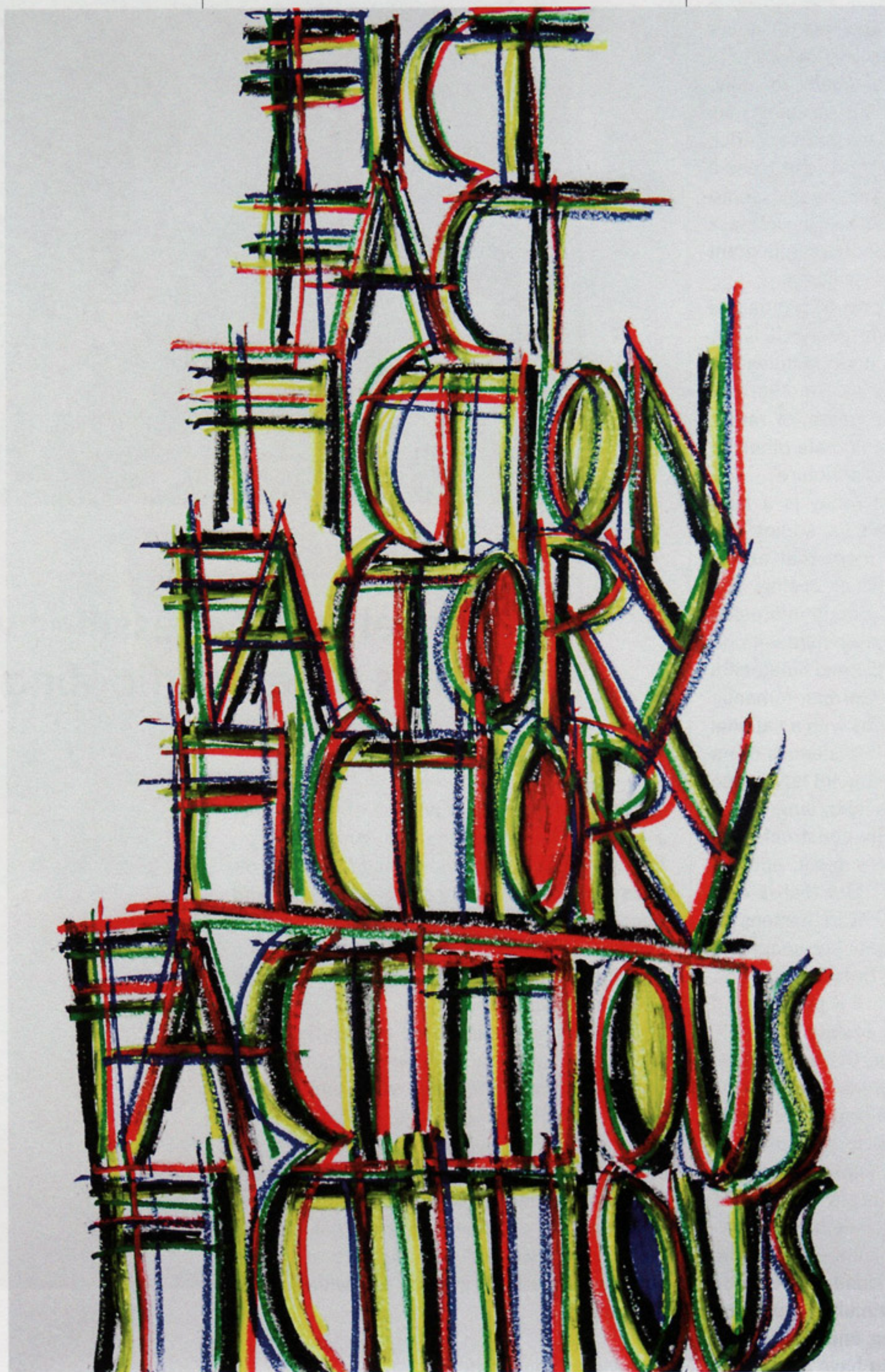


Ante Timmermans gets about a lot, generally by car and often, it seems, with a sketchbook on his lap. When we first contacted his gallery, the artist was in Zurich. When we were in Zurich, he was in Berlin. We reached him (over the phone) in Gent, and finally, he sent us the images for this feature after a meeting with his gallery back in Zurich. We had come full circle, back to where he had begun at the Barbara Seiler gallery, deep in Kreis 4. Circles, in fact, play an important part in Ante Timmermans work.



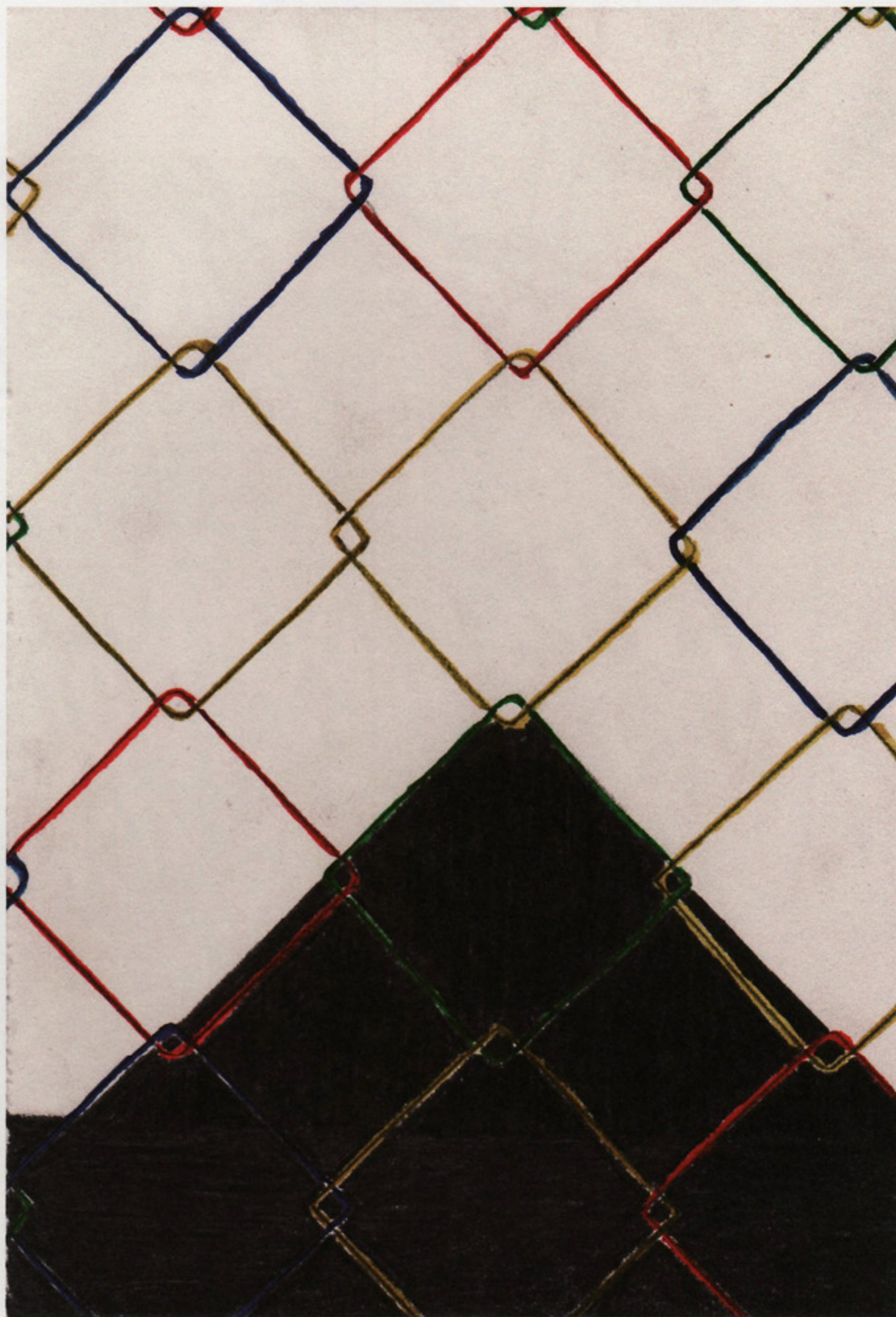
Fict Fact, 2011, 180x120 cm

'The circle is quite important in my work – with its association to cycles and routines, etc. To give you an example: at a certain moment I was driving on the motorway in Brussels and noticed, at one of those busy crossroads, these very big lamps. They were something I would drive past every day, without noticing. So I made a drawing there and then, changing the lamp into a wheel. And then later I also noticed, while looking at paintings by Brueghel, that wheels were used to torture people. And that's how my mind works. It's always about making these connections and associations. There's always this movement in my work: starting, say, with a circle, then a circus, then playing. [Circuses in the artist's work, by the way, are not just playful, but also something one gets caught into; more Kafka than Degas.] But I also had a fascination for this clock, and the idea of control, bureaucracies, factories... I see my work more and more as playing with these systems.'

Systems are certainly something Switzerland has in abundance. The artist moved to Zurich for personal reasons: 'My wife is an artist with Swiss roots. In 2007, we decided to live in Zurich for a while, slightly outside the city. It was an interesting period...' He says, before adding, 'Interesting doesn't have to mean something "positive". There are a lot of rules, and systems, and structures.' Though he also points out that, 'Even now that I am living in Belgium, I seem to be working with people in Zurich more than with Belgian people.'

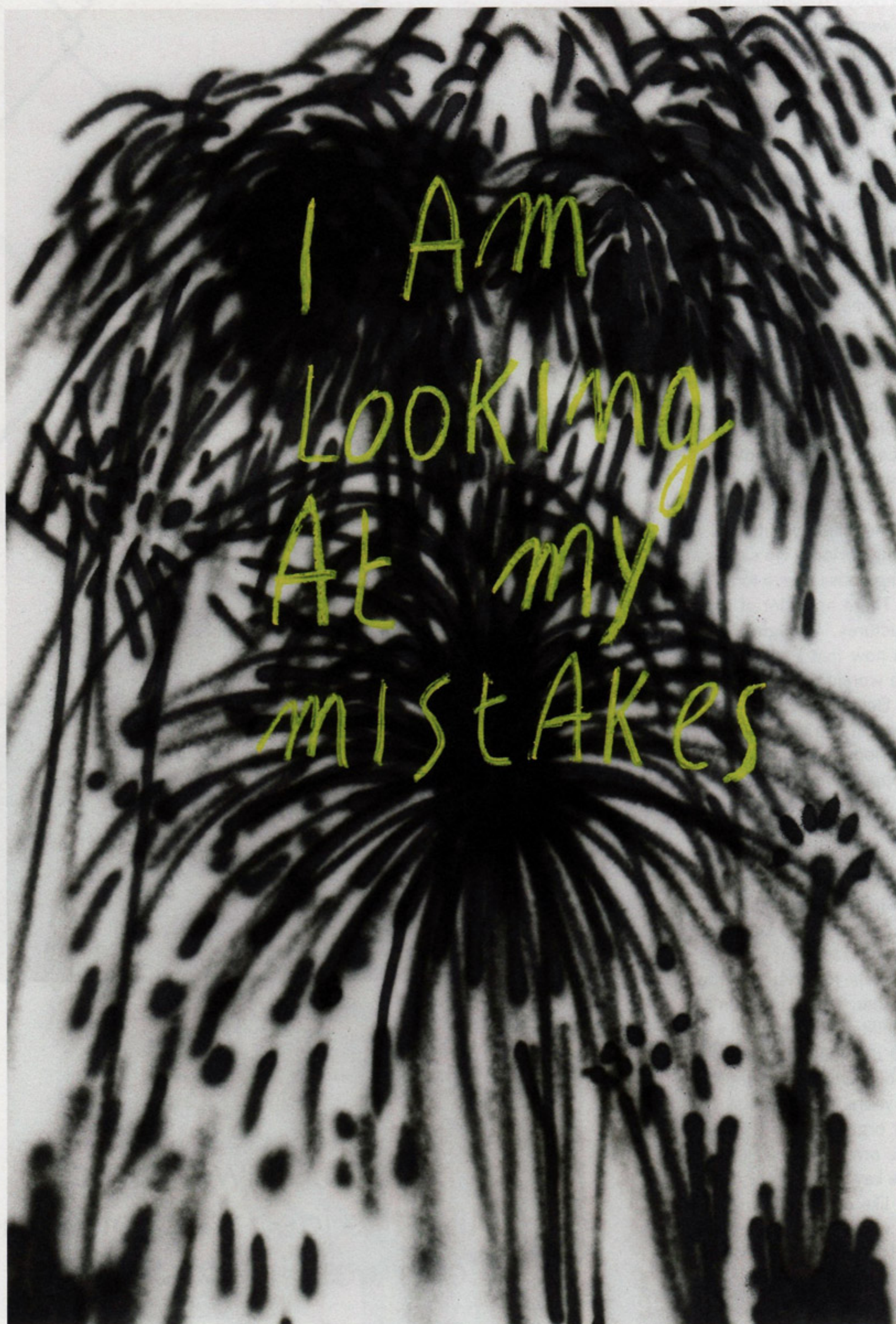
'I moved a lot in the last five years. First in Belgium, between various cities, then Berlin, Zurich. I had an opportunity to stay three months in New York. It's not some kind of strategy. I have just been following my work.'

Ante Timmermans is originally from Ninove, a small town between Gent and Brussels, 'a small town, an ugly town,' where he didn't have much contact with art or museums (except, he says, for Latin classes at secondary school). He then went to Brussels to study in order to become an art teacher, which is when he first realized the possibilities of the visual arts. This convinced him to continue studying and to go through art school in Brussels. After that, he worked for a few years as a teacher and worked for non-profit organizations. He was working full time while practicing as an artist. This is when one of the key themes, 'this every day routine that feels like a prison', emerged in the artist's work. 'I was working in the evenings and at weekends. Or I was making my drawings in trains, or in the car in traffic jams. I was trying to find my language as a visual artist. Then, in 2005, I applied to the Higher Institute in Antwerp for a postgraduate course. I gave up my normal job and had a studio for two years. I had made a decision to try to find my way as a visual artist. From there, I went to Berlin, and then to Zurich.'



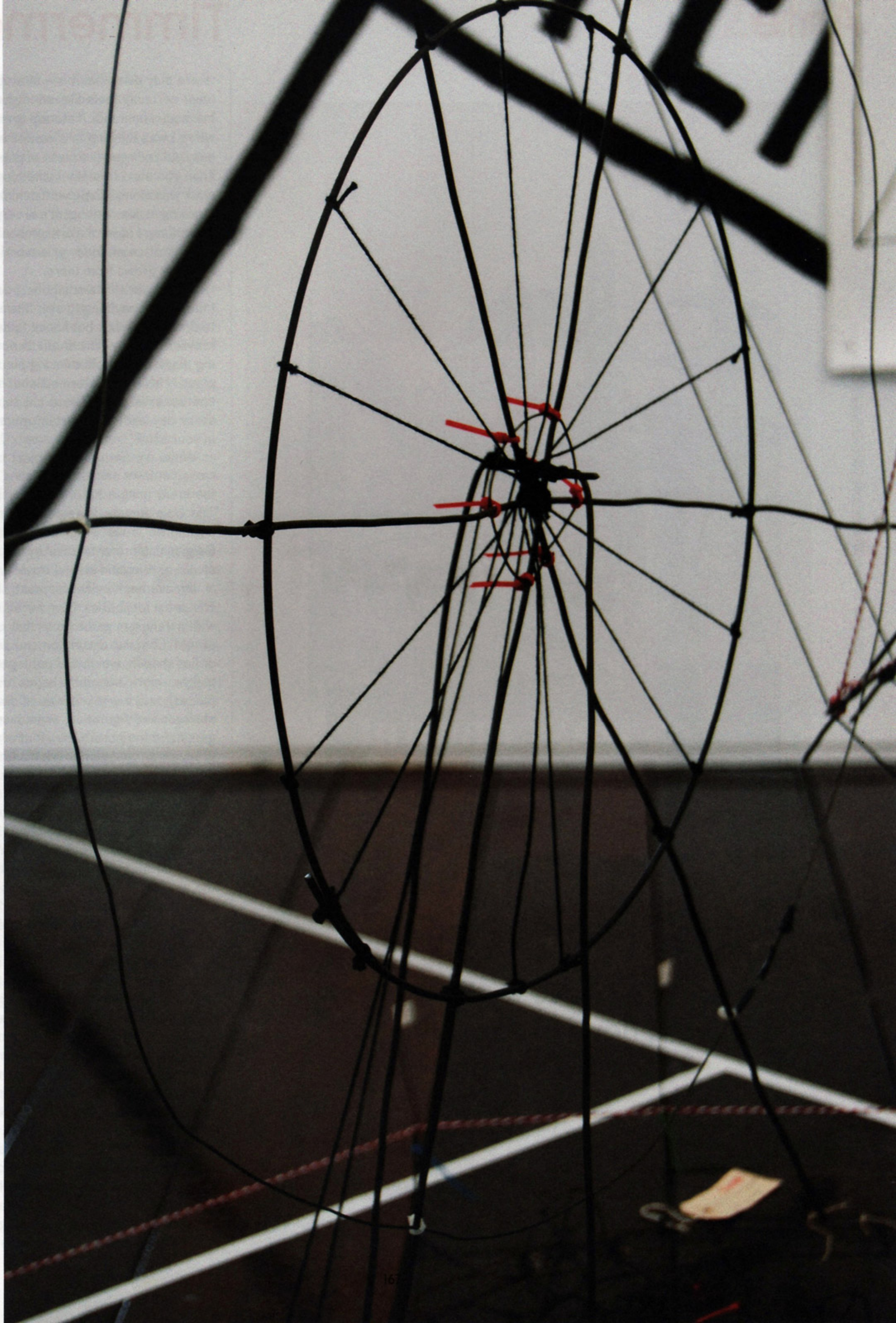
527/2011
2011, 21 x 14 cm

**I try to draw in space.
I like the idea that someone
can walk into a drawing**

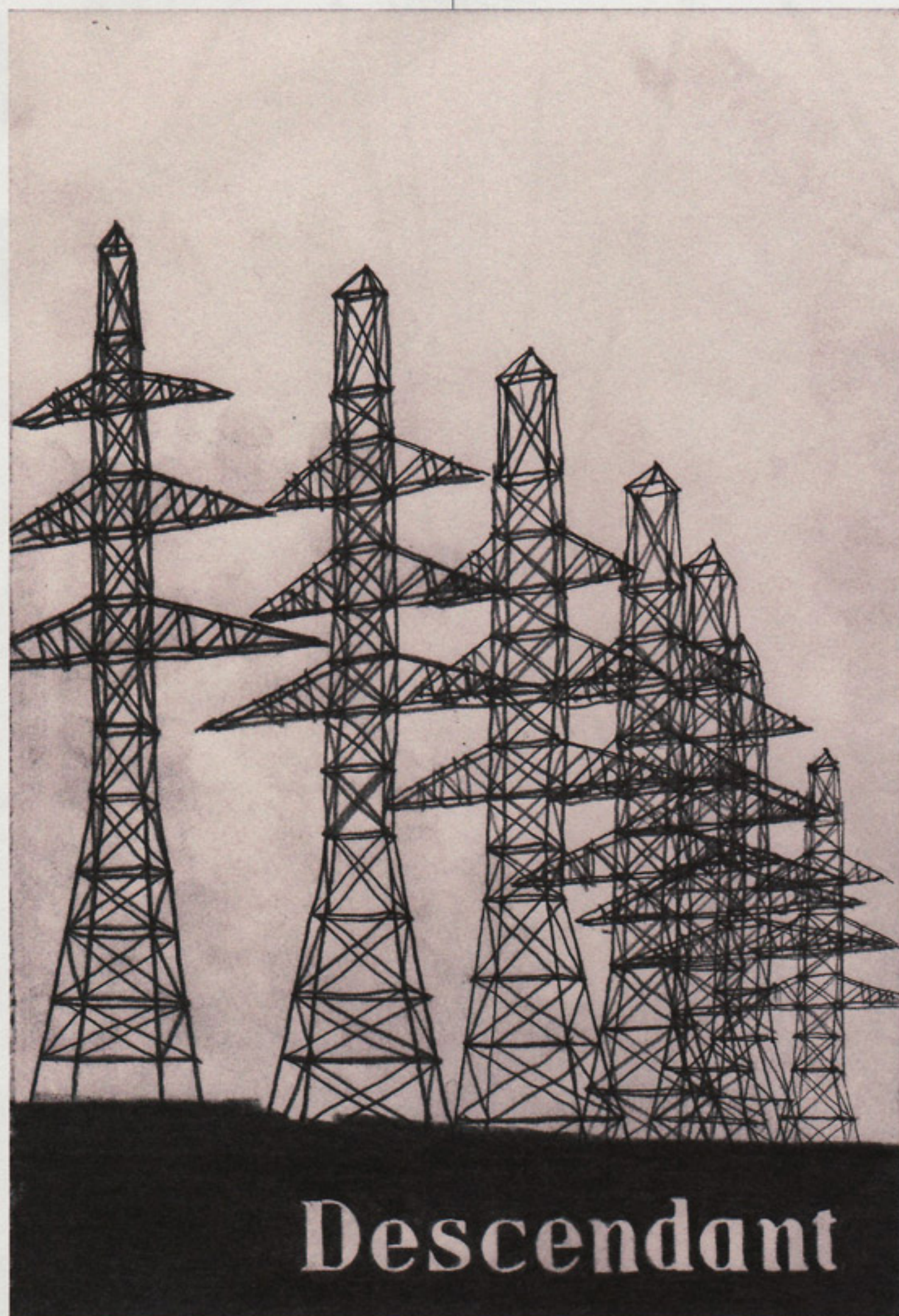


What are you doing? (Poesie der Langeweile), 2010,
spray and oil stick on paper, 180 x 120 cm

Architektur der Disziplin, installation view, 2010



489/2010, 2010, pencil on paper, 21 x 14.5 cm



It's not like I have to draw every day, but I have to deal with how I think every day

He may deny that it is a strategy, but *movement* certainly feels like an important part of his *modus operandi*: 'I started to make my work when I was thinking in a car, or in a train. It's easy. All you need is a piece of paper and a pen. Then you start to make something visible. My work was always to do with a thinking process. Drawing is like writing. It's a very direct way of working. I never make sketches. My starting point is often an idea, or a working title, and the work grows from there.'

'I am not at all a workaholic. I cannot work if I don't have anything to say. It's not like I have to draw every day, but I have to deal with how I think every day. The studio is not just a working place, it is also a thinking place, a reading place.' He has once termed what he does, 'routine observations'. 'These are things you see every day and, at a certain moment, it stays in your head.'

While we are on the subject of travel and movement, we cannot help noting the fact that there are quite a lot of trains in the drawings. 'The train for me is more like this track, "le chemin de la vie" – otherwise I am a typical Belgian and prefer to travel by car... Maybe this stupid or romantic idea of travelling by car...'

If movement is a key element, so are games. The artist describes how he started to play with a Tangram game [note that a Tangram is an old Chinese dissection puzzle consisting of flat shapes, which are put together to form bigger, more specific shapes using several pieces], and a whole series of drawings, both abstract and figurative, were inspired by the game and the possibilities it offers. In the Tangram game we seem to have a good image of Ante Timmermans' art practice itself: a playful system, in which shapes and connections keep being formed, then lost, then reformed; differently, creating different meanings.

The Tangram pieces will often form mountains and factories – and in relation to these the artist mentions the Sisyphus myth as being often in the back of his mind. 'But I do not consciously look for symbols. They just come out of the process of working.'

The artist has been producing larger paper works, but these are often still just pinned to a wall. 'I like to keep that contact with the paper. My work evolved organically. I started making small drawings and when I was invited to participate in an exhibition, it felt natural just to pin these to the wall.' Though drawing on bigger formats, he tries to retain the proportions of a page. He says, 'At one point, I started making large format landscape drawings, and worked for long periods of time on one drawing, sometimes three or four months. And what I noticed since I started working with these kind of formats is that, because they have the same proportions as the smaller drawings, it is easier for me to think and work in a coherent manner.'

It is a book format. And somehow, it is easier for me to think in those formats.'

His drawing practice does also involve sculptures and installations. These are generally made out of wire, emulating the language of line drawing. In fact, the artist refers to them as '3-dimensional drawings', and adds, 'I try to draw in space. I like the idea that someone can walk into a drawing. It is a form of investigation into what is a drawing. Or a form of zooming in and out.'

This drawing in space also includes directing shadows and using sound and movement, as in the piece, *Ludopticon*: 'It works in a short loop and connects to the idea of the wheel of fortune. My work seems to be moving more towards this installation kind of work. I love to visit exhibitions in which I am drawn completely into the mind of the artist. I like to combine drawings, 3D drawings and text works.'

Language is another significant presence in the artist's work. But, quite unusually, and in a way quite fittingly (as, again, it relates to movement and travel), he keeps switching between at least three different languages (French, English and German). 'At the beginning there were almost no words in my work. I was afraid to use them. I started to draw to visualize my thinking process. But I wanted to leave things open, avoiding big statements, whereas text is a lot more defined. I spoke French before, then I started speaking in English more and more often, then I learnt German. And I welcomed the opportunity to play in all these languages. This combination, these relations between words in different languages, makes it far more interesting to me. I like playing with words, connecting words, or even making new words. There are lots of texts and books around me at the studio.'

The words often remind one of graffiti on the streets of Paris in May 1968, which prompts us to ask the question of politics.

'I was expecting that question. There is a notion of protest in my work, that's true. But if I were a politician, I would be a very bad one. I doubt too much. I don't believe in one kind of truth. But maybe that's also political...'

We suggest that his work often embraces the language of protest and he admits that, 'Yes, but a subtle protest. A contradiction? No, I don't think so. I don't need to stand in front of people and scream.'

www.antetimmermans.de
www.barbaraseiler.ch



508/2011, 2011, ink and pencil on paper, 21 x 14.5 cm