



Río Sil, líneas y geometrías
(River Sil, Lines and Geometries)

La Fundación Cerezales Antonino y Cinia, Cerezales del Condado (León, Spain)
April – July 2023





River Sil, Lines and Geometries took shape over the two-year period between 2021 and 2023 and was structured in three phases of research and field- and studio-work. It all started upon the invitation from Susana González, Director of Collection at the María José Jove Foundation in A Coruña to develop a project in the area of the Ribeira Sacra in Galicia, Spain. The term 'Ribeira Sacra', meaning 'holy river-bank', is used to refer to the land where the rivers Sil and Miño meet. The River Sil is the determining feature of that landscape, flowing 234 kilometres through the provinces of León, Ourense and Lugo. It is one of the largest rivers in Spain regarding water flow. In geological terms, the north-western Iberian Peninsula is part of the so-called Iberian Massif, the result of the collision of two ancient continents 300 million years ago, which gave rise to a vast mountain range. The reliefs arising along the river's path exhibit diverse morphologies from mountains to plateaus to canyons, with significant contrasts in the topography and a broad range of rock formations.

First Trip

In November 2021, I made my initial site visit guided by geologist Víctor Barrientos, the professor in the Terrain Engineering department of the Higher Technical School of Civil Engineering at the University of A Coruña. During that trip I realised that the task wouldn't be straightforward as the landscape had been modified by its use for a very long time through agriculture, dams, and tourism. It was simply hard to find (imagine, even) a corner without human intervention. Such conditions were going to either kill or make the project, but under no circumstances were they avoidable. Step by step, I started to figure out how to tackle such obstacles. The Sil Canyon's viewpoints were naturally determined by the geography. One could either look downwards from the top or upwards from the water level. I decided to try both. Besides, the viewpoints were marked, it wasn't that easy to go for a walk and find new ones as curvy roads determined the areas where one could stand and look.

Those were the constraints I grappled with before turning them to my advantage. After standing long enough in some of the viewpoints, I realised that twists and turns of the river were creating interesting geometries, and I saw a potential in that. And once I noticed that, due to changes to the water level, the line formed in between the water and the mountain looked like a drawing of sorts, I started to feel hope. Víctor took me to a location called Cabo do Mundo in the province of Lugo to study an ancient wall made of schist, metamorphic rock that became

exposed when they did some roadworks. On location, the wall was 3 metres high and 20 metres long. It showed part of the geological history of the region. I saw a potential for future paintings in all those forms.

By the end of the trip another geologist, Eduardo González Clavijo, was driving me from the Ribeira to Chantada where I was going to run a workshop. On the way, we saw clouds underneath us as if suspended in between the river and the atmosphere. Eduardo explained that it was quite a frequent occurrence in the area. Having wanted to draw clouds for at least 10 years, it seemed that I found one more entry point to the project.

That first trip was essential for understanding the topography and for identifying the locations of interest and thus the ensuing research plan. It was during those days when I observed and studied the features—or four key themes—that would be tested in my next trip: the lines of the water level, the geometries of the riverbanks, the cloud formations, and the metamorphic rock. The shapes, patterns, and configurations of landscape elements (geometries) as the river zigzagged underneath a cumulous sky and against the schist wall were all something of a wonder.

Second Trip

I went back in May 2022 with a much more comprehensive understanding of the terrain and a fresh approach to work, bringing with me materials that enabled experimentations with my four points of focus. I needed to create drawings and sketches in the first

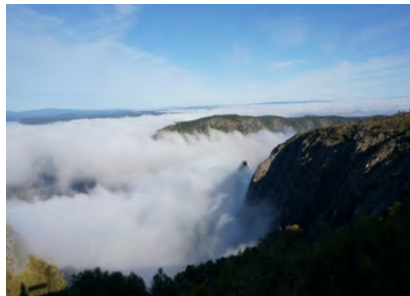
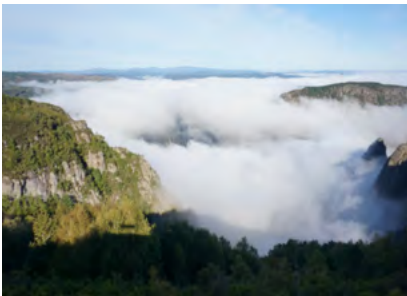
Field trips
River Geometries



River Lines



Clouds



Schist



instance, so that I could estimate the time needed for each of the necessary future steps (including potential additional trips). I made a series of sketches to record changes in the water level on the walls of the Sil Canyon, a 35 km-long gorge of tectonic origin whose vertical walls reach heights of up to 500 metres. These shifts in the water level leave strata-like marks on the canyon walls, recording how the level has changed over time. Such fluctuations dictate the survival of plant life and leave the rocks exposed, in most cases without any vegetation.

For a full day, I embarked on a standard commercial boat to test the idea of mapping by drawing an entire section of the river. It was just me and the pilot on the boat. He was making stops at my request so that I could try out different viewpoints and techniques. With a variety of paper formats and textures at hand, I used ink, pencil and watercolours to understand the most successful medium I might eventually choose. Crucially, I realised that in the future I would need a boat with a smaller engine, easier to stabilise and manage, to be able to better position myself between the two banks and select and set down frontal views of the vertical morphology of the valley.

During this trip I worked on the projects I was already certain of, namely *Clouds* and *Geometries*. *Clouds* (2022) recorded the shape of fog patterns forming in the river valley contained within its mountains. This natural phenomenon occurred at sunrise on good days. I woke up at dawn every morning hoping that I would see the clouds through my window (I'd previously visited a few villages to establish

the one at the optimal altitude above the sea level to be “on top of the clouds”). To make my drawings, I experimented with a range of paper colours (white, grey, blue), applying inks, watercolours, and pencils. The most successful ones were those with acrylic white ink on grey paper, and I pursued with that technique for final drawings.

The rest of the days were spent finding viewpoints for the geometries of the landscape. I was able to draw sections that define the plane of the water surface held within the geological formations, and that's how the series *River Geometries* (2022–2023) was born. These perimeter lines, along with the planes that they define, take in the unevenness of the terrain, its recesses and bulges. They describe the continuity of the riverbank and delimit areas conditioned by the chosen perspective.

My last accomplishment during the second trip was to think creatively through the schist rock formation. I went in with gouaches, different sets of brushes, and small wood surfaces covered with canvas to make several tests for future artworks.

At the time, Susana González and I joined forces with the Fundación Cereales Antonino y Cinia, and together we expanded our ambitions for the project and discussed an exhibition there the next year. The geographical proximity of the Foundation located in Cereales del Condado in León, near the source of the River Sil, made our collaboration relevant. Likewise, their mission to revitalise the Cereales region through education, culture, arts and crafts naturally aligned with the work I was doing.

Third Trip and the Exhibition

In October 2022 I boarded a small and agile non-commercial boat for 5 consecutive days. It stopped every 500 metres which enabled me to realise the *River Lines* (2022–2023) series of drawings, later developed into large-format paintings upon my return to Amsterdam. While on the river, I also collected some small shore-rocks to be later used as colour references for paintings in my studio.

For the series of paintings *Schist Wall* (2022), I had already discovered that to draw an interesting section of the rock would mean focusing on its surface of circa 70x70 cm, and then developing a painting on canvas board of 20x20 cm which is a format that allows me to work easily on locations. Gouache worked well as the medium of choice—it is quick to dry yet prevents the environmental dust and particles to settle onto the painted surface.

It was around that time in the autumn when Susana and I were formulating my exhibition which eventually opened to the public on 23 April 2023. In the exhibition, the schist wall paintings were shown in a grid with the position they had on the ‘wall of nature’. It translated beautifully into the exhibition design.

I also included geometrical ceramic sculptures (based on my drawings) in the exhibition. Their height related to the depth of the river, and they had the plain solid colour of the water at the location along the Sil where I drew. I approximated the colours through the Forel-Ule scale which provides a visual

estimate of the colour of a body of water. For this, I consulted researcher Jaime Pitarch at the Institute for Marine Biological Resources and Biotechnology of the National Research Council (CNR-IRBIM) in Italy. As it required a test and trial-based process, I was assisted by Le Maupas, the ceramic workshop I had worked with over the past 20 years. After the necessary experimental phase, the final sculptures were produced at Le Maupas.

We also decided to include some of my earlier works in the show, which we selected for their thematic correlation. *Here and Elsewhere* (2022), *Cardinal Points* (2018), *On Yellows* (2021–2022) and *Indexing Water* (2017) all evidence the determining character of the natural and dynamic element such as water in the modelling of the landscape and its colour, its capacity for change and its reconfiguring quality in relation to the physical environment.

A series of public events accompanied the exhibition, such as a workshop in collaboration with 12 Miradas in Boán, in which I shared my creative process with a group of young local artists. Several interdisciplinary public talks at Casa de la Cultura de Villablino in León saw a number of artists explore the geological history of the region so connected to water use (engineering) and mining.

With local schools, I ran a series of workshops in which I applied the physical endeavour of drawing to highlight methodologies I usually work with. A publication in collaboration with curator and graphic designer Alberto

Carballido shared with the reader the processes of understanding and transmitting the landscape and elucidated the conceptual and material methods that went into the exhibited pieces. In the publication, we included images of the topography I worked in and with, as well as some of my fieldwork sketches.

As ever, it is nearly impossible to capture the full story of a project with its different phases, multiple collaborators and creative ideas in a couple of pages. All the above stages were vital as they gave shape to the River Sil project so rooted in and connected to the particular region and the community of people working together.

I

Río Sil, líneas y geometrías
(*River Sil, Lines and Geometries*), 2023



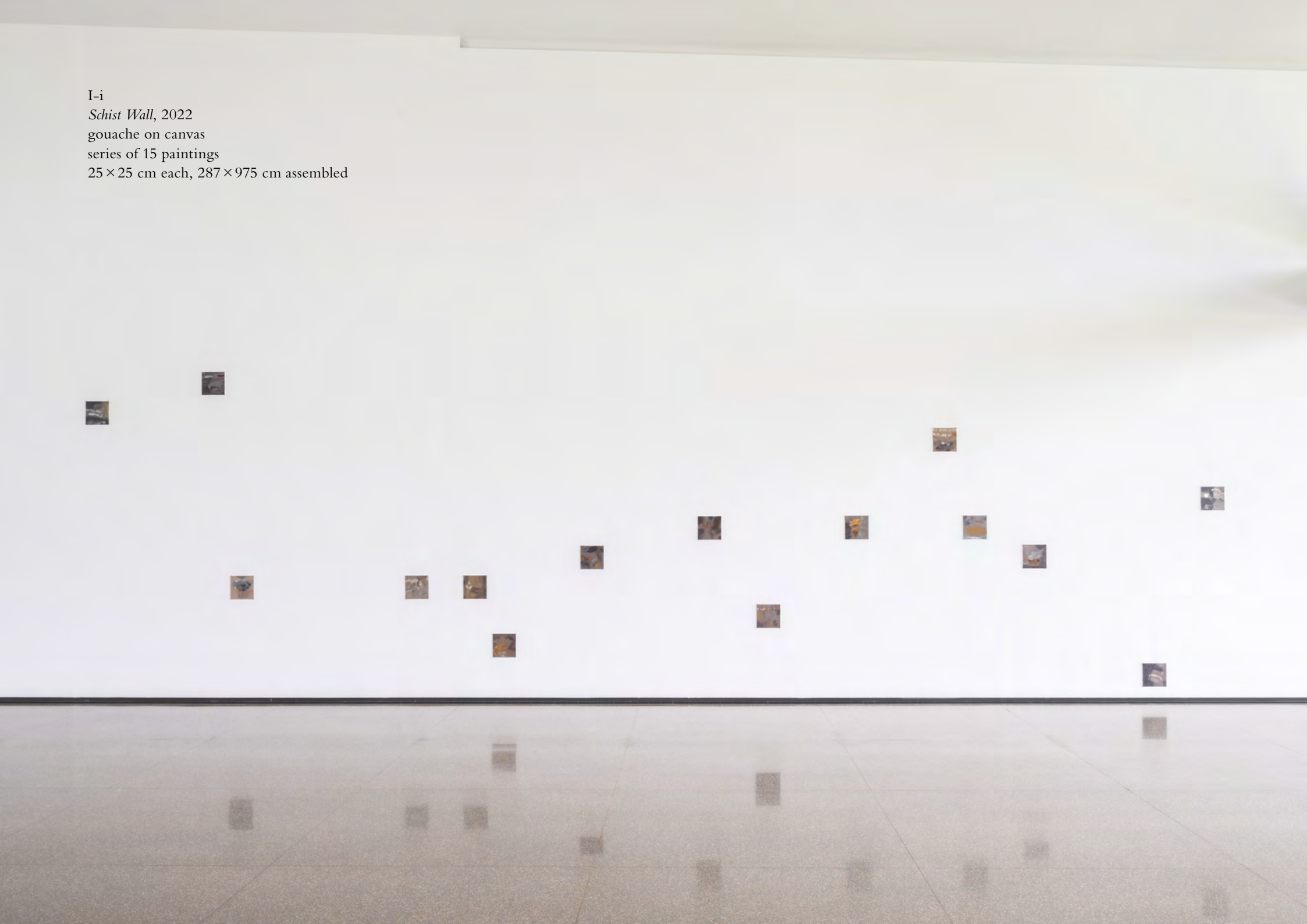
I-i

Schist Wall, 2022

gouache on canvas

series of 15 paintings

25 × 25 cm each, 287 × 975 cm assembled







Schist



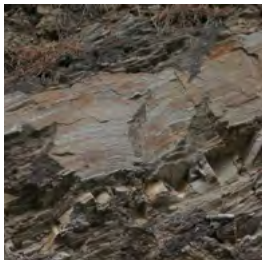
Schist



Schist



Schist



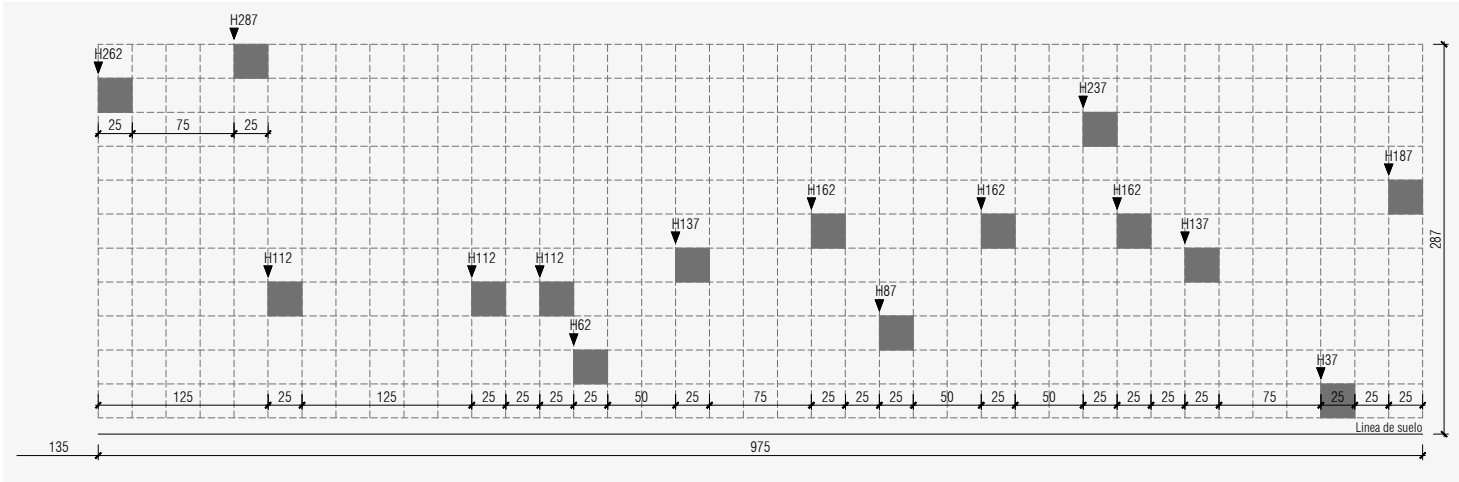
Process



Field map



Wall map



I-ii

River Lines, 2022–2023

series of 3 paintings



I-ii

River Lines; latitud 42.39,-7.62 A

oil on canvas

105×300 cm



I-ii

River Lines; latitud 42.39,-7.62 B

oil on canvas

105×300 cm



I-ii

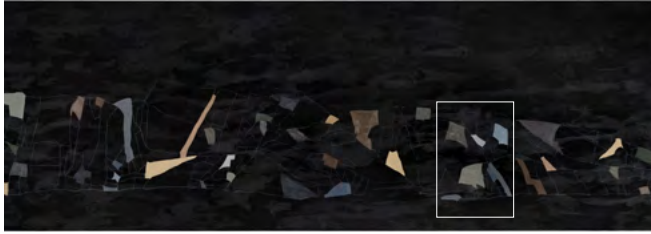
River Lines; latitud 42.39,-7.59

oil on canvas

105×300 cm



details



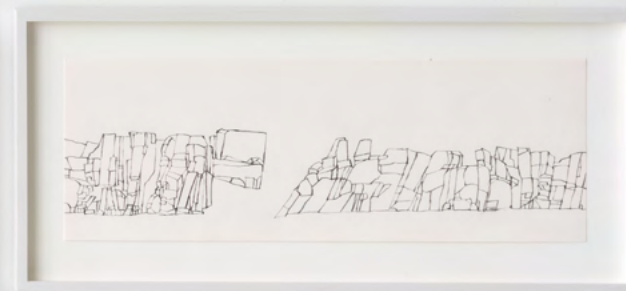
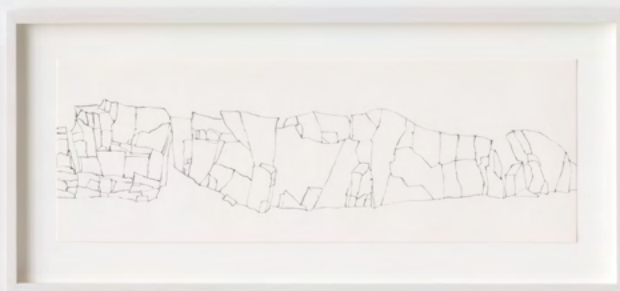
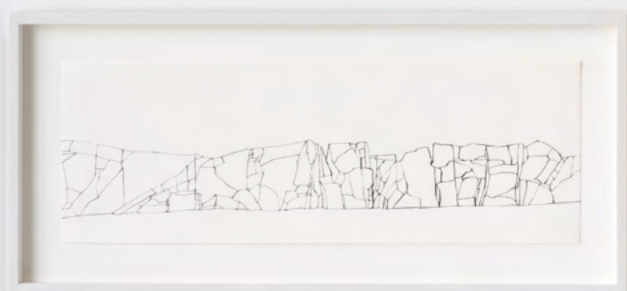
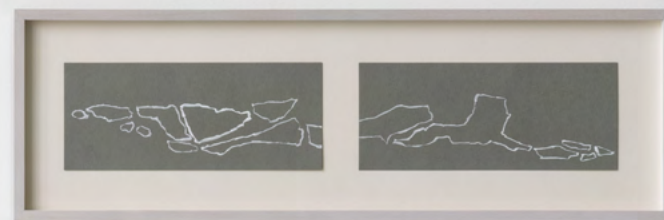
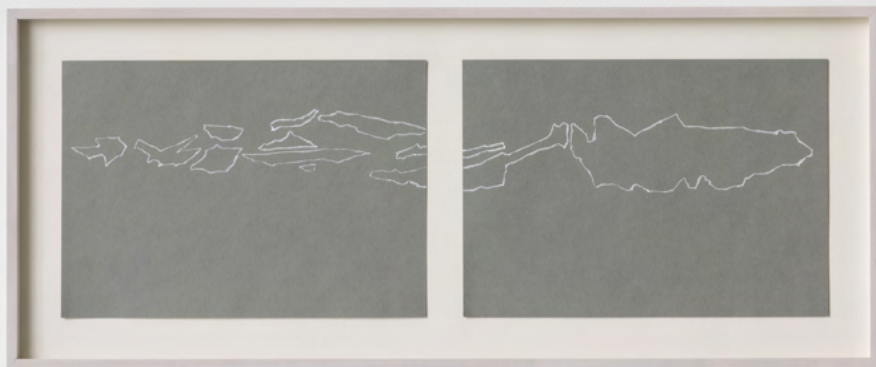
I-iii

Clouds, 2022

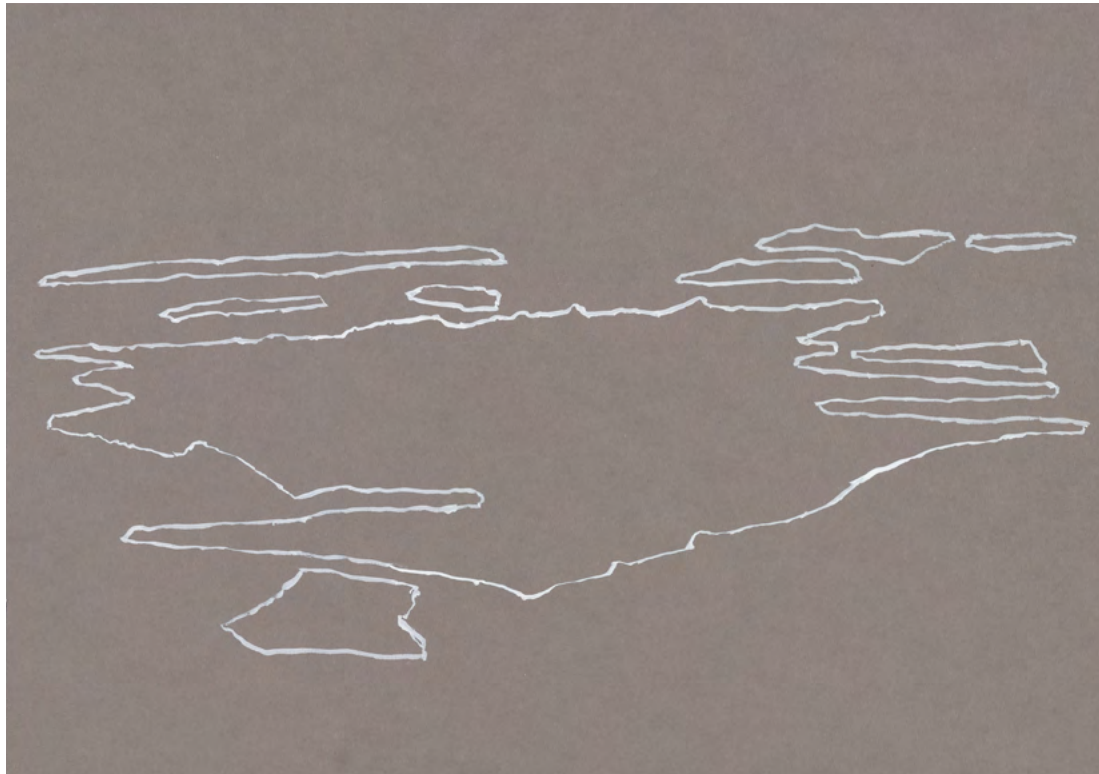
I-iv

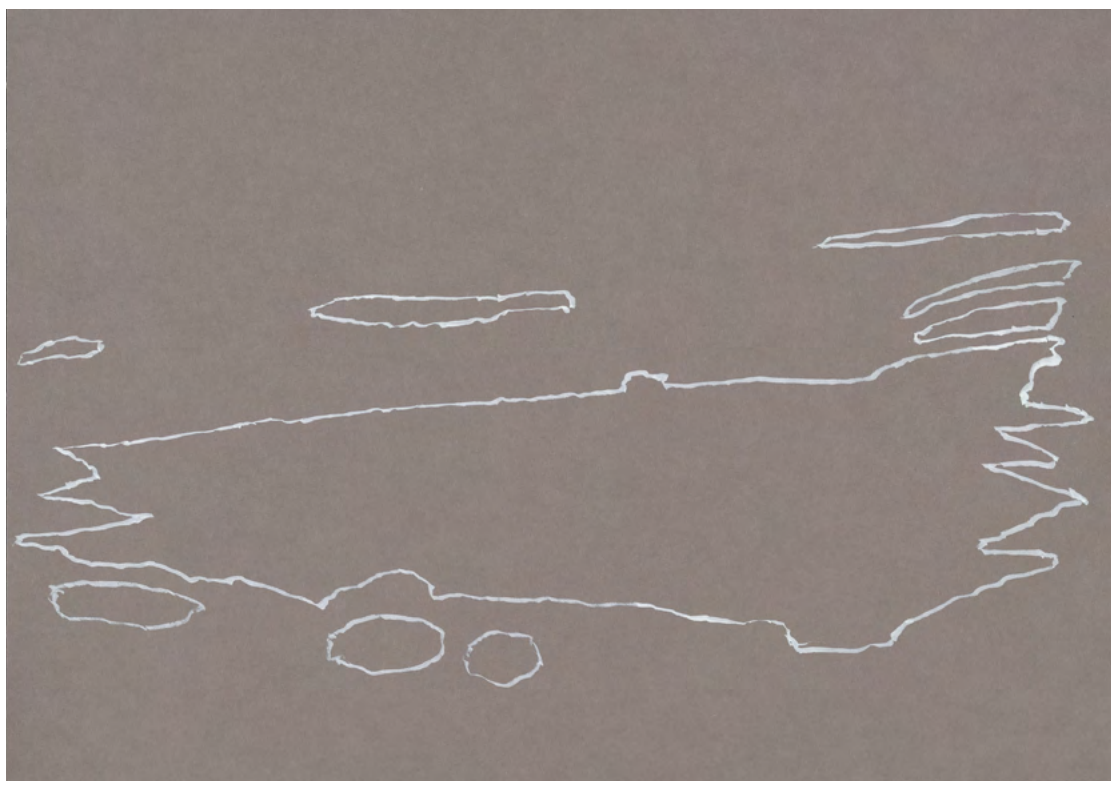
River Lines, 2022–2023

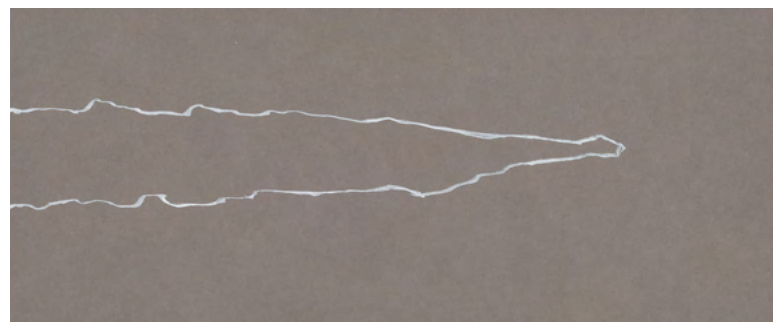
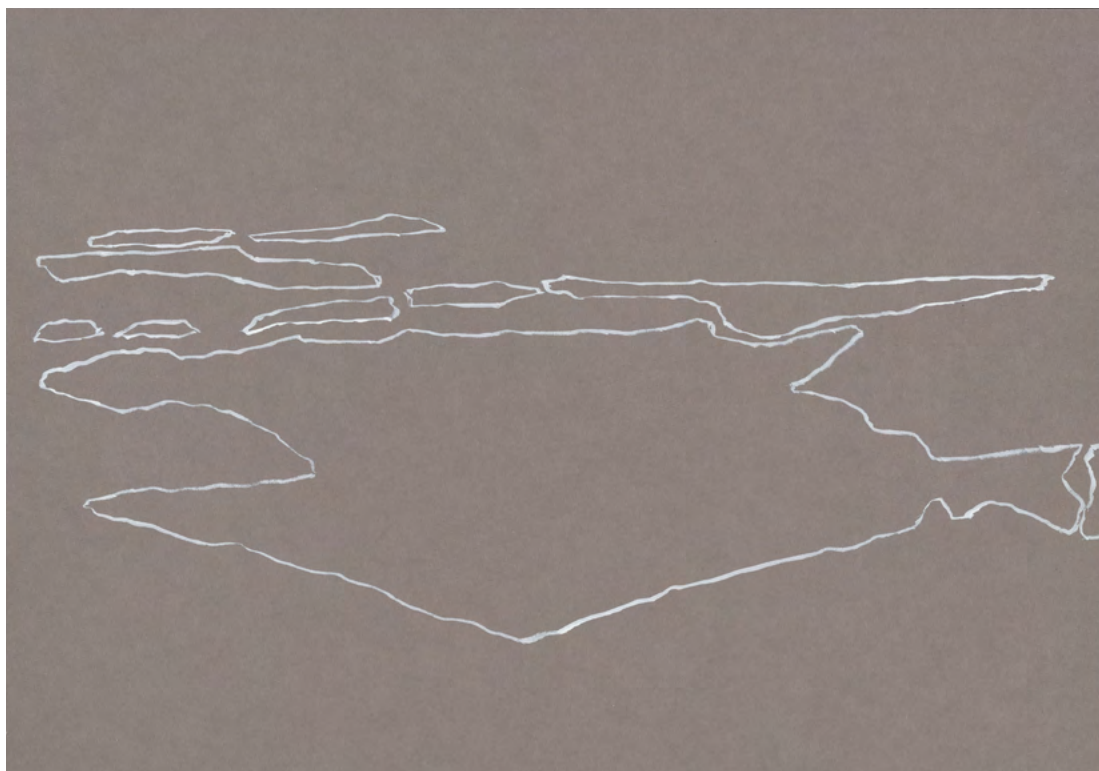


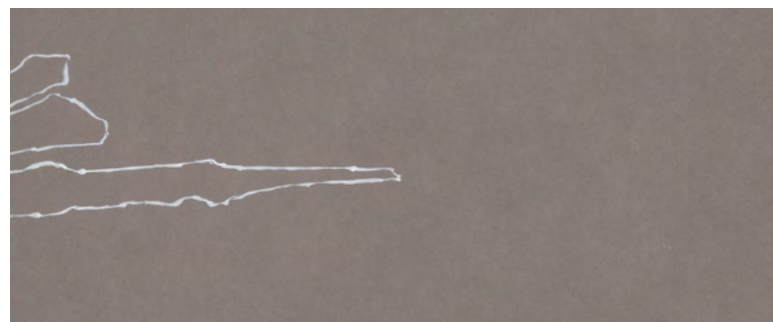
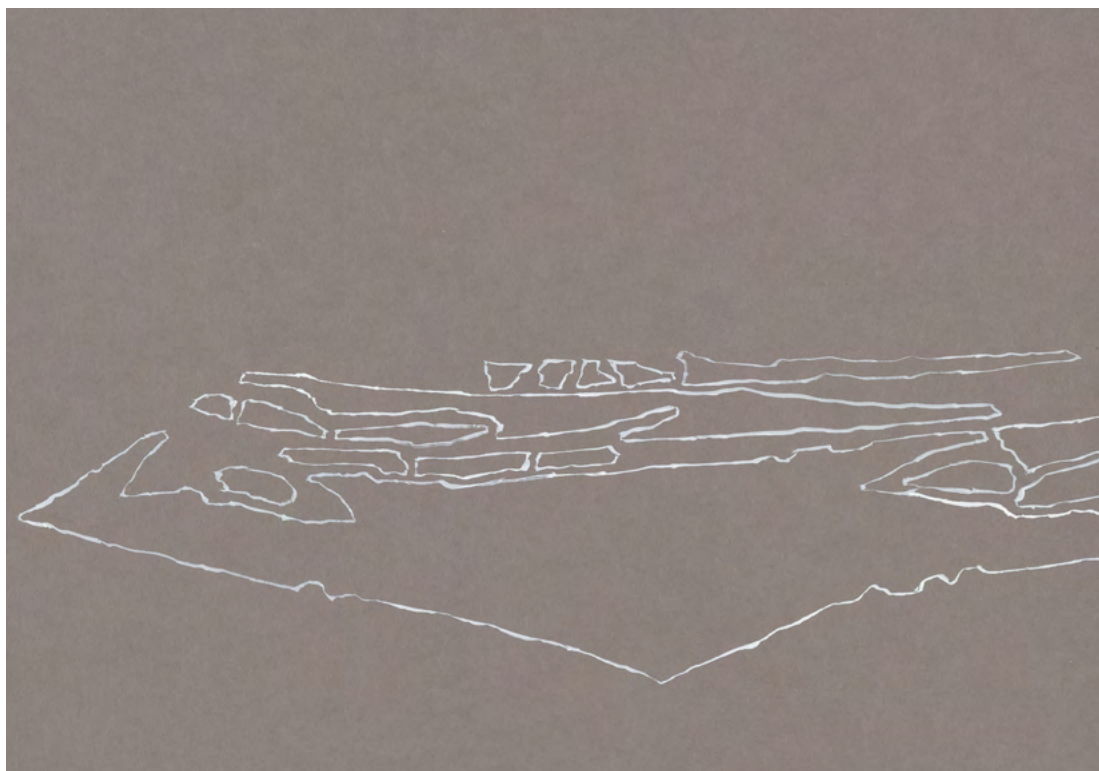


I-iii
Clouds, 2022
series of 13 drawings (5 diptychs)
ink on paper
21 × 29 cm, 9 × 21 cm

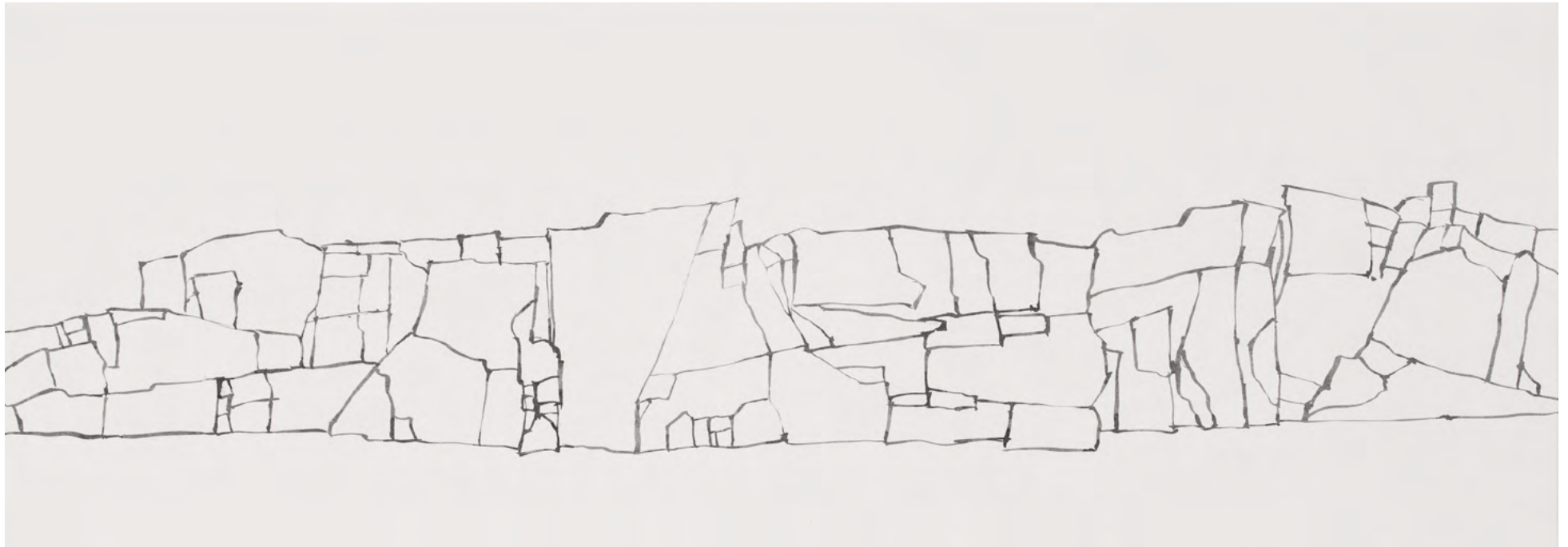


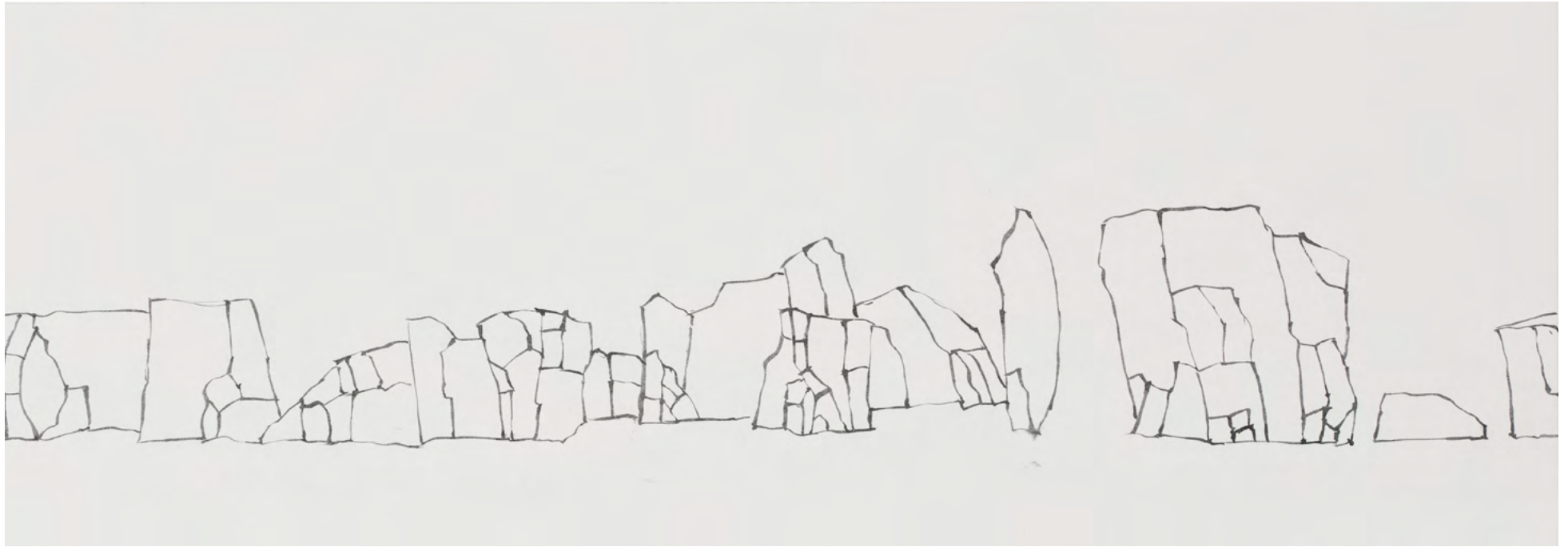


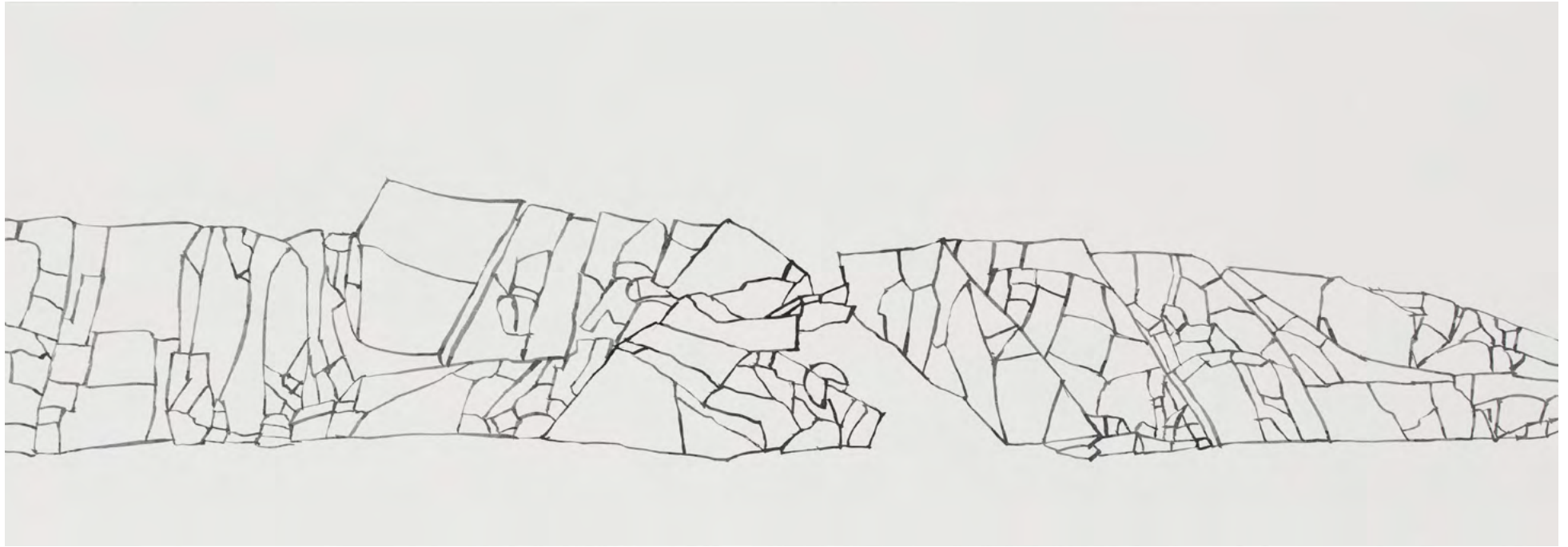




I-iv
River Lines, 2022–2023
series of 11 drawings
ink on paper
15 × 42 cm



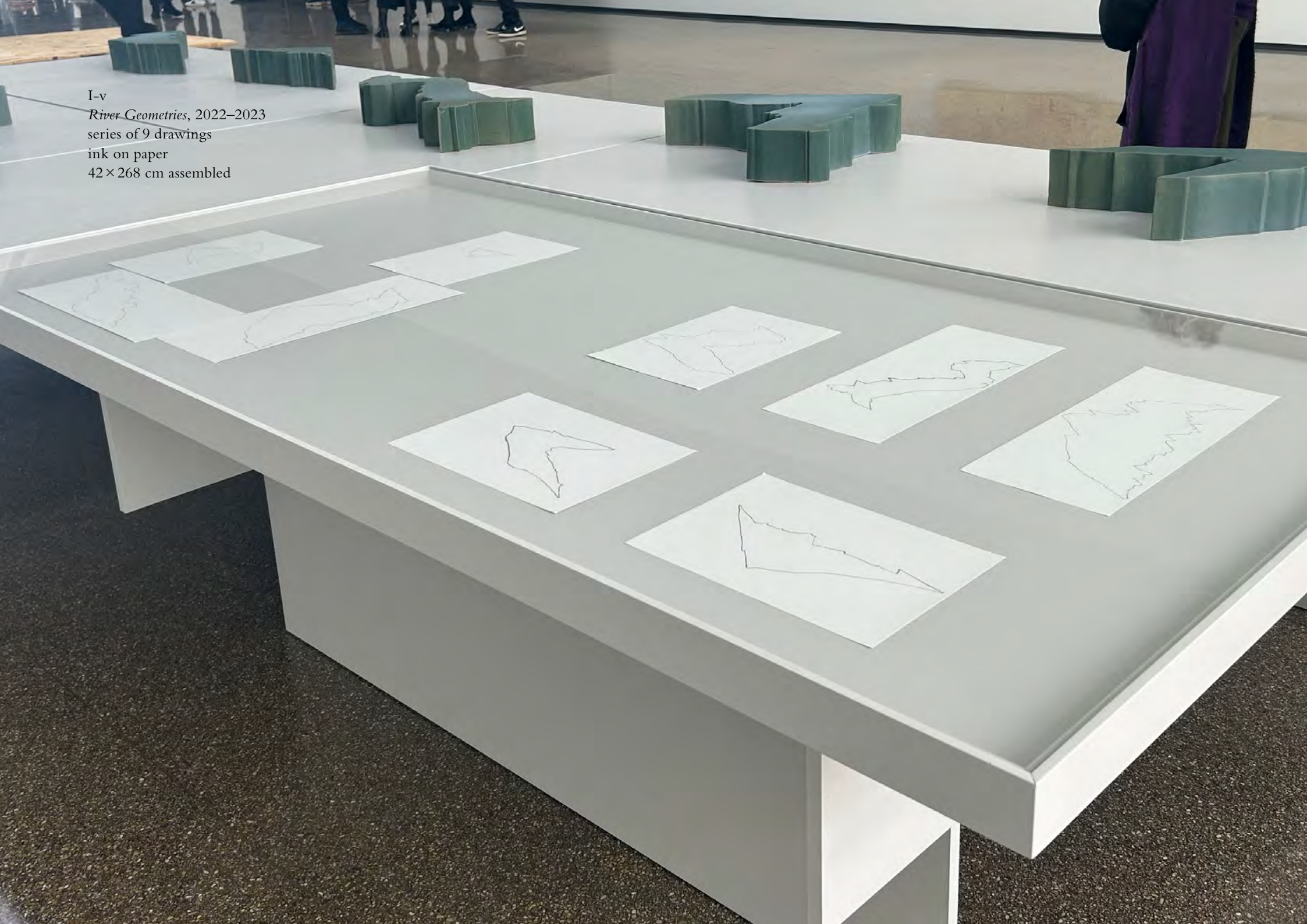




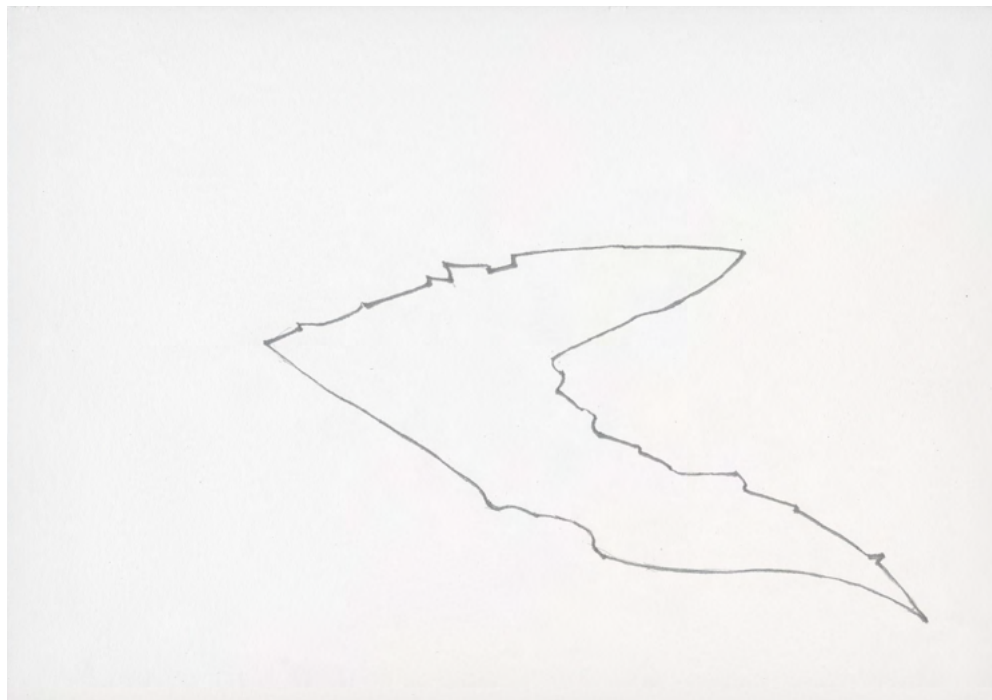
I-v, vi
River Geometries, 2022–2023



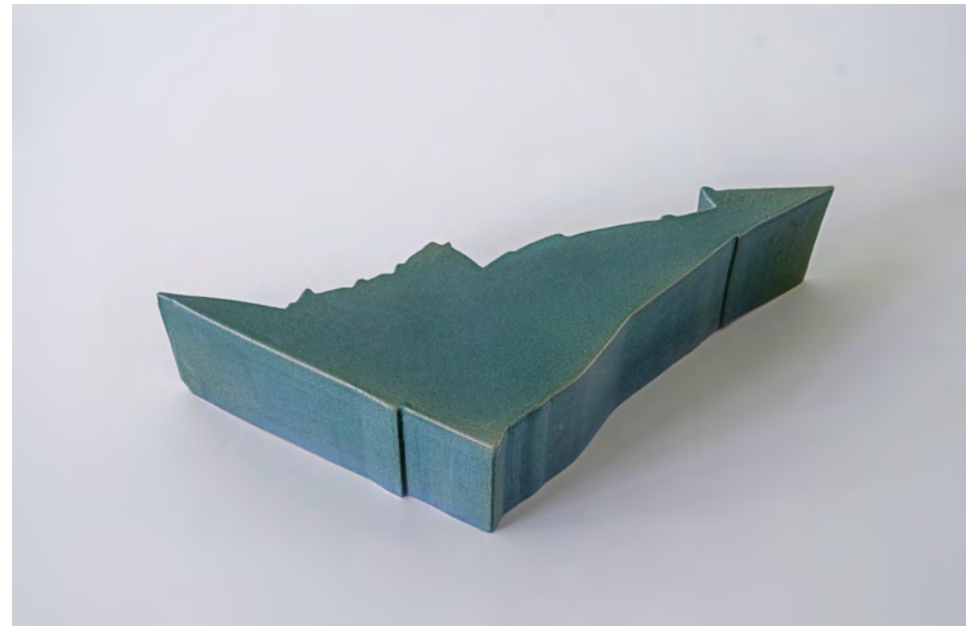
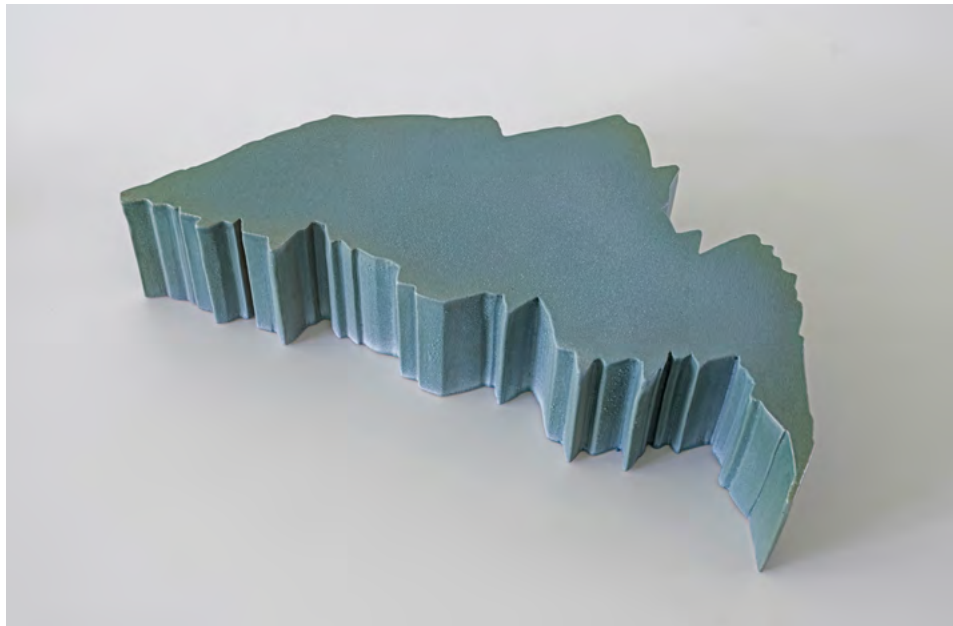
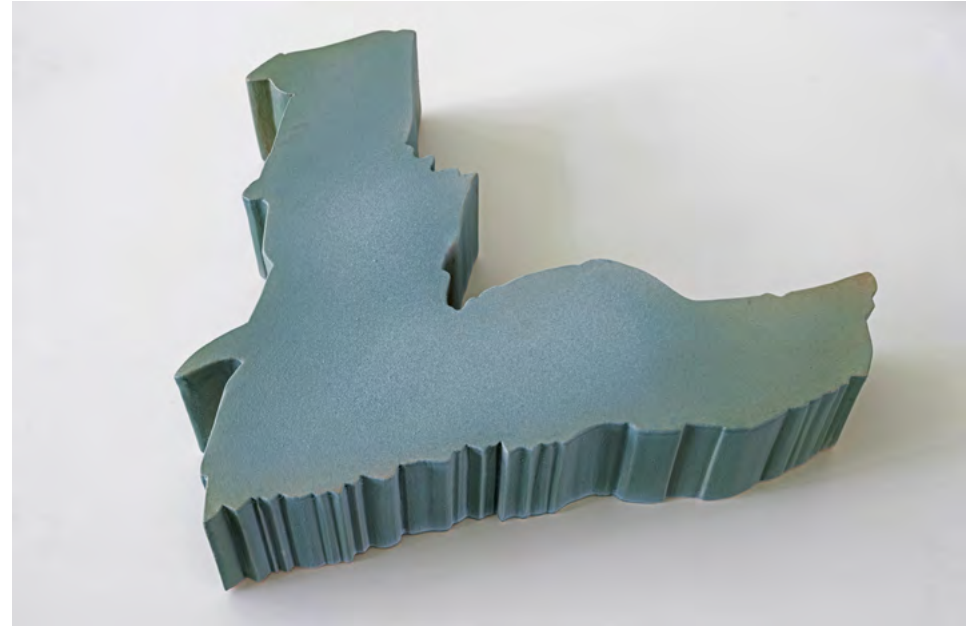
I-v
River Geometries, 2022–2023
series of 9 drawings
ink on paper
42 × 268 cm assembled

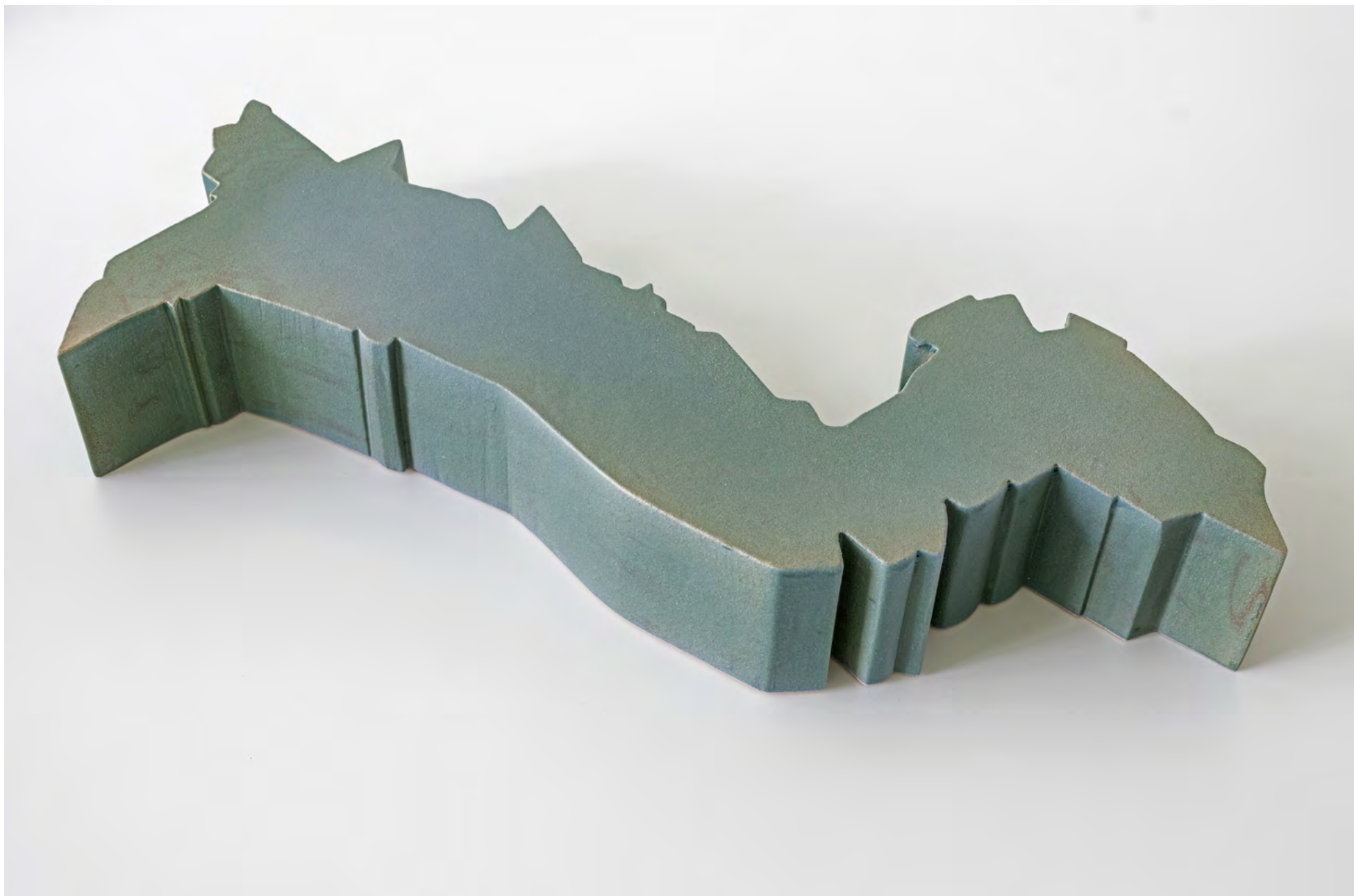






I-vi
River Geometries, 2022–2023
series of 7 ceramic pieces
ceramic
57.5 × 49.5 cm, 48.5 × 25 cm,
18 × 47 cm, 28 × 45 cm, 63 × 39 cm,
49.5 × 49.5 cm, 32.5 × 49.5 cm







I-vii
vitrine



II
Indexing Water, 2017



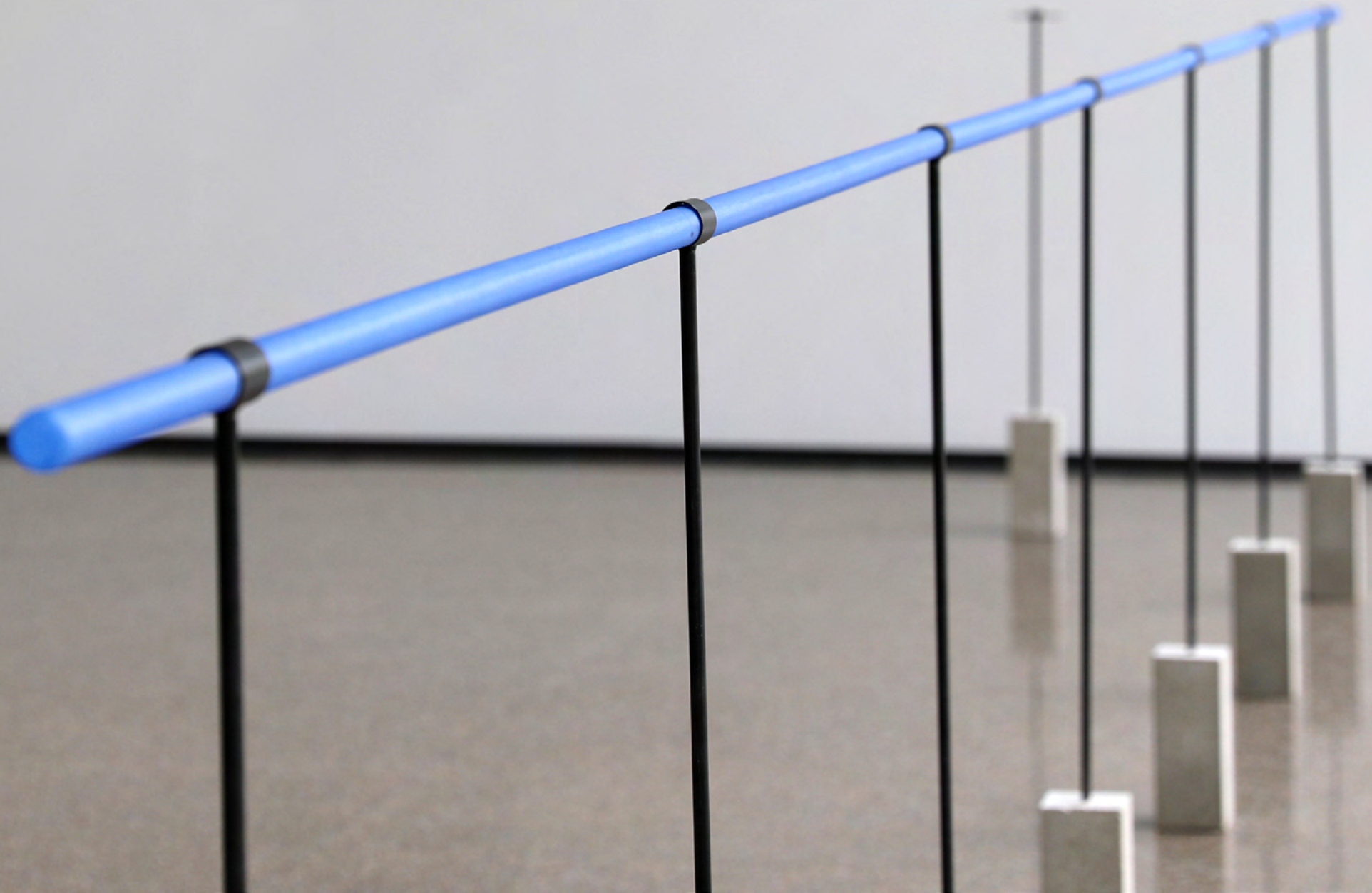
II-i

Water column – scale 1:10

longer visibility record taken with the Secchi Disk

glass, gel and pigments

790 cm × 3 cm diameter



II-ii

Water column – scale 1:10
shortest visibility record taken

with the Secchi Disk

solid glass

1 cm × 3 cm diameter



For more information, see also:

Indexing Water, 2017 [!\[\]\(003082e50e3009141f59bd5df831749f_img.jpg\)](#)

III

On Yellows, 2021–2022



III-i
On Yellows, 2019
ceramics
260 × 250 × 2 cm



III-ii

58 Colours of a Yellow-looking Landscape, 2019/2020

series of 5, 3 on display

oil on canvas

200 × 200 × 3 cm



III-iii

Cárcavas, 2020

series of 12 paintings

oil on canvas

20 × 20 cm



III-iv

On Yellows, 2019

series of 5 drawings

pencil on paper

25 × 25 cm



III-v
vitrine

For more information, see also:
[On Yellows, 2021–2022](#) ↗



IV

Here and Elsewhere, 2022



IV-i
1:1 Plot, 2022
ceramic
148.59 × 419.1 cm



IV-ii

Here and Elsewhere (Rolling Spreads)

series of 8 drawings

crayon on paper

29 × 42 cm



IV-iii

Here and Elsewhere (Close-Ups)

series of 8 drawings

pencil on paper

14 × 21 cm



IV-iv
vitrine

For more information, see also:
[Here and Elsewhere, 2022](#) ↗



V
Cardinal Points, 2018



V-i
Slump, 2018
ceramic
approx. 60 × 350 × 55 cm



V-ii
Slump, 2018
Molds
silicon and plaster

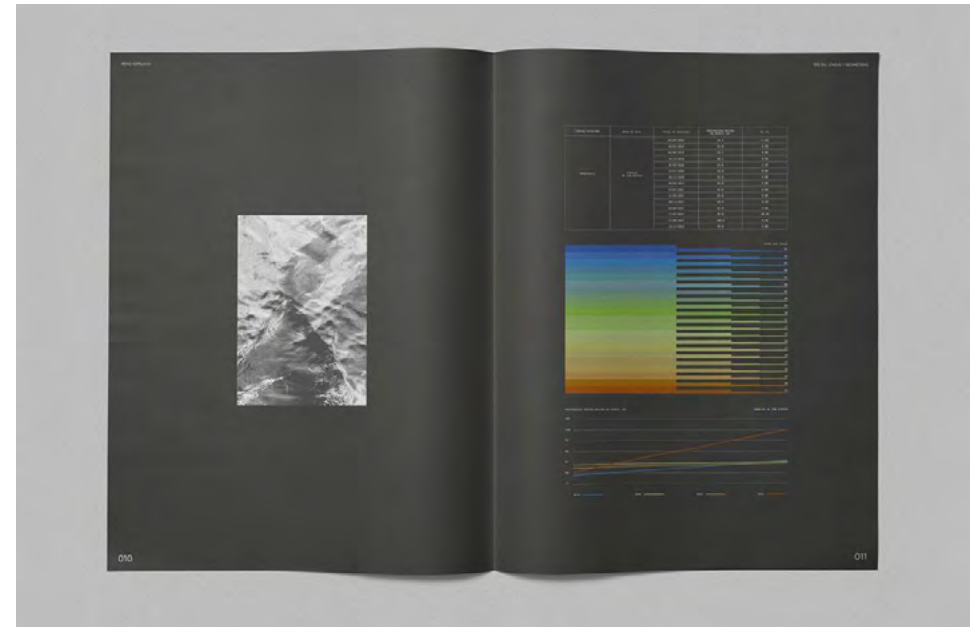
For more information, see also:
[Cardinal Points, 2018](#) ↗



VI Books



Exhibition booklet
Río Sil. líneas y geometrías



Pedagogical activities

Ejercicios en los alrededores

Colegio Santibañez, Colegio Vegas del Condado, Colegio Villaturiel y Colegio de Santa Olaja (Spain)
workshop on 20 and 21 June 2023



Irene Kopelman
Río Sil, líneas y geometrías
(*River Sil, Lines and Geometries*)

Concept:
Irene Kopelman

Curated by:
Susana Glez

Organised by:
Fundación María Jose Jove / MUV
Fundación Cerezales Antonino y Cinia

Exhibition Design:
Juan Manuel Villanueva

Scientific advice:
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Rodríguez, Diego Carro)

Installation photography:
Juan Baraja, Ana Andrés Cristobal

Photography small drawings:
Art in Print/Zeeuws Archief

Photography large drawings and paintings:
Margareta Svensson

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Keramiekwerkplaats Koloriet

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Dominik Czechowski

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Susana Glez

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