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Monochrome

No.2

Ultramarine A

Pitch *Prussian*

Indigo *Lulwor*

Lapis *Baby Sap*

Nimes *Regency*

Marine *Vardo*

Egyptian *Pacif*

ure Aqua Royal

Cobalt Electric

Celestial Teal

shire Aegean De

Oxford Y In Mn

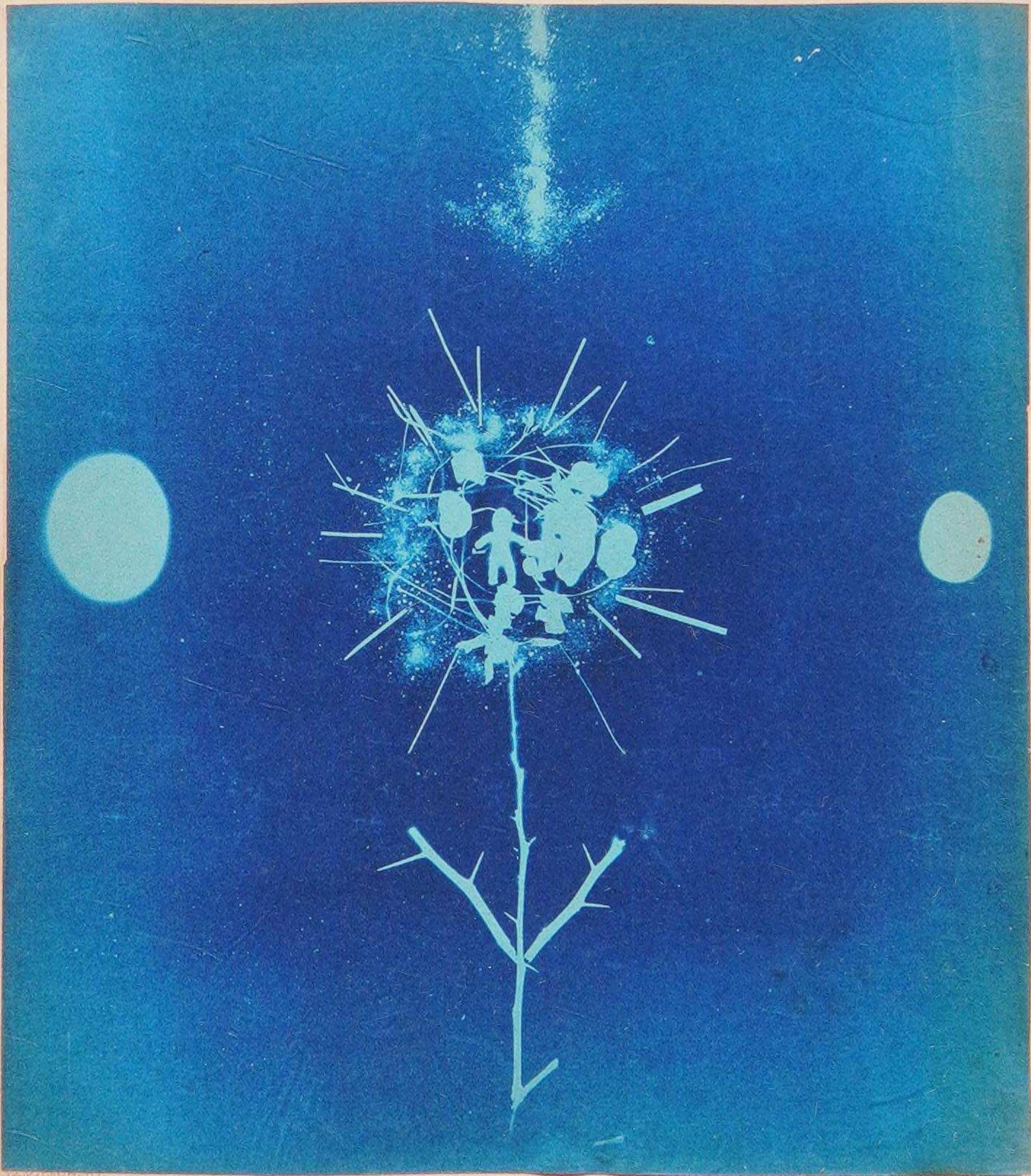
erulean Arctic

BLUE



Earth rises into view over the lunar horizon for the astronauts aboard Apollo 8, 1968





PHOTOGRAPH BY

ALBIONDAI PICTURE FOR HERMAN

Introduction

PILAR ORDOVAS

'This is the colour of my dreams,' said Joan Miró in his beautiful painting from 1925, just below a blob of blue. The colour blue was first produced by the ancient Egyptians in 2200 B.C. in an effort to create a permanent pigment from lapis lazuli that could be applied to a variety of surfaces. Blue was used for the after-life and the most precious objects and works and has continued to be used in this way throughout history. Blue is of course the colour of the sky and water and associated with life, as well as with the sacred and the divine.

When we started thinking of this exhibition *Monochrome No.2*, dedicated to blue, the possibilities were endless! How far back in time should we go? Egypt, Rome? The fun we had thinking of different possibilities... In the end we decided to focus on more recent times: our earliest work is a drawing by Jackson Pollock from 1939–42, while the most recent is a neon by Joseph Kosuth especially commissioned for this exhibition. A wonderful balance emerged between American and European artists, abstraction and figuration.

Robert Rauschenberg, *A Birthday Picture for Hermine*, 1952

We are incredibly grateful to all the artists, foundations, artists' estates and private lenders that have supported this exhibition as well as to James Fox for his contribution to our catalogue.

I am very grateful as always to all in our team at Ordovas, who make the impossible possible, and in particular to our colleague Natasha Rosenblatt for being such a champion of this exhibition.

It is really interesting to me how often our programme seems closely to follow life; I guess everything we do is deeply personal to me and so without my noticing, they run together. This exhibition about life and dreams could not come at a better moment for me personally and I am so looking forward to welcoming you all to the gallery, where you will find blue skies, foretelling those to arrive in London later in the spring.

Nothing of the

mind exists

Into the Blue

DEREK JARMAN

Excerpt from *Chroma: A Book of Colour*, 1994

Blue light. A spectral light. Leni's full moon falling through a crystal grotto in the High Dolomites. The villagers draw their curtains against this blue. Blue brings night with it. Once in a blue moon . . .

Tacitus tells us of a spectral tattooed army, the Pictish Britons nude in the colour of the Ethiopians, *Caeruleus*. Dark blue, not the sharp blue from the paint tube.

The blue men of the High Atlas are dyed by the indigo sweated from their clothes.

Blue spaces and places. The Blue Nile, and the Blue Grotto. The grotto is lit by light that is refracted through the water from a small opening five feet high into a vast cavern. The ferrymen sing 'O Sole Mio'. The silent magic is broken.

Black blue sadness in Geertgen's *Nativity at Night*. The virginal blue robe which mirrors the blue sky is swallowed by black.

Gun metal blue. The patina of copper. Verdigris on the edge of green. Egyptian blue, a clear astringent colour that is the blue of the mosque. This is the blue of glaze.

In 1972, every wall in the studio was hung with blue capes. Everyone liked them, but no one bought them!

Blue blood is ruby.

Blue lies.

The blue-tail fly dances the blues in blue suede shoes.

The sky blue damselfly, iridescent, flits across the blue lagoon.

The blue Buddha smiles in the realm of joy.

Dark blue embroidered with gold.

There are gold flecks in the lapis.

Blue and gold are eternally united.

They have affinity in eternity.

The Buddha sits on the blue lotus supported by two blue elephants.

The blues of Japan. The work clothes, the blue of the roofs of its houses.

The blue work clothes of France. The blue overalls here in England, and the blue Levis that conquered the world.

Royal blue of the garter robes. Deep cobalt blue.

The great master of blue – the French painter Yves Klein. No other painter is commanded by blue, though Cézanne painted more blues than most.

BLUE IS BLUE.

Blue is hotter than yellow.

Blue is cold.

Icy blue.

Curaçao with ice.

The earth is blue.
The virgin's mantle is the bright blue sky.
This is the living blue.
The blue of Divinity.

Blue movies.
Blue language.
Bluebeard.

'Blue gives other colours their vibration', Cézanne.
TRUE BLUE.

I am writing this wearing a Japanese workman's coat in tough linen of faded indigo. Indigo is the colour of clothes. Cobalt of glass. Ultramarine of painting. Indigo, *Indigofera tinctoria*. Marco Polo noted the process of dyeing in Coulan.

Pull up the plants by the roots, put them in tubs of water till they rot. Press out the juice and evaporate it leaving a paste which is cut up into small pieces and sold.

The arrival of indigo in Europe caused consternation. Woad was under threat in 1577 in Germany. A decree prohibited 'the newly invented pernicious and deceitful, eating and corrosive dye called the Devil's Dye'. In France dyers were required to take oaths not to use indigo. For two centuries indigo was hedged with legislation.

Woad – Anglo Saxon: wad.
Weld yellow and woad blue.
Lincoln greens and welcoming blues.

The first artificial blue was Russian, discovered early in the eighteenth century.

Ficino writes in the Platonic Academy for Lorenzo:

We dedicate the sapphire to Jove
the Lapis Lazuli was given this colour
because its jovial power was against
Saturn's black bile.

It has a special place among colours.

Colour the little wall maps of the universe you are making. The sapphire colour for the spheres of the world. It would be useful not just to look at it, but to reflect on it in the soul. Deep inside your house you might set up a little room and mark it with these figures and colours.

(Ficino, op. cit.)

Asaao ya
Ichivin fukaki
Fuchi no ivo.

Ah! The blossoming
Morning glory
Deep pool of blue.

(Yosa Busoi)

For the Japanese, the morning glory is the English rose, or Dutch tulip – deep blue, it blossoms at dawn and fades in the sunlight.

The Japanese slept under blue mosquito nets to give the illusion of peace and cool.

Something old,
Something new,
Something borrowed,
Something blue . . .

You say to the boy open your eyes
When he opens his eyes and sees the light
You make him cry out. Saying
O Blue come forth
O Blue arise
O Blue ascend
O Blue come in.

Yves Klein, *Leap into the Void*, photographed by Harry Shunk and János Kender,
23 October 1960, Fontenay-aux-Roses, France



Blue

JAMES FOX

*In the pandemonium of image
I present you with the universal Blue
Blue an open door to soul
An infinite possibility
Becoming tangible...¹*

DEREK JARMAN

If all colours are illusions, none is more illusory than blue. Unlike most other hues, blue rarely adopts a tangible form in nature. There are very few blue minerals and plants in the world, while only two of the planet's 64,000 vertebrate species are believed to possess genuine blue pigment.² The colour seems only to thrive in the unearthly realms of sky, sea and horizon. But while those vast cerulean provinces often surround us on every side, their bashful hue stays stubbornly out of reach. We can't touch the blue of the sky or bottle the blue of the sea, and no matter how far we travel we will never reach the hazy band of blue that lies outstretched across the horizon. This is because nature's most abundant blues are ultimately apparitions, the result of high energy photons being torn away from sunlight and scattered like orphans across the atmosphere. These blues reside not in surfaces but depths, not in objects but the spaces that lie between them.³

Blue's impossibility – or at least impalpability – has long shaped its cultural significance. The colour barely featured in the first twenty thousand years of art, and when, towards the end of the Neolithic period, humans finally found ways to manufacture stable blue pigments and dyes, they used them to denote things that seemed as enigmatic and unearthly as their colour. Egyptian artists smothered effigies of their evanescent sky god Amun with a synthetic blue pigment whose recipe had taken generations to perfect.⁴ Hindus depicted many of their chief deities, including Krishna and Vishnu, with indigo skin.⁵ From the twelfth century onwards Western artists consistently represented the Virgin Mary in a sky blue mantle, using an extremely expensive pigment whose raw material (lapis lazuli) had to be sourced 4,000 miles away in the mountains of Afghanistan. Italians called it *azzurro oltremarino* (ultramarine); a name that alluded to its colour's refractory remoteness – *oltremare* meant 'from overseas'.⁶

'As we readily follow an agreeable object that flies from us', wrote Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in 1810, 'so we love to contemplate blue, not because it advances to us, but because it draws us after it'.⁷ In the Romantic period, blue's liminal qualities – its connection to edges and distances, heights and depths, dusks and darkneses – generated another set of associations. The colour became a metaphor for the mysterious terrain of the mind – and particularly for emotions or desires that couldn't be controlled or satisfied. What began as a literary conceit (Werther's tragic blue frockcoat, Heinrich von Ofterdingen's coveted blue flower, Stéphane Mallarmé's endlessly haunting '*azur*') soon migrated to the work of modern artists. During his 'blue period', Pablo Picasso used the colour to simulate the gelid despair that stalked the underworld, while Wassily Kandinsky – who didn't just see blue but could hear it – considered it to be nothing short of transcendental.



Photo

Joan Miró, *Photo: ceci est la couleur de mes rêves*, 1925,
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



*ceci est la couleur
de mes rêves.*



Yves Klein, still from *The Heartbeat of France* by Peter Morley, February 1961



'It calls man towards the infinite, awakening in him a desire for the pure, and, finally, for the supernatural', he wrote. 'Blue is the typically heavenly colour'.⁸

As the public's interest in psychology and psychoanalysis grew, so did their craving for blue. In the late 1930s the young Jackson Pollock began his own course of psychoanalytic therapy, hoping that it might cure him of depression and alcoholism. Throughout his treatment Pollock made dozens of drawings in cheap notebooks, which his therapist believed could unlock his unconscious thoughts and even perhaps identify the aetiology of his self-destructive tendencies. The pictures were clearly inspired by the surrealist imagery of Picasso and Miró, and may even have been produced with the aid of 'automatic' techniques (including free association, improvisation, and closed-eye drawing). One of them, created between 1939 and 1942, extends across both sides of a sheet of yellowing paper. A menagerie of exotic entities proliferates like bacteria on a petri dish. Glowering eyes and tooth-filled grins, elephant feet and eagle talons, spiky starbursts and zigzags of illegible writing all jostle for the viewer's attention. It is a violently beautiful vision of an imagined universe – and one that, revealingly, has been fashioned from blue ink, Pollock having doodled his diptych with a blue ballpoint pen.

Ten years later, another American artist was creating his own surreal blue monochromes, though employing a rather different technique. Robert Rauschenberg and his then wife Susan Weil began experimenting with cyanotypes in 1949. They placed objects on sheets of photosensitive paper and exposed them to ultraviolet light. When the sheets were developed, the paper's white surfaces turned blue – except for the areas that had been obscured by the objects. Over the next few years Rauschenberg and Weil produced many such photograms – which they called

'blueprints' – though most have since been lost.⁹ One rare survivor was originally made as a thirteenth birthday present, which Rauschenberg gave to a friend's daughter in the summer of 1952. *A Birthday Picture for Hermine* is dominated by a clumsily intricate flower fashioned from the after-shadows of thorny twigs, blades of cut grass, pebbles, scattered sand, and, in its corona, a small children's figurine. The organism is set off by a ravishingly deep blue background, which, scattered with star-like dots, resembles an early evening sky.¹⁰

Rauschenberg, of course, was not monogamously devoted to blue. In his almost nihilistic quest to push pictorial representation to its limits in the early 1950s he made important monochromes in a number of different colours. Other American artists embraced the monochrome at the same time and for similar reasons, with most being drawn to the subtlety and severity of achromatic colours. From 1953 onwards (and for the rest of his career), Ad Reinhardt made pictures only in black, because for him the colour was the embodiment of 'pure, abstract, non-objective, timeless, spaceless, changeless, reactionless, disinterested painting'.¹¹ Robert Ryman, by contrast, specialised in white – or more specifically, *whites* – because it made everything around it more visible, and thus necessitated an unusually nuanced mode of looking. Across the Atlantic, however, one young artist was rather more catholic in his tastes, making monochromes in red, yellow, green, gold, orange, burgundy and pink, before staking his name – quite literally – on blue.

Yves Klein's short sparkling life was a perpetual quest for freedom. He was compulsively drawn to alternative forms of knowledge, experimenting with Zen and Judo. In the early 1950s he funnelled his prodigious energies towards art, concluding that colour was the answer to his questions. 'Colours alone inhabit



Robert Rauschenberg and his wife Susan Weil creating a cyanotype in their West Ninety-fifth Street apartment, photographed by Wallace Kirkland, *circa* 1951





UNDERWATER NYMPH floating in a haze of sea flowers adorns the blueprint after it has been developed. The paper is dark blue where it was exposed to the

direct light of the sun lamp. Cloudy areas are sections which were only partially exposed. In right center is Bob's foot, which got into the composition by accident.



EXPOSING blueprint, Bob holds sun lamp over section of paper for two minutes. In actual sunlight, time of exposure is much shorter.

SPEAKING OF PICTURES . . .

Blueprint paper, sun lamp, a nude produce some vaporous fantasies

Blueprints have long been the tool of architects and engineers who cover them with precise plans and cross sections. Recently two young painters, Bob and Sue Rauschenberg of New York, decided to put them to a more fanciful use. Spreading strips of blueprint paper on the floor, they decked it with leaves, ferns and other oddments salvaged from a florist shop and asked a model friend to come in and pose for them. As she lay nude on the paper, Bob moved slowly around her with a sun lamp, exposing the uncovered areas of the blueprint. At the end of 20 minutes he had produced the decorative image on the opposite page. Although the Rauschenbergs make blueprints for fun, they hope to turn them into screen and wallpaper designs.



DEVELOPING. Bob washes strip under the shower, plasters it on bathroom wall and sponges it with peroxide solution to fix the image.

SURREAL DANCER was made by Sue as Bob lay on paper in his jeans. She used string for head, shell for mouth, broken glass for eyes.



space', he wrote. 'Through colour, I experience total identification with space; I am truly free'.¹² By the mid-1950s he had focused his attention on the blueness of the sky, which to him seemed infinite in its possibilities:

'Blue has no dimensions, it is beyond dimensions, whereas the other colours are not... All colours arouse specific associative ideas, psychologically, material or tangible, while blue suggests at most the sea and sky, and they, after all, are in actual, visible nature, what is most abstract.'¹³

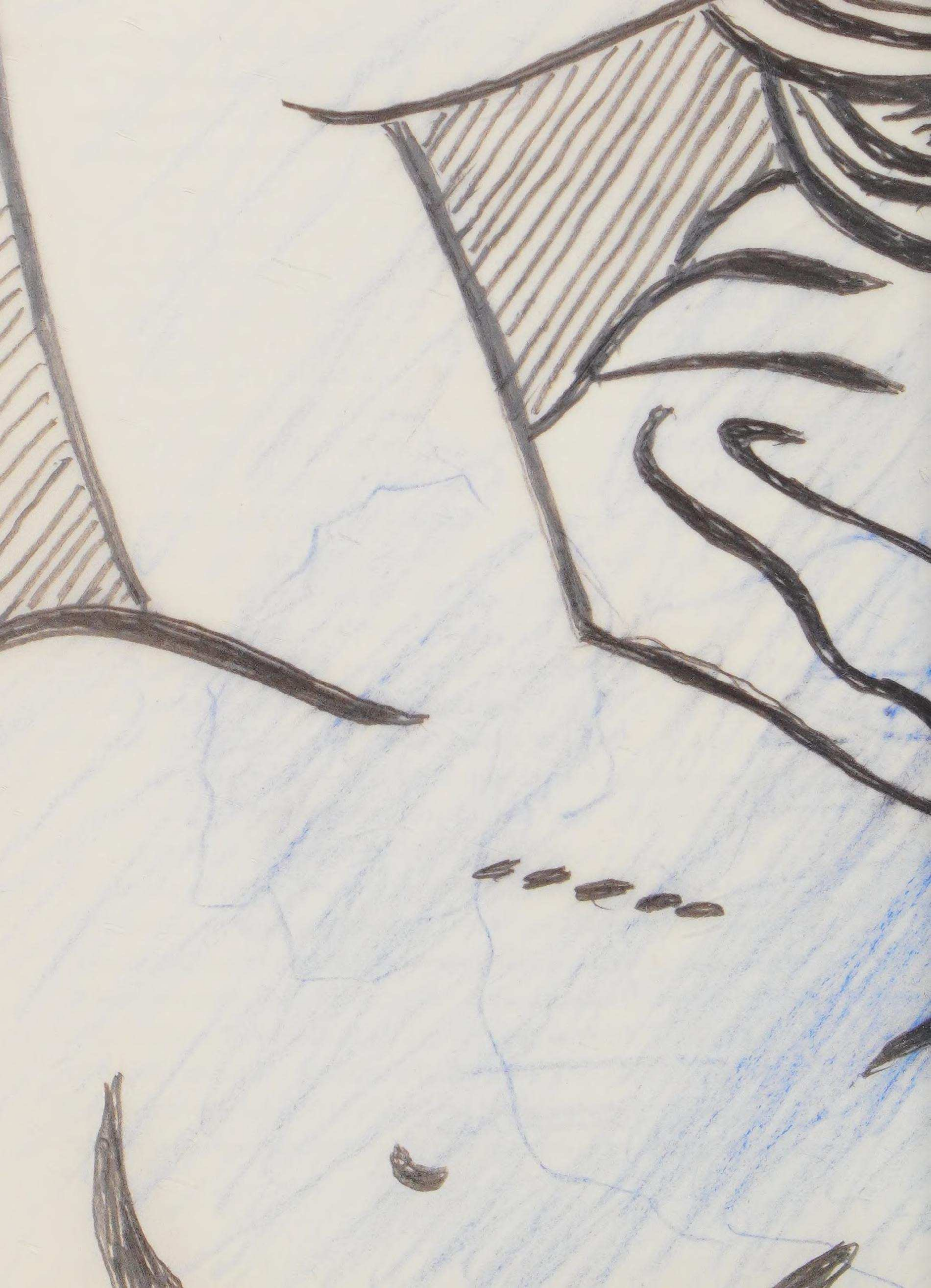
Convinced that no existing blue pigment possessed such transcendental qualities, Klein asked the celebrated Parisian colour merchant Édouard Adam (who also supplied paint to Picasso, Braque and Matisse) to help him invent a new one. After more than a year of experimentation, by 1956 they came across an artificial resin called *Rhodopas M*, which possessed a refractive index so low that it could bind pigments without compromising their luminosity. Mixing it with high grade synthetic ultramarine, Klein and Adam created a blue colourant that was more brilliant, and more resonant, than any of its predecessors. Klein was so impressed with the product that he subsequently patented it, under the name 'International Klein Blue'.¹⁴

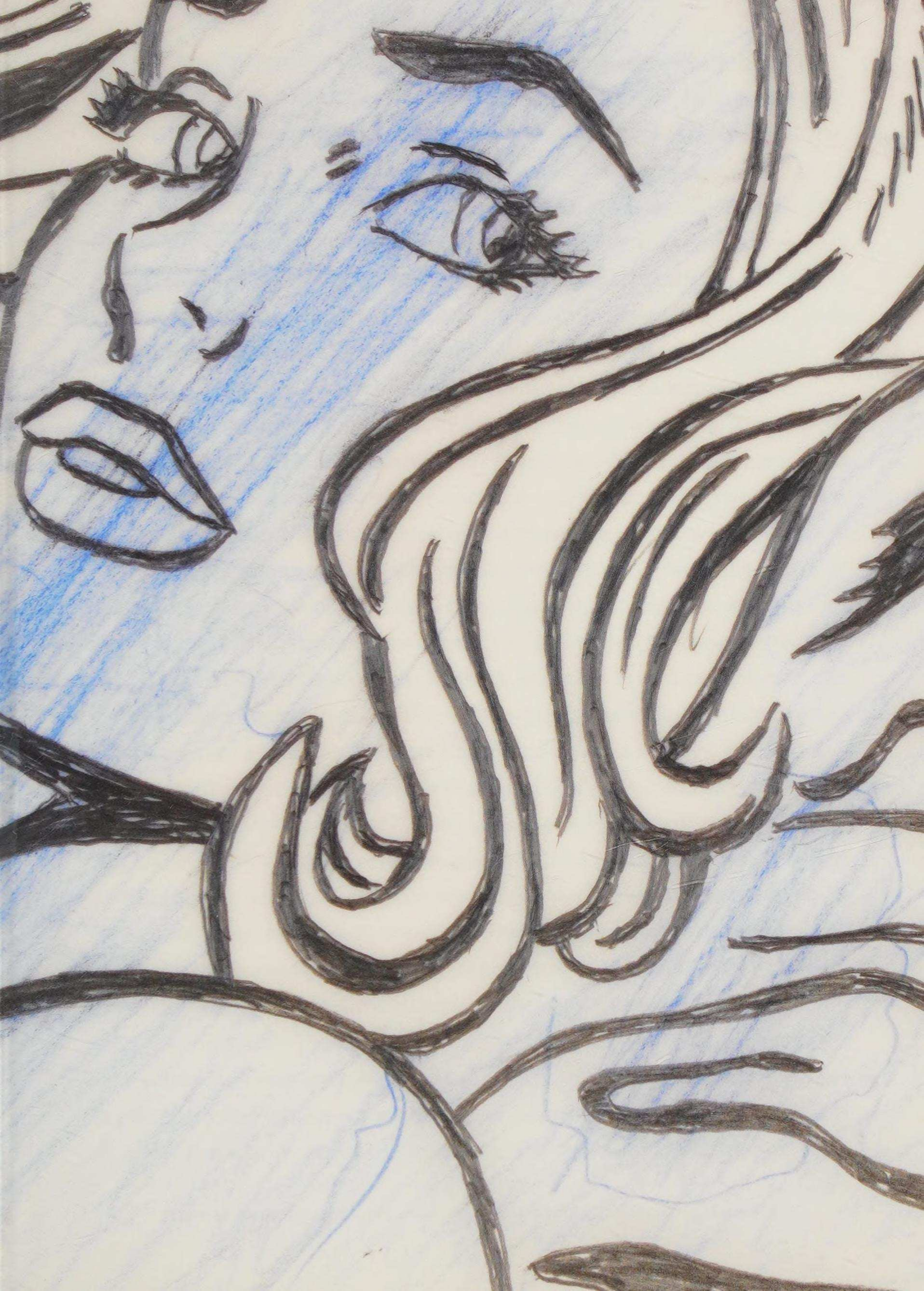
Klein immediately began a series of monochrome paintings in IKB, before experimenting in three dimensions. In the late 1950s he also made a number of sculptures from IKB-drenched sponges, tools that he had initially used merely to apply the paint to his canvases. They are intoxicating works. By transforming a colour of space and depth into one of mass and surface, Klein's sponges produce a destabilising effect on the retina. Suspended on a wire between wall and viewer, their surfaces appear to advance, retreat and advance again, producing optical vibrations

that induce an almost out-of-body experience in their beholders. For Klein the sponge pieces also had symbolic resonance. Just as the sponges had soaked up his eponymous pigment, so Klein wanted his viewers to be saturated and transformed by a new sensibility; a sensibility enabled and embodied by blueness.

Not that Klein didn't apply blue paint to humans directly. From 1958 he covered women's bodies in IKB then used them as 'living paintbrushes', making evocative blue marks by pressing their skin against paper. The *Anthropométries* had much in common with Rauschenberg's similarly indexical cyanotypes (Rauschenberg also made several blueprints of female bodies), but reversed the central principle: here the objects, rather than their absence, generated the colour. *La Marseillaise* (ANT 138), 1960, is a masterpiece of the form. It depicts Klein's studio assistant (and soon-to-be-wife) Rotraut Uecker as an allegorical representation of French *liberté* ('La Marseillaise' is the country's national anthem) amid a blizzard of IKB. It is constructed both from positive and negative marks: some of them impressed directly by Uecker's face, others sprayed, stencil-like, around her undulating body. The resulting image possesses an almost sacred magnetism. Indeed, surrounded by her ultramarine nimbus, Uecker might easily pass as a modern-day Madonna.¹⁵

Blue's mystique is not only physical but biological in origin. The human retina contains very few cone cells receptive to blue light, which are not located in the centre of the fovea – where our most precise vision is produced – but around its edges. As a result, blue objects are often hazy and indistinct, and sometimes completely invisible to us (we all possess a blue blind spot at the centre of our visual field which is disguised by neural filling-in processes).¹⁶ Our eyes are more sensitive to blue than other colours only in low-light conditions.¹⁷ From Giotto onwards, many





great artists exploited this mysterious perceptual phenomenon, using blueness to simulate night. Dan Flavin, who began making light works from commercially available fluorescent fixtures and lamps in the early 1960s, was among them. Flavin used a number of standard fluorescent colours over the next thirty years, but his blue pieces have a singular optical quality. As the viewer gazes at an all-blue light work dedicated to Flavin's friends James Brooks and Charlotte Park in 1964, the light does something that seems to defy the laws of physics: it produces the effect of darkness.

In the six decades since Yves Klein invented IKB and Dan Flavin discovered fluorescent blue lamps, hundreds if not thousands of new blue pigments and dyes entered the market, transforming a once almost unobtainable colour into a cheap and commonplace commodity. Modern artists did not hesitate to exploit this newfound accessibility. Roy Lichtenstein used children's blue crayons to decorate – or deface – his black and white drawings while Felix Gonzalez-Torres made sculptures from mass-produced blue glass and standard-issue blue paper. And yet despite this recent ubiquity, the colour's otherness persisted. Gonzalez-Torres likened it to a happy past that could be revisited but not recovered. 'If a beautiful memory could have a colour', he once said, 'that colour would be blue'. Gonzalez-Torres' artworks are similarly indefinite. "*Untitled*" (*Loverboy*), 1990, consists of a stack of sky-blue sheets of paper, placed directly on the floor, which can be endlessly replenished as visitors remove them. The sculpture's message is as blank as the unwritten paper, as infinite as its supply.

Other artists examined the colour's otherness in more knowing ways. In his characteristically gnomic *Hi There, My Old Friend*, 1994, Ed Ruscha painted five formless cerulean patches, which hover like phantoms on an unprimed canvas, to conceal what we must assume are the words of the picture's title. Like

the atmospheric blues of nature, their colour becomes a haze or veil, obscuring as much as it reveals. If Ruscha was happy to let the colour float away, his contemporary Cy Twombly repeatedly tried to pin it down. One marvellous sculpture, made at his home in the Italian coastal city of Gaeta in 2005, is constructed from three crudely fashioned rectangles of wood and plaster, piled atop each other like miniature megaliths, then covered in a coat of blue acrylic paint. Like Yves Klein before him, Twombly surely aimed to harness and materialise the ethereal colours around him: those scattered blue photons that raced across the firmament and bounced off the rippling surfaces of the Mediterranean. The finished piece might be abstract but it invokes the forms of a tomb – it is perhaps Twombly's memorial to a colour that can never be brought down to earth.

The most profound reflection on blue in this exhibition was almost certainly unintended. Prompted by what he considers to be the increasingly mendacious politics of the present, Joseph Kosuth has over the last few years made a number of works inspired by *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) – George Orwell's dystopian novel about a vast totalitarian state that polices even its citizens' thoughts. Kosuth excises words from the text, converts them into neon signs and displays them on gallery walls. In this, his most recent piece, he has selected a sentence that originally referred to 'The Brotherhood' – a secret organisation determined to bring down the all-powerful government, though one we later learn had probably been invented by the authorities solely to identify potential dissenters. Here, however, shorn of its original context and glowing in cobalt-coloured neon, Orwell's staccato sentence can't help but remind us of the perennial paradox of blue. Like 'The Brotherhood', the colour seems to be everywhere but is ultimately only an illusion. As Kosuth's piece reads: 'Nothing of the kind exists'.

- 1 From D. Jarman, *Blue* (1993).
- 2 They are two species of the callionymid fish. See J.T. Bagnara, P.J. Fernandez & R. Fujii, 'On the blue coloration of vertebrates', *Pigment Cell Research*, vol. 2 (February 2007), pp. 14-26.
- 3 For a discussion, see G. Hoeppe, *Why the sky is blue: discovering the color of life*, trans. J. Stewart (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 52-76.
- 4 M. Dolinska, 'Red and Blue figures of Amun', *Varia Aegyptiaca*, vol. 6 (1990), pp. 3-8.
- 5 See K. Kramer, *World Scriptures: an introduction to Comparative Religions* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1986), p. 52.
- 6 M. Pastoureau, *Blue: The History of a Color*, trans. M.I. Cruse (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 50-5.
- 7 J.W. von Goethe, *Goethe's Colour Theory*, trans. H. Aach (London: Studio Vista, 1971), § 781, p. 170.
- 8 W. Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, trans. P. Vergo, in K. Lindsay & P. Vergo (eds.), *Kandinsky: complete writings on art* (New York: Da Capo, 1994), pp. 181-2.
- 9 For more on the works, see M. Lobel, 'Lost and found: Susan Weil and Robert Rauschenberg's blueprints', *Artforum* (February 2016).
- 10 J. Saletnik, 'Robert Rauschenberg: Untitled (a birthday picture for Hermine)', in H. Molesworth (ed.), *Leap before you look: Black Mountain College, 1933-1957* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), pp. 314-15.
- 11 A. Reinhardt, 'Black-square paintings' (1955), in B. Rose (ed.), *Art as Art: the selected writings of Ad Reinhardt* (New York: Viking, 1975), p. 83.
- 12 Cited in M. Auping, *Declaring space: Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, Lucio Fontana, Yves Klein* (Munich and New York: Prestel, 2007), p. 55.
- 13 Y. Klein, 'Sorbonne Lecture' (1959), reproduced in C. Harrison & P. Wood (eds.), *Art in Theory 1900-1990: an Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 805.
- 14 Patent no. 63471 (19 May 1960) L'Institut national de la propriété industrielle.
- 15 <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.26.html/2014/contemporary-art-evening-sale-n09141> (accessed: 1 January 2020).
- 16 S. Magnussen et al., 'Unveiling the foveal blue scotoma through an afterimage', *Vision Research*, vol. 44 (February 2004), pp. 377-83.
- 17 The phenomenon is widely known as the 'Purkinje Effect' or 'Purkinje Shift'. For more, see R.N. Priestland, 'Who was... Jan Evangelista Purkyne?', *Biologist*, vol. 34, no. 5 (1987), pp. 249-50.

Blue: AS YELLOW IS ALWAYS

ACCOMPANIED WITH LIGHT, SO IT MAY BE

SAID THAT BLUE STILL BRINGS

A PRINCIPLE OF *darkness* WITH IT.

THIS COLOUR HAS A PECULIAR AND

ALMOST INDESCRIBABLE EFFECT ON THE

EYE. AS A HUE IT IS POWERFUL —

BUT IT IS ON THE NEGATIVE SIDE,

AND IN ITS HIGHEST *purity* IS,

AS IT WERE, A STIMULATING NEGATION.

ITS APPEARANCE, THEN, IS A KIND OF

CONTRADICTION BETWEEN

excitement AND *repose*.

— JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE —

Zur Farbenlehre (Theory of Colours), 1910





Dan Flavin, *untitled (for Charlotte and Jim Brooks) 4*, 1964

Bluets

MAGGIE NELSON

Excerpt from *Bluets*, 2009

1. Suppose I were to begin by saying that I had fallen in love with a color. Suppose I were to speak this as though it were a confession; suppose I shredded my napkin as we spoke. *It began slowly. An appreciation, an affinity. Then, one day, it became more serious. Then* (looking into an empty teacup, its bottom stained with thin brown excrement coiled into the shape of a sea horse) *it became somehow personal.*
2. And so I fell in love with a color—in this case, the color blue—as if falling under a spell, a spell I fought to stay under and get out from under, in turns.
3. Well, and what of it? A voluntary delusion, you might say. That each blue object could be a kind of burning bush, a secret code meant for a single agent, an X on a map too diffuse ever to be unfolded in entirety but that contains the knowable universe. How could all the shreds of blue garbage bags stuck in brambles, or the bright blue tarps flapping over every shanty and fish stand in the world, be, in essence, the fingerprints of God? *I will try to explain this.*
4. I admit that I may have been lonely. I know that loneliness can produce bolts of hot pain, a pain which, if it stays hot enough for long enough, can begin to simulate, or to provoke—take your pick—an apprehension of the divine. *(This ought to arouse our suspicions.)*
5. But first, let us consider a sort of case in reverse. In 1867, after a long bout of solitude, the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé wrote to his friend Henri Cazalis: “These last months have been terrifying. My Thought has thought itself through and reached a Pure Idea. What the rest of me has suffered during that long agony, is indescribable.” Mallarmé described this agony as a battle that took place on God’s “boney wing.” “I struggled with that creature of ancient and evil plumage—God—whom I fortunately defeated and threw to earth,” he told Cazalis with exhausted satisfaction. Eventually Mallarmé began replacing “le ciel” with “l’Azur” in his poems, in an effort to rinse references to the sky of religious connotations. “Fortunately,” he wrote Cazalis, “I am quite dead now.”
6. The half-circle of blinding turquoise ocean is this love’s primal scene. That this blue exists makes my life a remarkable one, just to have seen it. To have seen such beautiful things. To find oneself placed in their midst. Choiceless. I returned there yesterday and stood again upon the mountain.

7. But what kind of love is it, really? Don't fool yourself and call it sublimity. Admit that you have stood in front of a little pile of powdered ultramarine pigment in a glass cup at a museum and felt a stinging desire. But to do what? Liberate it? Purchase it? Ingest it? There is so little blue food in nature—in fact blue in the wild tends to mark food to avoid (mold, poisonous berries)—that culinary advisers generally recommend against blue light, blue paint, and blue plates when and where serving food. But while the color may sap appetite in the most literal sense, it feeds it in others. You might want to reach out and disturb the pile of pigment, for example, first staining your fingers with it, then staining the world. You might want to dilute it and swim in it, you might want to rouge your nipples with it, you might want to paint a virgin's robe with it. But still you wouldn't be accessing the blue of it. Not exactly.
8. Do not, however, make the mistake of thinking that all desire is yearning. "We love to contemplate blue, not because it advances to us, but because it draws us after it," wrote Goethe, and perhaps he is right. But I am not interested in longing to live in a world in which I already live. I don't want to yearn for blue things, and God forbid for any "blueness." Above all, I want to stop missing you.
9. So please do not write to tell me about any more beautiful blue things. To be fair, this book will not tell you about any, either. It will not say, *Isn't X beautiful?* Such demands are murderous to beauty.
10. The most I want to do is show you the end of my index finger. Its muteness.
11. That is to say: I don't care if it's colorless.
12. And please don't talk to me about "things as they are" being changed upon any "blue guitar." What can be changed upon a blue guitar is not of interest here.
13. At a job interview at a university, three men sitting across from me at a table. On my cv it says that I am currently working on a book about the color blue. I have been saying this for years without writing a word. It is, perhaps, my way of making my life feel "in progress" rather than a sleeve of ash falling off a lit cigarette. One of the men asks, *Why blue?* People ask me this question often. I never know how to respond. We don't get to choose what or whom we love, I want to say. We just don't get to choose.





Ed Ruscha photographed by Evelyn Hofer, Mojave Desert, California, June 1985





List of works

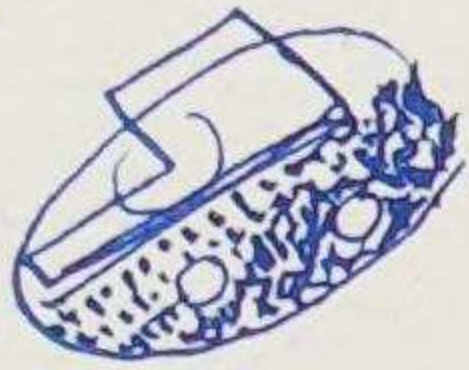
Monochrome No.2

Jackson Pollock (1912-1956)

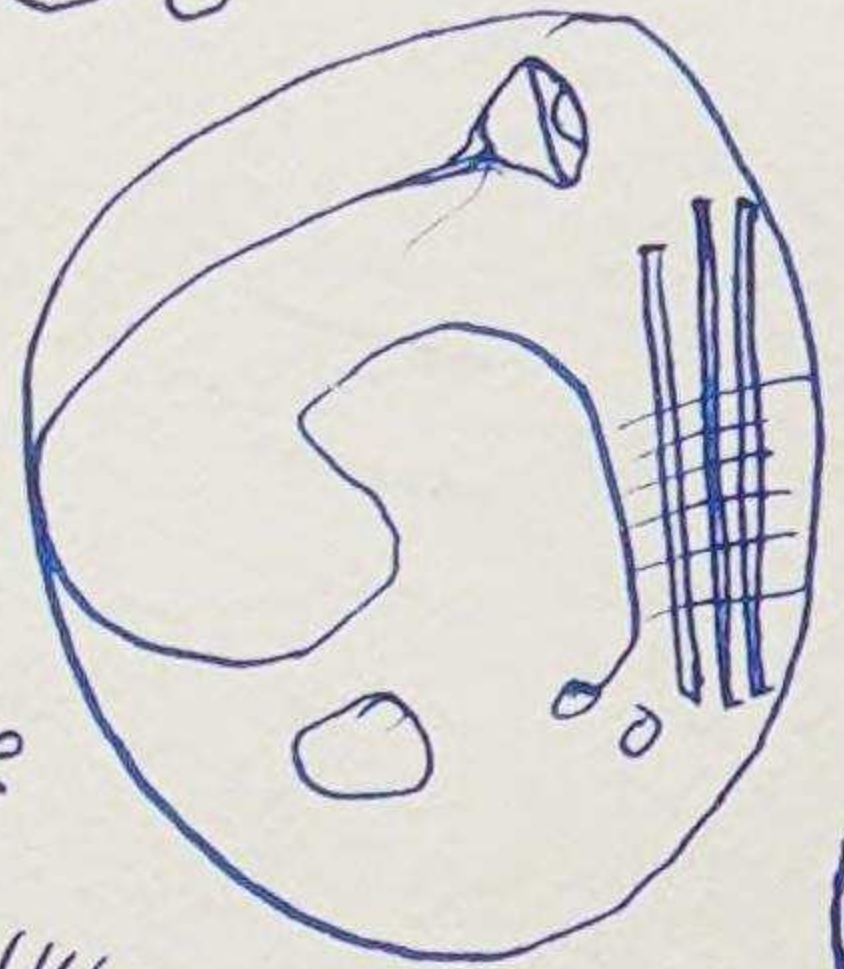
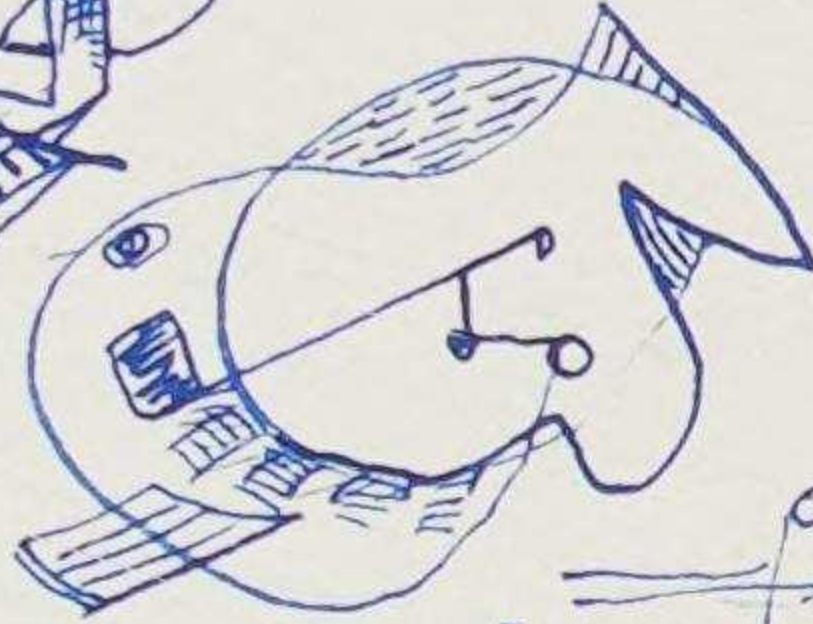
Untitled, circa 1939-42



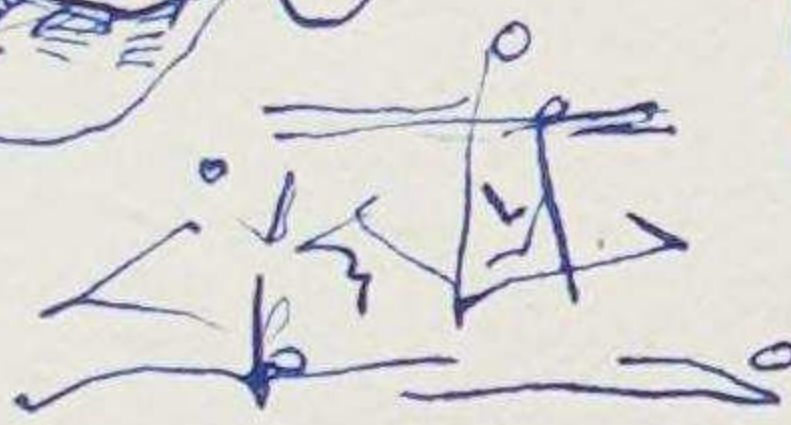
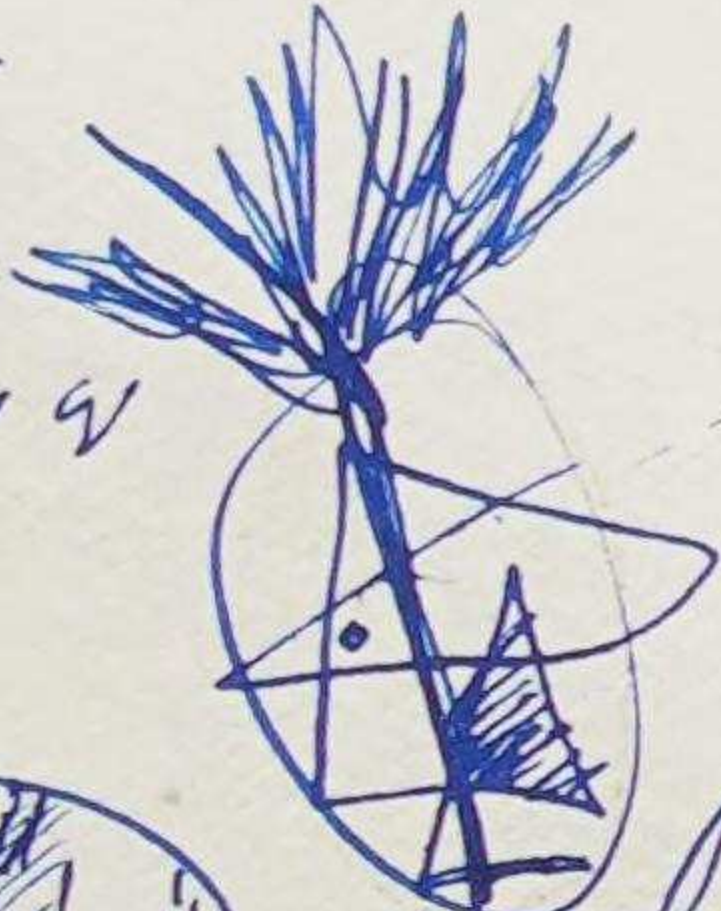
9/2/1949



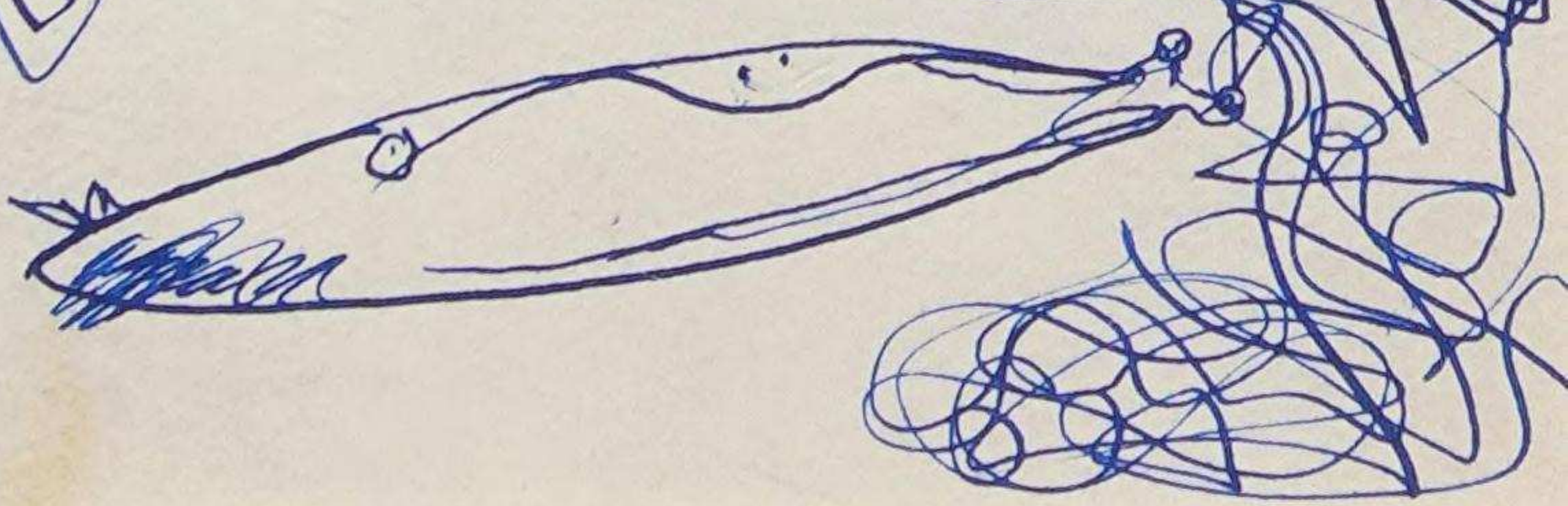
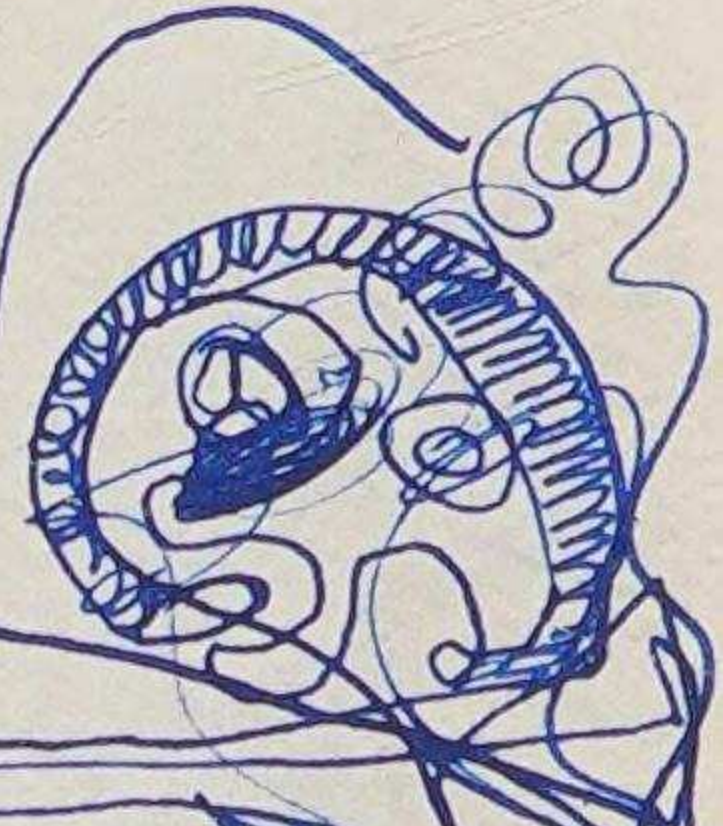
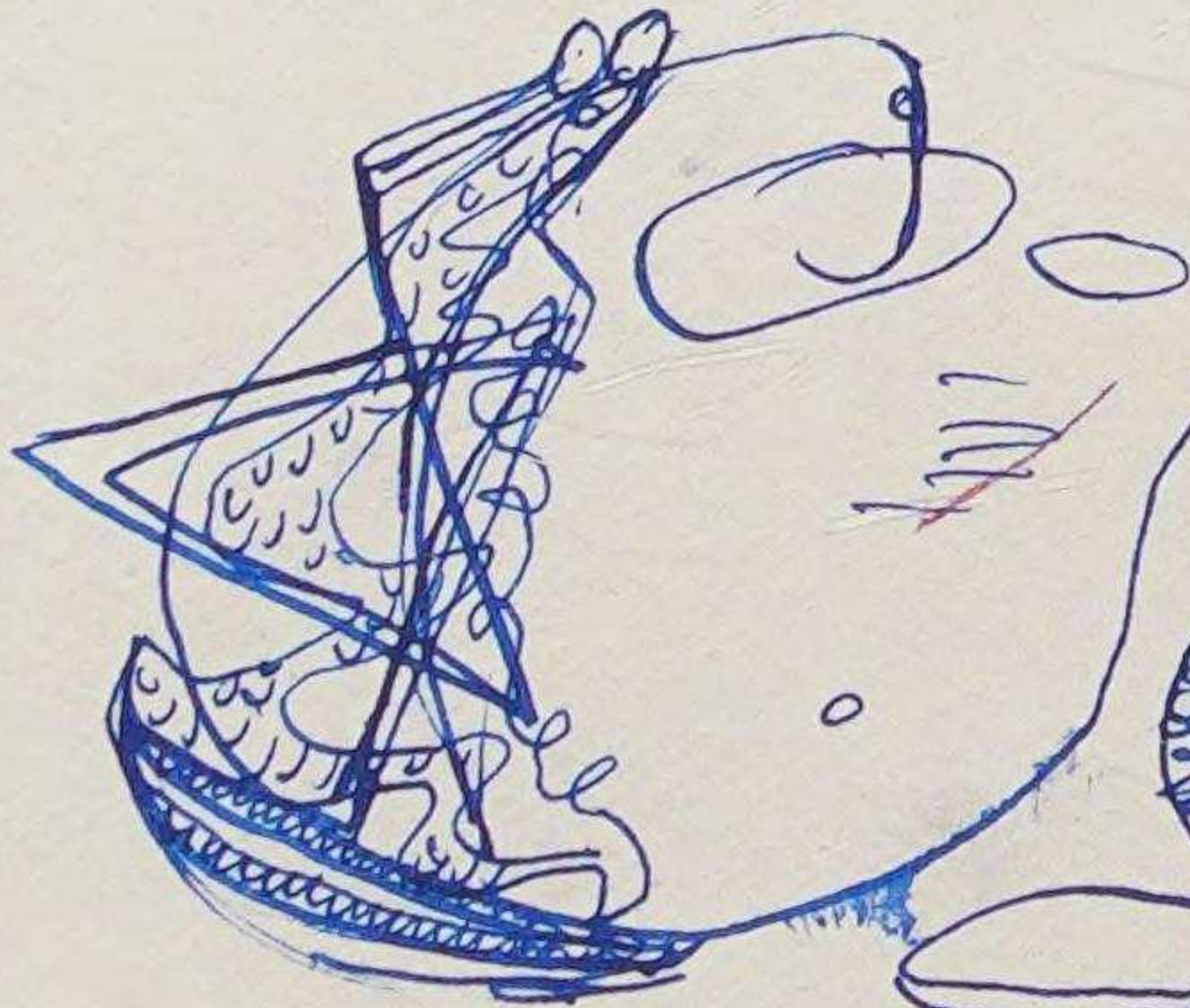
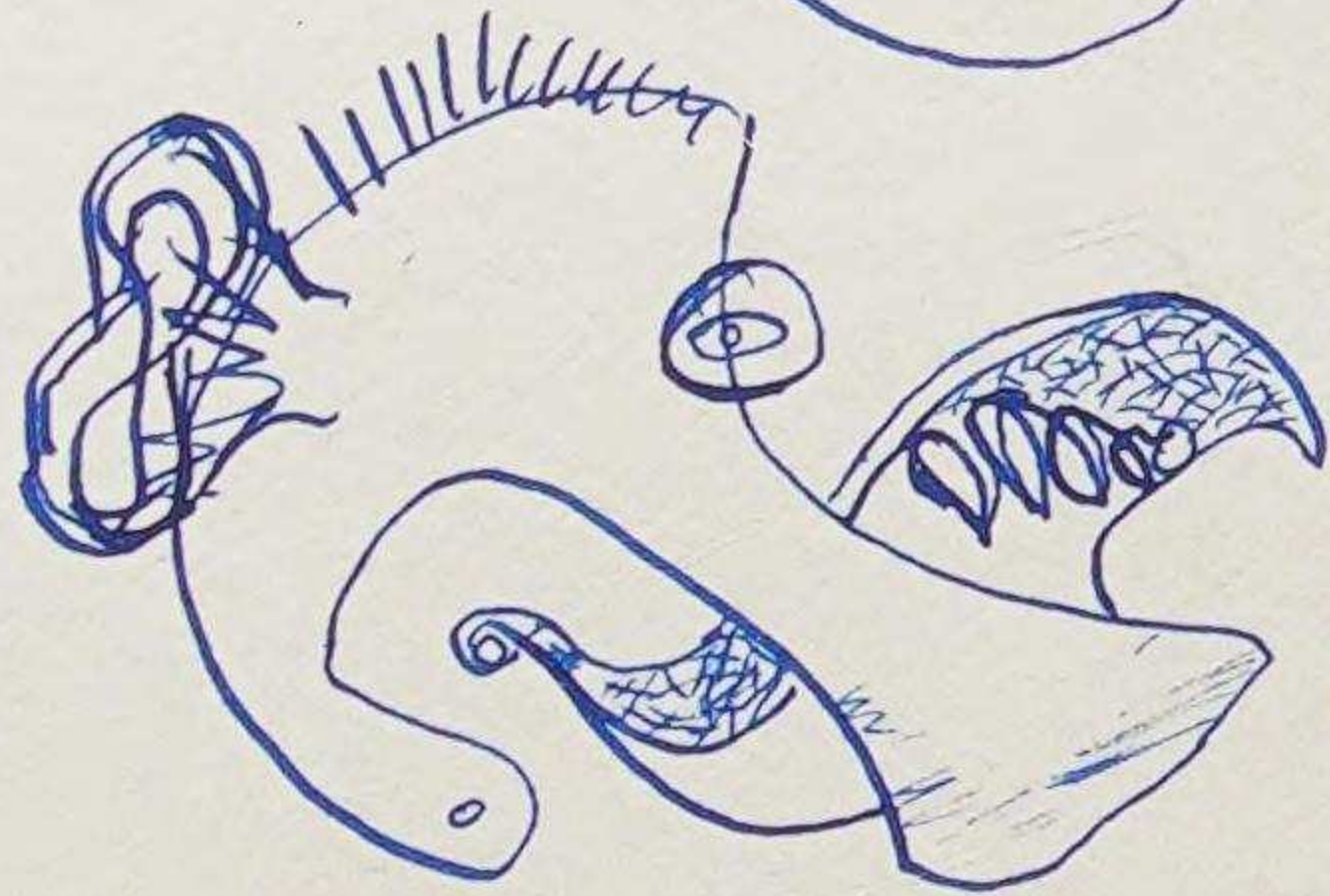
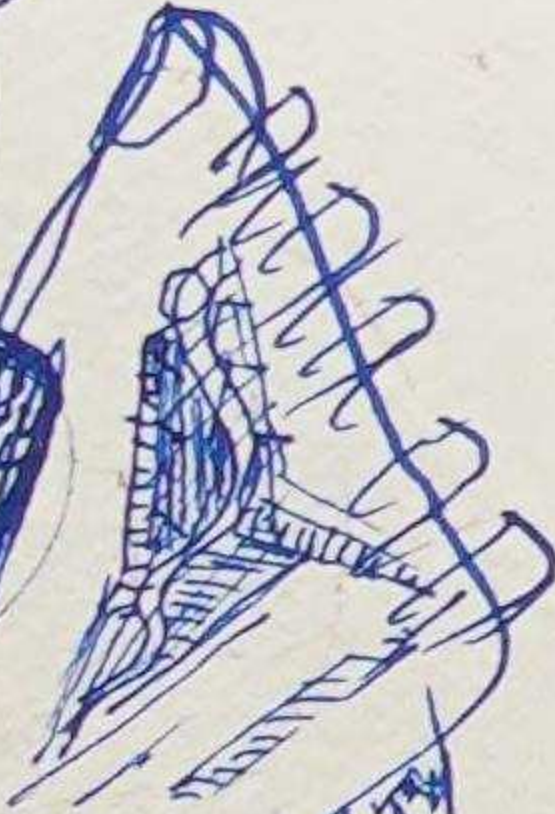
9/2/1949



9/2/1949

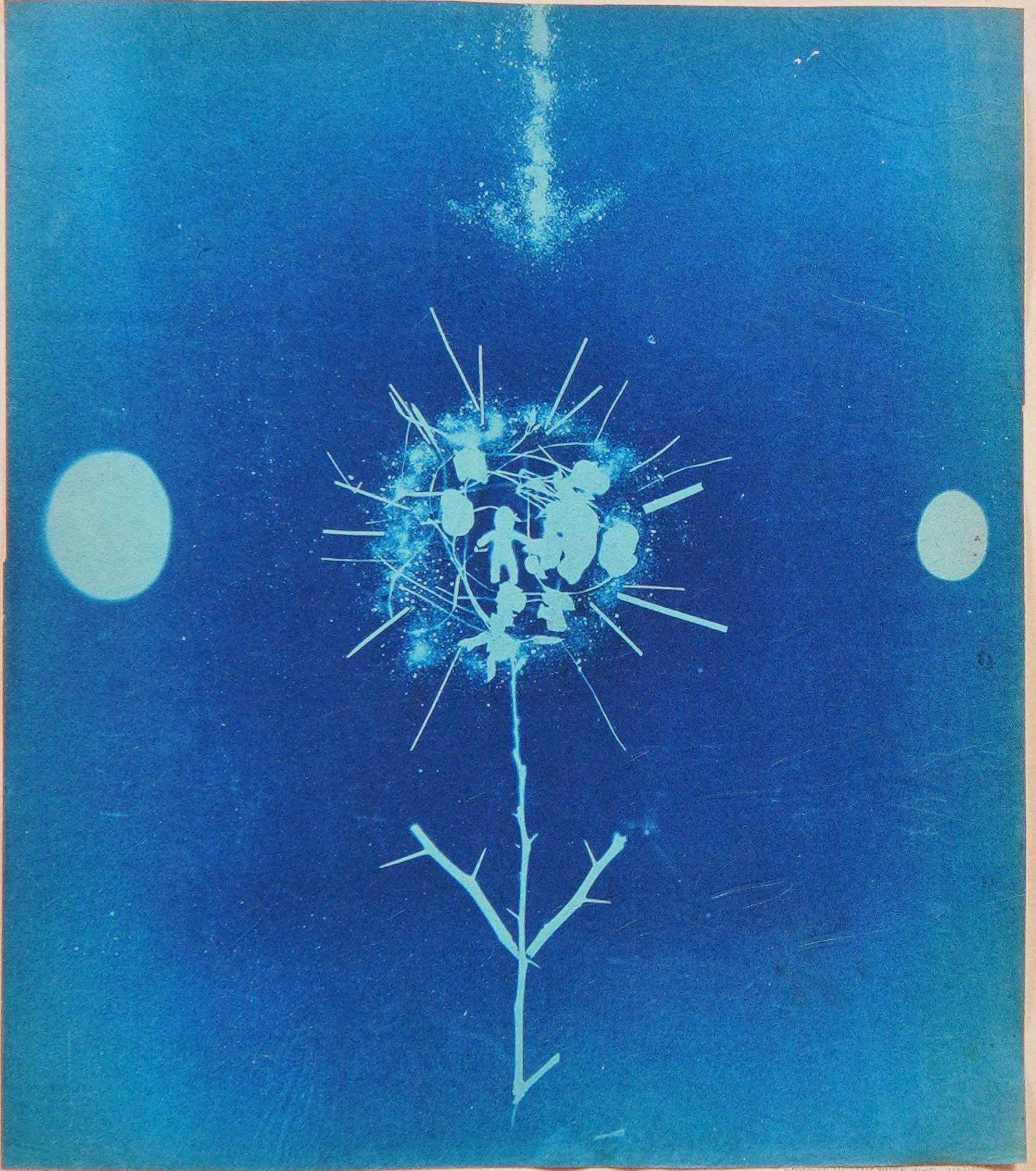


9/2/1949



Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008)

A Birthday Picture for Hermine, 1952

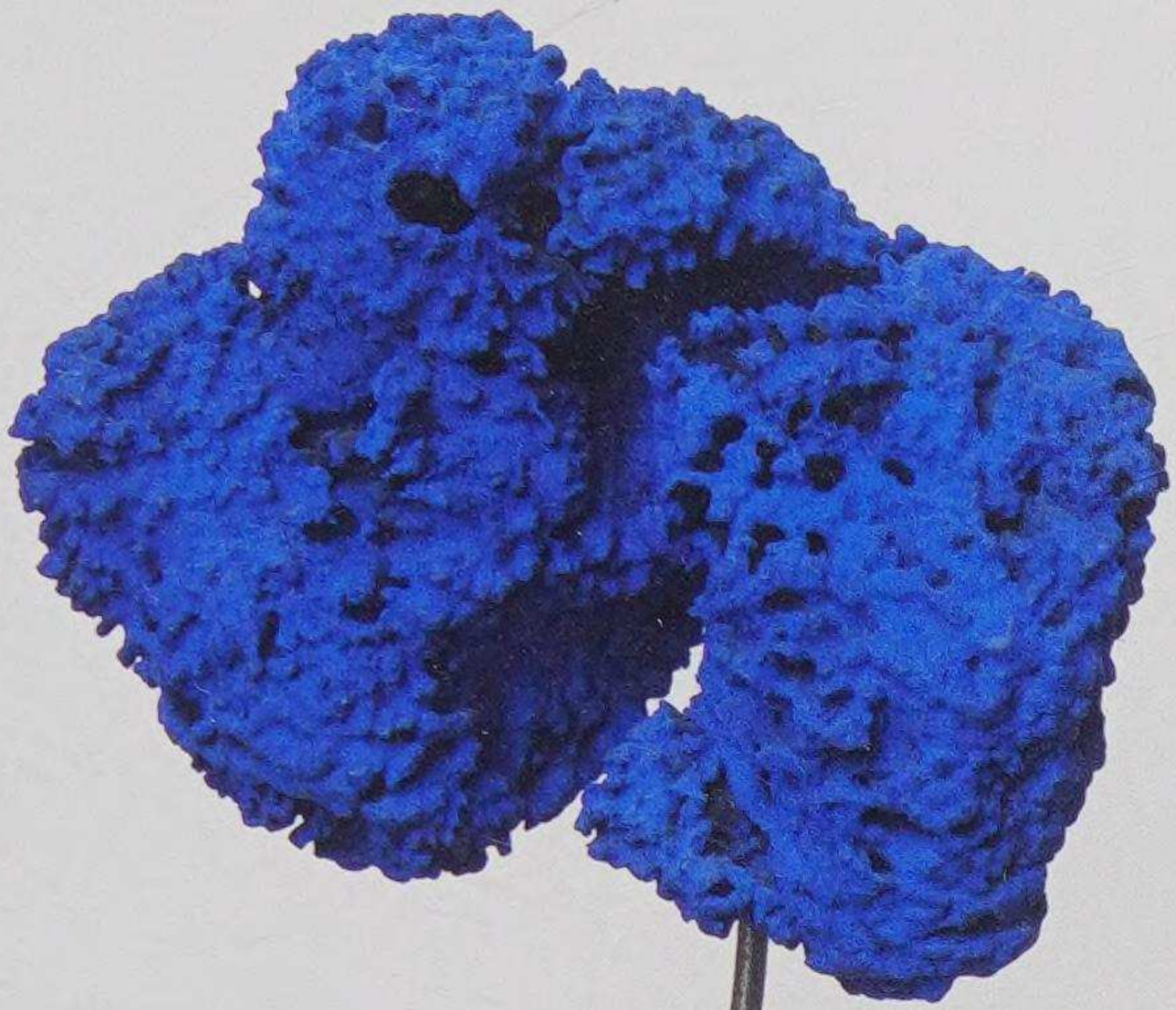


PLANTEN 1896

FRIDAY PICTURE FOR HERMANN

Yves Klein (1928-1962)

Sculpture éponge bleue sans titre (SE 165), circa 1959



Yves Klein (1928-1962)

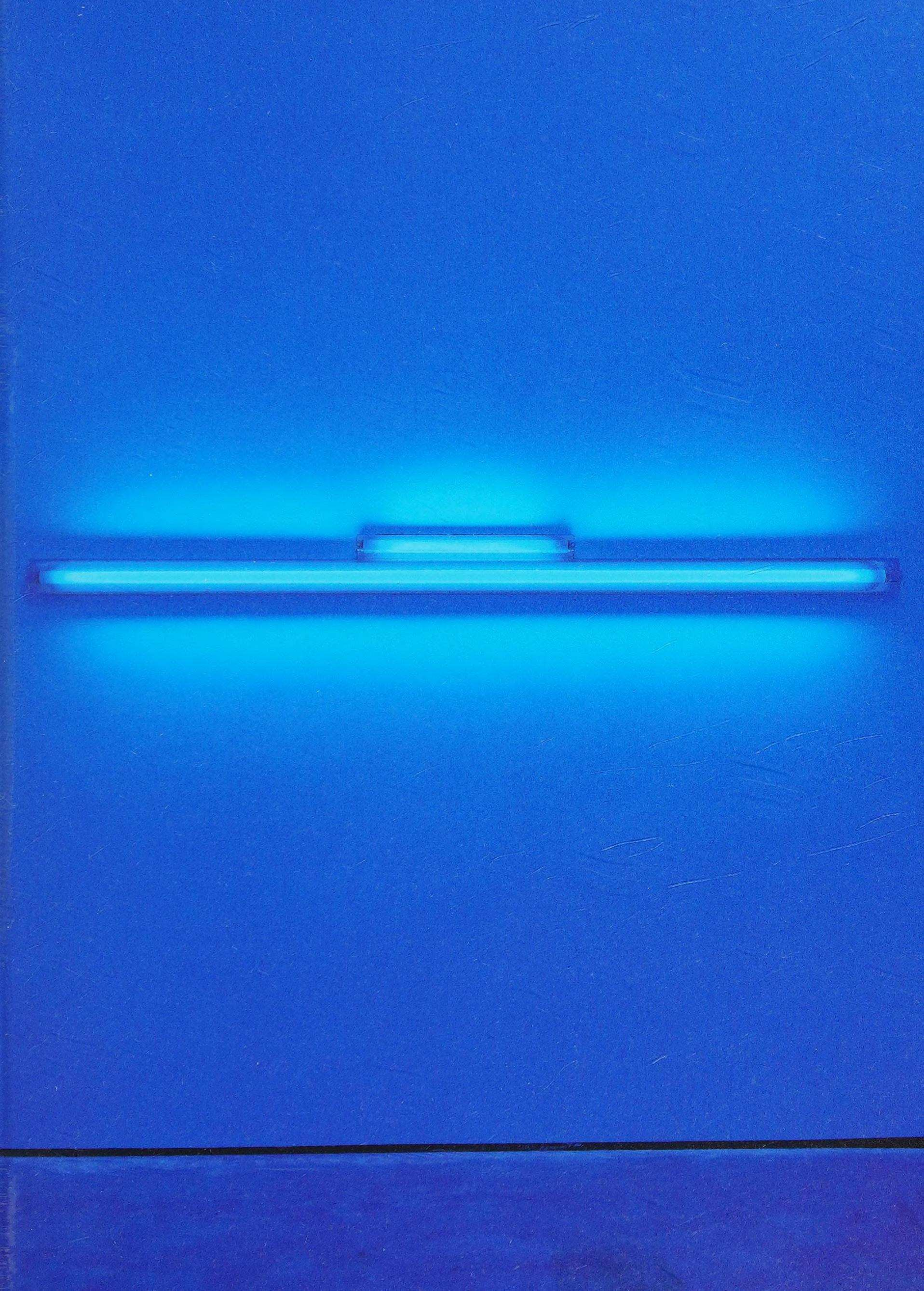
La Marseillaise (ANT 138), 1960



[Signature]
1960

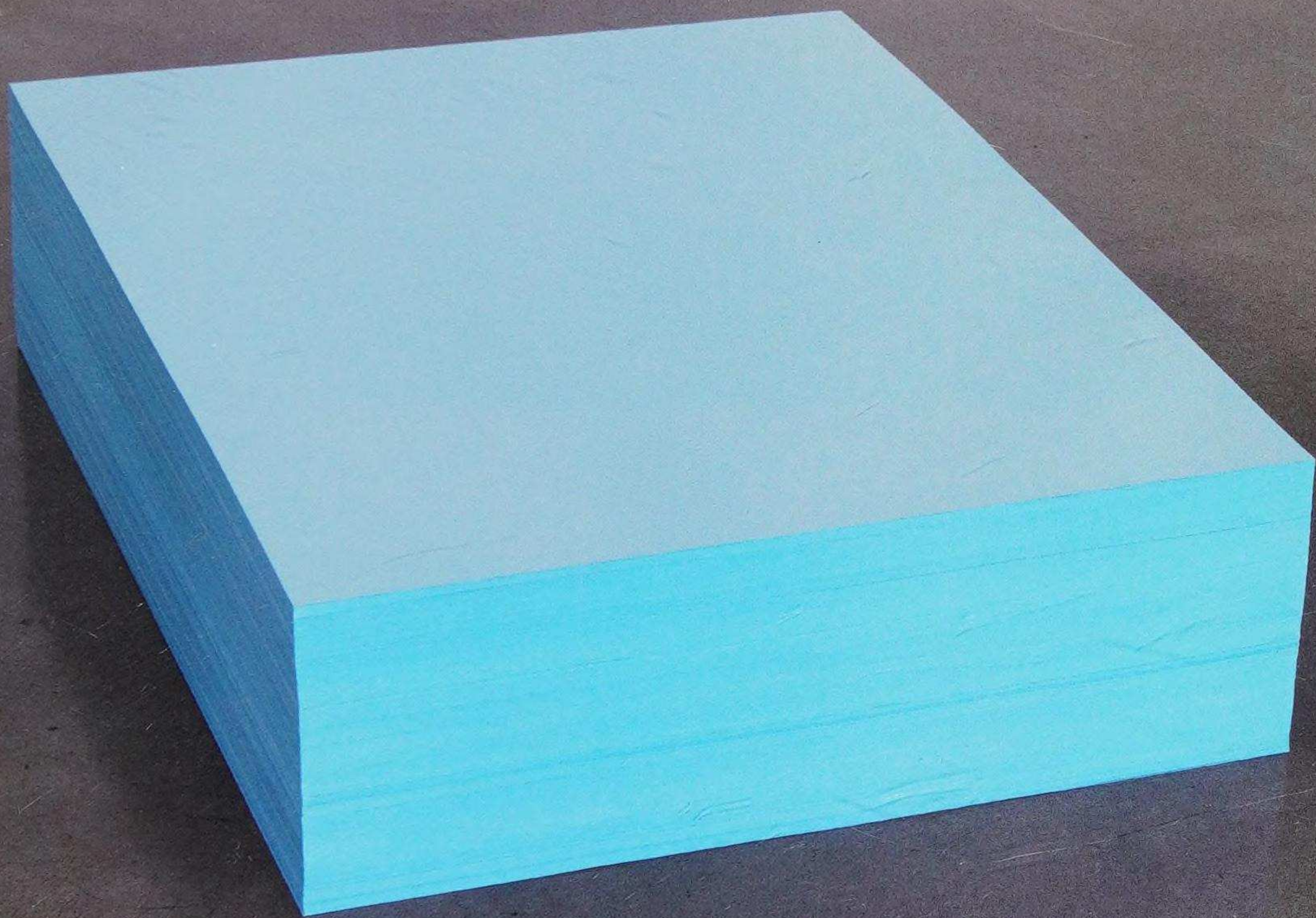
Dan Flavin (1933-1996)

untitled (for Charlotte and Jim Brooks) 4, 1964



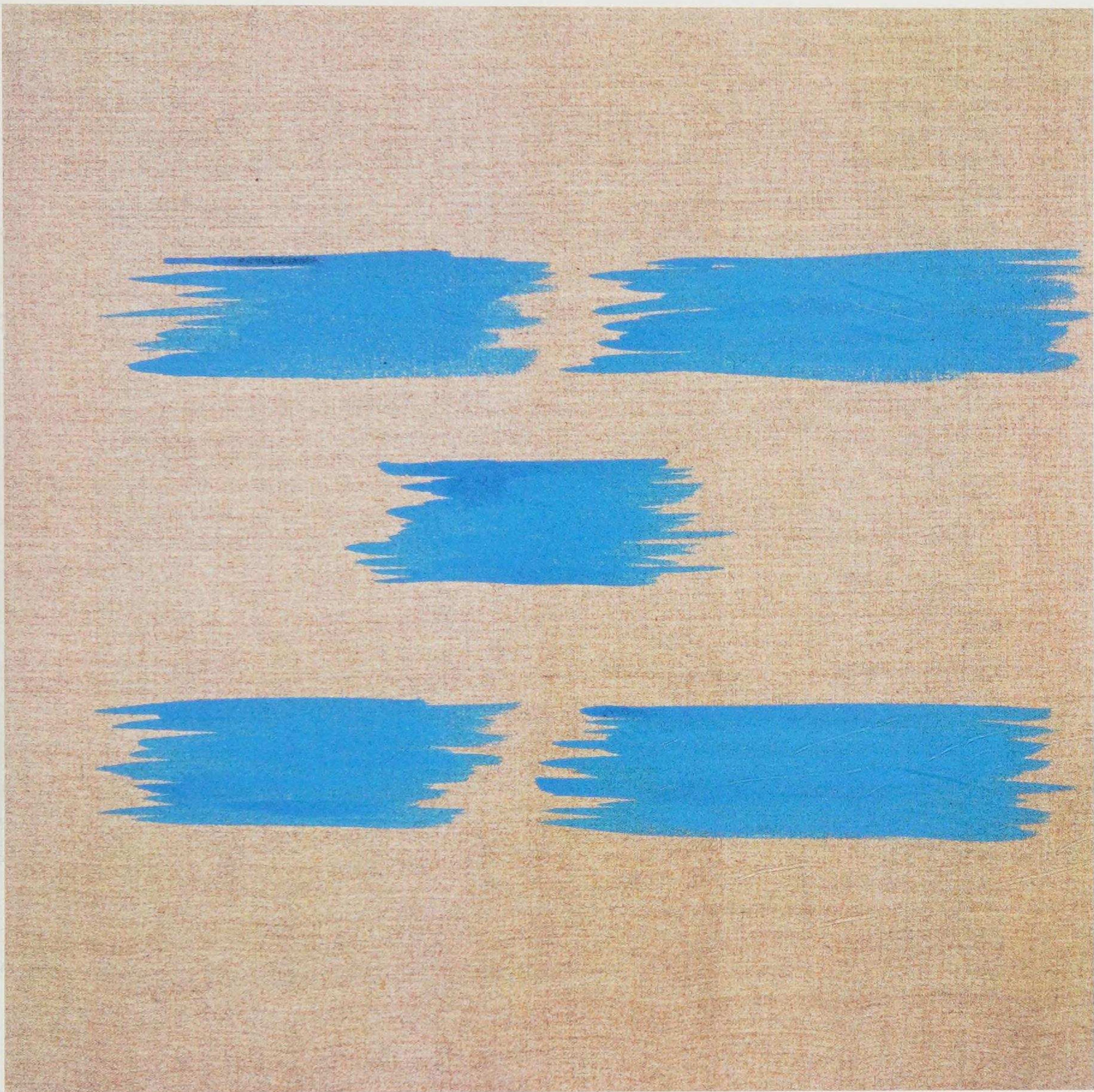
Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957-1996)

"Untitled" (Loverboy), 1990



Ed Ruscha (b. 1937)

Hi There, My Old Friend, 1994



Roy Lichtenstein (1923–1997)

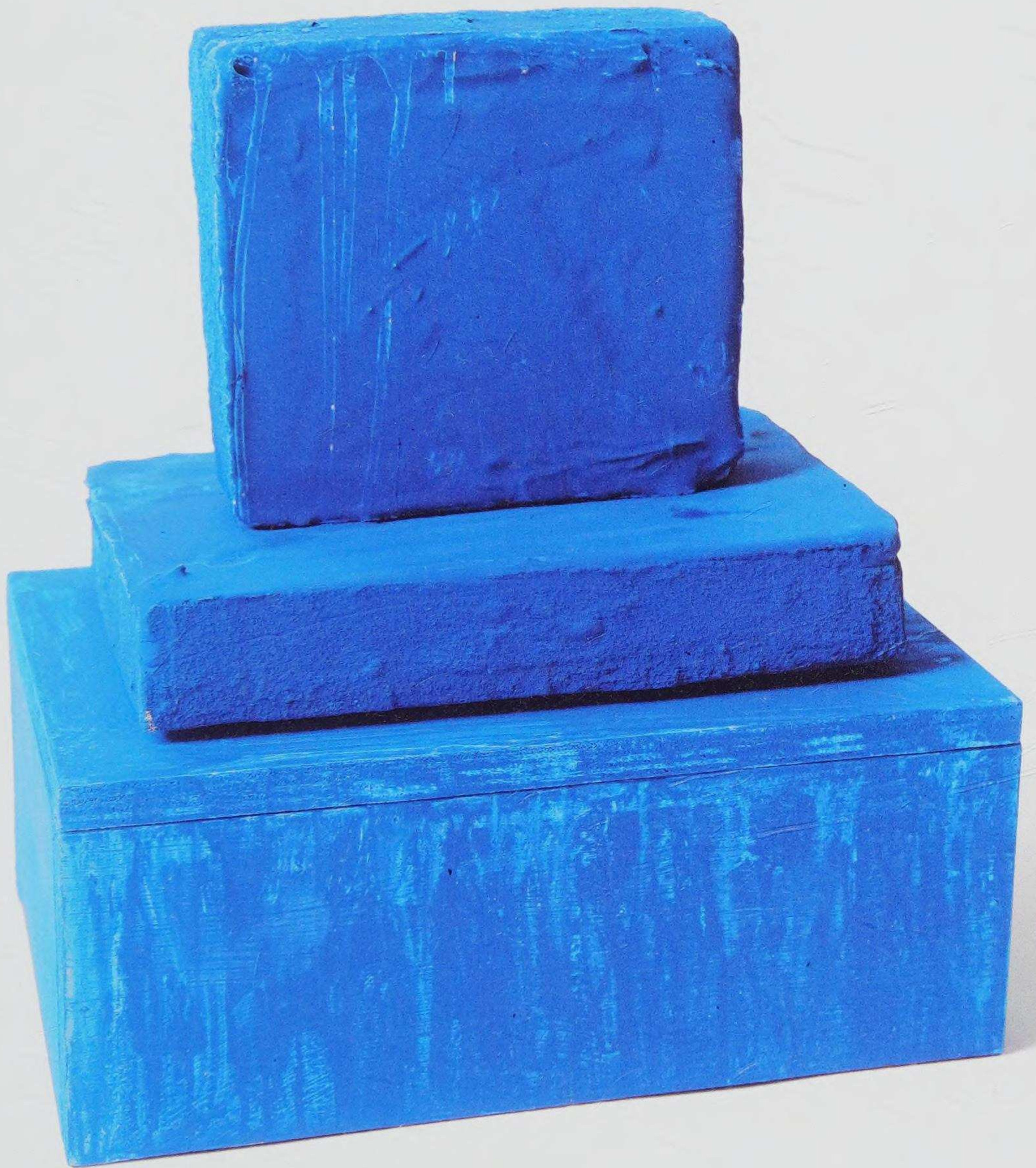
Seductive Girl (Study), 1996



PL# 3451-92

Cy Twombly (1928-2011)

Untitled, Gaeta, 2005

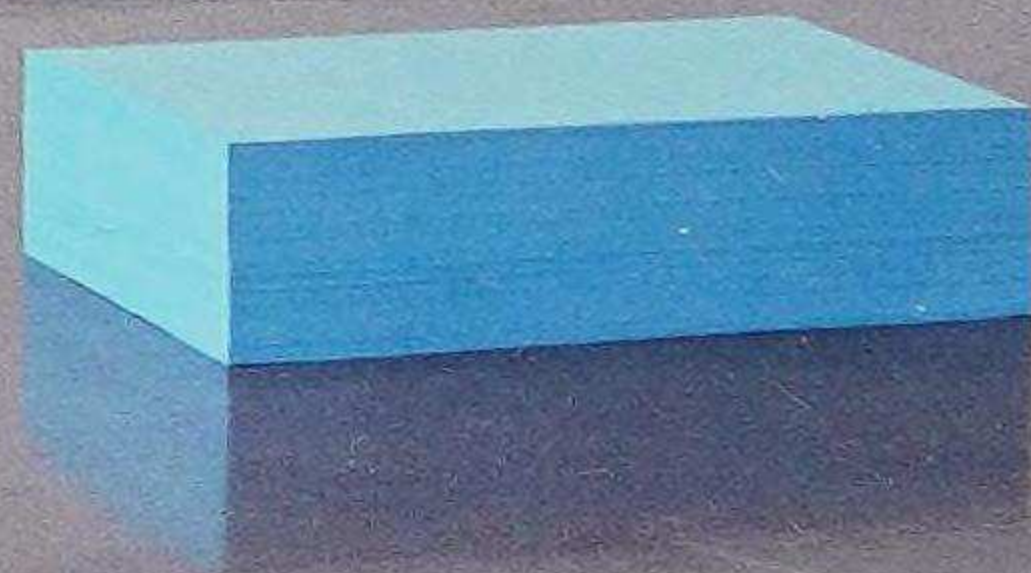


Joseph Kosuth (b. 1945)

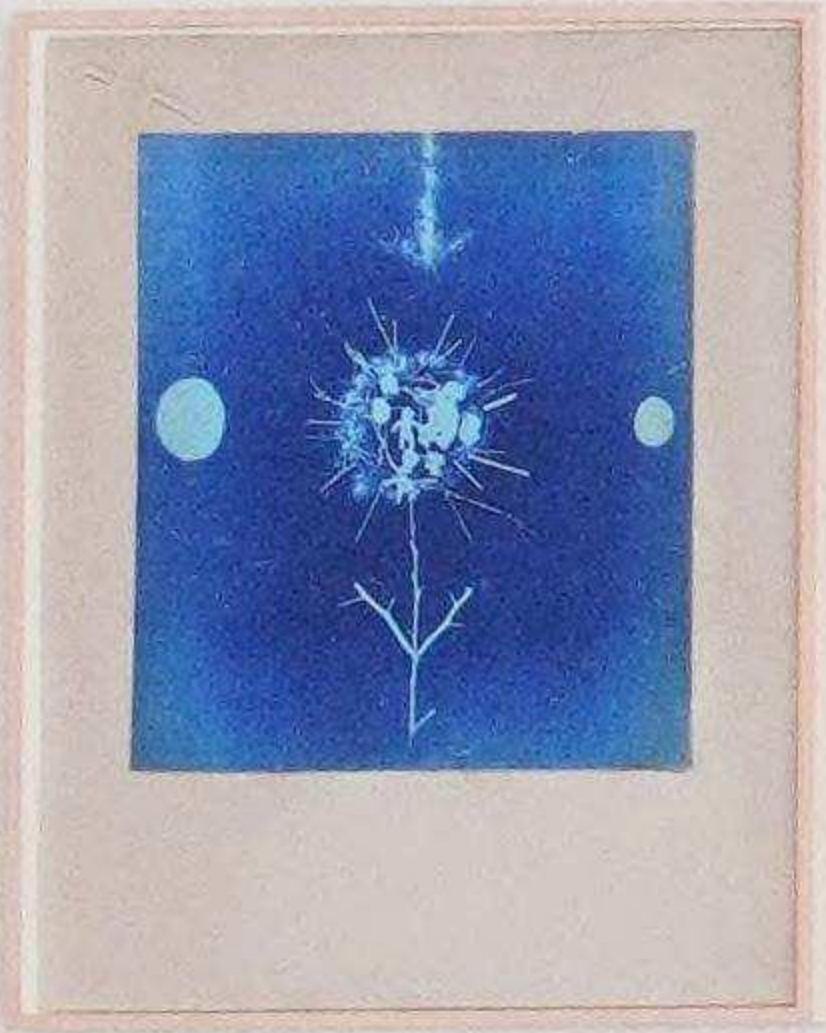
Nineteen Eighty-Four (Orwell) #4, 2019

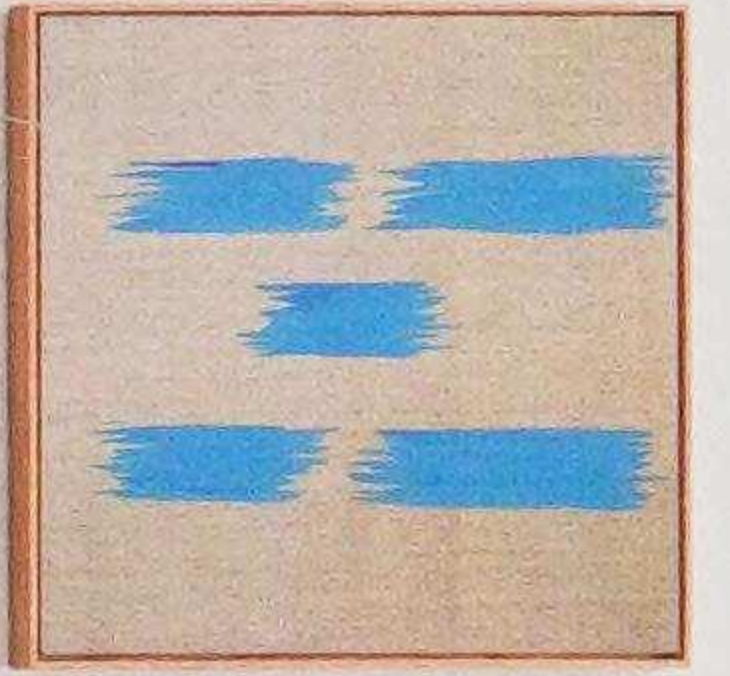
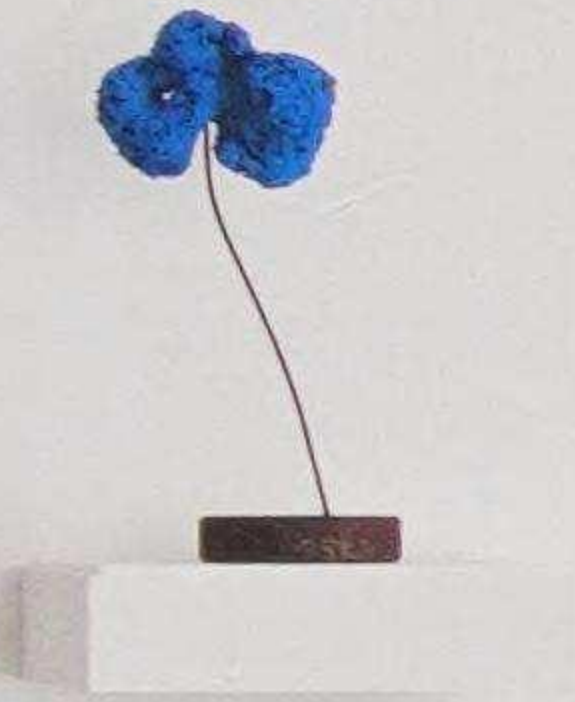
Nothing of the kind exists.

Nothing of the kind exists.



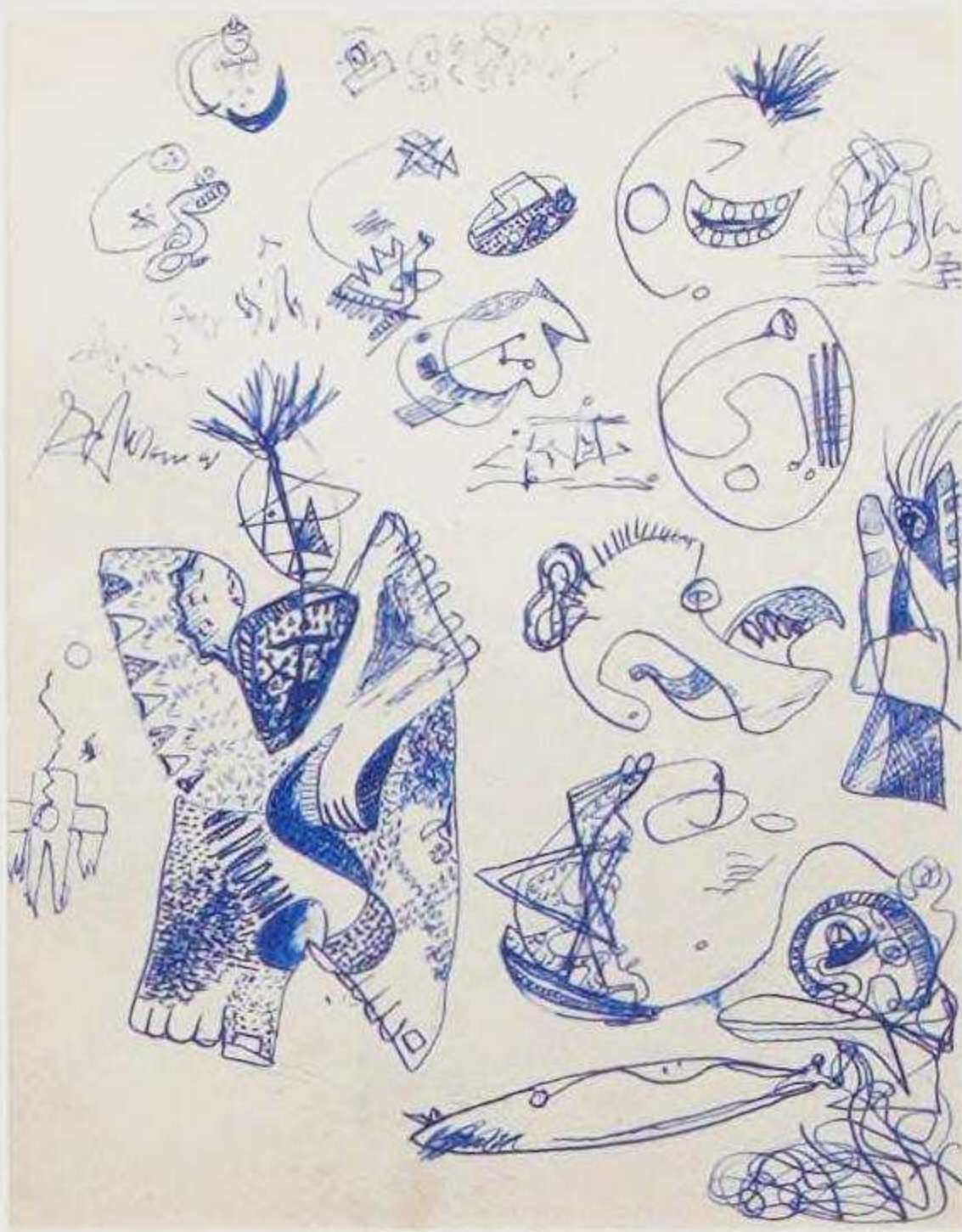






List of works

Monochrome No.2



52–53

Jackson Pollock (1912–1956)

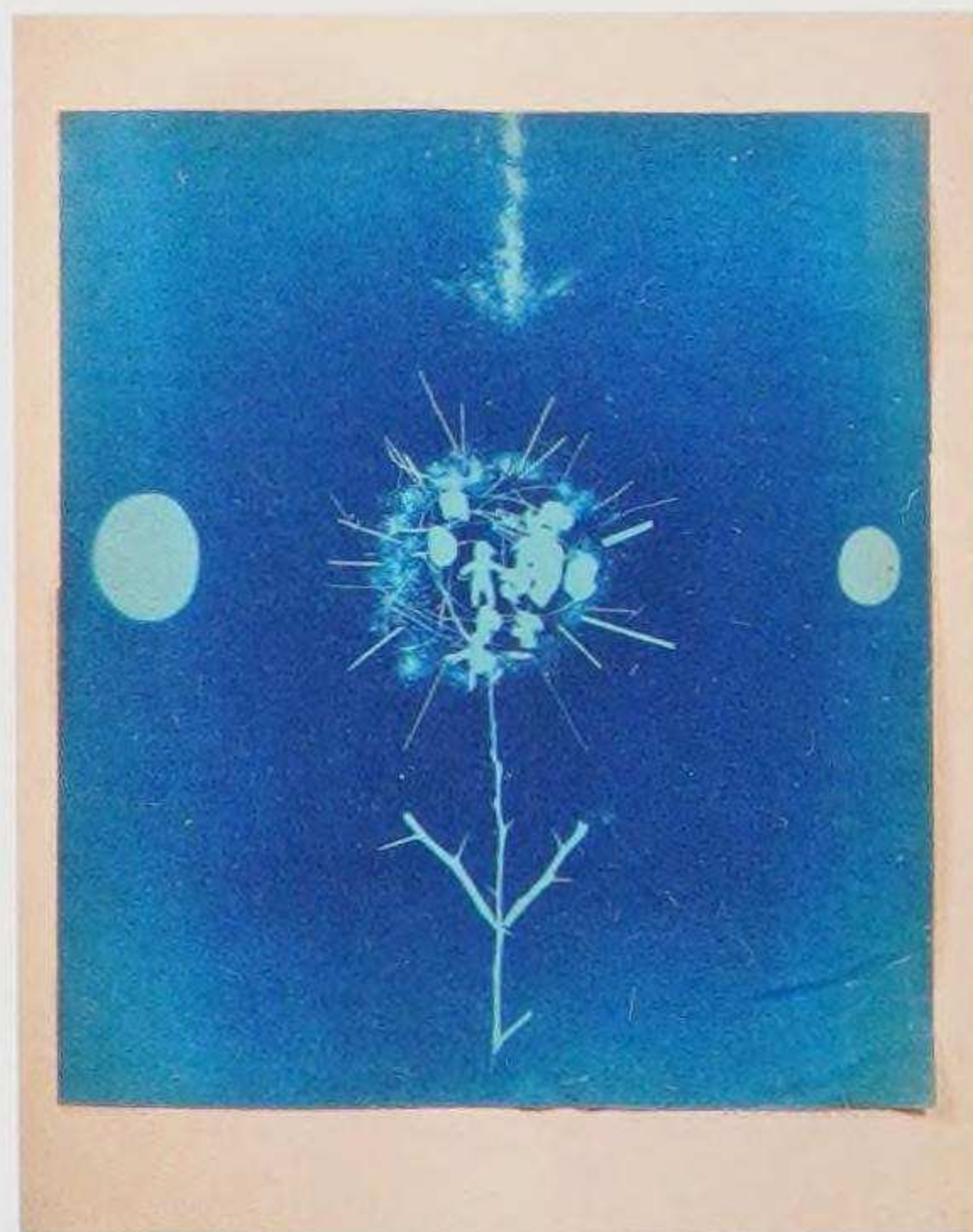
Untitled

pen and blue ink with touches of brown crayon on paper

13 × 10 ³/₈ in. (33 × 26.4 cm.)

Executed circa 1939–42

Courtesy Washburn Gallery, New York



54–55

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008)

A Birthday Picture for Hermine

signed 'Rauschenberg' (lower left) and titled 'A Birthday Picture for Hermine' (lower right)
cyanotype

18 × 15 ³/₄ in. (45.7 × 40 cm.)

Executed in July 1952

Private Collection, courtesy Artist Estate Studio, LLC, Brooklyn



56–57

Yves Klein (1928–1962)

Sculpture éponge bleue sans titre (SE 165)

dry pigment and synthetic resin on natural sponge, metal stem and base

7 7/8 × 5 1/8 × 5 1/8 in. (20 × 13 × 13 cm.)

Executed *circa* 1959

Courtesy of Private Collection



58–59

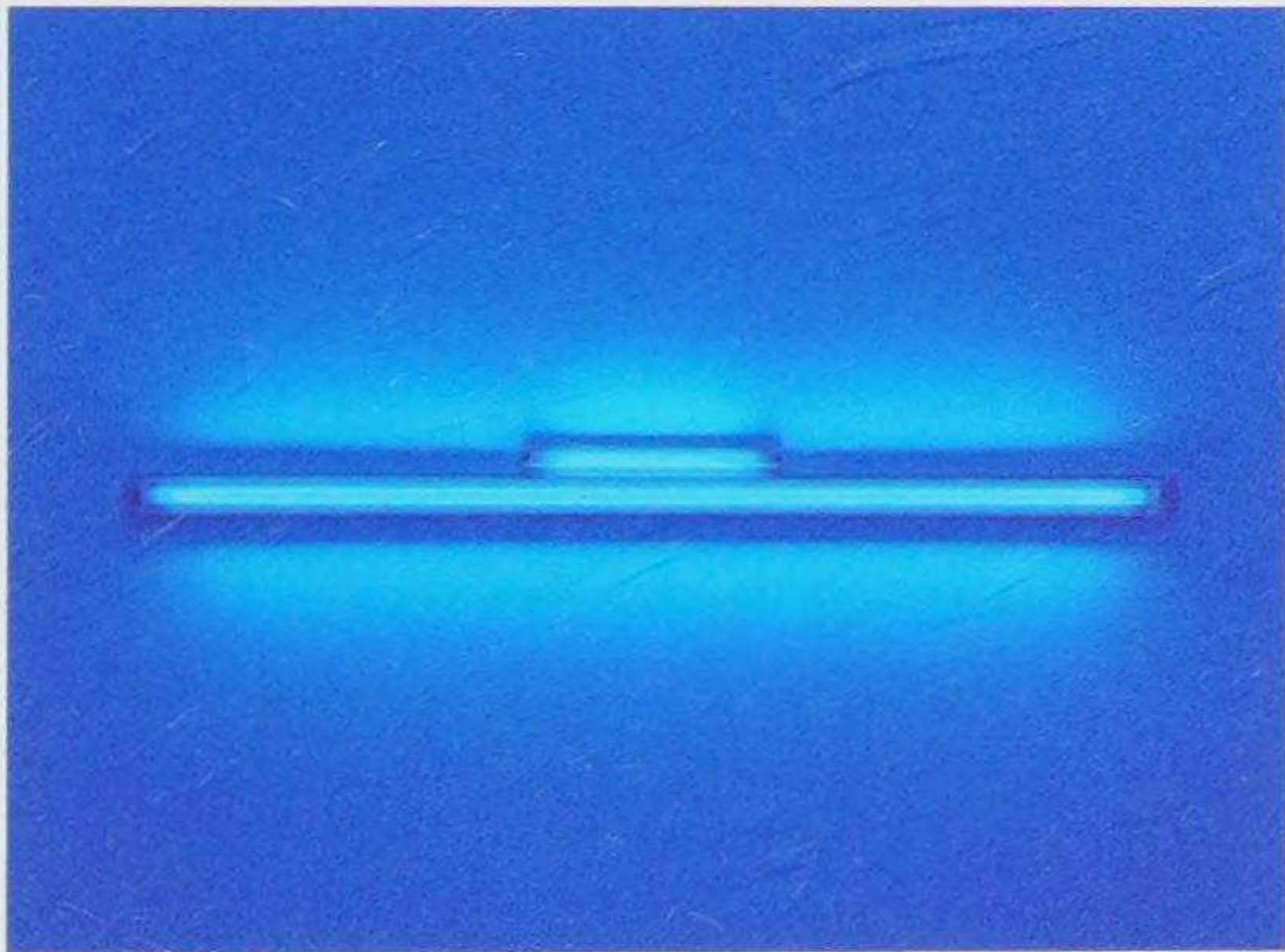
Yves Klein (1928–1962)

La Marseillaise (ANT 138)

signed and dated 'Yves Klein 1960' (lower centre); titled 'La Marseillaise' (on the reverse)

dry pigment and resin on paper laid on canvas
25 × 20 1/4 in. (63.5 × 51.5 cm.)

Executed in 1960



60–61

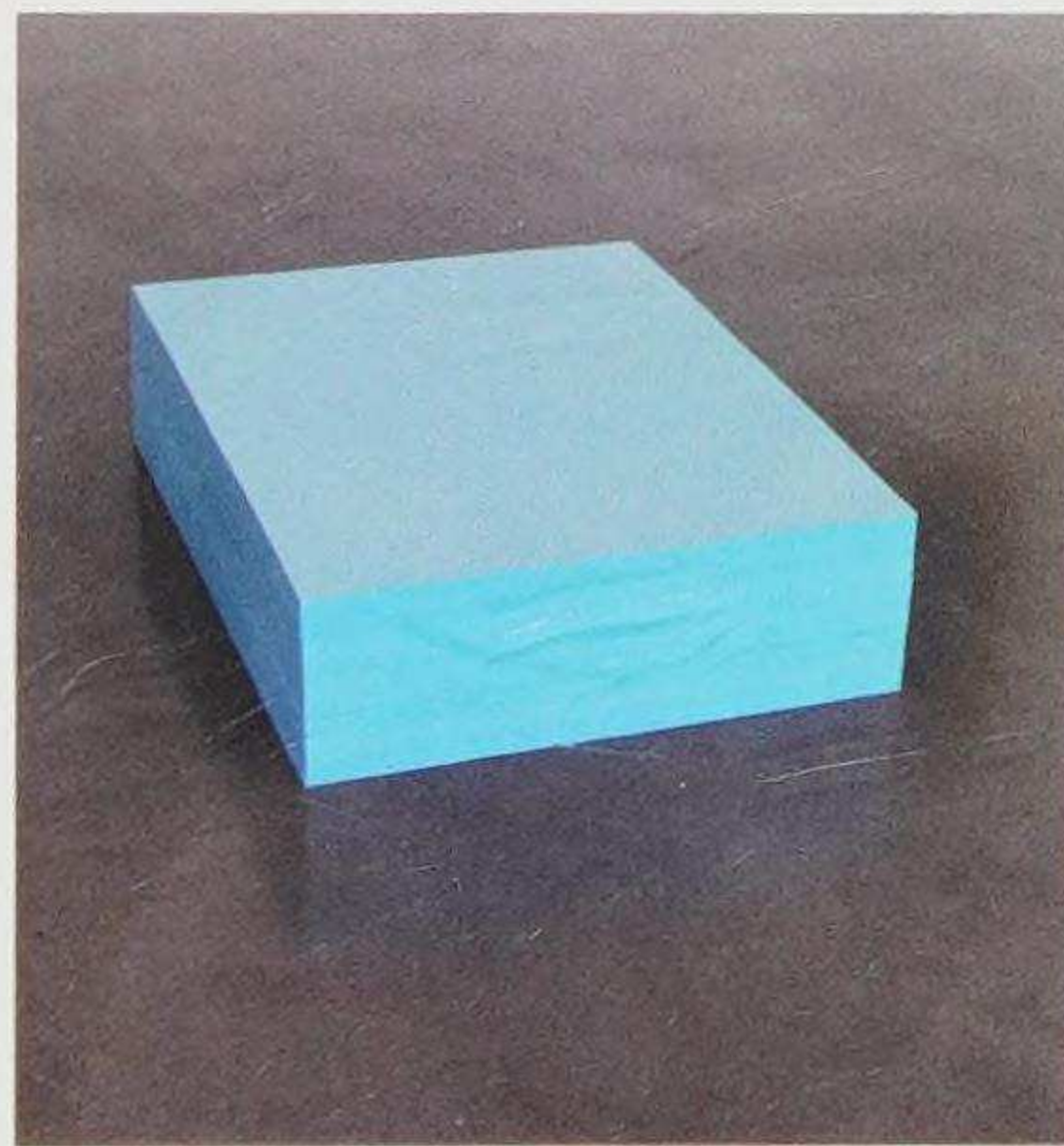
Dan Flavin (1933–1996)

untitled (for Charlotte and Jim Brooks) 4

blue fluorescent light

8 ft. (244 cm.) wide

Executed in 1964, this work is from an edition of five
Estate of Dan Flavin



62–63

Felix Gonzalez-Torres (1957–1996)

"Untitled" (Loverboy)

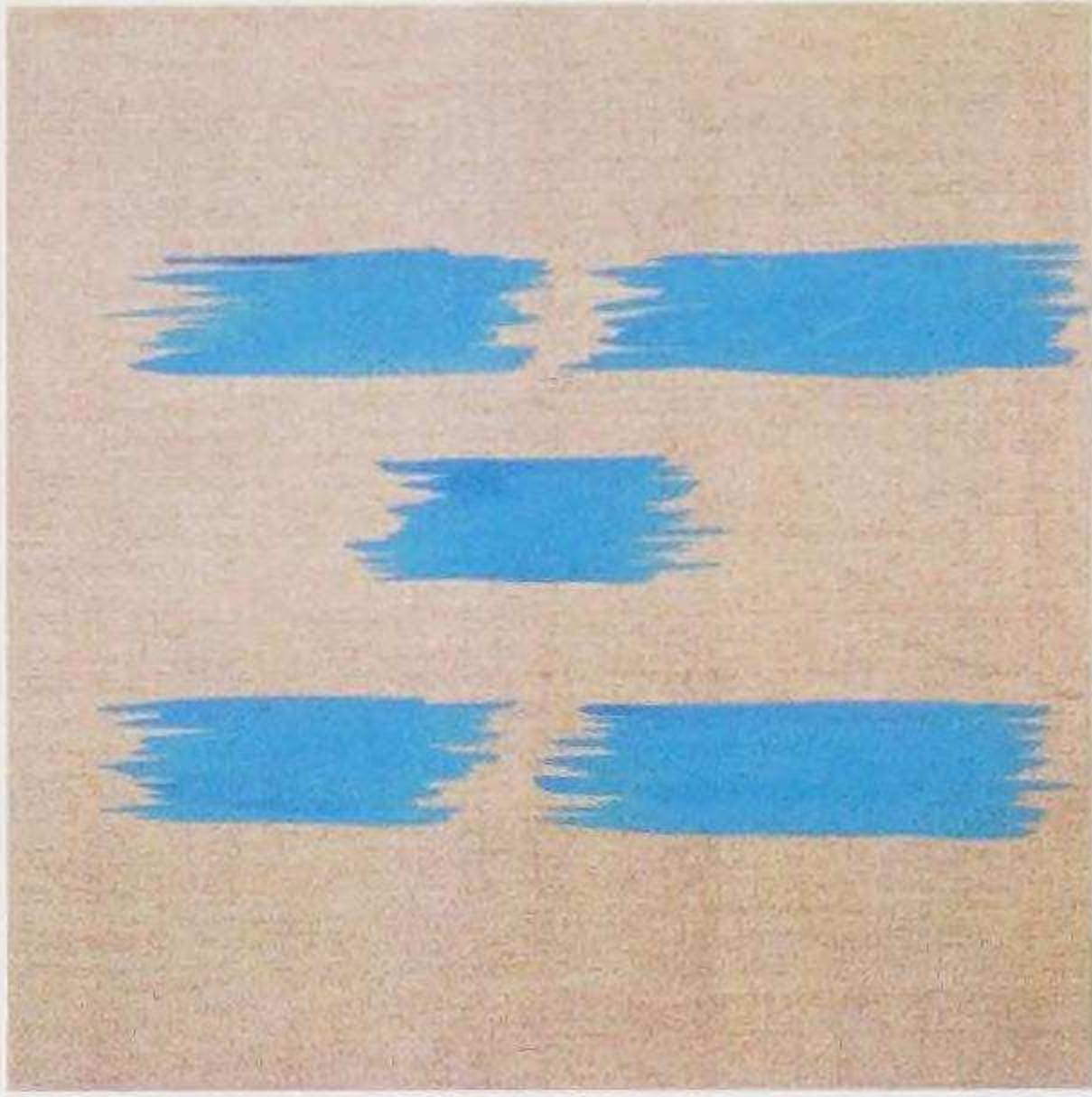
blue paper, endless supply

7 1/2 in. at ideal height × 29 × 23 in.

(19.1 × 73.7 × 58.4 cm.) [original paper size]

Executed in 1990

Private Collection



64–65

Ed Ruscha (b. 1937)

Hi There, My Old Friend

acrylic on raw linen

18 x 18 in. (45.7 x 45.7 cm.)

Painted in 1994

Courtesy of the artist and Gagosian



66–67

Roy Lichtenstein (1923–1997)

Seductive Girl (Study)

graphite and coloured pencil on tracing paper

10 ¹¹/₁₆ x 13 in. (27.1 x 33 cm.)

Executed in 1996

Private Collection, Courtesy

Castelli Gallery, New York



68–69

Cy Twombly (1928–2011)

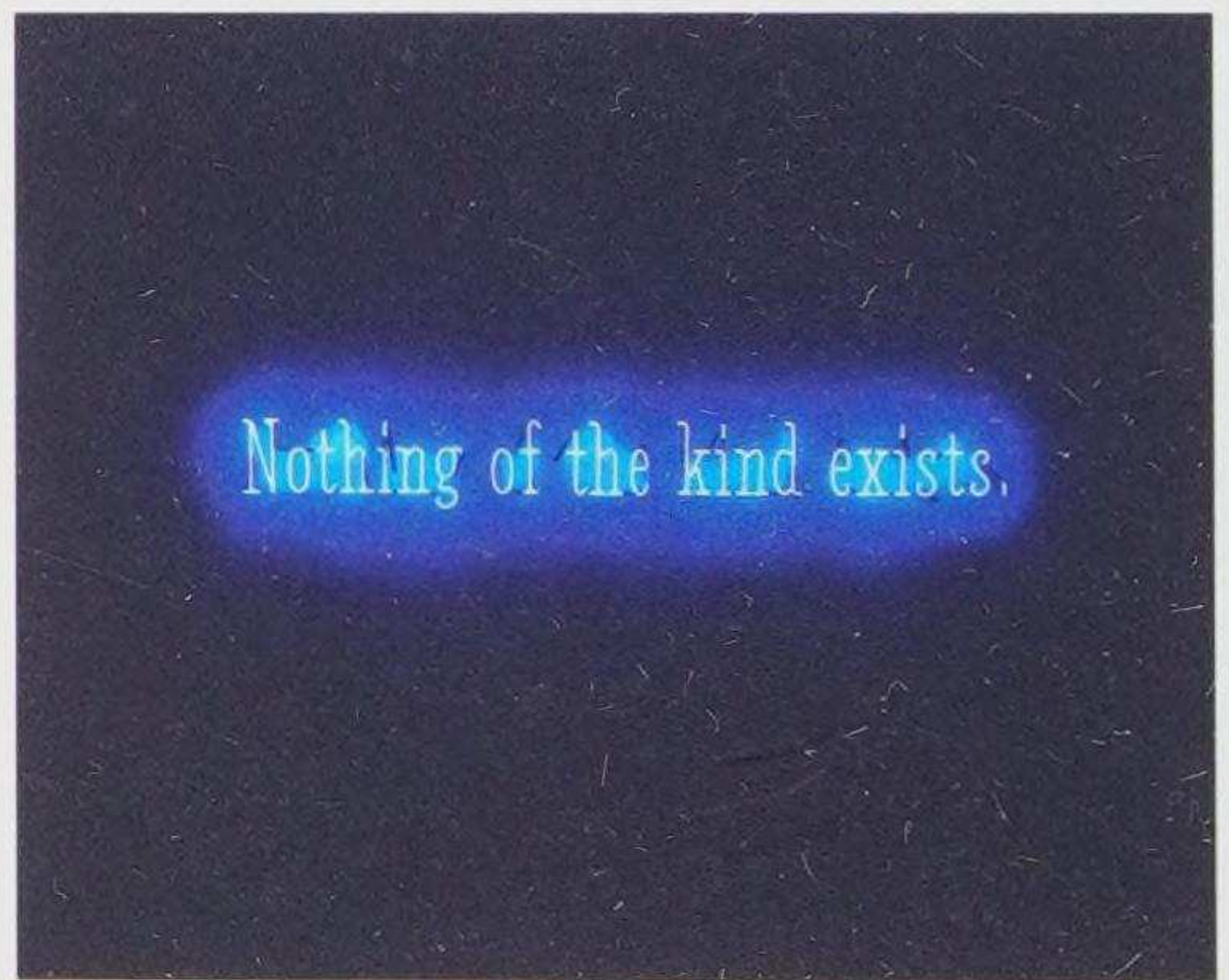
Untitled, Gaeta

plaster, wood and acrylic

17 ⁵/₁₆ x 15 ³/₄ x 10 ⁵/₈ in. (44 x 40 x 27 cm.)

Executed in 2005

Collection Cy Twombly Foundation



70–71

Joseph Kosuth (b. 1945)

Nineteen Eighty-Four (Orwell) #4

cobalt blue neon

7 x 74 in. (18 x 188 cm.)

Executed in 2019

Blue COLOUR IS
everlastingly

APPOINTED BY

the deity

TO BE A SOURCE OF

delight.

— JOHN RUSKIN —

Lecture 1, Architecture, November 1853

Published on the occasion of the exhibition
Monochrome No.2

11 February – 25 April 2020

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Editor: Pilar Ordovas
Project managers: Georgina Rumbellow, Natasha Rosenblatt, Silvia Ricci,
Louise Chignac and Clare Roberts
Copy editor: Liane Jones

Design by Sinéad Madden
Printed in England by Pureprint, Uckfield

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ISBN 978-1-9996681-6-7

Bibliography: p. 20: Yves Klein, 1957 – translated from the French original, in *Yves Klein le Monochrome: il nuovo realismo del colore* (exh. cat.), Milan, Galleria Apollinaire, November 1961. Photography: pages 6 and 7: Courtesy of Getty Images; pages 11, 12, 13, 50, 63, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 77 and 78: Photo by Andrew Smart and Stuart Burford; page 19: Photo: Shunk-Kender © J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles; page 23: Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (Musée national Picasso-Paris) / Mathieu Rabeau © Succession Picasso/DACS, London 2020; pages 24 and 25: The Pierre and Maria-Gaetana Matisse Collection, 2002 © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, NY © Successió Miró / ADAGP, Paris and DACS London 2020; pages 26 and 27: Charles Wilp's studio, Düsseldorf, Germany © Photo: Charles Wilp / BPK, Berlin; pages 30 and 31: Photo by Wallace Kirkland/The LIFE Picture Collection via Getty Images; pages 32 and 33: From the pages of LIFE © 1951 The Picture Collection Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted/Translated from LIFE and published with permission of The Picture Collection Inc. Reproduction in any manner in any language in whole or in part without written permission is prohibited. LIFE is a registered trademark of TI Gotham Inc. LIFE and the LIFE logo are registered trademarks of TI Gotham Inc. used under license; pages 36, 37, 67 and 78: Private Collection, Courtesy Castelli Gallery, New York; pages 42, 43 and 61: Courtesy David Zwirner; pages 47, 65 and 78: Courtesy of the artist and Gagolian; pages 48 and 49: Photo by Evelyn Hofer © Estate of Evelyn Hofer; pages 63 and 77: Courtesy of The Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation; pages 69 and 78: Courtesy Archives Fondazione Nicola Del Roscio. Photo by Giorgio Benni.

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We would also like to extend our profound thanks to Lauren Allday, Jason Andrew, David Baum, Ysabel Pinyol Blasi, Broc Blegen, Barbara Bertozzi Castelli, Susan Davidson, Mary Dean, Dorothee Dujardin, Seamus Farrell, Stephen Flavin, James Fox, Emilie Keldie, Joseph Kosuth, Simon Lee, Perry Levine, Shu Ming Lim, James Mackay, Cristina Vere Nicoll, Zoë Roché, Nicola Del Roscio, John Silberman and Joan Washburn for all their time and willingness to help, as well as for their important contributions to this exhibition.

