

Geometric Abstraction and the Infinite

Rhea Maheshwari
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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my work and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of another degree or diploma or a university or institution of higher learning.

Signed

Date: 22 May 2021

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ABSTRACT

In this project I use subjective storytelling to articulate my relationship with a field of expanded awareness, which is perceived through the accumulation of lived experience. I place this enquiry within the Hindu tradition of which I was born; and I deeply reflect on symbols of personal significance to make connections between personal events, past experiences and theoretical texts.

This project utilises drawing tools, materials, processes and strategies, all of which are described in depth in the exegesis. Transcendental ideas inform my drawing practice as I engage in a metaphysical mapping, where I co-create a drawing with a speculative energy that sits both outside and within myself.

My drawings emerge from literal guide-lines made from a particular combination of horizontal and vertical ruled pencil lines. Tools of Euclidean geometry drive the practice as I make moves and countermoves within this structural schema to achieve a sense of wholeness or balance within the paper substrate. An intuitive methodology aligned with gestalt design principles enables me to form complex relationships on paper, which emphasise that the whole of each drawing is greater than the sum of its parts.

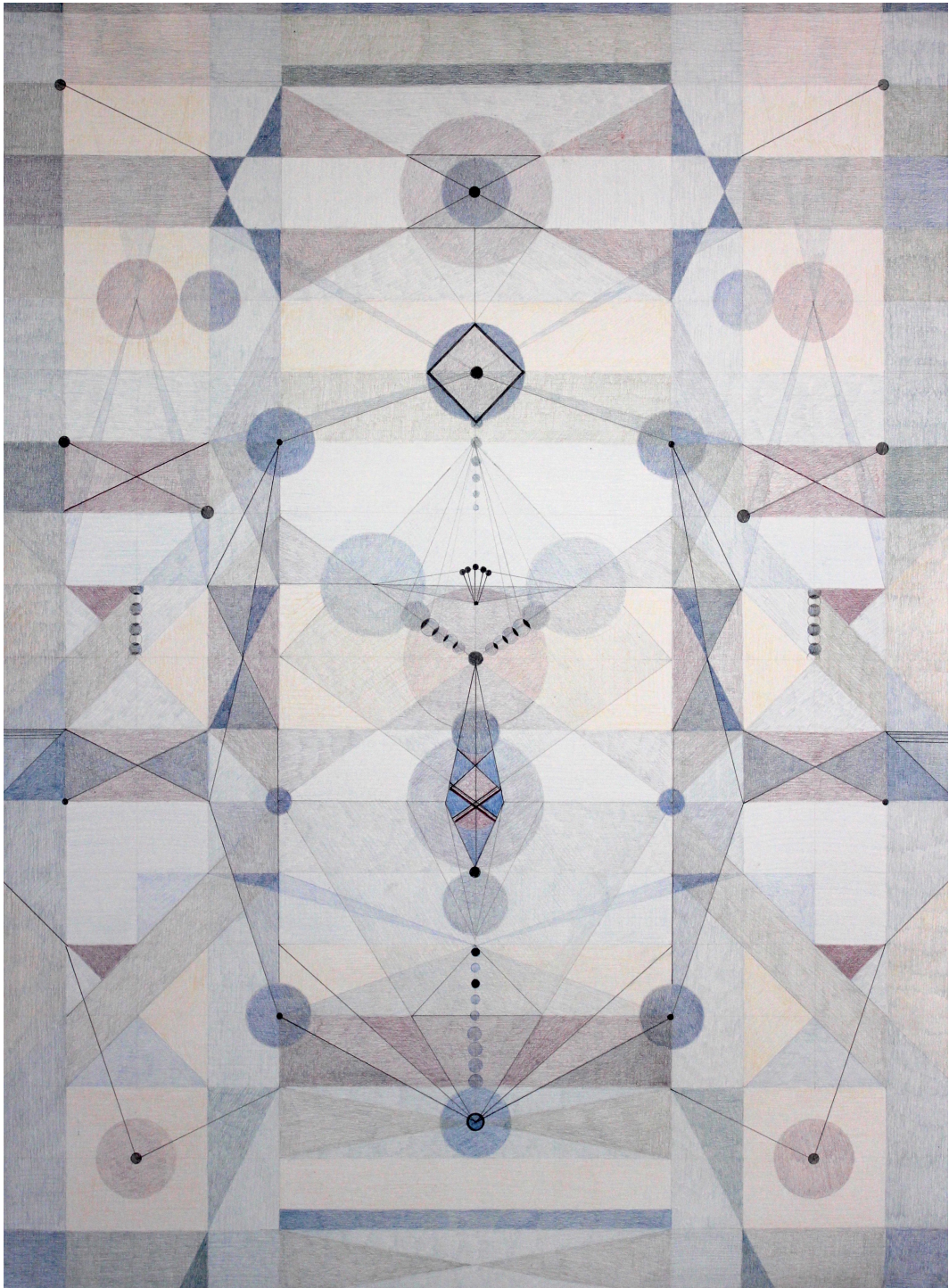


Figure 1. *Altar* (2021) Pencil and Graphite on Paper 50 x 70 cm

INTRODUCTION

In the first chapter, titled 'Framing the Energetic or Subtle Body,' I describe symbols of personal significance as a bodily system of coordinates. These connect my first memories of drawing and daydreaming to broader ancestral cultural practices and form a particular relationship between my body, mind and world.

In the second chapter, titled 'Emergence of the Higher Self', I employ subjective storytelling to thread together aspects of my lived experience, including symbols, texts, memories and feelings that together articulate a 'field' of larger awareness. I describe how symbols of personal experience from my childhood began emerging synchronistically through texts and uncanny events as an adult, which caused me to perceive a higher intelligence at play.

In the third chapter, titled 'Methodology: Integration and Differentiation,' I apply Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's 'flow theory' to these subjective experiences. I describe my drawing practice as a method of responding to a field of information within my awareness, which I order through my chosen tools which are pencils, protractors and rulers. The field of information includes my present environment, every aesthetic form and idea that exists in my memory, and my imaginings of the future. I explain how forms emerge from a set of ruled guide-lines from which I make moves and countermoves to achieve a sense of equilibrium or visual balance within the picture plane.

In the fourth chapter titled 'Symbolic Languages,' I research Emma Kunz and Louise Despont as practitioners who use geometric abstraction to frame transcendental ideas rather than explore formal qualities. Each artist uses different tools to access and explain in a symbolic language their awareness of, and relationship with, an energy outside and within their bodies.

FRAMING MY ENERGETIC OR ‘SUBTLE’ BODY

The subtle or energetic body is a framework referred to in many esoteric traditions as a commingling of visible forms and invisible forces.¹ This model sees the forces of each particular human body and the larger universe as being entwined in a reciprocal relationship.² The subtle or energetic body consists of metaphorical or invisible wheels (*chakras*) connected to each other by channels (*nadis*) which allow universal life-force energy (*prana*) to flow.³ I provide conceptual and symbolic form to my chakras through three vignettes which each describe an encounter, from my childhood, with particular objects. These objects evoked particular feelings, which triggered automatic or subconscious responses within my body. The memory of these encounters were etched in symbolic form as psychic traces within my subconscious, and began resurfacing through resonating chance encounters as an adult. Because of the manner in which they emerged, which I will explain in detail in the next chapter, I identify these memories as being part of my subtle body – my root, sacral and third-eye chakra respectively. These are parts of my body-mind, which synergise to make up the whole of me.

Vignette 1: The Ornamental Temple – this vignette enables me to visualise my connection to my ancestors and gives a visible form to the energy within my root (Muladhara) chakra at the base of my spine, which is the foundation of the energetic body.

There was a miniature wooden ornamental temple in the corner of my grandparents' living room with symbols of gods and goddesses inside it. My grandmother would arrange a plate with ordered mounds of red powder (sindoor), turmeric (haldi), and rice as material offerings to the invisible deities. In the middle of the vessel would be a stick of incense which my grandmother would light before symbolically ‘nourishing’ the statuettes by circulating them clockwise in counterpoint to the centre of the temple. She would perform this ritual every morning while singing rhythmic hymns passed down from previous generations.

This meditative ritual, called aarti, is common in Indian homes and temples. I would notice how the atmosphere would turn calm and tranquil as the fragrance of incense wafted through the air. The ornamental temple functioned as a portal through which I imagined the qualities of the divine.

Vignette 2: The Swooping Bird – this vignette gives symbolic form to my third-eye (Ajna) chakra situated at the centre of my forehead, which is the feminine chakra associated with intuition, imagination and wisdom.

I was looking out of my window around the age of seven when I noticed a swooping bird. It evoked a feeling in me which gave rise to a spontaneous daydream. In my daydream I imagined I was a bird who flew beyond the horizon to the gods and goddesses, who guided me to complete a task on Earth. The imaginative concept was felt viscerally but I could not articulate it in words.

¹ Raymond Foye, ‘Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture’ Drawing Papers 125, The Drawing Centre. February 2, 2016, 25.

² Ibid., 25.

³ David Malin, ‘The Twelve Chakra System,’ *Positive Health* 128 (October 2006), 18

Vignette 3: The Beautiful Curve – this vignette gives visible form to a force within my sacral chakra, situated just below the belly button, which governs my sexuality and self-expression.

In one of my earliest memories, I was scribbling with pencil on paper. From the chaotic scribbles, I noticed I created a beautiful curve by chance. My awestruck eyes fixated on the exquisite curve that stood out. I found the curve beautiful because of the feeling it evoked in me, and it made me question whether it was created intentionally or by chance. I automatically knew I had to mirror the curve to achieve symmetry and give it an intention.

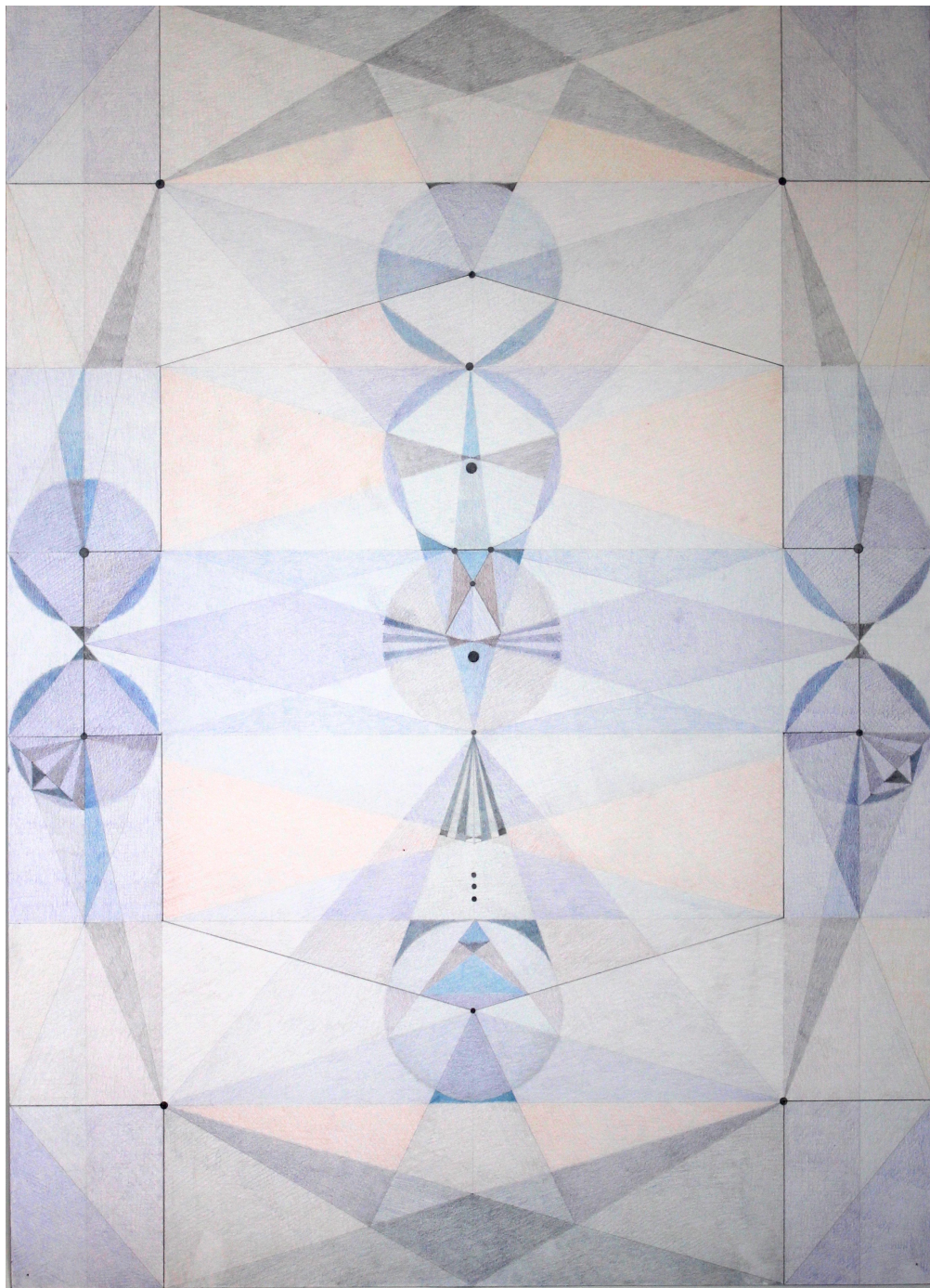


Figure 2. *Bird's eye* (2021) Pencil and Graphite on Paper 50 x 70 cm

EMERGENCE OF THE HIGHER SELF

In 'The Ethnographic Self: Fieldwork and the Representation of Identity', Amanda Coffey describes ethnography as the writing and representation of personal encounters.⁴ She describes 'fieldwork' as a process which involves the merging of lives and biographies – of both individuals engaging in fieldwork and the others involved in the journey.⁵ Through fieldwork, our physical, embodied selves are placed among the selves and bodies of others, and we construct our identities. Therefore, in recollecting and expressing our fieldwork experiences we are involved in processes of self-presentation and the construction of identity. This section is an autoethnographic story where I recall and write about my experience of encountering particular theoretical material and the symbols and memories they evoked. Through writing about my intimate and personal engagement with theoretical material, I articulate and represent my awareness of an evolving expanded 'field' that contextualises myself and my drawing practice.

I remember sitting in the university library in my first year of art school feeling uncertain about my relatively spontaneous decision to study art after finishing a commerce degree. Afraid I had made a big mistake, I began spiralling into an anxious state of mind. I perceived my decision to go to art school as impulsive, and I began berating myself for not being logical and considering the repercussions. I catastrophised that I knew nothing about real art and what it even meant to be an authentic artist. It was as if I were a child again, plunged into a chaotic and scary world. I wanted desperately to go home to safety. With no idea where to begin, or even to know whether I was on the right path, an overwhelming sense of uncertainty dawned over me. I felt a new level of mistrust within the depths of my body. Without conscious thought I began scrolling through the library database, searching for answers.

Within a few moments a title caught my attention – *Chaos, Territory, and Art* by Elizabeth Grosz. A comforting presence washed over me as I began to read. The chapter simply described how art is a method to organise chaos. Elizabeth Grosz describes chaos as a plethora of indistinguishable orders, forces, energies and desires which art orders through the creation of a frame.⁶ It felt almost like the text knew of the overwhelming uncertainty I had felt a moment ago and was providing solace. I automatically began reflecting back to my childhood in Mumbai, to the times when I felt anxiety and uncertainty as a child. Perhaps because I was thinking about my childhood, or perhaps because of the word *Chaos* in the title, the memory of the chaotic scribble emerged in my mind. As I related the information in text to my past, an unusual form of communication, an automatic language between my body, mind and the object of text began to ensue. In a chapter called 'Architecture and the Frame,' a vivid analogy describes how art occurs in the natural world. The analogy describes the daily ritual of a bird who is labelled by the author as a natural artist. I felt a familiar feeling within my body as the memory of the swooping bird daydream faintly appeared in my mind. The bowerbird's daily ritual begins first by it searching and scanning the environment for a particular tree species. It collects the leaves by sawing them off with its serrated beak and uses them to decorate its nest. Once it has a sufficient number of leaves, the bird centres itself

⁴ Amanda Coffey, 'Writing the Self,' in *The Ethnographic Self: Fieldwork and the Representation of Identity* (London: SAGE, 2011), 130.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁶ Grosz, Elizabeth. 'Cosmos, Territory, Architecture' in *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 5.

in the middle of the stage where it sings a complex song by linking tunes from other birds in its environment with its own spontaneous melodies. Through the organisation of materials in its unique way, Grosz claims that it establishes a territory, and orders chaos. As I read about the daily ritual of the bird, I was reminded of the ritual my grandmother performed every morning, which would fill the air with an indescribable tranquillity as she sang sacred hymns passed down from previous generations. I reflected on the uncanny way the text triggered my memories in a particular order to entice such a feeling in me. I imagined that the encounter was a divine sign and I felt connected to a cosmic intelligence beyond myself. There was something special about my experience, and I felt an auspicious sense that more encounters were to follow. The text was a portal into a phenomenon beyond logical comprehension, and when I left the library, I found myself questioning whether my experience was real, or whether I had purely imagined it. *Was the encounter intentional? Were the gods from my childhood daydream speaking back or was this just a coincidence?*

In semester two I went on a six-month student exchange to the Netherlands. My encounter in the library lay dormant in my subconscious mind, until an unlikely sequence of events caused me to perceive a larger intelligence at play. Each subsequent encounter conjured a feeling which triggered particular sequential thoughts, indicating the presence of an expansive consciousness within and outside of me.

The first of these encounters was a book called *Abstraction and Empathy* by William Worringer, written in 1984. I was interested in the book as Worringer believed abstract art had an affinity with transcendental religions,⁷ and this indicated a connection between my art practice and my grandmother's daily ritual. In the book, Worringer states that art satisfies the psychological needs of a people by articulating their relationship to the cosmos, and its value lies in its ability to delight a viewer.⁸ Worringer identifies two differing psychological tendencies which are satisfied through art: abstraction and empathy. Empathy is said to result from a relationship of confidence with the physical world, and abstraction results from a desire to find refuge from the uncertainty of the outside world in something necessary and irrefragable. I instantly associated my swooping bird daydream with the act of empathy and the beautiful curve with the act of abstraction. Worringer states that when an individual empathises with a physical object, there are two components: the object which causes a sensation, and the viewer's prior experiences which inform the way they make sense of it.⁹ Conversely, he describes the act of abstraction as the expression of an internal feeling or subjective attitude towards the cosmos. I applied these terms to my experience at the university library a semester before. In that particular event, the 'sensuously given' object was the book by Elizabeth Grosz that caused a feeling which I had made sense of by associating it with my childhood memories. It acted as a safe refuge from the anxiety I had felt beforehand and made me feel a connection with something beyond myself. As I read Worringer's text, a familiar feeling arose in me, like the one I had experienced at the library, but this time it increased in resonance. Worringer describes an 'ornament' as an object in the world which inspires an inner feeling of being part of something beyond oneself, because it merges both psychological tendencies.¹⁰ In the book, he states that the essence of a form can be removed from the uncertainty of nature by being immortalised through mathematical laws and created

⁷ Worringer, William. *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style* (New York: International Universities Press, 1967), 16.

⁸ Ibid., 13.

⁹ Ibid., 5.

¹⁰ Ibid., 20.

into an ornament.¹¹ I remembered the ornamental temple in my grandparents' dining room and the feeling of calm that would waft through the whole house after my grandmothers ritual. I knew it was ridiculous to believe I was receiving signals from beyond, but in the back of my mind I felt there could be some truth in my imaginings. At the very least it felt pleasurable to believe. The encounter catalysed more questioning: *What would I be giving form to? What does the bowerbird's ritual have to do with it? Is any of this even real or am I just making this up?*

Soon after the event, I came across a book called *Divine Love* by Joy Morny who discusses the philosophy of Belgian philosopher Luce Irigaray. It begins by articulating how the story of a transcendent god made in the image of man has had implications on every sphere of knowledge from logic and politics to science and mathematics.¹² As a method to counteract centuries of oppression, the question of an immanent 'god' who can be realised in and through the body is posed. As I read this text visceral goose bumps ran through me like an electric current. Morny conveys how Irigaray advocates that women cultivate subjectivities of difference to gain autonomy from an 'economy of sameness' which functions to limit an agent's sphere of activity.¹³ The bowerbird's ritual automatically appeared in my mind's eye, along with all my meaningful childhood experiences including the swooping bird, the ornamental temple and the beautiful curve. It was as if the text somehow mysteriously knew about my prior experiences and my innermost desires. Irigaray posits that within women's subjectivities there exist dimensions which are yet to be disclosed through alternative symbolic orders.¹⁴ I realised that my encounters were cultivating a unique power and force within my subjectivity which I was yet to understand. *Jouissance*, according to Irigaray, is said to be associated with an elusive domain termed the *real* – the unconscious in its unfathomable and uncoordinated dimensions.¹⁵ I began to understand why I could not articulate the significance of my recent encounters and how they disoriented my sense of time, space and what was real. I realised the symbols within my subconscious might be resurfacing for a reason. After this encounter I began to realise that there were two aspects of my subjectivity which conflicted with each other: the logical and cynical side of myself which interpreted these encounters as meaningless coincidences and delusions, and an expansive part of me which knew there was something larger and more intentional at play. The *realness* of each identity was purely a function of my own state of mind.

Soon enough, the 'other' subjectivity was evoked again through a book called *Ornaments of the Metropolis* by Henrik Reeh. It was a study on cultural theorist Siegfried Kracauer's academic writings about ornaments. I encountered this book, by chance, from a pop-up store in Kassel, Germany. The book grabbed my attention because the decorative architecture around Europe frequently triggered my memory of the ornamental temple and my grandmother's ritual. An 'ornament,' according to Kracauer, is a physical object which inspires a particular inner state.¹⁶ It could manifest in many ways, from childhood scribbles, to an arrangement of two-dimensional motifs, to a form of writing which inspires different

¹¹ Ibid., 6.

¹² Joy Morny. *Divine Love: Luce Irigaray, Women, Gender, and Religion* (Manchester University Press, 2006), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt155j9hh>.

¹³ Ibid., 8.

¹⁴ Ibid., 16.

¹⁵ Ibid., 16.

¹⁶ Henrik Reeh, *Ornaments of the Metropolis: Siegfried Kracauer and Modern Urban Culture*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2006), 5.

layers of meaning.¹⁷ I reflected on the connection between the memory of the chaotic scribble, and my recent encounters with texts that meant so much to me. I recalled how a beautiful form emerged from the chaotic scribbles. *Was I being informed that something beautiful is going to emerge from the chaos and confusion in my psyche?* Ornaments, according to Kracauer, function to enable an individual to self-reflect and access a more expansive form of reason or logic. He discerns a difference between *reason* and *ratio*, with the former being elusive, expansive, and emerging internally, whilst the latter is supposedly more tunnel-visioned and influenced by external forces. It was as if the text knew about my current experience and was guiding me to make sense of it. I reflected on my encounters and how a different expansive aspect of my subjectivity was emerging through theoretical texts. I noticed how the tunnel-visioned and cynical aspect of me kept denying the truth of my experiences and desires just because they were unfamiliar. I would often randomly recall the memory of the scribble and how a beautiful form emerged from the chaotic scribbles. *Why was my natural response to the beautiful curve to create a symmetrical curve? Without the verbal language for the feeling at the time, was I was creating a symbolic language? Was I unknowingly creating an ornament?* Around this time, I would experience states of boundless elation followed by hopeless depression. It was like all my senses had become heightened and all my previously suppressed feelings wanted to be expressed at once. Alone in my dorm room in the Netherlands, I would make brainstorm which attempted to express what I was feeling and why. I would start with a memory which connected to another, and then to another, until the whole page looked like a series of indiscernible scribbles. *How would I ever be able to explain this information to another person?* Slowly, as the internal pendulum swung between elation and depression, I began to spontaneously perceive geometric patterns emerging through my mind's eye.

About a month later, I left Europe to go back home to Auckland. In my first week home I found myself back in the library with a book called *The Sense of Order* by Ernst Gombrich, a comprehensive study about the psychology of decorative art. A lecturer from my art school in the Netherlands had recommended it, and I happened to find it in the university library. The book was less about decoration and more about the way organisms perceive and make sense of the world. Gombrich posits that the perception and creation of patterns result from a pre-existing invisible system of coordinates within the body, which he calls the 'sense of order.'¹⁸ His theories were built on the Gestalt theory of perception, and stress that an organism is an active agent in searching and scanning the environment for stimuli. It must exercise its instincts to solve two fundamental problems: to decide which objects are meaningful to it, and then decide on the action it requires – location, pursuit or flight.¹⁹ I thought of the bowerbird's ritual, and how it intrinsically and instinctively *knew* which leaves it needed to collect in order to decorate its home. Gombrich states that orientation is essential at any stage of life, and a subconscious system of coordinates exists prior to the individual stimuli which an organism reacts to.²⁰ I understood that as a child I responded to objects instinctively as they conjured sensations within me. These resonant encounters from my childhood subconsciously influenced the way I reacted to stimuli as an adult and acted as a system of coordinates. Gombrich states that the same way beautiful flowers signal their presence to pollinating insects, complex patterns, which are unlikely to have come about by chance, are signalling a

¹⁷ Ibid., 5.

¹⁸ Ernst Hans Josef Gombrich, 'Order and Orientation' in *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art*. (London: Phaidon, 2006) 1

¹⁹ Ibid., 1.

²⁰ Ibid., 1.

larger intention.²¹ Then, to my surprise and delight, Gombrich gave as an illustration of pattern-making in the natural world, the daily ritual of the bowerbird – that familiar symbol indicating, for me, the closure of a sacred circle. My environment was displaying a symbolic pattern which conjured a well of information and goose bumps throughout my body; there was no logical language to express the feeling to anyone. There was something uncanny about the proximity of each encounter, the almost symmetrical titles, ‘*Chaos, Territory, Art*’ and ‘*Sense of Order*,’ the initials of each author Elizabeth Grosz and Ersnt Gombrich, and the repeating symbol of the bowerbird in each book. Each individual memory, each imagining, each encounter played a part in it, but the wholeness or gestalt of the experience was so much greater than anything I could express logically. It was not the bowerbird in isolation but the significance of the bowerbird in relation to the field of all my past experiences and future dreams.

²¹ Ibid., 6.

METHODOLOGY: INTEGRATION AND DIFFERENTIATION

In this section, I explain how Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's flow theory relates to my drawing practice where I endeavour to create visual equilibrium on a substrate of paper using my chosen drawing tools.

My encounters with theoretical research caused a deep resonance within me, as they enabled me to form a meaningful connection between my mind and body through the physical, symbolic and conceptual objects in my environment. My drawing practice enables me to respond to the existing field of information perceived through my body using drawing tools such as rules, protractors and pencils. The field of information includes not only my present environment but also every aesthetic form that exists in my memory. In the vignette of the beautiful scribble, I explain how a symbolic language began from the time I noticed a beautiful curve emerge through scribbles, prompting a subconscious or automatic response to mirror it and make it whole or balanced. My methodology is built on the same automatic response, which is part of my intuitive sense of balance, except I now use a wider variety of drawing tools and my hand-eye coordination allows me to perform more complex manoeuvres. I begin by drawing a set of guide-lines from which I make moves and countermoves to achieve a sense of equilibrium or visual balance within the manifesting image. As information comes into my conscious awareness from my body through my environment, I respond on paper using my drawing tools with the intention of creating something whole, balanced and full.

According to theorist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, order in consciousness occurs when information that flows into awareness aligns with subconscious goals.²² Csikszentmihalyi states that the human nervous system is an extremely complex system where we can store memories and feelings, and create cause and effect relationships. The 'self' represents symbolically all of consciousness' contents and the pattern of their interrelations.²³ According to Csikszentmihalyi, the two dimensions of complexity are two psychological processes called *differentiation* and *integration*.²⁴ Differentiation relates to how different parts of the brain store information, and integration is about how they connect to each other so they can exchange information. As the memories hidden in my subconscious resurfaced through theoretic encounters, different parts of my brain began emerging, and connecting in surprising and delightful ways. Through each subsequent encounter, an aspect of me which I found completely 'other' or foreign emerged, conflicting with my sense of self at the time. The tension between my body's subconscious trigger responses and my conscious intellect resulted in what felt like internal chaos, but as I began compassionately accepting and surrendering to the wisdom in my body and the universe, the different or 'other' aspects began integrating, and I began noticing an ordered pattern emerging within my subjectivity. As the expansive aspect of my subjectivity began integrating with my 'tunnel-visioned' rational mind, a transformation and healing began to occur within me.

²² Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 'Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience,' in *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper and Row, 2009), 34.

²³ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 269.

Drawing is a way to allow these energetic forces which govern my fight or flight responses to flow. Drawing allows me to use different tools to express and transform these energies and integrate the healing within me. Much like my automatic and subconscious responses to theoretical knowledge guided me to make sense of myself and my environment, my body's automatic responses guide spontaneous decisions on paper to achieve balance or equilibrium. As formal relationships emerge through the subconscious decisions I make, I attune to the particular quality or sensation they conjure. These sensations act as a guidance method. The physical elements I create on paper are naturally influenced by the tools at hand and the aesthetic forms I have been exposed to in the past, which is the field of information I access when drawing. As I act, reflect, and counter-act, I anticipate and realise how each conscious action affects the larger scheme of the drawing. I use a ruler to create lines which are the first gesture of separation. Then I intuitively fill in the delineated space with faint layers of coloured pencil. I then draw more connective lines, so the separate compartments begin finding routes, connecting to each other to create something whole and full. As I make decisions on paper, I learn about relationships between ideas, qualities, elements and forms. Through this process, I learn to trust the intelligence and intrinsic wisdom in my body.

Gestalt theory emphasises the notion that the mind has a tendency to organise complex images that involve many elements, by automatically grouping different parts into an orderly system that creates something whole.²⁵ Gestalt theory provides guiding principles which inform the relationships between self and world. For example, the bowerbird encounter caused a well of information to resurface, which was meaningful only in the context of my past experiences, in other words my existing internal schema. The challenge was to be able to translate the wholeness of that experience into physical form. The empathetic relationship between self and universe can be articulated, separated, or abstracted into relationships on paper. Gestalt theory laws that influence visual relationships include similarity, closure, continuation, proximity and figure/ground.²⁶ These laws influence our perception of continuity and meaning in our environment, which enables us to come to an internal understanding or feeling about ourselves in relation to the larger universe. I do not strictly follow these principles in my drawing practice like a formulaic rule book; rather, I, like Gombrich, believe these perceptive tendencies are inherently part of our biological makeup. Gestalt theory of perception states that rather than leaving incoming stimuli intact, we incorporate them into prearranged slots or an existing eternal schema.²⁷ In many esoteric knowledge systems this prearranged structure or blueprint is visualised as a geometric configuration. Organisms might intuitively recall the sensuously given objects that have left an impression on this geometric configuration or system of coordinates when they encounter new stimuli that resonate and vibrate within their sensitive, perceiving bodies. These sensuously given objects may be concepts, symbols or physical objects. As we encounter sensuous objects, we become aware of the resonant qualities in ourselves and use tools to translate them to affect other subjectivities and transform our environment to create a positive feedback loop.

I first demarcate the paper with pencil and a ruler. These lines are the literal guide-lines from which connections and relationships become manifest. The pencil lines are of different distances from each other, as some are vertical and others are horizontal. This notion aligns with the gestalt design principle of good continuity, stating that the human eye naturally

²⁵ Cameron Chapman. 'Exploring the Gestalt Principles of Design.' Toptal.com. UX Design, n.d. <https://www.toptal.com/designers/ui/gestalt-principles-of-design>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

follows lines which enable a continuous flow of visual elements.²⁸ The horizontal lines automatically guide a viewer's eyes across, while the vertical lines automatically guide a viewer's eyes up and down. These act as the foundation from which I can pleasantly break the flow of continuation by adding an element of surprise or difference, which becomes integrated within the existing structure by aligning with the lines of continuity. Once the horizontal and vertical linework has been laid out, the page is demarcated with an organised combination of squares and rectangles. This will be the 'field' through which circles will emerge; these circles pleasantly upset the framework, as they create difference in relation to the existing structure. The placement of the circles is considered with regards to the law of proximity, which states that the elements that are closer together indicate more relatedness. The circles are placed in different proximity to each other and to the centre of the drawing. The elements on the horizontal line of continuation have a distinct relationship to the whole, as do the elements on the vertical line of continuation. There are millions of relationships which can be discerned from the frame, but each of the parts are only discernible in relation to the whole design. The whole design, as a result of these cumulative relationships, expresses a certain logic or quality that is greater than its individual parts.

After I draw the framework in pencil, I decide on one colour from a set of twenty colour pencils and allow the pigment to be manifested through parts of the delineated lines on paper. The process of filling in is slow, meditative and rhythmic, as I watch light strokes accumulate in layers. I am careful not to press too hard too early because if I then need to use an eraser, all the prior layers will be erased and muddle the design further. I make sure the pressure of the pencil is even by focussing my concentration and having a steady hand. The process of rendering is largely a balancing act because as I add layers of colour the balance of the whole framework is affected, and I will need to use my instinctive 'sense of order' to carry out the necessary adjustments to find visual balance again. Because I am using coloured pencil, which is translucent, I can overlap colours to create more contrast in relation to the rest of the design. I explore the transparent quality of coloured pencils and create depth in areas which I want to seem more distinct. The colours influence the way elements are perceived in a way I cannot foresee prior to their emergence, and I respond accordingly to create depth and complexity. For areas which I want to be more distinct to the rest of the design I layer on more pencil. Although I feel like I am choosing areas arbitrarily, I am always subconsciously being guided by my inbuilt sense of order which intrinsically knows how to achieve balance through the contrast. In order to increase the complexity in certain areas, I draw connective lines between elements. Often these connective lines result in a recognisable form which might resemble a portal, doorway or jewellery. In a mandala-like fashion, the connecting lines indicate emanation from a central point outward, or outward into a central point depending on how the viewer subconsciously perceives the link. The process of completing each drawing is almost like participating in a non-zero-sum game. Each element which is added needs a counteracting element to achieve equilibrium. Each element has distinct qualities which need to be balanced; these include but are not limited to proportion, texture, colour, shape, angularity and curvature. As I add layers of colour in a certain section, I notice how it affects the whole design. As I engage with the materials, I learn how they combine and react to each other, and I use that technical skill to create specific qualities. For example, if I want to increase the intensity of a particular hue, I will add a layer of coloured pencil, whereas if I want to increase the contrast without the vibrancy of the hue, I will add a layer of graphite. I learn to push and pull out different qualities within the manifesting image and in doing so attempt to create equilibrium, which is a state that balances opposing forces and qualities. The

²⁸ Ibid.

final image represents in a visual diagrammatic form that inner state of equilibrium, embodied as calm and tranquillity.

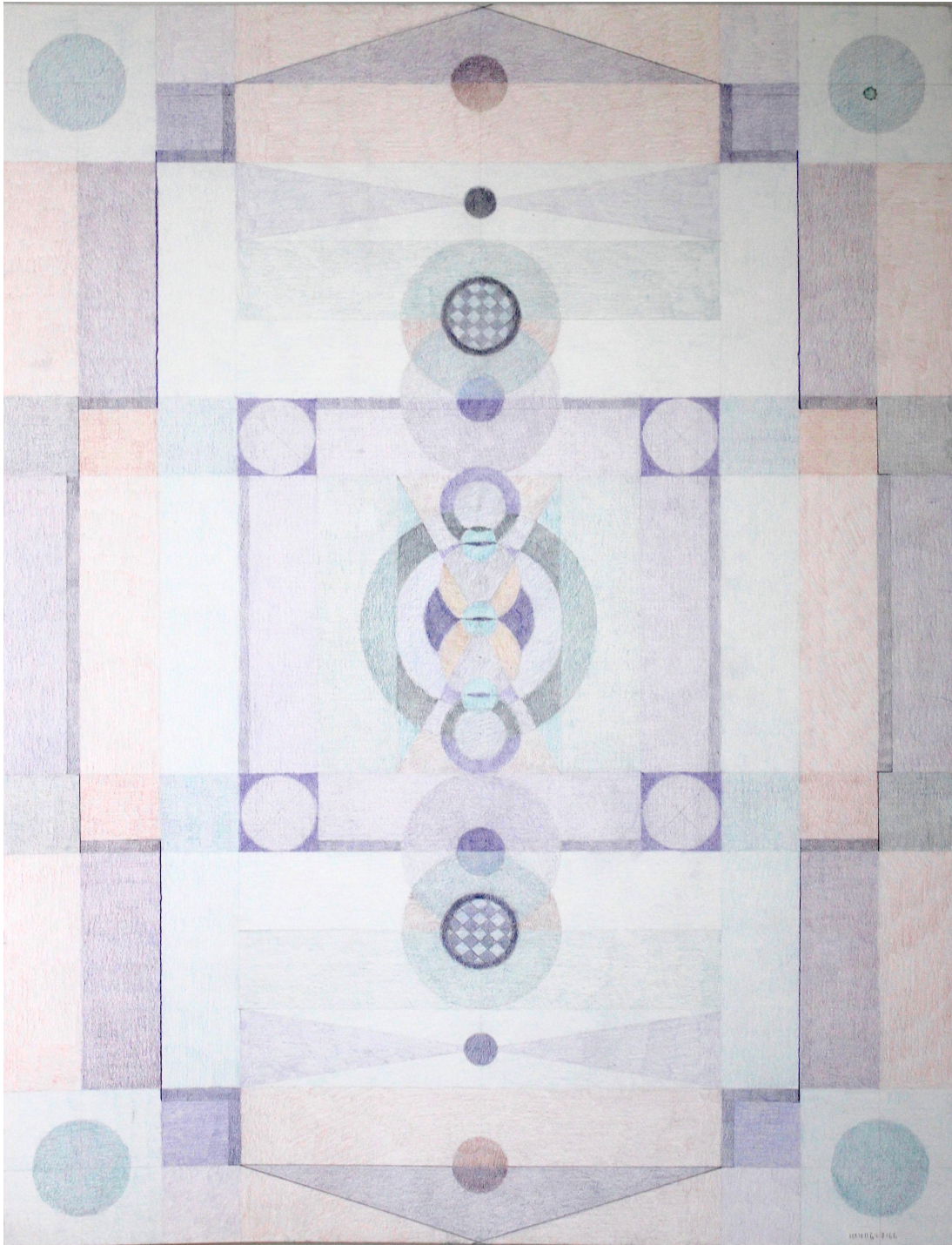


Figure 3. *Gamer* (2021) Pencil and Graphite on Paper 50 x 70 cm

SYMBOLIC LANGUAGES

In this section I research Emma Kunz and Louise Despont as practitioners who use geometric abstraction to frame transcendental ideas rather than explore formal qualities.

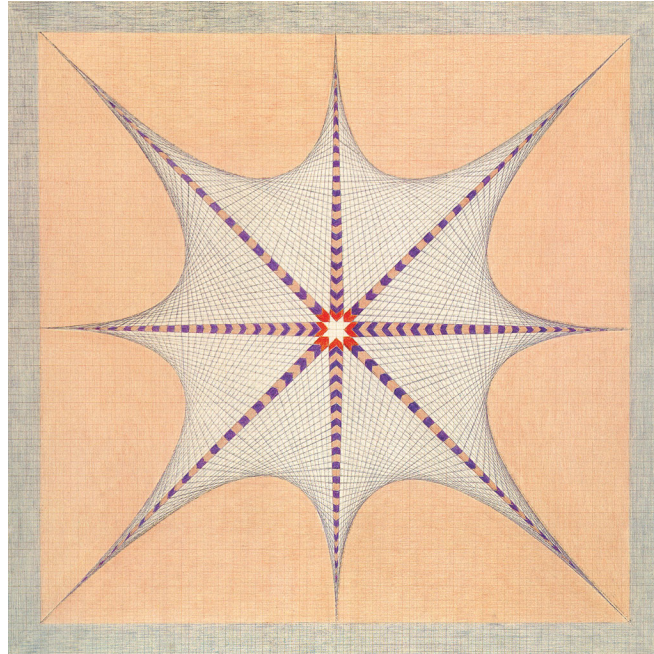


Figure 4. Emma Kunz, *Work No. 011* © Emma Kunz Zentrum

The painter Emma Kunz used geometry to express the transcendent and experiential nature of her knowledge. The complex shapes appeared on the paper grid in a mandala-like form. Kunz was intrigued by the notion of mystical energies, and her research sought to transform destructive energies into restorative ones through her drawing process.²⁹ She adopted a method known as radiesthesia (which roughly translates to the radius of feeling³⁰), which involved the use of a pendulum to access information about a certain object or person's energy field.³¹ Kunz's sensitivity to the pendulum was used as a decision-making strategy because the direction of the pendulum would determine the lines to be plotted and coloured in. A divining pendulum is said to be a tool to gain spiritual insight as it connects to the unconscious mind.³² It has no powers of its own but is a means of accessing a user's subconscious sensitivity to an object's electromagnetic field, which produces tiny involuntary muscle movements in the user. These are amplified by the tool into a visible movement. The nerves in our fingers cause the pendulum to swing in response to its reflexive or automatic movements. In this way the body perceives the resonances and vibrations of a particular

²⁹ Agnieszka Brzezanska, 'Emma Kunz: The Researcher Who Refused to Become a Guru,' *Frieze* (March 19, 2019), <https://www.frieze.com/article/emma-kunz-researcher-who-refused-become-guru>

³⁰ Una McGovern, 'Radiesthesia,' in *Chambers Dictionary of the Unexplained: A Guide to the Mysterious, the Paranormal and the Supernatural* (Edinburgh: Chambers, 2007).

³¹ 'Welcome to the Emma KUNZ Centre,' *Emma Kunz Zentrum*, accessed August 28, 2021, <https://www.emma-kunz.com/en/>.

³² McGovern.

object and responds automatically. A decision-making strategy is thus created by listening to one's intuitive guidance system, as the subconscious mind triggers responses that the pendulum amplifies. These previously undetectable reflexive movements are intensified by the tool into a movement or pattern which is detectible or visible. Every object or entity, according to McGovern, is said to have a distinct electromagnetic field which can be detected by a sensitive person.³³ The divining pendulum was in this way a guide for her drawing process. According to Brzezanska, a series of ordered dots would appear in her mind after engaging in a deep meditation.³⁴ Then she would focus on a pendulum as a fixing device to distinguish a pattern of lines and shapes through its movement.³⁵ She would in this way translate the energy or vibrational field of that person into the form of a two-dimensional pattern. These drawings supposedly carried a particular vibration and served as a healing or meditation tool for her patients. Similarly, I believe my drawing practise functions as a healing and meditation tool for myself as I reflect on symbols of personal and spiritual significance while making.

In *The Sense of Order*, Gombrich posits that perceiving is an active process, and every organism can search and scan the environment for meaningful resources which prompt subsequent action.³⁶ It is said that these decisions are the result of an elusive term called *instincts*, which are related to our unconscious fight or flight responses.³⁷ In the previous chapter I conveyed how my encounters with theoretical and physical objects automatically triggered certain responses within me which I found difficult to logically explain and express. I believe my body was resonating with the textual material (and its energy field), as I automatically responded with a visceral feeling, which I made sense of by associating it with my past experiences. As I encountered objects that triggered the same feeling, I was 'guided' to discern between the presence and absence of that invisible energy which resonated with my sensitive body. As my subconscious responses became amplified through the encounters with objects and theories of a similar energetic quality, I became more attuned to my instincts or subconscious reflexes and the way they responded to the stimuli in my environment. As the objects around me triggered particular ideas and feelings to resurface, I was slowly able to perceive a pattern of symbolic, conceptual and physical movement. The same way the pendulum was used as a divining tool to make an object's electromagnetic field visible, my sensitivity to conceptual and physical material made an invisible quality or essence visible or perceivable within me. I noticed that certain texts caused my body to respond automatically, and I subconsciously made sense of those feelings using the concepts and ideas I had been exposed to in the past. These unconscious triggers were at first almost undetectable and faint, but as I encountered more objects of a certain vibrational or energetic quality, automatic responses within me became amplified. The psychic traces of my childhood encounters in this way became a guidance system or conductive sense as they resurfaced and connected to my environment in new ways. Through this process I became more sensitive to the energies around and within me.

When I first became aware of my subconscious, I experienced it as an alien and separate entity apart from me. I speculate that the pendulum swing of emotion I experienced from my encounters was my body holding conflicting ideas or energies. As I integrated the fragmented and conflicting aspects within my body, my mind reconciled and ordered itself into a pattern

³³ McGovern.

³⁴ Brzezanska.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Gombrich, 1.

³⁷ Ibid.

fusing the different parts into a whole system. As I continuously experienced and reasoned with the novel information that came into my awareness between my encounters with the two bowerbird symbols, the information became more of an integrated part of me. This resulted in a synthesis, transformation and healing to begin. Although I did not have the language to articulate the experience logically, I began developing an alternative method to express those qualities back into the world. Through listening to my guidance system and reflecting on my responses, I was able to order the experience into a coherent story and symbolic system which I could then communicate to another. In connecting and giving form to this invisible energetic pattern, I speculate I that I am engaging in a self-transformation and ancestral healing.

I use paper, pencil, protractor and rulers as tools to trace my automatic responses, which become ordered into a unique pattern. This methodology enables me to trace my subconscious trigger responses through layers of pencil. Instinctual responses guide my actions on paper in the same way that the feelings which are evoked through the making process guide the direction of the whole drawing. I use the physical properties of pencil and paper to articulate the presence or creation of energy. In this way the drawing or representation of that energy and the energy itself is the same thing.

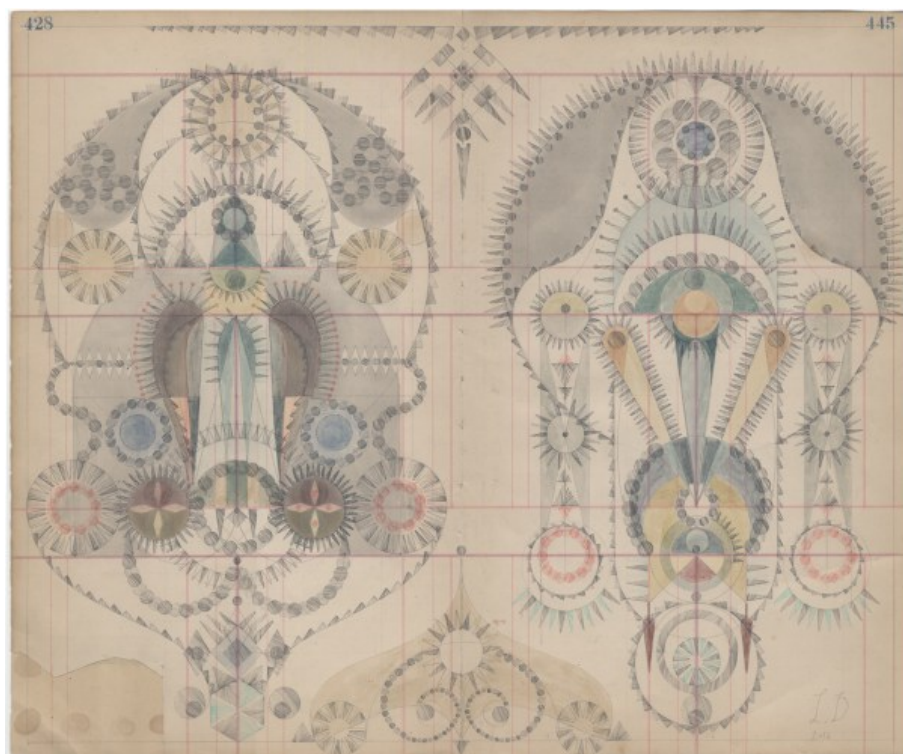


Figure 5. Louise Despont *No. 428-445*, 2012 graphite, colored pencil, and watercolor on antique ledger pages (34.3 x 41.9 cm)

The artist Louise Despont is an artist working within a similar territory to my own as she explores and frames transcendental ideas through drawing. She views the creative act as something which ‘allows you to access something completely outside yourself’ and enables a ‘communication with awareness rather than consciousness.’³⁸ This suggests drawing is a tool through which she accesses another aspect of her subjectivity, which is both within and other

³⁸ Wesley Miller and Nick Ravich, ‘Louise Despont According to the Universe,’ *Art21*, (The Lambert Foundation, November 13, 2015), <https://art21.org/watch/new-york-close-up/louise-despont-according-to-the-universe/>.

to herself. She describes the difference between awareness and consciousness through the analogy of an eye, stating that if ‘the pupil is the conscious mind then the white of the eye is the field of energy or an augmented awareness you can access outside yourself.’³⁹ There is a devotional aspect to her process where, by ‘offering her hands to make the work,’ a spiritual or energetic force is able to flow through her and the materials she works with.⁴⁰

Her primary medium is drawing, which she executes on grids salvaged from pages of antique ledger paper. Despont’s diagrams are inspired by sacred mandalas which are built from geometric forms.⁴¹ The antique ledger paper has predetermined lines which act as the foundational structure for her works. The first few lines of the drawing are the seeds from which the rest of the design emerges.⁴² These subconsciously influence the connection points and the subsequent forms in her works on paper. As we can see in Figure 3., she emphasises the principles of symmetry, continuation and closure to develop highly intricate systems of information. Her use of architectural stencils limit the possibilities of form yet at the same time open up an infinite number of variations, which indicate the abundant nature of energy. Despont, in her TED talk in 2019, stated that “thinking with my hands is a form of deep listening to the inherent wisdom in my body, in my subconscious, in my materials and in the fields of information all around me”.⁴³

Louise Despont’s methodology in the early stages was about collecting images and storing them into books. When she first began collecting particular images, she realised they had the power to conjure something visceral which can be felt as it ‘vibrates for you and you are moved and changed by it.’⁴⁴ Her practice seeks to translate that visceral energy through drawing, and she believes that when successfully rendered it should ‘vibrate with a hum.’⁴⁵ She recognises this phenomenon as a feeling of co-creating, of engaging in a relationship with an energy outside herself while a flow of energy passes through her and into the drawing.⁴⁶ The transparency of layering pencil on paper lends itself to making visible the forces which drive her process and the invisible energy behind her works.⁴⁷

The structures that appear in her works on paper are both architectural and organic, frequently referring to metaphysical doorways, bodies, portals, gardens and meditative spaces. Like Despont, I am interested in the connections between my personal memory and the physical objects I encounter which resonate with my subconscious mind. As conveyed in the earlier chapters, during my exchange in the Netherlands in 2018 I began encountering theories, images and objects which caused a resonating spark and started connecting with the contents of my own subconscious. I also took many photos of the mesmerising architecture, doorways, and portals, which then found their way into my work. As I encountered objects and texts which resonated, I began perceiving a higher intelligence or energy field. Much like Despont, the language of symbols and geometry helps me to articulate a higher awareness which I am beginning to access through a symbolic language.

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Raymond Foye, ‘Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture’ Drawing Papers 125, The Drawing Centre. February 2, 2016, 25.

⁴¹ Foye, 24.

⁴² Miller and Ravich, ‘Louise Despont According to the Universe.’

⁴³ Louise Despont, ‘Thinking with Our Hands: A Story of Drawing,’ TED, October 2019, https://www.ted.com/talks/louise_despont_thinking_with_our_hands_a_story_of_drawing

⁴⁴ Miller and Ravich, ‘Louise Despont According to the Universe.’

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Foye, 24.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 25.

INSTALLATION AND EXHIBITION



Figure 6. Installation view of *Cosmograph Series I – VI* (2021) St. Paul Street Gallery 1

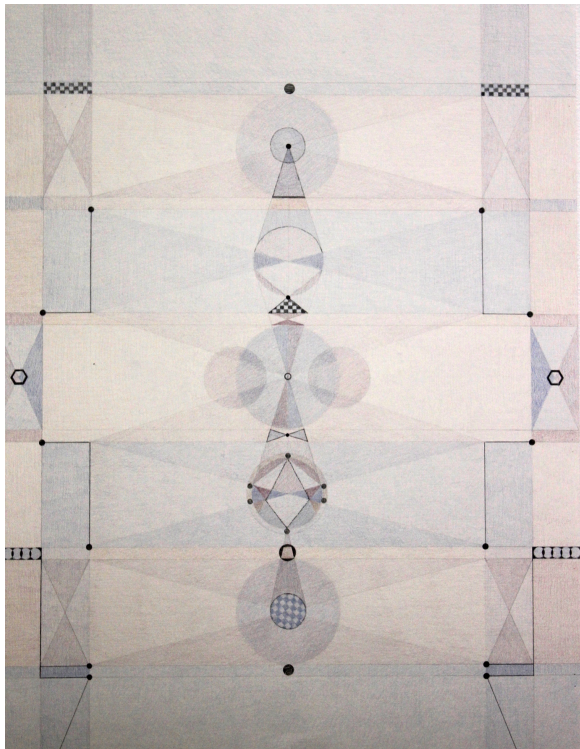


Figure 7. *Cosmograph I* (2021) Pencil on Fabriano Paper 50 x 70 cm

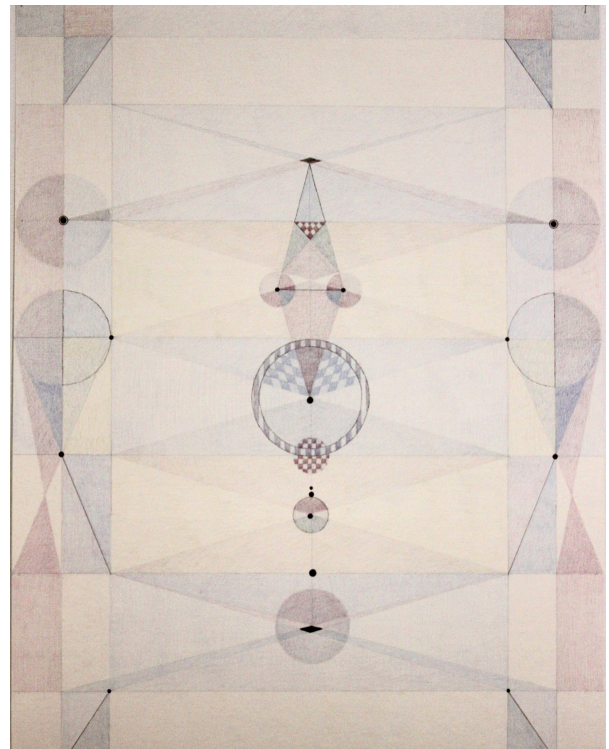


Figure 8. *Cosmograph II* (2021) Pencil on Fabriano Paper 50 x 70 cm

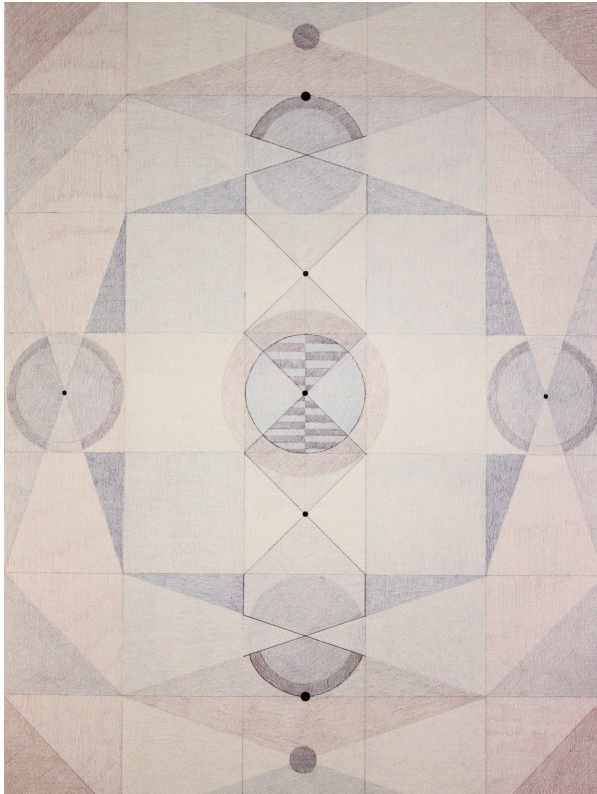


Figure 9. *Cosmograph III* (2021) Pencil on Fabriano Paper 50 x 70 cm

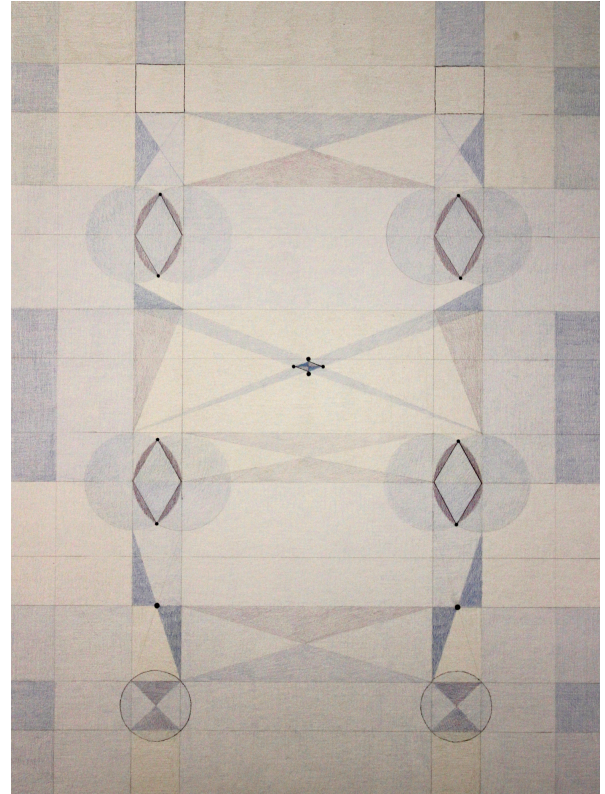


Figure 10. *Cosmograph IV* (2021) Pencil on Fabriano Paper 50 x 70 cm

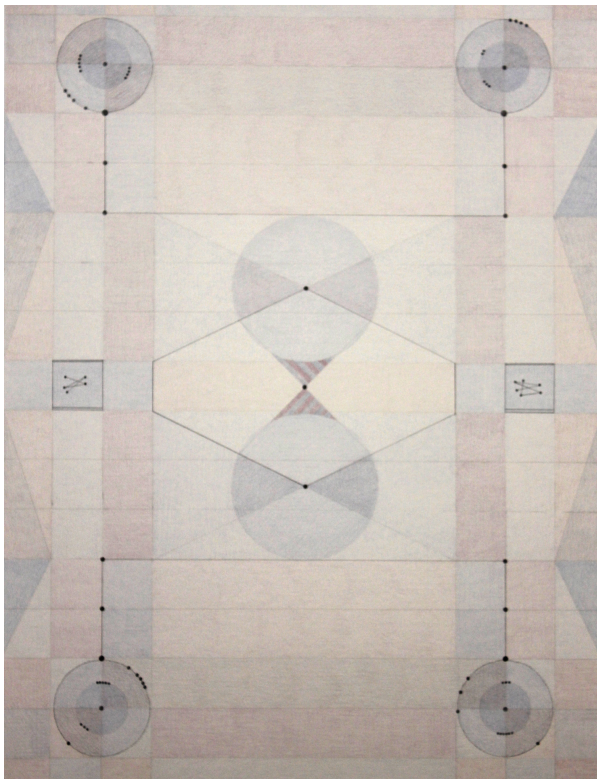


Figure 11. *Cosmograph V* (2021) Pencil on Fabriano Paper 50 x 70 cm

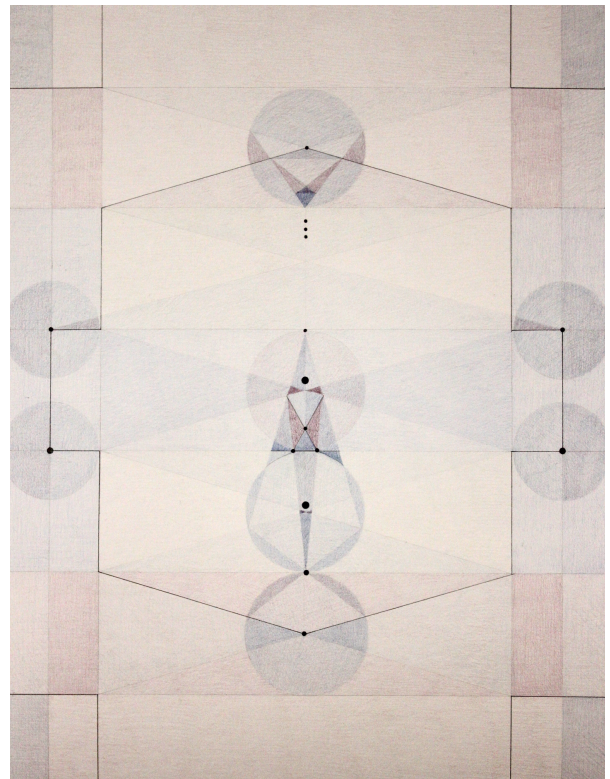


Figure 12. *Cosmograph VI* (2021) Pencil on Fabriano Paper 50 x 70 cm



Figure 13. Figure 13. Installation view of *Cosmograph Series* (2021) St.Paul Street Gallery

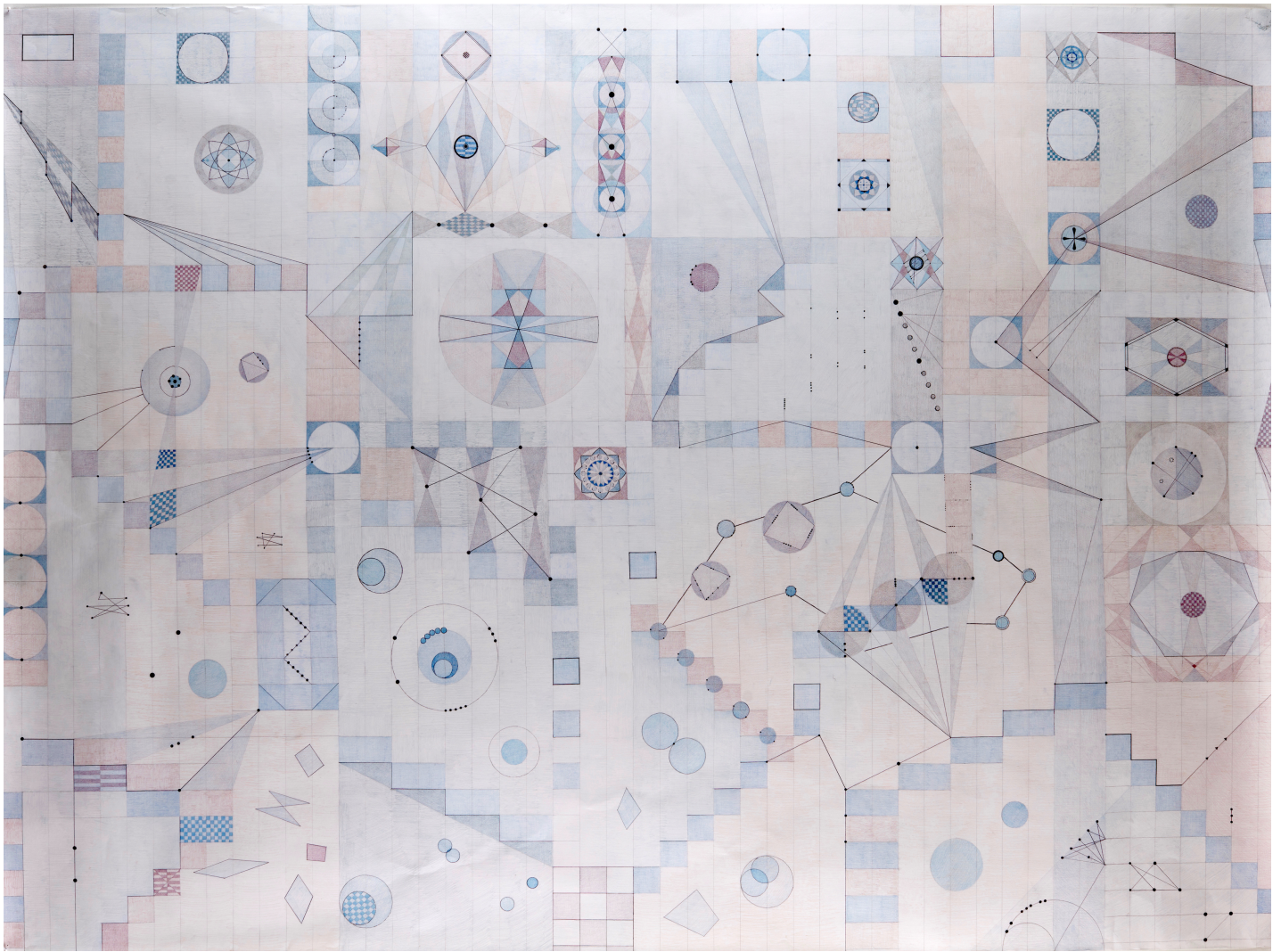


Figure 14. *Cosmograph* (2021) Pencil on Fabriano Paper 50 x 70 cm

CONCLUSION

My project navigates an issue central to visual art, that being the limitations of verbal language in articulating complex inner experiences relating to artmaking. Through the symbolic language developed and presented, I articulate the significance of my research and the challenge of presenting this within a linear written language. I employ subjective storytelling into the exegesis and contextualise it through the genre of autoethnography.

My diagrammatic, geometric and graphic drawing practice brings all my symbols of personal significance together with aspects of my lived reality. I use gestalt theory to retrospectively explain why and how all the ideas and texts offered through my journey might seem pre-organised, suggesting I am neither a receiver nor transmitter of energy, but collator of experience. My drawing practice as such is a form of metaphysical mapping where I create geometric configurations on paper as a representation of the energetic pattern which organises my embodied reality.

An exploration of abstraction in relation to forms of transcendence is of contemporary critical interest exemplified by numerous recent international shows such as the 32nd Sao Paulo Bienale Incerteza Viva (Live Uncertainty) exhibitions and Monash University Museum of Art 'Believe not Every Spirit' exhibition. My project is therefore well aligned with international contemporary art practices and extends this conversation by reflection on ancestral practices, everyday lived experience and memory.

LIST OF WORKS

Figure 1. *Altar* (2021) Pencil and Graphite on Paper 50 x 70 cm

Figure 2. *Bird's eye* (2021) Pencil and Graphite on Paper 50 x 70 cm

Figure 3. *Gamer* (2021) Pencil and Graphite on Paper 50 x 70 cm

Figure 4. Emma Kunz, *Work No. 011* © Emma Kunz Zentrum

Figure 5. Louise Despont *No. 428-445*, 2012 graphite, colored pencil, and watercolor on antique ledger pages (34.3 x 41.9 cm)

Figure 6. Installation view of *Cosmograph Series I – VI* (2021) St. Paul Street Gallery 1

Figure 7. *Cosmograph I* (2021) Pencil on Fabriano Paper 50 x 70 cm

Figure 8. *Cosmograph II* (2021) Pencil on Fabriano Paper 50 x 70 cm

Figure 9. *Cosmograph III* (2021) Pencil on Fabriano Paper 50 x 70 cm

Figure 10. *Cosmograph IV* (2021) Pencil on Fabriano Paper 50 x 70 cm

Figure 11. *Cosmograph V* (2021) Pencil on Fabriano Paper 50 x 70 cm

Figure 12. *Cosmograph VI* (2021) Pencil on Fabriano Paper 50 x 70 cm

Figure 13. Installation view of *Cosmograph Series* (2021) St. Paul Street Gallery 1

Figure 14. *Cosmograph* (2021) Pencil on Fabriano Paper 50 x 70 cm

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