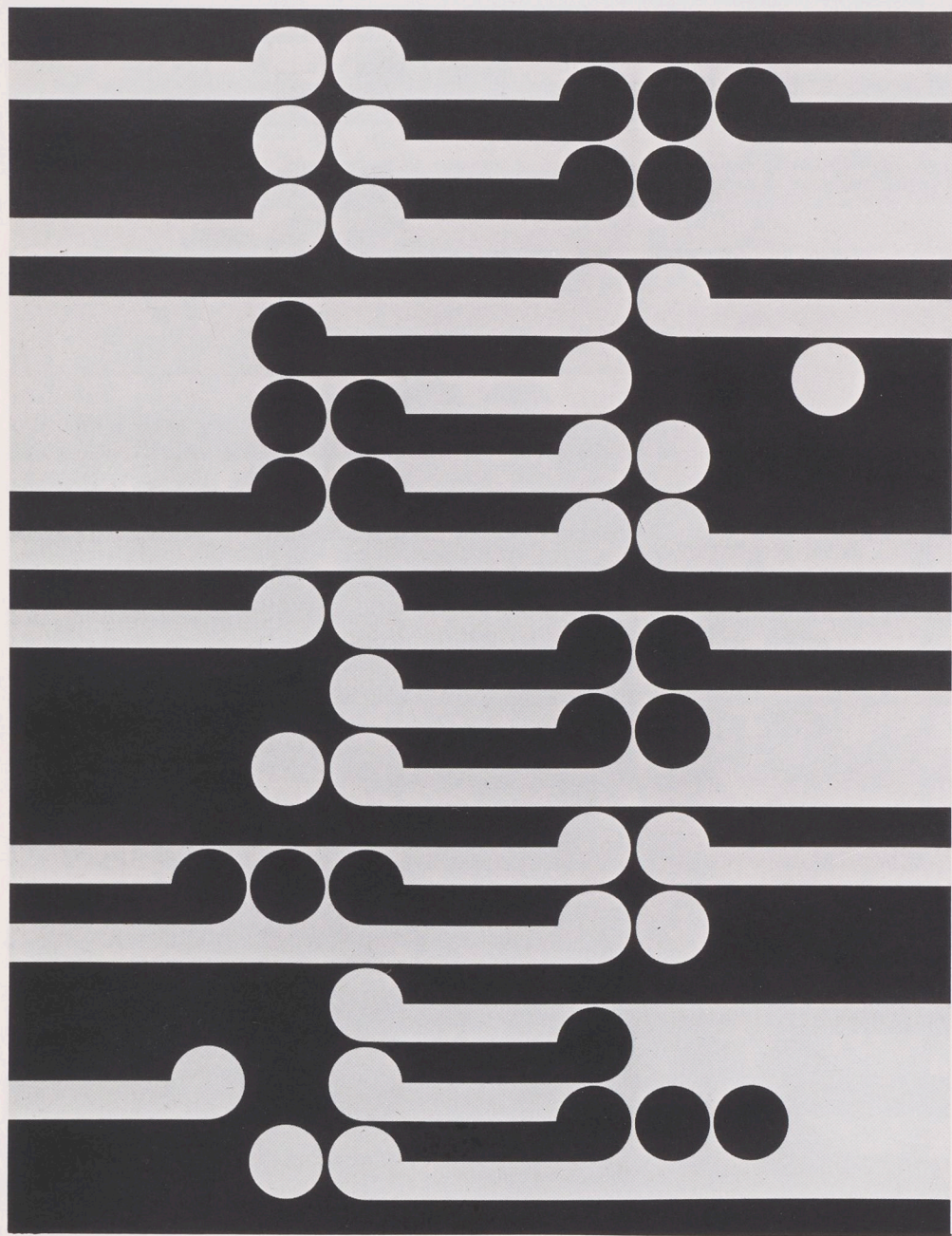


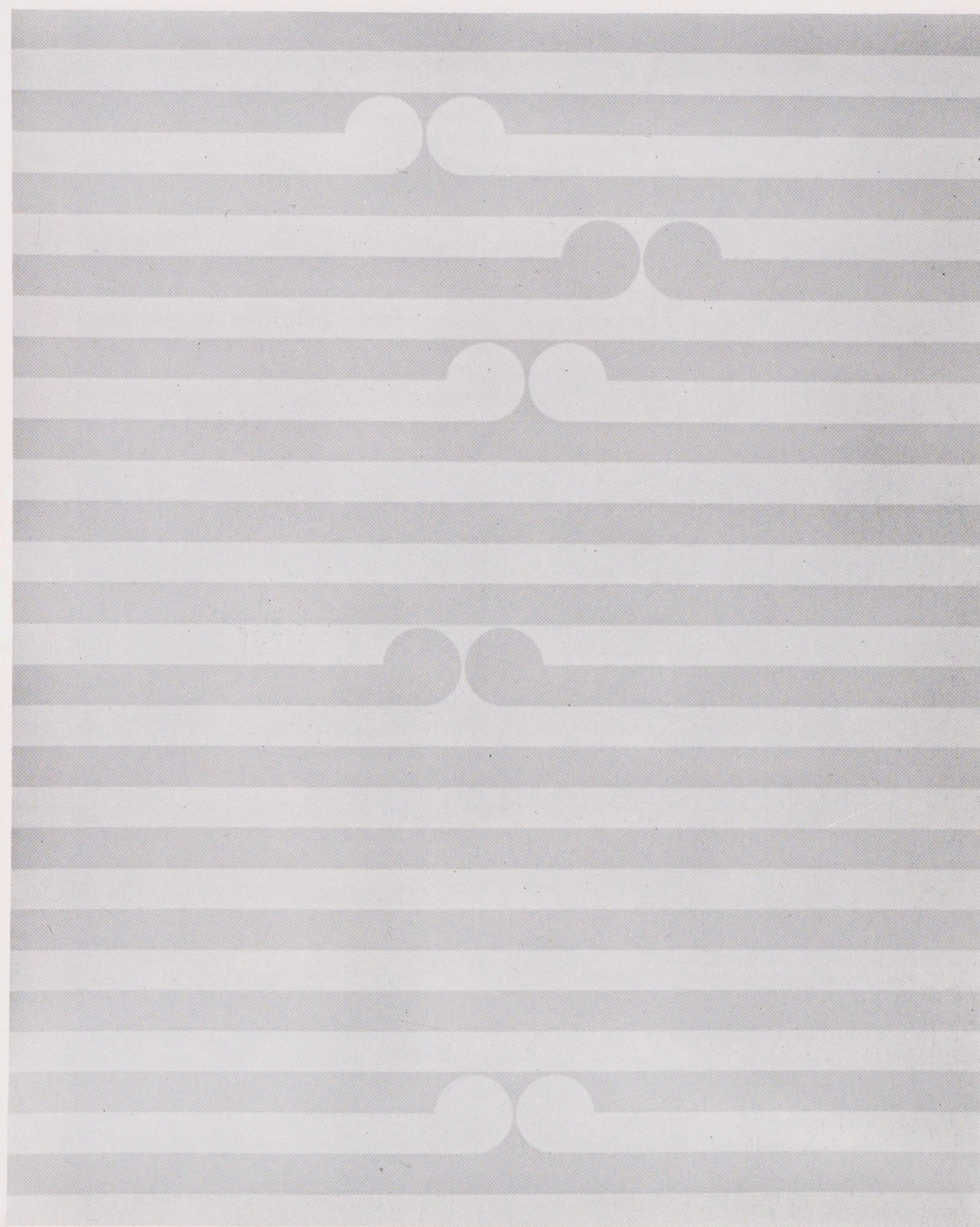


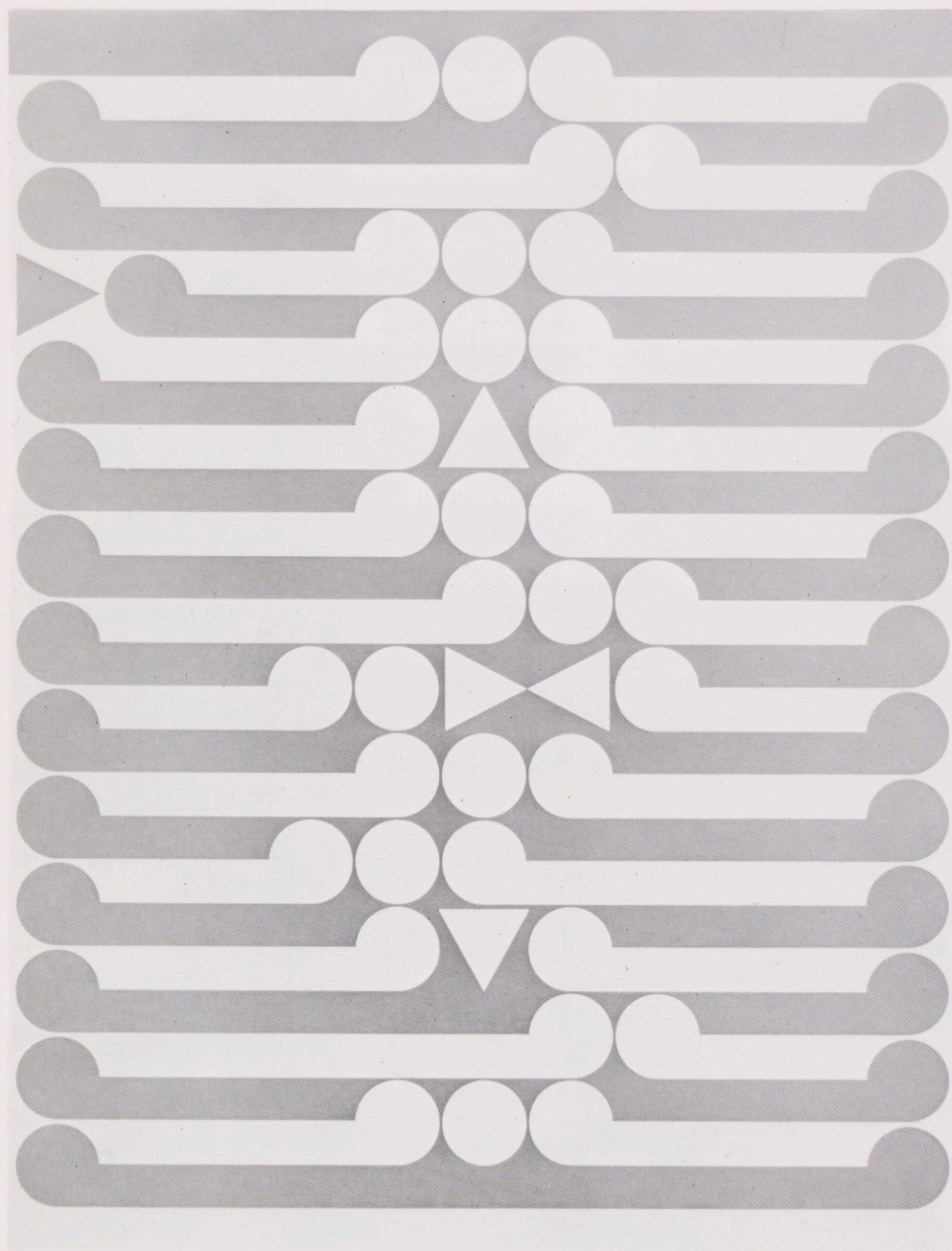




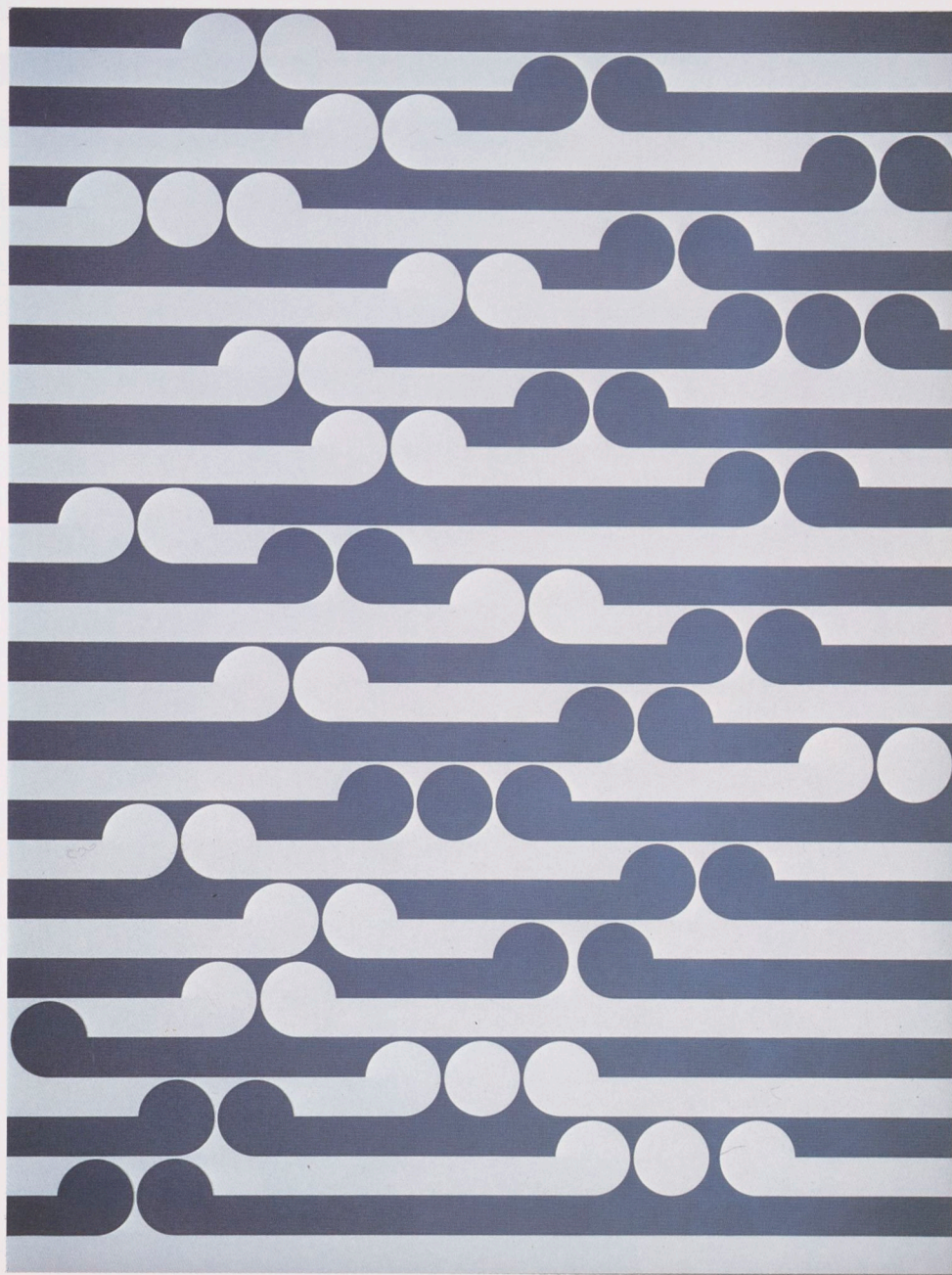


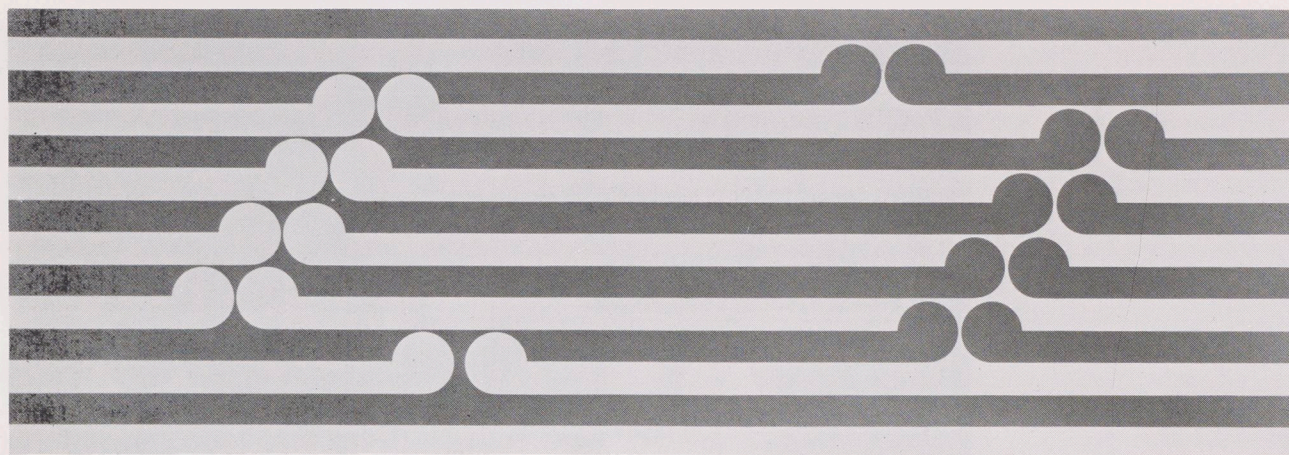


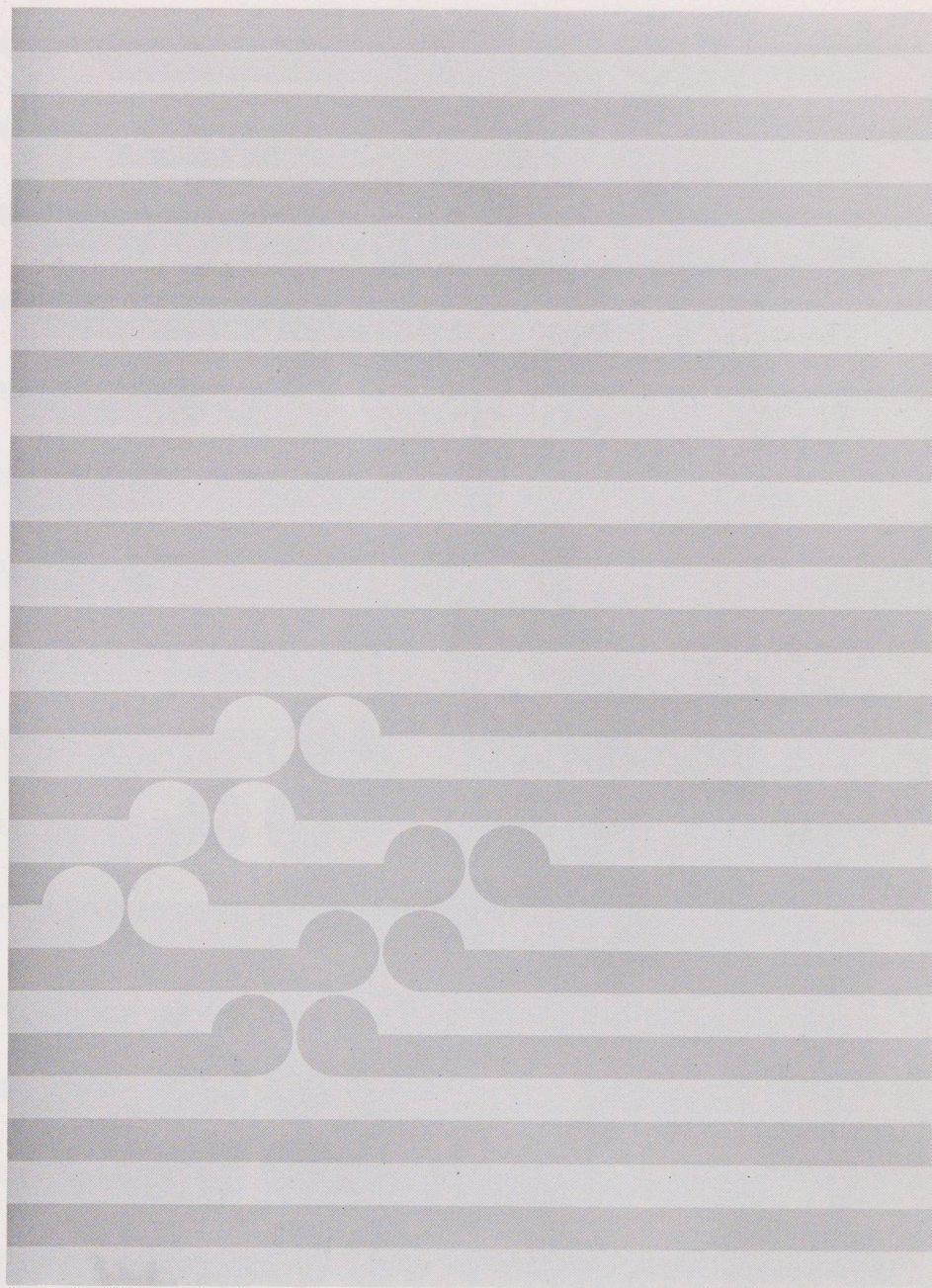


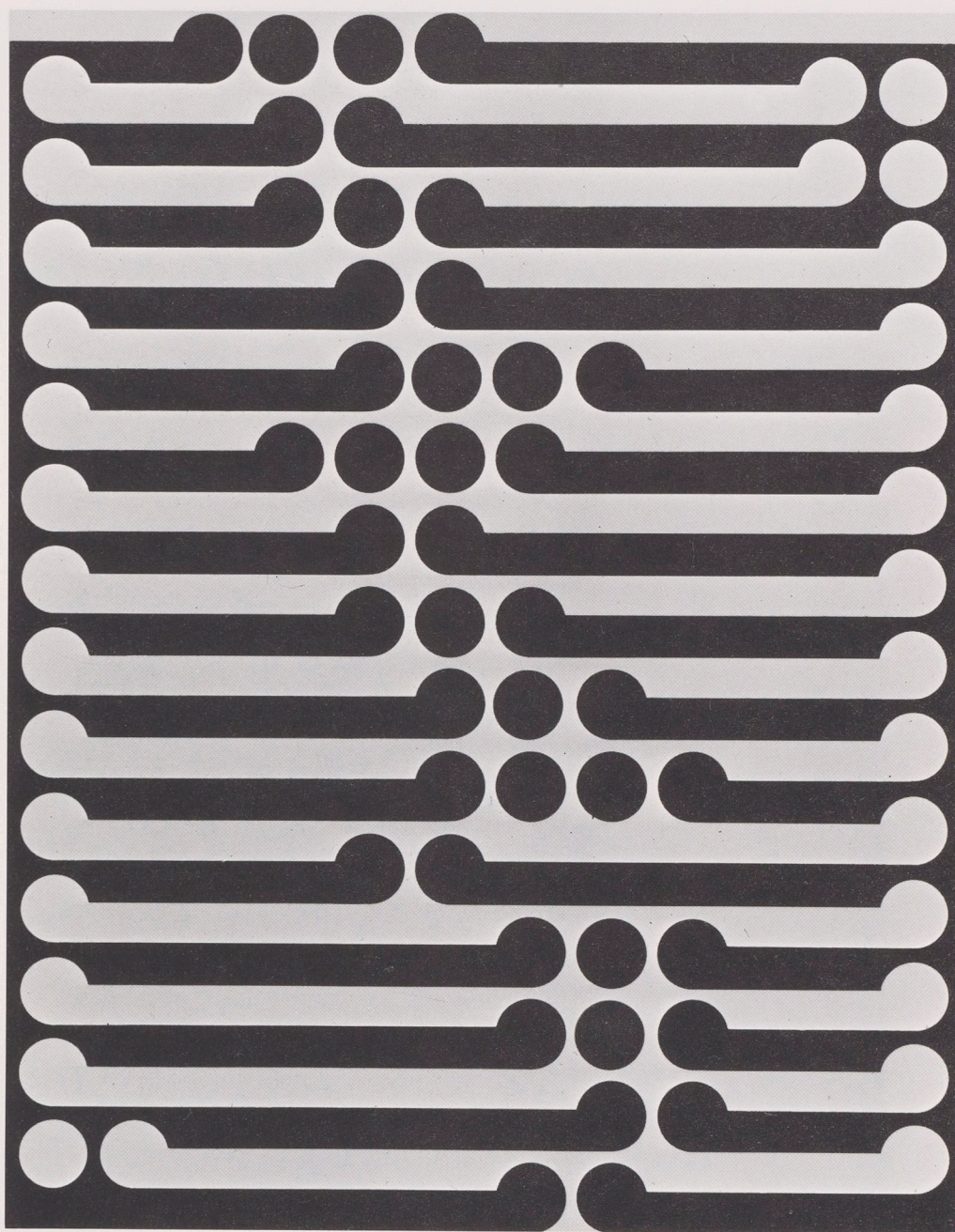


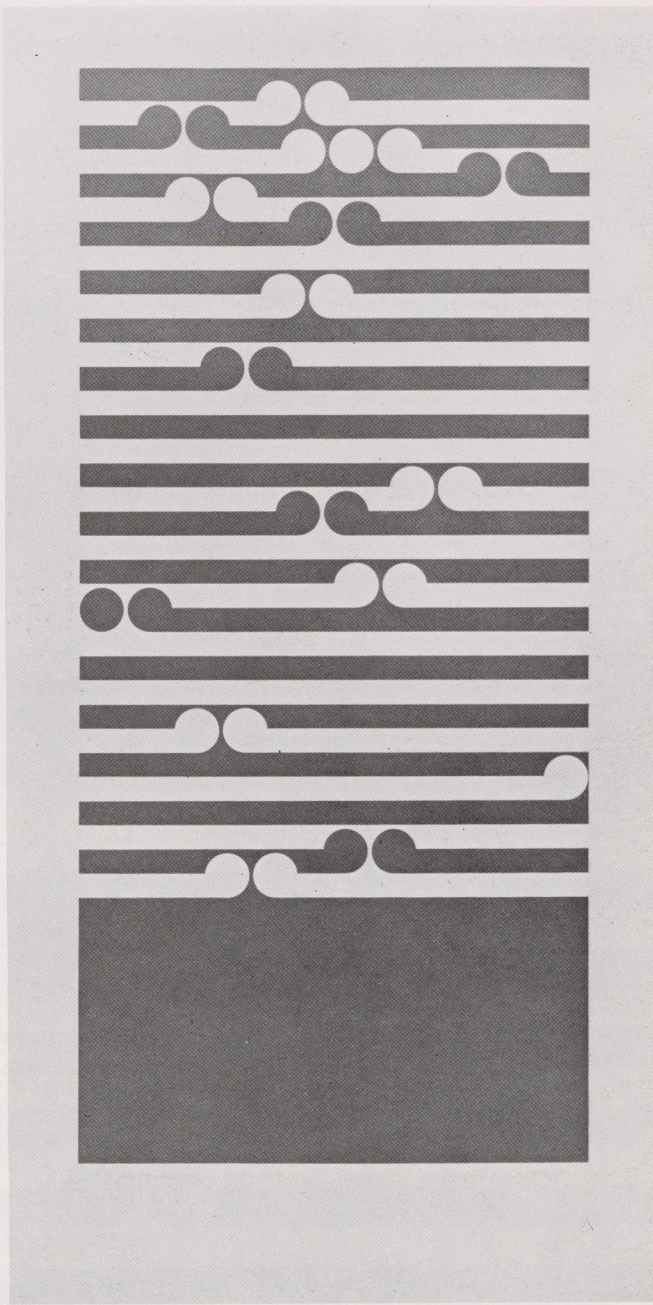
65 *Painting no. 9 1965: revised version 1981*

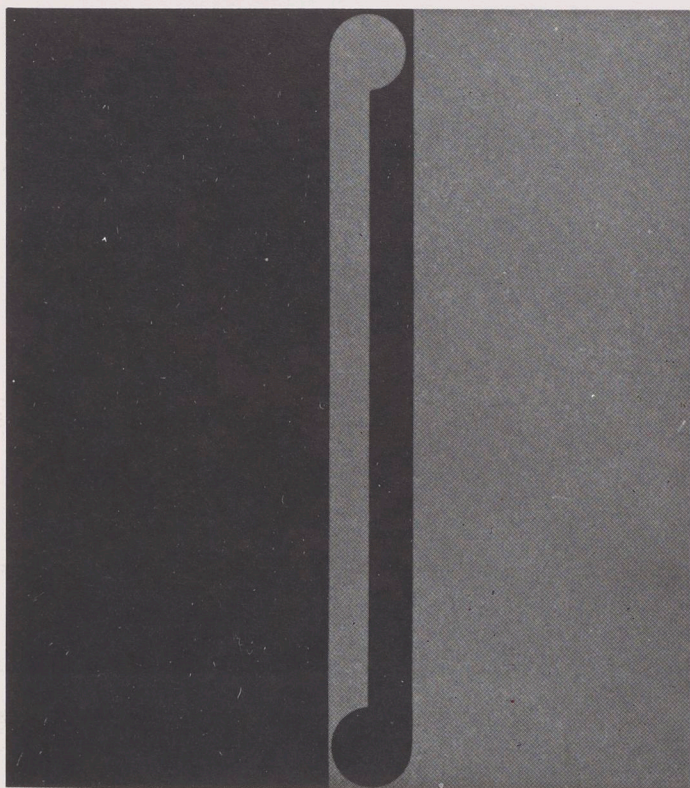


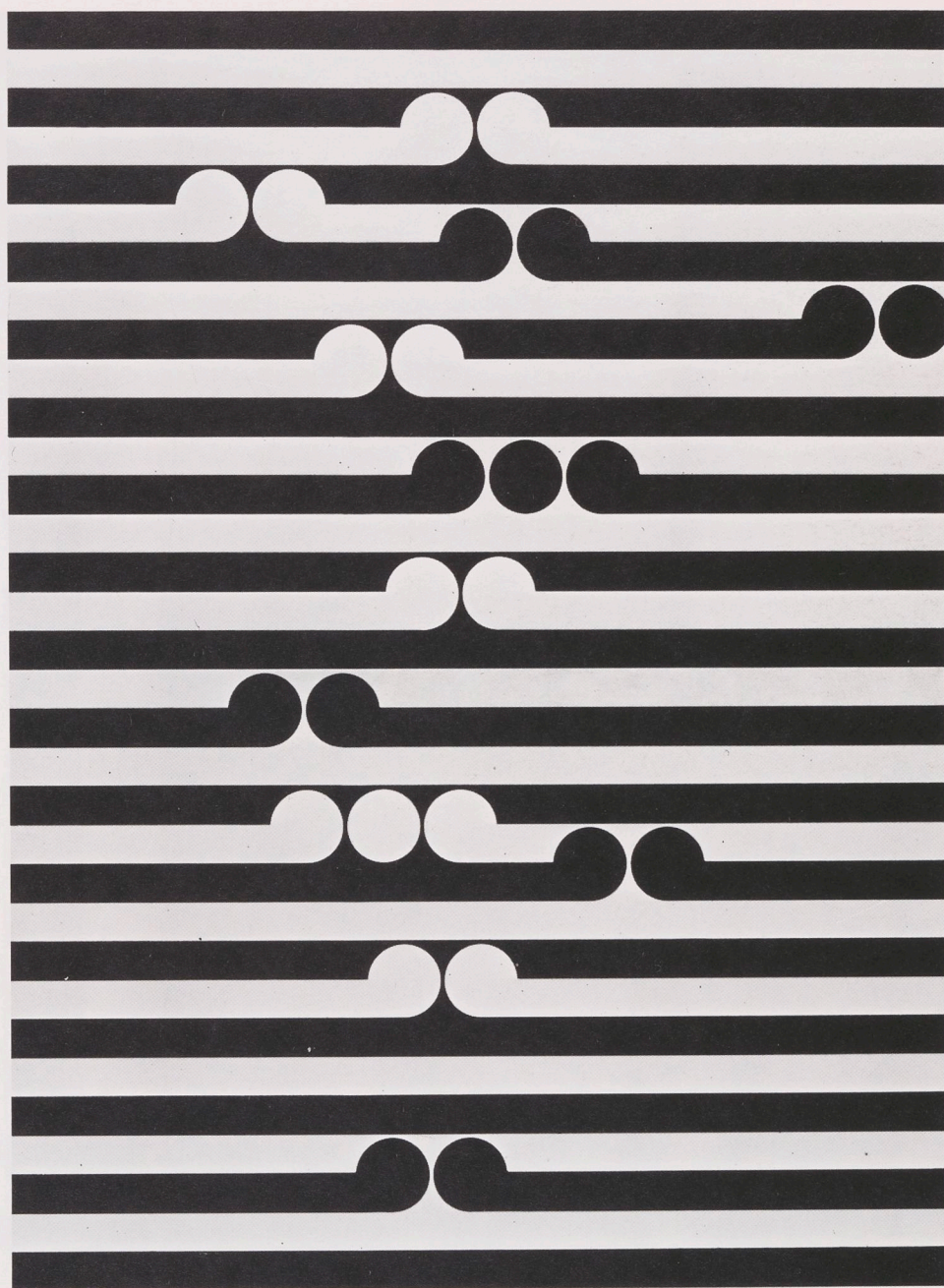


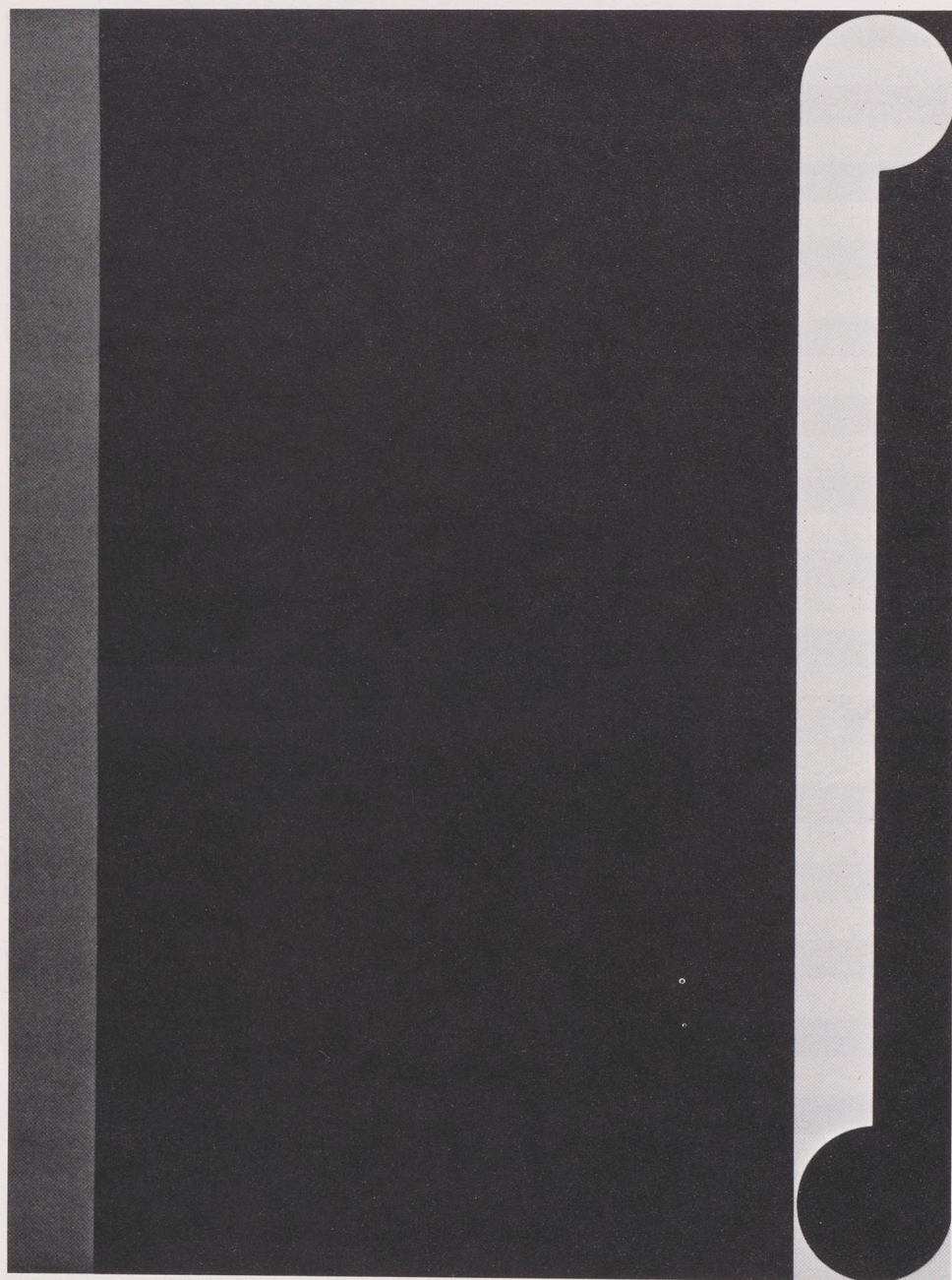


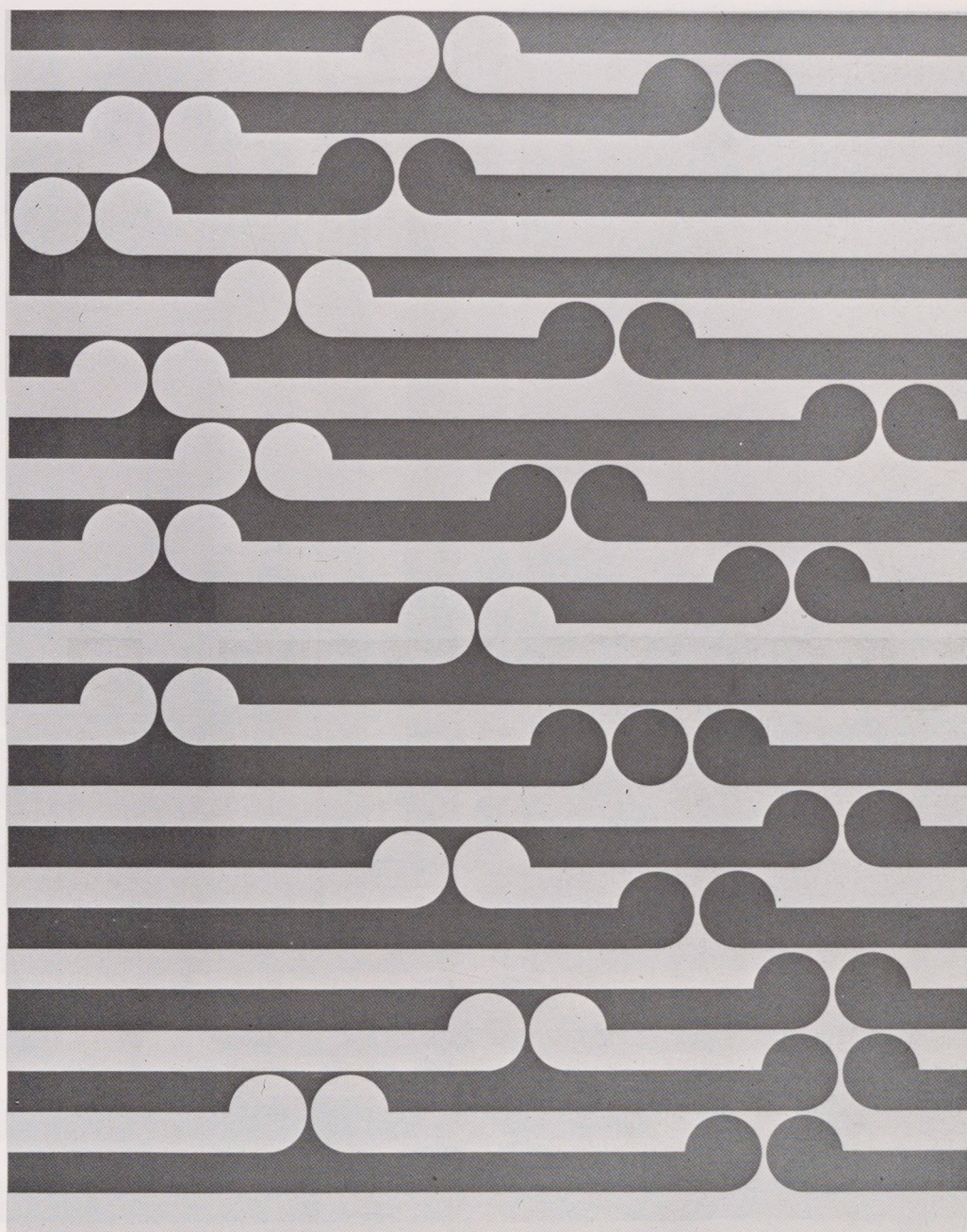


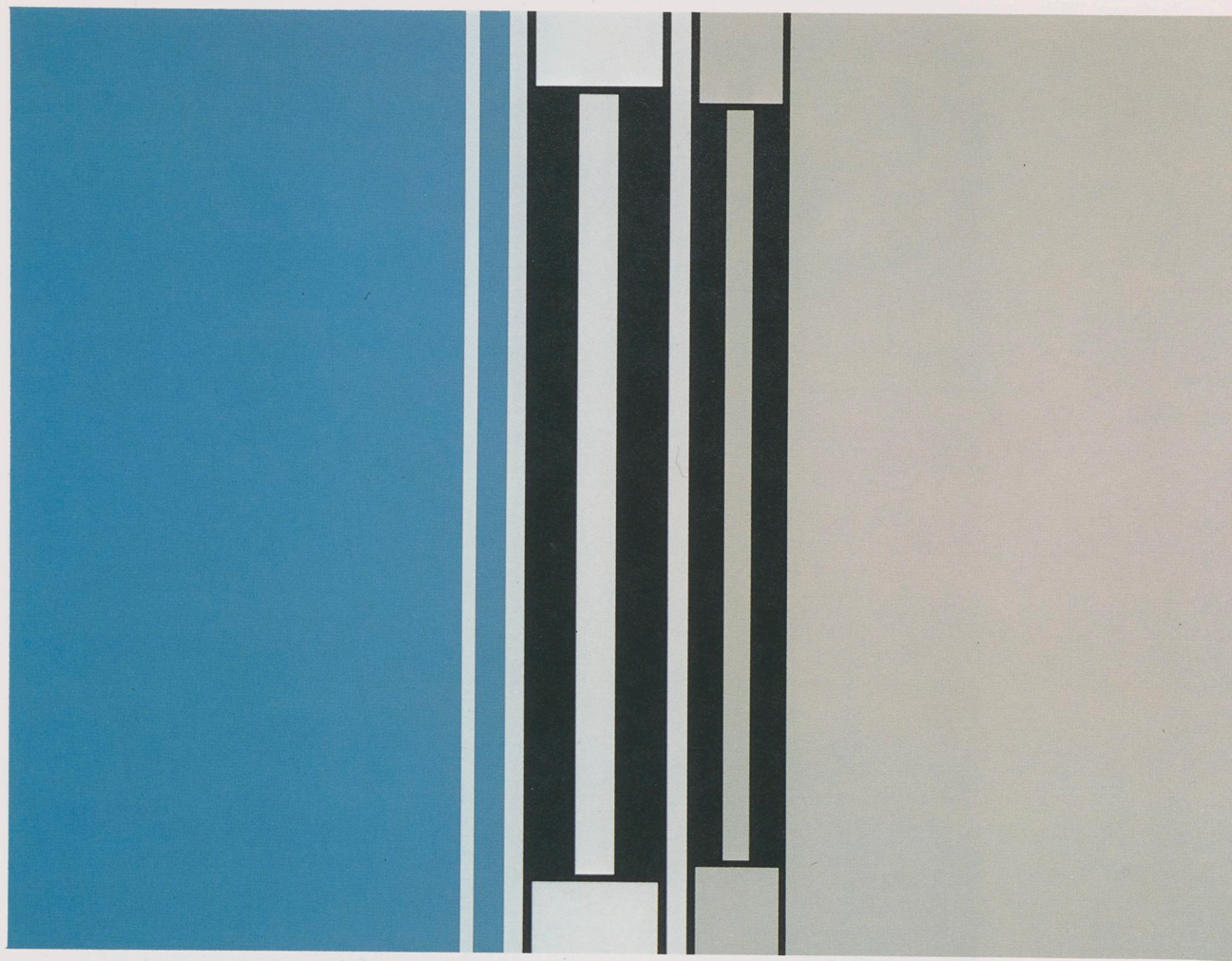


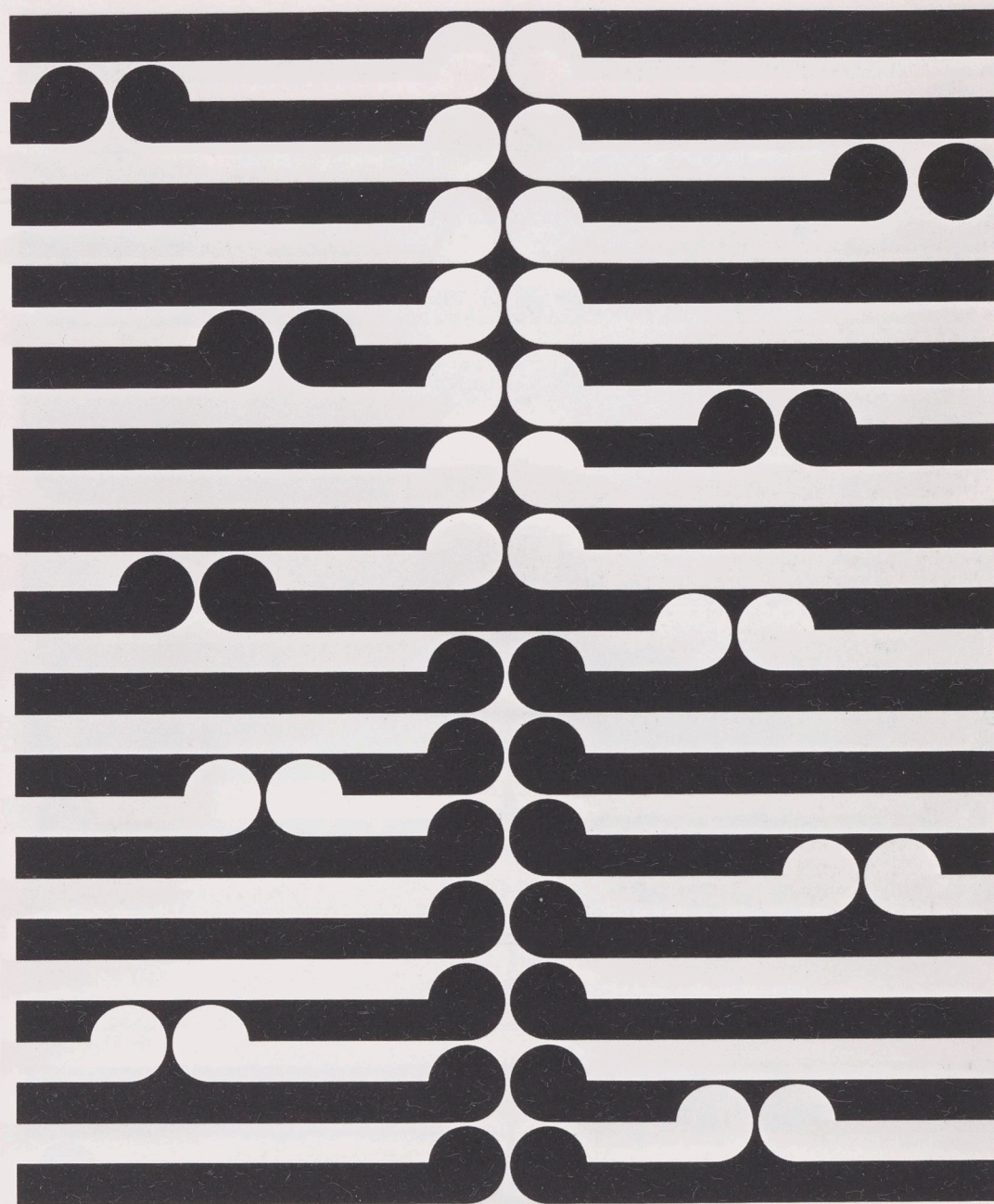


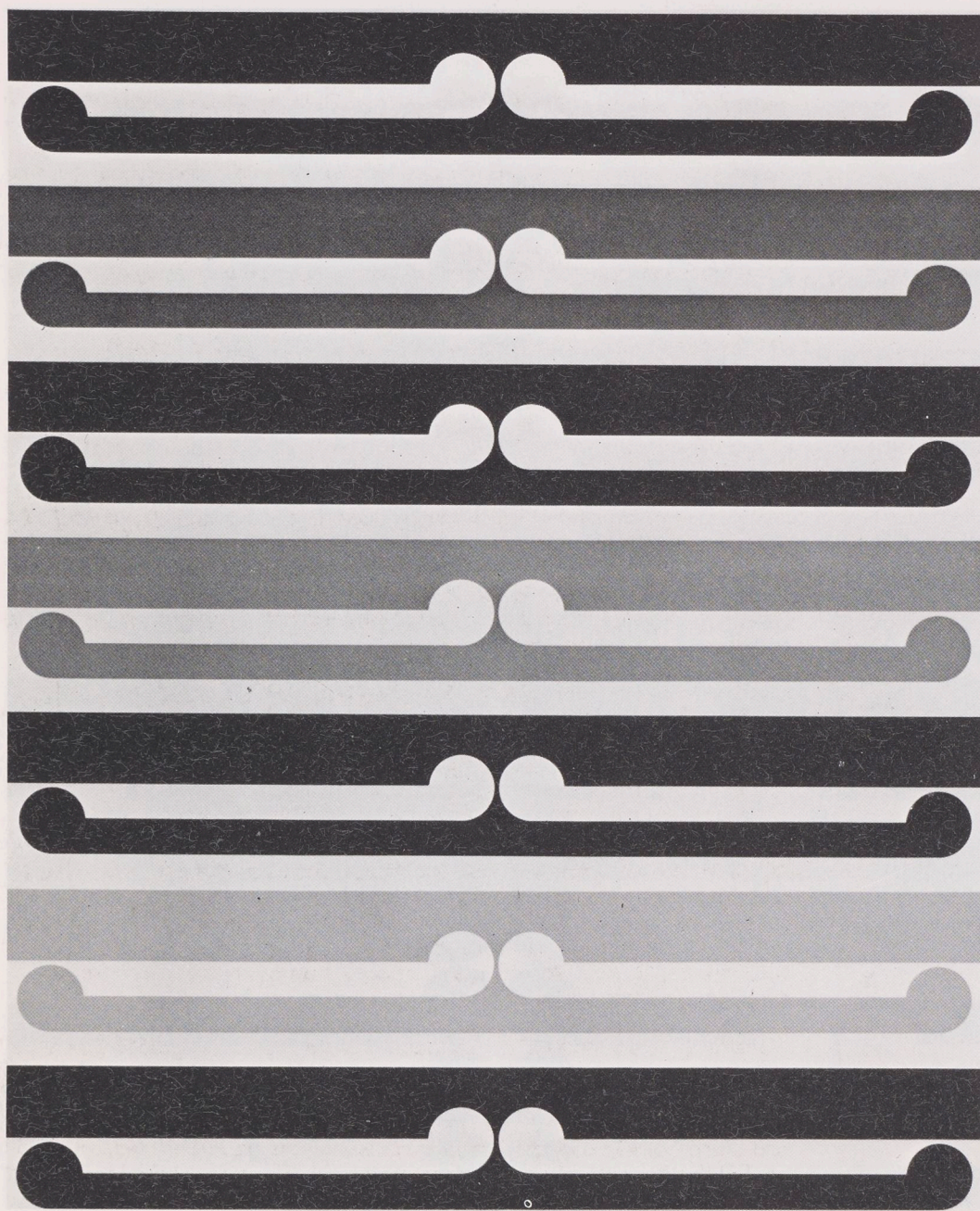












Statements by Gordon Walters

Theo Schoon

"My period of close association with Theo Schoon began when I first met him in June or July of 1941 and ended late in 1945 when he left Wellington for Dunedin and I left for a three-month stay in Sydney and Melbourne. We had become friends because our tastes in art tended to coincide, and I was able at this time to profit from Theo's larger experience and training in Europe. This background of his was of great importance to me, conscious as I was of my own lack of background and the impossibility of getting the sort of training I needed in New Zealand. These were the war years and one's isolation was complete.

"At this period Theo provided something of what I lacked in the way of traditional training in drawing and painting. I profited greatly from his experience, especially as he never tried to force on me his own attitudes and directions but encouraged me strongly to find my own way in art. I already had an independent approach to my work and this was strengthened by his encouragement.

"From 1946 onwards, though I often saw Theo again and our dialogue on art continued, the relationship was never as close as it had been in the early 1940s. At this time I was anxious to get overseas as soon as I could and in December 1947 I went to Sydney. I returned to New Zealand in late February, 1949, spent the rest of the year in Wellington, then left for England early in 1950. I saw Theo only briefly in 1949 and not again until I returned from England and Australia in July or August of 1953.

"During this period from 1946 - 1949 Theo had been engaged in recording South Island rock drawings, and before going overseas in late 1947 I had visited him twice in South Canterbury to see the drawings for myself. I shared his enthusiasm for these works and for a time they had an influence on my painting.

"I made contact with Theo on my return from overseas in 1953 and he saw the work I had been doing in Australia for the last couple of years. These were the first of my non-objective paintings and the studies I had done for them. The character of our respective works was very different. Theo's painting at this time showed the influence of rock drawings and Paul Klee and was basically linear, whilst my work was strongly influenced by the contemporary abstract work I had seen in Europe. Theo was not painting a great deal, however, and was becoming interested in ceramics.

"One thing he showed me at this time which did interest me greatly was a collection of coloured line drawings made by a schizophrenic patient at Oakley Hospital. He had collected these while working for some months as an attendant at the hospital. For a time my work was influenced by these drawings and I incorporated aspects of them into some of the gouaches I was working on. But this did not last as my interest was moving away from the linear to the planar.

"After returning from Australia I had stayed in Auckland for some months, finally returning to Wellington in October of 1954 to take a job as artist at the Government Printing Department. From this time on I worked in Wellington, very much in isolation. Occasionally I visited Auckland and usually took with me a folder of the gouaches and drawings I was then working on, to show Theo what I was doing: I valued his criticism of this work.

"Around this time (circa 1955 – 1956) Theo was studying Maori decorated gourds and tattoo patterns. Some of this material extended what I already knew from my own study of traditional Maori art, and I was stimulated to further investigate it. Our approach to this material was very different: Theo invested considerable energy in growing and decorating his own gourds and in painting kowhaiwhai patterns in a largely traditional way. I was out of sympathy with this approach and felt that he was trying to bring back the past.

"I was never influenced by the use Theo made of ethnic material as our approaches were so different. The influences I was digesting at this time were those of the artists whose work I had studied in Europe, and who were to have a decisive and lasting effect on my work. They were Arp, in his early reliefs and collages, Mondrian, the early Vasarely, Herbin and Capogrossi in particular. On the other hand there was the art of the Pacific, New Zealand, New Guinea (all of it), the Marquesas, the Austral Islands etc., which I had also studied closely in museums while overseas. It happened that my investigation of Pacific material coincided with the interest of certain French abstract painters in this material as well as some other areas of primitive art, in particular the early 1950s work of Capogrossi in Italy who related to this as well. My mature work had its beginnings in this movement.

"I have great respect for Theo Schoon, and the work of his which I have continued to admire is first of all his photographic record of aspects of the New Zealand landscape and also the paintings he showed at his exhibition at the New Vision Gallery in 1965, though I have by no means seen all of these. Over the years I have corresponded with Theo and met with him from time to time, and our friendship has continued."

October 15, 1982

"My work is an investigation of positive/negative relationships within a deliberately limited range of forms. The forms I use have no descriptive value in themselves and are used solely to demonstrate relations. I believe that dynamic relations are most clearly expressed by the repetition of a few simple elements."

1966, on the occasion of the exhibition at New Vision Gallery, Auckland

"The new paintings continue the exploration of motif began with the works shown in my previous exhibition. In the present series of paintings there are changes in emphasis. In some, the system of parallel stripes establishes a field for the tensions of the repeated motif. In others, the units tend to form a geometric structure. In all of them, feeling alone dictates the placing of the motif.

Some of the works depart from the figure-ground ambiguity to present a curved motif which also functions as a module. Here again form becomes a repetition, activating the plane of the canvas with a sense of movement."

1968, on the occasion of the exhibition at New Vision Gallery, Auckland

"This exhibition represents approximately half of a series of gouaches which were done between 1953 and 1959. With one or two exceptions, they have not previously been shown. Together, they represent the themes which occupied me during this period. Mostly they were preliminary studies for larger works, and they incorporate a wide range of stylistic influences, from Oceanic art to European abstraction of the period. They were not shown at the time I did them because I considered the artistic climate to be unsympathetic, if not downright hostile to abstraction. Some of the themes still interest me and I frequently take up and rework ideas which were not fully realised at the time."

October 2, 1974, on the occasion of the exhibition at Peter McLeavey Gallery, Wellington

Titles

"In the beginning I simply titled works *Painting number 1 1959* and so on, but I was not entirely happy with this. Then in 1964 I began to use Maori names for titles. This began with my painting entitled *Te Whiti*. The potent figure of Te Whiti had long fascinated me, partly perhaps because the street I had grown up in was named Te Whiti Street, so I decided to title what was then one of my strongest and most successful images in homage to the famous Maori leader. After this I began to use other Maori titles from my environment in Wellington where I had grown up.

"Most place-names there were Maori ones and these names had a strong emotional significance for me. By using them to title my works I was able both to pay tribute to the Maori tradition, which has meant a great deal to me, and to re-interpret it in terms of my own art and my immediate environment."

October 14, 1982

Painting Method

"After selecting one from a series of small-scale studies I make a full-size drawing on paper, in outline, and then transfer it to a stretched canvas. The canvas is primed, usually with three coats of acrylic gesso, lightly sanded, then given three or four coats (sometimes more) of white acrylic or PVA. After the image is transferred to the canvas it is outlined in acrylic with a very fine ruled line, then painted with four or five coats of whatever colour I am using. The multiple coats of paint are necessary to get sufficient density of colour, as I use the paint very thinly."

December 1982

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