Geometric Garden:
Mapping a Holistic Worldview Through Drawing

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Abstract

Building on the utopian language of geometry, my research project explores the potential for abstract drawing installations and immersive wall drawings to construct a holistic vision of the world. Both Japanese gardens and maps are deployed as unifying visual metaphors to conflate diverse geometric patterns and symbols. The forms that appear in my work derive from scientific illustrations and diagrams, esoteric symbolism, and religious architecture and decoration across cultures. They also reference the history of abstract painting. My work imagines a metaphysical harmony in which visual elements of science and religion, and nature and culture, are non-hierarchically combined to create a contemplative space. In other words, my research project interrogates how it might be possible for contemporary abstraction to visualise a worldview that encompasses and integrates diverse modes of knowledge for interpreting the world around us.

In this written dissertation, I advocate for the metaphysical and utopian implications of geometric images through some historical examples. I also reveal the limits of the conventional tendency of geometric abstraction towards absolutism. Through the lens of post-structuralism, I problematise fixed, hierarchical and divisive ways of picturing the world characterised by binary modes of seeing. I chart the contemporary revival of abstraction by examining artists who reevaluate geometry’s potential to construct more complex worldviews encompassing social, political, and religious themes. They include Emily Floyd, Julie Mehretu, Eugene Carchesio, Haleh Redjaian and Jess Johnson. I also consider how the arbitrary and mediating qualities of abstraction in my own work, embodied through the fluidity and translucency of an aqueous medium, unified colour schemes, and subtle fluctuations of hand-drawn lines, might extend this dialogue. Within the analysis around my unfolding bodies of work, I address how motifs derived from nature, maps, and gardens operate as connective devices between worldviews that are usually separated. As such, my project explores abstraction’s potential to generate a more inclusive, complex, and open-ended cultural imaginary.
Declaration

This is to certify that

(i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the masters,

(ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

(iii) the thesis is 10750 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices

Yuria Okamura 2015
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Introduction

...Abstraction has the best chance of any pictorial attitude to be inclusive about the expanding sum of our culture's knowledge.¹ - Frank Stella

Art reflects the way we see the world and in turn, it can influence the way we interpret reality. In particular, geometric images have a notable historical association with illustrating knowledge and projecting idealised worldviews because of their capacity to symbolise the unseen. Examples include Plato's metaphysical envisioning of a geometrically ordered universe and early 20th century abstract paintings by Wassily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian, Kazimir Malevich and Hilma af Klint that sought to depict spiritual dimensions and utopian visions.

My abstract drawing² project builds on these legacies. Through my work, I reimagine metaphysical and utopian possibilities to counter the predominantly rationalised tendencies of the modern western culture. At the same time, I also seek to extend beyond the delimiting aspects of geometric abstraction including divisive and hierarchical imaging of 'reality' associated with ideologies. Within this paper, I argue that such rigid representations and divisions limit our perception and imagination to binary terms such as culture/nature, material/immaterial, self/other, and truth/false and overshadow the diversity and nuances of interpretive possibilities.

Throughout each chapter, I examine the work of contemporary artists whose work signals abstraction's capacity to generate complex worldviews. Affirmed by their practices, I articulate my own emphasis within this revival upon the utopian language of geometry and the motif of the garden. I consider whether it might be possible for

¹ Frank Stella as cited in Craig Easton, "A Strange Arrangement: Constructing Reductive Abstract Painting through the Ancient Chinese Garden" (Ph.D, University of Melbourne, 2014), 19.
² My creative work deploys both drawing and painting but I refer to it as drawing for the purpose of this research. This distinction reflects my aim to harness drawing's association with mapping and 'connecting the dots' as a means to examine how abstraction might bring together diverse cultural and historical references. It is also a way of separating my practice from the Formalist notion of abstract painting, which ascribes the most important quality of art to visual properties such as composition, colour, and surface, rather than subject matter, narrative or meaning.
contemporary abstraction to project a harmonious vision that integrates diverse modes of knowledge and experience.

My pluralistic approach stems from a personal experience of growing up in Japan, migrating to Australia, and traveling to a variety of countries. In Japan, Indonesia and India, I was inspired by the ways in which mystical and religious beliefs can be incorporated into our perception to harness meaningful interpretations of the natural phenomena and by extension, our daily lives. This in turn motivated me to explore how depicting a sense of harmony between different modes of knowledge through drawing might aid in enriching our vision of the world.

Chapter one, *Mapping the Revival of Abstraction*, contextualises this research project. I analyse how geometric images translating unseen possibilities in the historical context yielded a predominant association with absolutism. In contrast to this, I explore how contemporary artists, such as Julie Mehretu and Emily Floyd, are reinterpreting abstract languages to uncover more open-ended imaginings. Aligning my practice within this analysis, I consider how my own work might contribute to an exploration of the utopian potential of geometry to envisage harmony.

Discussing my own unfolding bodies of work in chronological order, the subsequent chapters map the trajectory of this research. Each body of work charts and conflates diverse geometric patterns and symbols, and reconfigures them into a new whole. The abstract forms that appear in these works are derived from a wide range of sources including scientific illustrations, esoteric symbolism, religious architecture and decoration across cultures, and reference the history of abstract painting.

In chapter two, entitled *Nature as a Window*, a series of works on paper converges geometric and naturalistic representations of nature. Referencing the notion of biophilia and works of Hilma af Klint, I examine how my use of abstract symbolism might reconnect scientific and non-scientific knowledge.

In chapter three, *Open-ended Maps*, I address a series of diagrammatic drawing installations that investigate the associative quality of mapping. In this section, I compare my approach to that of Julie Mehretu and Hele Redjaian, who similarly challenge fixed ideologies attached to the history of abstraction. Paralleling my practice
with these female artists, also of non-western backgrounds, I underscore the inclusive and culturally expansive quality of contemporary abstraction.

Chapter four, entitled *The Garden as a Contemplative Space*, discusses a series of immersive wall drawings that I offer as contemplative spaces. I investigate the notion of the threshold in religious architecture and Japanese gardens, and other artists' use of spatiotemporal quality to support my own attempts to blur the boundaries between dichotomised realms and to generate a more complex cultural imaginary.

In summary, each body of work interrogates how contemporary abstraction might operate as a mediating agency to dissolve conventional divisions characterised by binary modes of seeing. By extension, my work advances a more holistic framework to promote emergence of new connections and subjective interpretations of the world around us.
Chapter 1. Mapping the Revival of Abstraction

Generated circuitously from the real and the ideal, abstract art can be envisaged as an oscillation between the imagined and the concrete. — Catherine de Zegher

1.1. The Historical Context

Geometry has long been associated with the 'ideal' since the time of Pythagoras and Plato, who believed that God used geometry as a tool to create an orderly and harmonious universe (figure 1). For many artists of the early 20th century, including Wassily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian, Kazimir Malevich, and Hilma af Klint, the ideal world was that of a spiritual realm, which had been excluded from the modern scientific image of reality. The significance of abstraction as a means to engage with immaterial realms was consolidated by the international surveying exhibition The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985 at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (1986). The abstract pioneers also employed geometric shapes to translate "the concept of a higher, unseen fourth dimension of space." These artists felt that the traditional naturalistic representation was limited to portraying the corporeal reality, thus geometric abstraction was invented to look beyond the physical world and visualise unseen possibilities in search for the 'ideal'. In the words of the art historian Hilton Kramer, "abstraction was meant by its visionary inventors to play a role in redefining our relationship to the universe." Malevich's Suprematist painting, for instance, sought to depict "the concept of a body passing from ordinary three dimensional space into the fourth dimension." His work,

6 The notion of the fourth dimension was sparked by new scientific advancements at the time, such as discoveries of electrons and radioactivity, and the invention of X-rays, which had proven the limitation of our perception. See: Lynda Dalrymple Henderson, "The Image and Imagination of the Fourth Dimension in Twentieth-Century Art and Culture," Configurations 17, no. 1/2 (2009): 131.
Suprematism. Painterly Realism of a Footballer. Colour Masses in Four Dimensions, suggests that geometric shapes might represent the metaphysical form of a footballer (figure 2). These angled shapes indicate motion towards various directions, and they appear to be floating in an undefined white space as if unbounded by gravity. He wrote:

Today we have advanced into a new fourth dimension of motion. We have pulled up our consciousness by its roots from the Earth. It is free now to revolve in the infinity of space….9

Although Suprematist painting opened up new pictorial means to imagine unseen possibilities, this statement demonstrates a somewhat hierarchical approach, privileging the immaterial as a higher, ultimate reality. 10 The title 'Painterly Realism' can also be understood to imply that the metaphysical forms are more 'real', consequently dismissing the physical reality as a subordinate illusion. 11

Mondrian and Malevich also held a strong vision of geometry as the absolute and universal visual language, and a belief that geometric abstraction would be a vehicle for a radical cultural change. Their utopian goals were tied to socialist ideologies including Suprematism, De Stijl and Bauhaus. Hilton Kramer observed:

Abstraction of a certain kind –geometrical, Constructivist, and depersonalized-came to look as if it had been conceived to illustrate the theoretical principles of Bauhaus pedagogy. 12

As such, the original intent of abstraction to liberate artists from constraints of Naturalism turned into a delimiting approach as it may have inhibited artistic freedom of both expression and interpretation. Mondrian in particular insisted that straight lines and primary colours are the only methods of achieving their spiritual quest, 13 and that "anything that suggested a residual dependency on subjective expression was regarded as a failure to conform to the universal 'reality'." 14

11 This outlook echoes the Platonic theory of Forms, which maintained that this physical world is a mere shadow of the perfect and eternal world of Ideas.
12 Kramer, The Triumph of Modernism, 49.
14 Kramer, The Triumph of Modernism, 40.
Figure 1
Keplerian model of the solar system constructed with Platonic Solids, demonstrating the idea of the geometrically ordered universe.

Illustration from *Mysterium Cosmographicus*, Johannes Kepler, 1596
Figure 2
Kazimir Malevich
*Suprematism. Painterly Realism of a Footballer. Colour Masses in Four Dimensions*, 1915
oil on canvas, 71.12 x 44.45 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
In summary, while early 20th century abstraction embraced a utopian vision and spiritual idealities, it became as divisive and hierarchical as the scientific objectivity that it sought to counter. Deploying an absolutist and binary approach, these artists promoted one form of 'truth', 'reality', or 'ideal' to the exclusion of all others.

My research responds by examining how contemporary abstraction might overcome rigid or absolutist approaches to promote interpretive possibilities emerging from a non-dualistic mode of seeing. By extension, my project questions how metaphysical and utopian potentials of geometry might be reclaimed to envision a holistic and open-ended framework for translating reality.

1.2. The Revival of Abstraction's Expansive Potential

A renewed interest in abstraction as an imaginative tool to visualise immaterial possibilities has been gaining momentum in the last few years. This development might be seen as a reaction to the secularisation of contemporary western culture including art discourse. In the 1980's, the distinguished art critic Rosalind Krauss expressed that she found it "indescribably embarrassing to mention art and spirit in the same sentence." This tendency is still prevalent in the contemporary field of art. The abstract painter Michael Evans writes, "secularists do not wish to hear of the spiritual, it has been passed beyond and is now either openly derided or ignored." Lamenting this loss, Evans further cites the art critic James Elkins who claims that, "...the buried spiritual content of modern and postmodern art may be the great unexplored subject in contemporary art history."

Exemplifying the re-exploration of the metaphysical, the 2013 Venice Biennale exhibition, *The Encyclopedic Palace,* presented diverse ways of "visualizing knowledge through representations of abstract concepts and manifestations of supernatural

17 Michael Evans, "Contemporary Abstract Painting and Spiritual Experience: An Investigation through Practice" (Ph.D, London Metropolitan University, 2013), 3.
18 James Elkins as cited in ibid., 1.
With the depiction of the invisible a central theme, the exhibition included 'spiritual science' diagrams by Rudolf Steiner, geometric 'energy maps' by Emma Kunz, spiritual abstract paintings by Hilma af Klint and Anonymous Tantric Paintings used in meditation. These historical works represent the development of the symbolic use of abstract language, offering a context and insight into the present revival of abstraction.

Also noteworthy in an international sphere was the recent retrospective exhibition of Agnes Martin's work at Tate Modern (2015) and the exhibition 3 x Abstraction: New Methods of Drawing by Emma Kunz, Hilma af Klint, and Agnes Martin (2005) at The Drawing Center in New York. Many art historians, writers and artists are reexamining Agnes Martin's work today, as it compels us to reevaluate geometric abstraction "as a means of structuring philosophical, linguistic, scientific, and transcendental ideas." Professor of Social and Critical Histories of Art Griselda Pollock argues that Martin's meditative painting engages the viewer with a notion of "the 'real' that is not about the body/mind, matter/spirit divide." Therefore, Martin might be considered a bridging figure between early modernism and now, marking a shift away from one-dimensional or hierarchical ways of picturing reality. Building on Martin's non-dualistic approach, my project investigates abstraction's potential to envisage a holistic worldview.

In Australia, a re-exploration of abstraction's spiritual potentiality was revealed by the recent exhibition Believe Not Every Spirit, But Try The Spirits (2015) at Monash University Museum of Art. The show, curated by Lars Bang Larsen and Marco Pasi, positioned the Victorian-era Spiritualist Georgiana Houghton's abstract 'spirit drawings' as a point of departure to bring together historical and contemporary artworks that

21 Ibid., 19.
"both explore and adopt Spiritualist practices and methodologies."

The works in these exhibitions demonstrate contemporary artists and curators' inclination to revise the stricture of modern rationalisation and reimagine possibilities of unseen worlds, affirming the aim of my own project to extend this field of practice. Also exemplifying this reclamation of the metaphysical, the Melbourne-based contemporary artist Lucy Irvine speaks of the validity and importance of metaphorical constructs as a way of understanding reality. Irvine argues:

> The subjective, emotional and tacit knowing that the rational reasoning of modern science excluded from knowledge as a whole, are in fact centrally important to our cultural evolution.\(^{28}\)

Much of contemporary abstraction is re-exploring the legacies of abstraction to project 'new visions', revising and unraveling the rigidity associated with the historical notion of the genre. The Melbourne-based curator Helen Hughes observes that these contemporary art practices employ 'archiving' or 'looking back into history' as a critical framework for reevaluating the present, and in turn, considering the future in a generative manner.\(^{29}\) Hughes remarks:

> The historical gaze of contemporary art is typically productive rather than reductive. It seeks to unfix historical narratives from a detached past and make them present; it instrumentalises minor histories in order to agitate against the dominant narratives that hold today.\(^{30}\)

Exemplifying the power of both deconstructive and agitative approach, the Ethiopian-American artist Julie Mehretu recontextualises and reconfigures abstract lexicons to construct multi-dimensional and complex images of reality. Her paintings chart and layer abstract marks and forms that are derived from modernist symbols and cityscapes, and it has been described as a "socio-political cartography of global


\(^{28}\) Lucy Irvine, "Landscape: Interwoven Knowledges" (Master of Fine Arts, The University of Melbourne, 2010), 60-61.

\(^{29}\) Helen Hughes, "Living Library: Emily Floyd and the Archive " in Emily Floyd: The Dawn (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2014), 33.

\(^{30}\) Ibid.
Figure 3
Julie Mehretu, *Mural*, 2009
acrylic on canvas, 2438.4 cm long, Goldman Sachs Headquarters, New York
connectiveness."\(^{31}\) Her work *Mural* (figure 3) for instance draws upon the history of finance capitalism, incorporating maps of trade routes, architectural plans, statistics and flowcharts of the development of capitalist cities.\(^{32}\) Imaging a chaotic flux, her work underscores the uncertainty and instability within the politics of globalism: power structures, conflicts, imperialism, diaspora and cultural identity. Her visual signs dynamically interact and overlap one another. Fluid marks against geometric forms and structures reflect rapid transformations of modern cities and multivalent individual experience in such conditions. As such, Mehretu reframes the traditional notion that abstract painting represents the quintessence of reality: on the contrary to the absolute reality envision by the 20th century pioneers, Mehretu’s transmuting marks map out multiple aspects of the hybrid modern world, conveying that "reality is networked, relational."\(^{33}\)

The Melbourne-based artist Emily Floyd also reconstructs the historical notion of abstraction, in particular its relationship to ideologies, to generate new visions. Through geometry and typography, Floyd brings together utopian perspectives of various social movements including socialism, feminism, community activism and alternative education systems, and her sculpture "gives utopian ideas new form..."\(^{34}\) Her work often references 'educational toys' invented by Rudolf Steiner, Bauhaus, De Stijl and Russian Constructivism (figure 4). Although Floyd is interested in the pedagogical quality of art, her work escapes didacticism by inviting playful engagement that opens up to multivalent potentiality. For instance, her recent installation *The Garden (here small gestures make complex structures)* (figure 5) was created for children to play with. While referencing educational frameworks of diverse ideologies, her sculptural objects encourage a creation of new meaning by individual participants. In this way, as Floyd explains, her work embodies an idea of "a knowledge garden."\(^{35}\)

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33 Ibid., 150.
Australia's Heide Museum of Modern Art curator Sue Cramer remarks that, "throughout Floyd's work the 'communal garden' is used as a metaphor for a utopian society..." 36 She adds:

Floyd's work offers open-ended propositions that might help us to navigate the complexities of contemporary life, and ask us to consider what makes a good and productive society. 37

In other words, Floyd's abstract language recontextualises the past utopian ideas to the present, and simultaneously opens up ways of thinking about future possibilities. 38

In addition to Floyd's metaphorical employment of the garden, the Melbourne-based artist Craig Easton similarly points to Chinese gardens as a potential model for "a recovery or redefinition of specifically utopian possibilities for abstraction..." 39 Many prototypes of Chinese and Japanese gardens embody an idealised vision of the world with an emphasis on a harmonic ideal of the cosmos, including of people and nature. 40 These gardens are largely influenced by the Chinese philosophy of yin and yang. The balance between the organic and architectural forms within the garden represents harmony between opposing forces. 41 In this context, oppositions, such as life/death, form/emptiness, nature/culture, are portrayed not as contradictory but actually complementary (figure 6).

1.3. Geometric Garden

My own work responds to and seeks to extend this momentum around and new appreciation for abstraction's capacity to embody multiple, complex and even seemingly oppositional elements within one worldview. Harnessing harmonic ideals through incorporating visual elements of Japanese gardens, my drawing installations and wall drawings seek to extend abstraction's utopian potential in an attempt to imagine a holistic vision of reality. While referencing the history of abstract painting to

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37 Ibid., 37.
38 Hughes, "Living Library," 42.
Figure 4
Emily Floyd
Steiner Cave, 2014
two-part epoxy paint on aluminium
dimensions variable, largest component:
173 x 300 x 60 cm

Figure 5
Emily Floyd
The Garden (here small gestures make complex structures), 2012
recycled timbers, wool felt, beeswax, fabric, baked ink
installation view, Jackson Bella Room, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney
reinstate metaphysical possibilities into the image of reality, my work, like that of Meheretu and Floyd, seeks to overturn the conventional absolutist approach and instead visualise a more inclusive, complex, and open-ended interpretation of the world.

Accordingly, my drawings chart the multiplicity of worldviews through a conflation of geometric symbols and patterns derived from scientific illustrations and diagrams, esoteric symbolism, and religious architecture and decoration across cultures. By reconfiguring these diverse cultural and historical references into a new whole, my work seeks to promote harmony between various modes of knowledge, including mysticism, religion and science.

My drawings aim to visualise such harmony by deploying the mediating quality of abstraction through motifs of nature, cartography, and religious architecture, including Japanese gardens. The combination of these elements suggests interstitial 'realms' between the physical and the metaphysical, the seen and the unseen, or the real and the ideal. The symbolic forms of diverse origins come together within such in-between spaces. The meaning of these recontextualised relics is arbitrary: they reference a range of cultural narratives but without fixed specificity.

In this way, my diagrammatic drawing installations envision an open-ended map that invites a variety of new connections and translations. Similarly, my immersive wall drawings incorporate spatiality in the hope of operating as an egalitarian space. Through my work, I ask viewers to reflect on and syncretise diverse worldviews within their own subjective vision, and invite them to contemplate a harmonious relationship with the world around us.
Figure 6
A Japanese garden view that illustrates the interplay between geometric and organic forms.

Yuria Okamura, *Circular Garden*, 2014, digital photograph, variable dimension
Chapter 2. Nature as a Window

Borrowing the encompassing perspective of theōria, my first body of work including Gathering, Geometric Findings, Crystal Metaphor, Formation, and Sky Map attempt to interweave representations of scientific and narrative knowledge. In his book The Noetics of Nature: Environmental Philosophy and the Holy Beauty of the Visible, Bruce Foltz explains that the precedence of science in modernity has reduced our perception of natural phenomena to a mechanism. He questions the status of science as "the theory of the real" in modern thinking by pointing out the etymological root of the term 'theory'; in ancient Greece, "theōria was contemplation, but not the 'observation' that fixes in place… Rather ancient theōria was… a mystical 'seeing' of the invisible within the visible." Within the works discussed in this chapter, images of nature are offered as a 'threshold' between physical reality and immaterial possibilities.

The geometric forms that appear in Gathering are derived from Islamic, Buddhist and Hindu motifs as well as platonic and occultist sacred geometry (figure 7). Within these systems of thought, the laws of nature are seen "as insights into a transcendent wisdom and perfection immanent to the world." Gathering borrows these cultural perspectives by means of geometric symbolism, through which natural systems are idealised as orderly, harmonious and meaningful. The geometric images are then configured together with naturalistic representations of organic objects that reference early scientific illustration in watercolour. By distributing these images within a non-hierarchical, cluster-like assemblage, Gathering aims to reconnect and integrate scientific and narrative knowledge without privileging one over the other.

The interplay between geometric and naturalistic representations in Gathering bears a resemblance to Outlines of Violets by Hilma af Klint (figure 8). In this work, each of the five violets is paired with a quadrant of varying colour combinations, appearing as if to

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44 Ibid., 3.
45 Ibid., 45.
Figure 7
Yuria Okamura, Gathering, 2014, acrylic and ink on paper, 114 x 160cm

Figure 8
Hilma af Klint
Group 3, Outline of Violets, 1919
watercolour on paper, 50 x 27 cm
represent the flower's physical form as well as its immaterial reflection. Theosophy, which af Klint was deeply involved in, held "that nature has a soul and that even inanimate matter, such as stone, contains cosmic energy." Analogously, af Klint's abstract forms symbolise unseen supernatural forces in nature, and her works therefore can be seen as "attempts to give shape to invisible contexts and make them visible."

The detail in the violets demonstrates the artist's attentive 'looking', recalling botanical studies, but her engagement could be viewed as 'contemplation' of unseen possibilities rather than purely objective 'observation'.

In my second series of small drawings, Geometric Findings, natural objects, such as quartz, stones and salt crystals are placed on paper in conjunction with diagrammatic lines and shapes (figures 9 - 14). In figure 13, Geometric Findings (Salt Crystal), softly coloured shapes and lines are drawn, extending out from the salt crystal and connecting to a cubic form that echoes an esoteric symbol. This work references the appearance of a scientific illustration (figure 15). However, instead of notating the physical properties, I used the lines and shapes in this work to chart unseen possibilities that might be contemplated through the natural object.

The idea of framing natural artifacts as a window onto other realms also relate to many non-western traditions including Shintoism, Buddhism and a number of indigenous cultures. Within Shintoist rituals, large rocks are often enshrined to invoke spirits (figure 16). As for Zen gardens, rocks can be seen as microcosmic representations of nature, as well as mediating objects between the natural world and man's inner self (figure 17). Rooted in both traditions, rocks in Japanese gardens function as the object of contemplation.

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47 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
Figure 9
Yuria Okamura, *Geometric Findings*, 2014, installation view

Figure 10
Yuria Okamura
*Geometric Findings (Pyrite)*, 2014
pyrite, acrylic and ink on paper
25 x 14 cm
Figure 11
Yuria Okamura, *Geometric Findings (Crystallography)*, 2014
quartz, acrylic and ink on paper, 24 x 29 cm

Figure 12
Yuria Okamura, *Geometric Findings (Calcite)*, 2014
calcite, acrylic and ink on paper, 22 x 30 cm
Figure 13
Yuria Okamura
*Geometric Findings (Salt Crystal), 2014*
salt crystal, acrylic and ink on paper
33 x 19 cm

Figure 14
Yuria Okamura
*Geometric Findings (Quartz), 2014*
quartz, acrylic and ink on paper
33 x 15 cm
Figure 15
Scientific Illustration of Corals
Illustration from Zoophytes. Atlas
James Dwight Dana, 1849

Figure 16
Enshrined Rocks, representing the two creator gods of the Shinto religion.
Near Ise Jingu Shrine, Japan

Figure 17
Rocks in Zen Gardens (representing islands in this image) are designed to aid in meditation.
Yuria Okamura, Island, 2014
digital photography, variable dimension
Maura Flannery, a professor of biology with an interest in the relationship between art and science, analyses the cell biologist Ursula Goodenough's book on Religious Naturalism. The book is concerned with the notion that empirical studies of the natural world can "be translated into a spiritual view of the living world." Flannery reinterprets this idea and suggests that, "experiences of wonder, mystery, awe, and reverence for the natural world," which Goodenough calls spiritual, can also be equated to "biophilia, an aesthetic view of the experience of nature." In so doing, she links ethics with spiritual and aesthetic views of nature, and argues that this linkage aids in overcoming "the dichotomies that have... led to all kinds of useless resentments: the dichotomies of art versus science and science versus religion." Flannery concludes, "aesthetic experience emerging from a study of the living world can also lead to a respect for that world and a desire to preserve it."

Resonating with this perspective, my larger works on paper Crystal Metaphor, Formation, and Sky Map seek to aestheticise, and thus idealise, scientific representations of nature through harmonious colour schemes and orderly geometric configurations (figures 18 - 20). For example, the diagrams that appear in Sky Map derive from illustrations that reveal the unseen mechanisms in the natural environment from micro to macro scale: a crystallographic structure and the moon cycle. The moon cycle image is adorned with a spiral pattern and a softly hued border, and is paired with another diagram below it that references how symmetry in nature has been translated into the structuring of religious architecture. Similarly, the pairing of crystallographic image and the pattern alludes to the tessellation shared between geometric decoration and molecular structures of minerals. Floating on a unified blue plane, the fragments of scientific and narrative knowledge harmonise.

In addition, these works also bring together an array of cultural and historical references that are often separated. For example, forms and patterns in Crystal Metaphor reference Islamic patterns, Italian tile decoration, tantric symbols, and

54 Ibid., 127.
55 Ibid., 129.
56 Ibid., 130.
57 Ibid., 129.
Figure 18
Yuria Okamura, *Crystal Metaphor*, 2014, acrylic and ink on paper, 89 x 83 cm

Figure 19
Yuria Okamura, *Formation*, 2014, acrylic and ink on paper, 80 x 105 cm
Figure 20
acrylic and ink on paper, 90 x 85 cm
occultist diagrams, as well as observational drawings and scientific diagrams of Fibonacci sequence and planetary motion. The conflation of these diverse images on one pictorial plane suggests a non-hierarchical space in which all modes of knowledge are equally privileged.

This compositing method is a strategy also visible in the work of Australian artist Eugene Carchesio. As demonstrated in 187 works for the People's Republic of Spiritual Revolution, his drawings reference a wide range of historical and cultural sources (figure 21). Amongst these are abstract painting of Malevich and Kandinsky, Italian futurist painting, alchemical illustration, and patterns and symbols from various traditions.58 These notational images are congregated as if to collapse the separations created by time and space to construct an encompassing vision of the universe (figure 22). The delicate application of paint in his work highlights the transparent and fluid qualities of the aqueous medium. For the curator Victoria Lynn, these qualities reflect "the sense that relationship between things are not finite and not certain,"59 and because of this fluidity, Carchesio's work conveys "an openness and willful mystery... despite the inner strength and completeness of forms such as the diamond, triangle and square."60

In my own work also, the use of transparent colours and watery stains speak to fluidity in the hope of opening up potentials for new connections and interpretations. In Crystal Metaphor, Formation and Sky Map, the references to natural forms, past idealities, Eastern and Western concepts are united through the translucent wash of the background, and the limited palette flows through diverse signs, guiding viewers' eyes to form relations between multiple perspectives.

Friedrich Nietzsche held that:

No one system reveals the entire truth; at best each adopts one point of view or perspective. We must consider many perspectives and not imprison our thought in one system.61

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60 Ibid.
Within this framework, this body of work seeks to integrate scientific and narrative knowledge of various cultures through conflating and aestheticising abstract and naturalistic representations of nature in an attempt to cultivate a holistic worldview. In these works, geometry serves as a common thread through diverse modes of seeing. In the following chapter, I will further investigate the potential of geometric symbols to map out new connections and invite subjective translations.
Figure 21
Eugene Carchesio
*187 works for the People’s Republic of Spiritual Revolution*, details, 1975–90
watercolour, pencil, collage, ink, pressed leaves on paper, 22.5 x 17.5cm each

Figure 22
Eugene Carchesio, Installation View of Exhibition *Someone’s Universe*, 2008-09
The Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art.
Chapter 3. Open-ended Maps

Binary oppositions represent a way of seeing, typical of ideologies. Ideologies often draw rigid boundaries between what is acceptable and what is not, between self and non-self, truth and falsity, sense and non-sense, reason and madness, central and marginal, surface and depth.\(^{62}\) - Madan Sarup

In an attempt to reconstruct a more inclusive and expansive utopian vision, my geometric drawings discussed in this chapter seek to conflate multiple forms of knowledge in a non-hierarchical manner. In this process, I examine how fixed meanings and divisions between different worldviews might be destabilised, and open up to new interpretations.

*Atlas* and *Diagrammatic Construct* are large-scale drawing installations that consist of a number of works on paper (figures 23 - 28). Departing from my previous series, there are no naturalistic representations in these drawings, yet nature is still symbolised through geometric forms. Many of these images are abstracted from scientific illustrations: figure 29 is based on a water cycle diagram and figure 30 resembles a crystallographic structure. The other forms draw from a variety of religious and mystical symbols and patterns, which embody idealised views of nature. The mandala is believed to be a microcosmic representation of the universe\(^ {63}\) (figure 31); Islamic patterns suggest symmetry in nature is sacred\(^ {64}\) (figure 32); religious architectural designs symbolise the order of the cosmos through geometric structure\(^ {65}\) (figure 33); and occult diagrams often converge cosmological images and sacred geometry\(^ {66}\) (figures 34 & 35).

Removed from the original context, the symbolic forms that appear in *Atlas* and *Diagrammatic Construct* lose their attributed meanings and take on ambiguity. They may still recall a range of cultural narratives and histories but their meanings are purposefully non-explicit. In his book *The Open Work*, Umberto Eco promotes creative

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\(^{62}\) Ibid., 41.


\(^{65}\) Ibid.

Figure 23
Yuria Okamura, Atlas, 2015
acrylic and ink on paper, and acrylic on wall, approx 300 x 700 cm

Figure 24 & 25
Yuria Okamura, Atlas, 2015, details
Figure 26
Yuria Okamura, *Diagrammatic Construct*, 2015
acrylic and ink on paper, and acrylic on wall, approx 300 x 700 cm

Figures 27 & 28
Yuria Okamura, *Diagrammatic Construct*, 2015, details
Figure 29
Yuria Okamura, *Diagrammatic Construct #6*, 2015
acrylic and ink on paper, 30 x 65 cm

Figure 30
Yuria Okamura
*Diagrammatic Construct*
2015, detail
(Top Left) Figure 31
Yuria Okamura
Atlas, 2015, detail

(Top Right) Figure 32
Yuria Okamura
Diagrammatic Construct #9, 2015, detail

(Left) Figure 33
Yuria Okamura
Atlas #10, 2015, detail
Figure 34
Yuria Okamura, *Diagrammatic Construct #4*, 2015, acrylic and ink on paper, 40 x 30 cm

Figure 35
Yuria Okamura, *Diagrammatic Construct #1*, 2015, acrylic and ink on paper, 30 x 75 cm
work's capacity to hold multiple interpretive possibilities. He calls this quality 'suggestiveness' and explains:

An artistic work that suggests is also one that can be performed with the full emotional and imaginative resources of the interpreter. [Such creative work] sets out to stimulate the private world of the addressee so he can draw from inside himself some deeper response that mirrors the subtler resonance underlying the text.67

This suggestiveness that I hope to generate in my drawings is also evoked by anonymous tantric paintings from India (figures 36 - 38). These simple geometric paintings are produced by crafts people "within a codified system of ancient and indeterminate origin,"68 and are used to assist meditation. Although these are known to represent "the transcendent form of the formlessness,"69 the exact meaning has become lost or reinterpreted as they are reproduced over generations.70 Corresponding to Ernst Gombrich's claim that undecodable signs stimulate creative interpretations,71 these paintings can be seen to play an active role in "visionary imaginative processes."72

Atlas and Diagrammatic Construct also bring together ambiguous symbols within diagrammatic configurations. In his book Deleuze and the Diagram, Jakub Zdebik reveals the way in which the diagram operates as a generative device that "creates new vistas."73 He describes how the diagram can map out abstract possibilities before they become concrete.74 In the words of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the diagram "does not function to represent, even something real, but rather constructs a real that

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69 Ibid.
70 Frank André Jamme, "Fumbling for the Keys: Notes on Tantric Paintings," in Tantra Song: Tantric Paintings from Rajasthan, ed. Frank André Jamme (Los Angeles: siglio, 2011), 100-01.
71 Gombrich interrogates the notion that all motifs may have originally functioned as symbols in ancient semiotic systems. He claims that "mysterious symbols of which the meaning has been forgotten," powerfully appeal to our imagination, invoking Egyptian hieroglyphs to underscore this idea. See: Ernst Hans Gombrich, The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Phaidon, 1984), 218.
74 Ibid., 1.
Figure 36
Anonymous Tantric Painting, 1998, mixed media, 20.30 x 33 cm

Figure 37
Anonymous Tantric Painting, 2006
mixed media, 32.05 x 26.04 cm

Figure 38
Anonymous Tantric Painting, 2003
mixed media, 33.34 x 22.23 cm
is yet to come, a new type of reality. Drawing on this idea, my work seeks to operate as an open-ended diagram for imagining a pluralistic vision of reality that embraces multiplicity and subjectivity.

The way in which I recontextualise symbolic forms is analogous to 'the diagrammatic process'. According to Zdebk, this process involves "a physical state or system being atomized into incorporeal abstract traits and then reconfigured into another state or system." In the new system, "elements abstracted from their specificity circulate... and heterogeneous things connect on this abstract level." In Atlas and Diagrammatic Construct, abstract images of disparate origins are charted across the wall, and within the new configuration, these are literally connected and interrelated by the lines of paint directly applied on the wall, as if to form a network between various perceptions.

Through the processes of abstracting, juxtaposing, layering, and joining, my work aims to collapse conventional orders and map out non-hierarchical spaces. I liken the spaces I envision to Homi Bhabha's concept of the Third Space. The Third Space can be thought of as:

The interstitial passage between fixed identifications [which] opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains differences without an assumed or imposed hierarchy.

He adds that in such spaces "the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity: that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, re-historicized and read anew."

Analogously, Julie Mehretu's cartographic painting also charts a non-hierarchical, hybrid space. She sketches out the invisible web of interactions between cultures, histories, identities, and memories through a superimposition of lines and forms derived from architecture, urban planning, and modernist abstract paintings (figure 39). As in my own work, each mark in Mehretu's maps can be seen to function as an undecipherable sign, embodying diverse cultural perspectives and subjective experiences of individuals.

75 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari as cited in ibid., 16.
76 Ibid., 1.
77 Ibid., 26.
78 Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 5.
79 Ibid., 55.
Figure 39
Julie Mehretu, Stadia II, 2004
ink and acrylic on canvas, 271.78 x 355.60 cm
Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh
in hybrid urban spaces.\textsuperscript{81} The fluidity of her gestural lines appears to resist confinement to "a fixed system of meaning,"\textsuperscript{82} and instead responds to the rapidly changing state of the world.

In this way, Mehretu's work challenges the fixed notion reality. In the cultural critic Eleanor Heartney's words:

Mehretu can be said... to have put a spin on the old idea that abstraction translates the very essence of Being. For her, such art expresses not some ultimate truth or underlying order but the more terrifying thought that only constant pattern is continual chaos.\textsuperscript{83}

The scholar Christine Ljundberg similarly suggests that Mehretu's work presents a political underpinning that prompts us to consider our uncertain future emerging from the chaotic flux of the globalised world, alluding to a "desire for social change."\textsuperscript{84}

Here, although my work and Mehretu's commonly employ mapping as a method of pluralisation, our approaches seem to diverge. Conversely to the way Mehretu urges us to contemplate the future through an unsettling image of flux, my work hopes to inspire a social change by depicting a utopian vision of the world in which multiple worldviews coexist in harmony.

\textit{Garden Path #1, #2 and #3} are iterations of selected drawings from \textit{Atlas and Diagrammatic Construct}, and these arrangements reference aerial maps of Japanese temples and their gardens (figures 40 - 47). \textit{Garden Path #1} echoes the aerial map of Ginkakuji Temple in Kyoto, Japan (figure 48). Within its ground, each building serves an independent purpose but all buildings join by paths and bridges. Also within gardens, elements such as rocks and sand serve as abstract representations of landscapes such as mountains and the ocean, collectively forming an idealised image of the natural world.\textsuperscript{85} Operating as organised 'gardens', \textit{Garden Path #1, #2 and #3} seek to form a holistic vision through incorporating diverse symbols. Each work on paper is offered as

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 96.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{83} Heartney, "Invisible Networks," 150.
Figure 40
Yuria Okamura
_Garden Path #1, 2015_
acrylic and ink on paper & acrylic and colour pencil on wall, 200 x 220 cm
Figures 41 - 43
Yuria Okamura, Garden Path #1, 2015, details
Figure 44
Yuria Okamura
*Garden Path #2, 2015*
acrylic and ink on paper & acrylic and colour pencil on wall, 220 x 150 cm
Figure 45
Yuria Okamura
Garden Path #3, 2015
acrylic and ink on paper & acrylic and colour pencil on wall, 170 x 235 cm
Figures 46 & 47
Yuria Okamura, Garden Path #3, 2015, details
Figure 48
Aerial Map of Ginkakuji Temple, Kyoto, Japan
a relic of diverse knowledge or belief systems, and these interact and connect through the dotted lines and shaded shapes, like stepping stones and bridges, to constitute a whole.

Through iterating the same drawings in a number of different configurations, the Garden Path series seeks to mirror the concept of ‘non-absolute space’ embedded in the traditional interior of Japanese architecture. The structure and perception of such spaces can be modified according to seasons and different events through the use of sliding doors and screens. Similarly, my drawings are not fixed in place: these continue to shift and regenerate to map out new spaces, in which symbolic forms can be read anew.

Geometric drawings by the Iranian-German artist Haleh Redjaian also demonstrate the mutability of structures. Her recent series Untitled #1-4 is generated from the same grid (figure 49). However, the triangular elements deviate from the rigid foundation in their own way within each piece. Through the processes of repetition and fragmentation, these grow into idiosyncratic abstract language. Redjaian draws from traditional patterns and forms, such as Sufi architecture, in which symbolic value is given to geometric order. Introducing structural irregularities and subtle tonal nuances, her drawings "reveal apparently strict patterns to be in actuality variable systems, revealing a discrepancy between a supposedly objective order and subjectivity." In this way, Redjaian unravels conventional strictures and invites viewers to construct their own sense of order.

Similarly, my work Wander (figure 50), still in progress, imagines mapping as a 'non-absolute' visualisation of space that can shift with viewers' perceptions. The composition of Wander is derived from a Japanese 'folding map' and it borrows the concept of the stroll garden. In stroll gardens, there is no vantage point from which to see the garden in its entirety. Instead, an array of vistas is revealed sequentially as visitors follow a path. In order to picture the whole garden, visitors must conflate the

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87 Haleh Redjaian, email correspondence, 5 August 2015.
88 Ibid.
Figure 49
Haleh Redjaian
*Untitled #1 - #4, 2014*
pencil, acrylic and watercolour on paper, 30 x 42 cm each
segments of impressions through their memory and imagination. Analogous to this way of seeing, the linear representation of the folding map "depict[s] the sequential transformation of space in relation to its time flow," corresponding to the movement of the traveller (figure 51). Drawing from these traditions, *Wander* presents a wide range of symbolic forms in a linear field stretched horizontally across the wall. Different visions are revealed as viewers move across the five panels, and stories unfold sequentially. While Mehretu's "absorptive map" works to "shatter the authority of a single, overarching viewpoint," *Wander* seeks to gently reflect shifting perceptions and encourage multivalent interpretations of the world around us.

Looking back at the history of cartography, Ljunberg explains that through the use of iconographies, the medieval *mappamundi* "provide a rich representation of the world views of both their makers and their readers as they integrate the spiritual and cultural concepts of their time." She remarks, "maps generally stimulate us to interact by figuring, conceptualizing or recording the world again." Building on this idea, my works *Atlas, Diagrammatic Construct, Garden Path* series, and *Wander* deploy mapping as a means of visualising multiple worldviews rooted in science, religion and mysticism through geometric symbolism. Ljunberg concludes, "maps generate new 'realities' as they continuously create new narrative spaces." Harnessing this generative quality, the diagrammatic works presented in this chapter aim to draw connections between different systems of thought and chart non-hierarchical spaces within which visual forms can be read anew by individual viewers. As such, this body of work seeks to rediscover the imaginative process of producing and interpreting abstraction through the method of mapping.

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89 Despina Sfakiotaki, "Analysis of Movement in Sequential Space: Perceiving the Traditional Japanese Tea and Stroll Garden" (Ph.D, University of Oulu, 2005), 40.
92 Ibid., 110.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
Figure 50
Yurie Okamura, Plan drawing for Wonder, 2015, ink on paper, 5 x 18 cm

Figure 51
A section of an Eighteenth century tourist map of Tokaido, Japan
Chapter 4. The Garden as a Contemplative Space

In this chapter, I discuss a series of immersive wall drawings that I posit as contemplative spaces. Religious architecture and abstract art are analogous in the way they can both act as a "doorway between the mental and the physical." Building on this notion, my last body of work incorporates architectural elements to interrogate whether the connective quality of abstraction might be further extended by means of spatialisation. In turn, these works aim to visualise a mediating space for integrating notions of inner and outer realities without privileging the physical world or immaterial possibilities.

*Rothko Chapel* epitomises the convergence of abstraction and architecture in a space created for the contemplation of the immaterial (figure 52). This non-denominational chapel permanently displays a series of fourteen dark, monumental paintings by the Abstract Expressionist Mark Rothko. According to the Dutch Emeritus Professor of Aesthetics Wessel Stoker these paintings capture something universal beyond boundaries between different faiths: "death and mortality." The paintings surround the viewer within the chapel's octagonal interior and stage "the confrontation of the finite human being" with "the absolutely unknowable void." Inducing a sublime encounter, *Rothko Chapel* stimulates an inner reflection within the individual viewer.

My work *Affinity* deploys a similar structure to the interior view of *Rothko Chapel*. It has a central composition with one point perspective and comprises three works hung in a symmetrical configuration (figure 53 - 55). However, *Affinity* actually draws from typical interior views seen in Japanese temples that open out to gardens (figure 56). In contrast to Rothko’s dark embodiment of mortality, *Affinity* is intended to provide a contemplative space for inner reflection upon nature and earthly life through the use of light, translucent natural colours. By extension, the colour in these works represent

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98 Ibid., 100.
99 Ibid., 96.
Figure 52
Interior View of Rothko Chapel, 1971, Houston, Texas

Figure 53
Yuria Okamura
Affinity, 2015
acrylic and ink on paper & acrylic on wall, approx 350 x 750 cm
Figures 54 & 55
Yuria Okamura, Affinity, 2015, details

Figure 56
An example of Traditional Japanese Interior
our contrasting worldviews; whereas Rothko was known to view the human existence as "tragic."\textsuperscript{100} I aim to bring attention to the beauty in this world by referencing gardens and aestheticising nature through abstract language.

The Melbourne-based artist Jess Johnson demonstrates a contemporary example of how architectural elements can be incorporated to visualise an imaginary realm. Combining figurative and geometric components inspired by science fiction, cosmology and comic books, Johnson depicts spectacles that appear to be set in religious architecture of a future civilization\textsuperscript{101} (figure 57). Using a simple shape as a building block, repetitive patterns aid in constructing Johnson’s fictional universe. Within her installations, patterns applied on the walls echo the pattering in her drawings. It is as if her imagined world extends from the paper to immerse the viewer. Johnson speaks about her use of densely layered patterning as a device to transform gallery spaces into "physical portals."\textsuperscript{102} The hypnotic effects created by her highly chromatic patterns transport the viewer into a fictional future (figure 58). The aforementioned Rothko Chapel can also be described to transport the viewer, into the inner world of their own consciousness, by positioning them in an enclosed environment that is "cut off from the outside world."\textsuperscript{103}

My work Affinity on the other hand, is not intended to take viewers to a completely different world. Rather, it seeks to construct a mediating space for reconnecting inner response or imaginative interpretation with outer reality as a means to enrich our perception of this world. Like the patterns in Johnson’s installation Every1 and Everything on my back, the perspective lines of the wall drawing in Affinity open out to occupy the gallery space, and simultaneously guide the viewer’s gaze into the depicted world. While the overall composition references an interior of architectural spaces, the colours reflect the natural world. The uneven application of paint also resonates with variable degrees of light and tonality of colours seen in nature. Thus, the depicted fields on paper can be seen as signifying the garden view outside or a representation of

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 93.
\textsuperscript{103} Stoker, "The Rothko Chapel Paintings," 90.
Figure 57
Jess Johnson
*Culture Pact*, 2014
artist frame, pen, fibre tipped markers, metallic paint and gouache on paper, 93 x 185 cm

Figure 58
Jess Johnson
*Every1 and Everything on my back*, 2013
installation, 6 drawings, artist frames, wall paint, skirting board, recycled carpet tiles
Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney
an internal, imaginary world. By pictorially blurring the boundary between 'inside' and 'outside', Affinity seeks to metaphorically integrate dichotomies such as the immaterial/material, interpretation/fact, self/other, and inner/outer realities.

To interrogate abstraction's capacity to evoke inner reflection, I also refer to Agnes Martin's work, which merges drawing and painting (figures 59 & 60). Her minimal surfaces, which consist of straight lines and grids over soft washes, have been described to "[invite] a contemplative gaze... as if the work of the work were to open on to an immaterial and meditative space." Martin's paintings are, as she expressed, "a size you can walk into." Even though they are not spatial in the same manner as Rothko Chapel or a Jess Johnson wall painting, the atmospheric expansiveness of her paintings can be described as a 'space' that draws the viewer in.

Martin's work has often been compared to landscape painting despite its pure abstract surface. Many of her titles such as Mountain, The Islands, White Stone, Grass, and Spring Field also indicate a resonance with the natural world. Martin has explained:

There are no straight lines in nature. My work is non-objective, like that of the Abstract Expressionists. But I want people, when they look at my paintings, to have the same feelings they experience when they look at landscape, so I never protest when they say my work is like landscape. But it's really about the feeling of beauty and freedom, that you experience in landscape.

Therefore, Martin's concern was not a representation of nature but the inner response to it, and she believed that abstract painting could evoke the same response. She has described that viewing art was like "a simple direct going into a field of vision as you would cross an empty beach to look at the ocean." The art historian Briony Fer believes that this statement poetically articulates the way Martin's painting operates not as an object to be looked at, but an invitation into an abstract, capacious "field of vision."

Martin maintained that she was "looking for a perfect space," and my wall drawings,
Figure 59
Agnes Martin
The Islands, 1961
acrylic and graphite on canvas, 182.9 x 182.9 cm

Figure 60
Agnes Martin
Untitled #3, 1995
acrylic and graphite on canvas, 152.4 x 152.4 cm
Into the Distance, Vista and Through the Window, similarly seek to envision an idealised space, through an abstract evocation of nature (figures 61 -71). Departing from my earlier works on paper and drawing installations, the wall drawings no longer contain symbols. Presented as a space, signs of disparate worldviews have been dissolved and completely integrated into a new whole. References to nature in these works are only hinted by means of lines, surfaces and colours. For example, the translucent blue stains in Into the Distance suggest water or mist (figure 63); solid grey shapes with subtle tonal variations in Vista derive from the nuanced surface of rocks (figure 67); and the central detail of repetitive horizontal lines drawn with ink in Through the Window seeks to echo the extended sense of depth experienced when looking at the ocean or mountains in a distance (figure 70).

Referring to the raked patterns in Zen gardens, Gabrielle Brauer speaks of the meditative quality embedded in the minimalist symbolisation of nature. She remarks, "the materiality of water is translated abstractly by sand or by gravel... In the work of these gardens, all of life is translated by the repeated lines inviting contemplation"109(figure 72). Kathryn Tuma describes Martin's work in a similar manner and writes, "the gentle play of repetition and difference of colour and line... [asks] eye and mind to attune to a more prolonged perceptual engagement."110 Creating a meditative quality through the repetition of the simplest marks, Martin's paintings illuminate that an ideal space can be found in the everyday and the mundane.111 It is through a similar, subtle visual effect that my work seeks to invite contemplation upon the beauty in the world by invoking an aesthetic response akin to experiences in nature.

Agnes Martin's work has been described to "let every line be its own revelation,"112 and so the irregularity of her repetitive lines reveal the ways in which nuances and variations can emerge from a seemingly mechanical act of drawing straight lines. This open-ended approach significantly differs from the 'absolute' straight lines Mondrian

109 Gabriele Brauer, "Veils of Meaning: The Art of Agnes Martin" (Master of Fine Arts, Victorian College of the Arts, 199?), 12.
110 Tuma, "Enhancing Stillness," 41.
111 Briony Fer, "Drawing Drawing: Agnes Martin's Infinity," ibid., 192.
112 Edward Hirsch, "Horizontal Line (Homage to Agnes Martin)," in Agnes Martin: The Nineties and Beyond, ed. Ned Rifkin (Houston, TX The Menil Collection in association with Hatje Cantz, 2002), 22.
Figure 61
Yuria Okamura, *Into the Distance*, 2015, acrylic, ink and colourpencil on wall, 240 x 320 cm

Figures 62 & 63
Yuria Okamura, *Into the Distance*, 2015, details
Figures 64 & 65
Yuria Okamura, Vista, 2015, acrylic, ink and colourpencil on wall, 230 x 1000 x 210 cm
Figures 66 & 67
Yuria Okamura
Vista, 2015, details
Figure 68
Yuria Okamura, *Through the Window*, 2015
acrylic, ink and colourpencil on wall, 280 x 550 cm

Figure 69
Yuria Okamura, *Through the Window*, 2015, installation view
(Right) Figure 70
(Below) Figure 71
Yuria Okamura
Through the Window, 2015, details
sought in his gridded paintings. Griselda Pollock points out "minimalist abstraction's structural potentiality for sustaining the dissolution of fixed terms, known ideas, and the authority of meaning." For Pollock, Martin's grid is not a suggestion of "a new order—a new, other fixity—but differentiation and pluralization." 

Correspondingly, details of my work Into the Distance reveal varying thickness of the drawn lines, inconsistent intervals, and uneven tonalities that also signify multiplicity and variations (figure 62). Through such subtle fluctuations of line and color, my wall drawings, like Martin's paintings, aim to destabilise "the rationally gridded absolute of the modernist field of vision," and instead create an egalitarian space.

Diverging from Martin's atmospheric space, my wall drawings are constructed through the use of geometry derived from architectural forms. For example, the central geometric shapes that appear in Vista were inspired by entrances and windows of Buddhist and Hindu temples, and Islamic mosques (figures 73 & 74). The symbolic use of such architectural elements alludes to the idea of a portal, the point between internal and external realms. Utilising corners of the room, Vista expands into three-dimensional space to immerse the viewer. Although this work incorporates a range of cultural sources, the Japanese garden remains central as a visual metaphor. As Japanese architectural features such as floors and eaves aid in framing the garden view, the use of geometric forms and natural colour schemes in my wall drawings seek to echo the experience of looking out to gardens from interior spaces (figure 75). Zen gardens in particular are widely considered a mediating space between material and immaterial realms, as they invite an inner reflection by guiding an attentive focus on natural objects, commonly perceived as outside of the self. Therefore, the garden metaphor in my work aids in constructing a contemplative space for integrating inner and outer realities.

Within the western tradition, frescoes often manifest a mediating, idealised space. Despite the contrast between figurative and geometric representations, a number of

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114 Ibid., 176.
115 Irvine, "Landscape," 60.
Figure 72
An example of raked lines seen in Zen gardens.

Yuria Okamura
Echo, 2014
digital photograph
variable dimension

Figures 73 & 74
Examples of Indian and Balinese entrances
Travel photos taken by Jack Rowland and Yuria Okamura

Figure 75
An example of Japanese garden view framed by architectural features

Yuria Okamura
Grid, 2014
digital photograph
variable dimension
viewers have related my wall drawings to frescoes in the way these directly incorporate the walls of the spaces they occupy. Incidentally, Gabrielle Brauer remarks that Agnes Martin’s painting and Giotto’s frescoes operate in a similar manner to "extend the vision of the spectator"\textsuperscript{118} by "reveal[ing] a threshold."\textsuperscript{119} Inside the Scrovegni Chapel by Giotto, the ceiling is painted blue with dotted stars as if the chapel extends to the heavens, and each panel on the sidewalls unfolds an illusionistic narrative space (figure 76). Giotto has transformed architectural features that are designed to 'enclose', into pictorial spaces that 'open' on to imaginary realms, thus creating a threshold between the seen and the unseen, or the physical and the metaphysical.

Although unintentional, the use of blue and gold, and the central composition in my work \textit{Into the Distance} appear to resonate with the interior view of the Scrovegni Chapel. Blue and gold geometric shapes, reminiscent of architectural forms, serve to section off a space on the white wall as if to draw up an imaginary threshold. Although it is a two-dimensional image, the central focal point and hints of perspective lines are aimed to create an immersive and expansive effect. Different hues of blue and the varied degrees of transparency resemble shimmering water. Like Martin’s abstract paintings and Zen gardens, my works equate contemplation of nature with inner reflection. In this way, I hope to dissolve divides between inner and outer, and immaterial and material realms. Instead, I present a holistic framework for experiencing the world, which Agnes Martin called "a full response to reality."\textsuperscript{120}

As a point of difference to frescoes, my wall drawings are characterised by their temporary existence. The fresco technique requires pigments to be applied on wet plaster so that once the plaster sets, the images are permanently embedded in the wall. Conversely, my wall drawings, which employ diluted acrylic and colour pencils, can be removed with effort disproportionate to the considerable amount of time and labor went into actualising the work. Haleh Redjaian finds an intriguing tension between the time and energy she invests into manifesting wall installations and the fact that "the direct and only moment you can experience the work is the short moment of

\textsuperscript{118} Brauer, "Veils of Meaning," 17.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
existence and the memory of it.\textsuperscript{121}

It is through harnessing this notion of impermanence that I seek to promote a meaningful appreciation and engagement with the world in which we live. Zen philosophy "emphasised the here and now rather than the afterlife,"\textsuperscript{122} and it is through the awareness of transience that a "heightened sense of present-ness"\textsuperscript{123} can be gained. Deriving from this philosophy, Japanese garden aesthetics bring attention to short-lived flowers such as cherry blossoms to find "beauty within transience."\textsuperscript{124} Likewise, the fugitive effects of thin lines, transparent colours, and the impermanent nature of my wall drawings invite viewers to engage with its present-ness.

\textsuperscript{121} Redjaian.
\textsuperscript{122} Knežic, "A Pocket Full of Stones," 21.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 34.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 33-34.
Figure 76
Giotto’s Scrovegni Chapel Frescoes, 1305, Veneto, Italy
and Yuria Okamura, Into the Distance, 2015
Conclusion

This project arose from my inclination to readdress histories of abstraction that yielded absolutist depictions of 'reality'. I began by instead exploring geometry as a visual tool for reinscribing metaphysical and utopian possibilities, in the hope of envisaging a holistic worldview. I questioned how it might be possible for contemporary abstract drawing to visualise a worldview that encompasses and integrates diverse modes of knowledge for interpreting the world around us.

The thesis began with a contextualisation of this research project by analysing the historical usage and contemporary reinterpretation of geometric visual languages. I revealed how the invention of geometric abstraction enabled many 20th century artists, particularly Mondrian and Malevich, to engage with spiritual idealities and envision a utopian society. I also problematised these artists' absolutist approaches towards abstraction as their ideas were constrained within binary modes of seeing that privileged one system of belief above all others. Referencing recent international and local exhibitions, I signalled the revival of abstraction as a tool for translating unseen possibilities. I examined the works of Julie Mehretu and Emily Floyd, to illuminate contemporary abstraction's potential to construct more complex and pluralistic worldviews.

Following this historical contextualisation, I extrapolated on my early studio investigations focusing on symbolic depictions of nature. Likening my approach to that of Hilma af Klint in my work Gathering and Geometric Findings, I conflated naturalistic representations of organic objects with geometric forms derived from scientific diagrams, religious decoration and esoteric symbolism. In these works, geometry operated as a common thread to interweave representations of both scientific and narrative knowledge. Sky Map, Formation and Crystal Metaphor deployed chromatically unified backgrounds and geometrically configured compositions to further integrate representations of scientific and narrative knowledge in a non-hierarchical manner. Borrowing the notion of biophilia, I aestheticised nature in an attempt to invite imaginative and meaningful translations of our relationship to the world.
Moving beyond syncretising scientific and non-scientific modes of knowledge, my project also explored the dissolution of hierarchies and divisions between a wide range of worldviews in favor of a more inclusive and open-ended vision. Throughout, I deployed a harmonious arrangement of geometric forms including platonic sacred geometry, Buddhist and Hindu symbolism, Islamic decoration, occult illustrations, and diagrams from the history of sciences and cosmology. Deflecting from fixed, singular depictions, my use of an aqueous medium also engendered a sense of openness. The translucent and fluid application of subdued colours suggested that notions of reality are relational and open to interpretations.

The processes of recontextualisation of signs and symbols in each series of drawings further supported this idea of relationality. In each work I removed geometric shapes from their original (symbolic and visual) contexts and converged them with other diverse forms. Epitomising Umberto Eco’s post-structural theory, these recontextualised symbols destabilised original meanings to open up their potential for new translations.

Mapping was another strategy deployed to connect and make harmonious relationships between diverse elements. In large-scale drawing installations, Atlas, Diagrammatic Construct, and Garden Path #1-3 multiple drawings on paper were linked by a series of lines and shapes, forming diagrammatic configurations. A work in progress, Wander, will further explore mapping’s potential to generate new narrative spaces. Mirroring the format of Japanese ‘folding map’, Wander will deploy a linear representation to conflate symbolic forms of diverse knowledge systems. With the unfolding structure of the work inviting a sequential, cumulative experience, this work encourages viewers to connect the fragments of visual signs and engage with multivalent interpretations of the world around us. In the thesis, I called upon Julie Mehretu and Haleh Redjaian’s strategies of mapping, the Deleuzian idea of the diagram and Homi Bhabha’s Third Space to mount an argument for my own use of the map to promote a pluralistic, expansive, multi-dimensional worldview.

As a motif and a metaphor, the garden was offered throughout as a site for harmony and contemplation. The compositions of the Garden Path series were derived from
cartographic representations of Japanese temple and garden layouts. Through iterating the same drawings in a number of different configurations, this series sought to embody the open-endedness of space and the mutability of structures found in traditional Japanese architecture and gardens. My wall drawings, including Affinity, Into the Distance, Vista, and Through the Window, incorporated geometric forms of various religious architecture and natural colour schemes to echo the experience of looking out to gardens from interior spaces. Visually blurring the boundary between nature and culture, and inside and outside, my wall drawings sought to construct a mediating space much like a garden.

I also demonstrated abstraction’s capacity to manifest a ‘threshold’ into other realms. Through my analysis of Rothko Chapel, Giotto’s chapel frescoes and drawings by Jess Johnson, I highlighted our capacity, when faced with certain works to move beyond the work into another imaginary or internal space. When referring to Agnes Martin’s abstract evocation of nature through minimal use of line, surface and colour, I also considered the ways the medium and its application might invite reflection. My engagement with creating contemplative spaces was explored in most depth in my series of wall drawings, which metaphorically integrated dichotomised realms such as immaterial/material, ideal/real, and inner/outer realities.

Finally, the subtle variations of hand-drawn lines and colour application, and the impermanent character of my wall drawings evaluated the significance of nuance and transience to a shifting and inclusive worldview. Through this final emphasis on the momentary, I underscored abstraction’s multivalent potential to promote metaphysical possibilities and invite an appreciation of present-ness in this world.

Encompassing and embracing various modes of seeing and imaging ‘reality’, I arrived at an egalitarian, contemplative garden-like space, in which nature and diverse cultural concepts coexisted harmoniously. By harnessing the arbitrary and mediating qualities of abstraction, my work moved beyond dualities to promote a holistic framework. It is my hope that viewers will locate a space for themselves in the work, to perceive and consider the world’s and their own expansiveness.
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Appendix

List of images from the final exhibition

Figure 77
Yuria Okamura, *Wander*, 2015, acrylic and ink on paper & acrylic, ink and colour pencil on wall, 350 x 3100 cm

Figure 78
Yuria Okamura, *Wander*, 2015, partial view

Figure 79
Yuria Okamura, *Wander*, 2015, partial view

Figure 80
Yuria Okamura, *Wander*, 2015, partial view

Figure 81
Yuria Okamura, *Wander*, 2015, partial view

Figure 82
Yuria Okamura, *Wander*, 2015, detail

Figure 83
Yuria Okamura, *Wander #1*, 2015, acrylic and ink on paper, 120 x 96 cm

Figure 84
Yuria Okamura, *Wander #2*, 2015, acrylic and ink on paper, 120 x 96 cm

Figure 85
Yuria Okamura, *Wander #3*, 2015, acrylic and ink on paper, 120 x 96 cm

Figure 86
Yuria Okamura, *Wander #4*, 2015, acrylic and ink on paper, 120 x 96 cm

Figure 87
Yuria Okamura, *Wander #5*, 2015, acrylic and ink on paper, 120 x 96 cm

Figure 88
Yuria Okamura, *Wander*, 2015, installation view

Figure 89
Yuria Okamura, *Wander*, 2015, installation view
Figure 77
Yuria Okamura, Wander, 2015
acrylic and ink on paper & acrylic, ink and colour pencil on wall, 350 x 3100 cm
Figure 78 & 79
Yuria Okamura, *Wander*, 2015, partial view
Figure 80 & 81
Yuria Okamura, *Wonder*, 2015, partial view
Figure 82
Yuria Okamura, Wonder, 2015, detail
Figure 83
Yuria Okamura, *Wander #1*, 2015, acrylic and ink on paper, 120 x 96 cm
Figure 84
Yuria Okamura, *Wander #2*, 2015, acrylic and ink on paper, 120 x 96 cm
Figure 85
Yuria Okamura, *Wander #3*, 2015, acrylic and ink on paper, 120 x 96 cm
Figure 86
Yuria Okamura, *Wander #4*, 2015, acrylic and ink on paper, 120 x 96 cm
Figure 87
Yuria Okamura, *Wander #5*, 2015, acrylic and ink on paper, 120 x 96 cm
Figure 88 & 89
Yuria Okamura, *Wander, 2015*, installation view
Author/s:
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