



CONGO CATALOGUE RAISONNÉ

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## THE CONGO EXPERIMENT, 1956 to 1959

In 1956 I began a research project into the origins of aesthetics with a young male chimpanzee called Congo. Over a three-year period he produced about 400 drawings and paintings. With the drawings it was possible to prove that the chimpanzee brain is capable of creating abstract patterns that are under visual control. To put it simply, the position of one line influenced the position of the next line, and so on, until the drawing was considered, by the ape, to be finished. If geometric patterns were placed on the paper, these altered the position of the animal's lines. In this way it was possible to demonstrate that the ape was able to balance a picture, left to right, and was able to develop a visual theme and then to vary that theme.

Congo's favourite design was a radiating fan pattern and once he had become familiar with this, he started to vary it, splitting it in two, reversing it, curving it, stippling it, and even adding a subsidiary fan. He kept his lines within the area of the paper and tried to avoid going over the edges. And he knew when a picture was finished, refusing to continue until a new sheet was offered to him.

He was never given any reward for his painting. Even at the level of the chimpanzee brain, it was clearly 'art for art's sake', and attempts to stop him painting before a picture was complete led to temper tantrums and screaming fits. At the peak of his picture-making, the intensity with which Congo concentrated on his work was astonishing.

In 1957 I allowed him to experiment with coloured paints. He enjoyed playing with these new 'toys' and at first his paintings contained too many accidental marks to be of any interest. But then, after tiring of the novelty of the paints, he suddenly started to concentrate with great intensity on what he was doing. I would hand him a paint-loaded brush and he would work with it a little, a lot, or perhaps reject it altogether. Then he would be offered another colour, and so on, until he considered the picture was finished.

Eventually he became bored by the regular painting sessions and started to obliterate the sheets of paper with large masses of paint, but before this final stage was reached, he did enjoy a period of several months during which every line or mark was placed exactly where he wanted it. There were about 70 paintings from this peak phase, and some of these were exhibited at the ICA in London in 1957. They created a sensation and examples were acquired by Pablo Picasso, Joan Miro, Roland Penrose, Jock Whitney, William Copley, Julian Huxley, Herbert Read, Solly Zuckerman, Sidney Bernstein, Princess Zeid, Prince Philip, and a number of other collectors.

The importance of these works is that they help us to understand the very ancient preoccupation with pattern-making that has been demonstrated by the human species all over the globe. They may only display the germ of an aesthetic impulse, but the fact that they display one at all is frankly amazing.

It is the work of Congo, not that of the prehistoric cave artists, that can truly be said to represent the birth of art.

DESMOND MORRIS

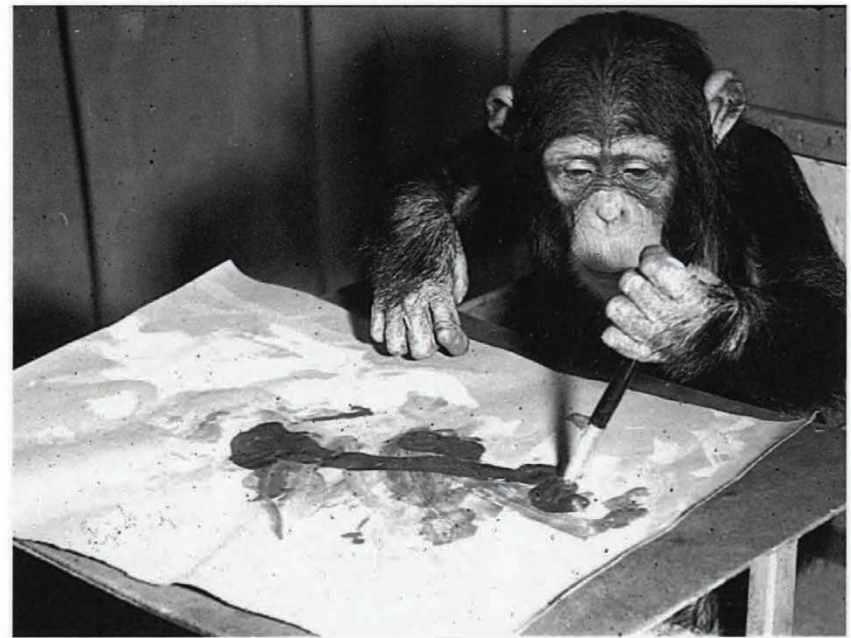


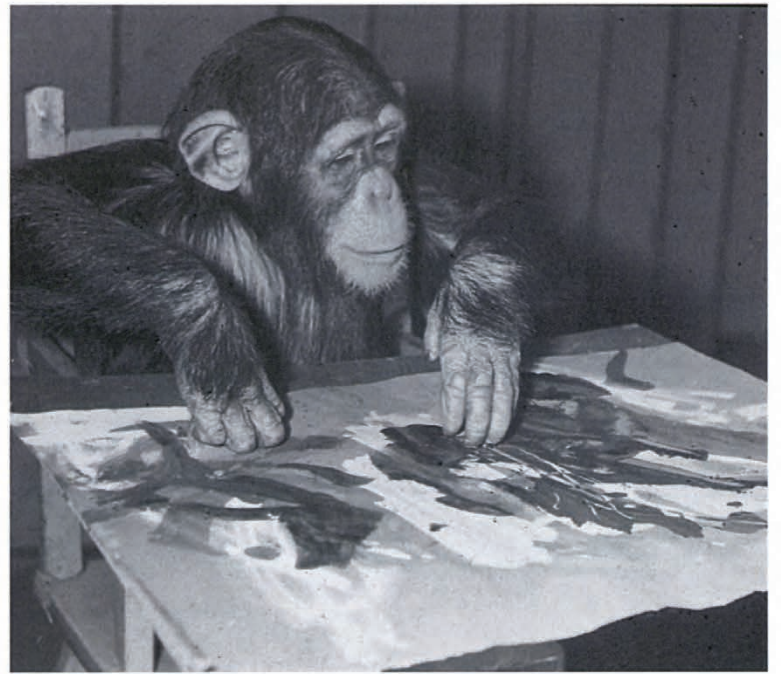
### CONGO PAINTING

Above left: Congo showing the advanced grip that he discovered for himself.

Above right: Using the primitive grip.

Below: Showing use of both right and left hand.







Opposite page, top left: CONGO WAS USUALLY HANDED COLOURS ONE AT A TIME, BUT IN SOME TESTS HE WAS OFFERED THEM ALL AT ONCE.

Top right: HE WOULD SOMETIMES ADD SCRATCH MARKS, USING HIS NAILS.

Below: DURING A PAINTING SESSION WITH DESMOND MORRIS IN 1957.

This page: CONGO WITH SOME OF HIS FINISHED PAINTINGS



FIRST PAINTING SESSION,  
17 MAY 1957

Top left: COLLECTION  
MICHAEL LYSTER, LONDON.



SECOND PAINTING SESSION, 24 MAY 1957

Top left: COLLECTION H.R.H. PRINCESS FAHR-EL-NISSA ZEID, LONDON.

Top right: COLLECTION ABBA P. SCHWARTZ, WASHINGTON.

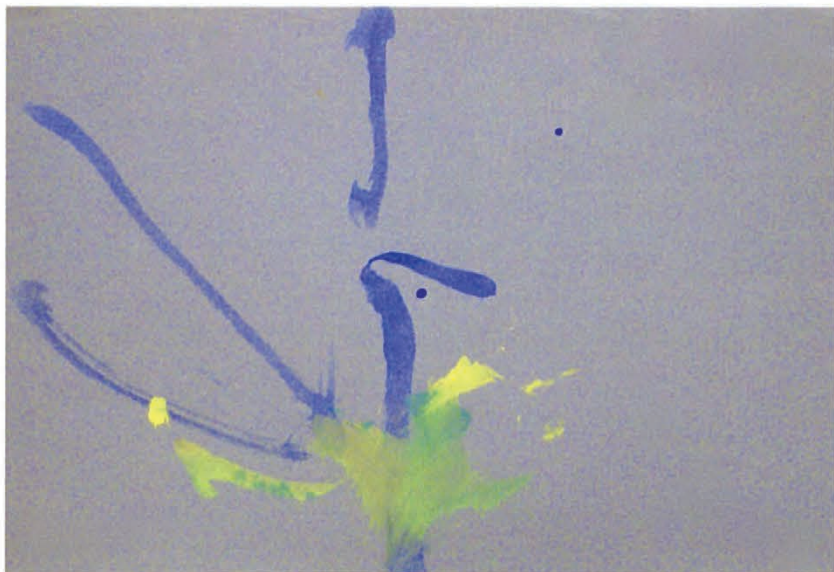
Bottom left & right: COLLECTION LADY ROTHERMERE, LONDON.





Above: THIRD PAINTING SESSION: 28 MAY 1957  
BOTH PAINTINGS MADE ON LIVE TV.

Below: FOURTH PAINTING SESSION 30 MAY 1957.  
Below left: COLLECTION DAVID THOMPSON, PITTSBURGH.



Top left: FIFTH PAINTING SESSION 11 JUNE 1957  
PAINTED ON LIVE TV.

Top right: SIXTH PAINTING SESSION 12 JUNE 1957  
COLLECTION JAMES MAYOR, LONDON. (ICA EXHIBITION, No.5.)

Below: SEVENTH PAINTING SESSION, 13 JUNE 1957  
Below left: COLLECTION NORMAN BROCK, SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS. (ICA EXHIBITION, No.6.)

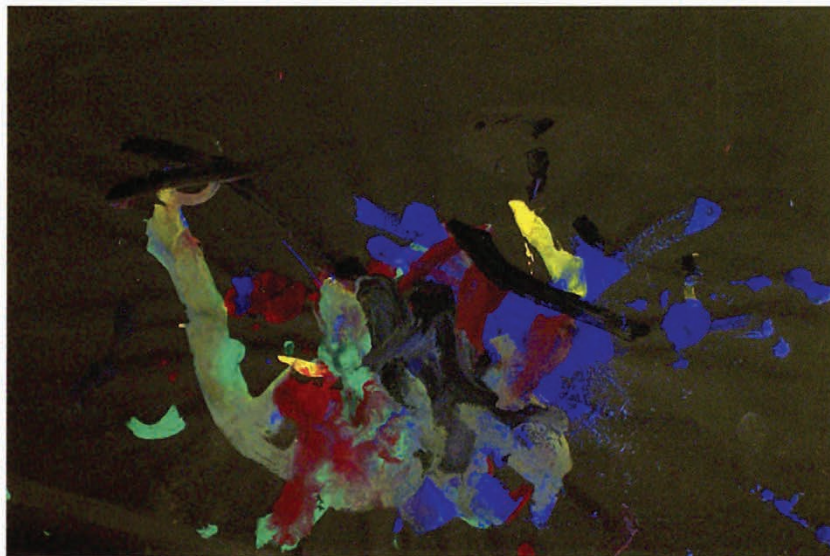


Top left: EIGHTH PAINTING SESSION 17 JUNE 1957.  
Top right & bottom left:  
NINTH PAINTING SESSION 18 JUNE 1957.  
Bottom right: TENTH PAINTING SESSION 12 JULY 1957.



Right & below: ELEVENTH PAINTING SESSION  
15 JULY 1957

Right centre and bottom left & right: TWELFTH  
PAINTING SESSION 18 JULY 1957





Opposite page, above: THIRTEENTH PAINTING SESSIION 20 JULY 1957  
Top left: COLLECTION L. DE. C. BUCHER, STRAWBERRY HILL, MIDDLESEX. (ICA EXHIBITION No. 7)  
Top right: ICA EXHIBITION No. 8.  
Bottom: FOURTEENTH PAINTING SESSION: 22 JULY 1957  
COLLECTION G. L. CARROW, LONDON . (ICA EXHIBITION No. 9)

This page FIFTEENTH PAINTING SESSION 23 JULY 1957. PAINTED ON LIVE TV.  
COLLECTION (1) SIDNEY BERNSTEIN, LONDON. (2) GRANADA TV, LONDON. (3) HOWARD HONG, CALIFORNIA.





Opposite page, above: SIXTEENTH PAINTING SESSION 29 JULY 1957  
Top left: COLLECTION DR. DORIS ODLUM, BOURNEMOUTH. (ICA EXHIBITION No. 10)

Below: SEVENTEENTH PAINTING SESSION 10 AUG 1957  
COLLECTION (1) ROLAND PENROSE, LONDON. (2) TONY PENROSE, CHIDDINGLY, EAST SUSSEX.  
(ICA EXHIBITION No. 11)

This page: EIGHTEENTH PAINTING SESSION 11 AUG 1957  
COLLECTION ABBA P. SCHWARTZ, WASHINGTON. (ICA EXHIBITION No. 12)







NINETEENTH PAINTING SESSION  
12 AUGUST 1957

This page, left:  
COLLECTION OLGA DAVENPORT, LONDON  
(ICA EXHIBITION No. 13)  
Below: ICA EXHIBITION No. 14

Opposite page, above:  
COLLECTION WILLIAM COPLEY, NEW YORK.  
(ICA EXHIBITION No. 15)  
Below: COLLECTION ABBA P. SCHWARTZ,  
WASHINGTON.  
(ICA EXHIBITION No. 16)





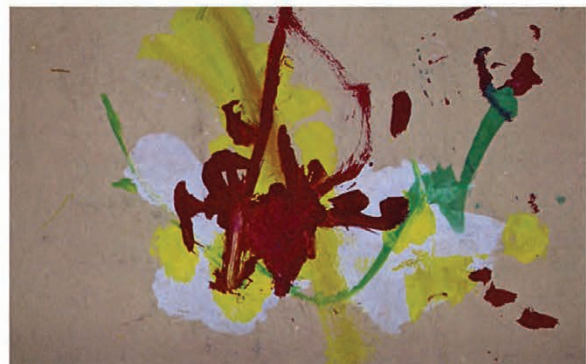


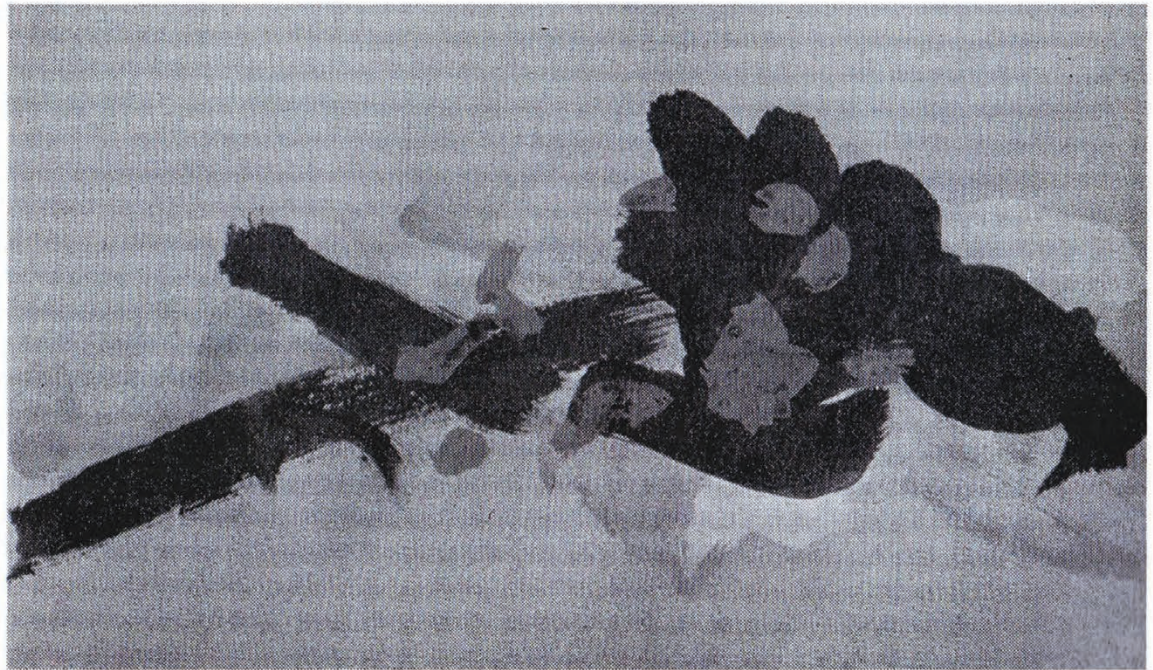
This page, left, centre & bottom left:  
TWENTIETH PAINTING SESSION 31 AUGUST 1957  
Centre: COLLECTION DR NEIL KENDALL, SHREWSBURY.  
Bottom right: TWENTY-FIRST PAINTING SESSION 1 SEPTEMBER 1957

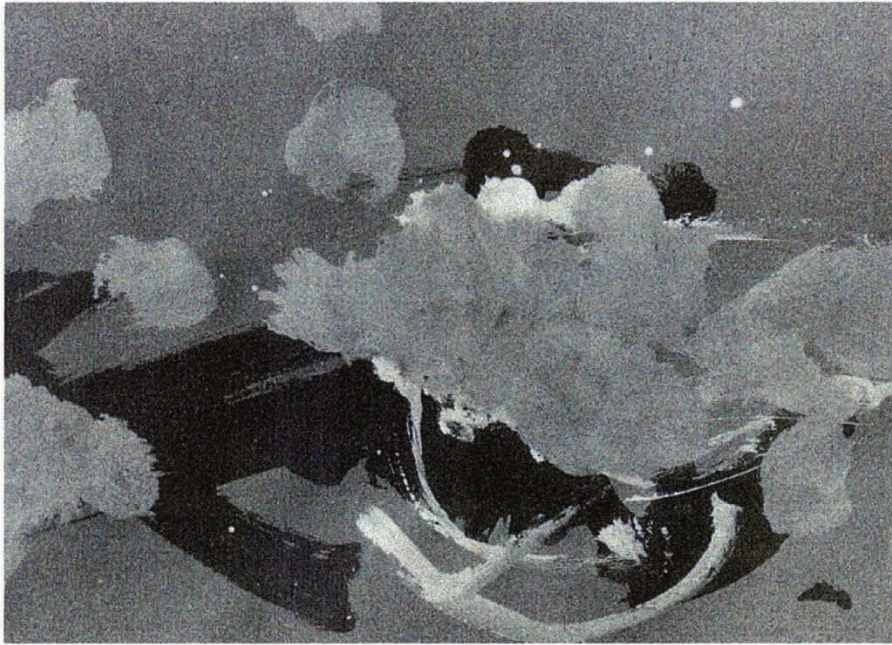
Opposite page: TWENTY-SECOND PAINTING SESSION  
2 SEPTEMBER 1957

Top: COLLECTION WILLIAM COPLEY, NEW YORK.  
(ICA EXHIBITION No. 18)

Bottom: COLLECTION PABLO PICASSO, FRANCE.  
(ICA EXHIBITION No. 19 )







TWENTY-SECOND PAINTING SESSION  
2 SEPTEMBER 1957

Opposite page, top left:  
COLLECTION WILLIAM COPLEY, NEW YORK.  
(ICA EXHIBITION No. 20)

Top right: COLLECTION  
(1) SIR JULIAN HUXLEY, LONDON.  
(2) FRANCIS HUXLEY, LONDON.  
(3) MARC CAMPINE, MECHELIN, BELGIUM.  
(ICA EXHIBITION No. 21)

Bottom left: COLLECTION JOCK WITNEY,  
NEW YORK.  
(ICA EXHIBITION No. 22)

Bottom right: COLLECTION M. S. WOODS,  
LONDON.  
(ICA EXHIBITION No. 23)

This page, top:  
COLLECTION Mr CULME-SEYMOUR,  
LONDON. (ICA EXHIBITION No. 24)  
Bottom left: COLLECTION  
(1) SIDNEY BERNSTEIN, LONDON.  
(2) GRANADA TV, LONDON.  
(3) HOWARD HONG, CALIFORNIA.  
Bottom right: COLLECTION ANDREW MURRAY,  
NORFOLK.





Opposite page, above:  
TWENTY-THIRD PAINTING SESSION 17 SEPTEMBER 1957  
COLLECTION (1) SIDNEY BERNSTEIN, LONDON.  
(2) GRANADA TV, LONDON.  
Below: TWENTY-FOURTH PAINTING SESSION 3 OCTOBER 1957  
PRIVATE COLLECTION, LOS ANGELES.

This page, right: TWENTY-FOURTH PAINTING SESSION  
3 OCTOBER 1957  
COLLECTION (1) LORD ZUCKERMAN, LONDON.  
(2) PRIVATE COLLECTION, LONDON  
Below: TWENTY-FIFTH PAINTING SESSION  
28 OCTOBER 1957  
COLLECTION MUSEUM OF NATURAL SCIENCE, TURIN, ITALY.







TWENTY SIXTH PAINTING SESSION  
31 OCTOBER 1957





TWENTY SEVENTH PAINTING SESSION  
3 NOVEMBER 1957

Left: COLLECTION

(1) SIDNEY BERNSTEIN, LONDON.

(2) GRANADA TV, LONDON)

Above: (1) SIDNEY BERNSTEIN,  
LONDON.

(2) GRANADA TV, LONDON.

(3) HOWARD HONG, CALIFORNIA.

Below: TWENTY-EIGHTH PAINTING  
SESSION 12 NOVEMBER 1957.





Left: TWENTY-NINTH PAINTING SESSION  
10 DECEMBER 1957.  
COLLECTION

(1) EMILY CRANE CHADBOURNE, CHICAGO.  
(2) FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY,  
CHICAGO.

Below: THIRTIETH PAINTING SESSION  
11 DECEMBER 1957

COLLECTION DESMOND MORRIS, OXFORD.  
SPLIT FAN PATTERN WITH CENTRAL BLUE  
MARK.





UNDATED 1957  
COLLECTION DESMOND MORRIS, OXFORD.  
FAN PATTERN WITH CURVED BASE.



UNDATED 1957  
COLLECTION DESMOND MORRIS, OXFORD.  
SPLIT FAN PATTERN WITH CENTRAL BLACK SPOT.

UNDATED 1957  
Above: SPLIT FAN PATTERN  
WITH CENTRAL YELLOW SPOT.

Below: COLLECTION DONALD  
HARKER, LONDON.  
FAN PATTERN WITH SUBSIDIARY  
FAN.





UNDATED 1957

COLLECTION (1) SIR GAVIN DE BEER, NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM, LONDON.

(2) DR B. K. BLOUNT, LONDON.

(3) NIEL BALLY, WALES.

(4) PRIVATE COLLECTION, LONDON.



UNDATED 1957

COLLECTION PRINCE PHILIP, LONDON.





UNDATED 1957

Left: COLLECTION ANTHROPOLOGY  
DEPARTMENT, NATURAL HISTORY  
MUSEUM, LONDON.





Above:  
THIRTY-FIRST PAINTING SESSION  
EARLY JANUARY 1958

Right:  
THIRTY-SECOND PAINTING SESSION  
5 JANUARY 1958







Opposite page, above:  
THIRTY-THIRD PAINTING SESSION  
9 JANUARY 1958

Below:  
THIRTY-FOURTH PAINTING SESSION  
19 JANUARY 1958

This page:  
THIRTY-FIFTH PAINTING SESSION  
31 JANUARY 1958





This page:  
THIRTY-FIFTH PAINTING SESSION  
31 JANUARY 1958  
COLLECTION URI GELLER, BERKSHIRE.

Opposite page:  
THIRTY-SIXTH PAINTING SESSION  
13 MARCH 1958







Opposite page:  
THIRTY-SEVENTH PAINTING SESSION  
7 MAY 1958  
Bottom: COLLECTION URI GELLER, BERKSHIRE.

This page:  
THIRTY-EIGHTH PAINTING SESSION  
9 JULY 1958





THIRTY-NINTH PAINTING SESSION  
14 AUGUST 1958



THIRTY-NINTH PAINTING SESSION  
14 AUGUST 1958  
COLLECTION URI GELLER, BERKSHIRE.



THIRTY-NINTH PAINTING SESSION  
14 AUGUST 1958



FORTIETH PAINTING SESSION  
17 AUGUST 1958



FORTY-FIRST PAINTING SESSION  
19 AUGUST 1958  
COLLECTION DR CORSINI, ITALY.



FORTY-FIRST PAINTING SESSION  
19 AUGUST 1958



FORTY-FIRST PAINTING SESSION  
19 AUGUST 1958

This page, top: COLLECTION  
NICHOLAS SILVER, LONDON.











Opposite page: FORTY-FIRST PAINTING SESSION  
19 AUGUST 1958

This page: FORTY-SECOND PAINTING SESSION  
9 NOVEMBER 1958



FORTY-SECOND PAINTING SESSION  
9 NOVEMBER 1958  
COLLECTION MARC CAMPINE, MECHELEN, BELGIUM



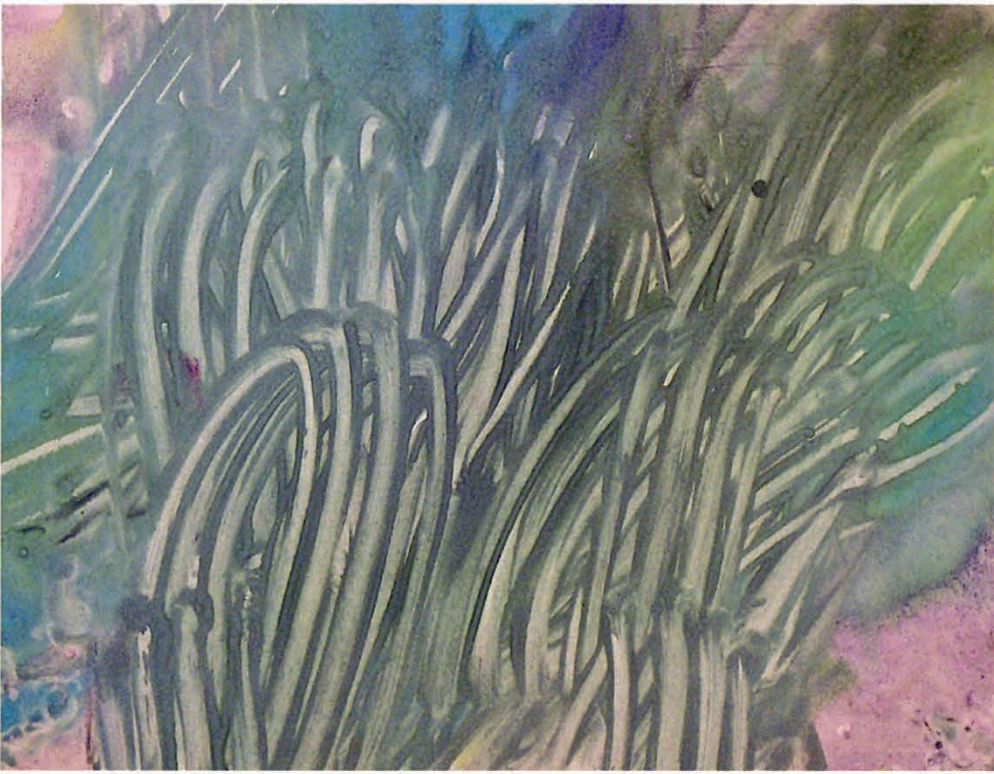
FORTY-SECOND PAINTING SESSION  
9 NOVEMBER 1958



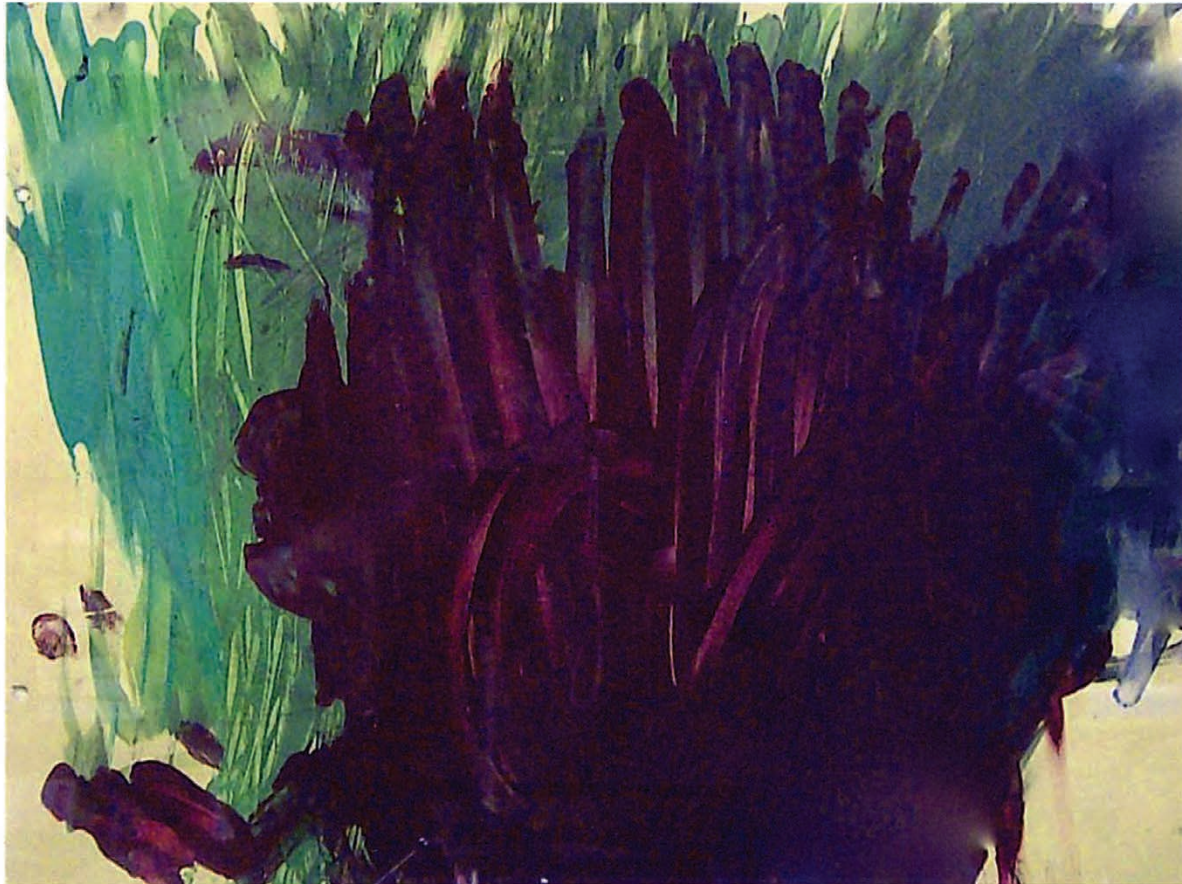


FORTY-SECOND PAINTING SESSION  
9 NOVEMBER 1958

Opposite page, above: COLLECTION NICHOLAS SILVER, LONDON.



FORTY-SECOND PAINTING  
SESSION  
9 NOVEMBER 1958  
FINGER PAINTINGS









FORTY-SECOND PAINTING SESSION  
9 NOVEMBER 1958

FINGER PAINTING



UNDATED 1958  
HORIZONTAL MOTIF WITH CIRCULAR LOOP.



UNDATED 1958



UNDATED 1958



UNDATED 1958



## **DRAWINGS**

In addition to the paintings, Congo produced a large number of drawings and pastels.

A selection of these is shown on the pages that follow.



## CONGO PASTELS

31 AUGUST 1957

FAN PATTERNS











Opposite page:

31 AUGUST 1957  
FAN PATTERNS

This page, above:

1 SEPTEMBER 1957  
PATTERN WITH LOOP

Below:

2 SEPTEMBER 1957  
FAN PATTERN







Opposite page, above:  
23 JULY 1958 BROKEN FAN PATTERN WITH LOOPS  
Below: 14 AUGUST 1958 BROKEN FAN PATTERN WITH LOOPS

This page:  
14 AUGUST 1958 PATTERN WITH MUTLIPLE LOOPING.



14 AUGUST 1958  
FAN PATTERN



14 AUGUST 1958  
REVERSED FAN PATTERN

This unique drawing reveals the existence in the chimpanzee's brain of a 'fan image'. Altogether Congo produced over 90 fan patterns. All but this one were made by starting the lines at the top of the page and then drawing them down towards himself. This action is similar to the movements chimpanzees make at night when drawing bedding towards themselves when making a sleeping-nest. But on this one occasion he completely reversed the process and, starting at the bottom of the picture, with great difficulty created each line by drawing it away from himself. So, using completely different muscular actions, he ended up with the same, favourite fan pattern.





Opposite page, above:  
15 AUGUST 1958  
SIMPLE FAN PATTERN  
Below: 28 AUGUST 1958  
FAN WITH CURVED TOP

This page:  
3 SEPTEMBER 1958  
Above: SPLIT FAN WITH CENTRAL  
SPACE.  
Below: DISRUPTED PATTERN.  
(PICTURE PAINTED VERTICALLY  
WITH PAPER FIXED TO WALL.)



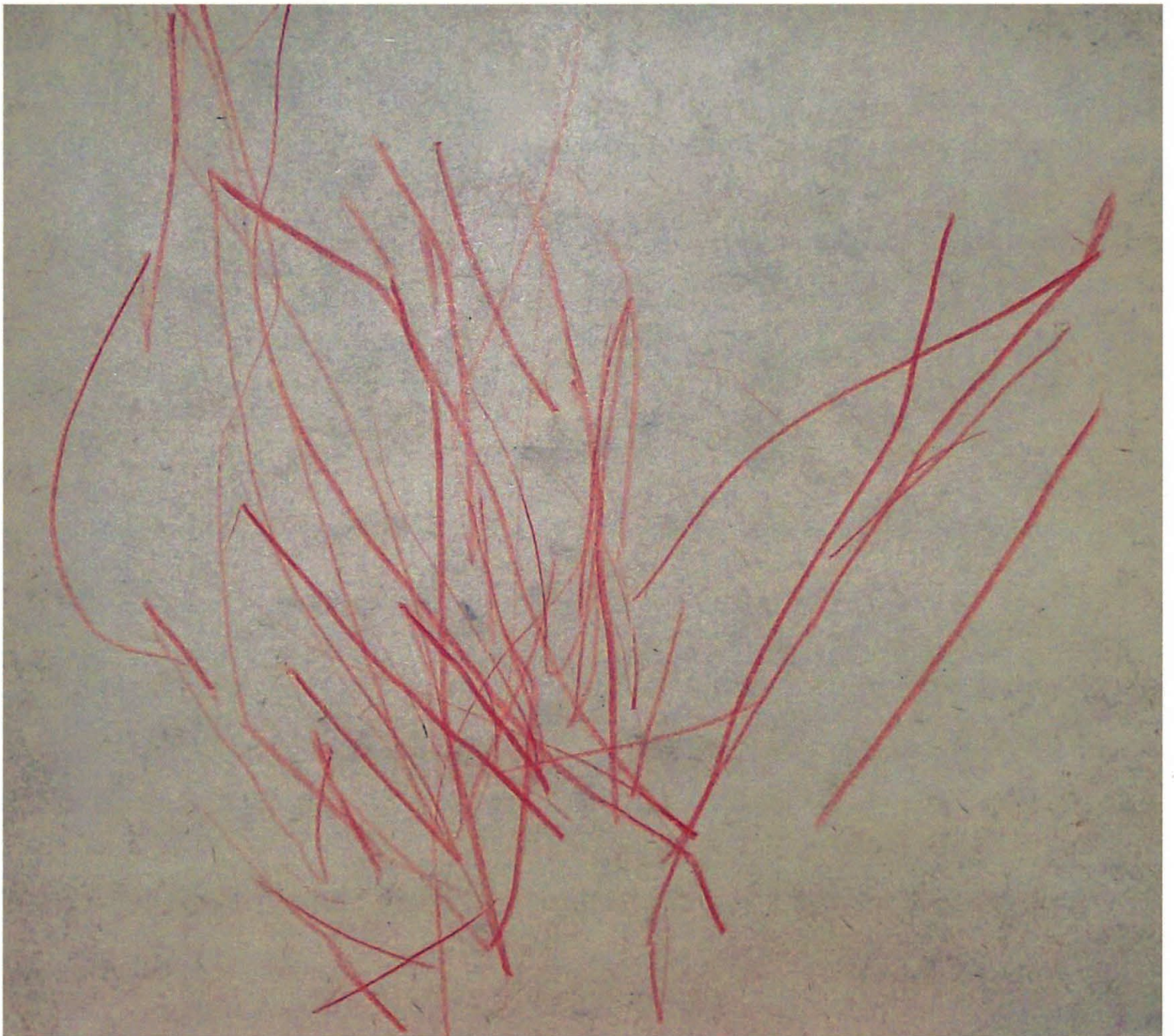


## CONGO DRAWINGS



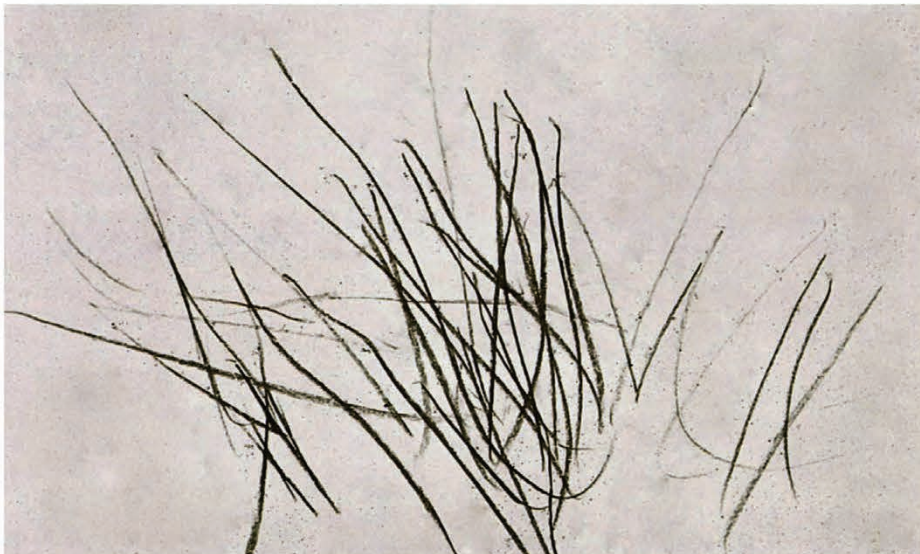
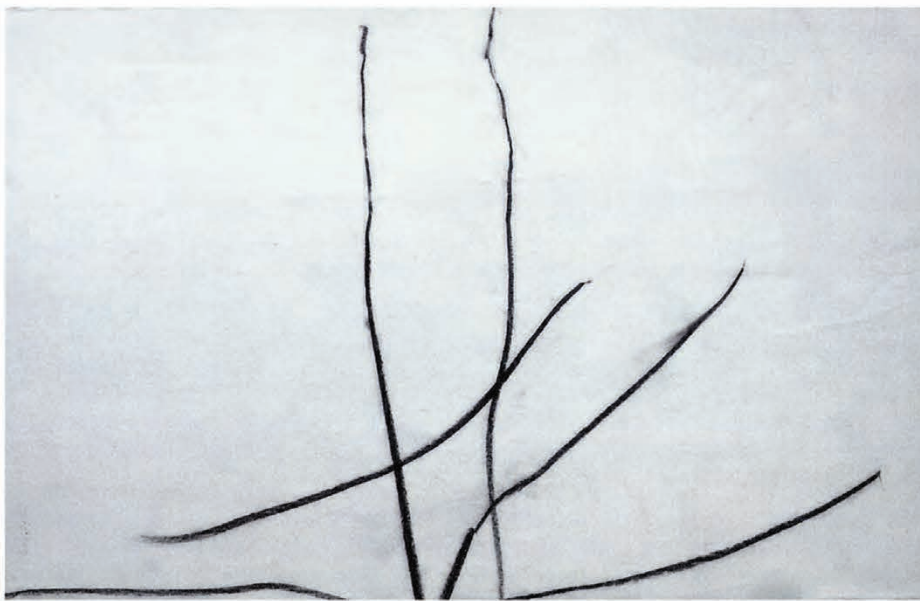
CONGO'S FIRST DRAWING, 23 NOVEMBER 1956

This is the drawing that started the Congo art project. Given a pencil one day he began making lines on a piece of card. Two features emerged. First, he concentrated intensely while making the lines. Second, the lines were focussed on a small mark than already existed on the piece of card. This meant that there was visual control operating and the lines were not random.



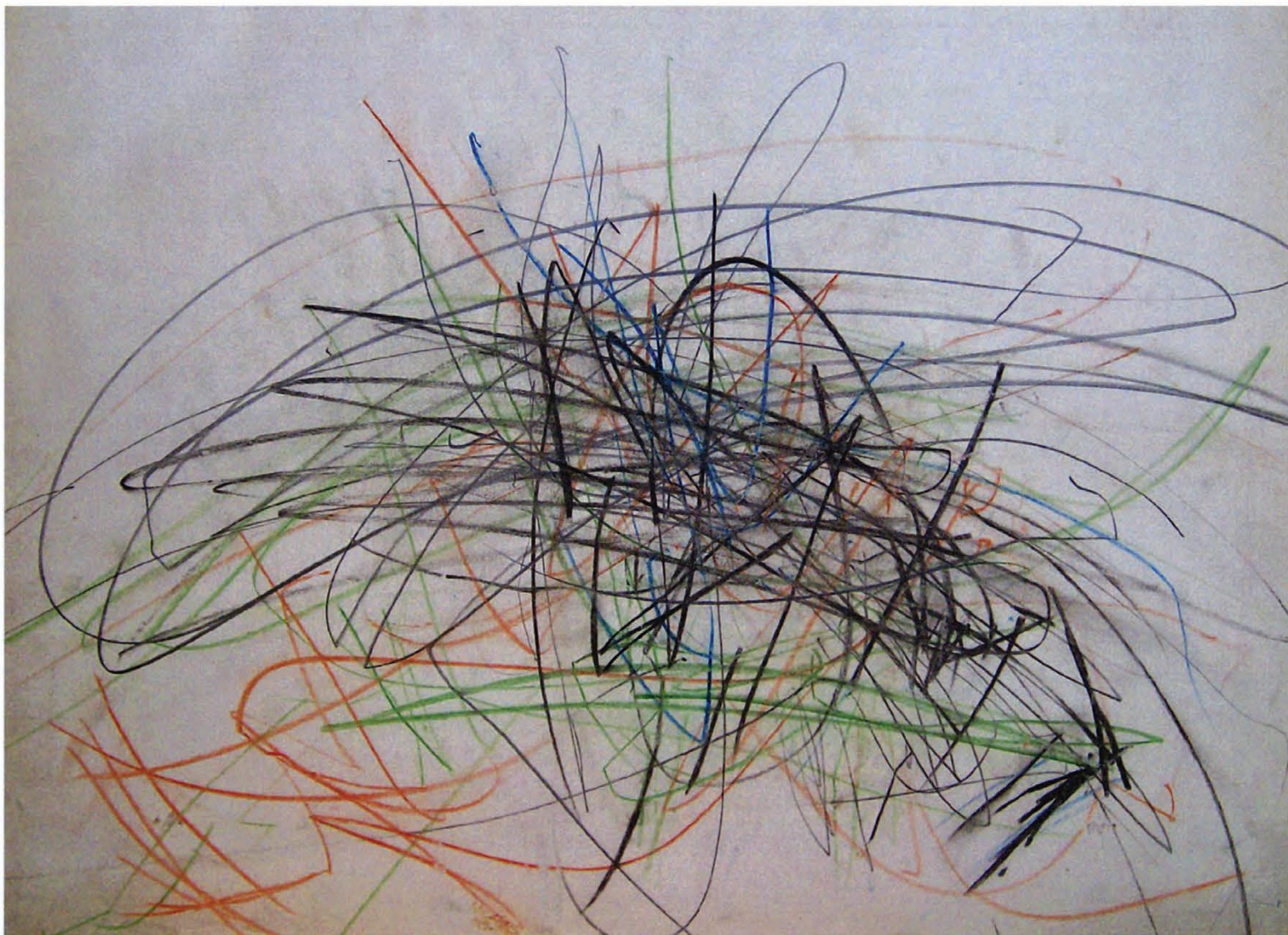
CONGO'S FIRST FAN PATTERN, 8 DECEMBER 1956

Congo's favourite pattern was a fan of radiating lines, typically drawn from the top of the page towards the bottom. This fan pattern appeared in over ninety of the total of 384 pictures that he made in 1956, 1957 and 1958.



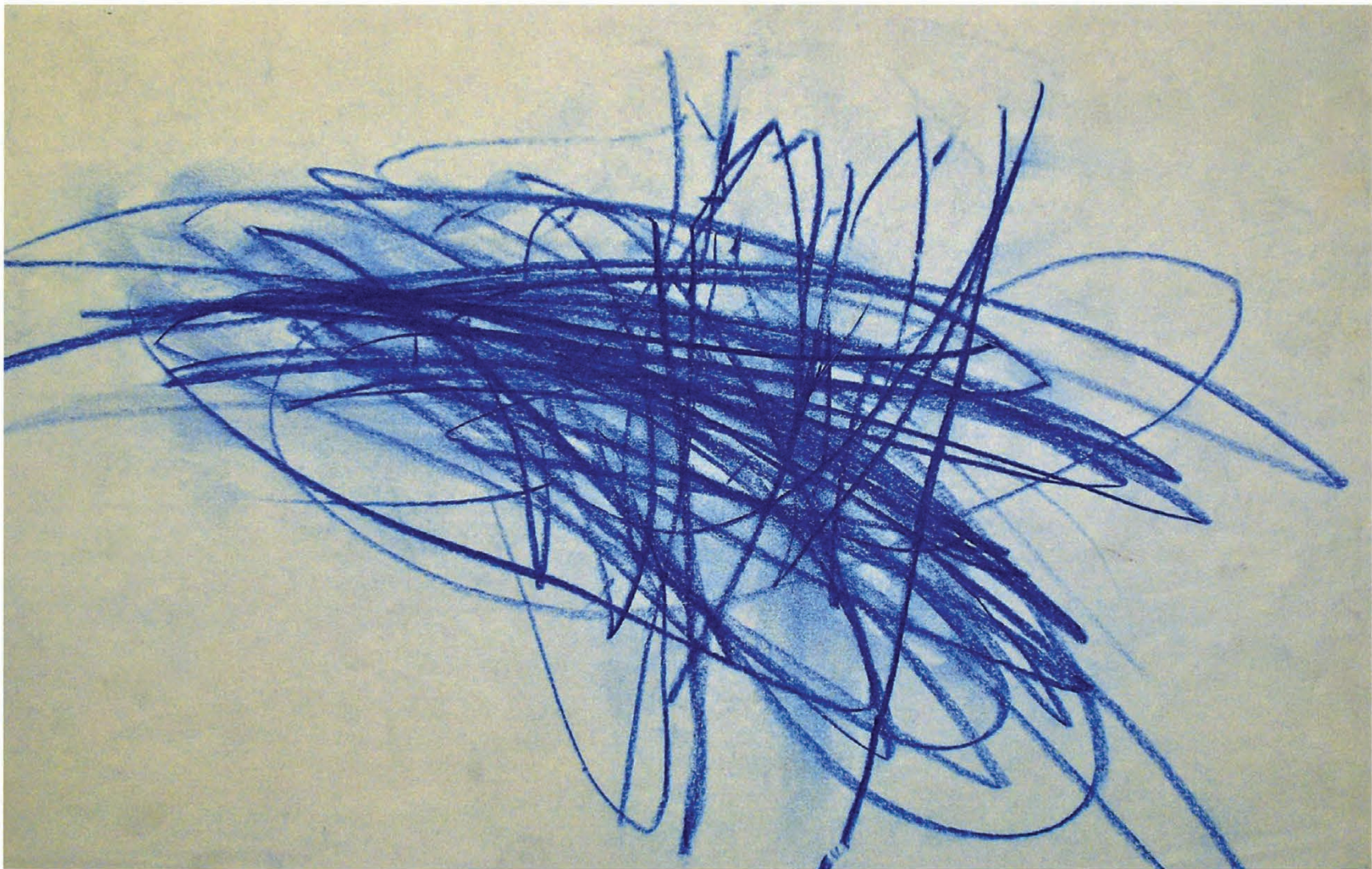
#### FAN PATTERNS

The number of lines used by Congo to create his favourite fan pattern varied from a few up to forty.



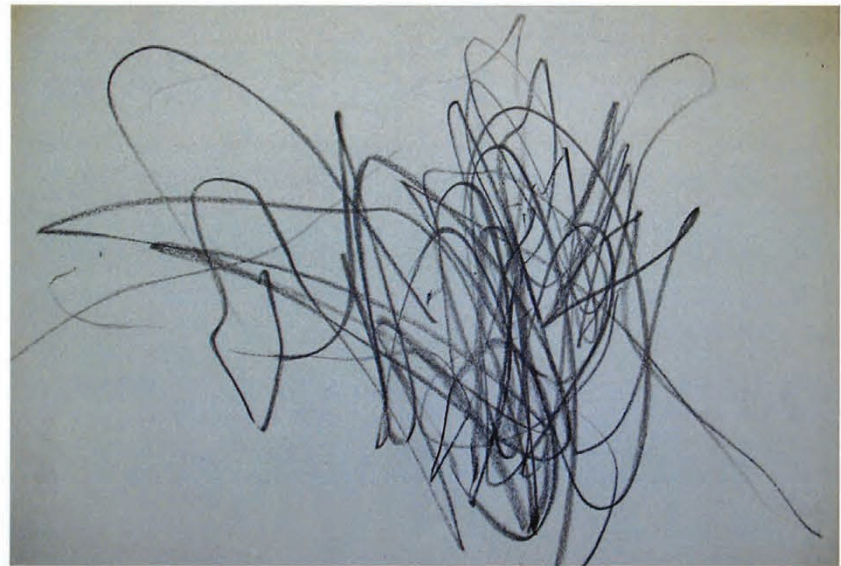
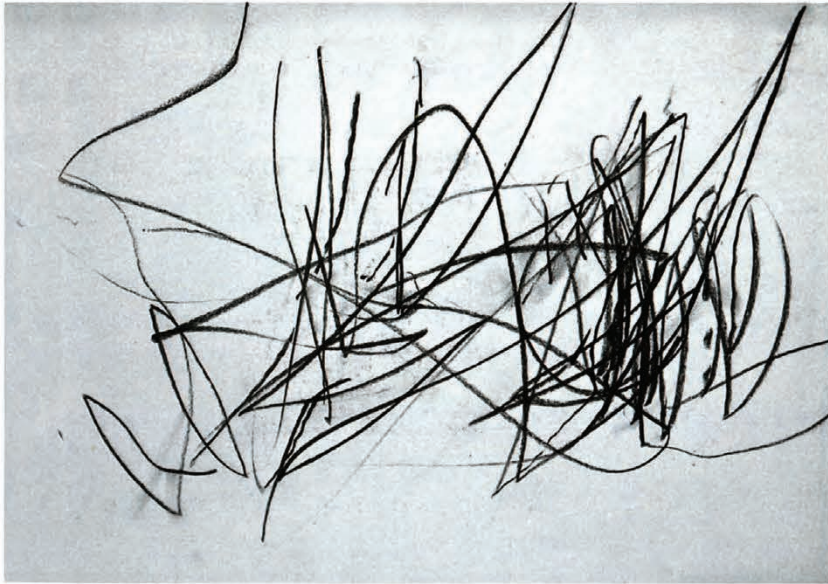
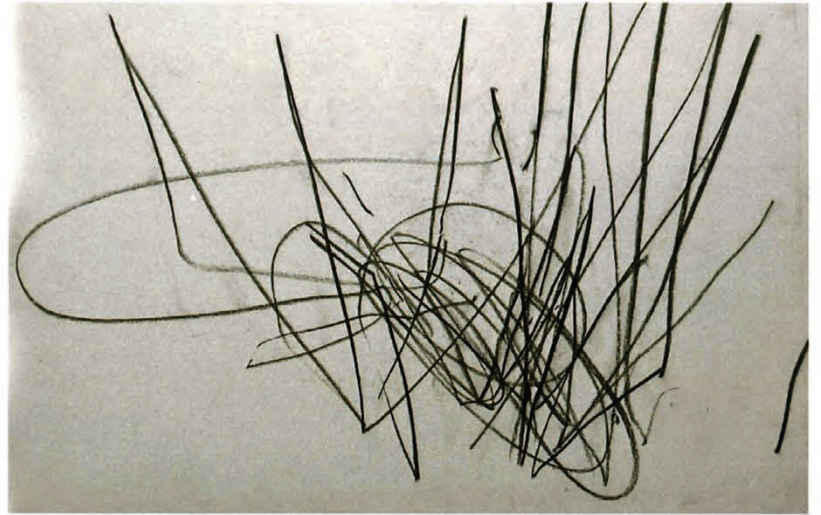
19 FEBRUARY 1958

CURVED HORIZONTAL LINES ARE OFTEN ADDED TO LATER FAN PATTERNS.



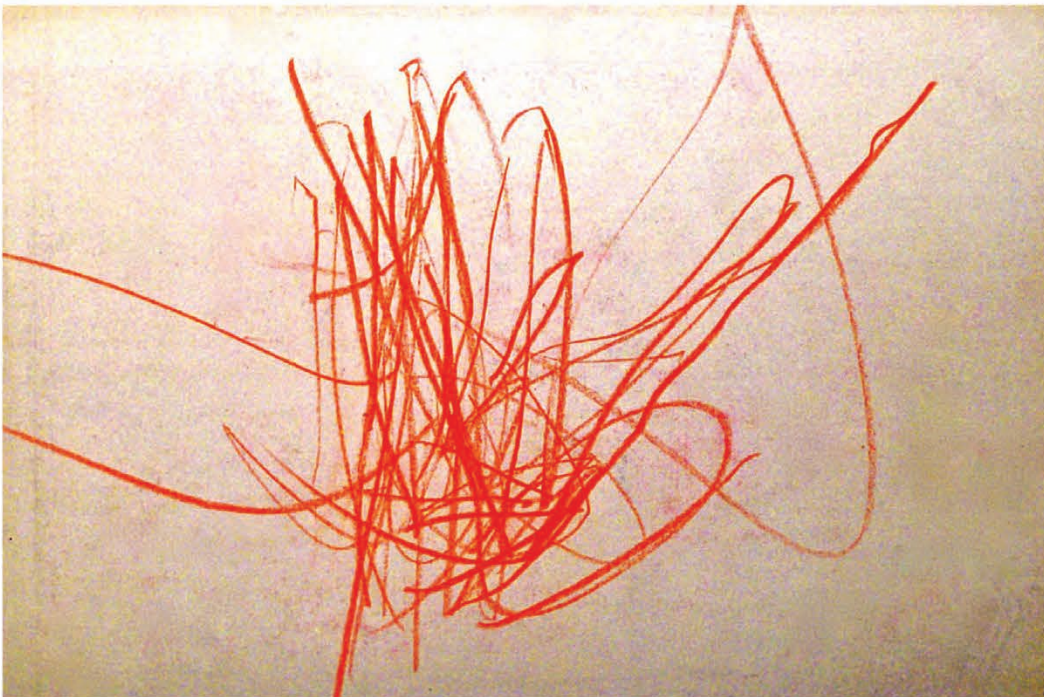
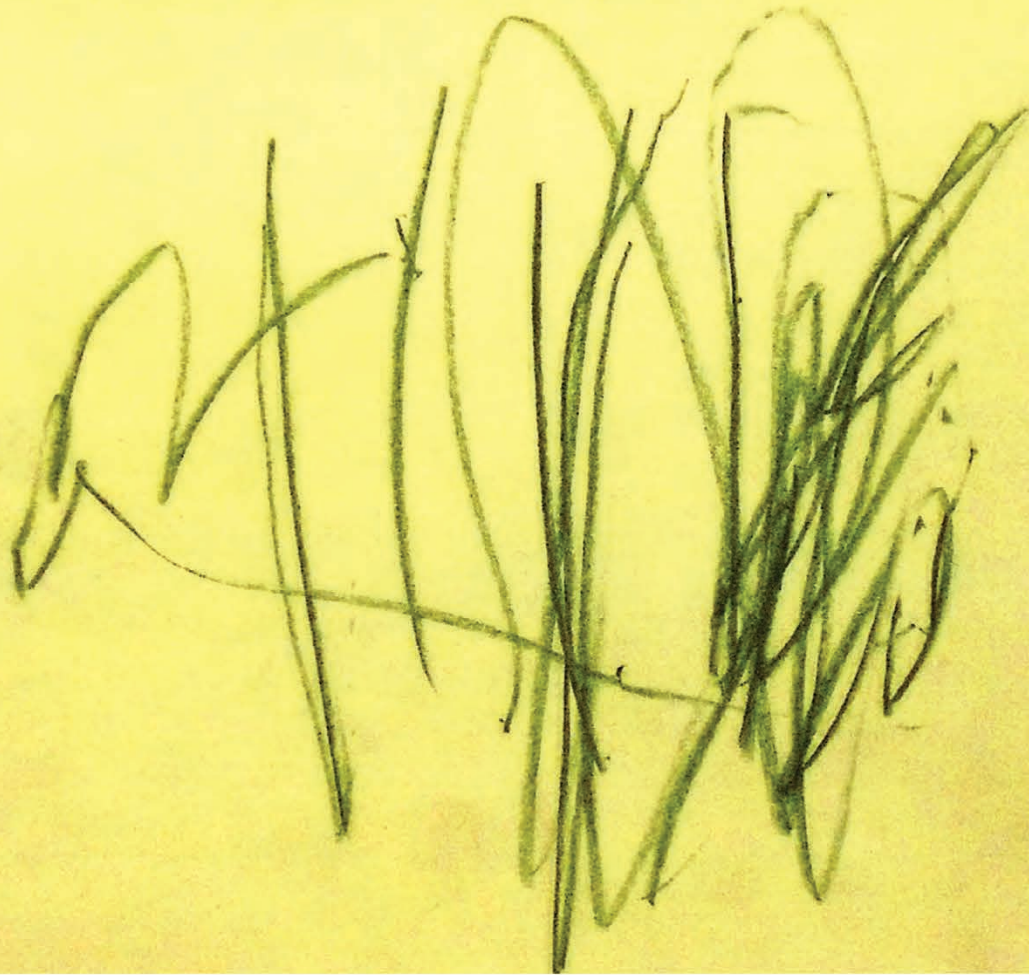
9 NOVEMBER 1958

LATE FAN PATTERN OVERWORKED WITH MULTIPLE CURVED  
HORIZONTAL LINES.



Above left: 7 MAY 58.  
Above right & below left: 20 AUGUST 1958.  
Below right: 3 SEPTEMBER 1958.

LATE FAN PATTERNS DISRUPTED BY LOOPS AND HORIZONTAL LINES.



COLOURED FAN PATTERNS

Above: 9 NOVEMBER 1958 FAN  
PATTERN WITH LOOPS

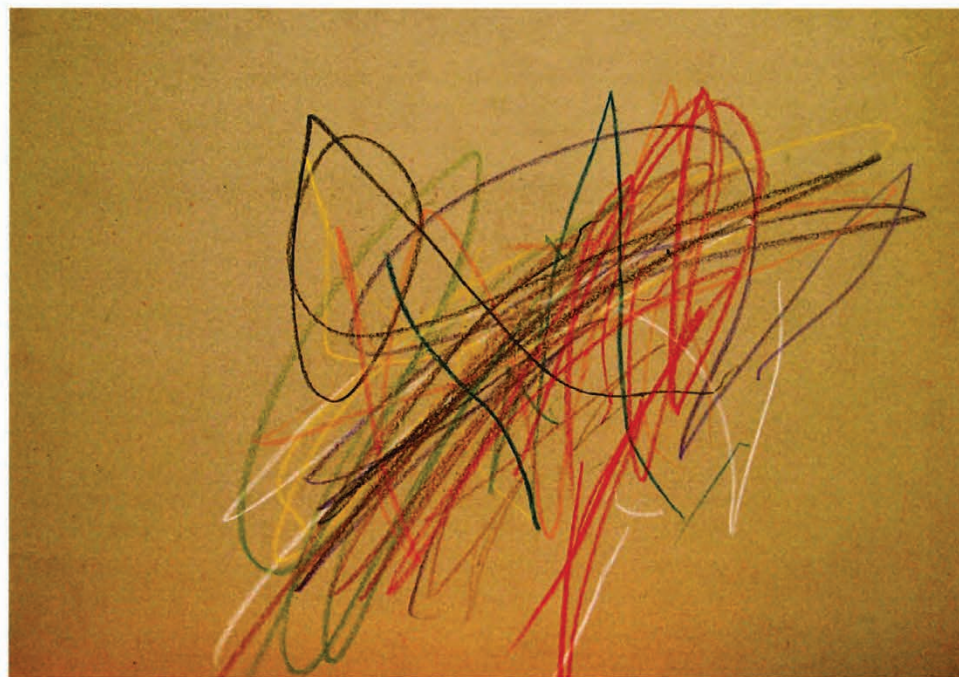
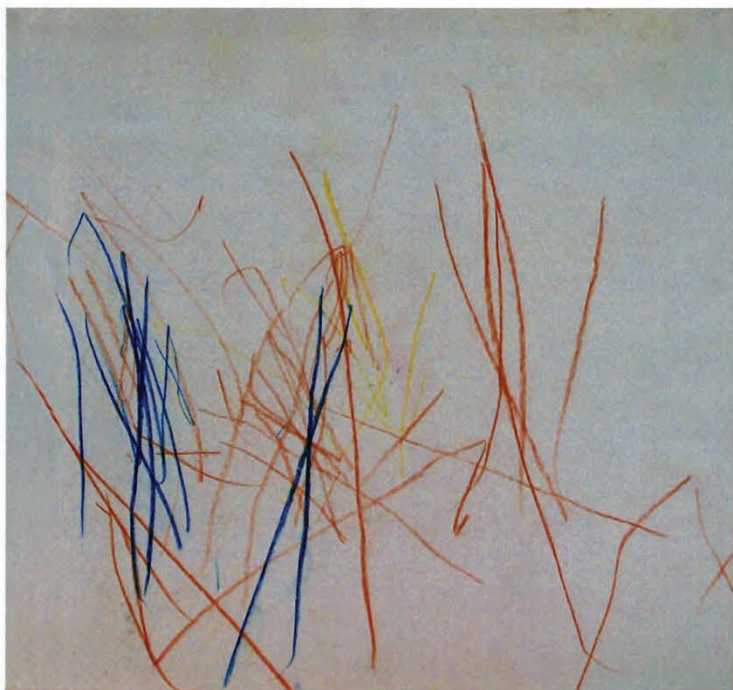
Below: 28 AUGUST 1958



**COLOURED FAN PATTERNS  
WITH DISRUPTIONS**

**Above: 15 AUGUST 1958  
Below: 17 SEPTEMBER 1957  
Above right: 28 AUGUST 1958**

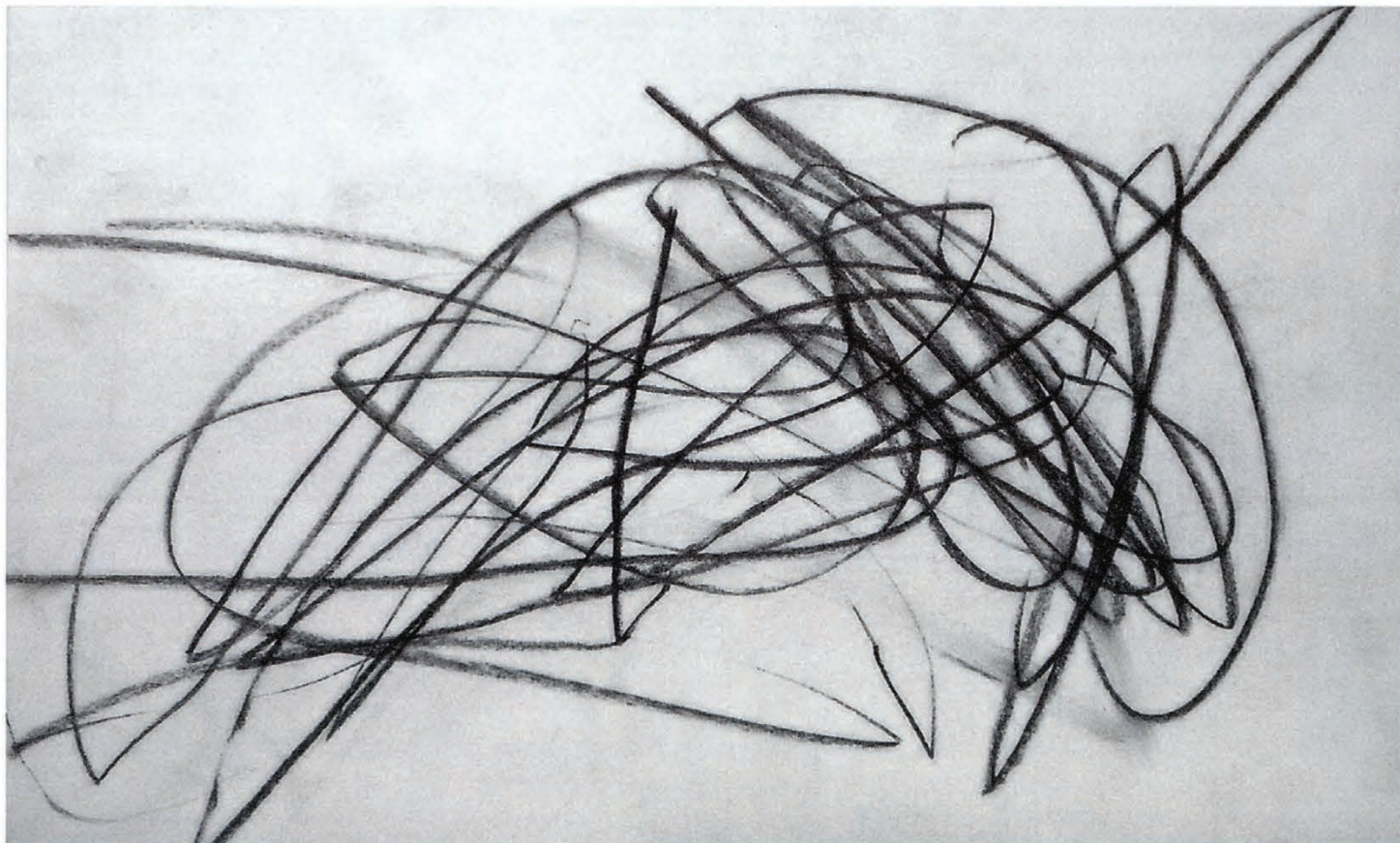
**Below right: 2 SEPTEMBER 1958  
ALL LINES IN THIS DRAWING MADE  
WITH THE RIGHT HAND.**





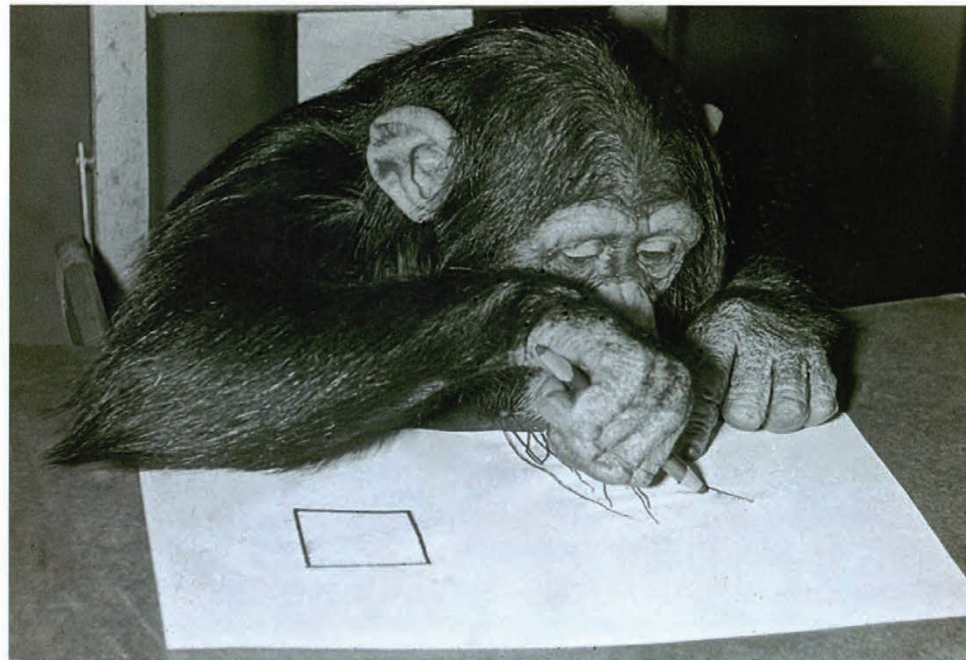


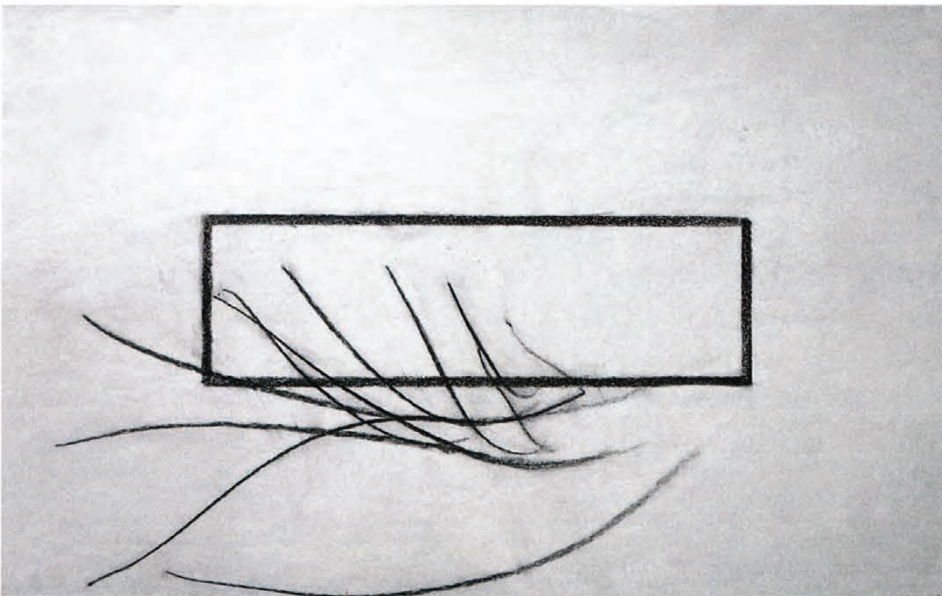
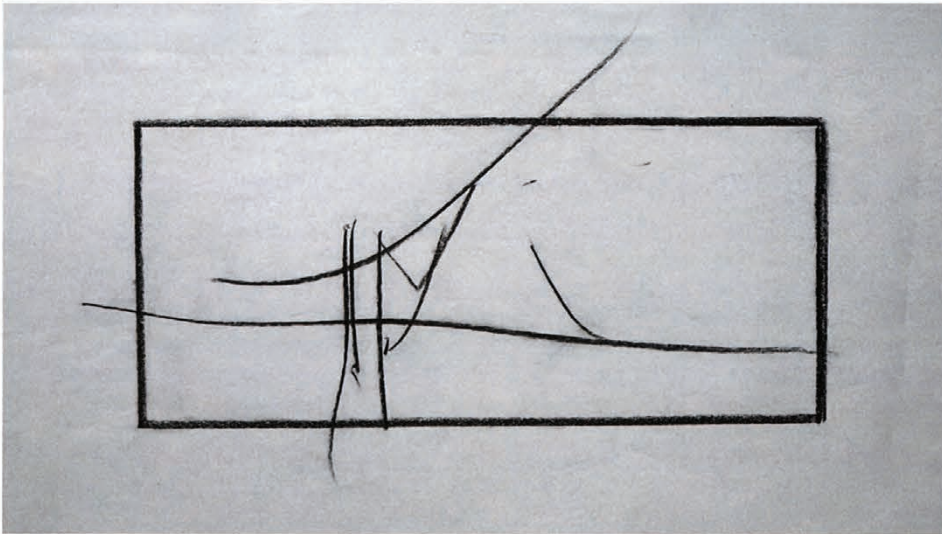
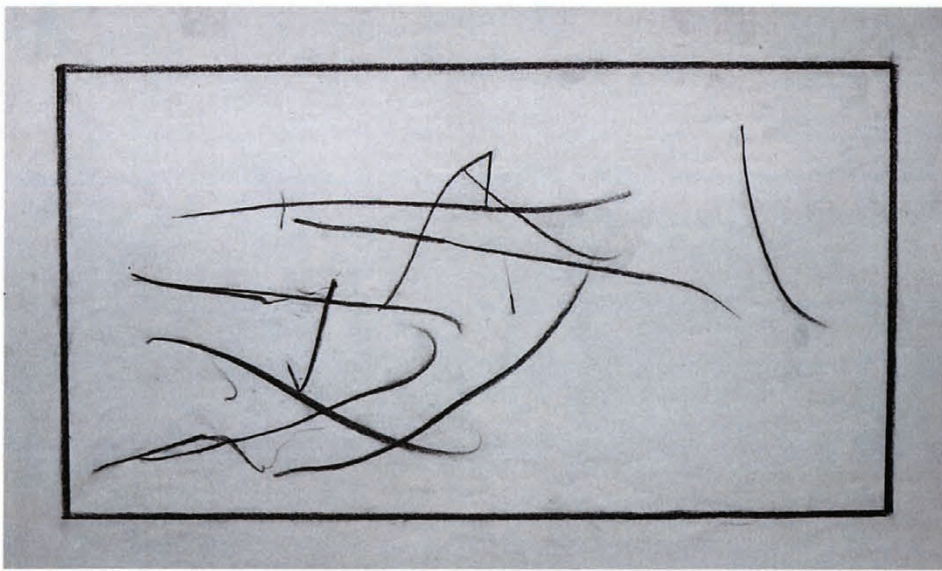
DRAWINGS  
WITHOUT FAN  
PATTERNS



## EXPERIMENTAL DRAWINGS

TO ANALYSE HIS VISUAL CONTROL, CONGO WAS SOMETIMES GIVEN TEST CARDS ON WHICH A SIMPLE GEOMETRIC SHAPE HAD BEEN PLACED BEFOREHAND. IT WAS THEN POSSIBLE TO STUDY THE WAY IN WHICH HE REACTED TO THIS INTERFERENCE.

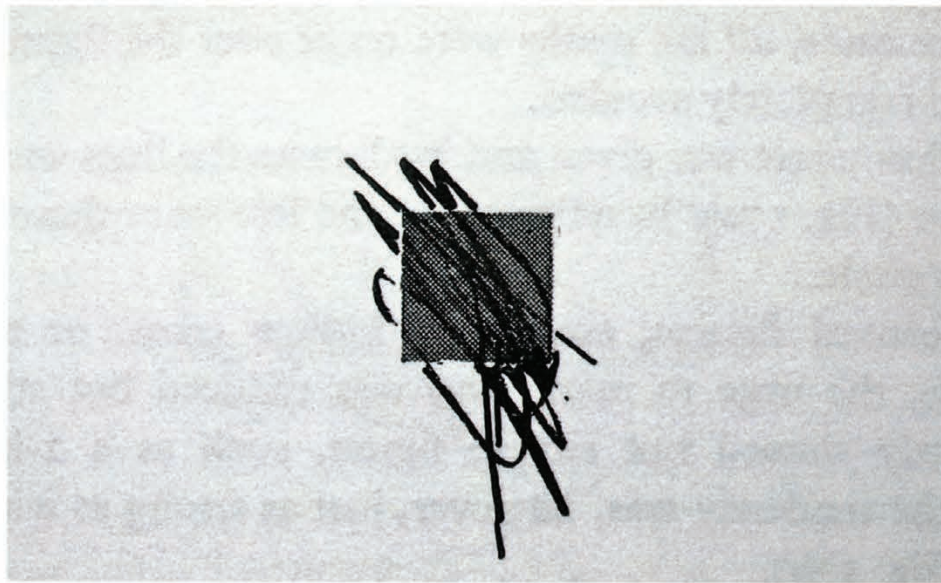




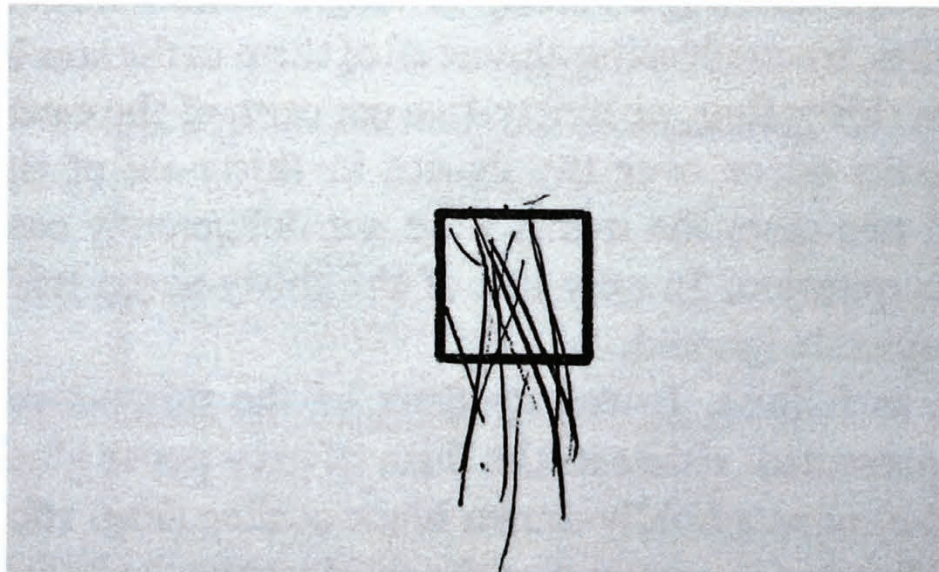
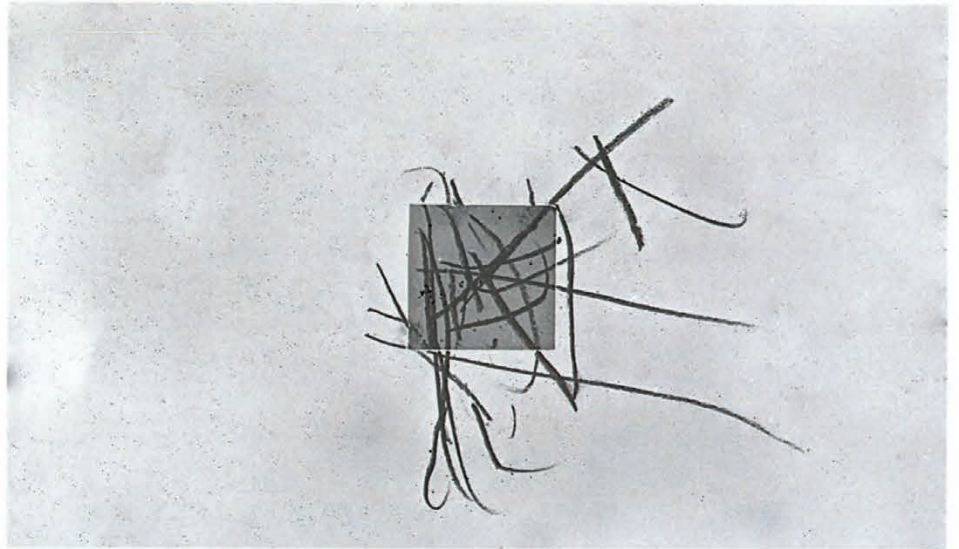
Above: A LARGE RECTANGLE IS TREATED LIKE A SPACE AND MARKINGS CONFINED INSIDE IT.

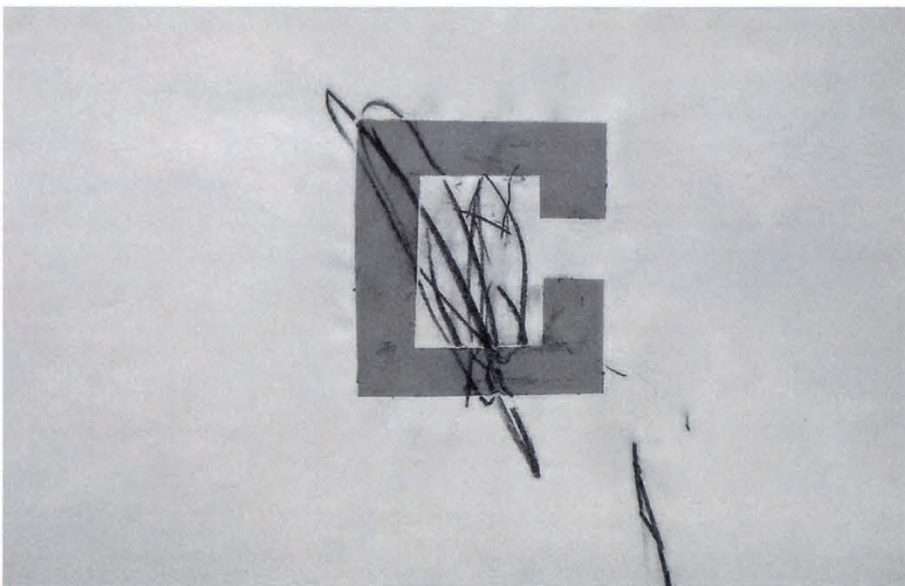
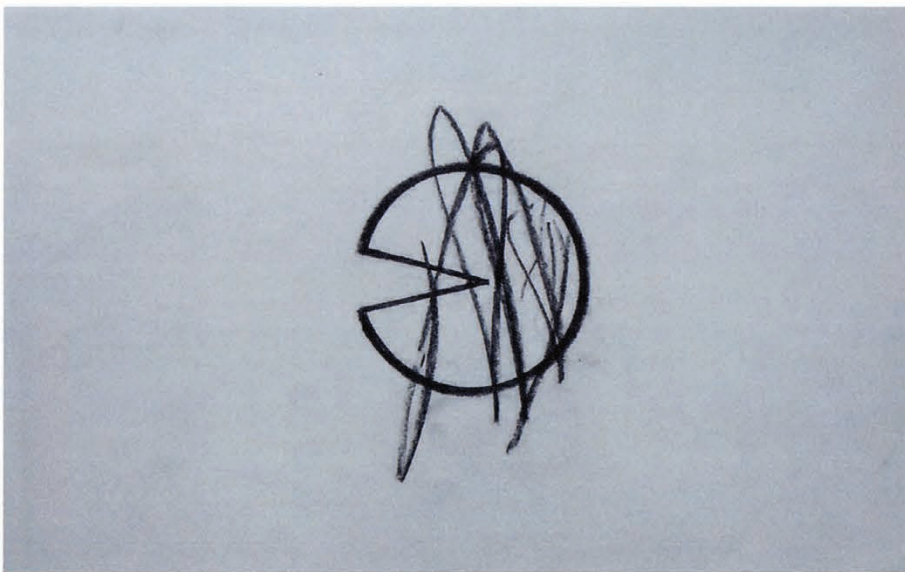
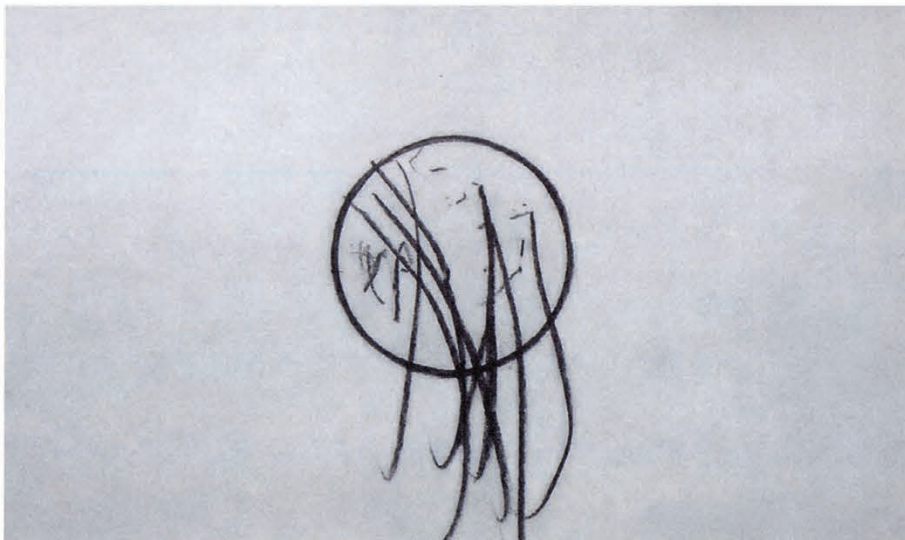
Centre: MARKINGS START TO STRAY OUTSIDE A MEDIUM-SIZED RECTANGLE.

Below: A SMALL RECTANGLE IS MARKED OVER RATHER THAN INSIDE.



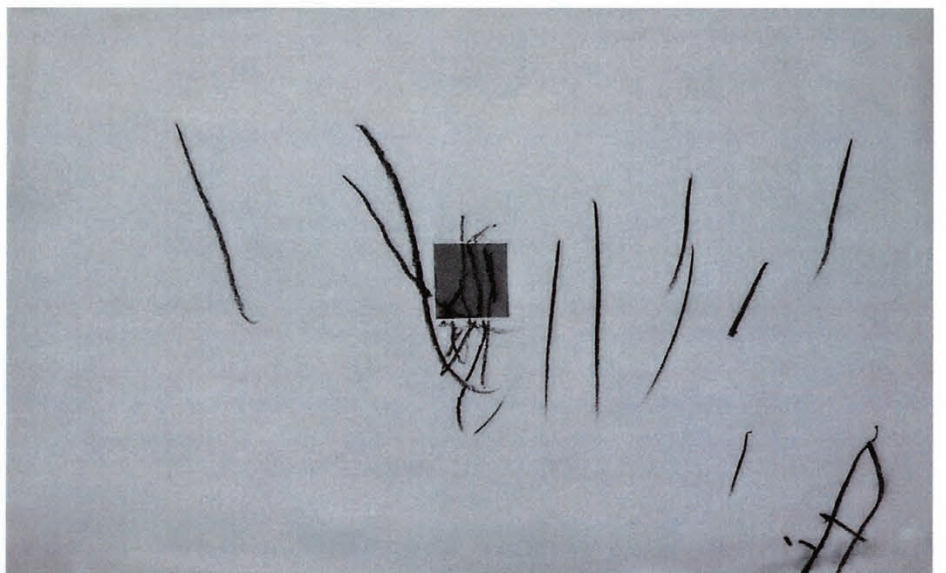
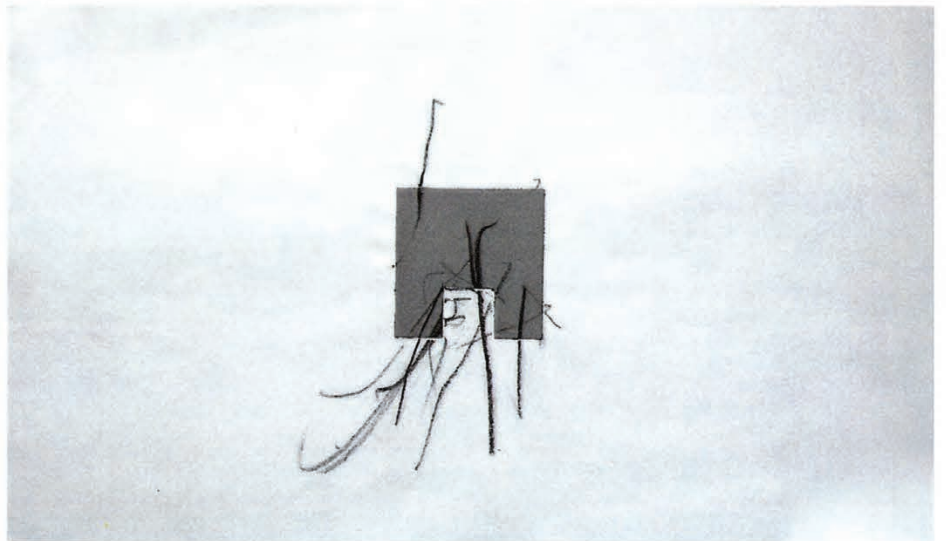
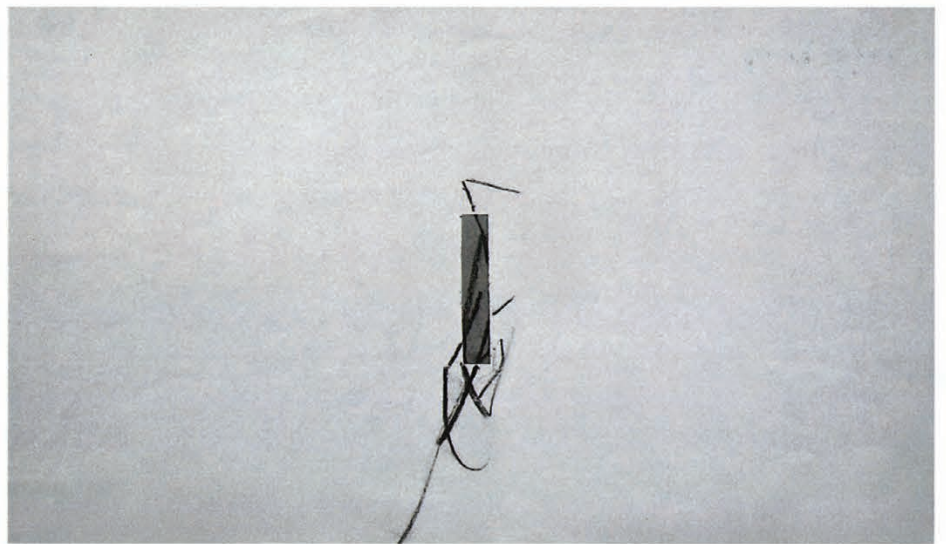
WHEN A CENTRAL 2-INCH SQUARE  
IS PRESENT ON THE PAPER  
THE MARKINGS ARE TIGHTLY  
CONCENTRATED IN THE REGION OF  
THE FIGURE.

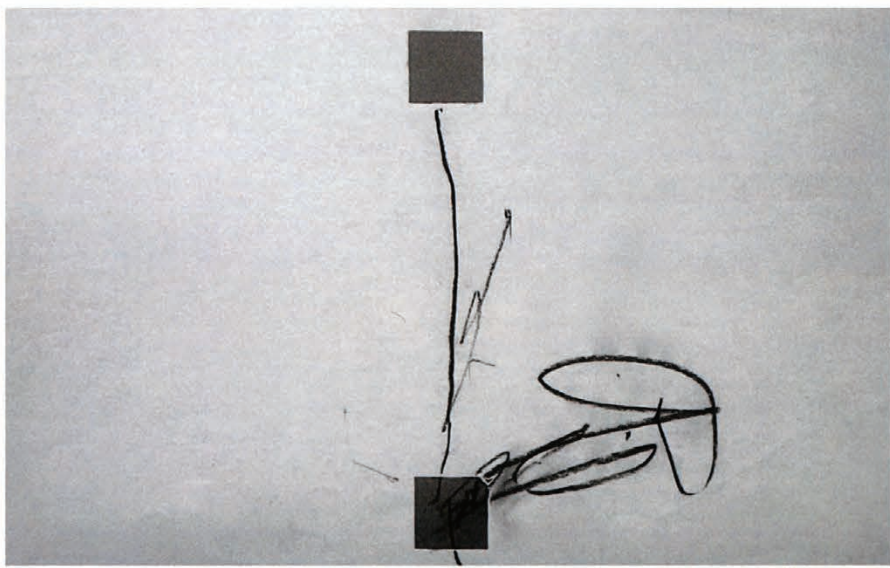
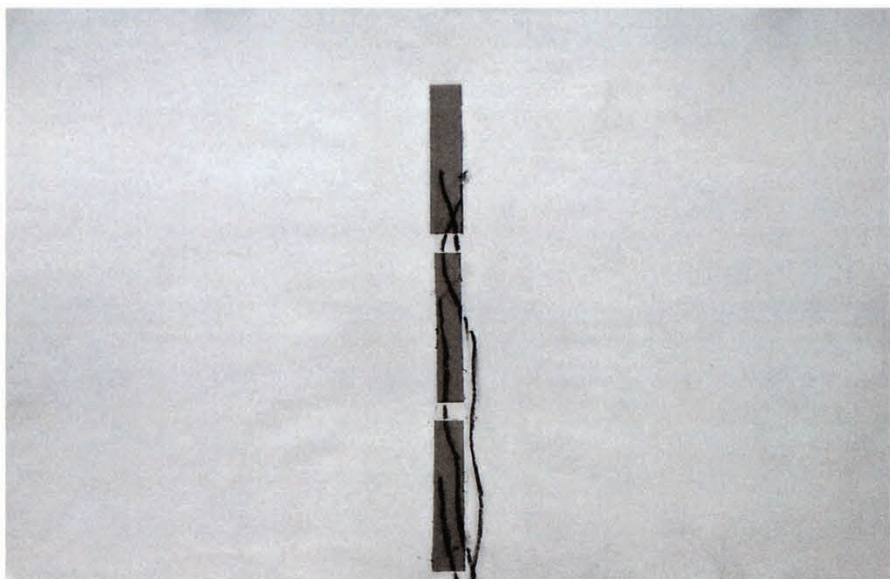
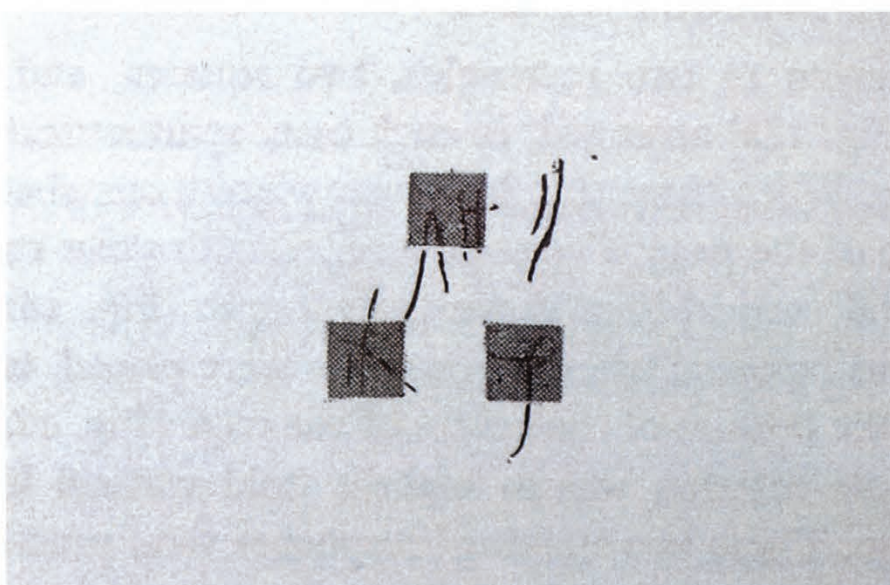




WHEN SMALL CENTRAL FIGURES OF DIFFERENT SHAPES ARE PRESENT ON THE PAPER OFFERED TO THE CHIMPANZEE, HE NEARLY ALWAYS CONCENTRATES HIS MARKS IN THE REGION OF THE FIGURES, LEAVING THE REST OF THE AVAILABLE SPACE ALMOST EMPTY.

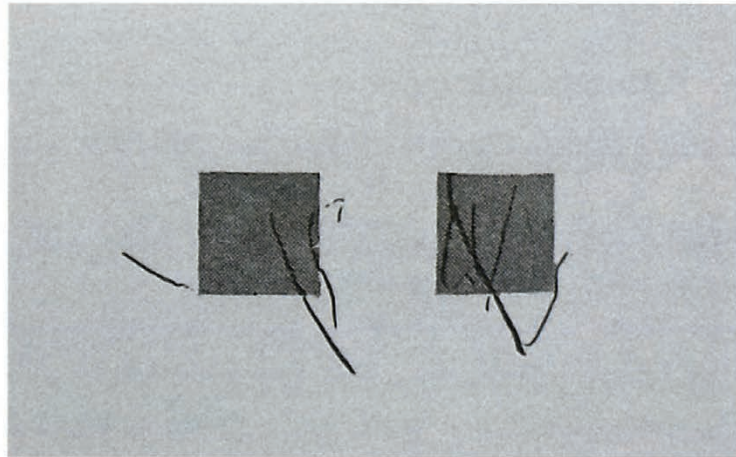
This page, bottom: WITH A VERY SMALL ONE-INCH SQUARE, THIS RULE IS BROKEN. THE FIGURE IS MARKED BUT THEN AN ABBREVIATED FAN PATTERN IS ADDED IN THE SURROUNDING SPACE.





**MULTIPLE FIGURES**

**WHEN TWO OR THREE  
CENTRALLY PLACED FIGURES  
ARE PRESENT ON THE PAGE,  
THE CHIMPANZEE MARKS EACH  
ONE IN TURN.**

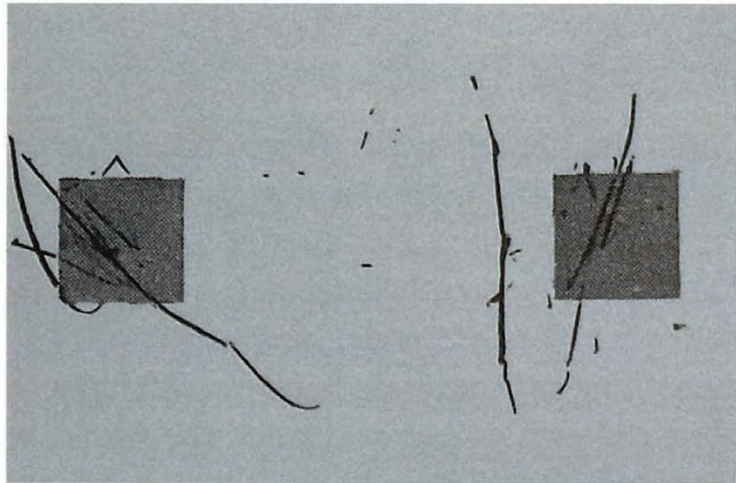


Above:

WHEN TWO SQUARES ARE PRESENT  
SIDE-BY-SIDE ON THE PAPER THE  
CHIMPANZEE MARKS EACH ONE IN  
TURN.

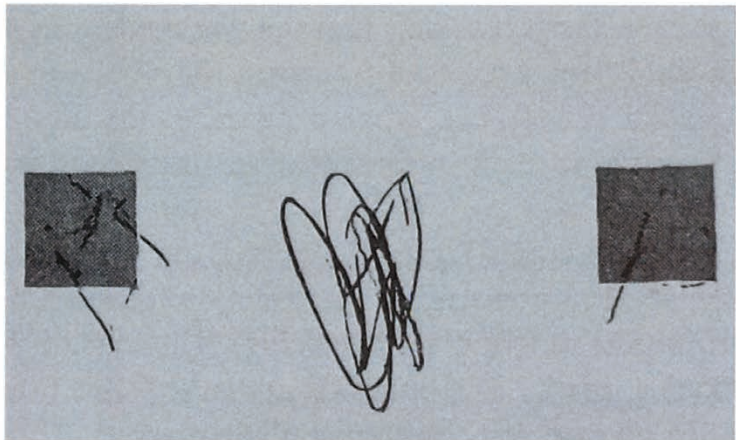
Centre:

WHEN THE SQUARES ARE FURTHER  
APART, BOTH ARE MARKED BUT THE  
LINES BEGIN TO STRAY INTO THE  
CENTRAL SPACE.



Below:

WHEN THE TWO SQUARES ARE  
PLACED FAR APART, THEY ARE BOTH  
STILL MARKED, BUT THE CENTRAL  
SPACE IS NOW TOO INVITING AND  
A CENTRAL PATTERN IS ADDED  
THERE TO FILL IT.

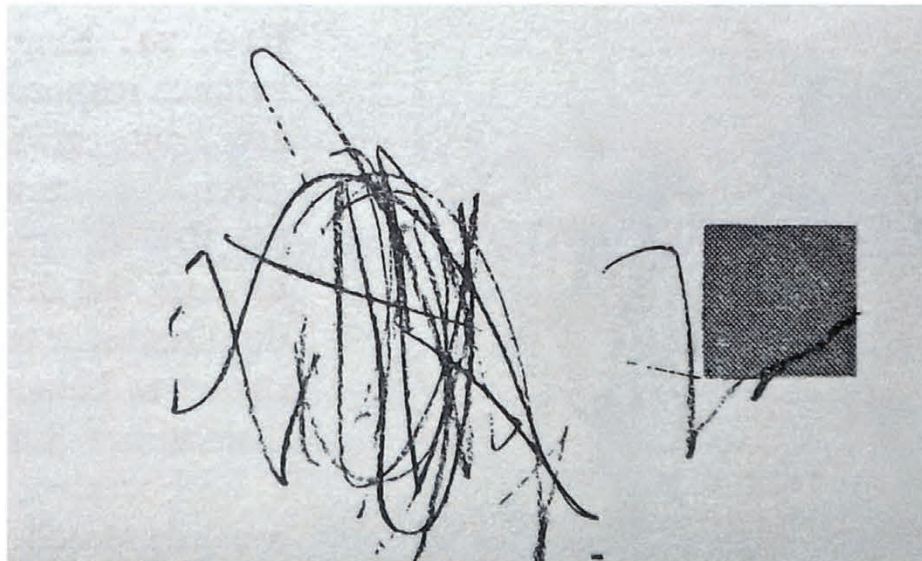


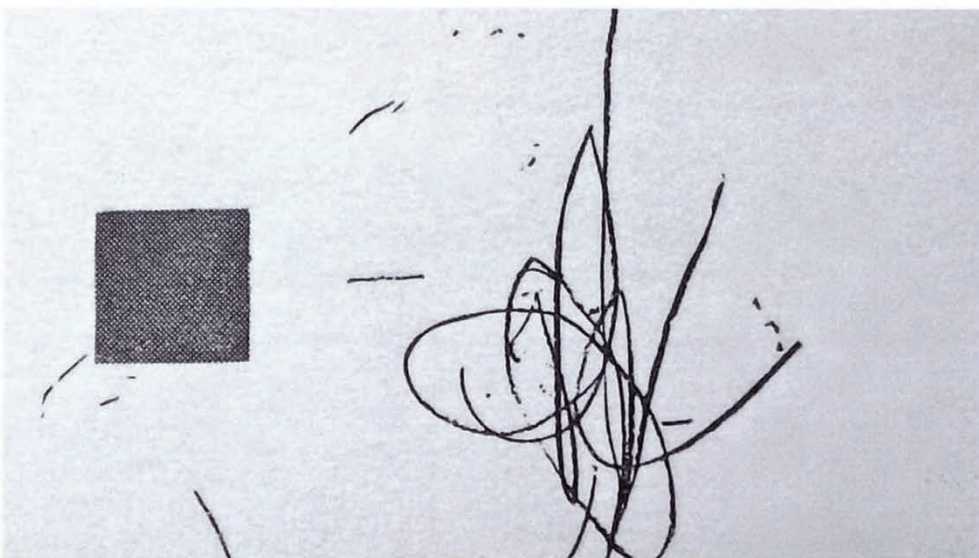
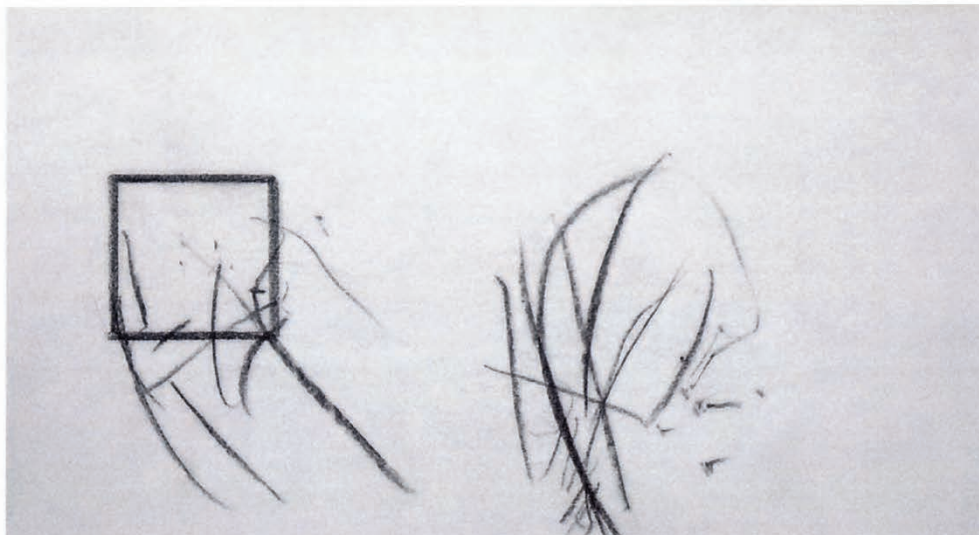


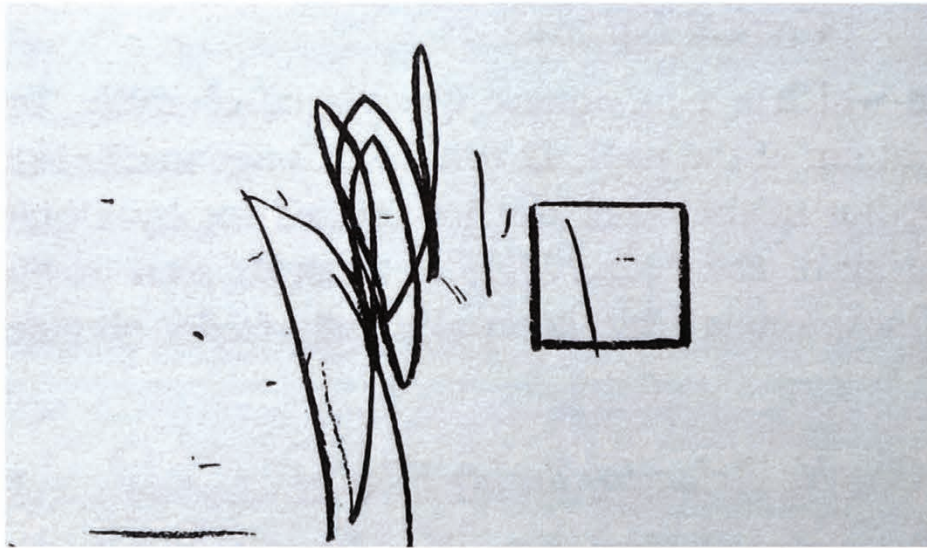
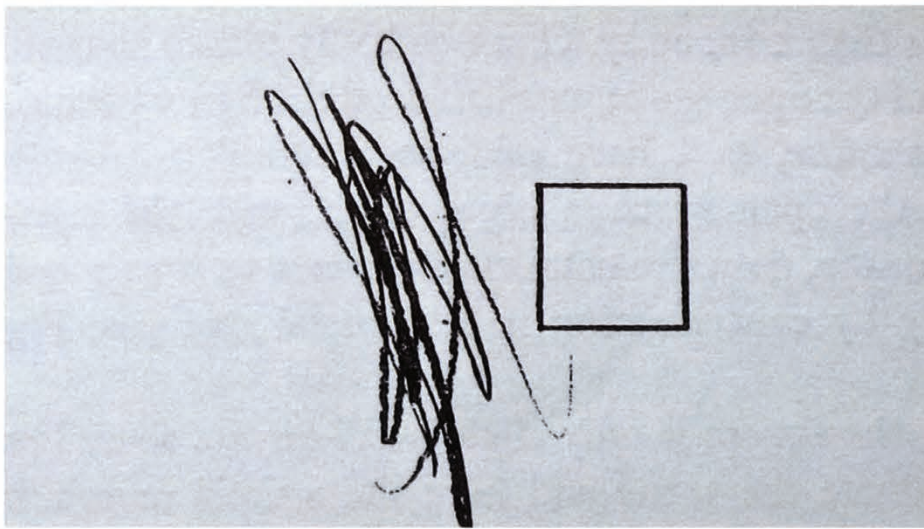


LEFT-RIGHT BALANCE

CONGO BALANCED AN OFFSET  
SQUARE BY MAKING MARKS ON  
THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE  
PAGE.

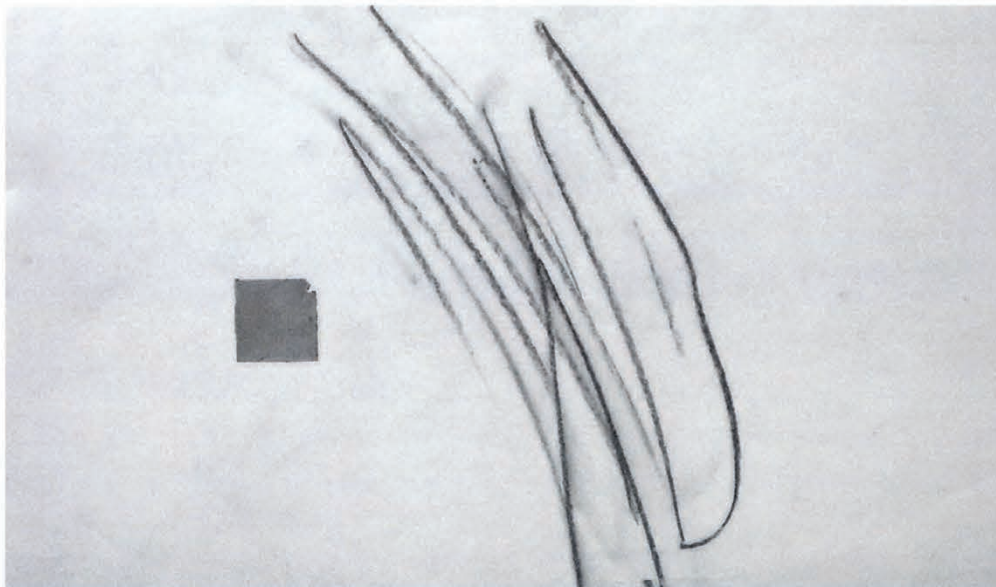


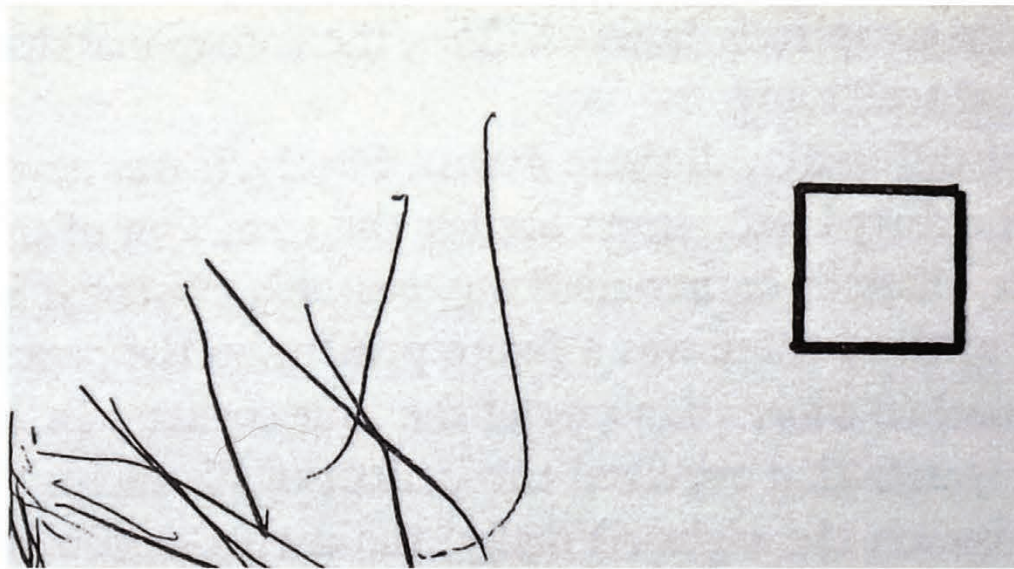




#### LEFT-RIGHT BALANCE

IF A SQUARE WAS ONLY SLIGHTLY OFFSET, CONGO WOULD BALANCE IT WITH MARKS THAT WERE EQUALLY OFFSET IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION, REVEALING A SENSITIVE UNDERSTANDING OF COMPOSITIONAL BALANCE

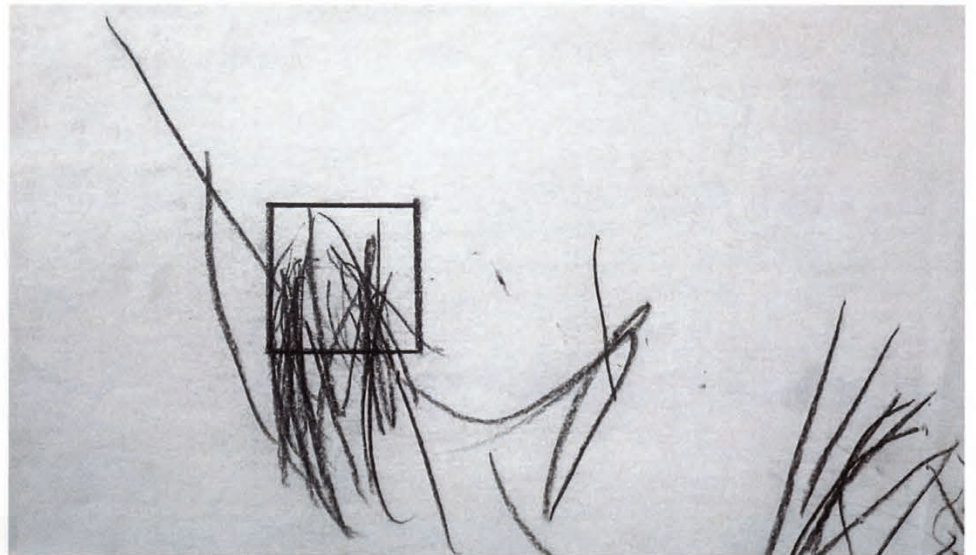


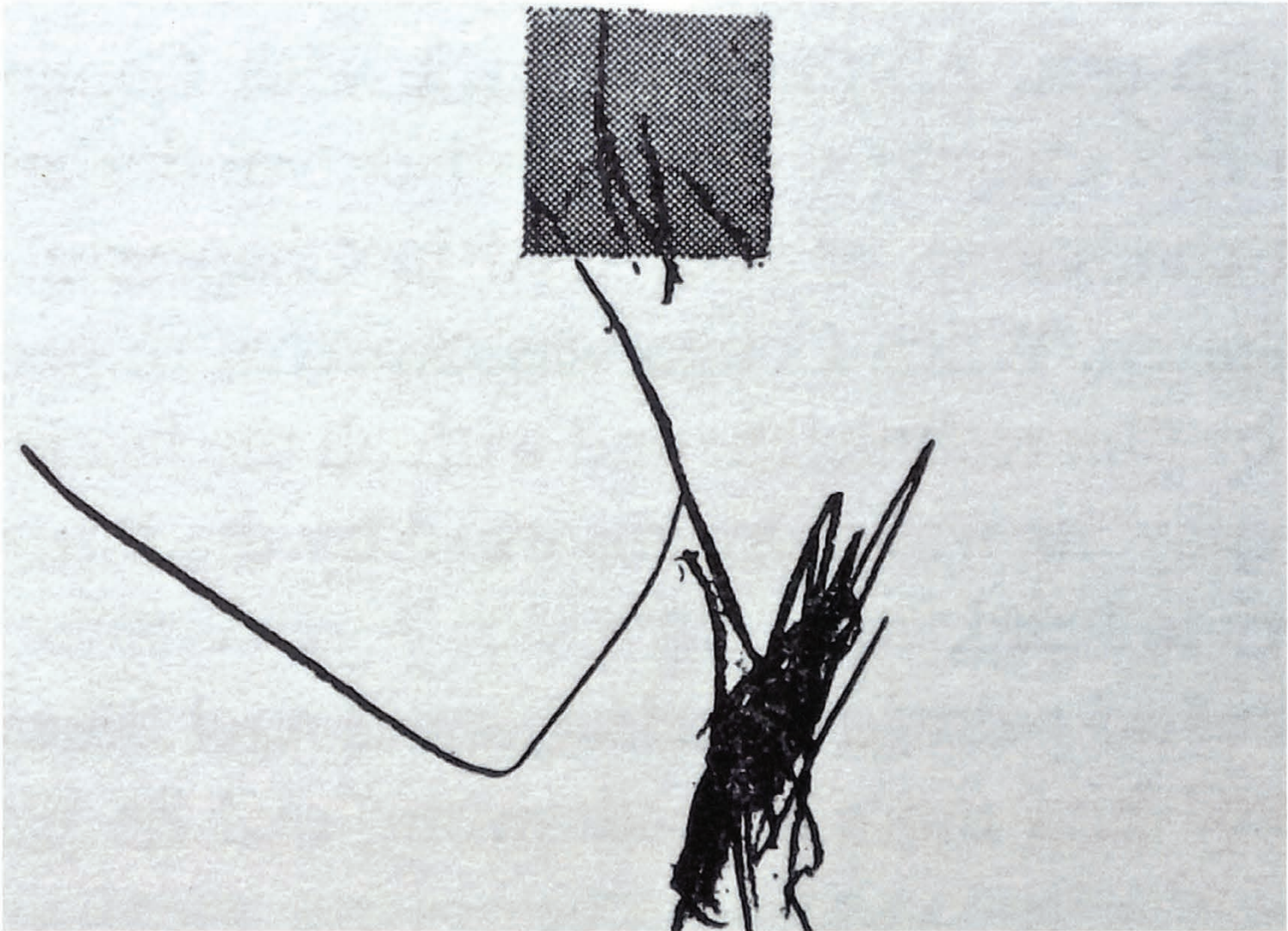


LEFT-RIGHT BALANCE

CORNER-MARKING

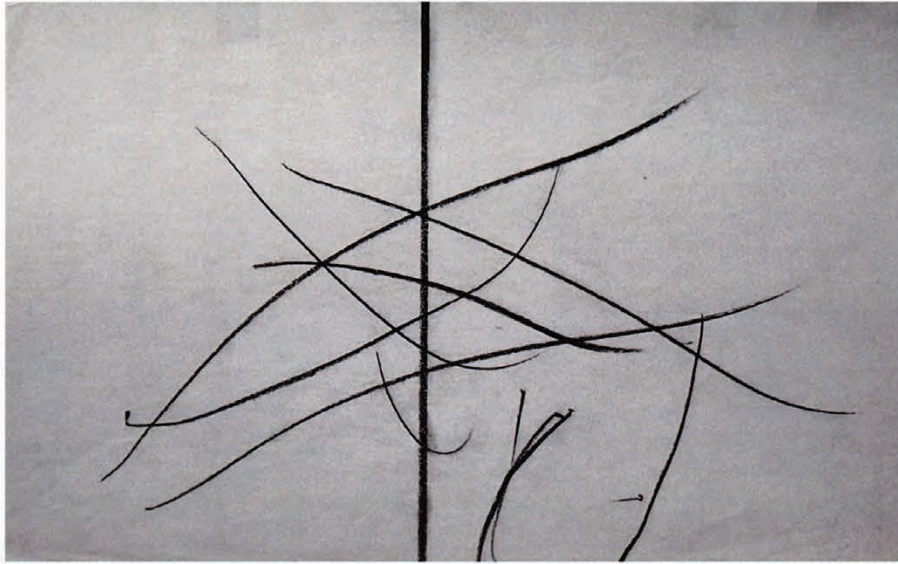
IN SEVERAL CASES CONGO  
REACTED TO AN OFFSET  
SQUARE BY MARKING THE  
LOWER CORNER OPPOSITE IT.



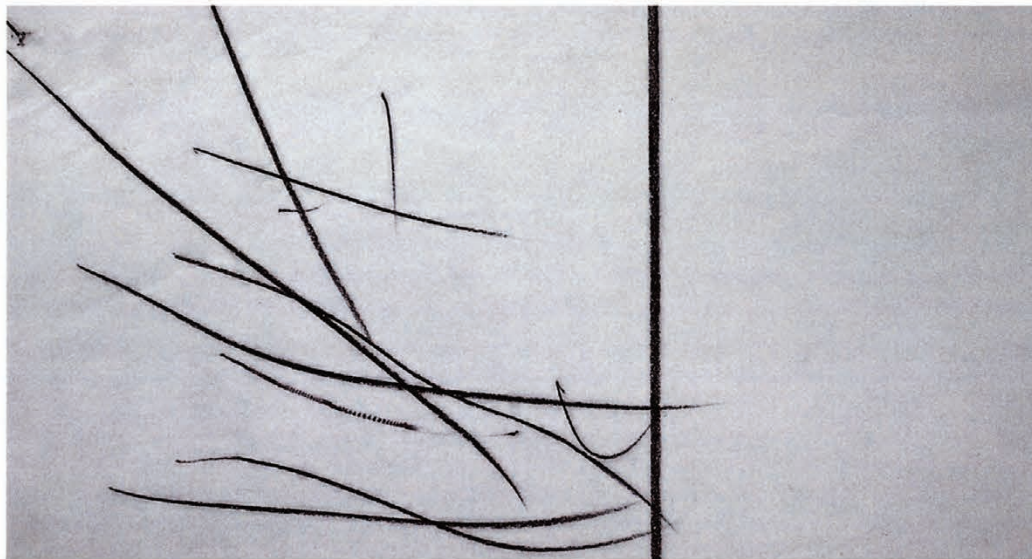
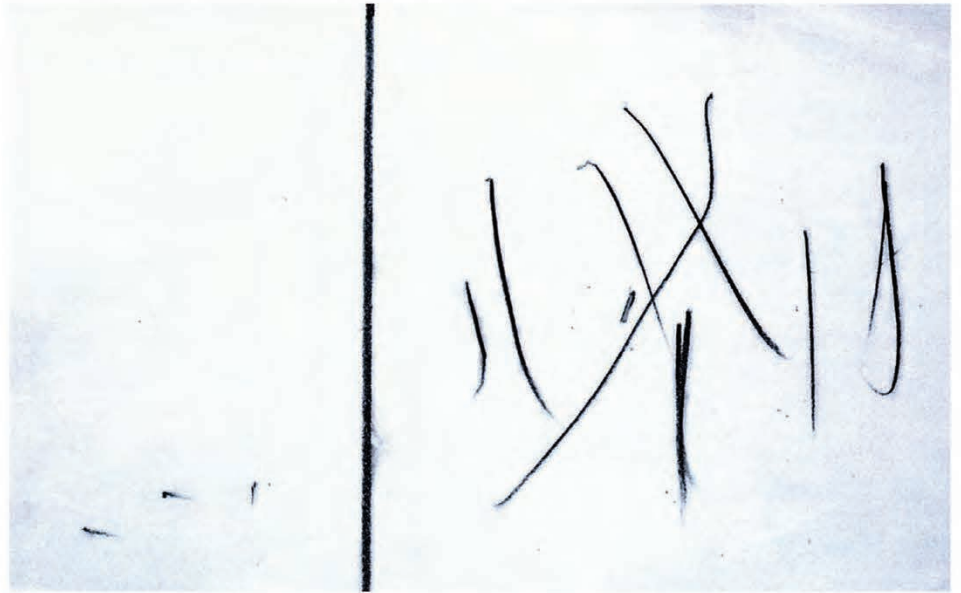


VERTICAL BALANCE

THIS IS CONGO'S MOST REMARKABLE EXPERIMENTAL DRAWING IN WHICH HE BALANCED A SQUARE THAT WAS OFFSET TO THE TOP OF THE PAGE BY MAKING A CLUSTER OF MARKS AT THE BOTTOM OF THE PAGE, DIRECTLY OPPOSITE IT.



WHEN A VERTICAL BAR HAD BEEN PLACED AT THE CENTRE OF THE PAPER, CONGO INTERSECTED IT WITH CRISS-CROSSING LINES. BUT WHEN THE BAR WAS PLACED OFF-CENTRE, HE TREATED THE LARGER OF THE TWO SPACES IT CREATED AS THE AREA FOR DRAWING AND RESTRICTED HIS LINES TO THAT PART.



## **CONGO'S PICTURE-MAKING OBEYED THE FOLLOWING RULES:**

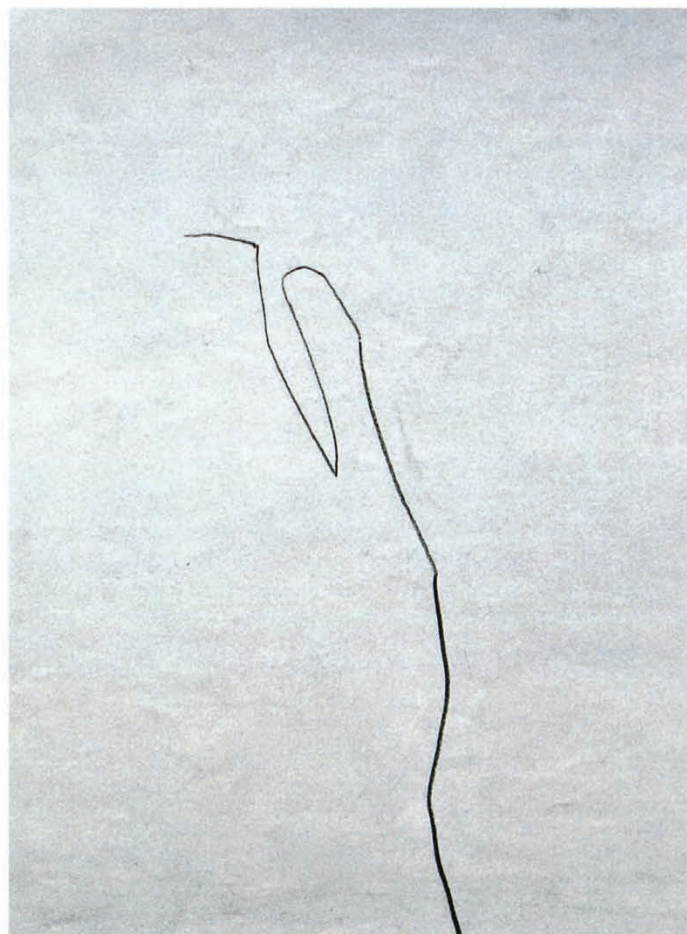
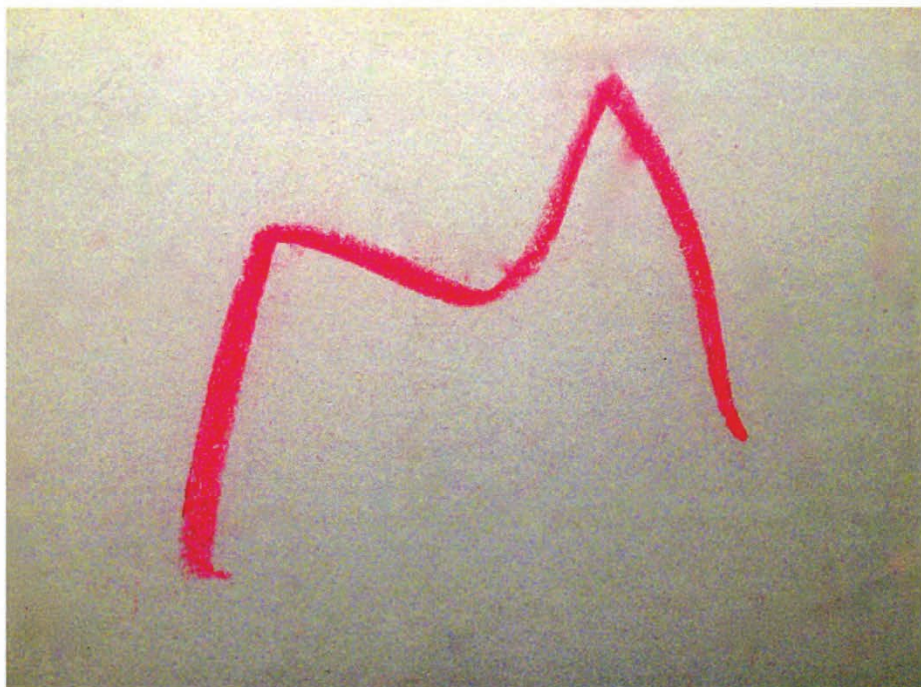
1. HE WORKED AT PICTURE-MAKING WITHOUT ANY REWARD FROM HIS HUMAN COMPANION.
2. HIS REWARD WAS THE EXCITEMENT OF MAKING VISUAL PATTERNS EMERGE ON BLANK SHEETS.
3. HE WOULD THROW A TEMPER-TANTRUM IF HE WAS INTERRUPTED BEFORE HE HAD FINISHED A PICTURE.
  4. HE WOULD NOT CONTINUE WITH A PICTURE ONCE HE CONSIDERED IT COMPLETE.
  5. HE DID HIS BEST TO KEEP HIS MARKS INSIDE THE BORDERS OF THE SHEET IN FRONT OF HIM.
  6. HE LIKED SPREAD OUT HIS DESIGN TO FILL MOST OF THE SPACE IN FRONT OF HIM.
  7. HE WAS ABLE TO DEMONSTRATE AN UNDERSTANDING OF LEFT-RIGHT AND VERTICAL BALANCE.
    8. HE DEVELOPED A FAVOURITE PATTERN, A RADIATING FAN SHAPE.
  9. ONCE HE HAD BECOME FAMILIAR WITH THE IMAGE OF HIS FAN PATTERN HE BEGAN TO VARY IT.
    10. HIS THEMATIC VARIATIONS INCLUDED:  
LOP-SIDED FANS, SPLIT FANS, SUBSIDIARY FANS, REVERSED FANS, STIPPLED FANS, AND FAN-BUNDLES.
11. IN LATER WORK HE ADDED NEW SHAPES - CIRCLES, LOOPS, ZIGZAGS, SPOTS AND HORIZONTAL LINES.

## SHAPES

A TYPICAL CONGO PICTURE WAS A CAREFULLY ARRANGED  
PATTERN OF SIMPLE UNITS - VERTICAL, DIAGONAL AND  
HORIZONTAL LINES WITH VARYING DEGREES OF CURVATURE.  
IN HIS LATER PICTURES, HOWEVER, HE BEGAN TO  
EXPERIMENT WITH NEW SHAPES.







SHAPES CREATED BY CONGO

Opposite page, top left: STAR-LIKE CROSSING

Top right: CIRCLE

Bottom left: ZIGZAG

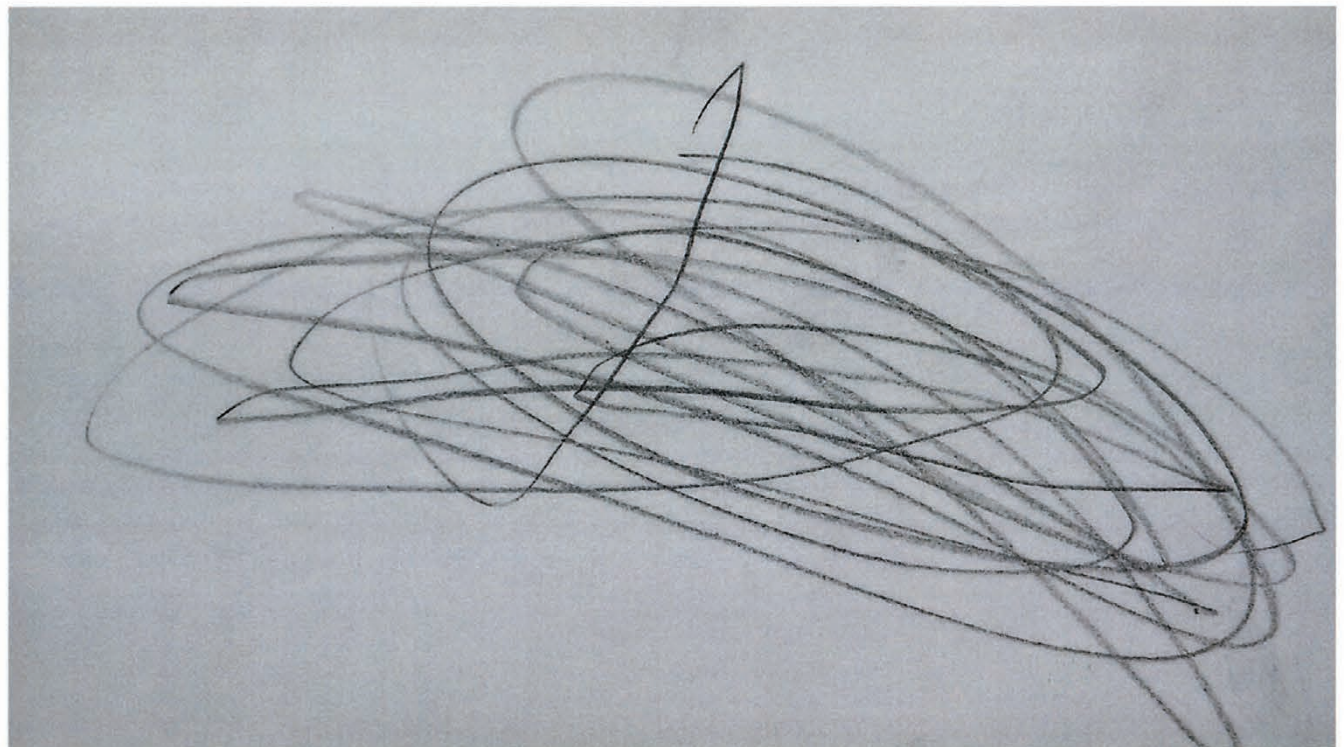
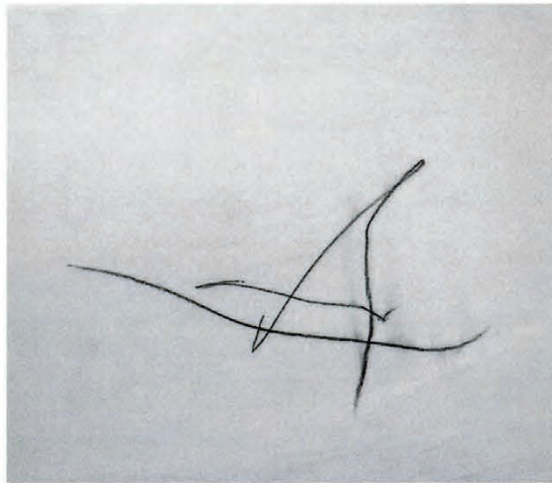
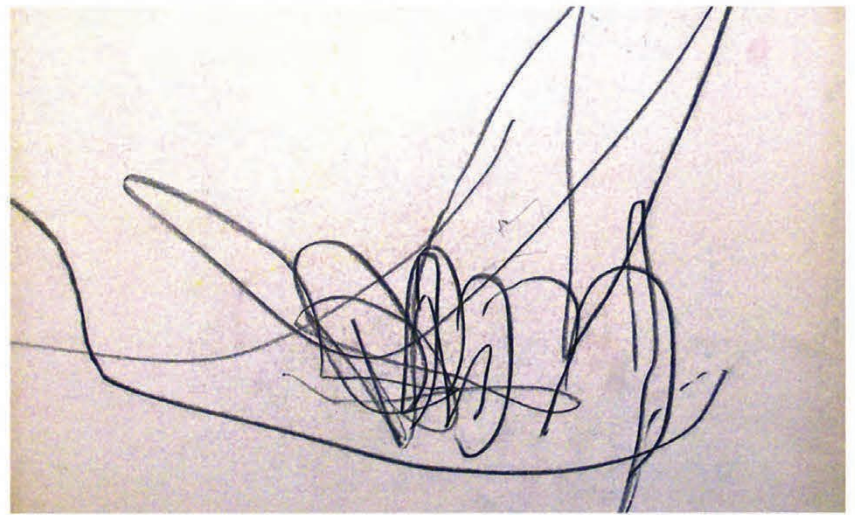
Bottom right: ROVING LINE

This page, right: REPEATED LOOPS

Centre left: TRIANGLE

Centre right: MULTI-CROSSINGS

Bottom: MULTIPLE CIRCLING



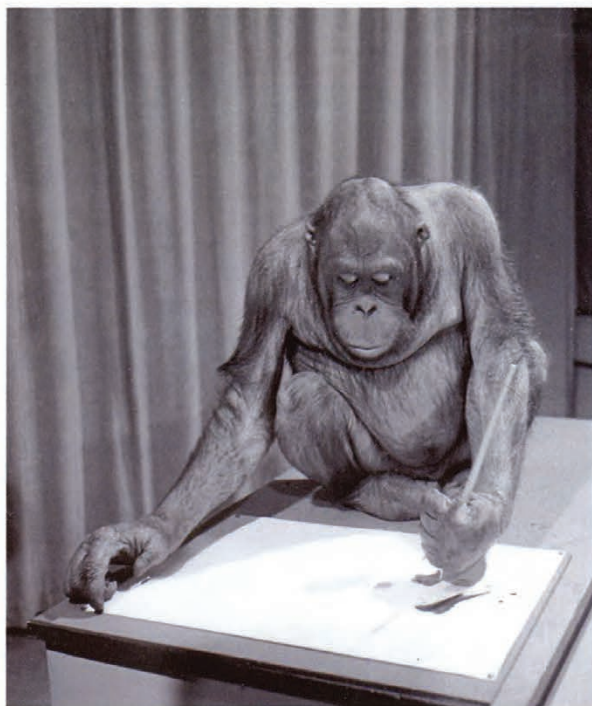
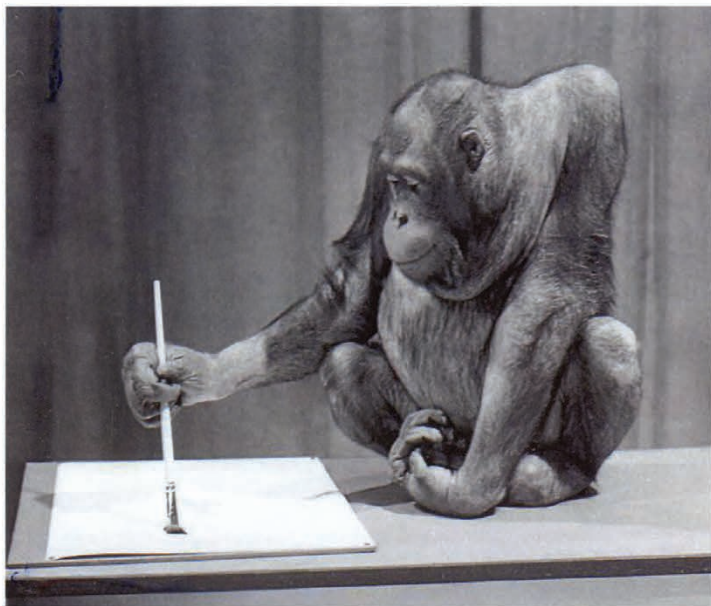


**CONGO'S MOST IMPORTANT DRAWING**

**ON THIS ONE OCCASION CONGO CAME VERY CLOSE TO CREATING A PICTORIAL IMAGE.  
HE MADE A CIRCLE AND THEN CAREFULLY ADDED SMALL MARKS INSIDE IT.  
A HUMAN CHILD WOULD HAVE SEEN THIS AS A FACE AND THE DRAWING WOULD HAVE ACTED AS THE  
PRECURSOR TO A FIRST REPRESENTATIONAL WORK.  
TANTALIZINGLY, CONGO NEVER TOOK THAT NEXT GREAT STEP.**

## PICTURE-MAKING BY OTHER APES

ALEX, AN ORANG UTAN AT LONDON ZOO, PRODUCED A NUMBER OF PAINTINGS IN THE LATE 1950s, SOME OF WHICH SHOWED A CHARACTERISTIC HORIZONTAL MOTIF, DIFFERING STRIKINGLY FROM CONGO'S FAN PATTERN.

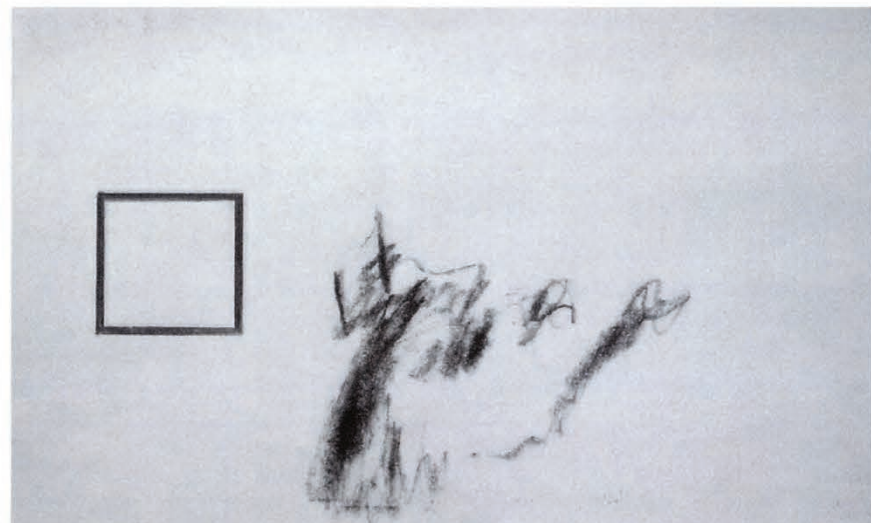
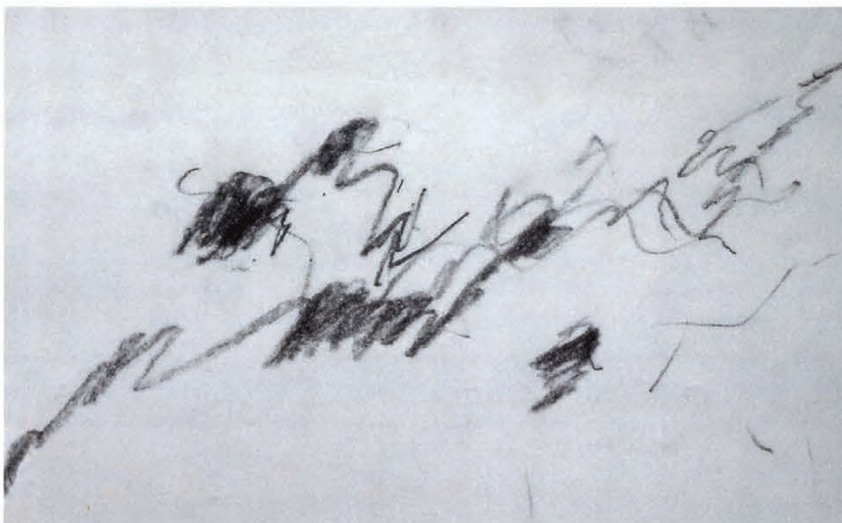
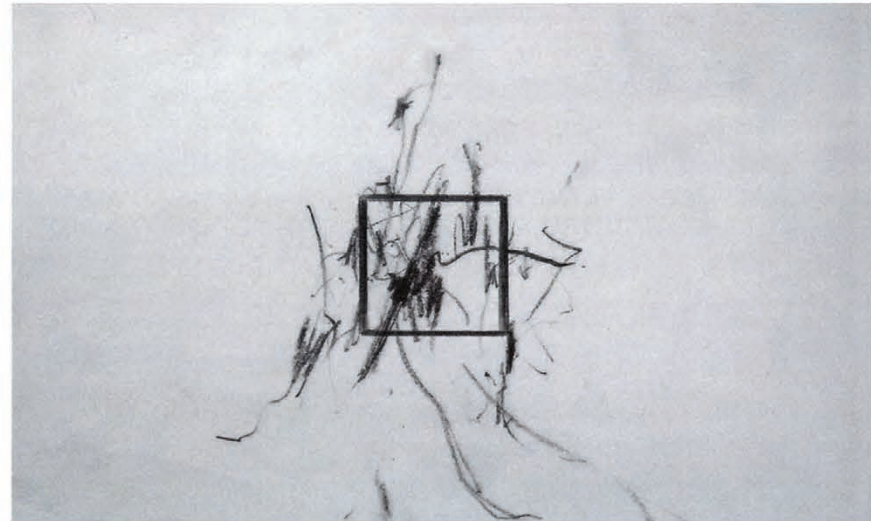
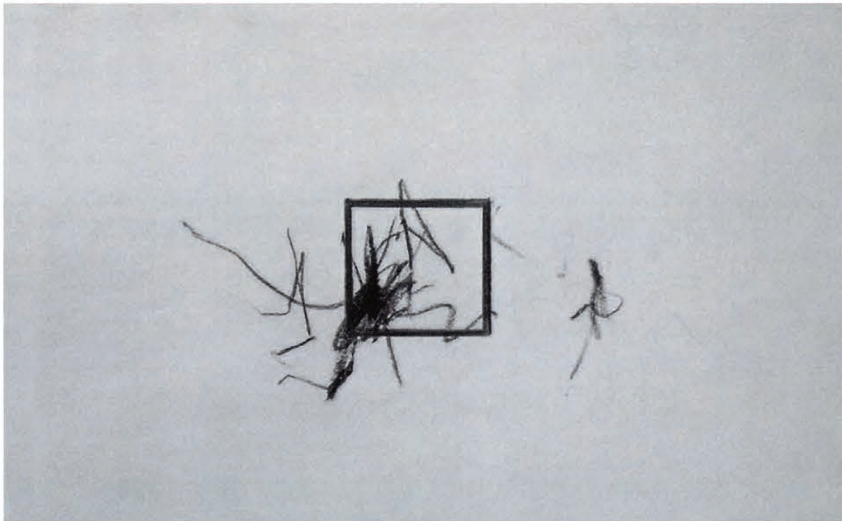




Opposite page: SOPHIE, AN ADULT GORILLA AT ROTTERDAM ZOO, PRODUCED A NUMBER OF DRAWINGS AND PAINTINGS IN THE 1950S.

This page: SOPHIE WAS ALSO GIVEN VISUAL CONTROL TESTS LIKE CONGO'S, WITH SIMILAR RESULTS.

CENRAL SQUARES WERE MARKED AND OFFSET SQUARES WERE SOMETIMES BALANCED.





**WORKS BY OTHER CHIMPANZEES**

**Top left: BETSY FINGER-PAINTING  
AT BALTIMORE ZOO**

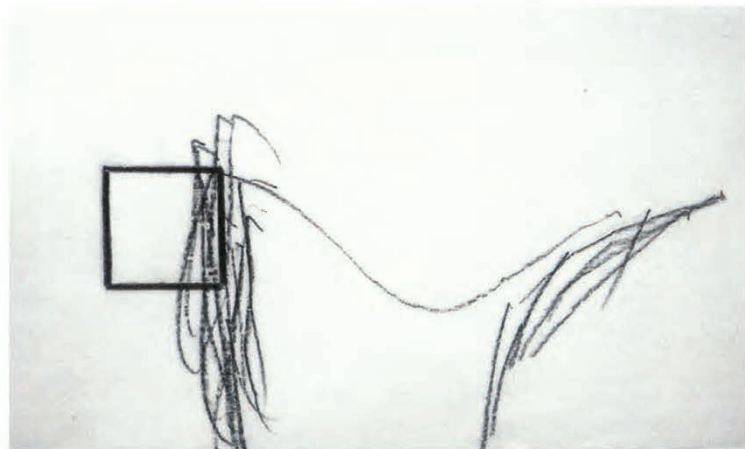
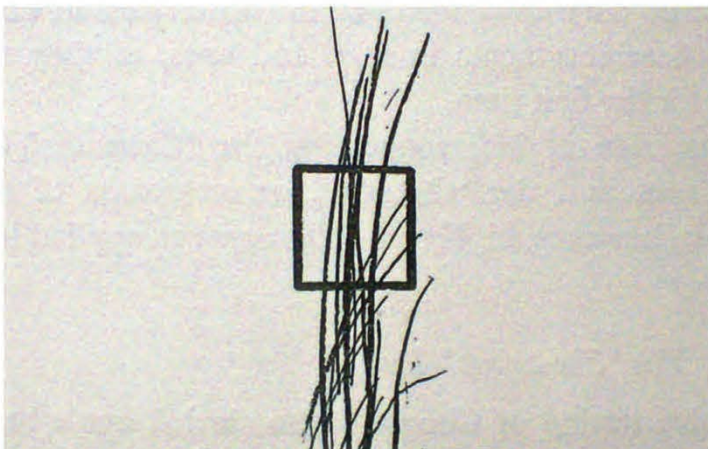
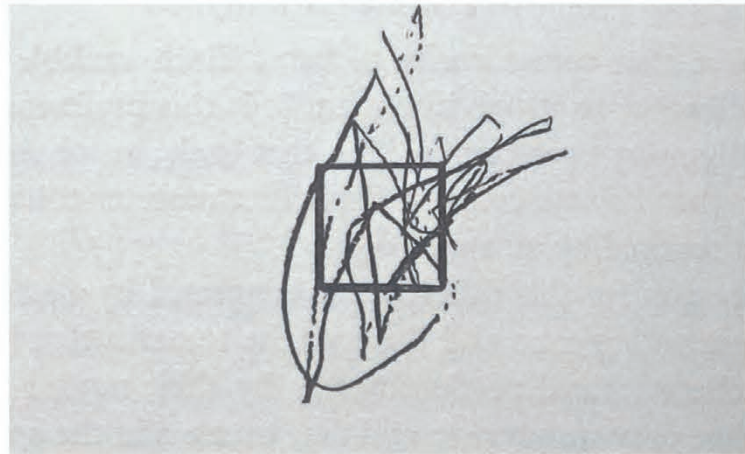
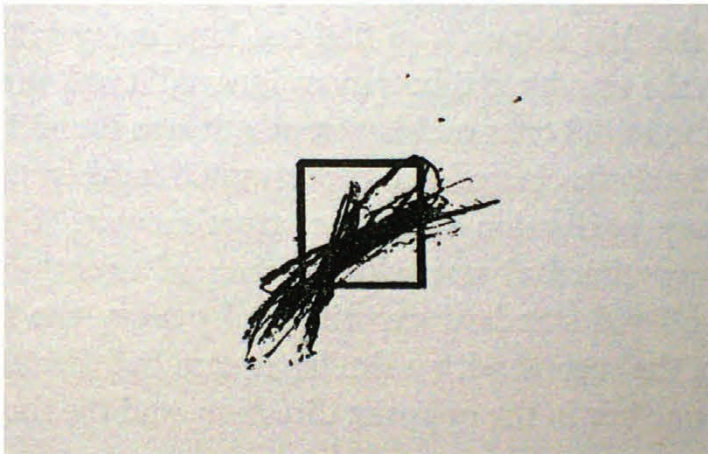
**Above: SIMPLE FAN PATTERN BY  
BELLA AT AMSTERDAM ZOO**

**Centre left: CHARLIE AT LONDON ZOO,  
MARKING CENTRAL SQUARE**

**Centre right: JUBI AT LONDON ZOO**

**Bottom left: JOSIE AT LONDON ZOO**

**Bottom right: FIFI AT LONDON ZOO,  
SHOWING LEFT-RIGHT BALANCE**



**ICA**

In association with **GRANADA TV NETWORK**

and the **ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY  
OF LONDON**

Presents an exhibition of



## Paintings by Chimpanzees

17-18 Dover Street London W1  
17 September - 21 September *Gallery*  
23 September - 12 October *Library*

### CONGO EXHIBITION

IN SEPTEMBER 1957 THE INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ARTS IN LONDON STAGED THE FIRST EXHIBITION IN HISTORY BY NON-HUMAN ARTISTS.

WORKS BY CONGO OF THE LONDON ZOO AND BETSY OF THE BALTIMORE ZOO WERE PUT ON SHOW FROM 17 SEPTEMBER TO 12 OCTOBER. THE EXHIBITION WAS OPENED BY SIR JULIAN HUXLEY.

THE EXHIBITION LATER TOURED AMERICA.

**ICA**

17 September - 12 October

# PAINTINGS BY CHIMPANZEES

**CONGO of the London Zoo**

**BETSY of the Baltimore Zoo**

arranged in conjunction with the  
**GRANADA TV NETWORK**  
and the **ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON**

Monday to Friday 10 am to 6 pm

Saturday 10 am to 1 pm Closed Sundays

**Institute of Contemporary Arts**

17-18 Dover Street London W1

Printed by Graphix Press Ltd





# THE BIOLOGY OF ART

Desmond Morris

## THE BIOLOGY OF ART

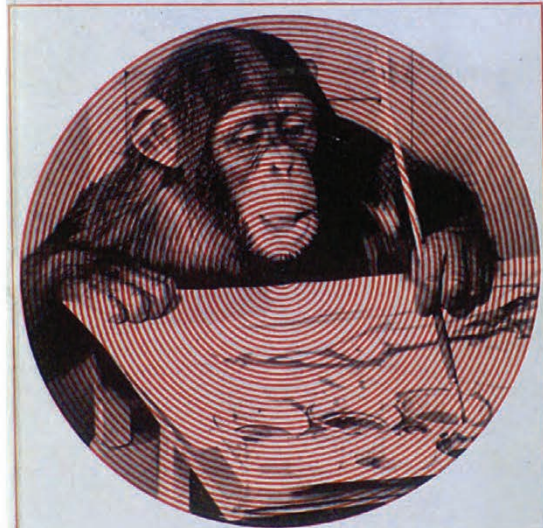
IN 1962 THE FIRST BOOK DEVOTED TO THE SUBJECT OF NON-HUMAN ART WAS PUBLISHED IN LONDON, SUMMARIZING THE PICTURE-MAKING STUDY MADE WITH CONGO FROM 1956 TO 1958 AT THE LONDON ZOO.

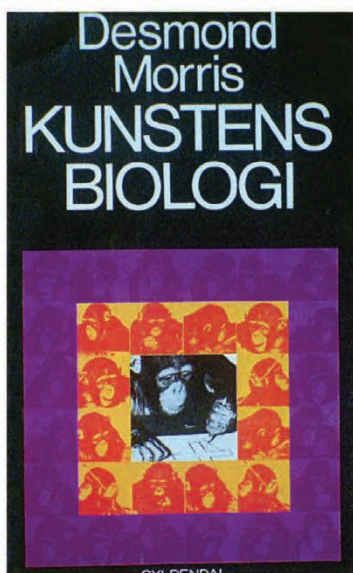
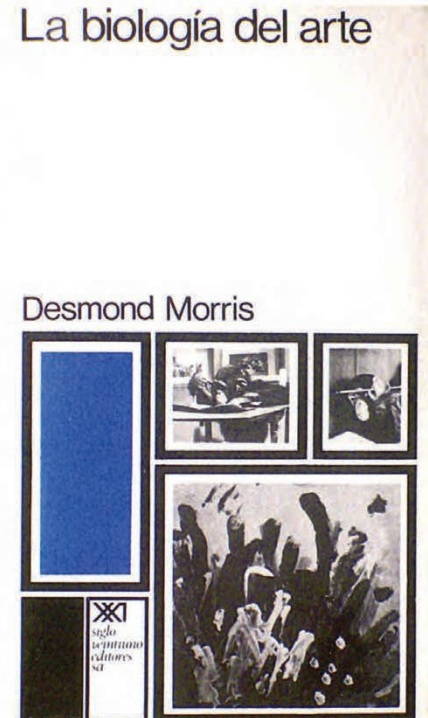
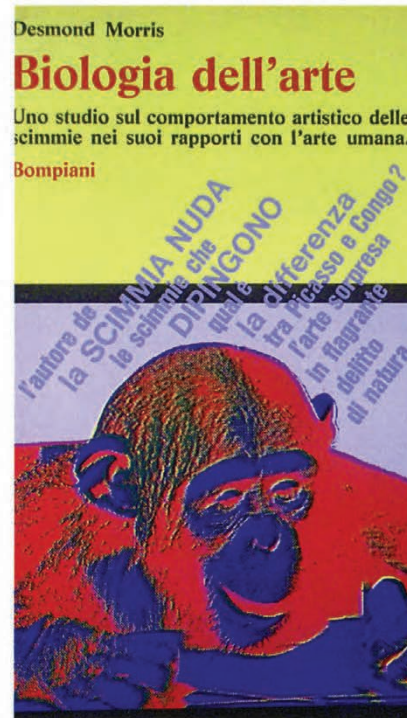
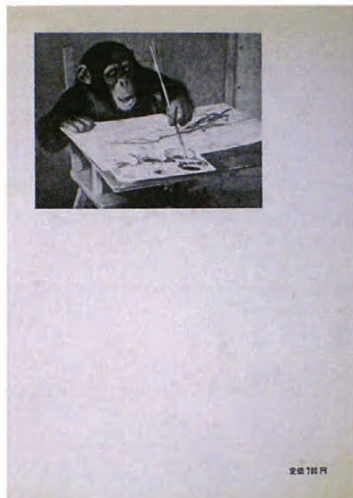
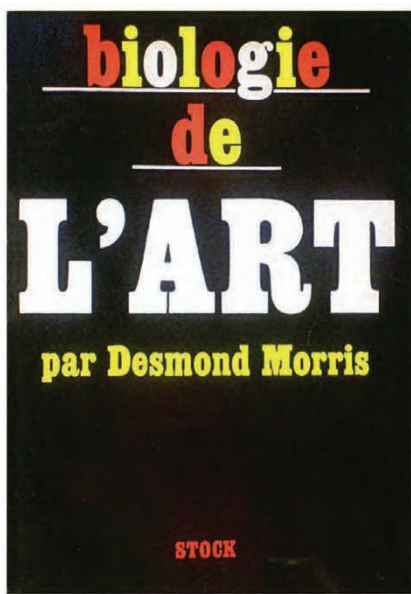


University Paperbacks

## The Biology of Art

Desmond Morris





THE BIOLOGY OF ART ALSO APPEARED IN A NUMBER OF FOREIGN EDITIONS:

From top left: FRENCH IN 1962, PORTUGUESE IN 1962, GERMAN IN 1963, SWEDISH IN 1963, JAPANESE IN 1966, GERMAN PAPERBACK IN 1968, ITALIAN IN 1969, MEXICAN IN 1971 & DANISH IN 1972.

# ART UNUSUAL TALENT

**A** UNIQUE event will take place next month at a leading auction house in London. On June 20, for the first time, three paintings by a non-human painter will go under the hammer, alongside works by major artists such as Renoir and Warhol. Bonhams will be offering for sale three pictures made by a chimpanzee called Congo.

Congo became a television celebrity in the late 1950s as the star of my animal programme *Zootime*, which was transmitted live each week from London Zoo. He was an exceptionally intelligent ape and became well known for his uninhibited appearances on the show between 1956 and 1959.

His more lasting claim to fame, however, is the 1957 exhibition of his paintings, which was held at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, an event that caused endless debate and uproar in the art world. News of this event spread around the world and critics had a field day. Headlines shouted 'Apeing the Masters' 'A new outlook on art' 'Chimps for the Tute?' and 'Art for ape's sake'. There were cartoons of apes sipping wine in front of their private views, or deftly creating masterpieces.

Commentators were divided between those who saw the exhibition as an excuse to ridicule modern art and those who realised that, in truth, this was a serious study of the origins of art and that the ape paintings, although very simple, displayed the first stirrings of an aesthetic sense — the very beginning of a rudimentary attempt to create a work of art.

Some critics suggested that if I were serious about investigating the roots of art, I would be better occupied examining child art or prehistoric art. I disagreed, pointing out that child art quickly becomes involved in the making of pictorial images and that I wanted to analyse an even earlier phase — abstract pattern-making.

When children are at their pre-pictorial scribble stage, their arm and hand muscles are not sufficiently developed to enable them to apply their lines with accuracy. The chimpanzee's arm is much stronger and, therefore, capable of making its abstract patterns with greater precision and confidence.

As for prehistoric art, any visit to the caves at Lascaux or Altamira will show you that the rock art there is not — as it has sometimes been billed — 'The birth of art', but is much more advanced — more like its adolescence.

So, for me, the paintings made by Congo had a special value and were of immense interest to anyone who was searching for a definition of human art. My experiment with Congo had begun in a simple way. He was sitting on the carpet in my office and I held out a pencil for him. He took it and I placed a piece of card in front of him. He touched it with the pencil and noticed that something strange had happened.

This is how I recorded it at the time: 'Something odd was coming out of the end of the pencil. It was Congo's first line. It wandered a short way and then stopped. Would it happen again? Yes, it did, and again and again.'

Still staring at the card, Congo began to draw line after line and I noticed that he was beginning to concentrate his lines in one particular region — a part of the card where there was a small ink blot. This meant that, even in his very first scribble, Congo's lines were not random scribbles.

I decided to start a long series of drawing tests with him, and we modified a child's high chair, fixing a large drawing board to it.

**C**ONGO sat in the chair and a sheet of paper was placed on the board. He was then offered a pencil or a crayon and allowed to draw for as long as he used. When he became bored with one piece of paper, it was taken away and another one was put in its place. Each art test lasted about half an hour, after which he wanted to play at something more physical.

There were many such test sessions, from 1956 to 1958. They were usually conducted in a private room in the zoo's Tower Block where there were no distractions for him, and it was amazing to see how quickly Congo accepted the test.

He would settle down in his high chair like a dutiful child in a classroom — but he did his best to place every pencil. On a few occasions he was



by  
**Desmond  
Morris**

persuaded to make pictures on live TV, but he found the studio too exciting to concentrate on picture-making for very long.

As the tests proceeded, I started offering him sheets of paper on which I had already placed a geometric shape — a square, rectangle, or a circle, for example — to see how this would influence the position of his lines. It soon became clear that, if I placed a shape on one side of the paper, he would try to balance it by making his marks on the other side, proving he had a good sense of basic composition.

**W**HEN a shape was placed at the top of the page, he would balance it by making his marks at the bottom. After a while he became so accurate in his markings that I decided to risk trying him out with paints and brushes.

At first, like most chimps when faced with coloured paints, Congo went splash-splash, playing with his new toys and making a terrible mess. This went on for a long time and I was about to abandon paintings and return to drawings, when suddenly — without any prompting from me — Congo started to concentrate on what he was doing.

The novelty of the liquid paints had worn off and now at last he was exploring pattern variations in paint, as he had done with his earlier drawing.

His favourite design was a radiating pattern, and, once he had mastered that, he began to vary it. He would cover it with spots, or split it in two and place a single spot in the middle, or make a curved fan, an inverted fan or a subsidiary fan.

Developing a theme and then varying it like this is the very basis of human art and it was intriguing to see the chimpanzee following the same kind of visual development. What's more, the animal did all this without any reward from me.

It was truly art for art's sake, and as the weeks passed, Congo became increasingly obsessed with his regular painting sessions. I tried to stop him before he had finished a painting, but he would have a screaming fit. And if I tried to persuade him to go on painting after he considered that he had finished a picture, he would stubbornly refuse.

When he was working, he concentrated intensely and tried hard to make his picture fit the card or paper in front of him — always attempting to avoid going over the edges. Congo never managed to make a recognisable pictorial image — the chimpanzee brain is not advanced enough for this.

Every human child develops verbal language and the ability to make and identify pictorial images, but the ape never reaches that stage. As a result all his pictures were abstract patterns — but he did his best to place every line just where he wanted it. I never



PHOTOGRAPH BY GIANPAOLO TEBERACCHIO/ALAMY

in the eyes of art collectors. Interestingly, it was the major artists who were quick to understand the true significance of the pictures. Picasso acquired one and was fascinated by it.

When a reporter asked him his opinion of it, Picasso left the room and then reappeared with his arms swinging like an ape's, jumped at the reporter and bit him. It was presumably his eccentric way of saying: 'The chimp and I are in the same business.'

The Spanish master, Miró, visited me at the zoo, where he carefully selected a Congo painting and gave me two of his own in exchange. Salvador Dalí was entranced by Congo's work, exclaiming: 'The hand of the chimpanzee is quasi-human; the hand of Jackson Pollock is totally animal!'

Indeed, whoever buys Congo's work will be in good company. Apart from Picasso and Miró, there is an original Congo in the Natural History Museum in London and even one at Buckingham Palace, owned by the Duke of Edinburgh.

**T**HERE was something so human about Congo's intelligence — and I had developed an incredibly close bond with him — but something had to be done with him as he became bigger and more powerful. When he became fully grown, he would be stronger than any man, and it was with a great sadness that I realised he would soon have to be transferred to an enclosure in London Zoo's Monkey House. The problem was that Congo had grown up with humans and he considered himself to be human.

When he saw the other apes in the Monkey House he was not at all impressed, and in his remaining years at the zoo, right up to his death, he never did take to them. Dalí was right — he really was 'quasi-human'.

In my enthusiasm for studying him, I had unwittingly created a 'mental hybrid' — and I realised never again to humanise a wild animal in this way.

Chimps should live with other chimps, not with humans. And although I had learned a tremendous amount about chimpanzee behaviour from my studies on Congo, I was beginning to realise that, in the future, what was needed was not more captive studies, but a serious in-depth investigation of chimpanzees in the wild.

In the 1950s this had not been attempted because it was thought to be too dangerous, but working with us at London Zoo was a young girl who would soon prove that it could be done. None of us had recognised her potential, or imagined that she would one day become a world famous primatologist for her fieldwork in Africa.

Her name was Jane Goodall. And the rest, as they say, is history.

**It was a ground-breaking experiment by Britain's leading anthropologist — could he teach a chimp to paint? The results were so extraordinary they were bought by Picasso and Miro. Now, almost 50 years on, they are up for auction for the first time**

influenced the way he painted. I simply sat and watched in astonishment. When something special happened, such as the moment he discovered how to make his first circle, he would utter soft grunts of pleasure.

The moment that excited him most of all was when he had made a circle in the middle of a paper and then proceeded to make marks inside it.

Had he been a human child, he would have seen a face in what he had drawn and it would have been the start of pictorial exploring, but

sadly there was no way of knowing whether Congo saw it that way, and he never took it any further.

It was a tantalising moment, as though he was right on the threshold of pictorial art, but he could go no further.

Without any training from me, he learned by himself how to switch from his early, primitive grip of the brush to a sophisticated human grip. And when selecting his paints it was he, not I, who decided how much of how little to use of each colour. His favourite colour was red; his least favourite was blue. Sadly,

this phase of serious painting lasted only for a few months, out of the three years I was working with him. He produced 384 pictures, but during his peak period he made only about 40 or 50 paintings that were under complete visual control by him, and after that he became bored with the effort of it all and reverted to playful splash-splashing again, blotting out his patterns and gradually losing interest.

Significantly, apes at other zoos that have been given paints as a gimmick have never reached the stage of intense concentration that

Congo experienced. One scientist wrote to me to say that, after three whole days, he had failed to get the same results as those I had described with Congo — with balance, composition and pattern variation — and because of this he doubted the validity of my results.

I replied that if he had tried for three years instead of three days, I might have been more impressed by his comments.

So the three paintings coming up at Bonhams are quite rare and it will be interesting to see how valuable they turn out to be

IN 2005, HALF A CENTURY AFTER THEY WERE PAINTED, THREE OF CONGO'S PICTURES WERE AUCTIONED BY BONHAM'S IN LONDON AS LOT 29 IN THEIR 'MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART' SALE ON 20 JUNE. ESTIMATED AT £600-£800, THEY WERE SOLD TO AN AMERICAN COLLECTOR FOR £12,000. TWO MORE CONGO PAINTINGS WERE INCLUDED AS LOTS 12 & 14 IN THEIR 21 OCTOBER 2005 SALE OF 'CONTEMPORARY ART', AND SOTHEYBY'S ALSO SOLD A CONGO IN THEIR 18 MARCH 2008 SALE OF '20TH CENTURY BRITISH ART', LOT 137.

EPA/SANTIVISALLI/INC/BONHAMS/PA



One of Congo the chimpanzee's three abstract paintings, which started a bidding war at auction yesterday

## Art world goes wild for chimpanzee's paintings as Warhol work flops

By NIGEL REYNOLDS  
ARTS CORRESPONDENT

THE art world, confusing at the best of times, took another right-angled lurch at Bonhams auction house yesterday.

Amid wild scenes, three paintings by a chimpanzee were sold for £14,400, more than 20 times their estimate.

In the same sale an Andy Warhol painting and a small Renoir sculpture attracted so little interest that they had to be withdrawn.

The chimp daubings are believed to be the first works of art by a non-human to go under the hammer. But they were executed by no ordinary



14 September – 14 October 2005

## APE ARTISTS OF THE 1950s

PRIVATE VIEW

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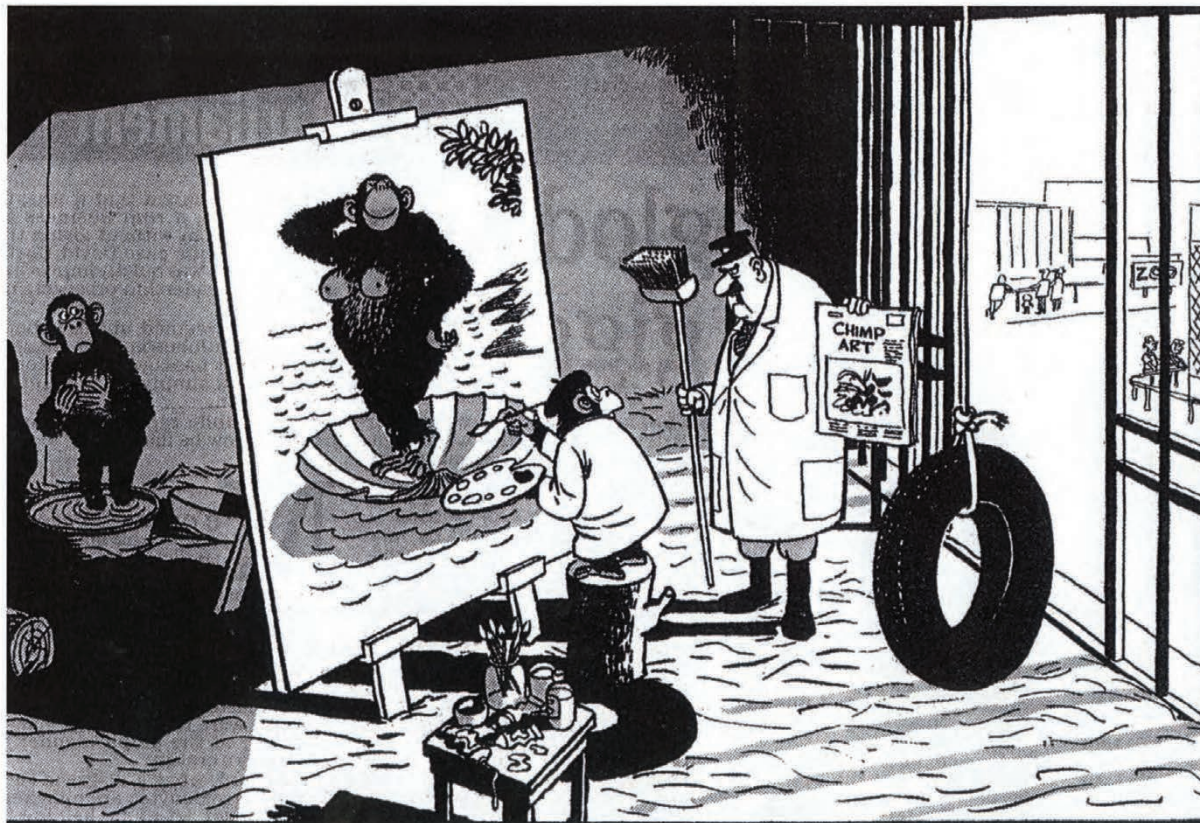
Left: AS A RESULT OF THE AUCTION SUCCESS WITH CONGO'S PAINTINGS IN JUNE 2005, THE MAYOR GALLERY IN LONDON STAGED AN EXHIBITION OF APE ART IN SEPTEMBER OF THAT YEAR, FEATURING WORKS BY CONGO, BETSY, ALEX AND SOPHIE.

Right: IN 1990 BELGIAN ART HISTORIAN THIERRY LENAIN PUBLISHED AN ANALYSIS OF APE PAINTING. AN ENGLISH EDITION APPEARED IN 1997.

## Monkey Painting

Thierry Lenain

with an introduction by  
Desmond Morris



**'No, no, no! Start again. This is the kind of stuff that sells for £15,000.'**

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