

aviso

ao grande Público

À luz de um preconceito sociológico recém-tradicional, baseado nos preconceitos de optimismo e generosidade naturais, um artista, ainda que de vanguarda, ainda que portanto mais associal e mais responsável, mais combativo, mais seguro dos seus perigos e mais senhor do sentido do futuro — um artista deveria ser explicador da sua própria obra, nivelando-lhe o significado na escala do entendimento da maioria. Ora, convirá que seja alguém o dizê-lo não aconteça não haver ninguém a querer pensá-lo, não será culpa dos artistas que o público, habituado (isto é, mais lento e conformista do que em crise de exame moral), os não «compreenda». Pois que de facto os compreende perfeitamente opostos e por isto mesmo os não aceita.

Vêm os artistas ao Mundo não para convencer, mas para testemunhar a liberdade humanista exercida como direito de completar a realidade acontecida a todos (realidade cuja autenticidade parece estar somente na intensificação existencial dos extremismos). No mais, que se saiba que tem cada pessoa, se tiver, na boa-vontade e menor clemência o missionário de que precisa. E se de alguma ignorância reincidente ficar uma vontade de opinião, pense-se que como já foi afirmado cada qual tem o direito de dizer o que sente desde que sinta como deve — o que de novo implica o rigor duma humildade adequada.

guia da Exposição

Cada obra fala por si própria — e o público repare que ela está a vê-lo.

24. Março.1966

ANTÓNIO AREAL

1.

Aviso ao grande público

Original: 22 x 16,5 cm
Flyleaf, Funchal,
1966



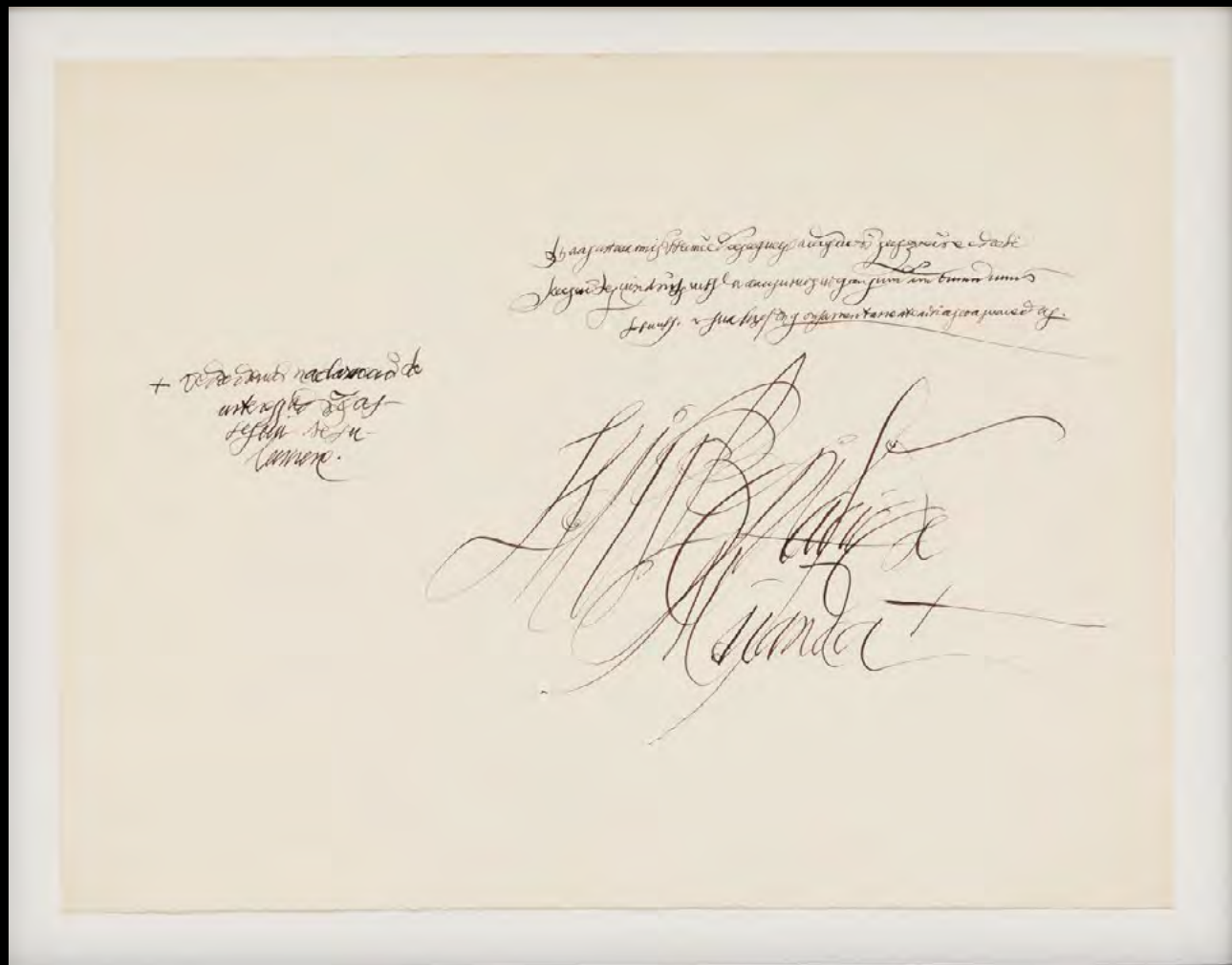
2.

O Formoso Capacete

1972

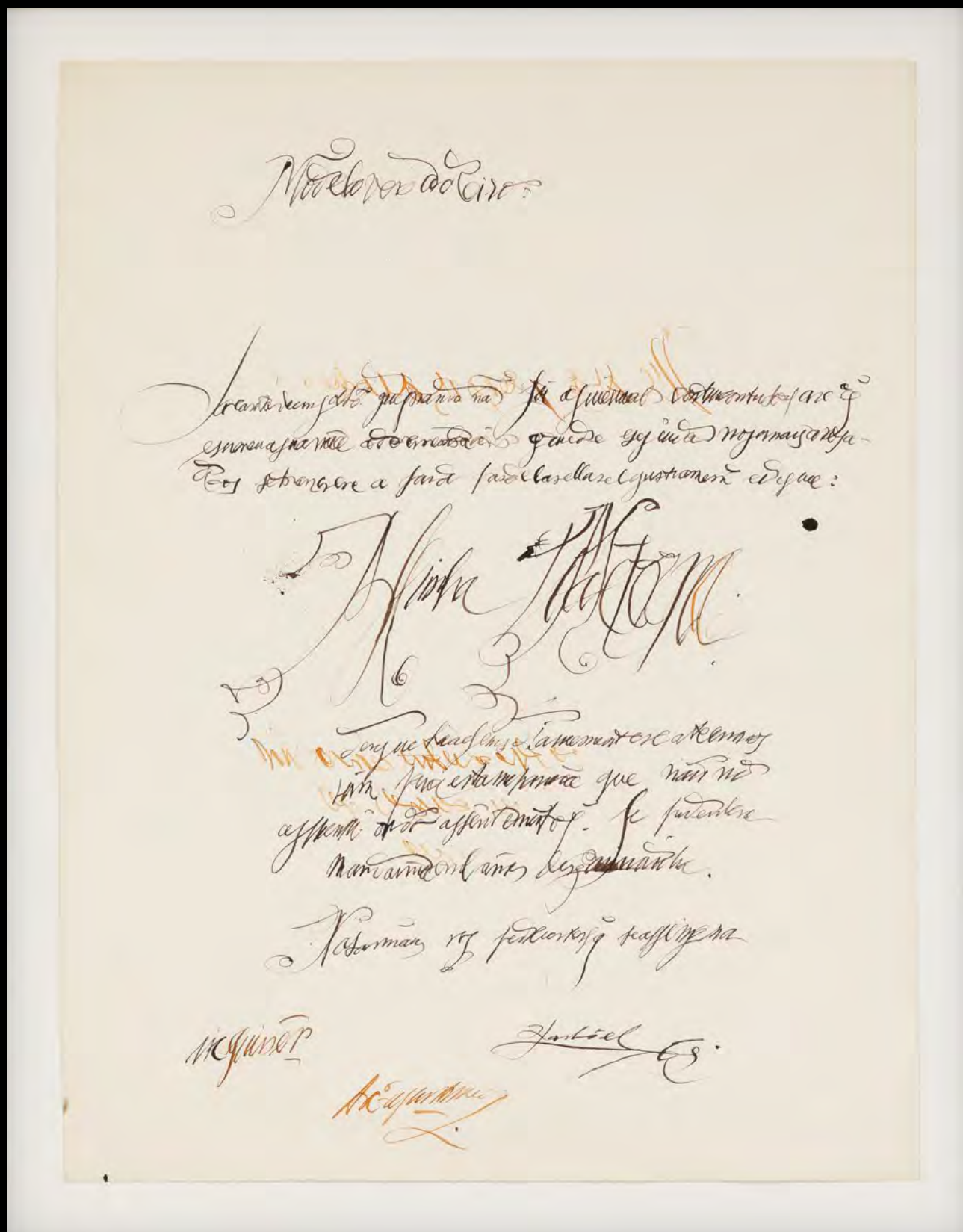
Mixed media on plexiglass

65 x 53 cm



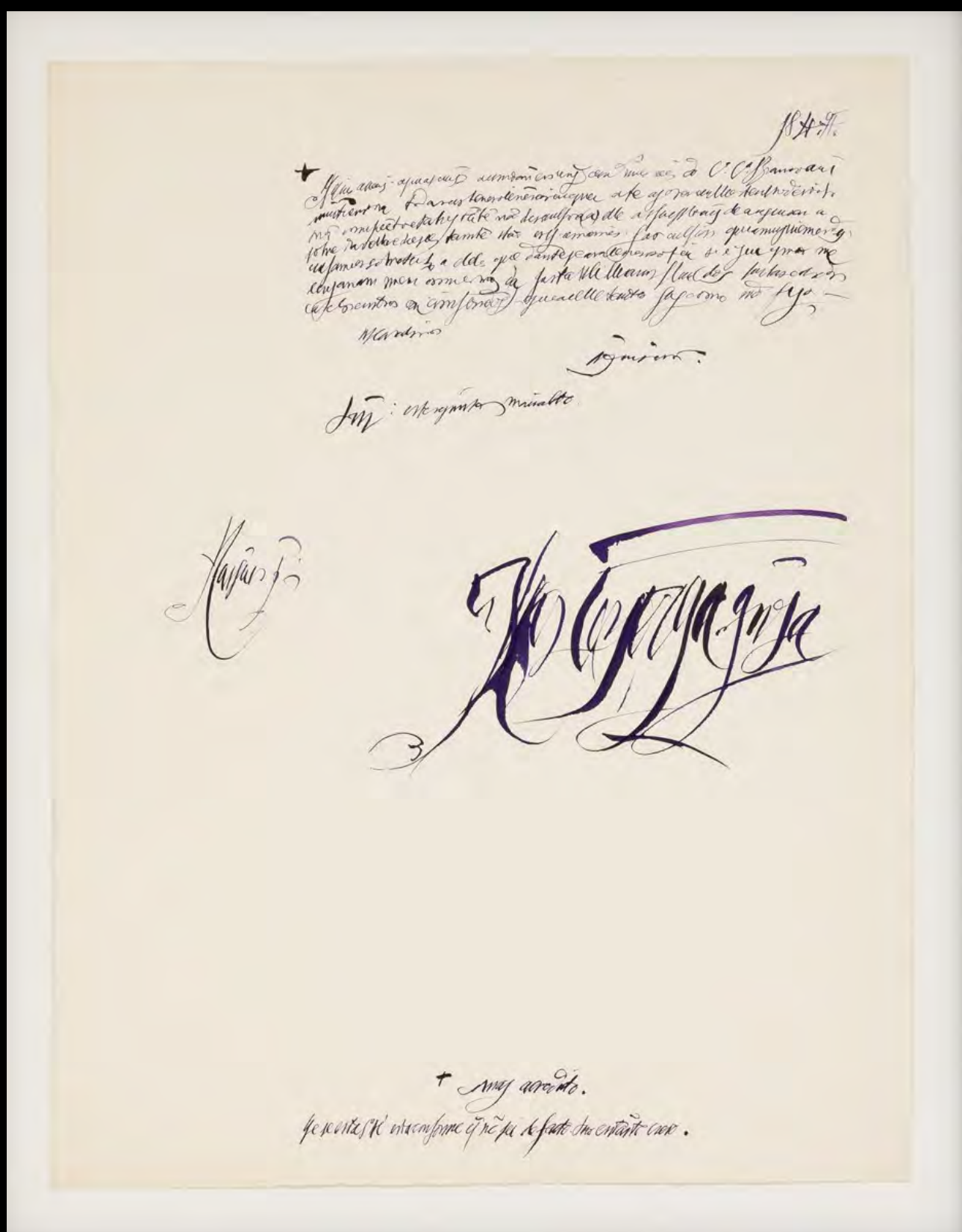
3.

Sem título
c.1969
China ink on paper
44×58cm



4.

Sem título
c.1969
China ink on paper
58×44cm



5.

Sem título
c.1969
China ink on paper
58×44cm



6.

Sem título

1972

Mixed media on paper
Ø11cm



7.

Moisés e a religião judaica

1962

Mixed media on paper
26×33,3cm

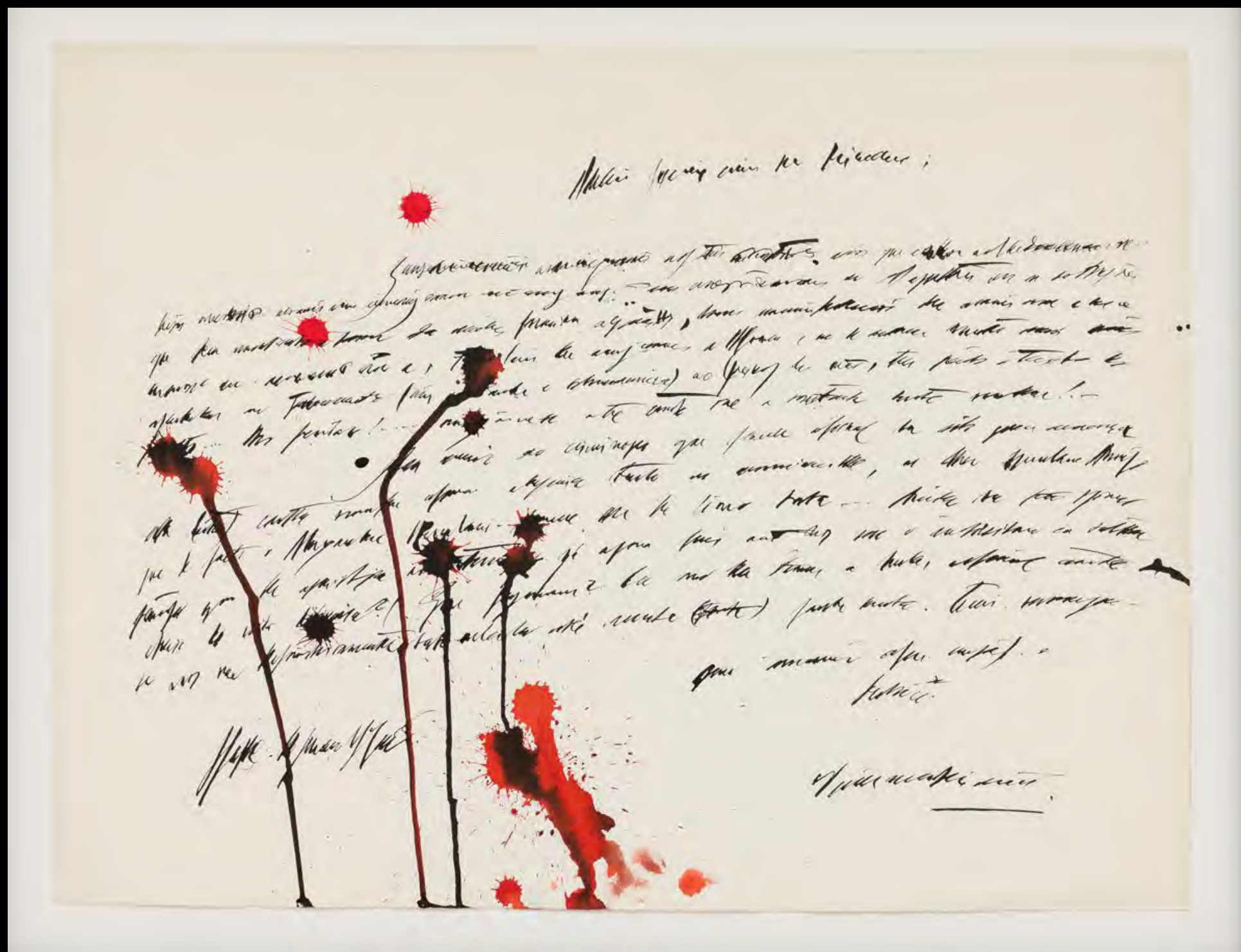
8.

Josefa

1972

Mixed media on latex
12,5×12,5cm





9.

Sem título

c. 1969

Mixed media on paper

44×58cm

10.

Estudo

1966

Mixed media on platex

67,5×44,5cm





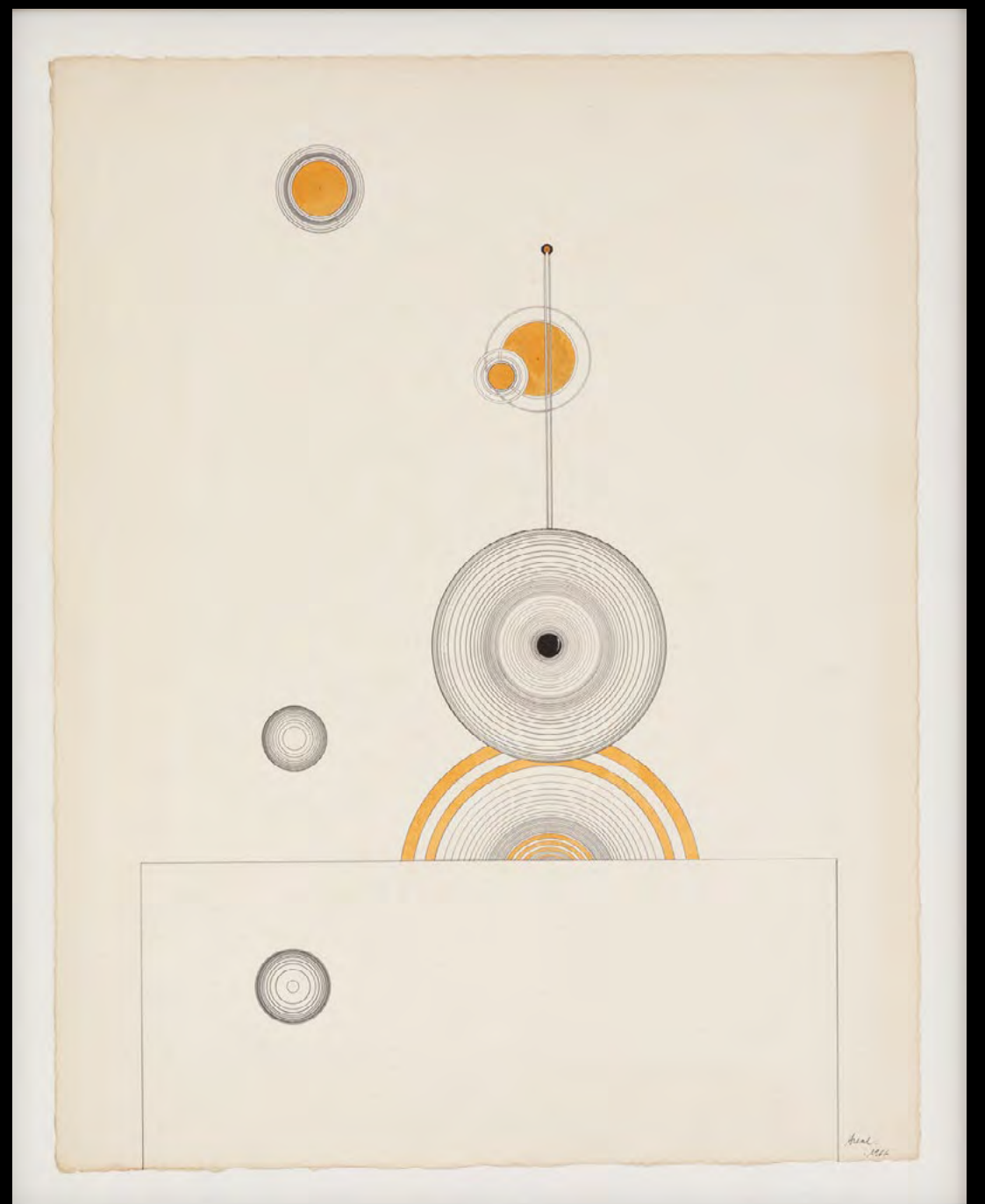
11.

Sem título

c. 1966

Mixed media on paper

64,5×50cm



12.

Sem título

c. 1966

Mixed media on paper

64,5×50cm



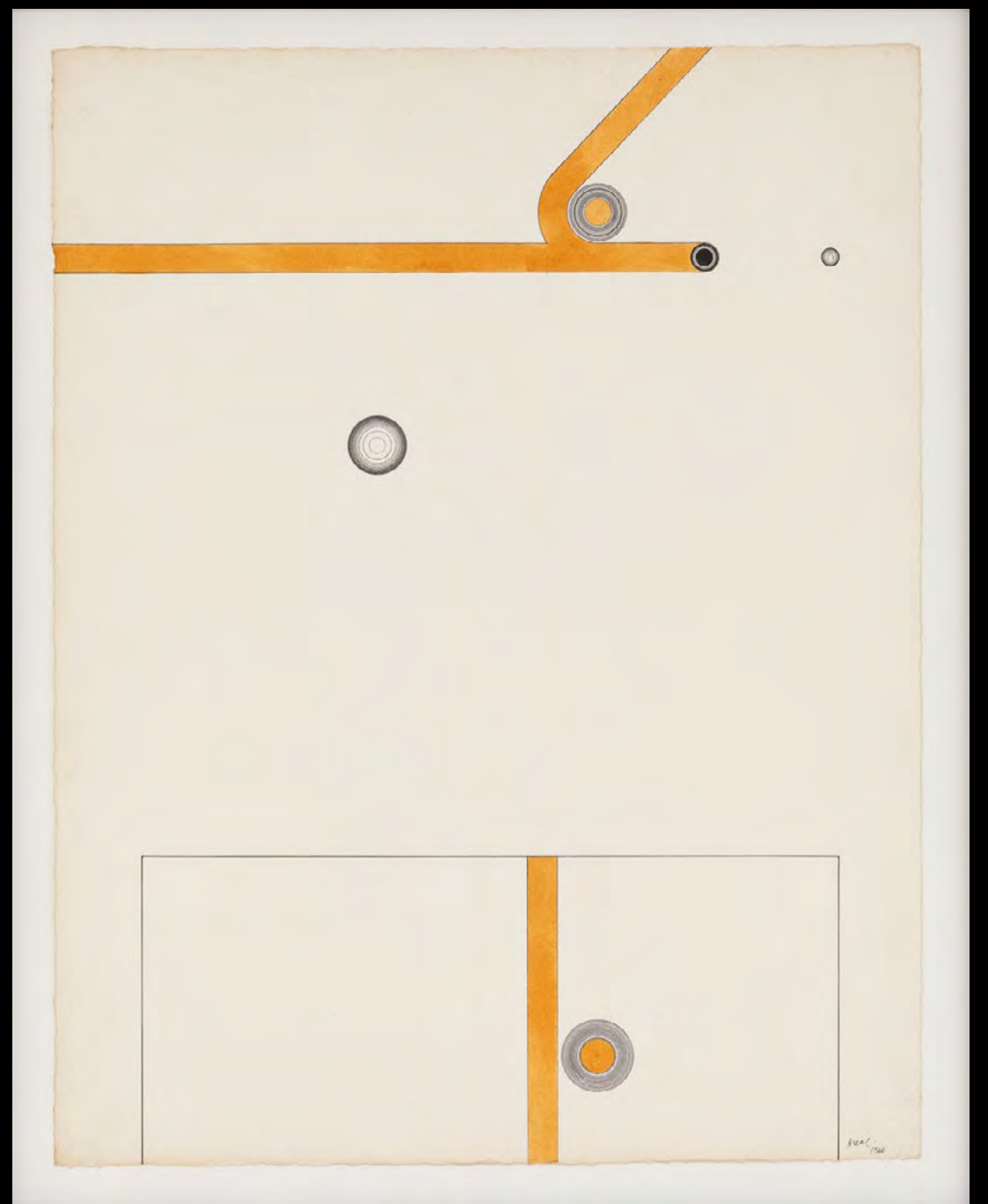
13.

Sem título

c. 1966

Mixed media on paper

64,5×50cm



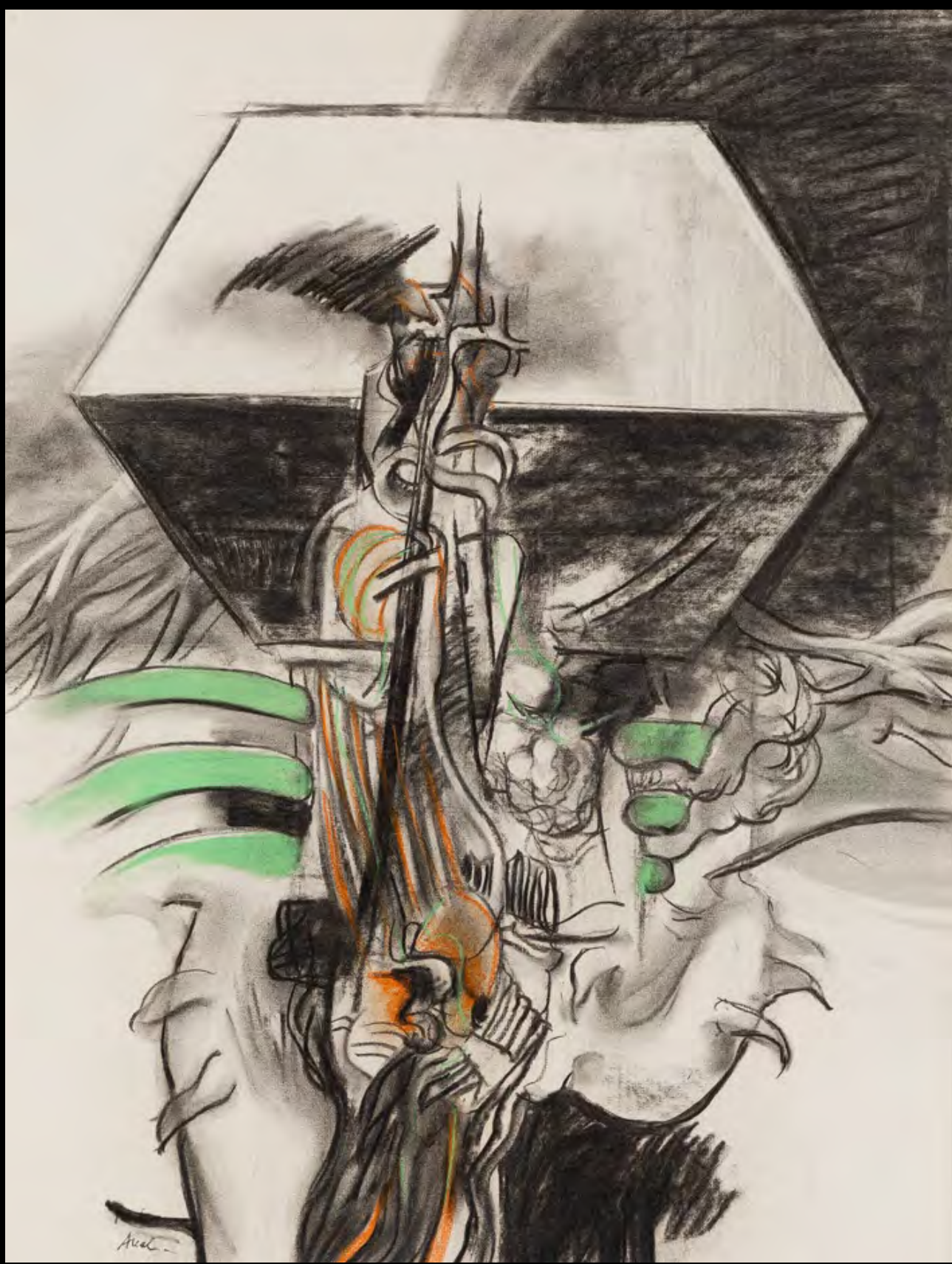
14.

Sem título

c. 1966

Mixed media on paper

64,5×50cm

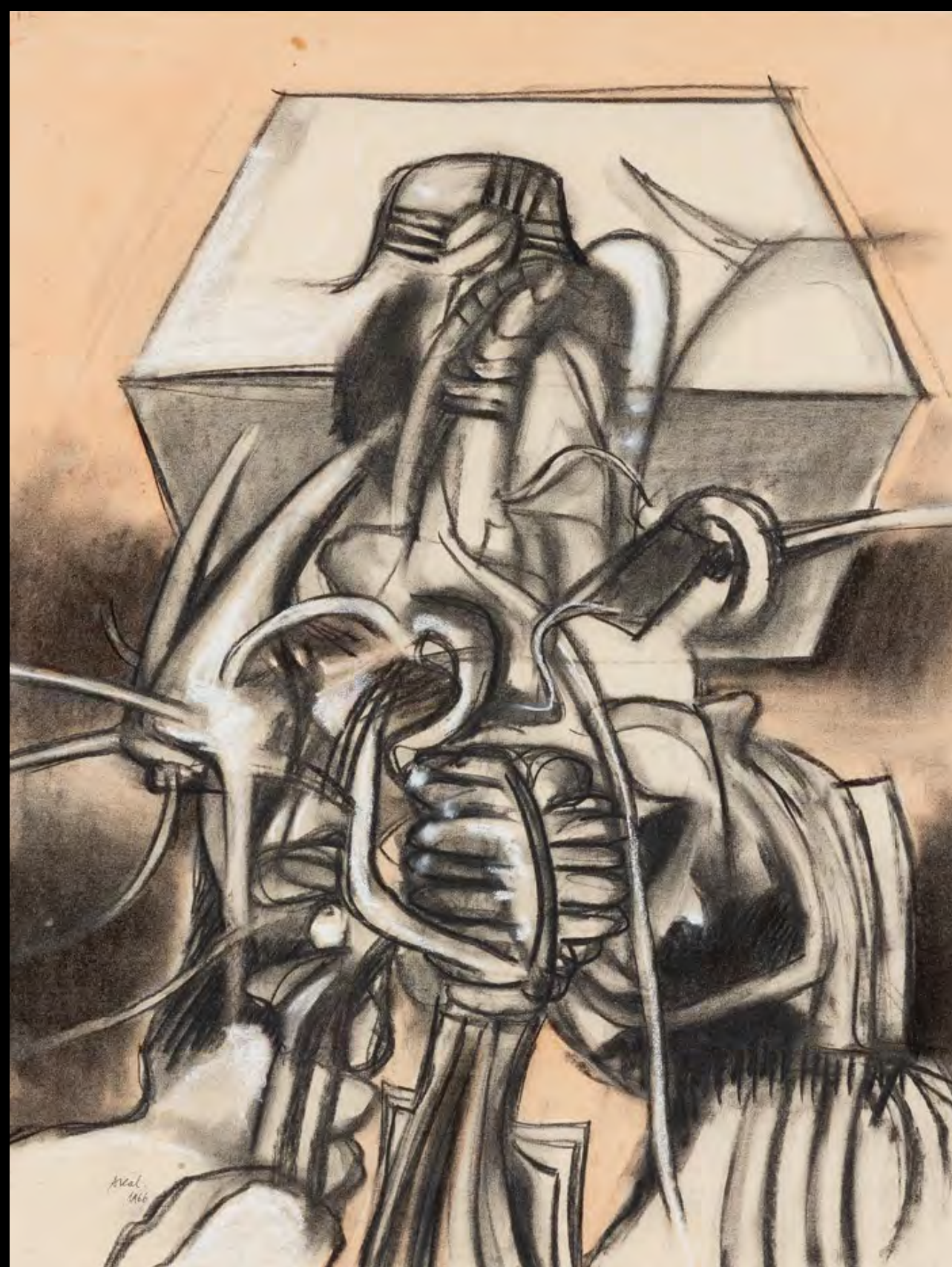


15.

Sem título

c. 1966

Mixed media on paper
62,5×48cm



16.

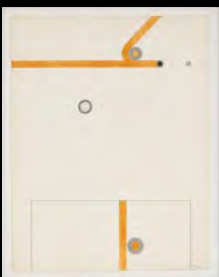
Sem título

c. 1966

Mixed media on paper
62,5×48cm

THE AVENGING IMAGINATION
António Areal

guia da Exposição
Cada obra fala por si própria—e o público repare que ela está a vê-lo.
24. Março 1966 ANTÓNIO AREAL



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UPPERCUT

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ANTÓNIO AREAL *THE AVENGING IMAGINATION*

*To such endless impressions
we poets, give ourselves absolutely,
making, in silence, omen of mere event,
until the world reflects the deepest
needs of the soul.*

Louise Glück

Writing about the work of an artist, or, if we use a term that once upon a time served for all those who make tangible an artistic intention, a *poet*, invariably reveals itself to be a thankless, incomplete task. The work of art is what first speaks, manifesting itself always before we can know its purpose, its process, the end result, since the desire to try to make sense of it, in other words grant it agency on a theoretical level,

is an endeavour that is sure to suffer, inevitably, from a failure, of those who write about the work, to live up to its complexity and demands.

A work of art is not born, nor is it immediately manifested, in order to explain something; it is born, yes, of the skilful prescience of they that made it. The work is «*sensory representation at the exact moment of its maximally corporeal phenomenal appearance*», Wagner wrote. It is also «the redemption of the artist, a suppression of the last traces of creative arbitrariness, the indubitable determination of what until that moment [of creation] was just mental representation, the

deliverance of thought in sensibility, the *satisfying of the lack of life in one's own life*»¹, in as much as the artist, whether a painter, a draughtsman, a sculptor, a composer, or someone that writes poetry, «does not describe what he wants and who he loves, but rather truly *wants and loves*, and communicates via his artistic faculties the joy he feels in his wanting and loving: he does so specifically, with utter exuberance, in definite, immediate terms, through the drama he portrays»².

So what then does the essayist have to add? If art is beyond all description, all explanation, and mindless excuses for often woefully substantiated

arguments - the fact being the proof is *there* for our delectation and in no need of explanation - what motivates those who think and write about art ought to be, therefore, the fulfilling of a task that accrues, and upends, through suggestion, overture and possible readings that do not overshadow the qualities of what we see before us, and that lead the onlooker to reflections, and interpretations of their own, to indulge the full extent of the imagination innately granted them, making them aware of the sheer vulnerability of the moment when before the outcome of what, indeed, is an exercise in human freedom and immortality: a work of art that

has been brought forth brought forth into the light, ready to be welcomed and contemplated, in profound remembrance of that moment of proof, as it only lives and endures as long as someone is there to experience it.

It's certainly true that a work of art can provide us with answers to some of our most intimate questioning. We can catch a glimpse of moments of clarity deep within the dense fog as it weaves the thick veils of reality, keys to enigmas which relentlessly ravage our anguished, restless spirit, streaks of light in times of crisis and darkness. But the desire to embrace what makes

a work unique goes deeper. This desire stems, for those who wish to give themselves up to the contemplation of art, from the effort to unravel a mystery, a secret that originally belonged to the artist which, in tacit, momentaneous approximation – an encounter no more than partial, because one is never, but never, granted total access – brings the essayist to a state of enigmatic wonderment, once they unlock a fresh, but strangely familiar impression, or natural intuition, of a feeling of discovery (similar to that which we feel in our childhood, when we had yet to be moulded by the rules and norms of the world we all share

as one). This feeling takes place, not due to reason or logic, but by the comprehension of what is before us, an unexpected sense of the unlocking of a *truth* which sparkles, and shimmers, which is alive, but which until that moment remained hidden, waiting to be found.

Inevitably, this encounter always takes place in retrospect, always at cross purposes to the order and rhythms of time between the moments of creation, the manifestation of the artistic object and, finally, the theoretical argument that is conceived following this process. Nonetheless, not because of this, this half-hearted approximation of the person devoting their

critical faculties to the work, seeking to access its intimate essence and the reason why it was made, ends up no longer being the catalyst, the fundamental reason why he or she goes about their designated purpose: by essaying, experimenting, and to *attempt* this approximation. The truth is, the challenge lies in searching for the words, without rote description, of what in the experience was disquieting and apparently indescribable, picking between the dense web of perceptible phenomena which make up reality. To understand the work, it's a case of forgetting all that came before it (and nothing more so than the history of art

itself), when all art finds itself to be truly alive, at all and in any moment in which it becomes an object for reflection and wonderment, stupefaction and giddiness, as it scrutinises us and *looks* back at us, making us recognise our place in its presence.

António Areal (1934-1978), throughout his entire artistic career, thought and wrote about art and the cultural and social issues it entailed, in course of the 1960s and 70s. With tenacious wisdom and a discourse of acute lucidness, he presented and put forward radical theoretical arguments constantly motivated by questions associated with the

systematisation and decline in art critique at the time when he lived, and which, according to his attentive gaze - ominous omen - deliberately distanced itself from understanding the fundamental act of creation and the motivating forces behind a work of art's intrinsic quality. He wrote that «a painting is decisively more active than its subsequent ideological interpretation»³, and precisely for having understood this, he declared, he was not one to write texts with aesthetic pretensions. In his own words, all his texts were to be limited to the «ethical behaviour» of the artist, because conceptualism, symbolism, dogmatism, teleology and

whatever spurious labels were given by the art establishment to his work, mattered nothing to him.

An heir to interests that were profoundly philosophical and literary, Areal wrote that he sought, in his work, to fulfil the exercise of the «revolutionary imagination which establishes the power of contradiction to enhance with the utmost freedom».⁴ In his view, it was the artists themselves whose own reflections on art were the foundation of theoretical authenticity, due to their primary condition: a predisposition towards creation. From what he saw, art had nothing to do with periods or epochs, as it

transcended all such barriers. Amply demonstrated, when he wrote in his «Notas de Evidência Aleatória» (Notes of Aleatory Evidence) in 1971, that presenting a *series* of works of his from different time periods in his career – as a kind of experimental or «encyclopedic» showcase –, is no «synthesis (...)», but principally an instance of movement: when all is said and done, a situation. And systematisation is not (the/a) system». ⁵

These days, Areal's body of work continues to demonstrate this very same impulse: a merciless assault on the methodisation and normativisation of the creative exercise, on the undermining

of the creative spirit which motivates artists (how rare to hear this said, today!) which has actually been made a calculated mission statement of intent to ensure approval and a collective voice. His work is, without any doubt, truly an «avenging imagination».⁶

This exhibition, besides certain recognised works, is a chance to show a series of never-before-seen pieces. A soldier, a war helmet revealing attentive, watchful eyes. Indecipherable cards, mapped out, an exercise in free writing that asks for no resolution, but which win us over with their vividness. Drawings of plotted routes, cosmic maps, astral maps, maps of uncertain,

fragile lives, between looming shadows and spectres in constant movement casting their murk over the trails, leaving us disorientated. Sacred histories, stories of war, defeats and victories, abysses and conquests, poems of love and regret, sacrifice and delight. Here we also find a portrait of Josefa de Óbidos, celebrated Portuguese female painter of the baroque. For sure Areal was the first artist to do so, for who else has done a portrait of Josefa de Óbidos, smiling at us with an enormous toothless grin? Imagination conquers all, memory earns its place and occupies space, freedom is accomplished, and each work,

as he himself said in his *aviso ao grande Público* (warning to the general Public) and *guia da exposição* (guide to the exhibition): «Each work speaks for itself – and the public can see how it is watching them».

It's possible that this exhibition demonstrates how the ethical dimension of the work is not far removed from its aesthetic predisposition, which risks nowadays the possibility of rejection. Will there ever be a winner, between art and philosophy? Even if created in isolation, both arise from the need for the presence of others, to exist besides others. It is they which provide a measure for our finite condition, through

our experience of the world around us, and demonstrate how our ephemerality can be blessed with a surprising dash of immortality, through the creation of something whose purpose is to be an object of experience and reflection, out of time, of imprecise movements, frustrating our convictions, ideologies and historicity.

«Creation is at least as much ethical as it is aesthetical»⁷ and «all experience is essential and immediately aesthetic. But also ethical, social and dialogic, in a way political and even religious: as it may be more sacred for some than for others. Nothing is every exactly the same for one and all», said Manuel Rodrigues.

Just as the philosopher reflects on the world and on the experience of thought through the lives that occur within, the artist recreates and enables us to recognise the most intimate of experiences of this world we all share and which unites us. About this way of living and being in the world, the words of Manuel Rodrigues could not be more incisive: «When I write a poem, I do not stop being a philosopher, and if I think philosophically, I do not stop being a poet; you could say when I take a breath *my heart continues to beat*». ⁸

Filipa Correia de Sousa

- 1 Richard Wagner, *The Art-work of the Future* (1849), Portuguese translation: *A Obra de Arte do Futuro*, translation. by José M. Justo, Antígona, Lisboa, 2003, p. 15. (our italics)
- 2 *Ibidem*, p. 109.
- 3 António Areal, *Pequena Antologia de Textos de António Areal (A Brief Anthology of the Texts of António Areal)*, in Artes Plásticas, Porto, Number 2, pgs. 6-7, January 1974.
- 4 *Idem*, in *Notas de Evidência Aleatória* presented in the exhibition text of his show at Galeria S. Mamede, Lisbon, in 1971.
- 5 *Ibidem*.
- 6 An expression used by Lima de Freitas as subheading for the text “Da actualidade do surrealismo” in Artes Plásticas, Porto, Number 1, pgs. 10-14, October 1973.
- 7 Manuel Rodrigues, *Desejo e Destino. Conversa em torno do desenho com Cristina Robalo*, Sistema Solar (Documenta), Lisbon, 2023, p. 93.
- 8 *Ibidem*, p. 115. (our italics)