

## Ernest Mancoba

*Aicon Gallery Exhibition February 23<sup>rd</sup> – March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017*

*Press Preview & V.I.P. Reception: Thursday, February 23<sup>rd</sup> 6:00pm – 8:00pm*

*35 Great Jones St., New York NY 10012*

**Aicon Gallery** is proud to present the first major New York solo exhibition by renowned South African artist **Ernest Mancoba**. Ernest Mancoba (1904-2002) was born and raised as a black man under the South African apartheid system. In 1938 he moved to Paris to be able to study, work, and especially, to think freely as an artist. At the end of World War Two, Mancoba moved to Denmark with his wife, artist Sonja Ferlov-Mancoba, where they would both become founding members of the COBRA avant-garde art movement. The COBRA doctrine was comprised in part by a stress on the absolute freedom of form and color with a focus on spontaneity and experiment, a reaction against the prevailing tenets of Surrealism, and inspiration drawn from children's drawings and "primitive art." Mancoba's work represents a unique synthesis of modern European art and African spirit. His goal was to bring to European art his deep understanding of African culture, represented by the frequently appearing totems in his drawings and paintings that reflect the humanist Ubuntu philosophy, which developed in Southern Africa and stresses "the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity." Or, as Mancoba put it: "A human is a human by and for other people." The exhibition is staged in generous partnership with **Galerie Mikael Andersen**, Copenhagen and the **Estate of Ernest Mancoba**.



Ernest Mancoba, *Untitled (1)*, 1985, Oil on canvas, 31.5 x 25.5 in. Image courtesy of the Estate of Ernest Mancoba and Galerie Mikael Andersen, Copenhagen.

Mancoba's interest in art began in 1925 at the Grace Dieu mission school outside of Johannesburg, where he initially trained in wood-carving and furniture making before deciding to pursue fine art full time and moving to Cape Town in 1935. Upon his arrival in Paris in 1938, Mancoba continued his art studies at the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs de Paris. When the Germans occupied Paris during World War Two, Mancoba was arrested and spent time in a Nazi internment camp. At the war's end, Mancoba and Sonja decided to relocate to Denmark and immerse themselves in the European avant-garde art movements of the time. Although he was a founding member of COBRA and exhibited with them from 1948-51, his relationship to and influence on the group was, until very recently, almost erased from the historical records and texts pertaining to the movement. Many have argued that this marginalization was due to a combination of a Eurocentric notion of Modernism, which would have viewed both Mancoba and his work as representative of a "primitive" Other, and the "ghettoization" or categorizing of his practice as inherently "African" and thus apart from Europe's modernist movements. Despite this, Mancoba consistently challenged and defied what was expected from him as a "Black Artist" by his European artistic counterparts and scholars, and developed his own uniquely subjective practice that cannot be classified or pigeon-holed as African or "primitive" Modernism.

As such, Mancoba's historical importance to the founding of a notion of global Modernism cannot be overstated. Indeed, as the eminent artist and scholar **Rasheed Araeen**, who has written extensively on Mancoba, has stated:



**Ernest Mancoba**, *Untitled (Figure 7)*, Oil on canvas, 24 x 19.5 in. Image courtesy of the Estate of Ernest Mancoba and Galerie Mikael Andersen, Copenhagen.

*"What is extraordinary about Mancoba's achievement is that he is very likely the first artist from the whole colonized world – Africa, Asia, the Americas, Australasia, and the Pacific – to enter the central core of modernism at a time when this world, particularly his own country of South Africa, was still struggling under Colonialism, and to challenge modernism's historical paradigm on its own terms."*

Historical and sociopolitical issues aside, Mancoba's work more than holds its own amongst the 20<sup>th</sup> century's preeminent practitioners and proponents of avant-garde Modern art, whether globally or in the West. As his practice reached maturity in the late fifties and early sixties, a primary focus of his work emerged in delicate linear compositions on paper and canvas of version after version of a central totem-like abstracted figure composed with a minimal use of controlled but vibrant lines and subtle splashes of diffused color. As Mancoba himself stated about this focus in his art, "In my painting it is difficult to say whether the central form is abstract or not. What I am concerned with, is whether the form can bring to life and transmit, with the strongest effect and by the lightest means possible,

the being which has been in me..." The canvases and drawings in this exhibition represent this central concern of Mancoba's and are accompanied by an additional set of the artist's talismanic calligraphic drawings, in which figuration succumbs entirely to expressionistic groupings of line and color resembling a series of mystical alphabets suffused with life and movement yet rendered with an astounding economy of means.

Only now, after a lifetime of marginalization and miscategorization, does Mancoba's work seem to finally be garnering the critical attention and reevaluation it deserves, when viewed as pioneering and defining a crucial moment in art history at the crossroads of a Eurocentric verses a global understanding of Modern art. At the end of apartheid, Mancoba was honored with large retrospectives at the National Gallery in Cape Town and the Museum of Modern Art in Johannesburg. His work has been included in major institutional exhibitions at the Tate Britain, Haus der Kunst, Munich, and MOMA PS1 in New York and will be shown in this year's Documenta 14, Universe in Universe in Kassel and Athens. This is the artist's first major solo exhibition in New York and the first showing of his work at Aicon Gallery.

Please contact Aicon Gallery ([Andrew@Aicongallery.com](mailto:Andrew@Aicongallery.com)) for more information.



## Ernest Mancoba



**Ernest Mancoba**, *Untitled (1)*, 1985, Oil on canvas, 31.5 x 25.5 in.

## Ernest Mancoba



**Ernest Mancoba**, *Untitled (2)*, 1963, Oil on canvas, 24 x 19.5 in.



## Ernest Mancoba



**Ernest Mancoba**, *Untitled (3)*, Oil on canvas, 16.5 x 13 in.



## Ernest Mancoba



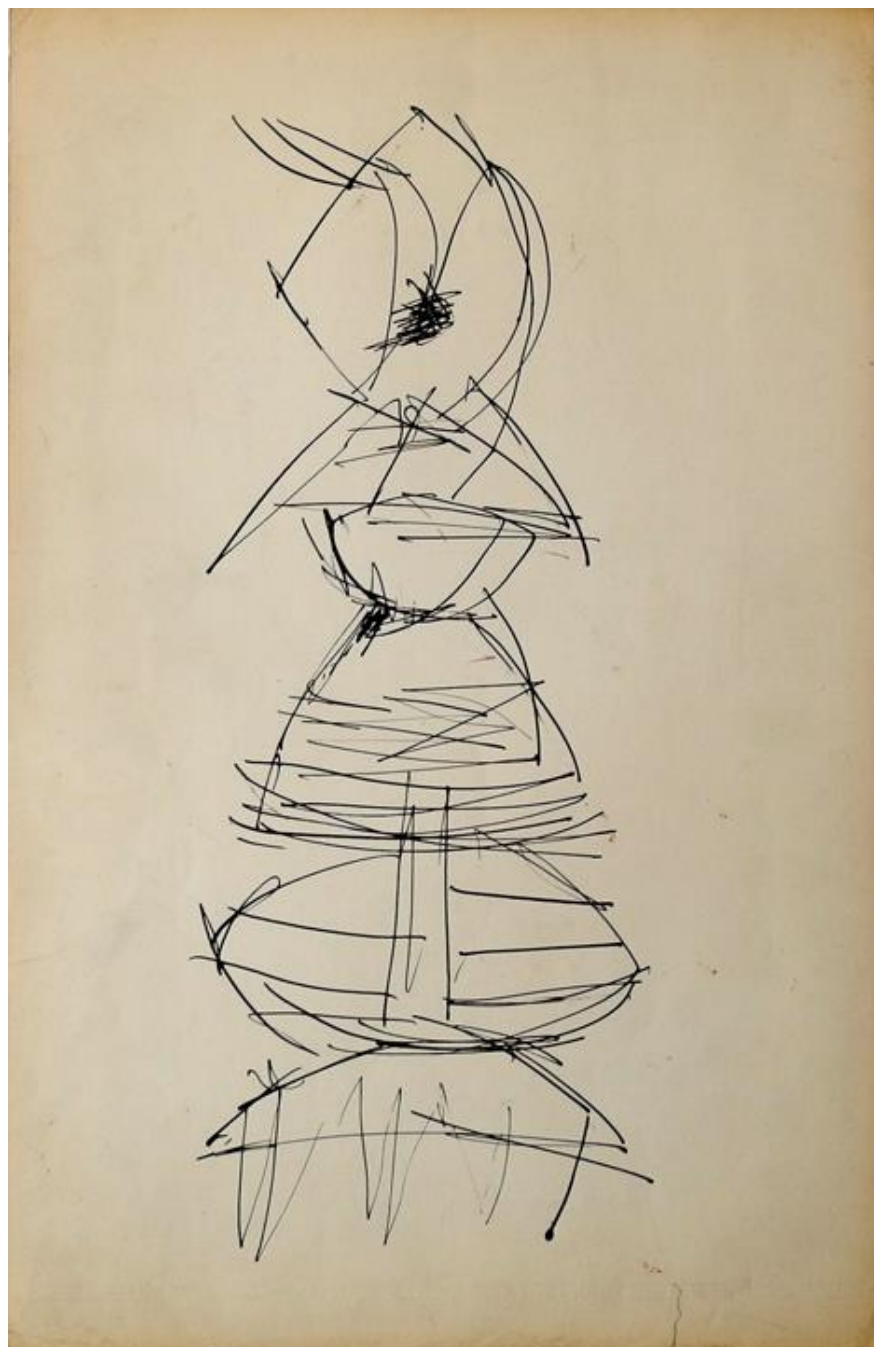
**Ernest Mancoba**, *Untitled (4)*, 1958, Oil on canvas, 16.5 x 13 in.

# Ernest Mancoba



**Ernest Mancoba**, *Untitled (Figure 1)*, 1973, Ink on paper, 19.5 x 13 in.

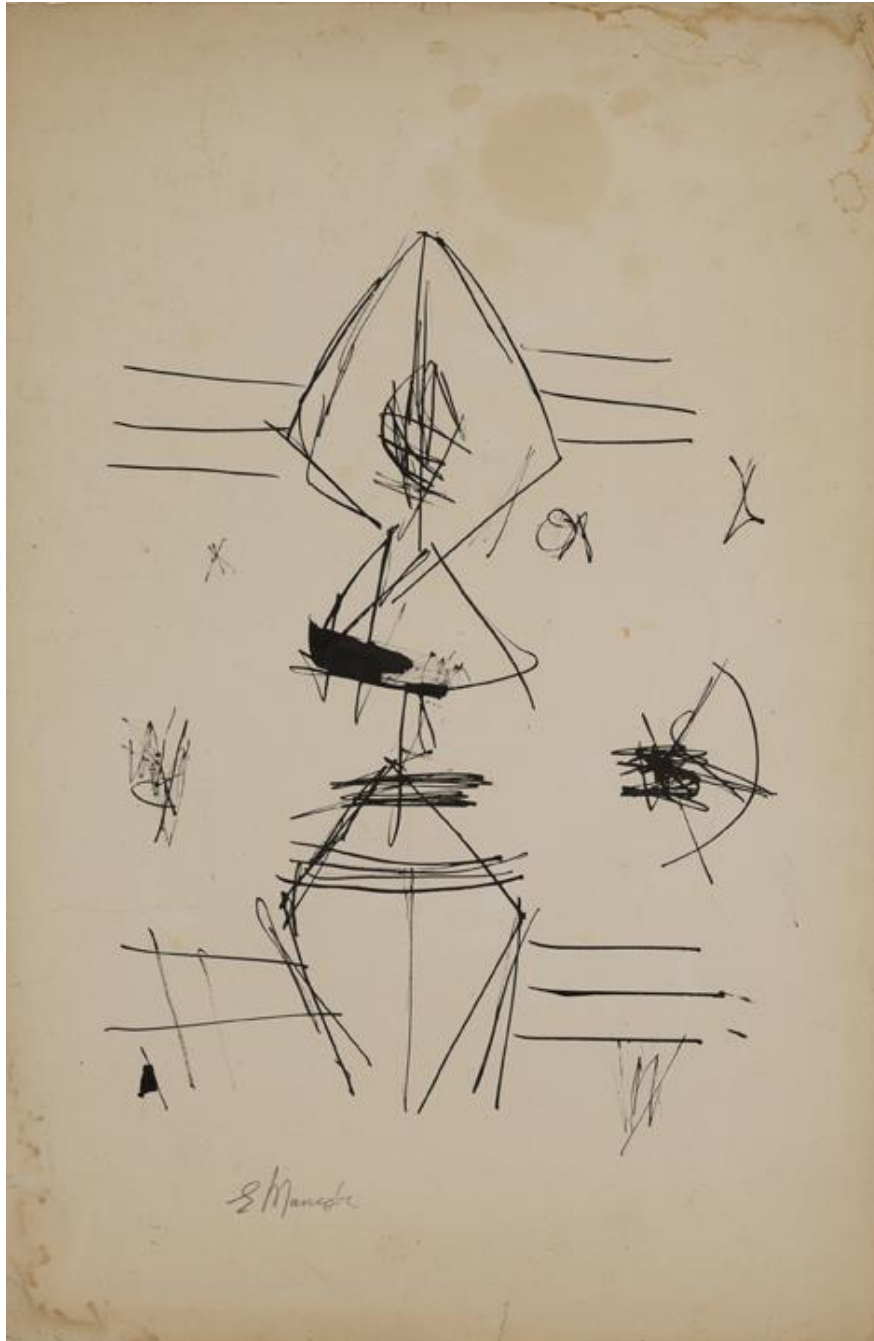
## Ernest Mancoba



**Ernest Mancoba**, *Untitled (Figure 2)*, Ink on paper, 19.5 x 13 in.

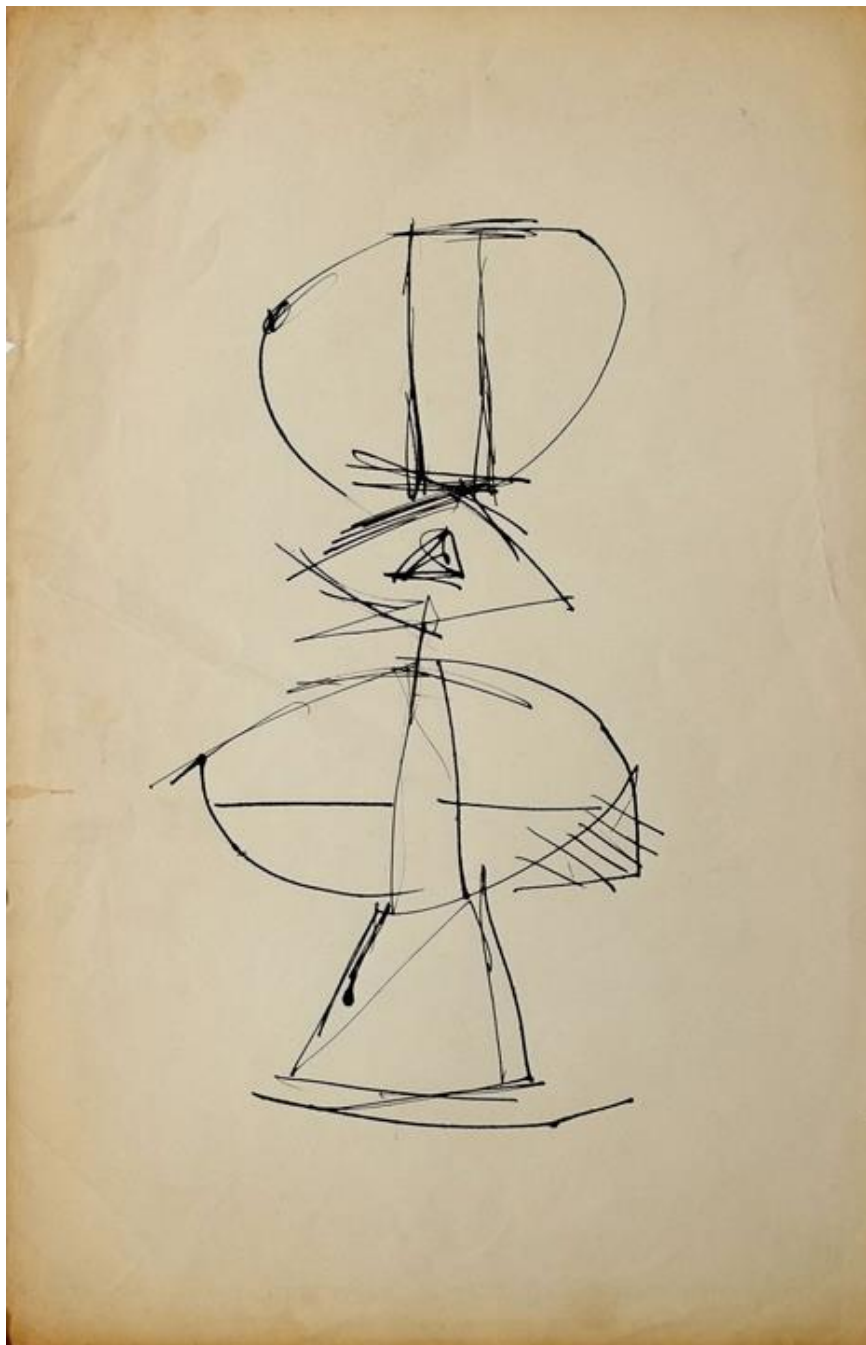


# Ernest Mancoba



**Ernest Mancoba**, *Untitled (Figure 3)*, c. 1975, Ink on paper, 19.5 x 12.5 in.

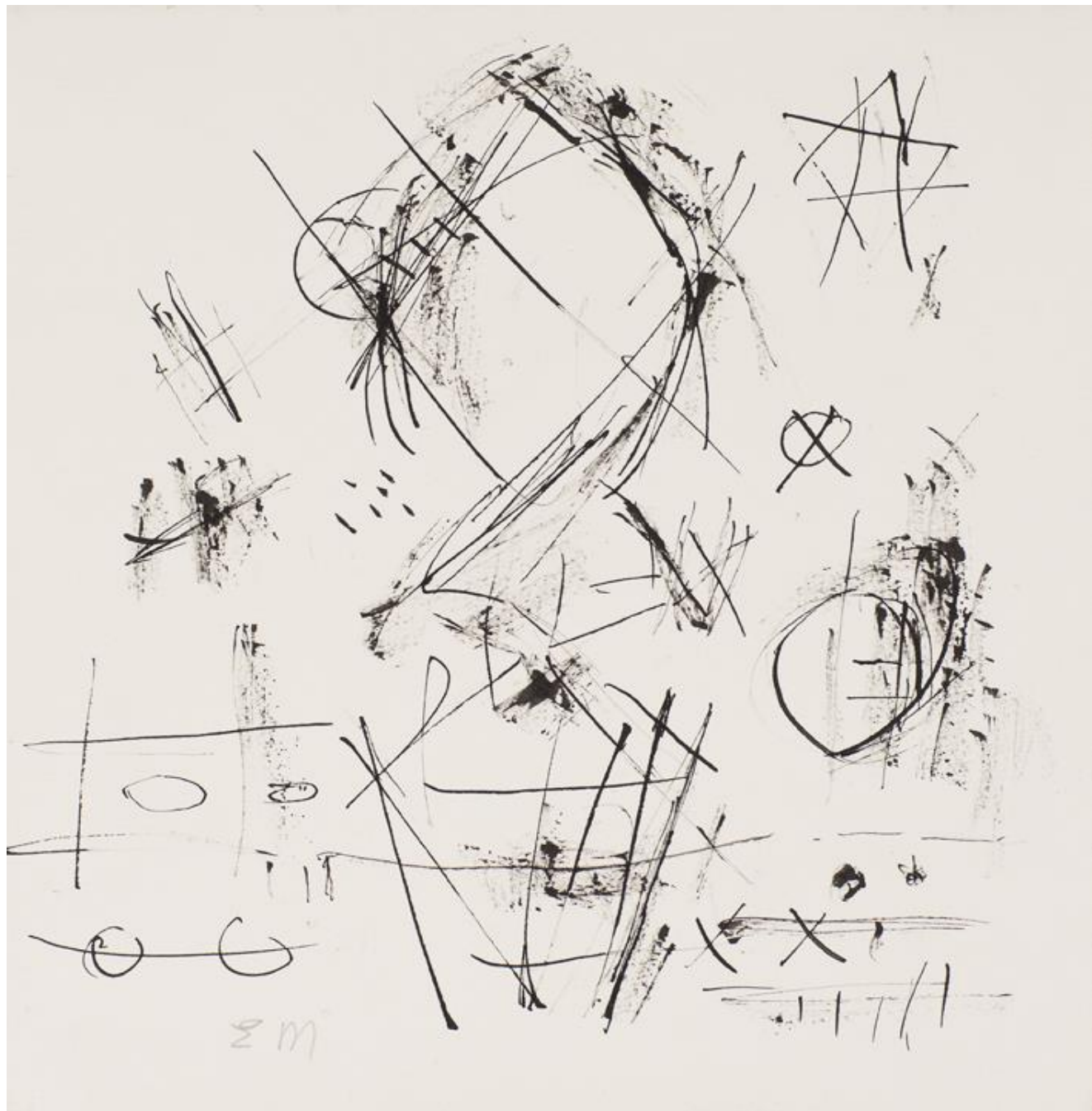
## Ernest Mancoba



**Ernest Mancoba**, *Untitled (Figure 4)*, Ink on paper, 19.5 x 12.5 in.

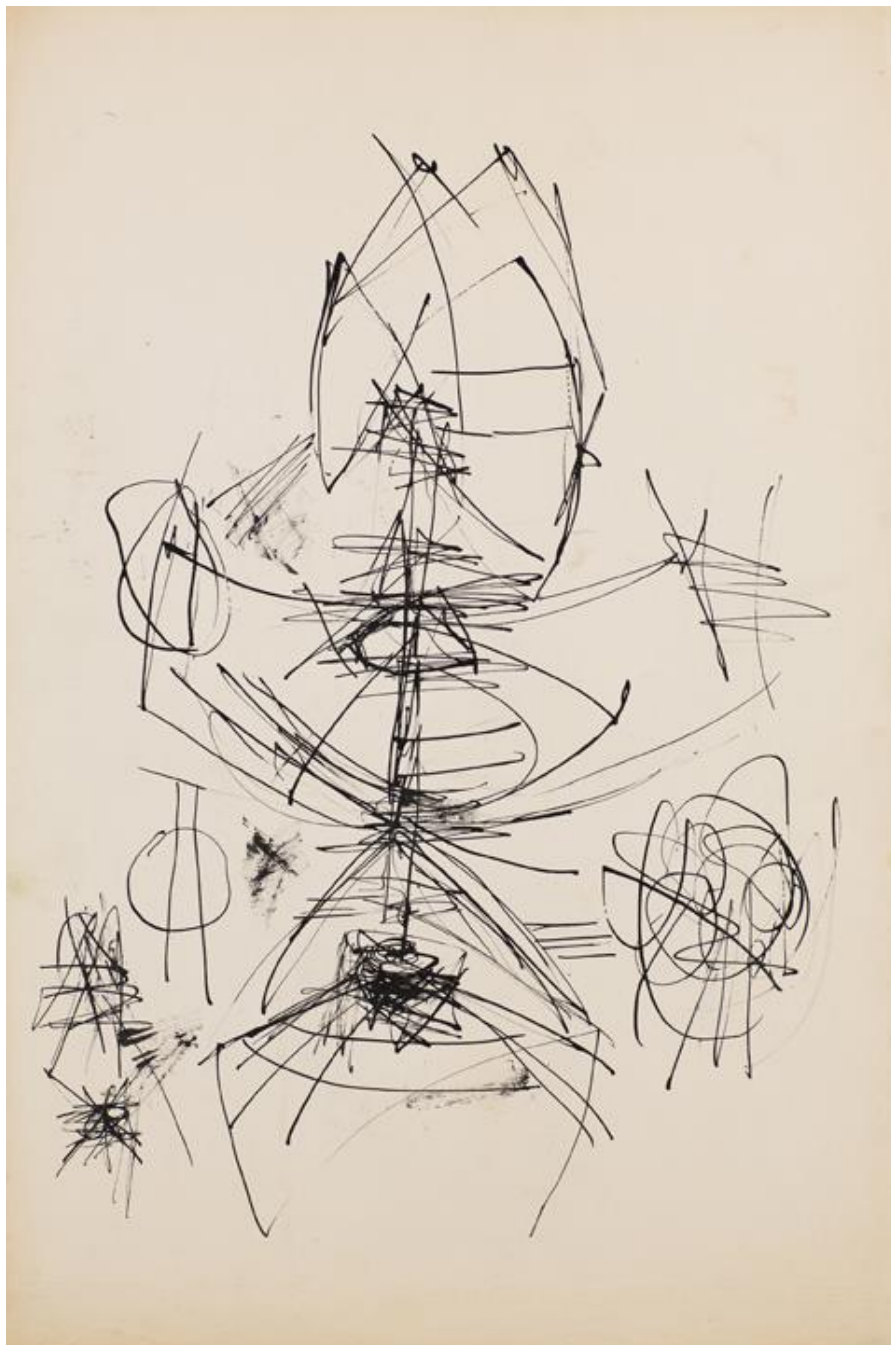


## Ernest Mancoba



**Ernest Mancoba**, *Untitled (Figure 5)*, Ink on paper, 11 x 10.5 in.

# Ernest Mancoba



**Ernest Mancoba**, *Untitled (Figure 6)*, Ink on paper, 19 x 12.5 in.

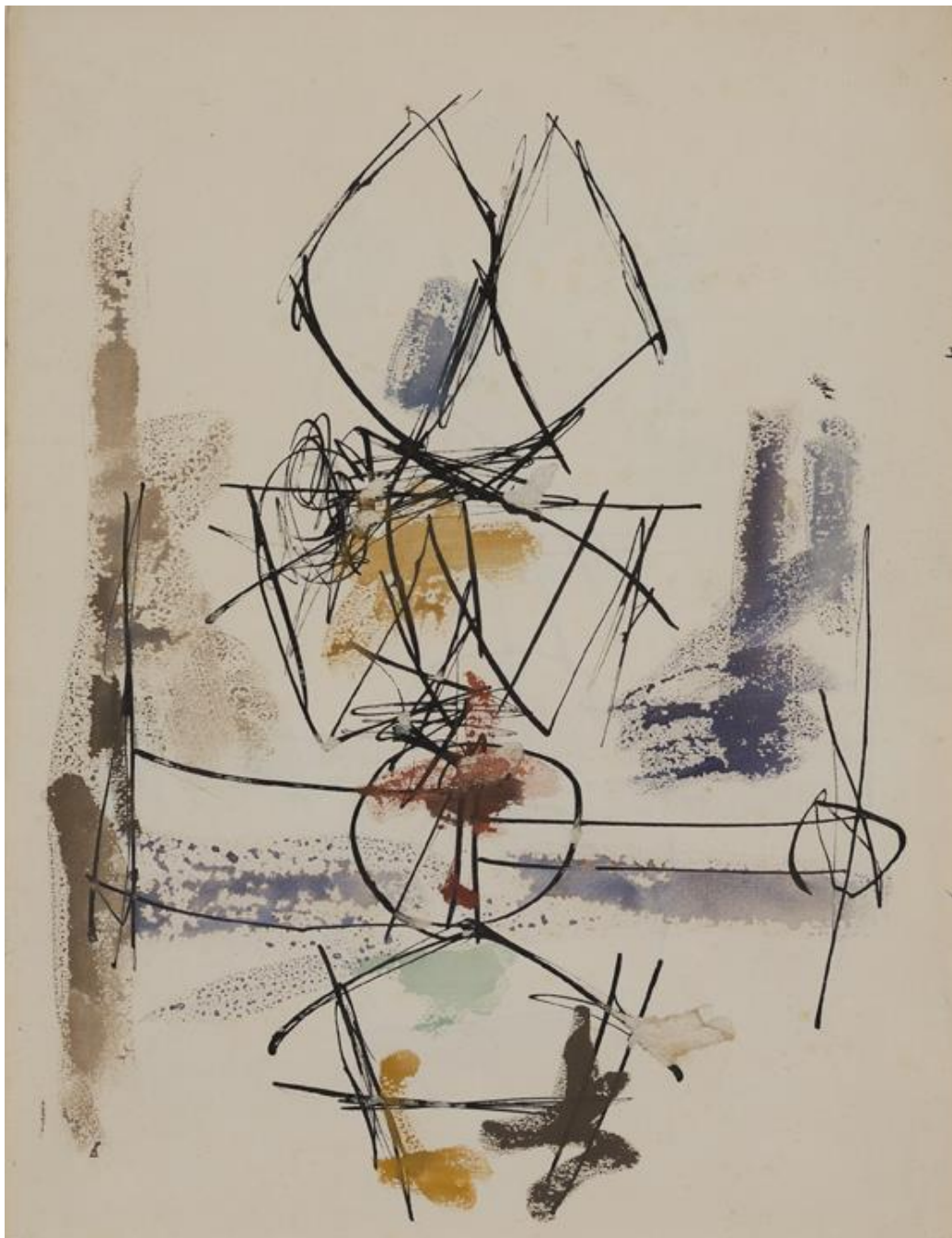


# Ernest Mancoba



**Ernest Mancoba**, *Untitled (Figures)*, Ink and oil pastel on paper, 16 x 23 in.

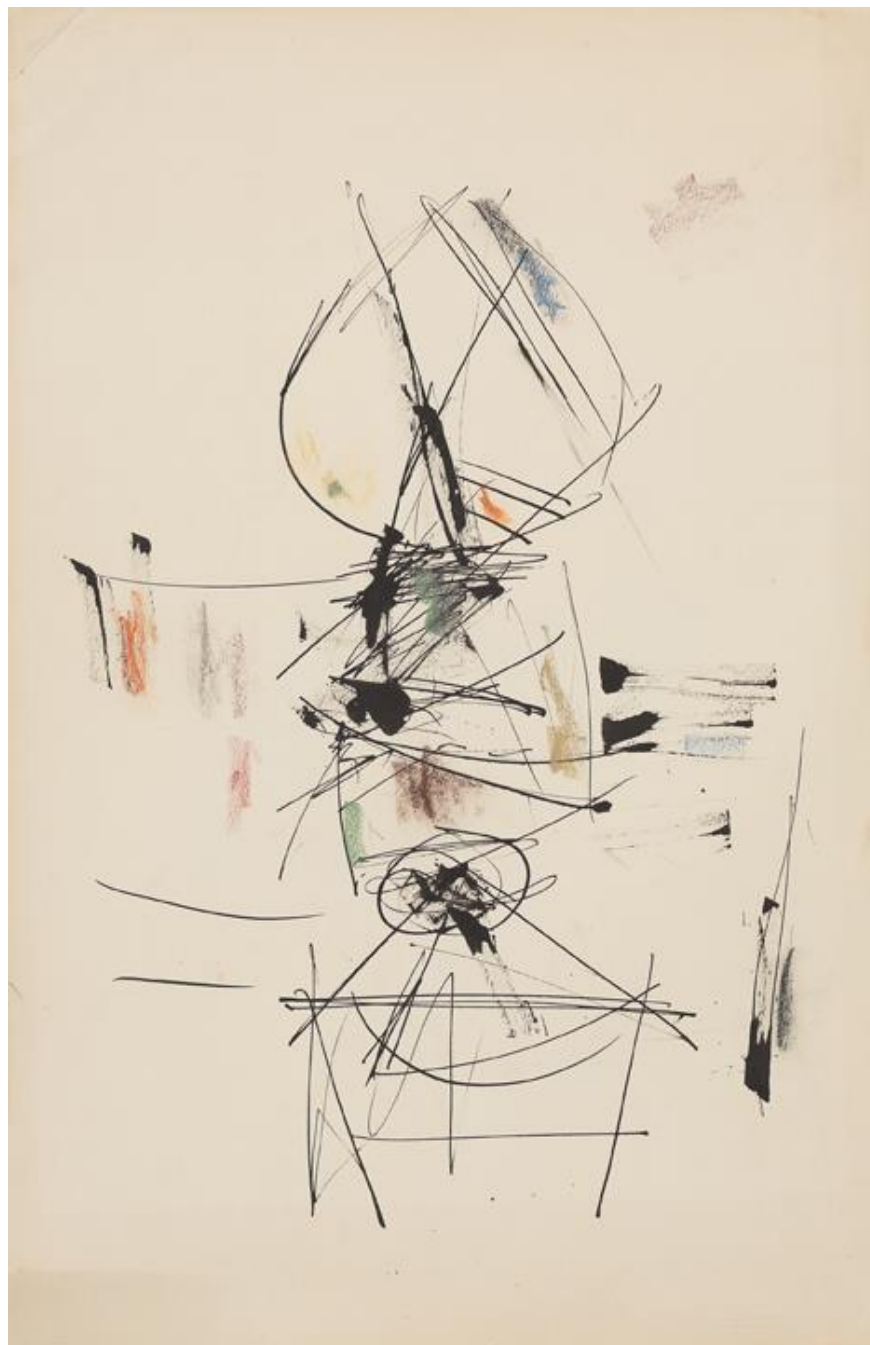
# Ernest Mancoba



**Ernest Mancoba**, *Untitled (Figure 7)*, Ink and watercolor on paper, 13 x 9.5 in.



# Ernest Mancoba



**Ernest Mancoba**, *Untitled (Figure 8)*, Ink and oil pastel on paper, 19.5 x 13 in.

## Ernest Mancoba



**Ernest Mancoba**, *Untitled (Figure 9)*, Ink and watercolor on paper, 19.5 x 12 in.

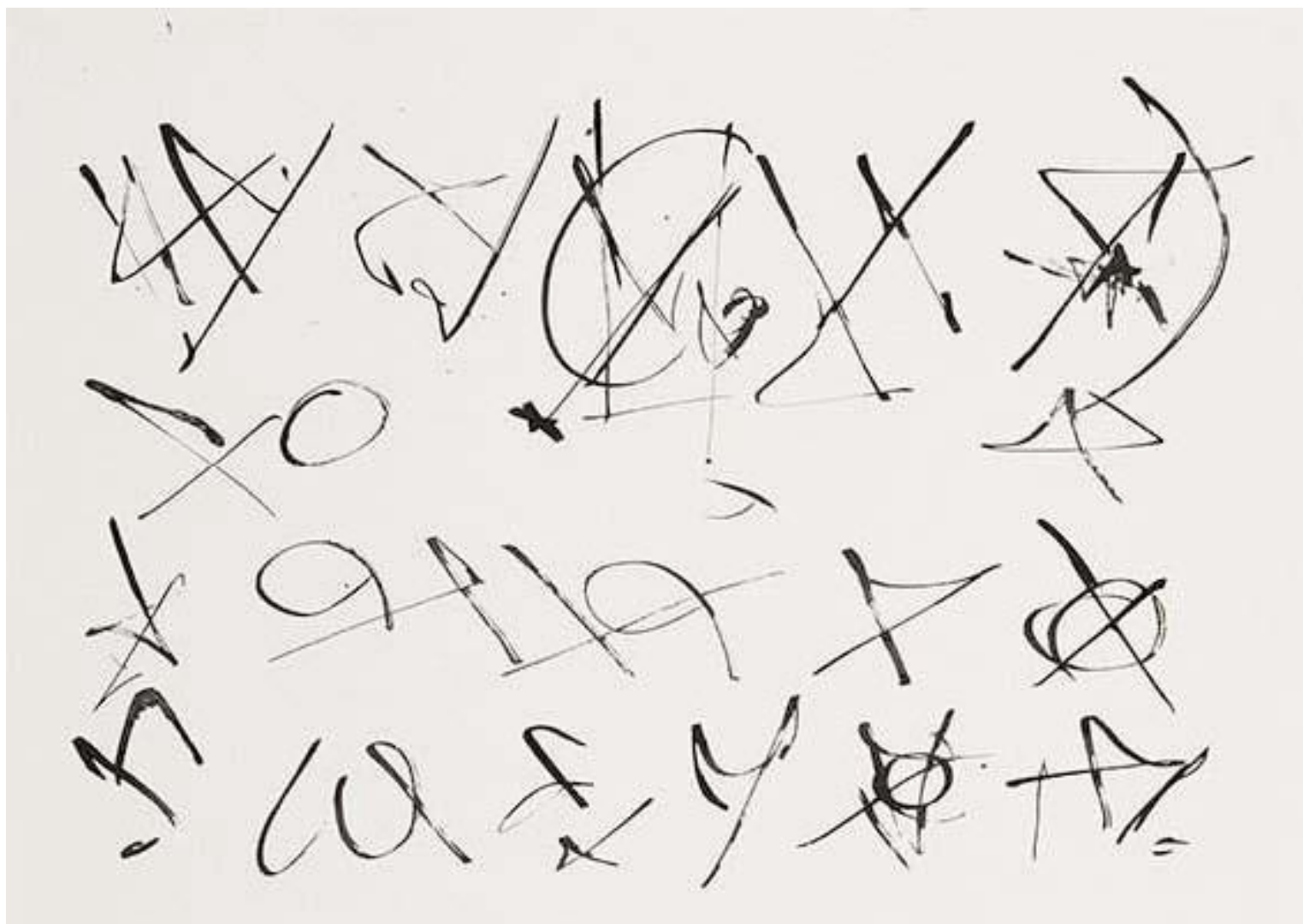
## Ernest Mancoba



**Ernest Mancoba**, *Untitled (Figure 9)*, Ink and watercolor on paper, 16.5 x 11.5 in.

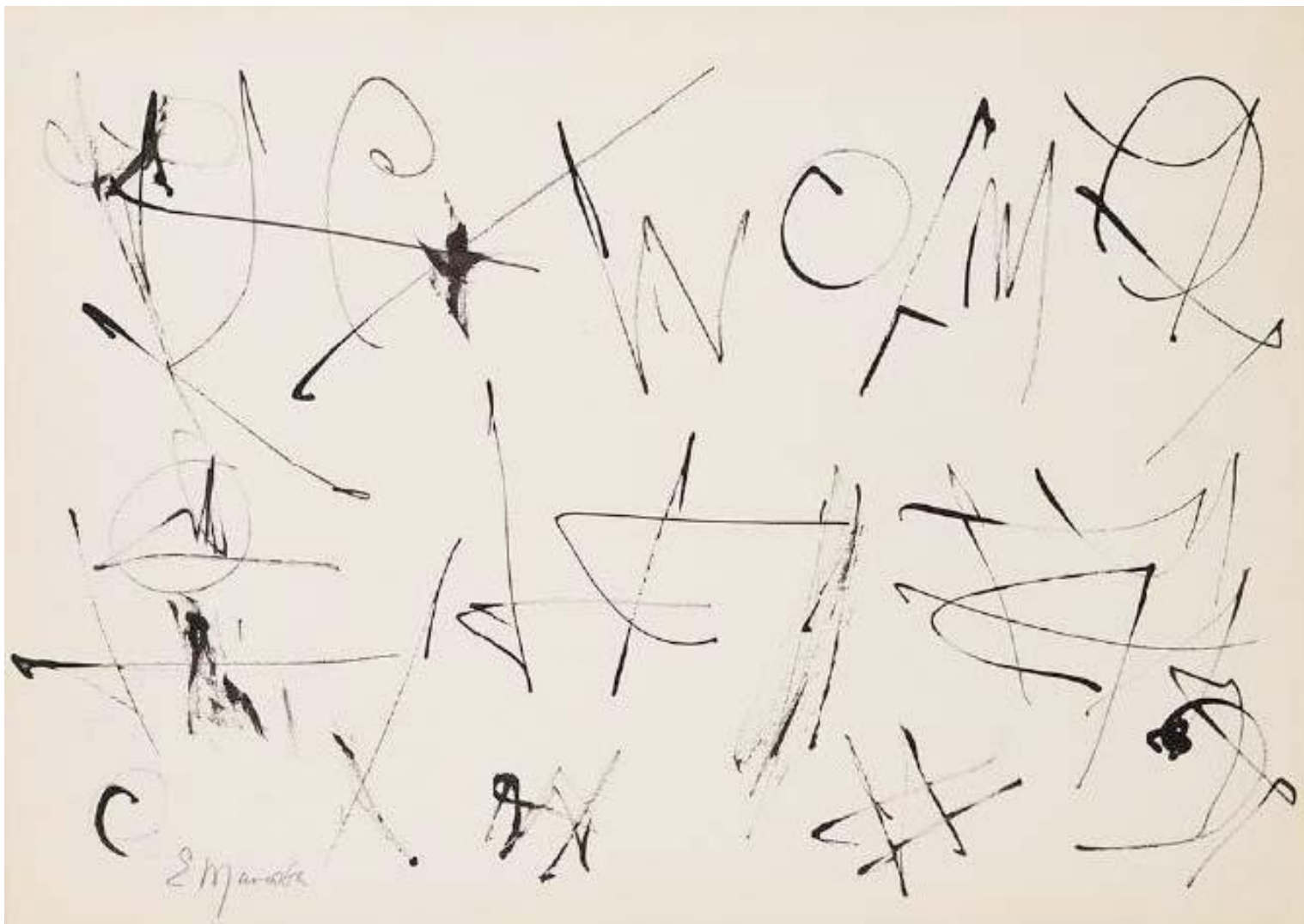


## Ernest Mancoba



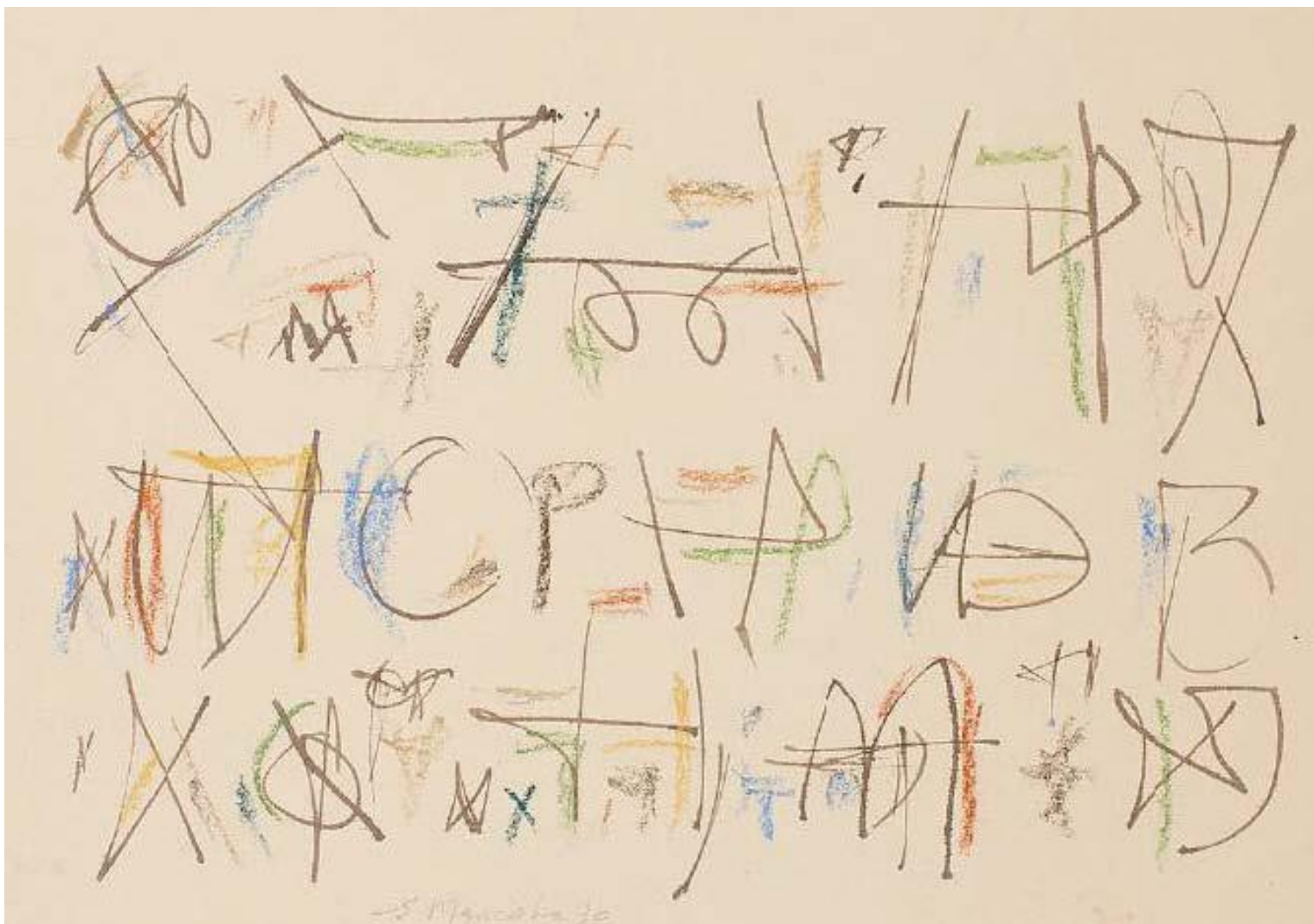
**Ernest Mancoba**, *Untitled (Calligraphic 1)*, Ink on paper, 11.5 x 16.5 in.

## Ernest Mancoba



**Ernest Mancoba**, *Untitled (Calligraphic 2)*, 1990-92, Ink on paper, 11.5 x 16.5 in.

## Ernest Mancoba



**Ernest Mancoba**, *Untitled (Calligraphic 3)*, 1990, Ink and oil pastel on paper, 10.5 x 15 in.

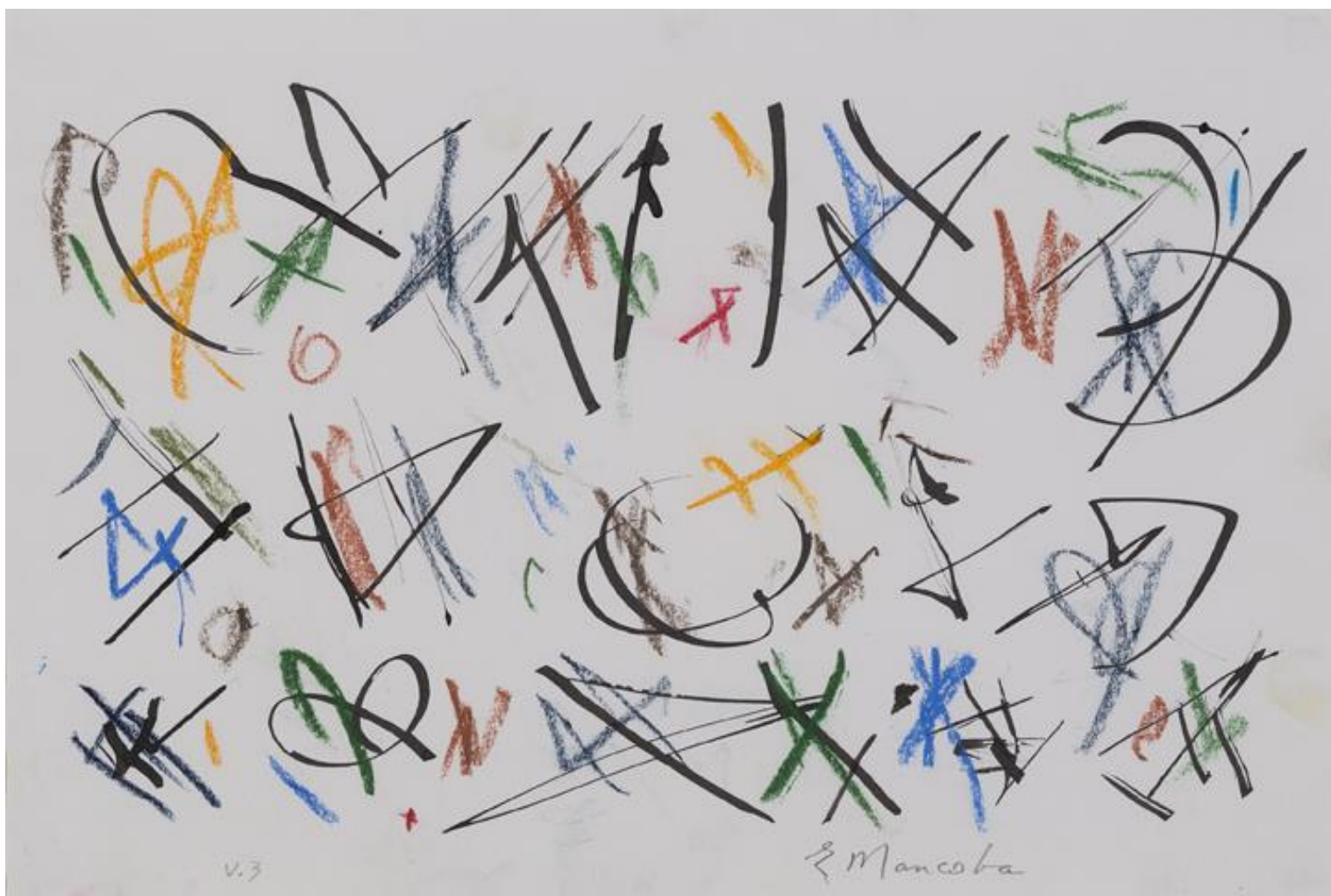


## Ernest Mancoba



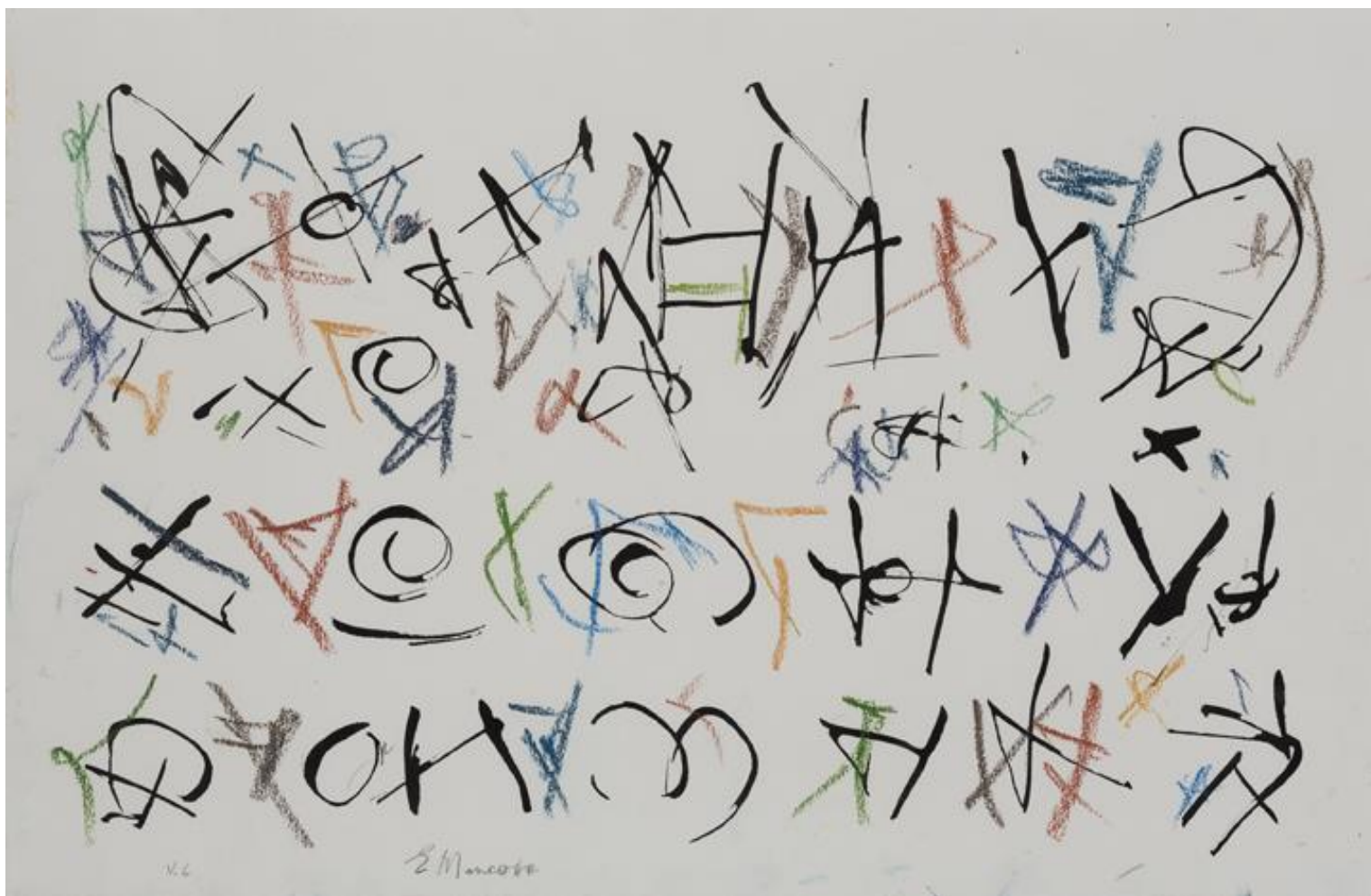
**Ernest Mancoba**, *Untitled (Calligraphic 4)*, 1990, Ink and oil pastel on paper, 19.5 x 25.5 in.

## Ernest Mancoba



**Ernest Mancoba**, *Untitled (V.3)*, 1993, Ink and oil pastel on paper, 8.5 x 12.5 in.

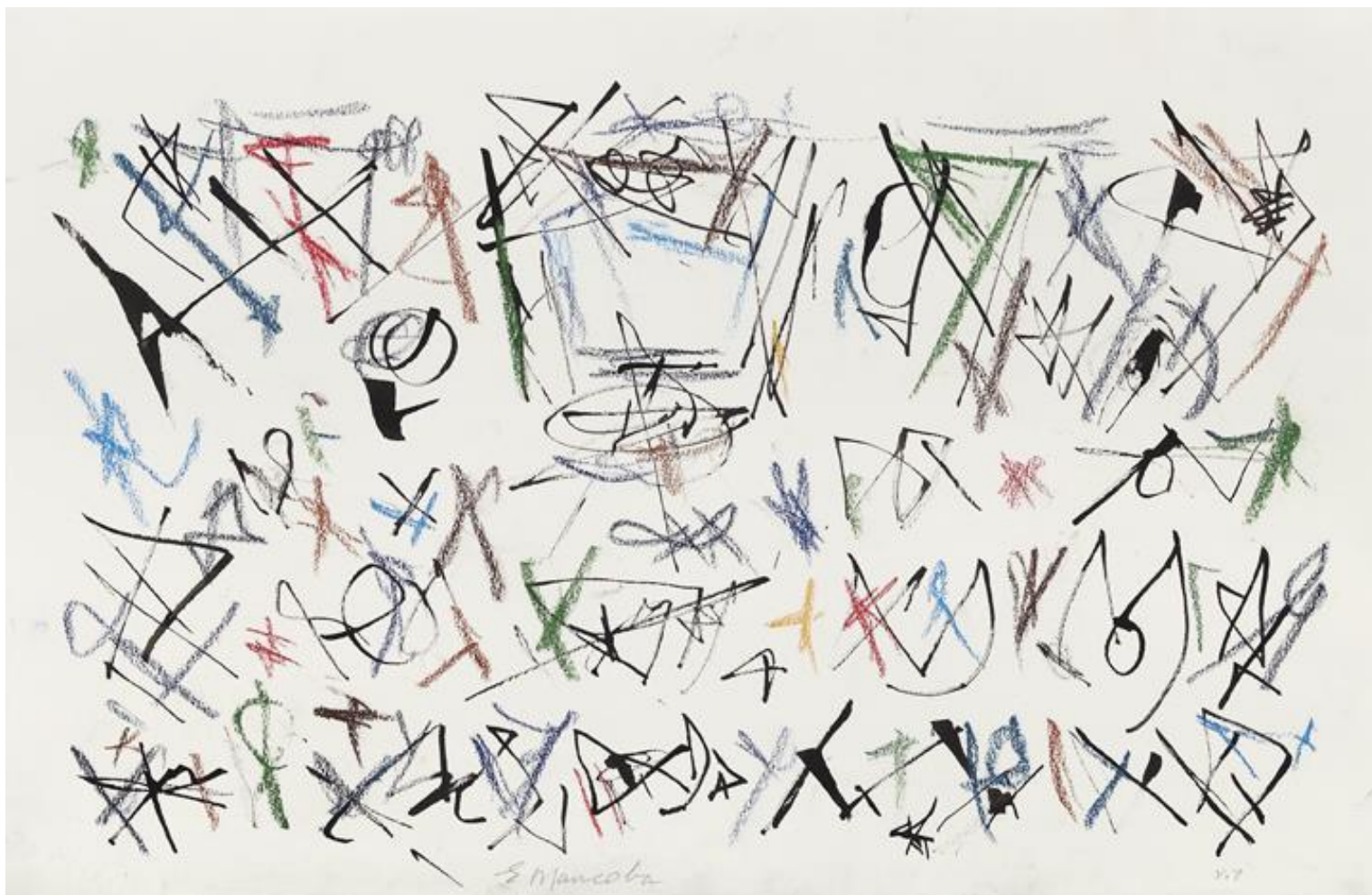
## Ernest Mancoba



**Ernest Mancoba**, *Untitled (V.6)*, 1993, Ink and oil pastel on paper, 12.5 x 20.5 in.

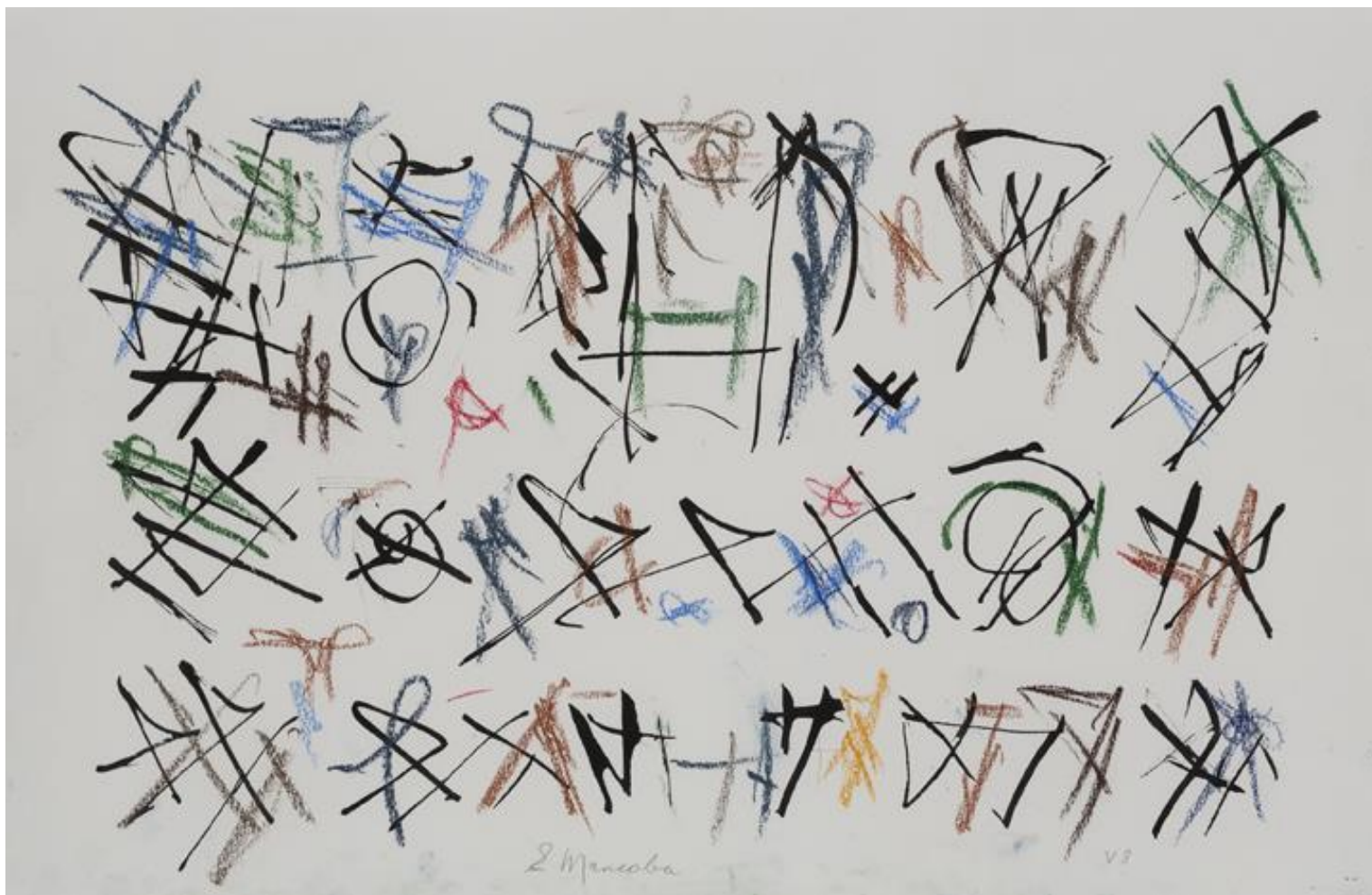


## Ernest Mancoba



**Ernest Mancoba**, *Untitled (V.7)*, 1993, Mixed media on paper, 12.5 x 19.5 in.

## Ernest Mancoba



**Ernest Mancoba**, *Untitled (V.8)*, 1993, Ink and oil pastel on paper, 12.5 x 19.5 in.

## ERNEST MANCOBA

Ernest Mancoba (1904-2002) was born and raised a black man under the South African apartheid system. In 1938 he moved to Paris to be able to study and, as he later wrote in a text for the Danish artist Ejler Bille's 90th birthday, to work, and especially think, freely as an artist. In Paris, Mancoba met with the Danish artists' colony and soon joined the CoBrA circle. In 1942, he married the Danish artist, Sonja Ferlov Mancoba. They both showed at Høststudstillingen in Copenhagen in 1948 and 1949.

Ernest Mancoba's work represents a unique synthesis of modern European art and African spirit. His goal was to bring to European art his deep understanding of African culture, represented by the frequently appearing totems in his drawings and paintings that reflect the umuntu philosophy he so often referred to: A human is a human by and for other people. After the end of apartheid, Mancoba was honoured with large retrospectives at the National Gallery in Cape Town and the Museum of Modern Art in Johannesburg.

### Education

1938-1941      École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs de Paris

### Selected Exhibitions

2015	<i>The Avant-Garde Won't Give Up: Cobra and Its Legacy</i> , Blum & Poe, NYC
2014	EWS, Stevenson gallery, Cape Town, South Africa
2011	EWS, Galerie Mikael Andersen, Copenhagen
2001	<i>El tiempo de Africa</i> , La Sala de Plaza de España, Madrid
	<i>El tiempo de Africa</i> , C.I.T., Las Palmas de Canaria
1993	<i>Choix d'estampes – Cobra</i> , Paris
	<i>Retour sur Cobra</i> , Galerie Artcurial, Paris
	<i>Images of Africa</i> , Vejle Kunstmuseum, Denmark
1989	<i>Images of Wood</i> , Johannesburg Art Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa
1988	<i>Cobra – 40 years later</i> , Nieuwe Kerk, Amsterdam
	<i>The neglected Tradition</i> , Johannesburg, South Africa
	<i>Cobra is my mirror</i> , Odense, Denmark
1986	<i>Den Globale Dialog</i> , Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark
1984	<i>Cobra Movement</i> , Caracas, Venezuela
1982-83	<i>Cobra Retrospective</i> , Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville, Paris
1977	<i>Ernest Mancoba</i> , retrospective exhibition touring to Kunstforeningen, Copenhagen; Fyns Stifts Kunstmuseum, Odense and Silkeborg Kunstmuseum, Silkeborg, Denmark
1972	Den Frie Udstilling, Copenhagen
1969	<i>Ernest Mancoba</i> , Kunstmuseums in Holstebro and Århus
1951	<i>Sonja Ferlov Mancoba, Grethe Inge Pedersen and Ernest Mancoba</i> , Galerie Birch, Copenhagen
1950	Became a member of Cobra
1949	<i>Cobra</i> , Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam – was invited, but differences of opinion within the Høst-movement prevented participation
	<i>The Høst Exhibition</i> , Copenhagen
1948	<i>The Høst Exhibition</i> , Copenhagen