The image shows the front cover of a spiral-bound notebook. The cover is a light cream or off-white color, decorated with numerous large, solid-colored polka dots in red, blue, yellow, and pink. The dots are scattered across the surface. On the left side, a black plastic spiral binding is visible. In the center of the cover, the title "The Story of 'B'" is printed in a black, serif font. Below the title, the author's name "Cindy Tower" and the date "Spring 1991" are printed in the same font, stacked vertically.

The Story of "B"

Cindy Tower
Spring 1991

INTRODUCTION

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO BRENDAN
AND THE OTHER "B" MEN IN MY LIFE

August 1, 1994

INTRODUCTION

Through this tale describing her quest for romance, love and a serious relationship, Cindy Tower provides us with a glimpse of the process of an artist "doing her art,"--making her "B" paintings. This happens almost inadvertently, while we are treated to a very engaging story. Cindy's purpose in writing this essay may be to explore and understand her experiences during this quest--both the ecstasies and the horrors. But for the reader, and for anyone interested in understanding "what is art" and how art is made, this essay provides rare opportunity to discover how an artist's life, experiences, desires and passions are transformed into her work.

Carole Cleaver

I am adding this insert, because I left something out. Shortly after this show, I moved from Williamsburg into an apartment of my own at 46 West 85th Street, number 2B. 2B was clearly visible on the door and I recognized the humor of it immediately. I became convinced that the meaning behind my obsession creating “B” paintings was simply to learn to “be”, (or to learn to be myself).

Also, upon moving into apartment 2B, I received a UPS package from Wyoming. Inside the box was a smiling cow skull that had been found inside the house in which I had been held hostage. The skull was sent to me as a gift of appreciation and closure with a mention that a trial against Max for assault had been won.

Twenty years later in rereading the story, I cringe at my own lack of awareness and am struck by how emotionally frozen I was at the time. In retrospect, it is clear to me now that the meaning behind the paintings was the yearning “to be seen”. For me, this is what the work is about. The story still holds merit in that it illustrates how meanings may be decoded and processed through obsession. Today I would behave differently, but I still stand behind the work. For me, the “B” paintings still resonate.

I am thinking of getting the “B” paintings out of storage for anyone who, like me, has trouble simply “being”, “being him/herself” and who realizes the importance of “being seen”. Perhaps these works may provide visual inspiration to do so.





The "B" story began as a quest for a relationship, although in retrospect I think it was a little absurd to spend the last three years searching for a soul mate in a town of twelve people, in the middle of nowhere, with nothing in it (except a mountain with a "B" on it).

I was lonely living in San Diego. I wanted a relationship that worked and for some reason felt that I wasn't feminine enough to get it. I began a campaign to become more feminine by buying all the flowered clothes I could find in local LaJolla thrift shops. I dyed my eyelashes and painted the inside of my garage pink.

I had been writing my old boyfriend in New York. We were thinking about getting back together again and we decided I'd visit for a week to see how we would get along. The day of my flight, I drove to the desert to finish a painting because the ocotillo would no longer be in bloom if I waited until after my trip. I got on the highway and eventually turned off onto a sandy road which led into the middle of the Anza Borrego Desert (where Leaky's prehistoric man was found) and where the site of my painting destination lay.

While I was painting, I thought to wear my bikini to work on my tan for New York. It was hard to concentrate, however, because flies kept landing on me. I kept brushing them off until I realized they were not flies, but bumble-bees. I figured they must have been attracted to the bright orange color of my suit, and since it was off-season and I hadn't seen a person or even a vehicle in the desert for weeks, I felt it was pretty safe to take it off and paint in the raw. When I got naked, the bees left me alone and I was able to finish my painting.

Around 3:30 I'd had enough sun and decided to pack up my gear. My flight was at seven. I placed my clothes, suit and water-bottle near a boulder so I could find them again and carried my folding easel and paints to the truck.

When I got there, however, I freaked out because it was completely engulfed in a giant swarm of bees. Miraculously, I had left the windows of the cab rolled up so the bees had not gotten into the vehicle. I was able to slowly stick my arm through the swarm, open the car door a crack and slip in. The keys were in the ignition and I drove down the road a little ways to shake the bees off so I could then load my stuff. I stopped my truck and got out to make sure the swarm was gone. Unfortunately, the swarm, in the shape of a funnel-

cloud was following behind close to the ground. It might have been the bag of oranges in the back of the truck the bees were after. I couldn't turn the truck around or it would get stuck in the sand and was forced to pull out onto the highway naked and drive to the next exit in order to shake the bees.

Actually I thought this "Bee" incident was a good omen for my trip to New York. I thought this encounter with bees certainly meant that great passion, sex and romance awaited me. Furthermore, while driving back to San Diego, I passed through the town of Banner, California which had a mountain with a beautiful letter "B" drawn on it. I was pleased to see another "Bee" that same afternoon and took it as a doubly positive omen.

Andy greeted me at Kennedy Airport that evening with a black, hefty garbage bag. He knew me well and remembered the never-ending wool needlepoint project that I had begun in the early eighties and still to this day take with me whenever I travel. "Here Cindy, put your needlepoint in this--I have this terrible moth infestation at home", he exclaimed. And sure enough, we got to his place and there were hundreds of moths all around his bed that seemed to have hatched out of the sweaters on his shelves. Needless to say, I interpret the moth as a symbol of decay and it certainly was fitting since the week turned out to be rather hellish and we didn't get along at all. I flew back to California sad and angry, but the bees came to my mind. The bees were still in California and I hoped that this meant that my "B" man was there waiting for me as well.

For my birthday that July, I decided to visit my birthplace at the Holloman airforce base in Alamogordo, New Mexico, where my father had been a test-pilot in the 50's. As a baby he took me flying with him in jets, but I had not seen New Mexico since. I was now living in southern California, and I thought it was a good time to go. So I took off.

After 18 hours of driving with only a couple more hours to go, I got second thoughts about being in Alamogordo for my birthday. I pulled into a shell station to ask the attendant what he thought of Alamogordo. "It is dull, isn't it?" I said. He nodded. I looked at the map. Alamogordo is situated just south of the Trinity test bomb site in the "Todos Las Muerto" range--or 'Day of the Dead' mountains. Furthermore, the name "Holloman" sounded to me



Lightning Field Cabin

as if there would be a lot of "hollow men"--unthinking, soulless men--walking around the base which seemed rather dismal.

Instead I called up the DIA Art Foundation to ask if there happened to be a vacancy at Walter de Maria's Lightning Field Installation in Quemado. As luck had it there was supposed to have been a television crew filming footage but they had canceled at the last minute, so I could have the place to myself.

It was the perfect gift on my 31st birthday. I recalled being a little disappointed that the weather was so beautiful. It was clear and sunny with a full moon. I had wished for thunderheads so that I could watch lightning hit the 500 rods surrounding the cabin. The cabin was rustic with a wood-burning stove and a wood shed out back. It had a front porch with several repaired rocking chairs on it.

The first thing I did when I arrived was claim the place as my own. I rearranged the furniture and then took off my clothes to change Walter de Maria's piece conceptually into a nudist colony. I then took a three-mile hike around the perimeter of the field. Each of 500 rods were placed approximately a city block apart in a giant grid. Each was polished to a mirror finish to reflect the light. Around dusk I suddenly became aware of the great beauty of this piece when the landscape transformed itself. Each rod lit up red from the sunset suggesting a monumental birthday cake with 500 firey-red candles ablaze. I wanted to stay out there forever dancing naked among the columns of light but it was getting cold. It was time to head back, for it would get dark soon. Looking towards the cabin, I noticed a third dwelling that I hadn't seen before. Somehow I had overlooked an outhouse to the right of the cabin's entrance. As I approached, the outhouse whipped its tail and I realized that what I was looking at was a giant black bull. The bull stepped over to block the doorway of the cabin, so I had to circle around the cabin and crawl in through a back bedroom window.

I didn't want to go back outside until the bull was gone, but he wouldn't leave. I could hear him scratching his head against the cabin wall. The sunset was so beautiful that I decided to watch it anyway, despite the bull. After all, it was my birthday. So I sat out there watching the sunset on my birthday with a bull, and then out from underneath the cabin a bunny rabbit joined us. The three of us peacefully coexisted together for about fifteen



Bull or Building?



minutes. I remember watching the sunset's pink filter through the bunny's ears. I was happy and content. I felt my femininity reaffirmed by attracting both the bull--a symbol of virility, and the bunny--symbolizing wisdom and propagation. I had received confirmation that I was a desirable and attractive woman.

Years ago in New York I asked a psychic if I'd ever get married. He told me that he didn't see it for quite some time but that he did see a man that would be very important in my life--he couldn't visualize the name or face but he did get a clear reading of a giant letter "B", "for whatever it's worth", he added. I had forgotten all about this session. Until I met Barry. The next time I went to a psychic I actually paid him \$40 to not tell me anything.

I met Barry on a job site, building a giant fountain in LaJolla in the middle of a wealthy businessman's sculpture garden. The previous owner of the residence had been the bachelor son of the president of Mexico who had landscaped this garden with every kind of fruit imaginable. There were figs, kiwi, blackberries, raspberries, bananas, coconuts, kumquats, oranges, grapefruit, grapes, nuts and lemons. It was truly the garden of paradise. We fell in love working outside together. Both of us were tan and blonde from the sun and fit from doing construction. All the exposure to the sun irritated Barry's lips so that he continuously broke out in herpes sores, but despite this, he was the most handsome man I had ever met.

Barry lived in New York and was in LaJolla to fabricate this one fountain. It was originally supposed to take a month to build, but it ended up taking four. After having worked solidly without taking time off, Barry mentioned that he'd like to go hiking one afternoon. I had seen a nice looking trail that went straight up the "B" mountain in Banner. From the road the trail appeared to continue along atop the ridge, and would have a spectacular view. It must have been part of the Pacific Crest Trail I had heard so much about.

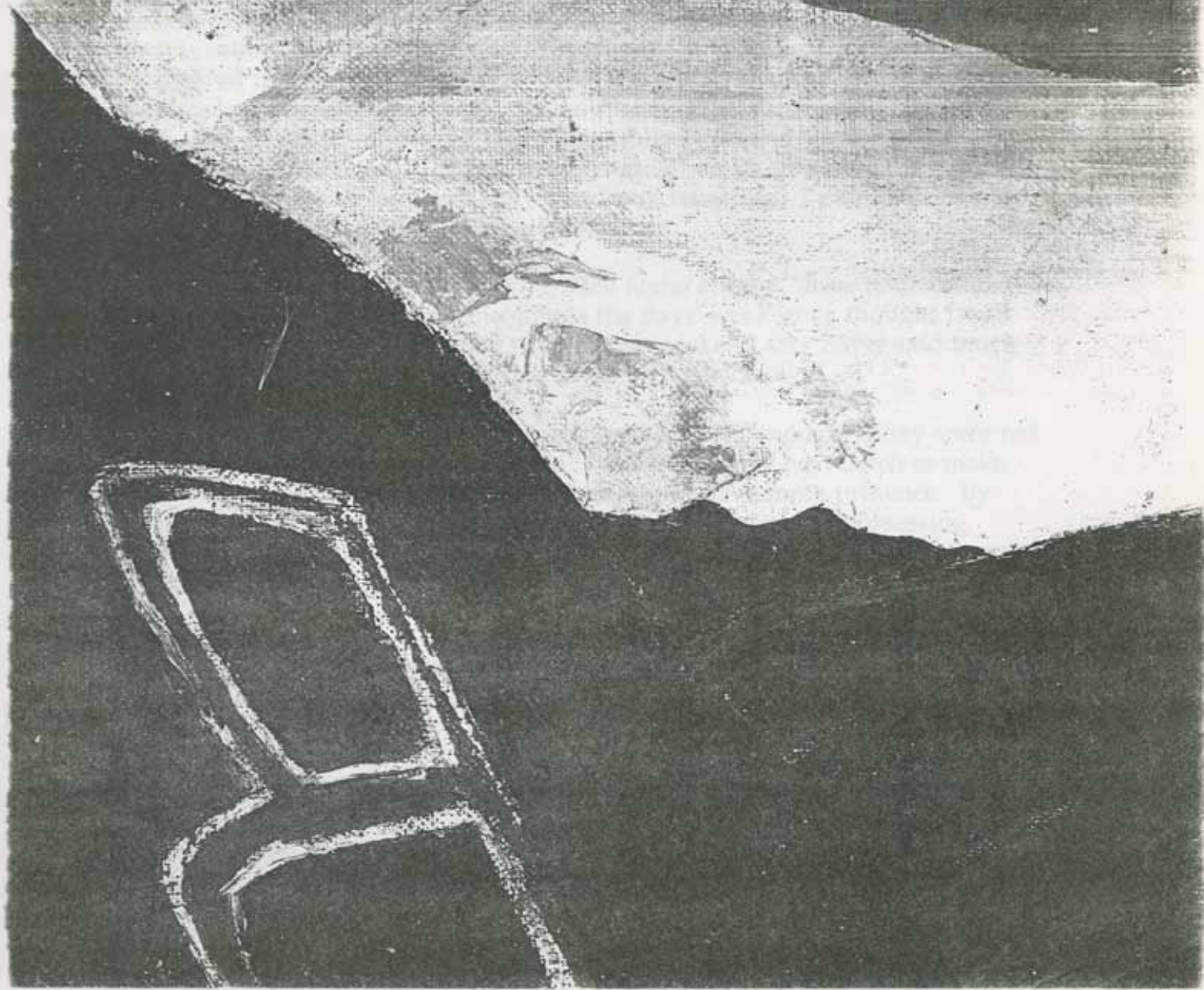
So, we drove to Banner, parked at the general store and began bushwhacking through the brush to get to the trailhead. We were interrupted by an old man who told us to get off his property. I first argued with him because I was convinced the public had access rights to the trail, and then, when the old man told me the trail was not a trail, I argued about that until he got exasperated and invited us into his cabin for tea. Jim Stoddard was a

billionaire who owned one hundred thousand acres of ranchland and waterfront property in LaJolla as well. Jim was in his late 70s and kept dozing off as we were speaking. Irene, his mistress, was in her 50s and used to be the family's housekeeper. Jim was still angry at his wife, for divorcing him six years ago, because of his drinking and for moving to Borrego Springs, six miles down the highway. His ex introduced herself to me one day when I was along the roadside painting the big "B", though I already knew all about her.

It turned out that the trail was not a trail at all but rather a twenty-year-old scar left on the mountain when an unmanned bulldozer was deliberately set loose to crash because of a dispute regarding equipment rental or something. Barry was angry at me for making him hike up what was a steep scar instead of the Pacific Crest Trail. It did turn out to be a pretty tough hike, full of prickles, cactuses and buffalo grass, which has sharp spiked ends on the blades. I made sure I was always far enough ahead of him to be just out of earshot so that he couldn't tell me he wanted to turn around. Occasionally I'd have to stop and wait for him to catch up. (He smoked cigarettes.) As I waited, I saw him silhouetted against the big "B" engraved on the side of the hill. I remembered the psychic mentioning the coming of the "B" man into my life. After making love in the scrub on top of the mountain, at dusk we finally began our descent in darkness, which made navigating difficult bushwhacking back.

Barry moved in with me, but at the same time he laid me off the job, since he was the foreman. He said he didn't want to have an affair with someone with whom he worked. I didn't really understand his reasoning, but it was OK with me because it meant I could go paint the mountain in Banner.

For someone who was used to getting carsick quite a bit, I was surprised that the three hour drive to Banner and back each day didn't bother me. I listened to the same Al Green tape over and over as I got to know every bump and turn on the road. I actually found these trips reassuring. I remembered reading something a nature lover wrote once about how slow the process of getting to know a mountain was--how one needs to visit it at all times of day, in all seasons and weather conditions. And also, that one should approach it from all angles to really get to know it. I felt this way about my "B" mountain. I drove the back roads to paint it from every angle imaginable. I



even went hiking for a few days dragging around a heavy six-foot-tall oak mirror like a martyr so that I could paint the mountain's reflection.

It puzzled me that no matter where I painted the giant "B" from, its appearance barely ever changed. It consistently appeared firmly planted, peaceful, serene, balanced and centered. I envied that mountain. It seemed content to me. I wanted to understand how it was able to be. My attraction for this mountain lay in its ability to symbolize something which was unresolved in myself, something which I wanted to attain. I strove to capture the simple grace and elegance of the mountain. Like a tree rooted in the earth, this mountain displayed itself beautifully open and spread and symmetrically balanced. The engraved letter "B" on its side posed like a giant question mark for me. It constantly stood out, reflecting. I painted it over and over again in an attempt to understand it.

I felt like an insane person. I'd drive back home another three hours after painting all day and show my neighbors the days' work--they thought I was bringing home the same painting each day as a joke. Barry never said much about my paintings. I attributed this to his being color-blind.

I felt my "B" paintings were not being taken seriously enough. They were not being read as important subject matter. I decided on the next batch to make thick, deep stretchers so that the paintings would have more presence. By doing this I hoped that the mountain would stand out more, possessing greater monumentality and self-importance. By painting on these boxes, my "B" mountain appeared as a more massive, solid entity.

I used transparent material for a similar reason. The air seemed thin in juxtaposition to the weightiness of the mountain. The ridge to which the "B" mountain was connected was the last to catch the rain before the land abruptly fell to the desert floor below. This hole in the ridge which exposed the sky seemed like the edge of the earth; it symbolized a point of departure or transcendence. To illustrate this juxtaposition of nothingness alongside extreme presence and physicality, I chose light, airy, translucent material on which I scraped and dragged the oil paint with a pallet-knife. I wanted my mountain to be rendered more viscerally.

Aside from Jim Stoddard and his mistress Irene, the town of Banner was inhabited by twelve blue-haired retirees who lived in trailers behind the general store. The general store/post-office/gas-station was run by Peaches, whose deceased husband Steve made the big "B" and then died of a heart attack after its completion. Steve and three other men climbed up the side of the hill opposite the general store (fighting waist-high scrub) one hot June day in '65 to make the "B". There once had been another "B", smaller and to the upper right of the one today, at the turn of the century when Banner was a boom town. Sometimes when the light is right one can still make out the faint trace of the original. Steve and his crew decided to make a lower, bigger version. One man walked ahead slowly with his arms out to determine the letter's width. The other three men followed his trail cutting the brush with chainsaws and being careful not to cut wider than the leader's arms' width. Red earth was exposed and outlined with bright white lime. What amazed me the most about the making of the "B" was that that lead man was able to walk a perfect "B" shape through such scrubby brush. I know from experience how hard it is to walk those hills with sharp grass blades puncturing leather boots, even. In this landscape one even needs to wear a double thickness of socks to prevent the heat from burning through the bottom of one's shoes. In certain spots if one stops for even a second to catch one's breath a caravan of biting fire ants can crawl up under one's pantlegs and attack like parahnas. Carving the giant "B" was no easy task. It exists today as a true piece of art and craft.

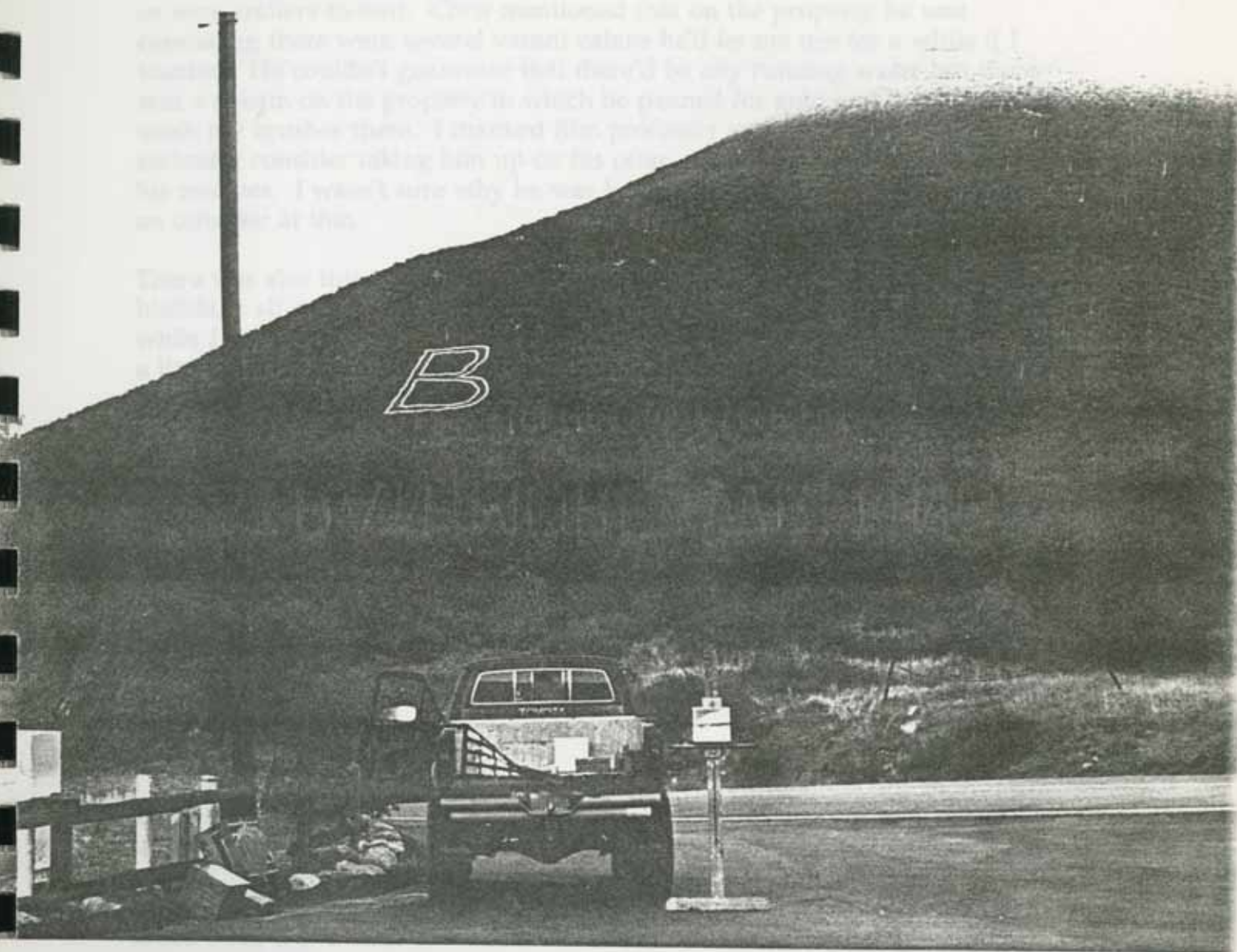
I was getting so sick of driving hours back and forth each day that I tried camping out one night by myself to see if I could do it. Peaches also runs a campground behind the general store. I paid my \$6 fee for the night and was assigned area two. I could have camped in any of the areas because they were all vacant. But I didn't really care about camping in the best area, and besides, campsite number two was the closest one to Peaches' trailer so I felt safer. I was a little bit nervous about camping alone in some wierd little town. I got the tent set up despite not knowing what to do with several of the poles. I washed my brushes, brushed my teeth and crawled in to go to sleep. I couldn't go to sleep at first because of the noises, and then it was the street light shining through the tent and in my face that kept me awake. Around midnight I had this ingenious idea to back my truck up so that my tent would be in its shadow. So I did, but in doing so I hit something hard with my tailgate. I thought it was a tree stump I hadn't seen, but it was worse than that.

To my horror I had broken off a huge water main and water was pouring out. I drove my truck uphill to park so it wouldn't get stuck in the newly-formed mud. I left my tent standing where it was because it was safely out of the direction of the flow. It was too late to do anything about my accident then, so I just went to sleep. In the morning I looked out my tent and saw that I had created a river with real ducks swimming in it. I walked up the hill to the general store to confess but made sure I got my coffee first. The town handled it very well. They were very nice and didn't get angry. They didn't even charge me for the damage--which cost them two full days of digging in addition to the repair.

I continued to use the campground after this incident, but not for camping. I'd bring my wet paintings there each night before driving back. Depending on the weather I'd either set them on top of or underneath the picnic table. If I drove home with wet paintings in back of my truck, usually at least one would bounce out along the way, or else the paintings would rub against each other and become obliterated. If I found myself further up the valley at the end of the day, I'd find a live oak to leave them under.

Sometimes thundershowers would creep up as I was painting. In such an emergency I'd have to stash the Banner boxes under the truck and wait in the cab for the clouds to pass. After the downpour, I'd get out to assess the damage--ninety percent of the time, the works would be splattered with mud. I tried not to clean them off too much because I considered the splattering part of the creation process. If anything, more of a story became imbedded in them. For that matter any bugs or grass blades that blew into a painting surface were also included.

During the day in Banner it sometimes got as hot as 125 degrees in the sun. I made a trip to the general store approximately three times a day to buy Gatoraide. Often I'd have lunch on the picnic table outside with two local guys, Chris and Joe. Chris and Joe were caretakers who mostly just hung out drinking beer. They were sweet, harmless old drunks. It was a little sad to hang out with Chris, though, because he was my age and a serious alcoholic. He was handsome with long blonde hair and a good build. He seemed to be the heart-throb of the area, yet he couldn't quite get his act together. Joe was in his fifties, very sweet, a little simple-minded, and rather fat. Joe was like Chris's shadow and just followed him around. The two were inseparable.



Banner Boxes at the Base of the Mountain

They went everywhere together. Chris was concerned about all the driving I was doing. I explained to him that I didn't feel I had much choice given what a lousy camper I was. There was nowhere else to stay. There were no hotels or even trailers to rent. Chris mentioned that on the property he was caretaking there were several vacant cabins he'd let me use for a while if I wanted. He couldn't guarantee that there'd be any running water but there was a stream on the property in which he panned for gold and he said I could wash my brushes there. I thanked him profusely and said that I would seriously consider taking him up on his offer. However, I was a little wary of his motives. I wasn't sure why he was being so nice to me--a total stranger, an outsider at that.

There was also this 17-year-old guy who developed a crush on me. He used to hitchhike all over town searching for me so that he could hang out with me while I painted the "B". He had dropped out of high school--it seemed he was a little dyslexic and the little country school in Julian couldn't help someone like him. We would have tailgate discussions about what he should do next. He wanted to go to truck driving school, and I wanted him to learn welding instead, move to Brooklyn and be an artist. We also talked a lot about his living situation and how to deal with that--he lived with his aging grandparents both of whom were dying of cancer. Anyway, one day he asked me if I was a lesbian because he had heard Chris talking about me down at the general store as if I were one. I was a little taken aback as well as intrigued. I wanted to know specifically why Chris thought so. He told me it was because I had short hair, drove a truck and wore boyish clothes. That really cracked me up. It was more likely because I was probably the only woman around for miles who didn't have a crush on Chris. Besides, I was living with someone male and was madly in love.

I had a premonition of death at the hardware store in LaJolla one morning. The cashier was holding a long pole with a sickle blade on top of it--a tool used to prune trees. Like Death, he was tall, thin and grey with hollow, beady eyes. That afternoon a friend dropped by to introduce me to her new boyfriend who was intrigued by the "B" paintings covering my garage. He asked what the "B" was for. I told him it could be about anything, really. It was up to him.

I had given one of the first "B" boxes to Kim MacConnel for his Birthday. Kim didn't even question what to do with the piece or what it was for. Instantly he hung it on his wall and stashed a wad of cash behind it. To him, "B" clearly stood for "Bank".

My visitor thought for a moment and then replied, "Your Boxes are Beautiful But I Best Be going, Bye-Bye, Been real But I'll Be Back to Bug you, Buenas noches". He was leaving on a vacation to Africa and left my garage for the airport to get killed in a plane crash.

The next day in Banner I found out two other friends had been killed that night. Chris and Joe were found dead up a canyon supposedly from a shoot-out over mineral rights. It was peculiar that Joe's body had 38 holes in it, from an Uzi, but the murders were never investigated because no one pressed charges.

Barry's fountain job was ending which meant he was leaving for New York. I was very upset. We went to a marriage counselor together for a couple of weeks to try and figure out what we meant to each other. He told me he loved me. I was going to fly back and visit him in a month's time.

We took one last weekend trip together camping above the treeline, ten-thousand feet above King's canyon. We pitched our tent next to a silver lake and stayed there. I did some sketches of Barry naked with my bloody tampax.

I was catatonic when Barry finally left. I couldn't eat or get out of bed for days. He had given me a smelly shirt of his so I could sleep with it under my pillow. I lay there hugging it and crying. Eventually, I was forced to get up, however, because Barry needed his drill. He hadn't had time to finish packing and he had left quite a bit of gear behind. So I crated Barry's tools, along with my tears, and shipped them to New York.

On my answering machine there was a call from the Ucross Foundation in Wyoming. They had called to inform me that an opening had become available that month and that I was invited to fill it. I phoned Barry and told him I was going to Wyoming, for a month, to stay in the artist's colony at Ucross.

Twist in Tale of Julian Shoot-Out

Lawyer Claims Survivors Jumped His Gold-Mining Claim

By GENE YASUDA, Times Staff Writer

A San Fernando Valley attorney and his business partner, who said Wednesday that they own the mineral rights to federal land outside Julian where a fatal shoot-out occurred between two bands of gold miners, accused the survivors of trespassing on their claim.

"They had no right . . . absolutely no right to be there," said James Tweedy of Van Nuys during a telephone interview. He was referring to the East County family that was apparently searching for valuable minerals on the land 6 miles east of Julian, a quiet, 19th-Century gold-mining town of 4,200 residents.

Authorities still have only the version of the incident provided by the East County family, whom investigators have refused to identify. The group, according to authorities, arrived on the property Monday to picnic and search for

gold. But the family encountered two Julian men—Edward (Joe) John Lopez, 60, and Christopher Mark Zerbe, 34—already on the property. Zerbe had been entrusted to oversee Tweedy's mining site.

The two groups then argued over who had a legitimate mining claim to the site, authorities said. The dispute later erupted into a gun battle, in which Lopez and Zerbe were killed. No one from the East County family was injured.

"We've owned those claims for 25 years," said Tweedy, who shares the mining rights with Benjamin Haimos of Encino. A spokeswoman for the California office of the federal Bureau of Land Management confirmed that Haimos had 25 claims for land clustered near Julian. All mining claims on public land must be filed with the BLM office.

"We're concerned about this in-

vestigation because Mr. Haimos knew Chris (Zerbe) well," Tweedy said. "And, secondly, those other people were trespassing."

In fact, according to Tweedy, Zerbe called Haimos several hours before the fatal shooting Monday and said he had encountered trespassers.

Trying to Blast Site

"Chris told us that he found claim-jumpers on our site and that these people were going to try to blast on our site," Tweedy said. "We're just waiting for someone to give us real concrete information."

But according to San Diego County Sheriff's Department investigators, the East County family told authorities that they too had a legitimate right to the gold-mining area, known as Horseshoe Bend.

Such contradictions and unan-

Please see JULIAN, Page 9

JULIAN: Lawyer Claims Survivors Trespassed

Continued from Page 1

swered questions shroud the bizarre gun-blazing incident that has the sleepy town of Julian abuzz with gossip. Thus far, authorities have had no major breakthroughs in the case.

"We'll be investigating that aspect [claim right] because it is relevant . . . we will investigate who or who all had a right to be there," said Lt. John Tenwolde of the Sheriff's Department. "But pieces of paper, or the lack thereof, don't justify this violence in any way."

Members of the East County family told authorities that they had "recently acquired the mineral rights," Tenwolde said. Authorities have not yet confirmed such information.

Tenwolde said the family's name is being withheld because the investigation is still in a preliminary stage and that, "although there's no real reason to believe danger is facing these people, we can't be sure because we don't know every thing about the deceased."

No one has been charged or

arrested in connection with the Memorial Day incident, he added.

Finding answers for the case's many puzzles, including who had legitimate claims to the site, may prove to be a difficult task.

According to officials at the Bureau of Land Management, gold-miners often stake claims on sites that have already been claimed by others.

"It happens all the time," said Gary White, a spokesman for the BLM's El Centro office. According to White, a mining applicant need only stake out the property he desires, then notify the bureau of his actions. White said the bureau

is not responsible for checking whether the targeted site has previously been claimed; that duty falls with the prospective gold-miner. A dispute between two miners over claims is often settled in civil court.

White added that, even if an individual has sole claim to a site, that person cannot forbid others from roaming the area.

"The land is still federally owned," White said. "They have no right to exclude other legitimate users of public land. As long as you do not interfere with their mining operations, you're allowed to go on their site."

The wildest thing about Wyoming was its topography. There were all these grassy little knolls and strangely-pointed cone-shaped mountains the locals called squaw tits. They had eroded tops exposing pink outcropping which looked like erect nipples. A goofy band of wild turkeys paraded up and down the valley like Toulouse Lautrec. There were also tons of deer and antelope. I never felt alone painting outside with all these animals around.

For the duration of my stay I refused to remove my Count Basie tape from the car stereo. I regarded my daily painting escapades as a sit com to which Count Basie was the theme song. The music was so silly and bubbly--it described the landscape there perfectly. I heard there was a giant "M" on a mountain in a nearby town, but for some reason, I wasn't compelled to go in search of it. I was already in love with one little valley six miles from Ucross.

This valley turned out to be another town named Banner. Banner, Wyoming. Population, 40. It also had a general store. I suggested they put a giant letter "B" on their mountain but they would have had to cut trees down, rather than just brush, in order to carve it.

This Banner was completely different from Banner, California. Colors were different. California had browner, subtler shades. In Wyoming, the land seemed richer with more texture and humor. I felt I was painting two completely different sides of the same place. The two Banners were of the same series--Banner, California, was a serious, sombre, contemplative version; Banner, Wyoming, was a whimsical, light-hearted one.

Up high, little breast-shaped mounds dotted the horizon. To me, the landscape seemed compulsively eccentric and I had an idea to use polka-dotted material. If someone were to ask me to come up with a logo which signified obsession, it would be polka-dots. I searched in thrift stores for dotted shirts or dresses to paint on. I brought my booty back and stretched fragments of the clothes to paint on.

I was staying at a converted schoolhouse in Ucross on the foundation's premises. The foundation provided residents with studio space as well, but I just used mine for storage. There were only four invited residents there at a time, and pretty much all they did when I was there was work in their studios



"Squaw-tits", Banner, Wyoming

behind closed doors. I was too curious about Wyoming to just stay indoors and paint still-lives. I wanted to explore those wierd little hills that looked like they belonged on the moon.

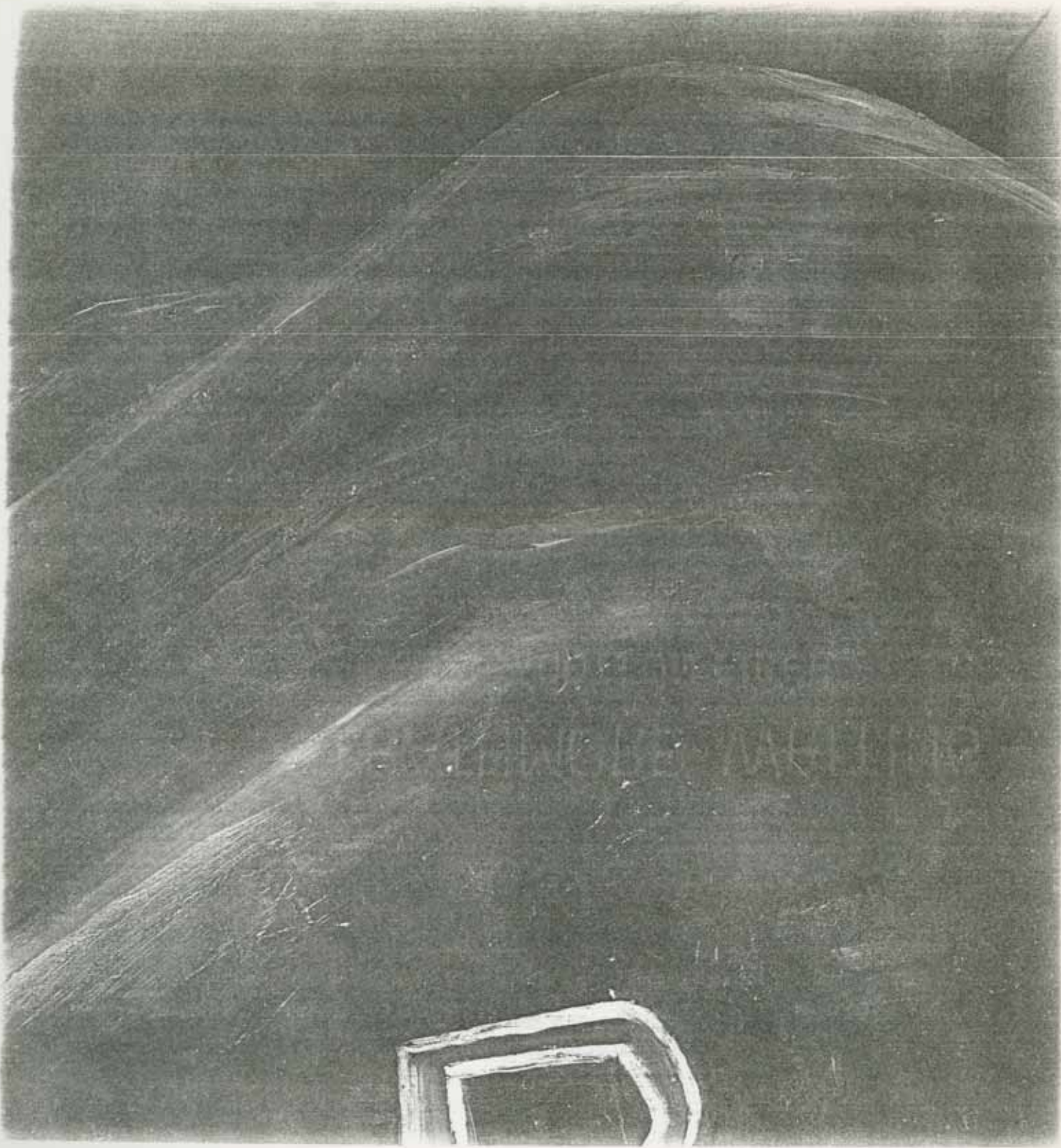
There was a dude ranch affiliated with the foundation which residents were allowed to use as long as the wrangler came along and there were at least two people. My friend Allison's residency was nearly over and she wanted to go riding one last time before leaving. I went along. The wrangler, Max, led us up the hill for a view of the Ucross valley. Max seemed particularly interested by the fact that I was a landscape painter. He told me he knew of a special place with spectacular red cliffs he wanted to show me. I wasn't particularly interested in red cliffs. Throughout the ride he kept mentioning that he'd be happy to take me out in the landscape to paint in his 4-wheel drive vehicle, drop me off, and pick me up later. I wondered why he was being so nice to me. I thanked him, but frankly wasn't interested since I was content painting over in Banner. However, he kept pressing the issue of wanting to show me this incredible site and finally Allison chimed in and told me I should take him up on it. I agreed to go with him the following afternoon.

The minute I got into his jeep I knew I had made a mistake. The first question out of his mouth was, was I married or not. I didn't know what that had to do with anything and told him it was none of his business. I mentioned that I knew he was married to an accountant in Buffalo who was six-months pregnant with their first child. Things got strange. Max was driving very fast in the opposite direction from where he originally said he was going to take me. We were headed up a barren vast valley alongside some rusty railroad tracks. I asked where we were going. He didn't answer me. He just smiled and told me how cute I was. He grabbed my hand and told me I was going to stay right there by his side and that I would never leave. I broke out in a cold sweat which I tried to conceal. I was in danger, but I didn't know the extent of it. The only thing I knew was that I didn't want to let on that I was afraid. Something snapped in my head. My mind seemed to detach itself from my ineffective, trembling body. Its analytical side took over and spouted out geological terminology I had learned at Cornell. It pointed out all the exfoliation along the way. Max seemed to be headed for an abandoned ranch. He was digging his finger-nails into my skin. My mind was searching for glacial remnants such as erratics. It kept chattering in an

attempt to diffuse the escalating sexual tension. He had to stop the jeep to unlatch the fence. There was no use in trying to run for there was nowhere to run to. He got back in the car and parked next to the house. I began a critique of the architecture. I was just discussing the proportions of the mansard roof in relation to the window ledges when he picked me up and dangled me over a 60-foot well. Very coolly and matter-of-factly I replied that no, I didn't particularly feel like going down there. He set me down, grabbed my breasts and kissed me on the forehead. He kept telling me I was cute as a button and that he was keeping me with him. Sadistically, he led me through every room of the house. In each room I wondered if this was where I was going to lose my life. I was terrorized. He pulled me down into the coal cellar. On the floor I could dimly make out the smiling jawbone of some animal like a lynx. I didn't get upset, though, and it didn't happen there. We went upstairs and then out onto the porch. I had been chattering about the architectural and decorative details of the ranch assessing the symbolism of linoleum and wallpaper patterns in an effort to turn him off. Gunshots were heard in the distance and interrupted my comments. We then heard a vehicle approaching. Four hunters wearing fluorescent orange drove past the fence in a dune buggy. They waved. Max waved back. I changed the topic to hunting. Max seemed to respond to this subject. It turned out to have been the first day of deer hunting season. I asked him hundreds of questions to keep the conversation flowing as we walked to the jeep, got in and drove back to Ucross.

I was in shock. I didn't know what to do, I called Barry in New York. I told him what a weird day I had had. He told me that he could see why I wouldn't want to be a tattle-tale. Afterall, I hadn't been raped. He wasn't very consoling, but I was too numb to notice. I just wanted to get out of town. I asked the cook if I could go with her and her husband down to Laramie for the weekend to attend the Wyoming Arts Council meeting. They thought my request a little strange but they were happy to have me along.

There was a book in the back seat of the car titled "The Rape of the Town of Lovell". I asked Elizabeth's husband what it was about. Apparently Lovell is a town a few over from Ucross. It has a fairly large Mormon community and until recently had only one gynecologist who serviced the entire community. Apparently this doctor had been giving Mormon women of all ages pap



smears with his penis for years. After thirteen years of complaints against him, he was finally convicted and sentenced to a couple years in prison.

This story infuriated me. I decided it was important for me to notify the President of the Ucross Foundation of what had happened to me with Max. I never expected the reaction which followed. The President didn't believe a word I said and sided with Max. He couldn't believe Max could do such a thing. Max was a charming, intelligent, attractive 6'4"-tall man who was a poet as well as a wrangler. Max had only been working for the foundation a little over a month, but because he had a wife and a baby on the way, he had more credibility than me. The President regarded me as a single, female artist who was so creative she must have let her imagination run hog wild. He thought every unmarried woman would love to have an affair with a handsome cowboy. I realized I was in trouble in chauvinistic, God-fearing good-'ol-boy country. I decided to try the sheriff in Sheridan anyway.

I lucked out with Sheriff Orton. He was no red-neck, although he had red skin being part Apache Indian. I was convinced that this is what made him different from other men around there. He thought it was important that I place assault and battery charges on Max. By my description of his behavior, the sheriff suspected Max of being a predatory sex offender, most likely the most dangerous individual I would ever come into contact with. There was a good possibility that Max was also a stalker type who was not finished with me yet. Sheriff Orton advised me to get out of town quickly. My life could be in danger.

For no apparent reason (except to terrorize me more) Max showed up at the door of my studio that evening. Luckily I was using a skilsaw to chop wood so I felt safe enough. I didn't let on that I had reported our little incident. We just bantered for a couple minutes before he left.

I had to get out of town, but I didn't want to leave Wyoming. I had driven 3,000 miles to paint and was in the middle of twenty or so Banner paintings. I wanted to finish at least a couple before leaving Wyoming. So, I moved to Story, Wyoming and stayed with a sculptress named Roz Powell who had recently separated from her husband and had an extra room.

Roz's studio was in a barn out back. Among other things, the barn housed a giant three-ton triphammer which she had bought at auction in Seattle and reassembled in her barn by herself. Her current project was pouring a cement floor on which to weld. Whenever Roz finished a sculpture she would hide it in the woods on her property.

Roz was in the process of filing for divorce. She had been married for thirteen years. The last five had been spent trying to conceive. She had had several operations which were suppose to increase fertility, but the seed never stuck and she gave up. Recently she had been in the hospital to get artificially inseminated while her husband was down the street in a university dorm having an affair. Roz found a stack of letters he had written his young mistress and kept them just in case she needed to use them in court. The divorce settlement seemed amicable enough. Roz was going to let him keep the house. She just wanted out--he could go have his baby with somebody else.

One night Roz and I went to the local cowboy bar to have a drink. On the way out, in the parking lot we ran into some guy who Roz introduced to me as the man she was about to divorce. The moon was full and Roz had been drinking scotch. She went home with him to have one last fling. The next morning she came home and told me she had had fun, but that she would never see him again.

I talked to Barry in New York. The fountain had sprung a leak and he had to return to San Diego. He wondered if I would be back in time to pick him up at the airport. I had finished most of my Banner paintings and the first dusting of snow had already come. It was getting too cold to paint outdoors. I felt ostracized from the Ucross community since both the Foundation's President and Director thought I was a fabricator. Furthermore, my life was in danger because a pervert was on the loose. So, I drove 36 hours straight without stopping to meet Barry.

We actually reunited in a cheap hotel room near the LAX International Airport. San Francisco had just had its earthquake and Barry's flight had been diverted to Los Angeles. I knocked on the door of his hotel room. I barely recognized him. To mark our time apart, Barry hadn't shaved since we slept together by the side of the lake and had a beautiful red beard. We stayed in

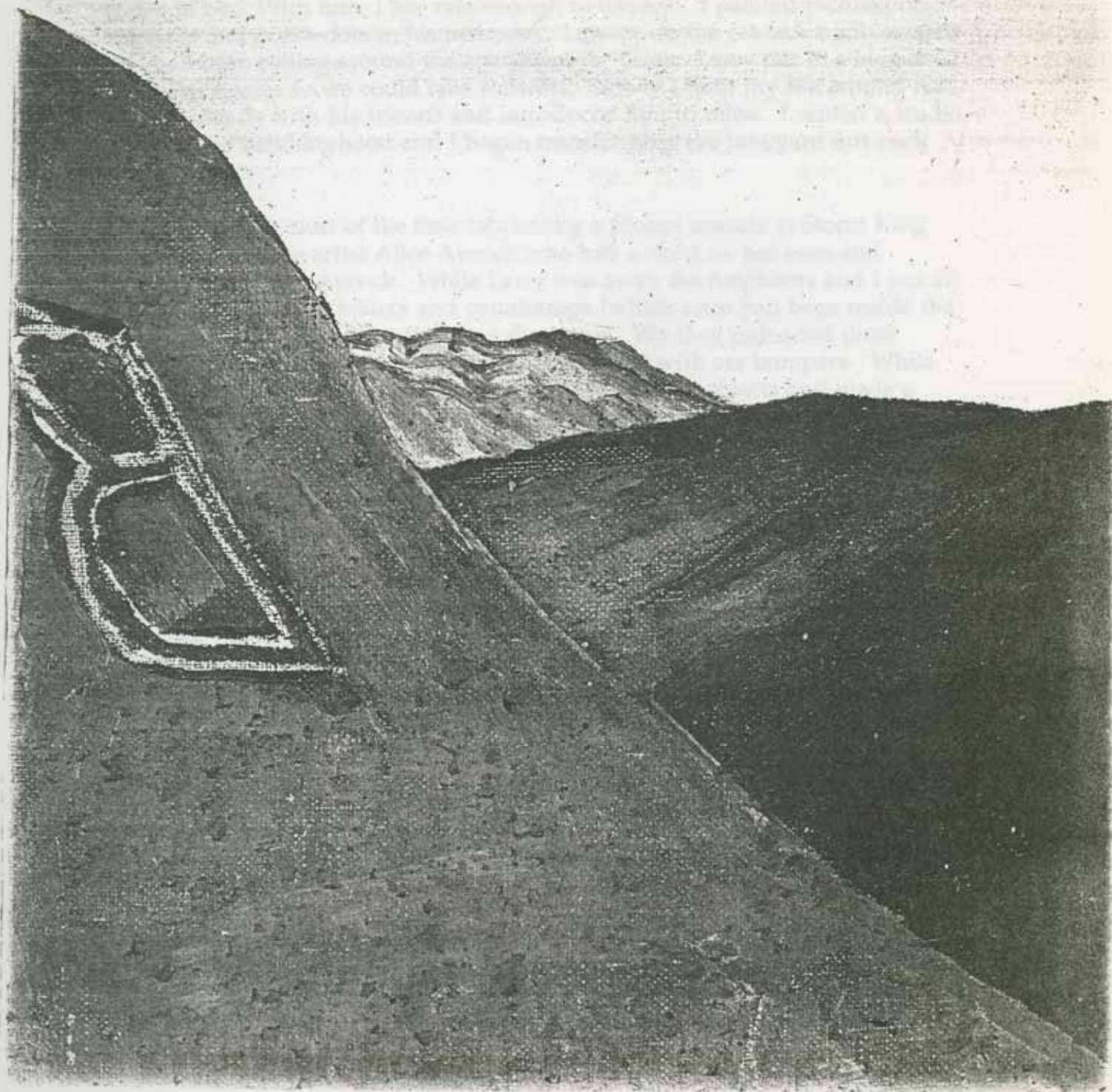
bed for a couple of days before finally waking up and driving down to San Diego.

The loose ends left in Wyoming wrapped themselves up neatly. I didn't do anything. Sheriff Orton's detective found out that Max was in fact a predatory sex offender who had already been incarcerated three times for rape. I also heard he was 36 and already on his fourth marriage. Max confessed and was charged with assault and battery. He was fined and placed on probation. Ucross fired him. The Ucross Foundation also fired both its President and the Project Director who was supposed to lookout for the residents. Elizabeth the cook became the new Director. Her salary was increased by forty-thousand dollars which allowed her husband David to quit his job and focus on his writing. Roz Powell got back together with her husband and had a baby boy exactly nine months after that full moon fling. I went to live with Barry in Brooklyn, moving three thousand miles to be together.

If anyone knows the meaning of a symbol, it's my friend Victoria. I met her rock-climbing when I lived in California. She's an expert on any subject that is even slightly exotic. Our discussions while climbing had included topics such as occultism, orientalism and mysticism. She had taught herself Sanskrit, practiced rebirthing and integral yoga, and was a t'ai chi expert. I asked her if she knew what the letter "B" stood for. She had two answers. In the Viking's Language of the Trees, which preceded the Druid's language, the "B" stood for rejuvenation and rebirth. In the ancient Hebrew Cabala, however, the "B" meant partnership.

I felt that all my driving and painting and driving to Banner and painting Banner was about striving, longing and worshiping. This ritual was a kind of giant prayer. I had been taught when I was young that if I prayed hard enough for things, they would occur. It was a grand prayer because I wanted something of the tallest order--to love and connect with another. I wanted to explore intimacy in the deepest way; diving down deep into emotional depths with another.

When Barry asked me to come live with him I didn't think there were any problems with our relationship. We had a great sex life. We ate, drank, read and even peed together. Each morning he brought me



coffee in bed. With him, I felt safe enough to unpack. I painted pictures on his walls and polka-dots in his bedroom. I swept up the cat-hair tumbleweeds that had been rolling around the apartment for years. Barry put in a bigger hot water heater so we could take showers. Slowly I built my life around his. I made friends with his friends and introduced him to mine. I rented a studio space in the neighborhood and I began transforming the junkyard out back into a garden.

Barry was away most of the time fabricating a project upstate at Storm King. He worked for the artist Alice Aycock who had a child on her own and named him Zipper Aycock. While Barry was away the neighbors and I put all the old refrigerators, boilers and countertops (which once had been inside the deli where Barry and I lived) into a dumpster. We then unloaded three truckloads of soil into a terraced garden-bed lined with car bumpers. While digging in the garden I occasionally unearthed curious objects and made a "Qu'elle que chose de la Jardin" collection. I hung up some bird cages and plants under the fire escape. I planted ivy and morning glories to disguise the chain-link fence, discovered a little red maple seedling under some debris, removed the garbage stuck in the fully-grown maple tree, and, together with the neighbors, planted rosebushes, blueberries, lilies, lily-of-the-valley, tiger-lilies, cysanthemums, snap-dragons, violets, geraniums, pachysandra, bee-balm and pumpkins. Throughout the garden were makeshift benches from curbstones and found-object sculptures: mufflers and cast boiler parts. Willy next door heard mewing coming from his apartment one day and pulled out a mother cat and five kittens from his ceiling. There was an old rusty tank that we torched in half and made into a grotto in which the nursing mother and kittens could live and be protected from the weather. This living grotto completed our garden. I got very attached to that cat family. Before work each morning I'd count the kittens to make sure they were all there, but one day a kitten was dead. Willie took its little limp body out from beneath its mother. He dug up a blueberry and buried it. The kittens must have been diseased. Eventually under every blueberry bush in our garden a dead kitten had been planted.

Barry had told me he always wanted a garden, yet when he returned from upstate he seemed less than thrilled about it. I wasn't sure what was bothering him. He seemed withdrawn. I asked what was wrong and he replied that if I really wanted to know, he didn't love me. That he never

loved me. He had been just using me the whole time. He'd been involved with another woman the entire time we had known each other. He had been seeing her before he even met me, he worked with her and wanted me to move out.

When my mother first met Barry she took me aside and asked me if he had been traumatized. I didn't know what she was talking about but I did find her observation humorous. It turned out Barry had a rather difficult childhood. During Barry's puberty, his father came out of the closet in Kansas City admitting he'd been having sex with men in shopping mall restrooms for years. Mr. Kane left his wife and four children and became a severe alcoholic. Barry's mother also became gay, blimped out to three hundred pounds and moved to Seattle (along with her children) to be with her lover, Selma.

I wasn't quite sure what motivated me to fly to Seattle when Barry and I split up. This particular summer Barry was going to be in Southern California and then visit his family in Seattle. My plans coincidentally were to do the opposite. There was really no reason for me to be visiting Seattle at this time in my life but I had planned to go hiking. The only stories I'd heard of the northwest were about Barry's childhood there. His family was still there. On the plane I was reading a book which explained that it was common for one who'd suffered the loss of a loved one to go in search of them. According to this book, this was a natural part of the bereavement process. I imagined myself running into Barry's brothers downtown and asking them to explain Barry's behavior to me.

Out of the airplane window I saw the tip of Mount Rainier poking up through a massive cloud bank. It was the only peak around that was high enough to pierce the clouds. It reminded me of something out of Jack and the Bean Stalk, of climbing up through the clouds to a sunny white place.

At the airport I discovered the friend I was supposed to go hiking with stood me up. I was stranded by myself in Seattle without any plans. I thought about climbing the mountain I had seen from the airplane window. I thought it would be therapeutic for me at least to get some exercise rather to hang around Seattle keeping a lookout for a fat, middle-aged lesbian who looked like Barry and hung out with a woman with a motorcycle named Selma.

I called up the Parks Department. Climbing Mount Rainier turned out to be a much bigger venture than I had dreamed. One couldn't do it in tennis shoes. The cap was covered with glaciers. One had to be fully equipped and experienced to climb it. The previous spring an avalanche had wiped out an entire rope team of twelve, including two Parks Department Guides. The bodies were preserved somewhere under the ice. Each year the Parks Department takes a limited number of people climbing, but usually there is a two-year waiting list. There happened to be an open slot the very next day but the last bus had already left and Mount Rainier was three and a half hours away. I had lost my driver's license so I couldn't rent a car.

I talked a total stranger into lending me his car. He even knew I didn't have a driver's license. The car had only cost him fifty dollars. I doubted it was registered. I had to climb in through the windows because the doors didn't open. Occasionally at red lights the car stalled out and I would have to open the hood and shake a wire which was connected to the battery to get the vehicle started. I made it to the base lodge of the mountain in a town called Paradise where the car did die--in the parking lot. I registered in time for the training session the next morning at seven before beginning the actual ascent at night. I learned that most of the climbing was done at night to avoid avalanches. I camped that night for the second time by myself. In the trunk of the car was a book titled, Indian Mythologies of the Pacific Northwest. It mentioned Mount Rainier.

Mount Rainier was the favorite wife of Mount Hood who had another wife; an island in the Puget Sound. The island had never borne him children. However, Mount Rainier had three offspring--Mount St. Helens, Mount Adams and Mount Jefferson. Mount Hood's two wives quarreled. They had sparks. The island was jealous of Mount Rainier. Mount Rainier, who was slightly volcanic, stormed off by herself. She got even angrier because her husband Mt. Hood refused to get involved, tell her he loved her and to come back. She blew her lid, and still sits where she is today, refusing to budge. Longingly, she faces her three children and her husband in the distance. Years later the island eventually had a baby island--a small rock along her southside.

CERTIFICATE OF ACHIEVEMENT

ASCENT OF MT. RAINIER

CONDUCTED AT
MT. RAINIER NATIONAL PARK, WASHINGTON

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT ON May 15 19 90

Cynthia S. Tower

made the successful ascent of Mount Rainier (14,411 feet) under the auspices of
a professional guide whose signature is affixed to this certificate.

Bob Ferguson

CHIEF GUIDE

L. Bone

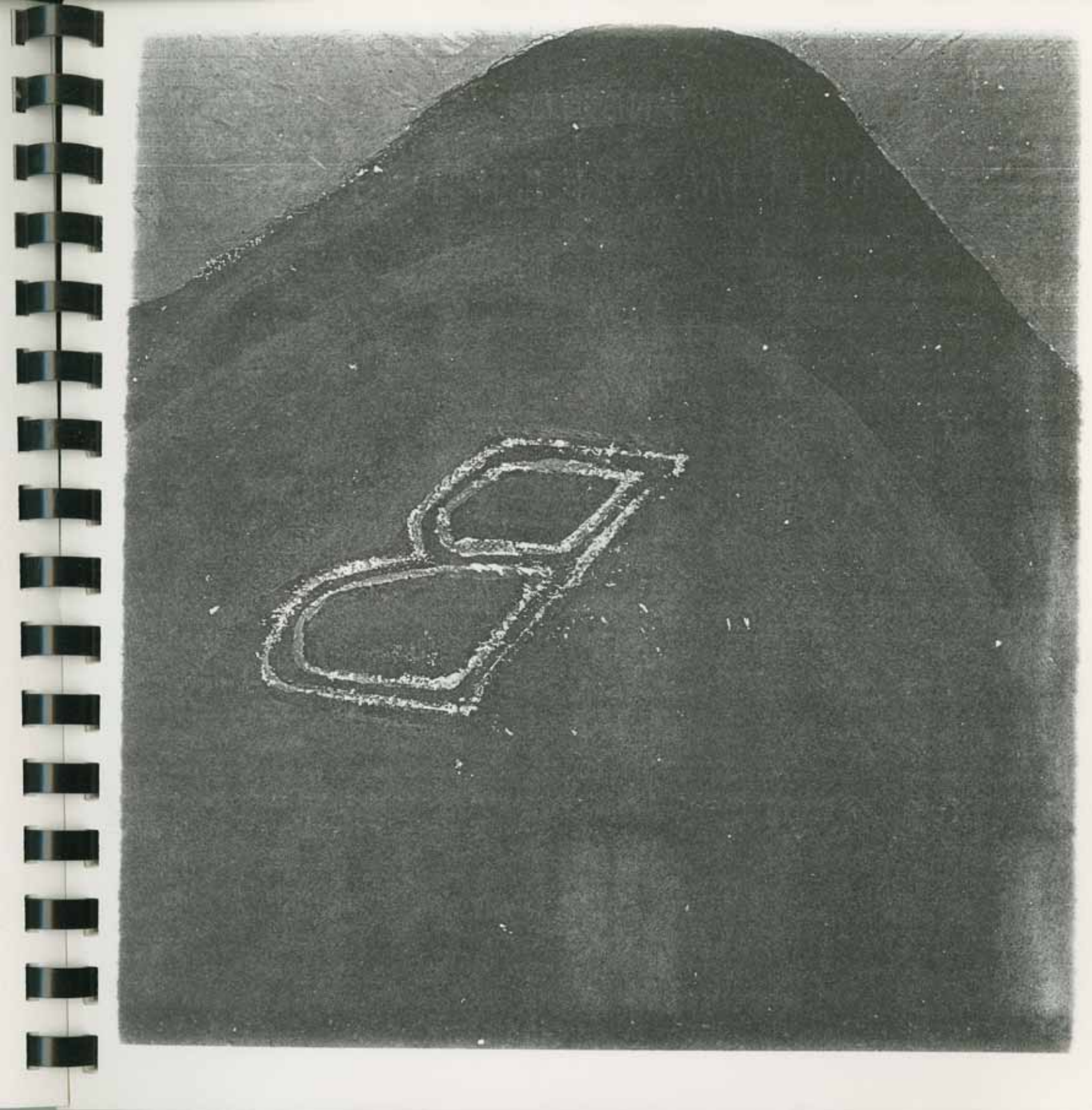
SUMMIT GUIDE

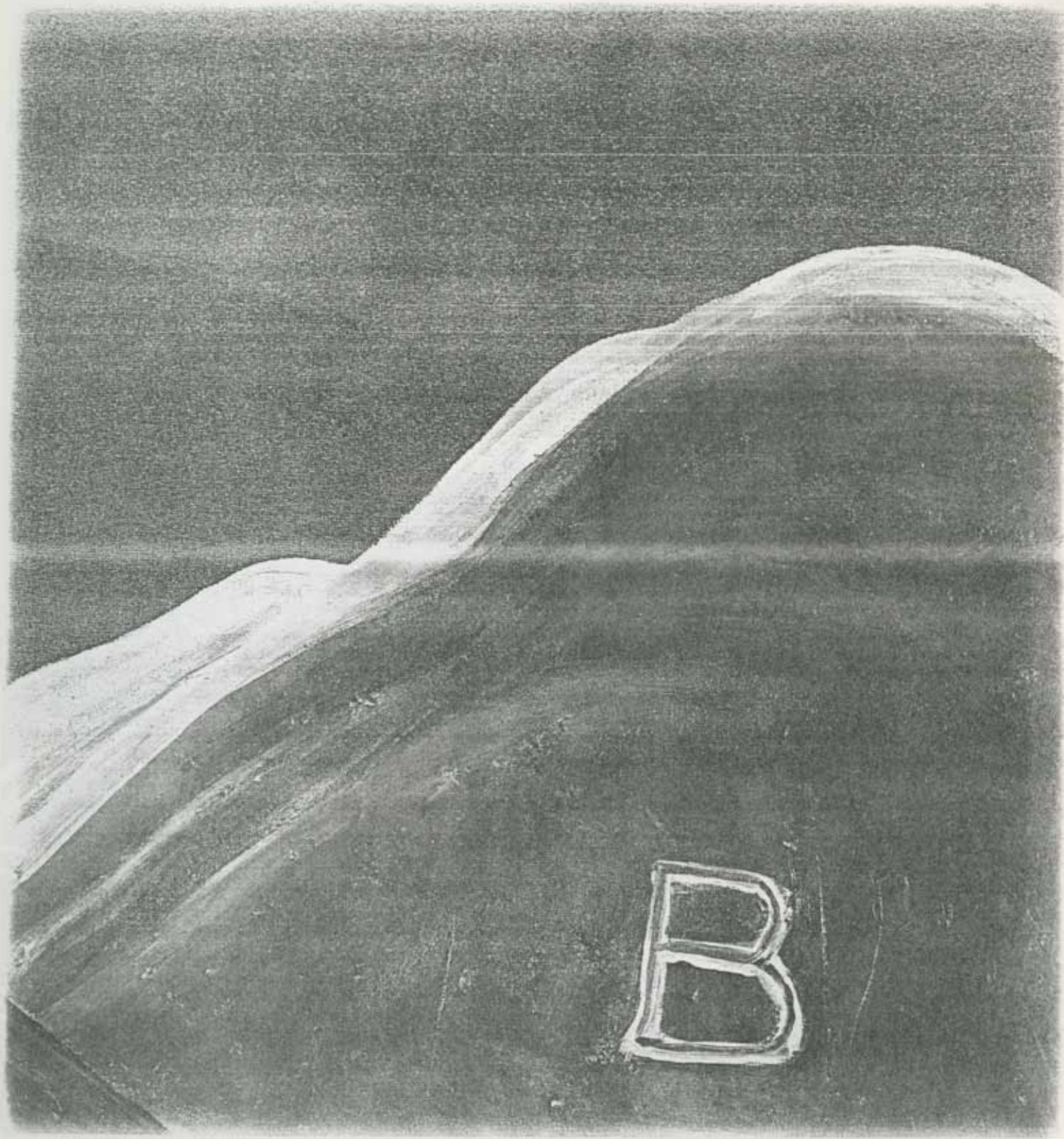
Rainier Mountaineering, Inc.
PARADISE, WASHINGTON

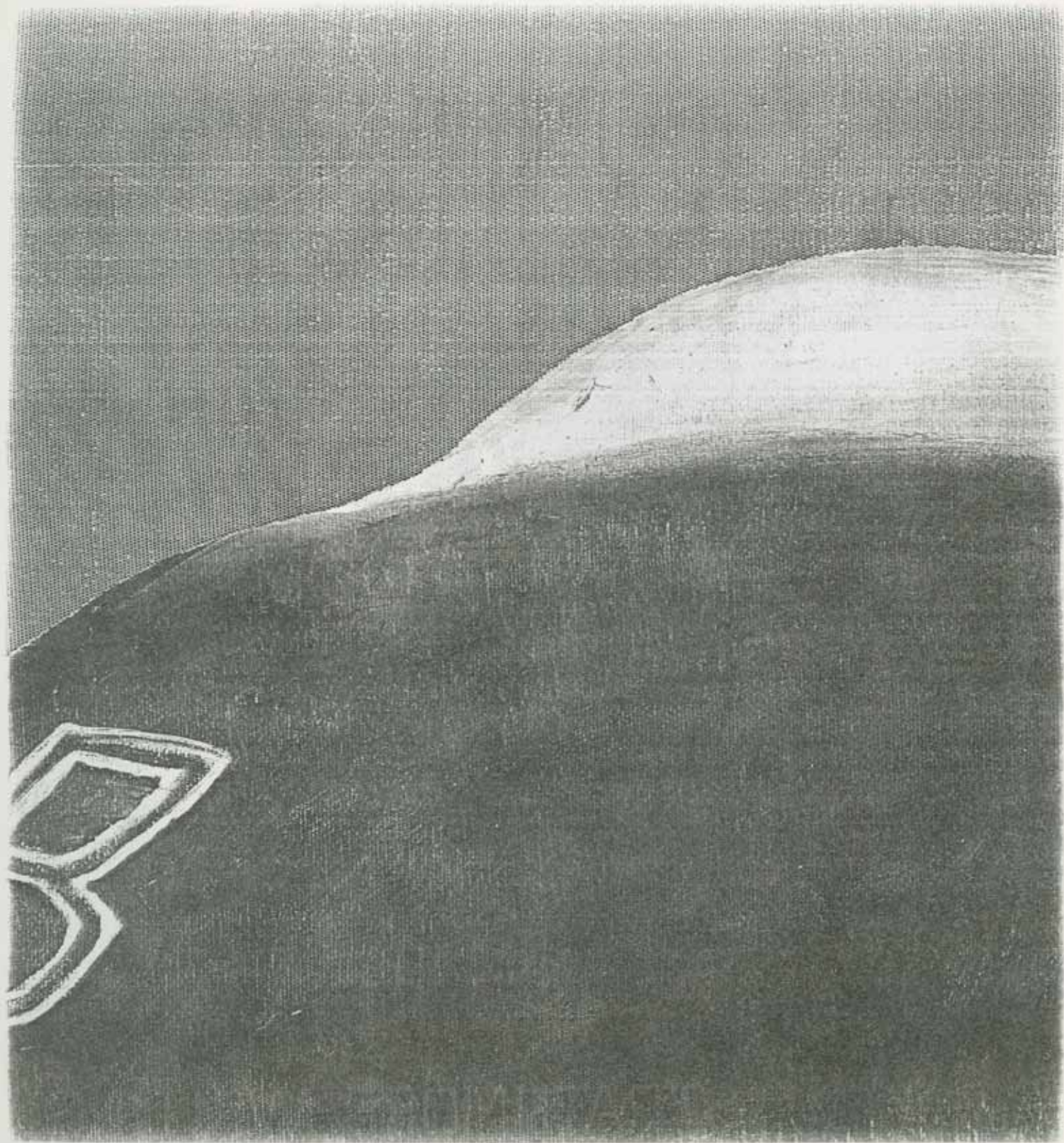
As I was climbing, I empathized with Mount Rainier. I knew what it felt like to lose the man you love. As I hiked through the snowfields, my footprints exposed pink bacteria called Watermelon ice. To me it made Mount Rainier seem fleshy and alive. During the afternoon I slept clinging to her side thinking of her as a big mother who would protect me from the wind and avalanches.

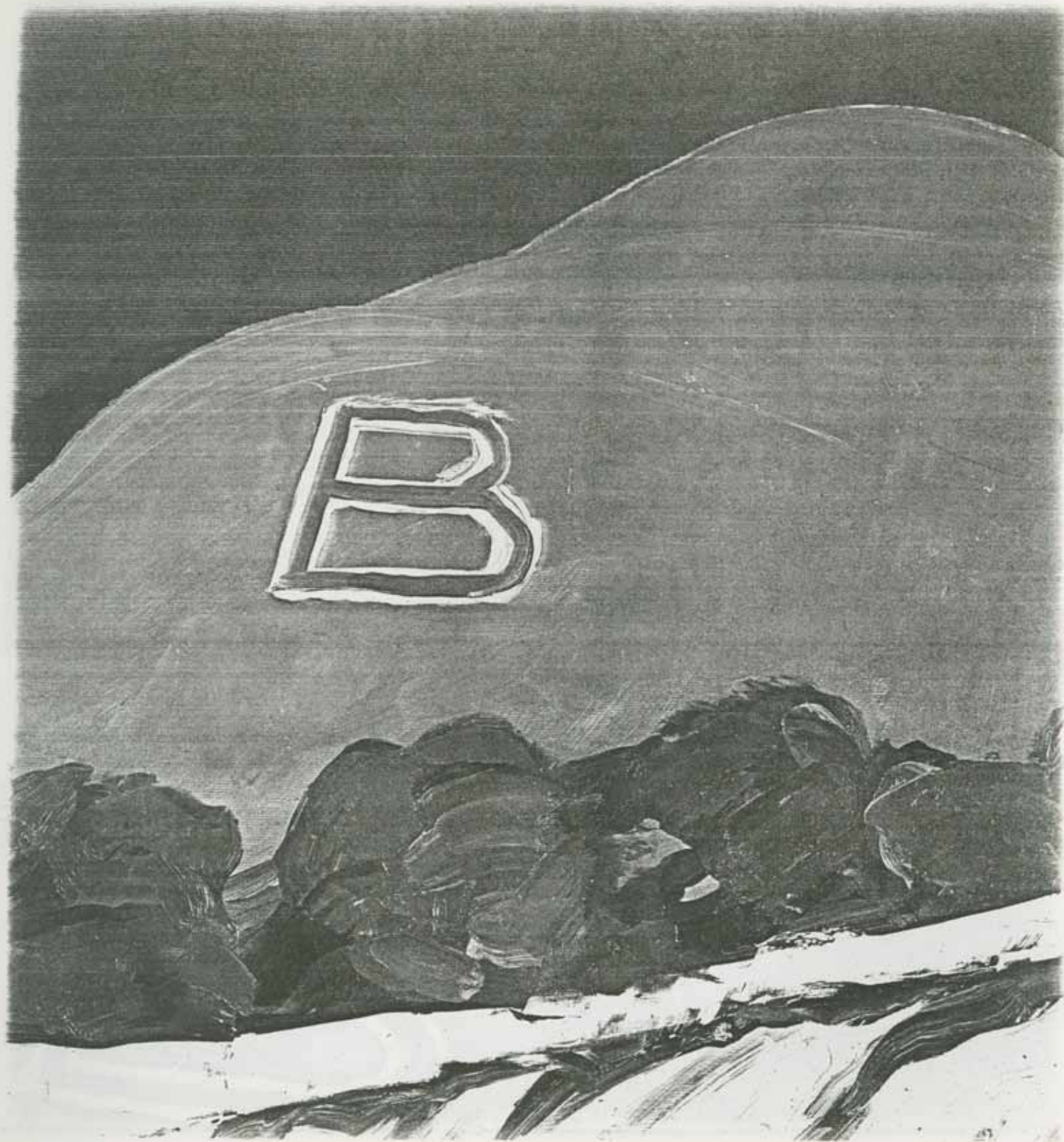
The other climbers were a little awed by the fact I was one of only two who made the summit and climbed around the crater's rim. I was the only New Yorker and I was also the only one who had not been in training. They didn't understand that for me climbing was a mental thing, not a physical one. They didn't realize how angry I was and what a cathartic release climbing had been. From the top of Mount Rainier I hurled lightning bolts at Barry who I heard was down in Southern California installing a sculpture that consisted of a hundred vertical poles in a pond. Later I found out that on the last day of his installation the poles collapsed like dominoes and submerged. He had made a mistake.

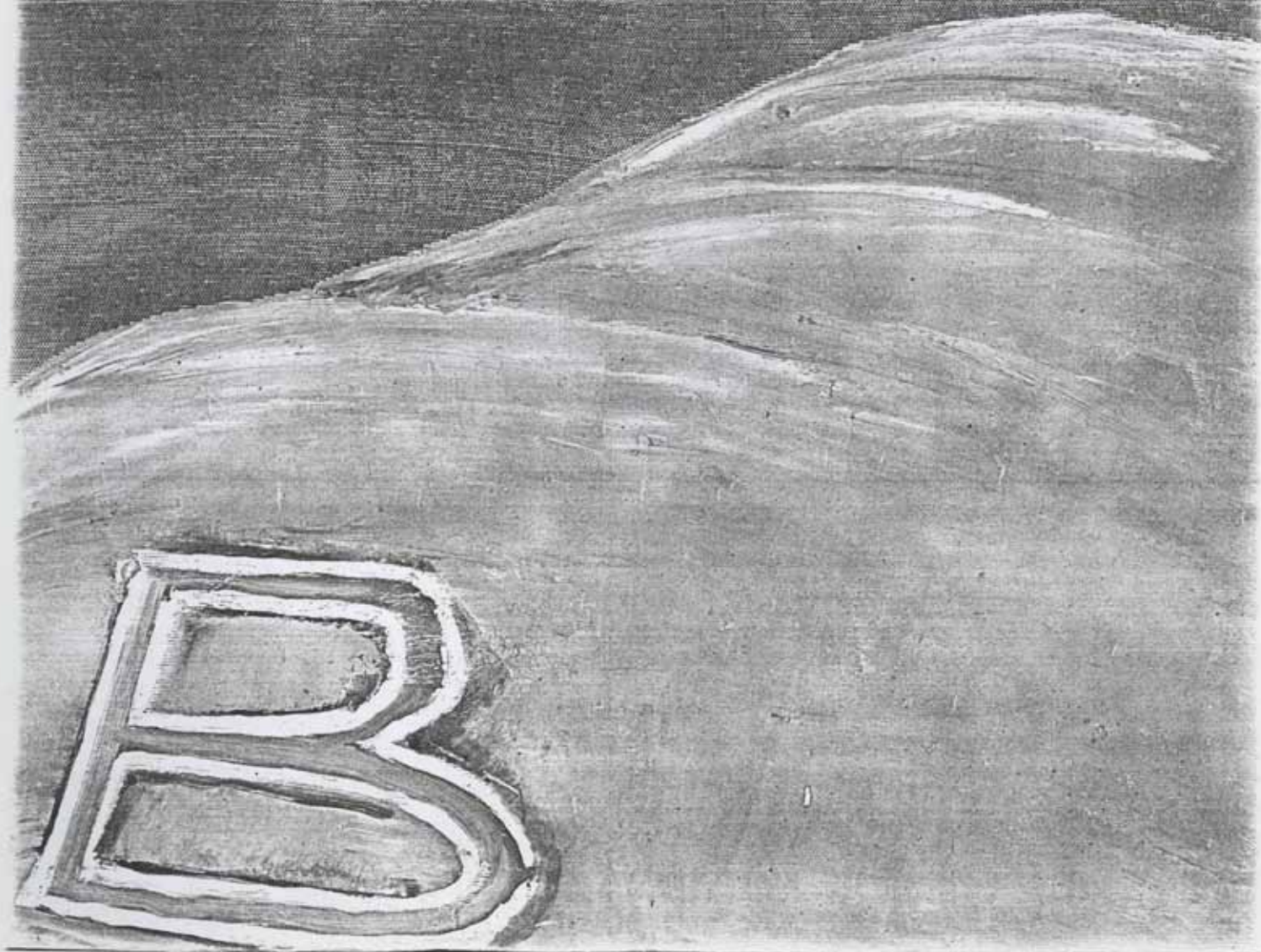
I'll never understand what happened to Barry. Maybe he wasn't the "B" man. I never saw him again. It is possible that "B" just stands for Brooklyn or someone else. My real love affair had been with the land, however. I began painting polka-dots to polk fun at my obsessions. I was down right disgusted with myself and my outrageously ridiculous behavior. It was just too much. In some way I had hoped that each polka-dot would serve as a period or endpoint to this recent compulsion, but I keep finding myself in the midst of obsessions even to this day..... This phase of the "B" story culminates here; with this exhibition. The "B"s and polka-dots covering the gallery walls are testimony to my love, passion and desire during this span of my life.

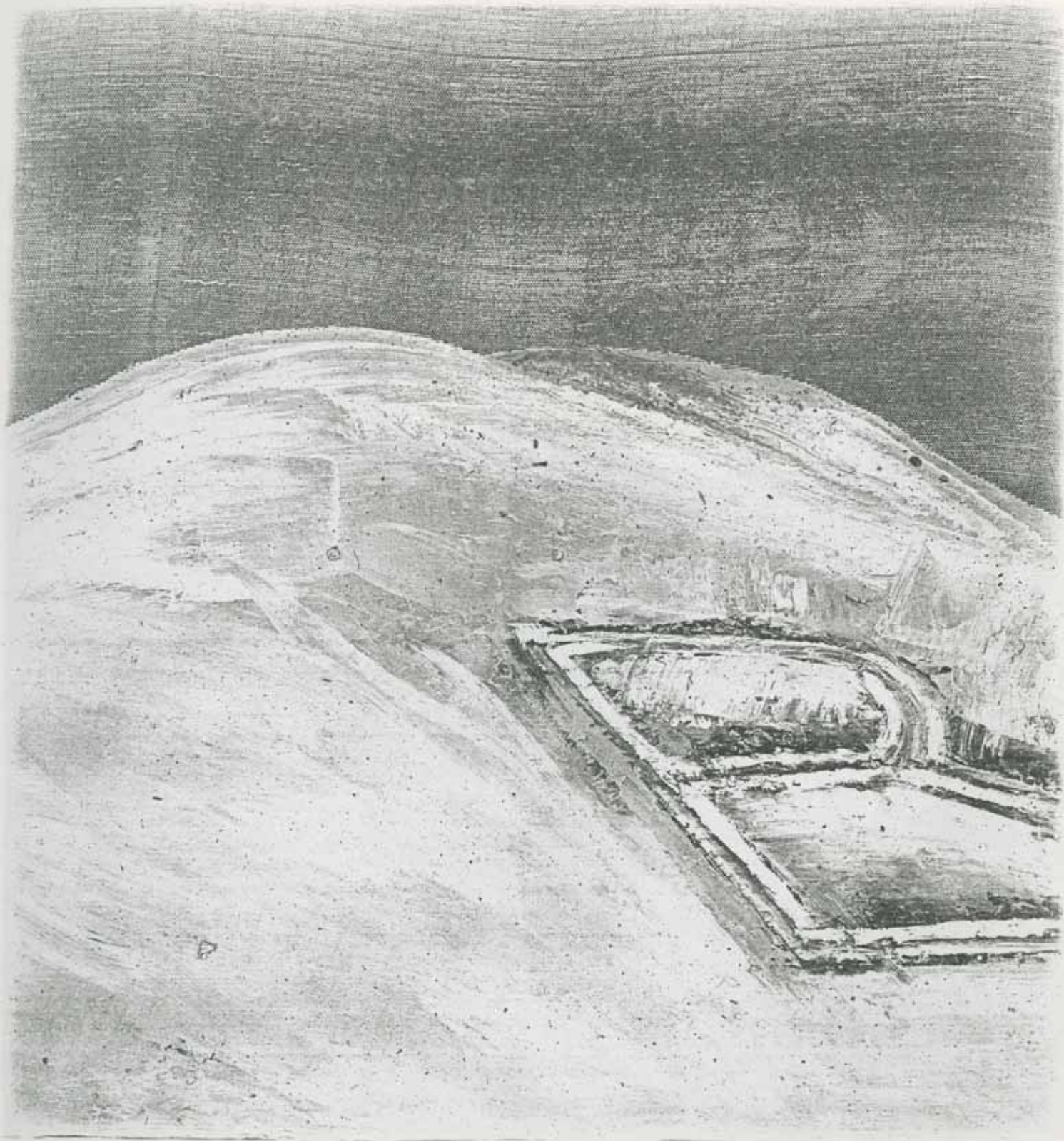


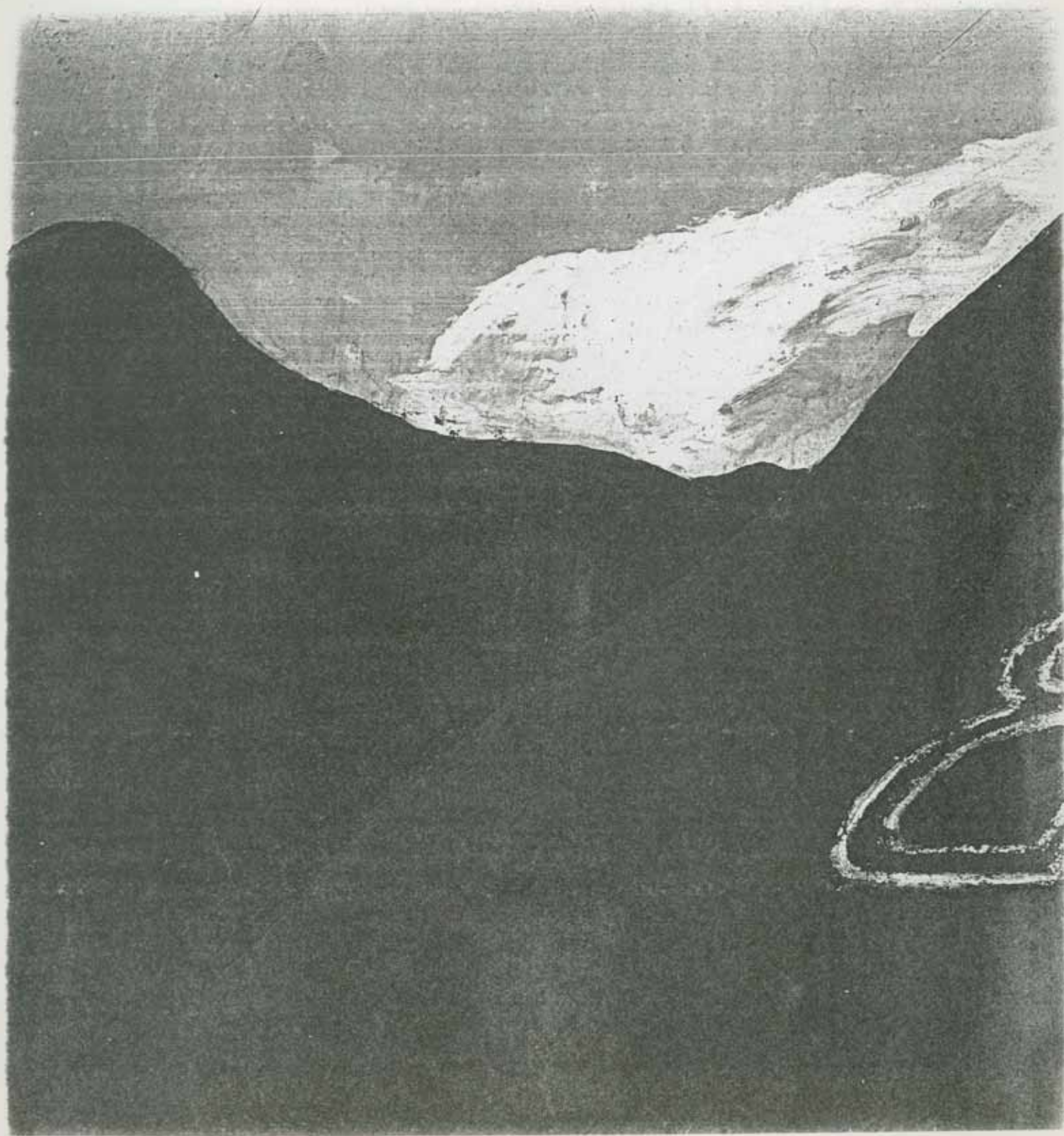




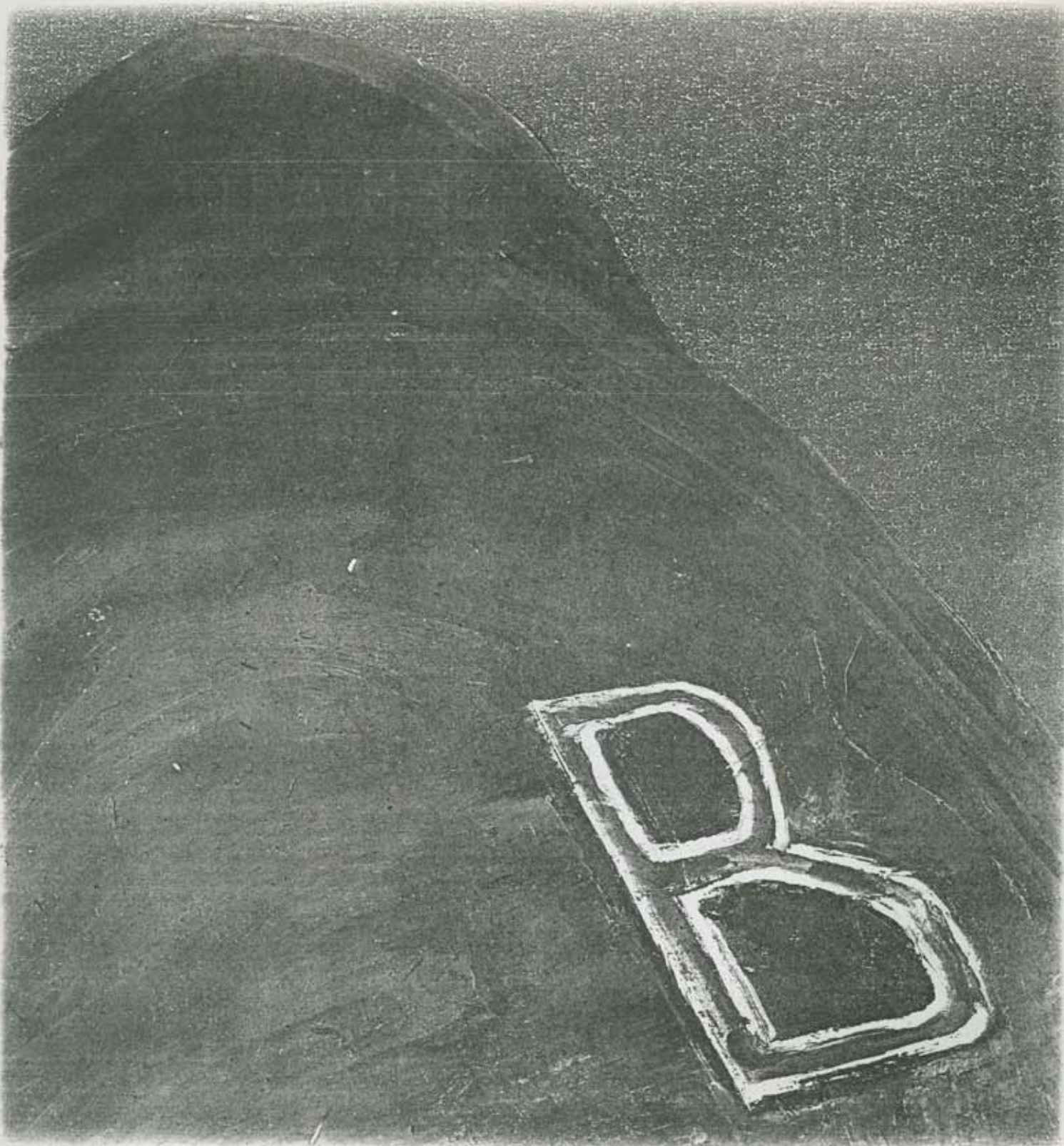




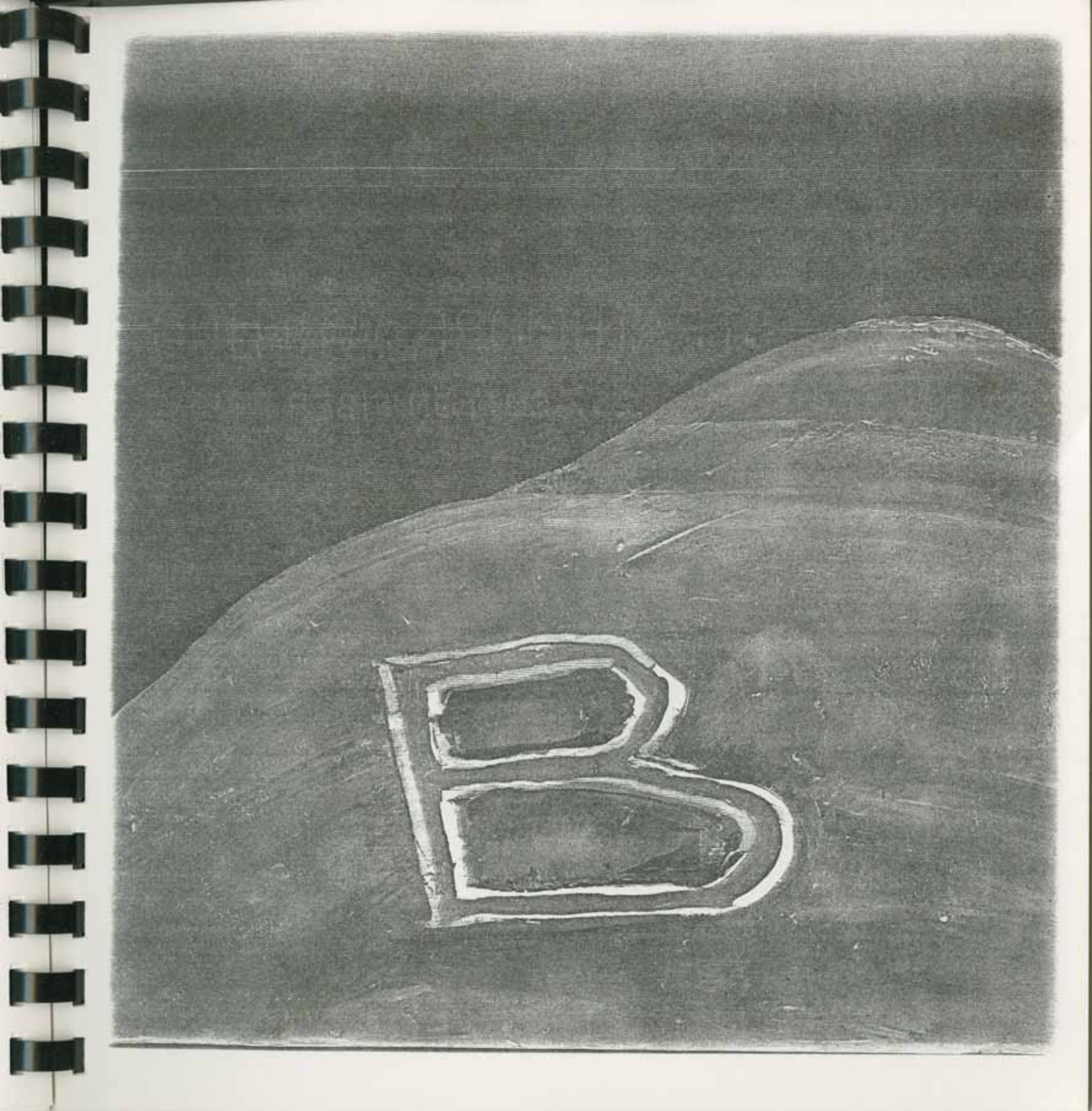


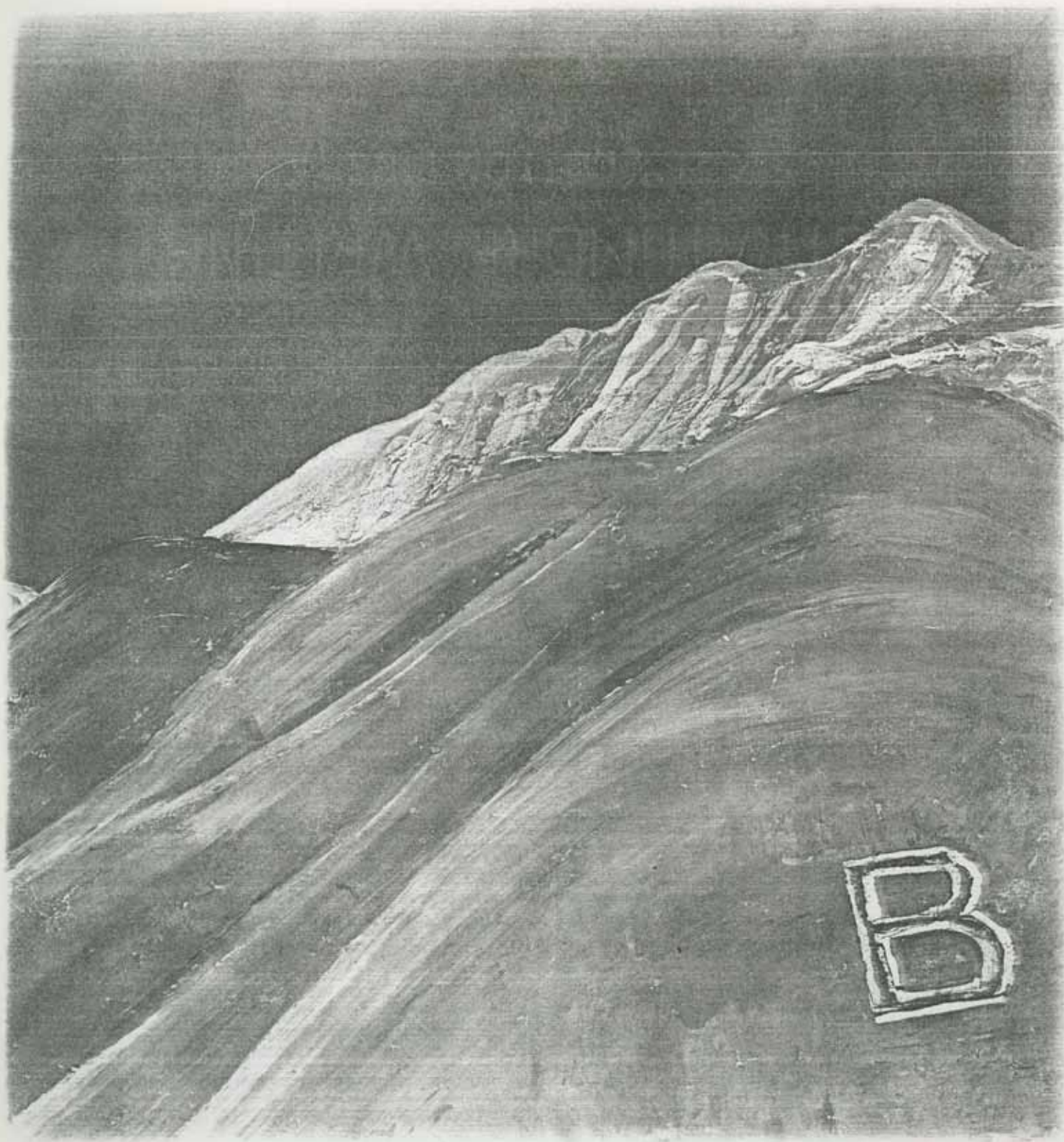






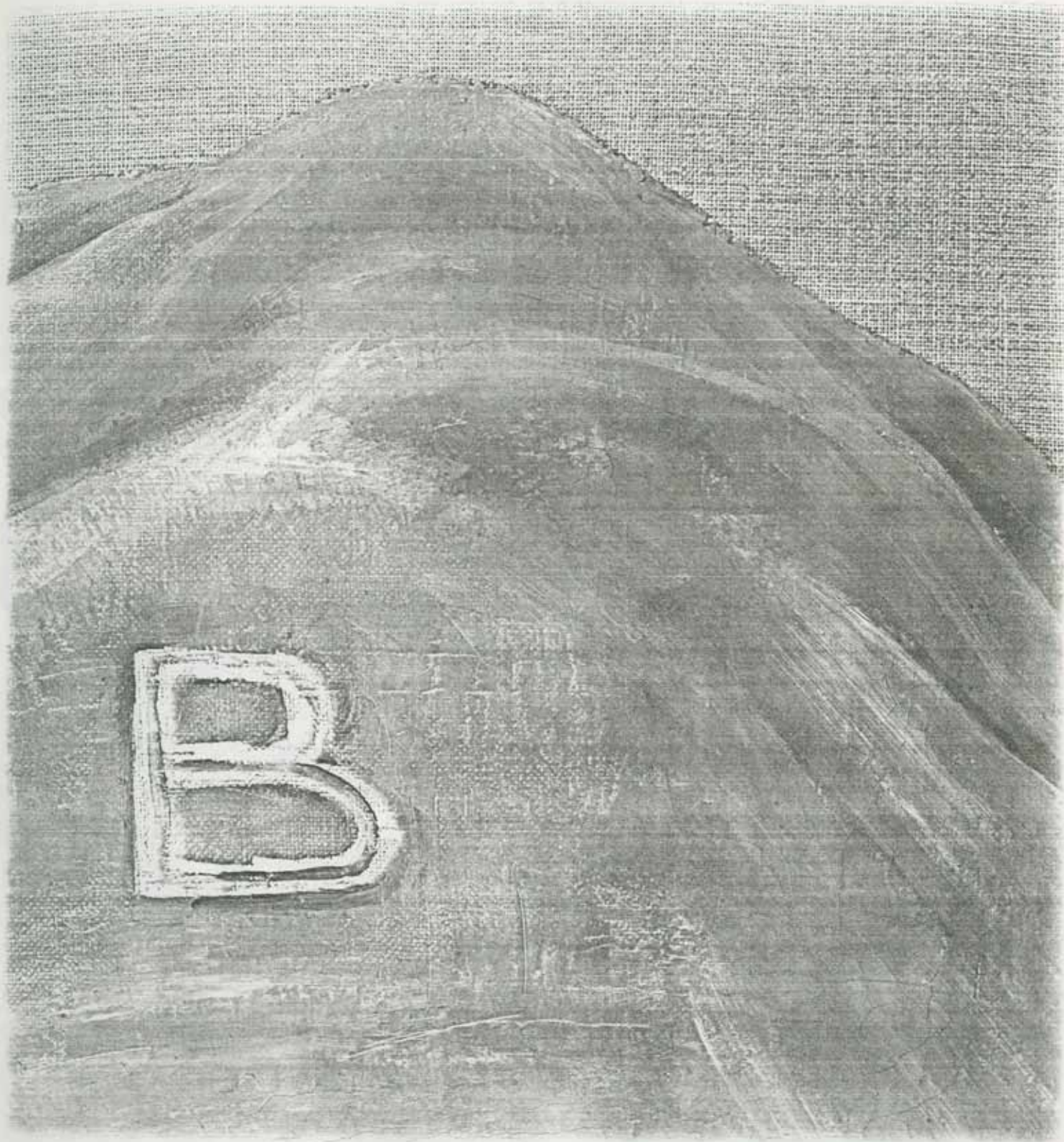


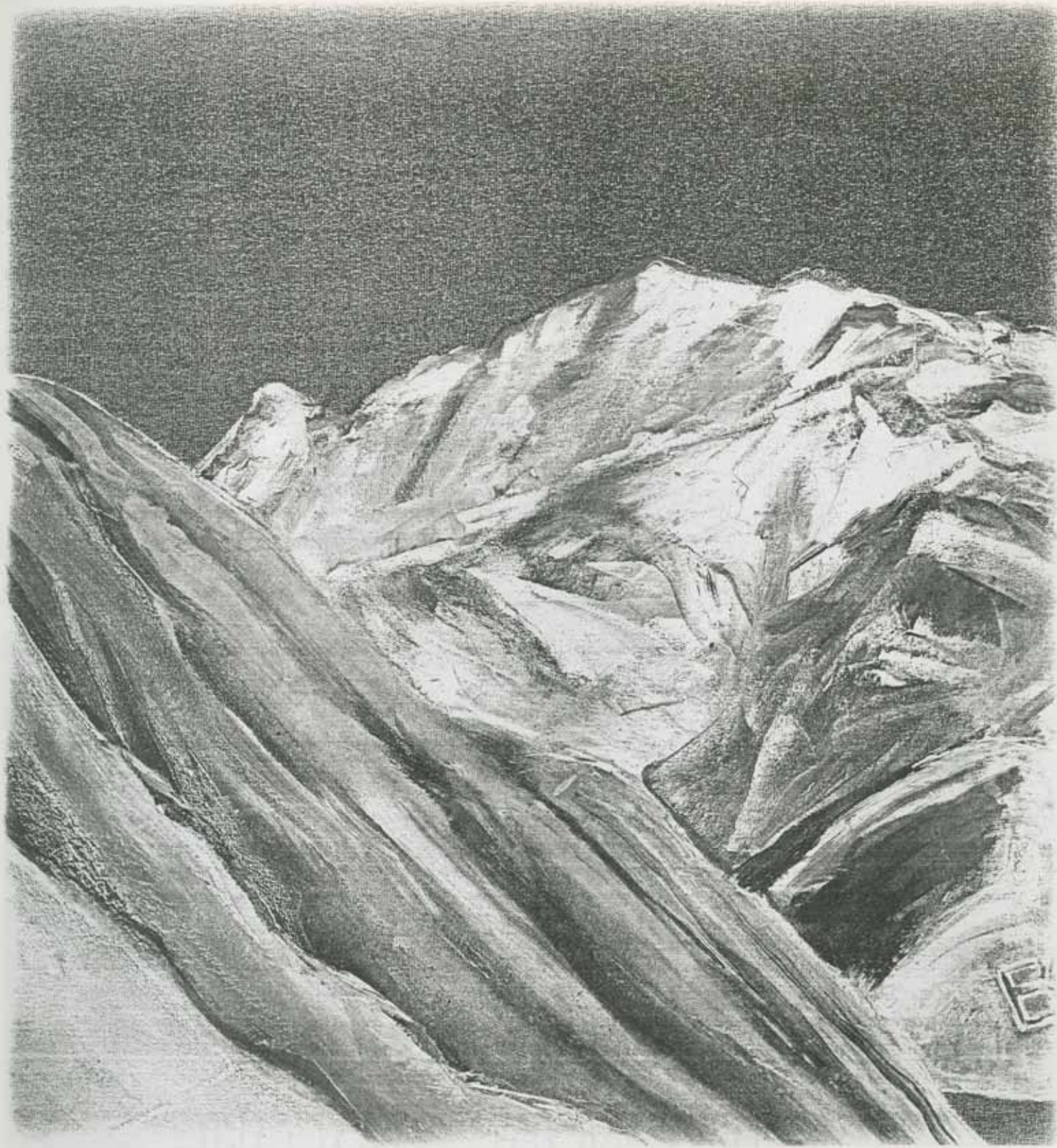




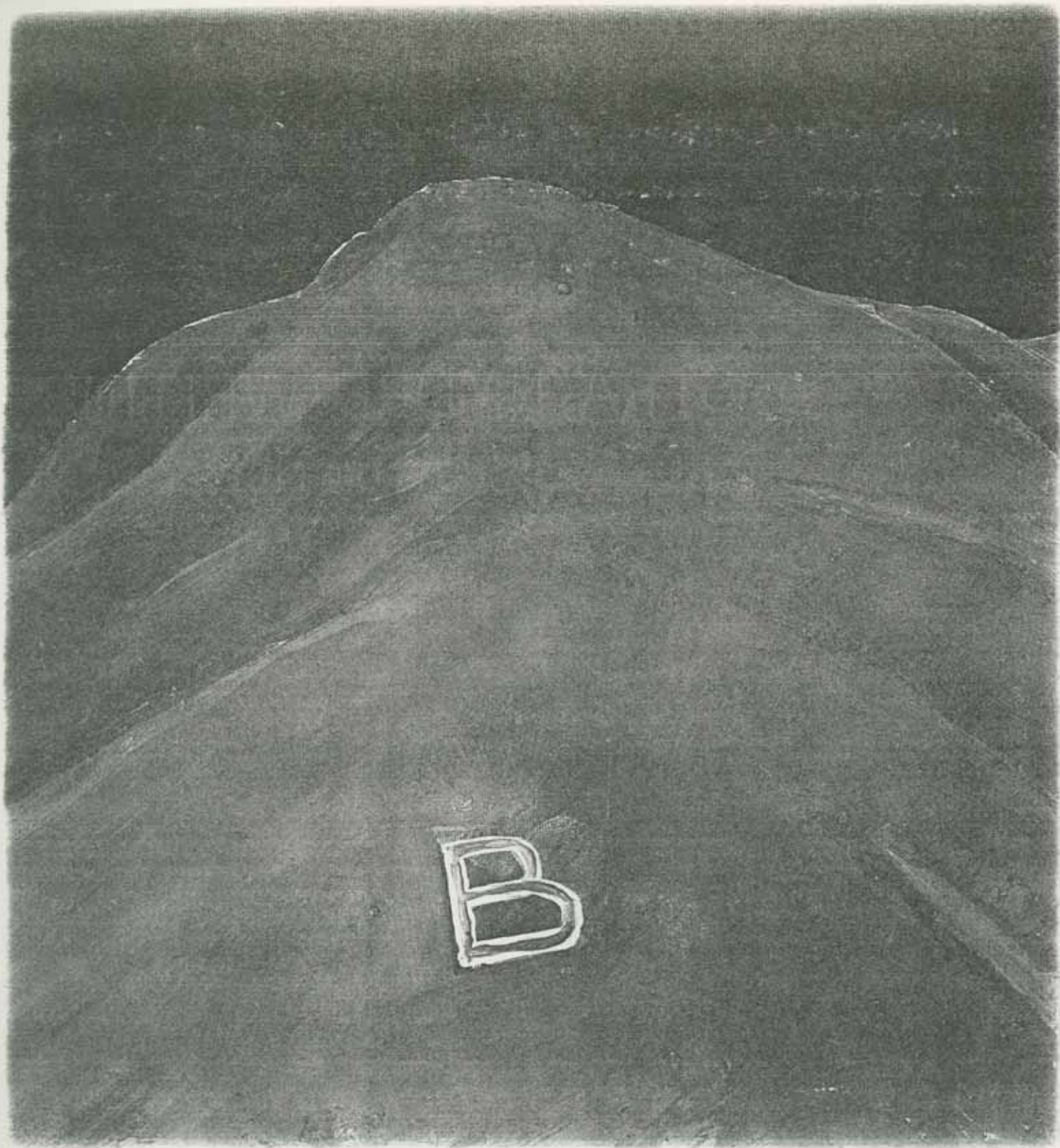
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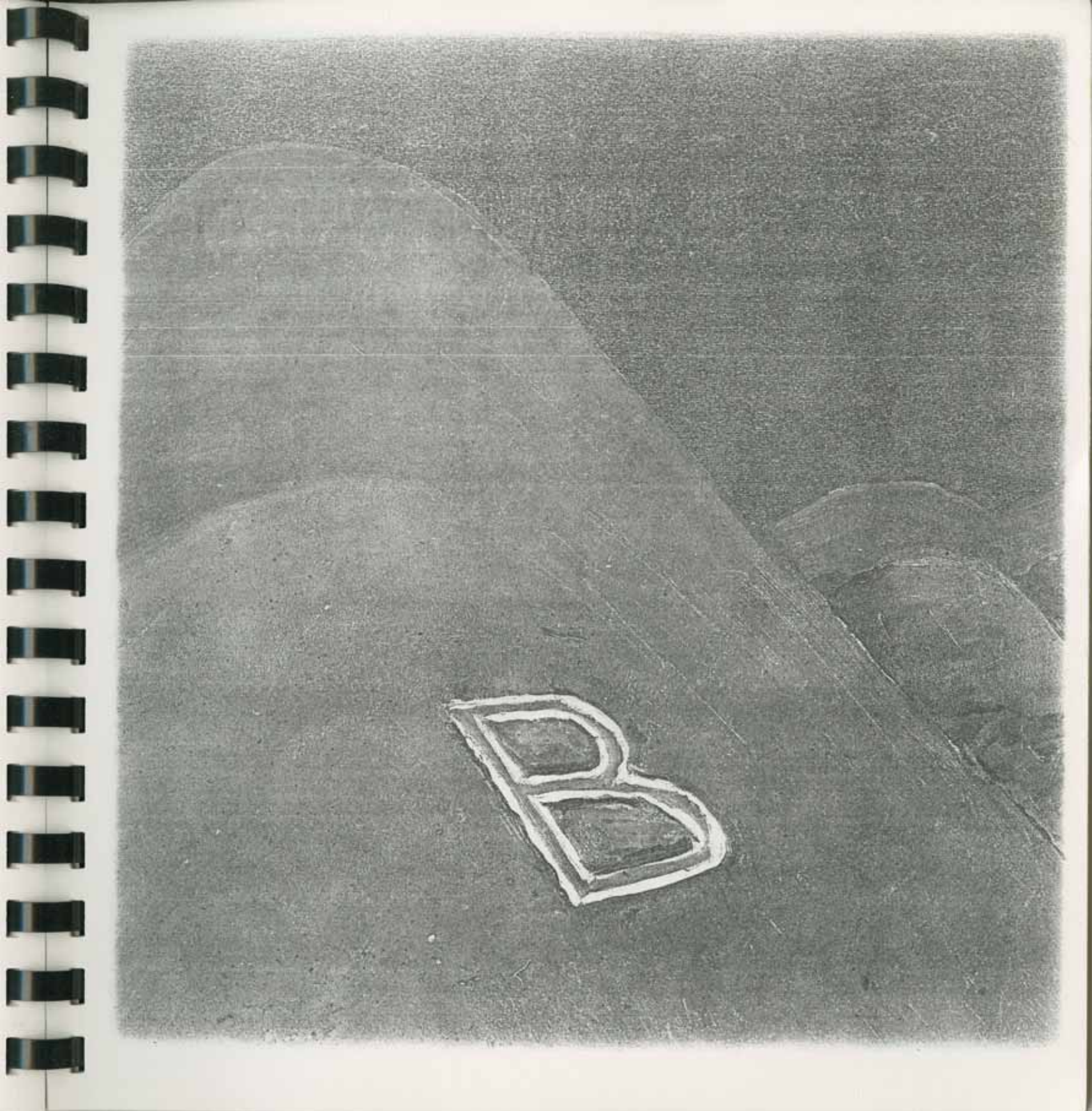


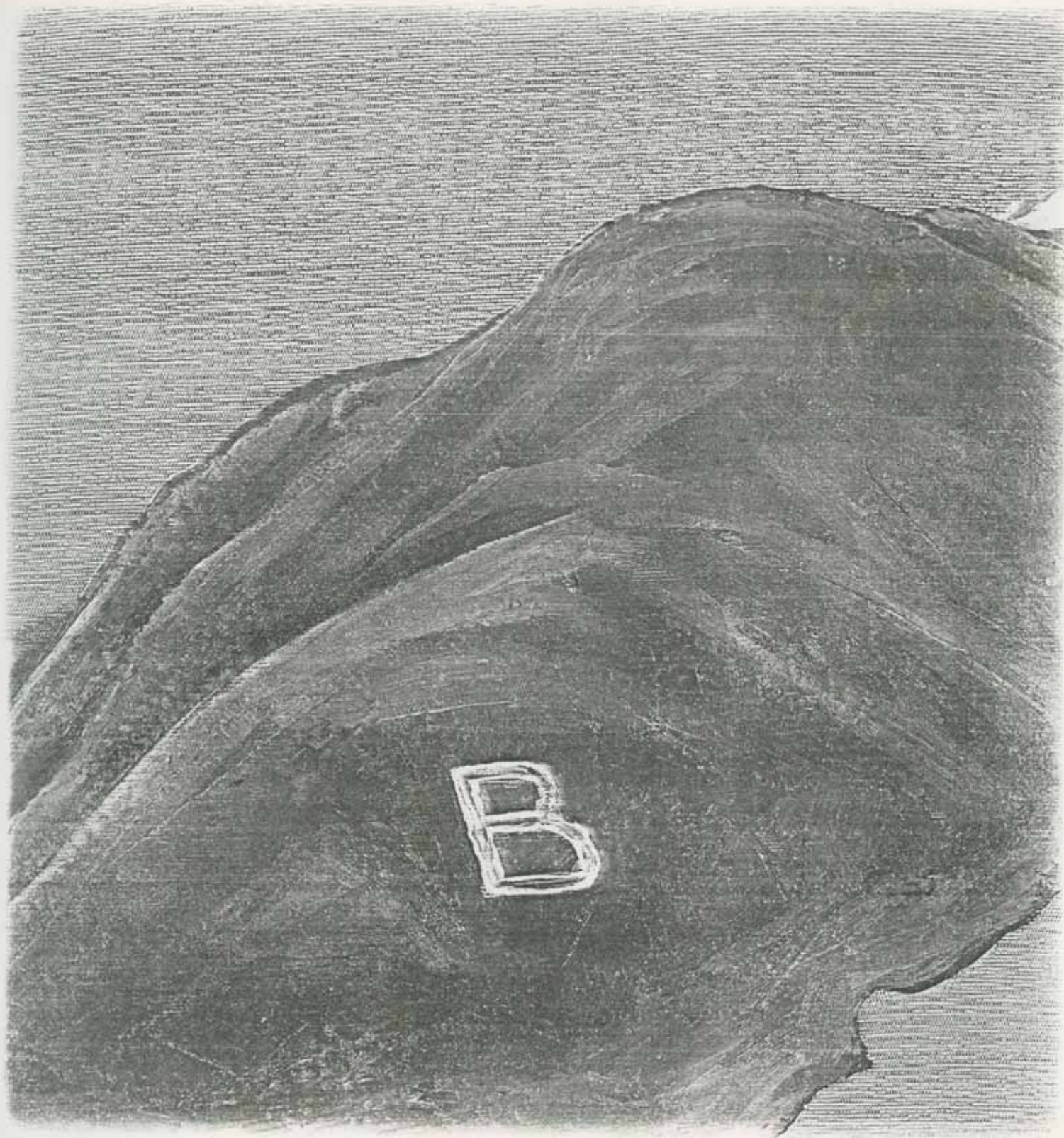


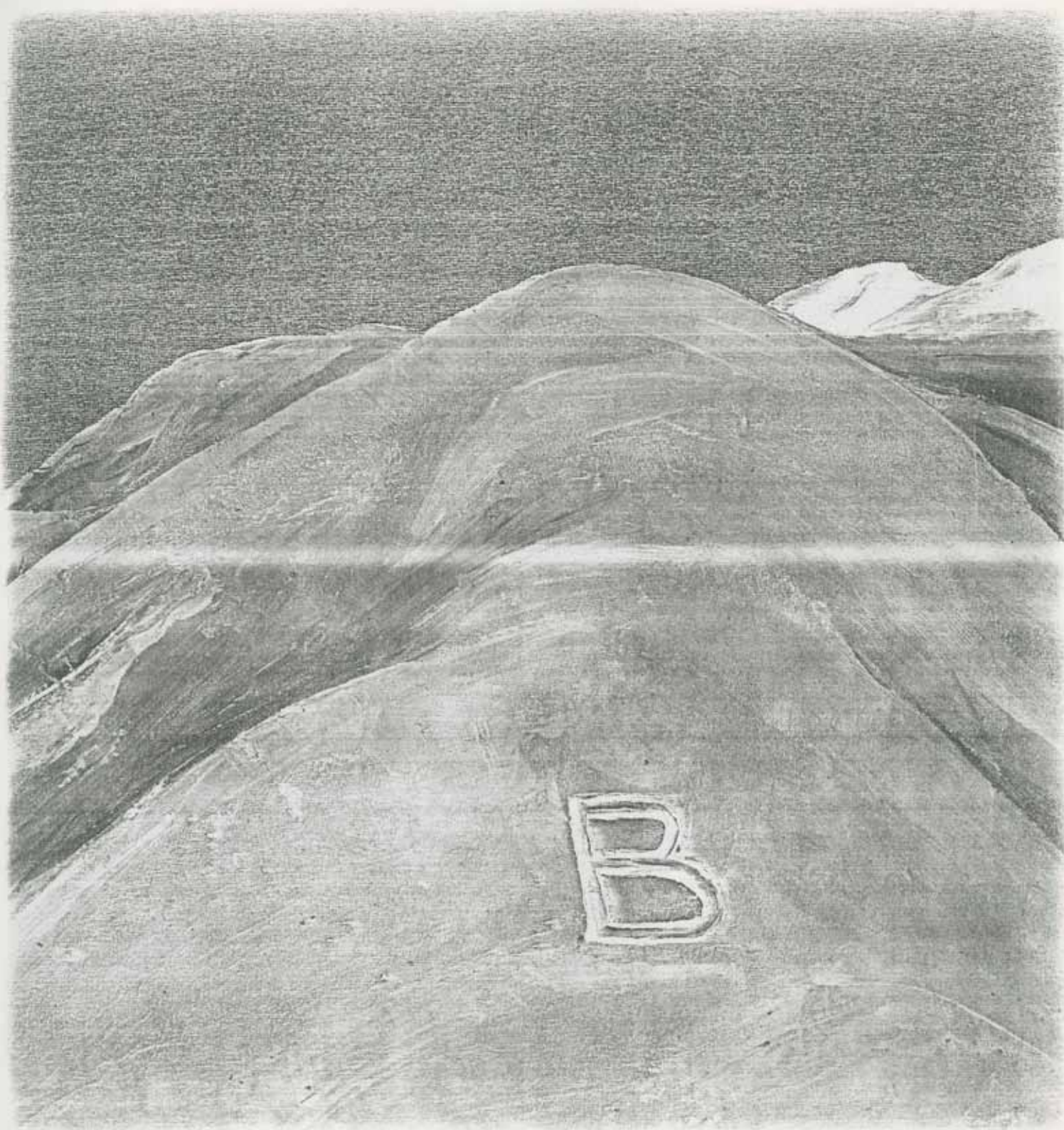


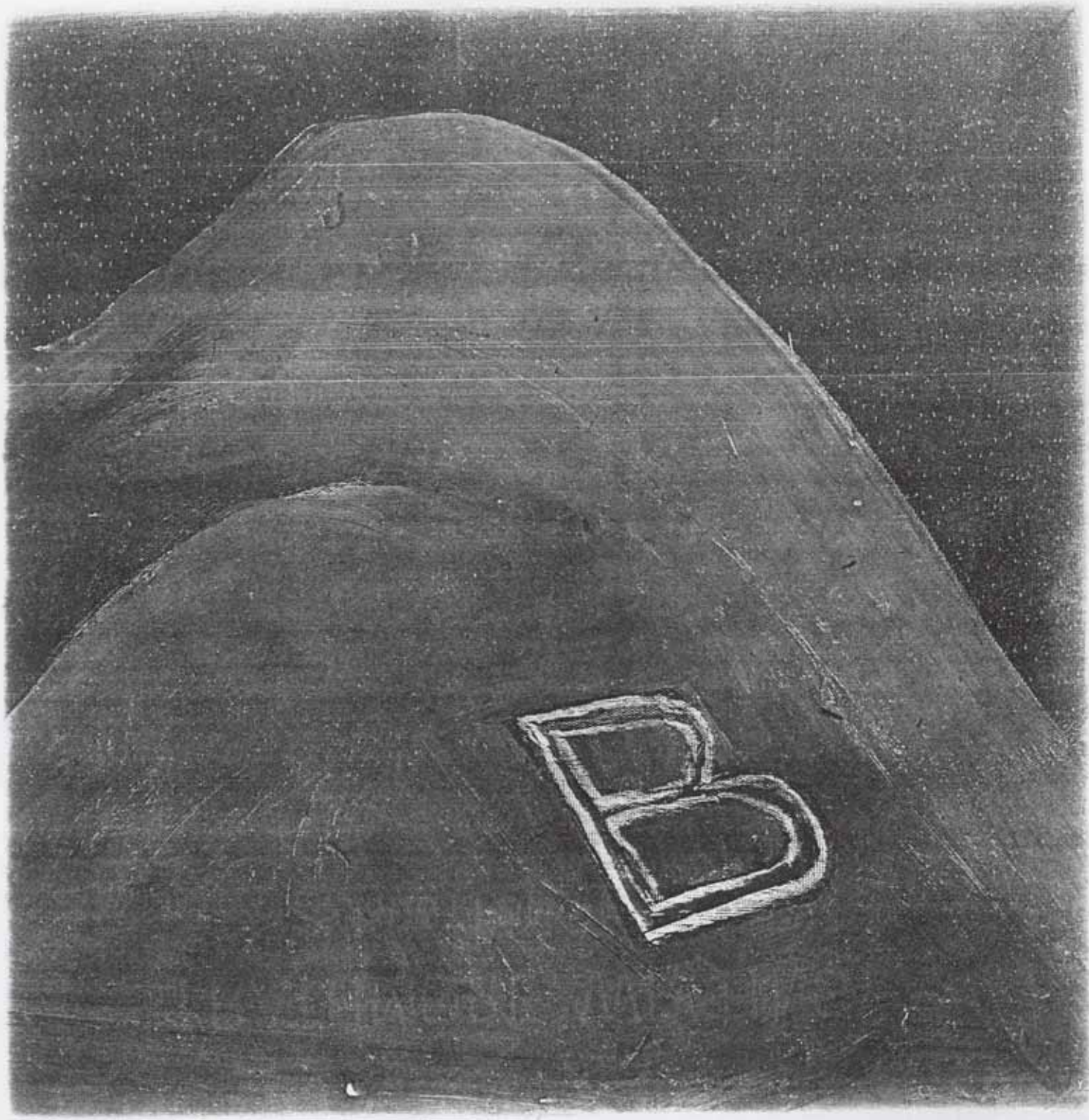




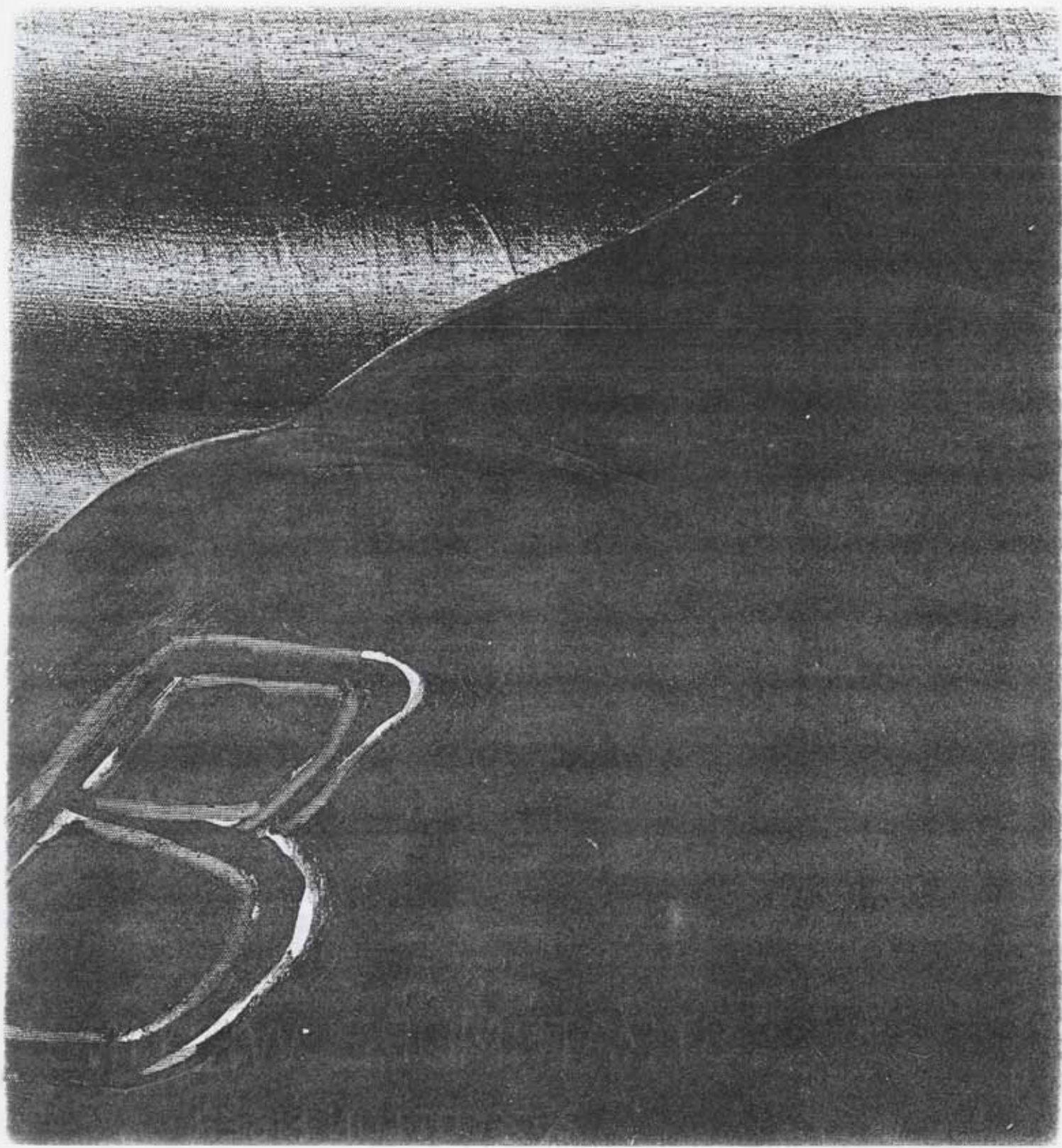




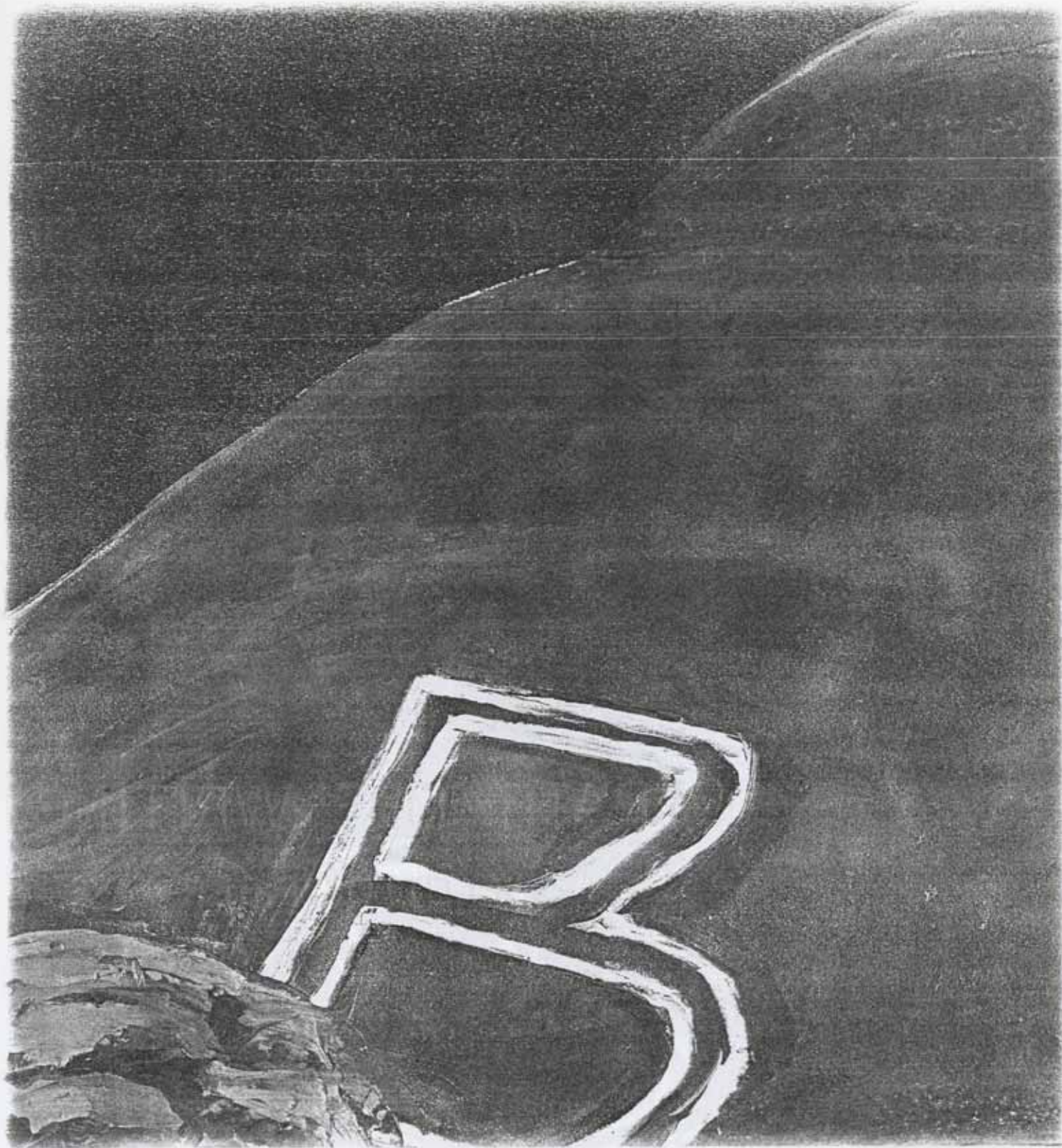


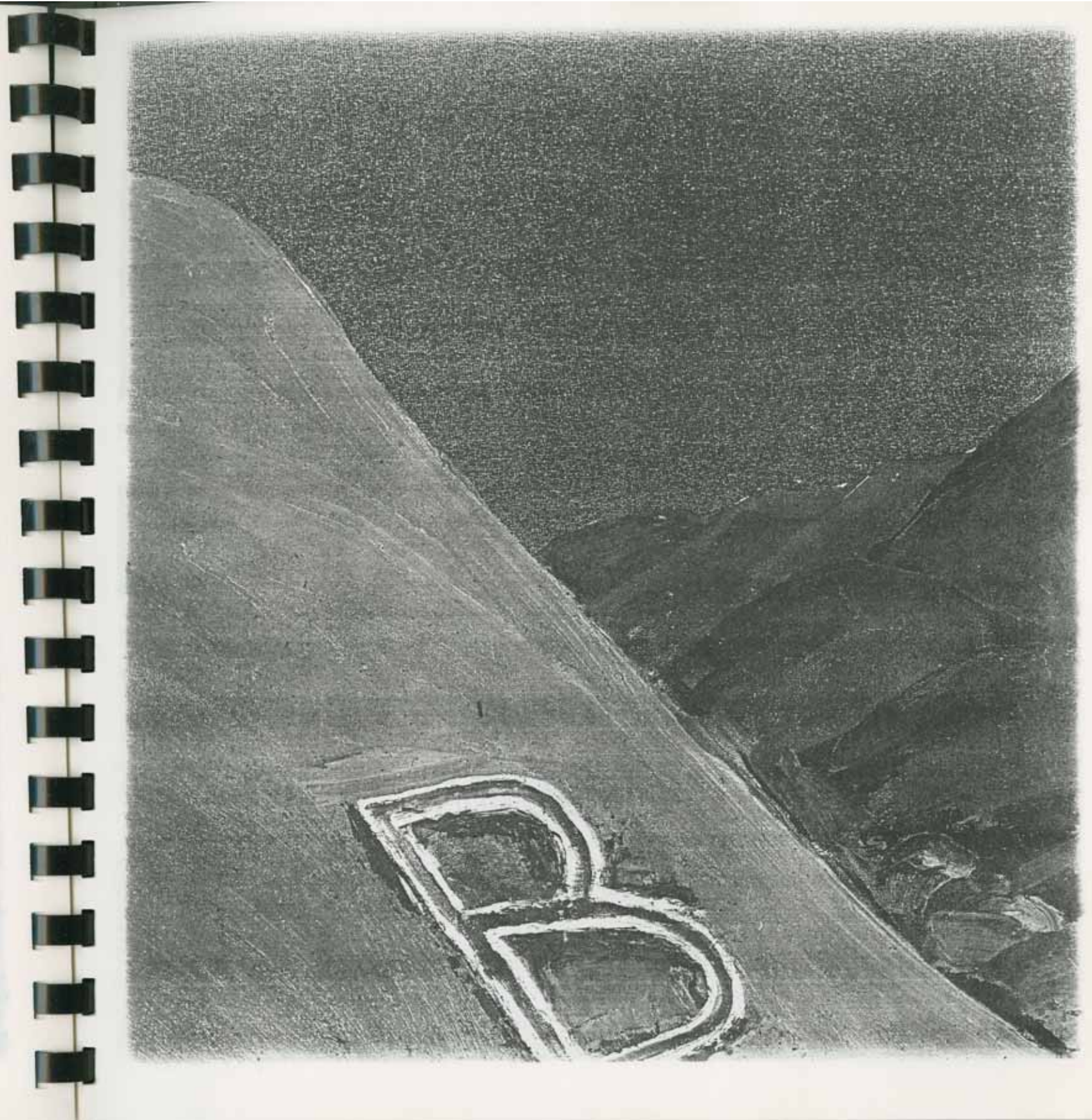


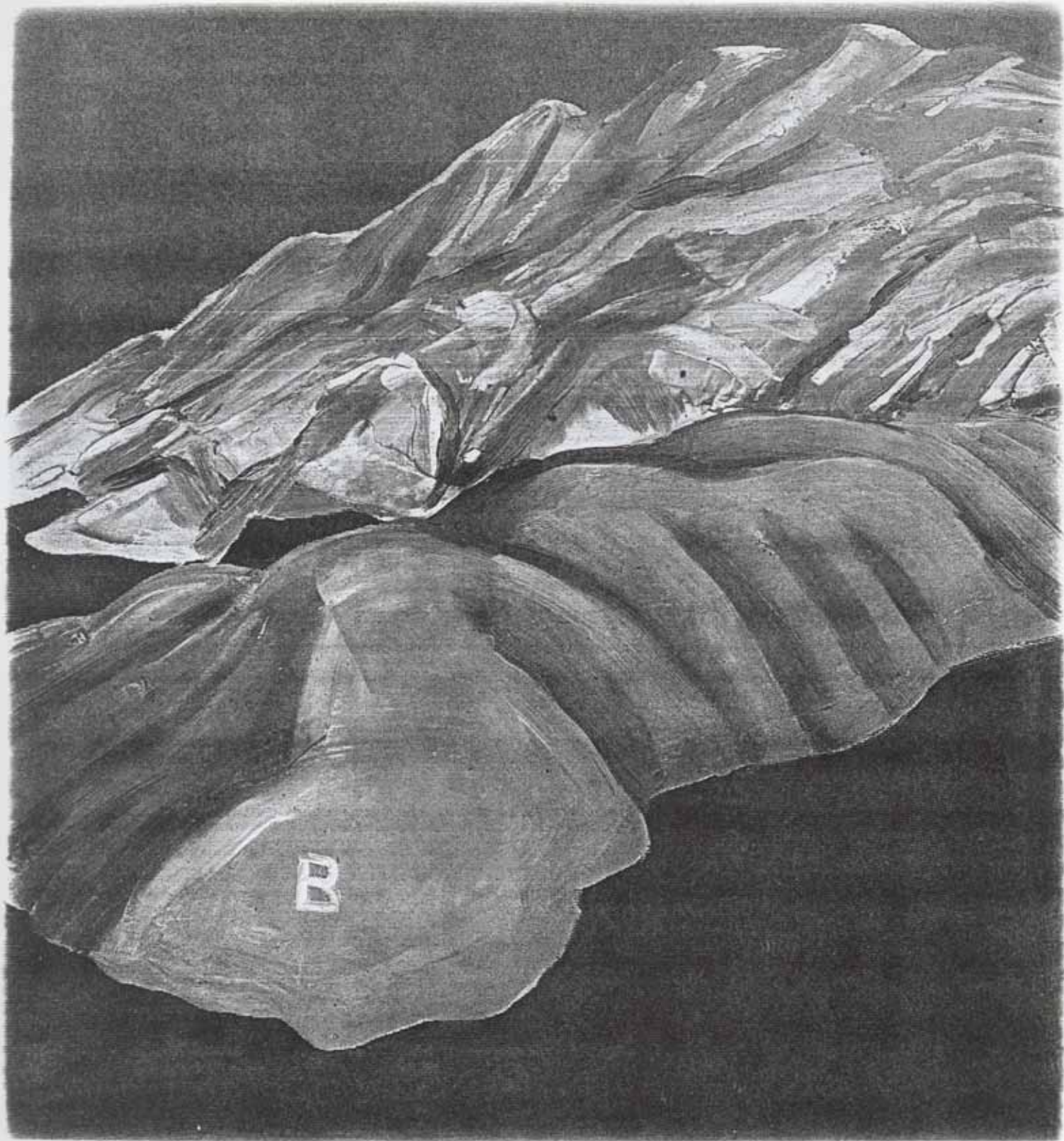


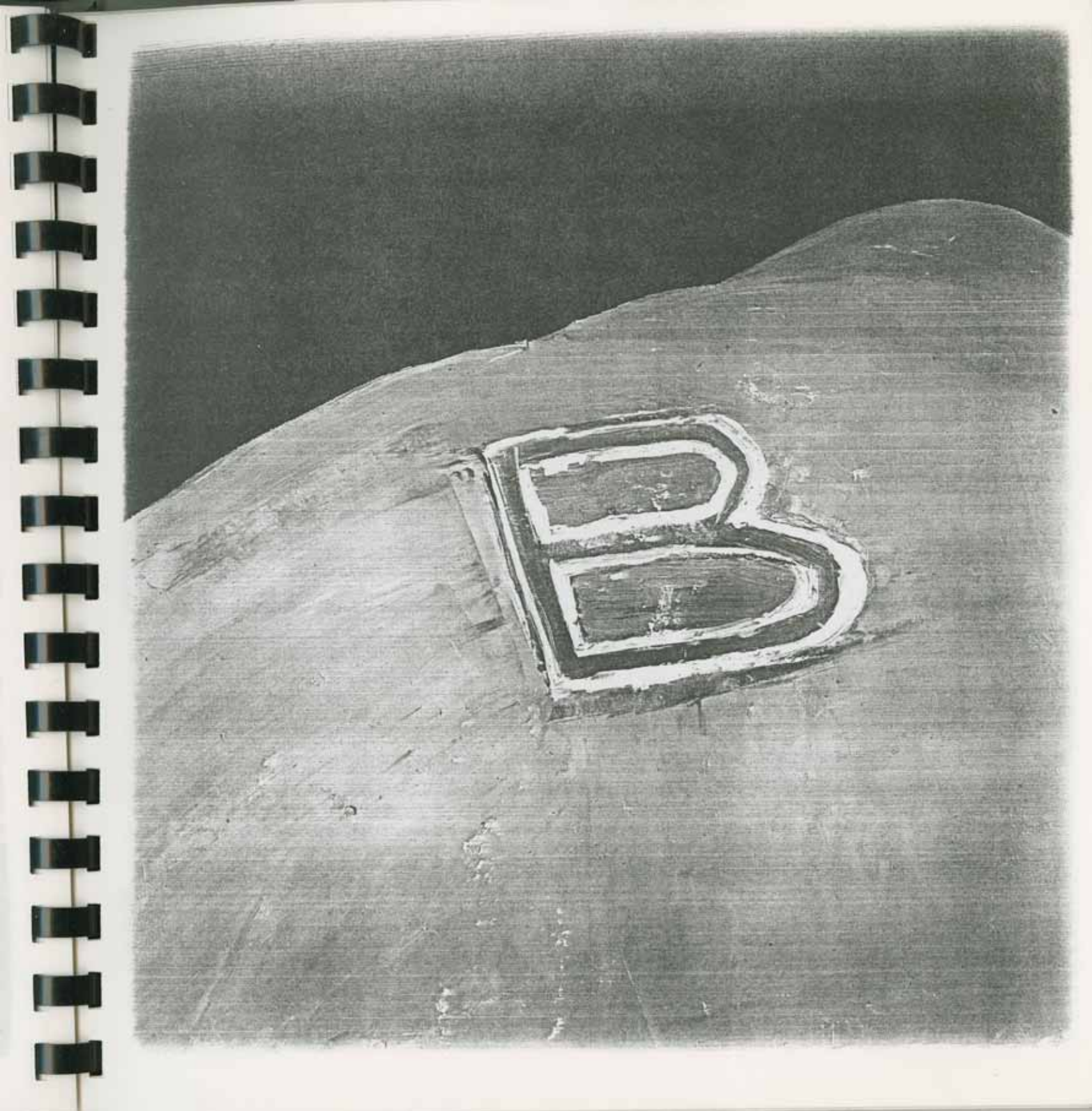


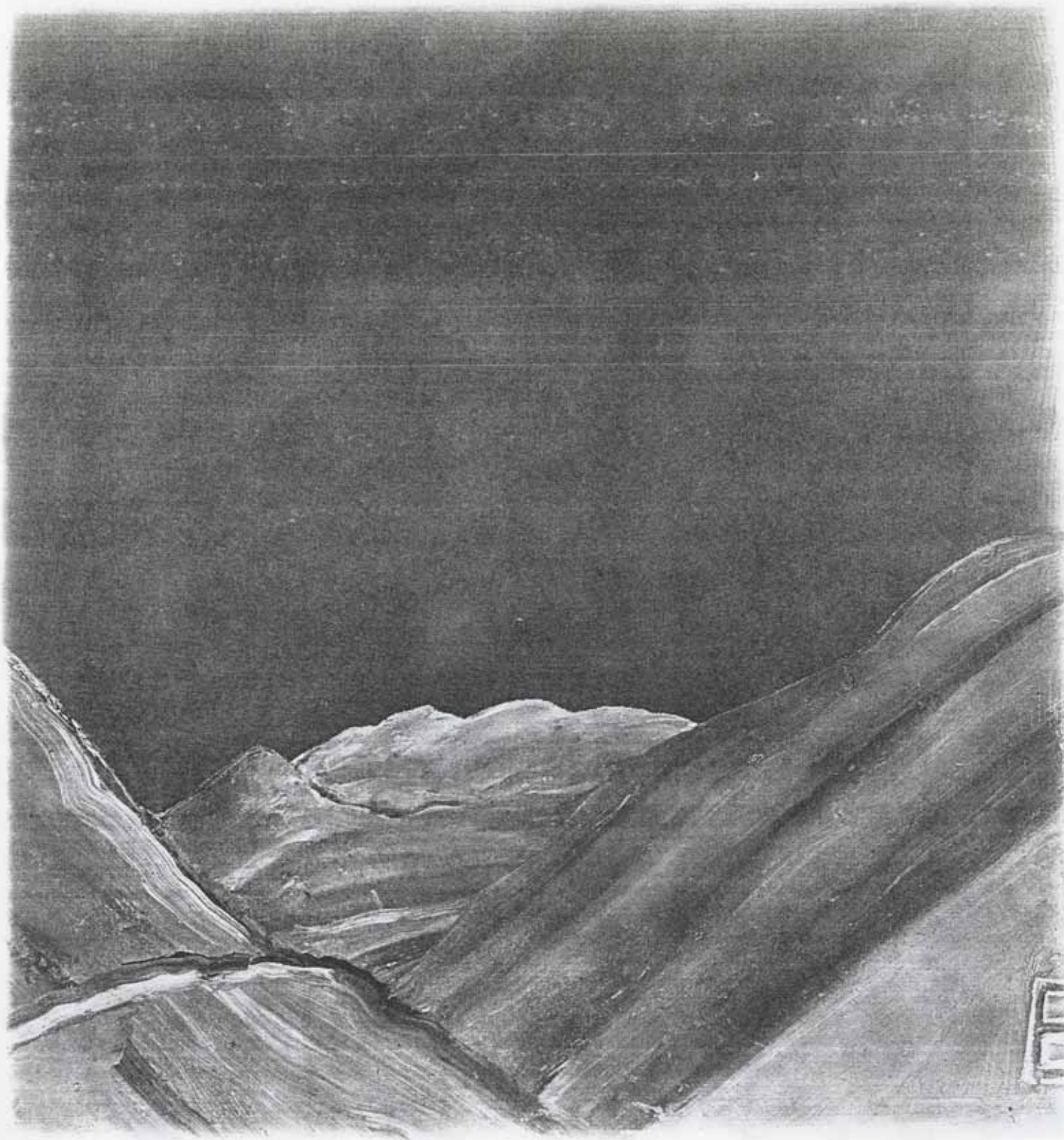


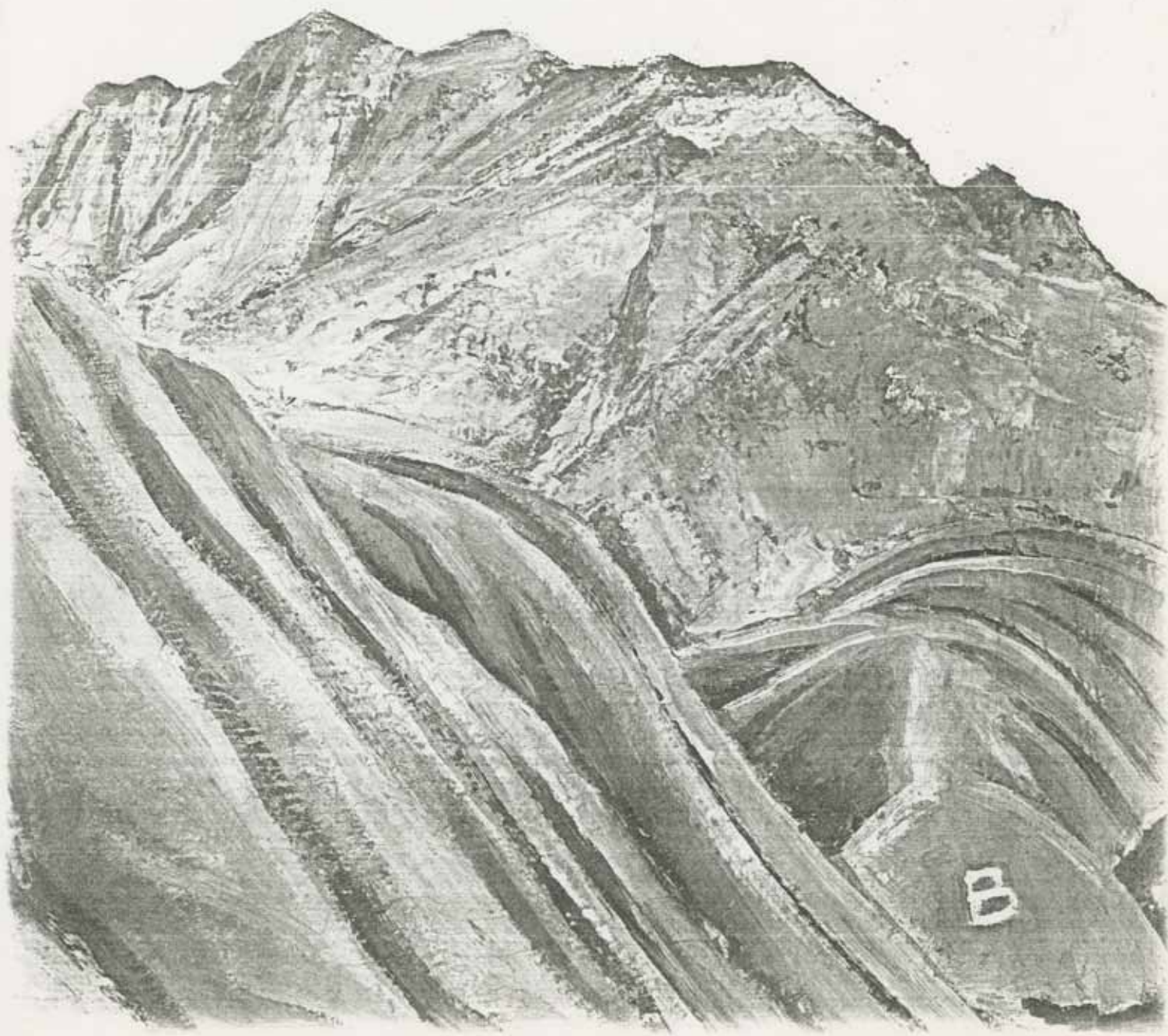


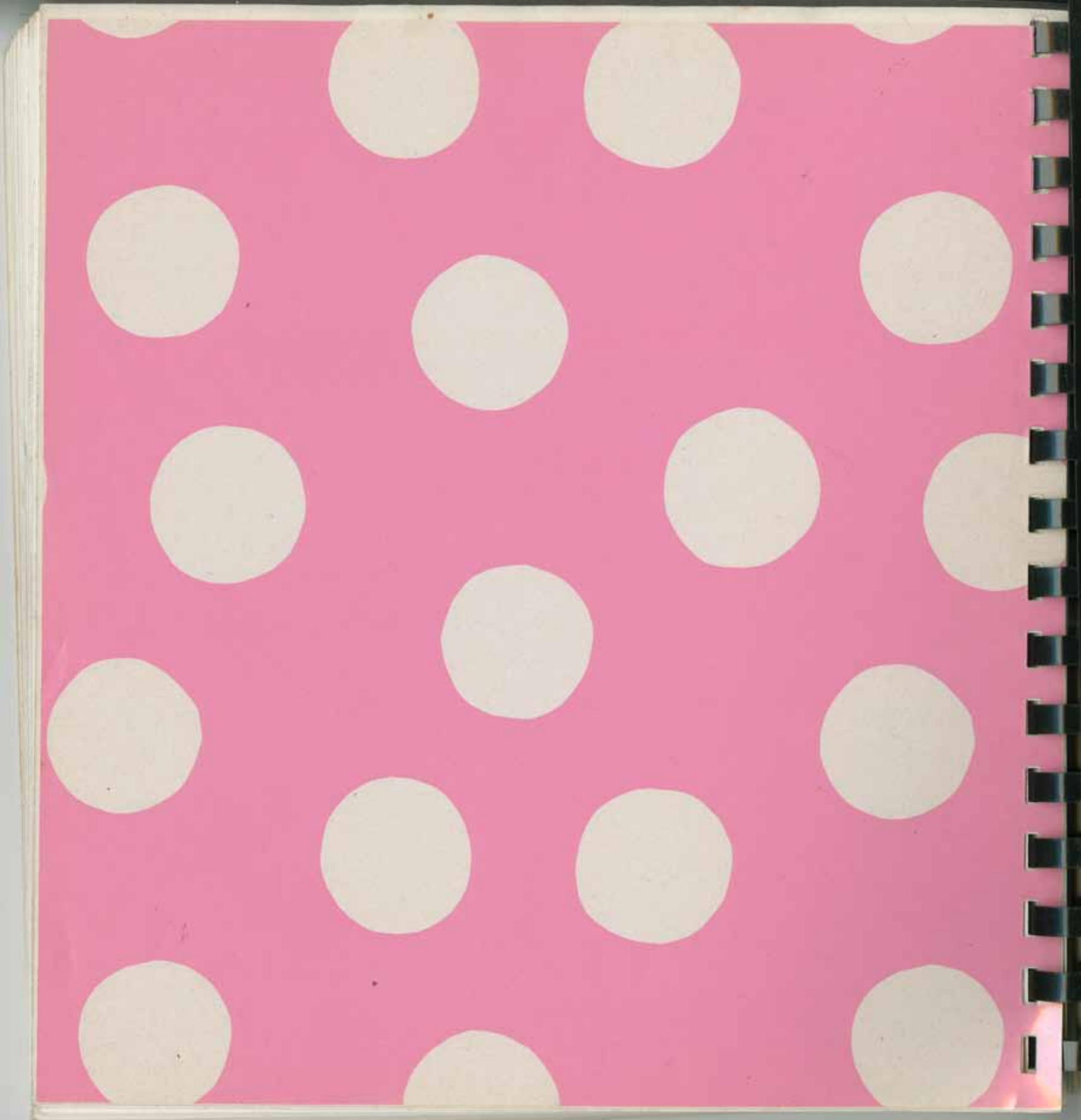
















CINDY TOWER'S
PRETTY DOT PIECE



















