

THE
DRAWING
CENTER

Louise Despont
*Energy Scaffolds and
Information Architecture*

The Drawing Center

January 22 – March 20, 2016

Main Gallery

Louise Despont

Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture

Curated by

Brett Littman

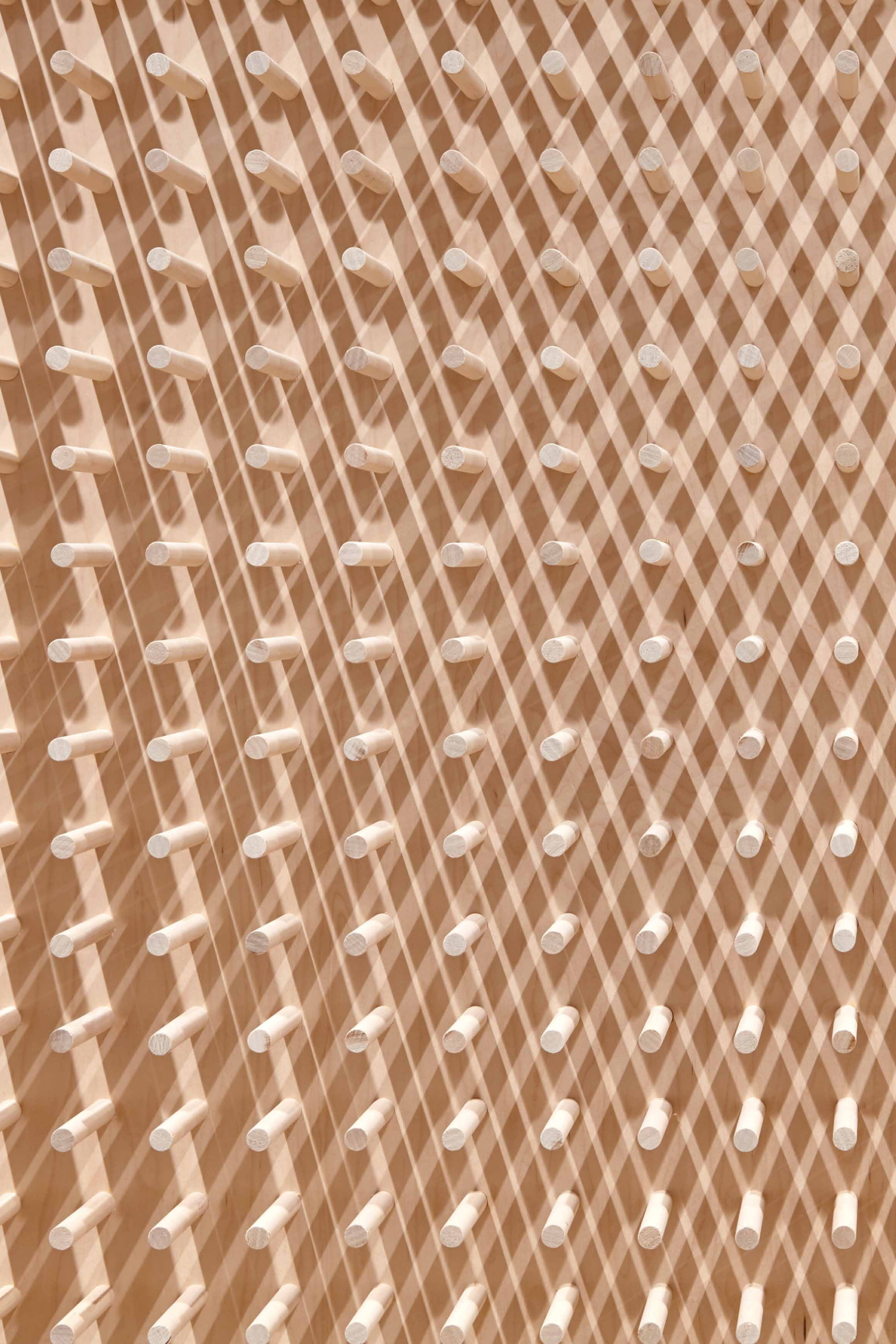
DRAWING PAPERS 124

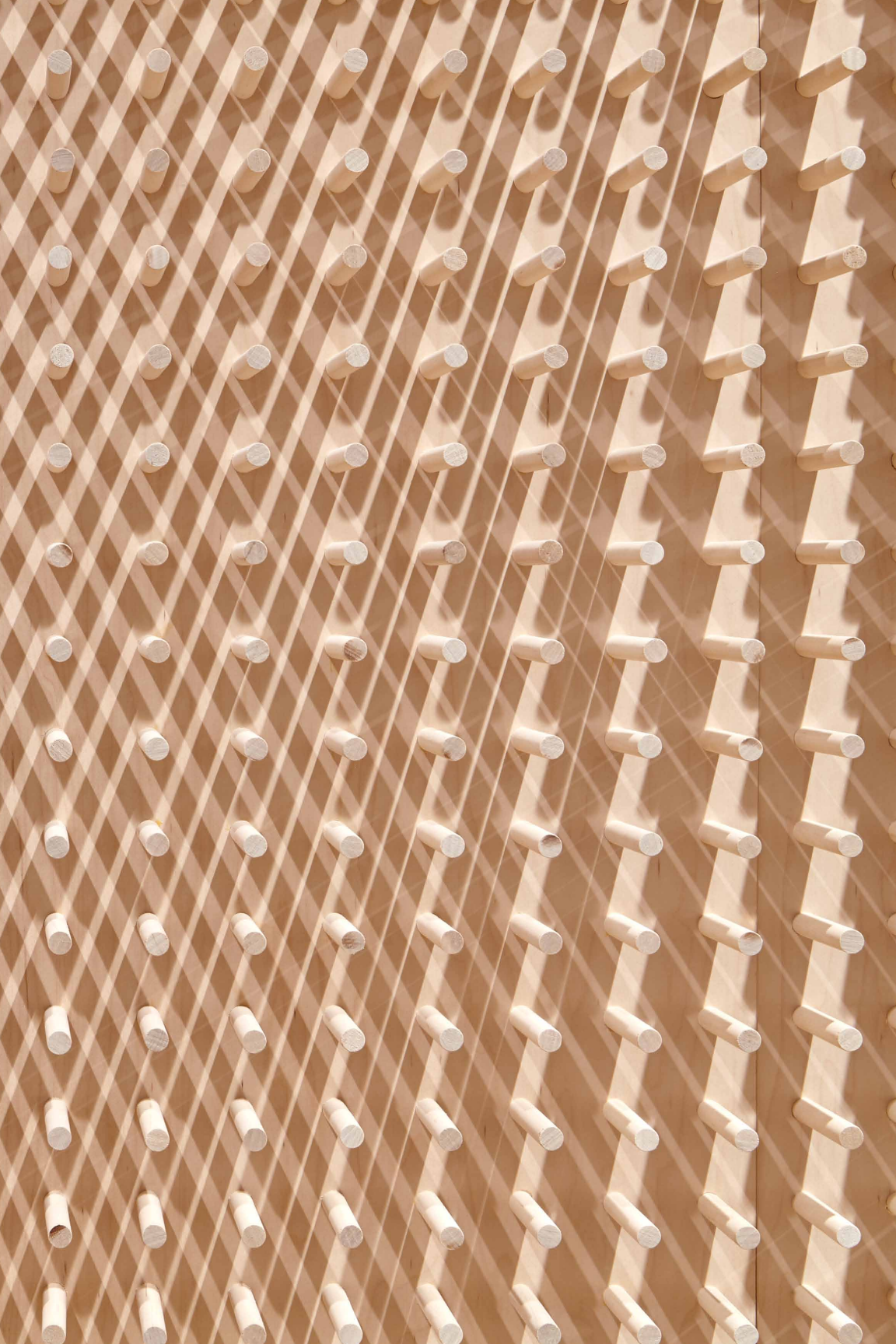
Essay *by* Raymond Foye

Interview *with* Louise Despont *by* Brett Littman

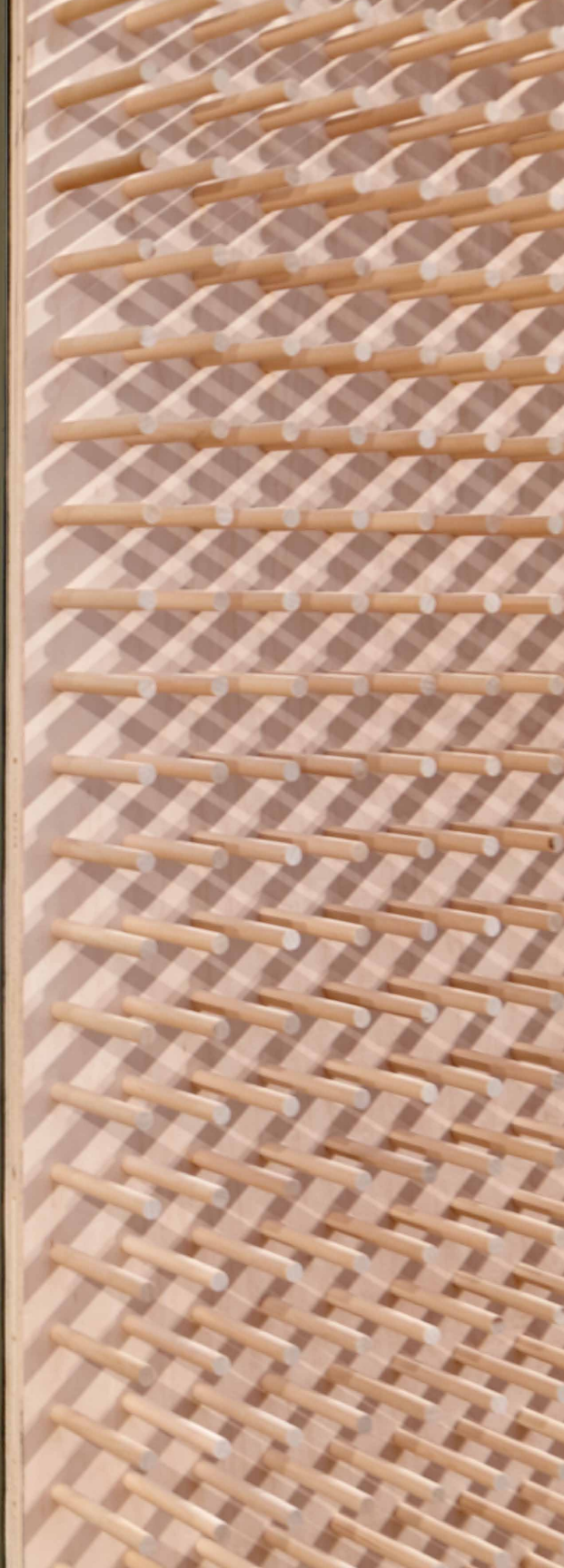




























Louise Despont: The Pure Dimensions of the Individual

Raymond Foye

Drawing is like walking backwards, blindfolded in a dark room—feeling the objects in a space to find where you are. A form of meditation. Rediscovering something already known—creating a loop that connects the unconscious, the conscious, and the higher self in a moment recorded in line on paper. The use of triangles to build up lines and forms is like the life blood of the drawings. They are always moving. They are the ever moving activation of a still image. —LOUISE DESPONT¹

In the Veda it is said, every form is an image (of an original form). This is divine knowledge. —VASTUSUTRA UPANISAD²

Drawing has mechanics at its root: at some level, every drawing is a diagram of the energies and forces of its own creation, which in turn play out in the world in the subtle realms of thought, feeling, and imagination. A drawing is a plan of action. It can be as much an explanation as a representation. Turning to the diagram as the basis for her drawings, Louise Despont has constructed a remarkable body of work that gives new form and shape to eternal themes, concerns, and ideas and reminds us of the ways the visual arts comprise a body of knowledge that we may enter into and of which we may partake.

Despont's drawings open a space that is both ancient and contemporary. In her works made on old ledger paper with the original notations obscured by successive layers of mark making, Despont creates an archaic atmosphere suggested by the paper together with the sense of layering and erasure, which evokes the palimpsestical approach of Cy Twombly. But her project also shares aspects of such information-based works as the "writings" of Hanne Darboven, where the activity of drawing itself is conducted as a self-reflective discourse. With its graph-paper ground and its reliance on a system that contains the seeds of its own unfolding, Despont's work equally calls to mind Jennifer Bartlett's *Rhapsody*, 1975–76, a similarly monumental composition made up of smaller gridded uniform panels. Most vividly for this viewer, they continue the itinerant project of Francesco Clemente, begun so brilliantly in Madras in the late 1970s and extending to the present day, with his

¹ Louise Despont in correspondence with Brett Littman, 2015.

² From the Second Sutra of the Vastusutra Upanisad as quoted in Alice Boner, with Bettina Bäumer and S. R. Sarma, *Vastusutra Upanisad: The Essence of Form in Sacred Art* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000), 40.

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painted tents from Rajasthan—large-scale visual environments that surround the viewer in an etheric envelope, activating bodies in space and space in bodies.

The basic forms of Despont's diagrams derive from sacred mandalas, traditional metaphysical mappings, and the related realm of sacred geometry. Although the mandala as such is an Indian or Tibetan schema of the cosmos, mandala-like expressions exist in various forms in nearly all cultures, including our own. As a child, Jackson Pollock accompanied his father on surveying trips throughout the American west. There, he encountered Navajo sand paintings that were indeed cosmic diagrams.³ Drawn directly on the ground, they were maps of the heavens and one's place in the universe. One need not elaborate on the obvious role these "drawings" played in the development of the abstract vocabulary of Pollock's mature work, yet to focus on their graphic form alone would be to overlook the broader metaphysical meaning of the mandala. Indeed, for Despont the form of the mandala is far less relevant than the diagram's capacity to suggest a cosmic content. In fact, in Tibet, the term for "mandala" does not only mean the diagram as such but the realm that the diagram articulates. Tibetan Dzogchen master Namkhai Norbu writes:

Mandala means dimension, pure dimension. The pure dimension of the individual. The contrary of a mandala is samsara: impure dimension. It means then one has no knowledge or understanding of one's nature. When you have knowledge and understanding then you have the possibility to manifest your pure dimension. So that is mandala, really what it means.⁴

"The pure dimension of the individual," taken in this sense, is an apt description of the subject of Louise Despont's monumental drawings. Like those extolled by William Blake, the "bounding lines" of Despont's figures reveal—again to reference the poet—body as the

3 Jackson Pollock, "My Painting," in *Pollock: Painting*, ed. Barbara Rose (New York: Agrinde Publications Ltd., 1980), 65. Originally published in *Possibilities I*, New York, Winter 1947–48.

4 Chögyal Namkhai Norbu. "What Does Mandala Mean?" Video interview, 1989. <https://vimeo.com/album/2833211/video/39714595>

“human form divine,” the reciprocity, that is to say, of the individual and the cosmos. Her drawings are compositional diagrams rooted in esoteric knowledge of what in Indian philosophy is known as “the subtle body,” a commingling of visible forms and invisible forces. The sensitivities of pen, paper, and ink provide us with a transparency that allows us to gaze not only upon but through these works, to the motivating forces behind them. They remind us that we are always at the center of the universe, in that what we know empirically of the physical world, we know through being centered in our bodies.

How do Despont’s diagrams evolve? In writing about her current work, the artist describes a process that carefully balances an acute awareness of her historical lineage and an intuitive approach that allows each drawing to unfold in its own way, eschewing programmatic form, in an open “field” governed by breath and the perceiving mind:

The control I have over how a drawing will develop is minimal. I started the sixty-foot work knowing I wanted to explore the subtle body, but many cultures speak of a subtle body and the mapping and meaning can be quite different. I wasn’t interested in illustrating any one concept but wanted to discover for myself through the act of drawing what this meant to me. While my ideas are influenced by the hierarchies set forth in Indian, Tibetan, and Theosophical traditions, this is really a personal exploration based on my own experience and guided by the process of drawing.⁵

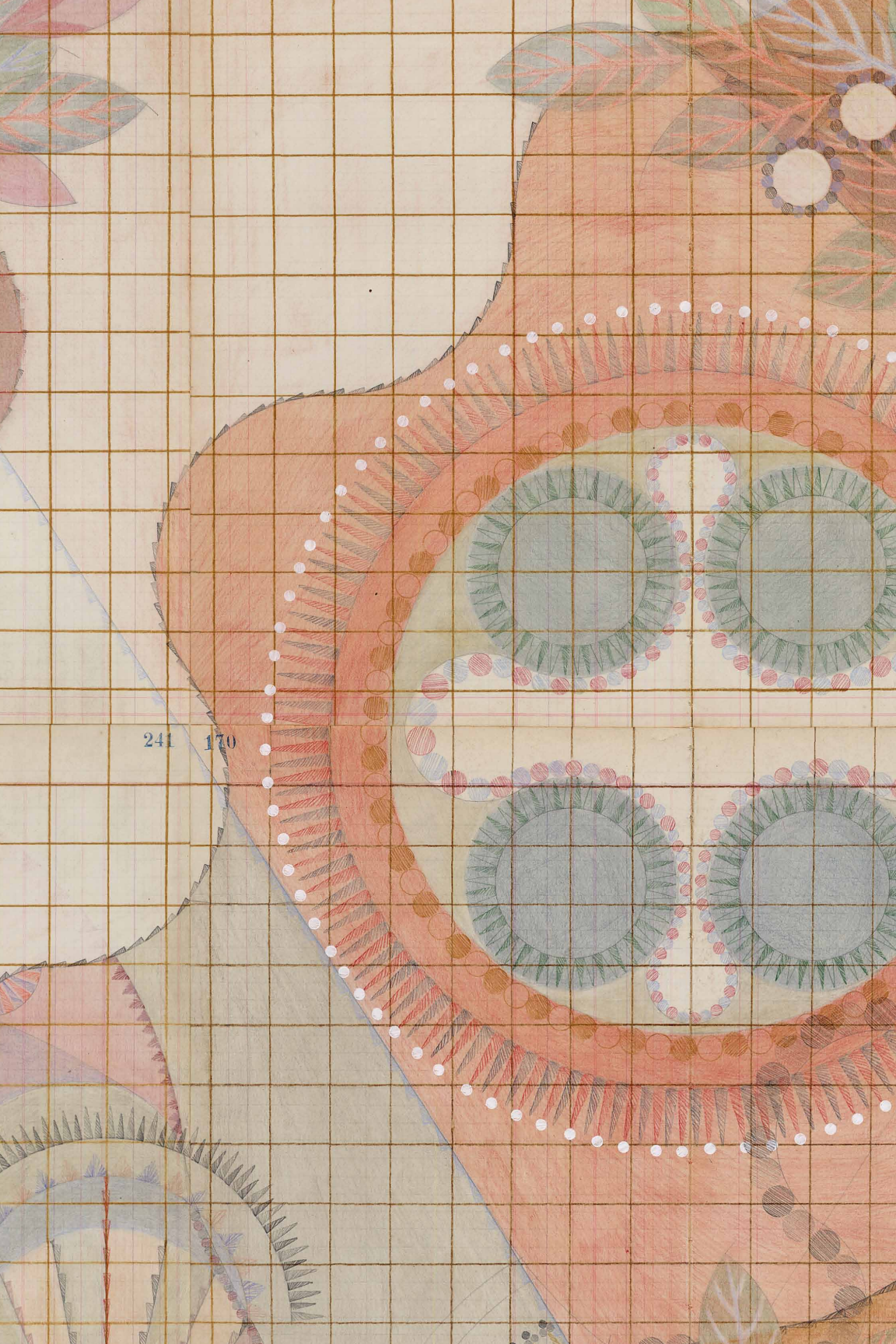
Francesco Clemente told an interviewer in 1987, “The making of a painting has to do with breathing, in a sense; the focus of ideas has to do with that.”⁶ The movement or rhythm in Despont’s work originates in the breath, and this accounts for the work’s grounded presence. These drawings are pervaded by a kind of peaceful abiding, rooted in attentiveness. The passages of decorative or ornamental patterning in the work are active components that engage the eye and mind and function as a form of trance—a mediation with the divine.⁷

⁵ Louise Despont in correspondence with Brett Littman, 2015.

⁶ Rainer Crone and Georgia Marsh, *Clemente: An Interview with Francesco Clemente* (New York: Elizabeth Avedon Editions/Vintage Books, 1987), 48.

⁷ For a discussion of the relationship between ornament and religious experience, see: Oleg Grabar, *The Mediation of Ornament (The A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts)* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).





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Gravitational forces, polarity and magnetism, electrical energy—all have their counterparts in the subtle body: chakras, kundalini, prana. Although these subjects have become rather familiar through “New Age” adaptations, for the founders of modern art they were pregnant discoveries. Kandinsky, Malevich, Mondrian and Kupka encountered them through the pioneering works of Theosophy. *Thought-Forms* by Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater and Leadbeater’s *Man Visible and Invisible* contained illustrations of “subtle energies” that are considered some of the first consciously abstract images.⁸ Roger Lipsey refers to this as the “hidden side of Modernism.”⁹

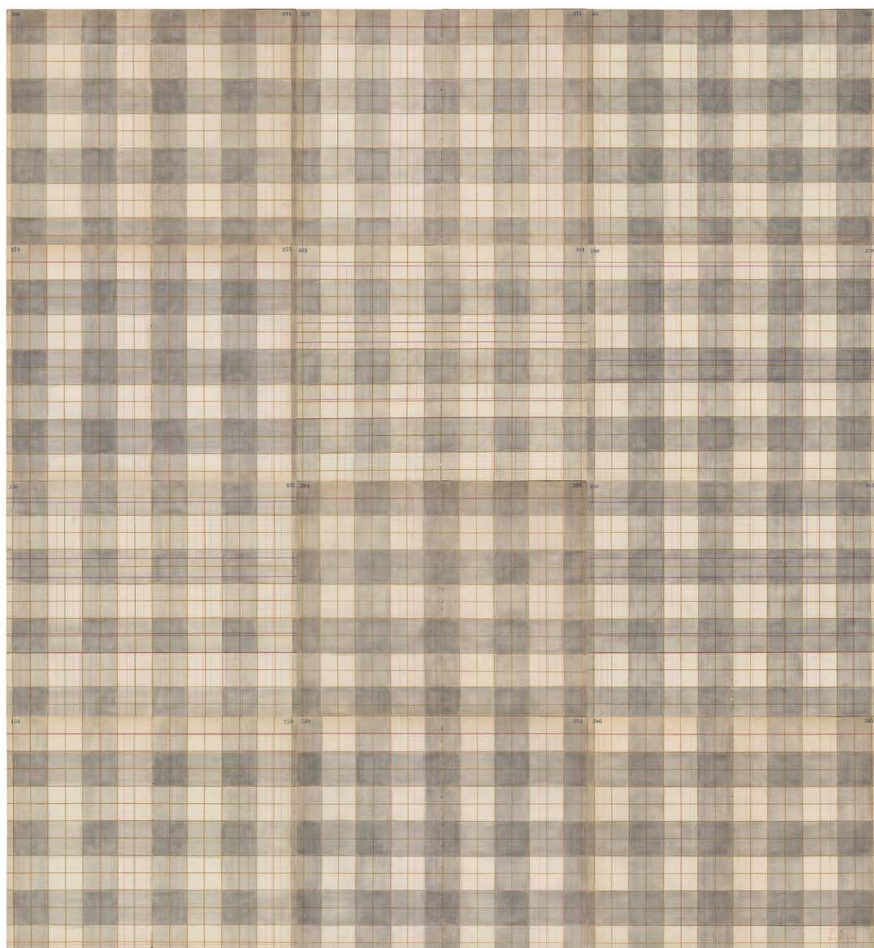
“Constructed” in both an actual and a metaphorical sense, Despont’s drawings are built up piece by piece in a grand architecture that calls to mind a temple edifice—an imposing façade hiding dimly lit interior spaces adorned with images of deities and other mythological figures. For the Indian, the temple is a world-image, reflecting and built in harmony with the universe; but also, according to Indian ideas, it is a mandala put into practice, an image of our true nature that exists in each one of us. The poet Philip Whalen once remarked of his work, “This poetry is a picture or graph of a mind moving,

8 The groundbreaking study of the role of Theosophy in the origins of abstract painting is Maurice Tuchman’s *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting, 1890–1985* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986). Despite the foundational role that occult tradition played in the origins of abstract art, these topics were gradually excluded from prevailing theories of modernism, with its tendency towards formalism (read: rationalism). Alchemy, hermetic philosophy, chakras, and the psychic body—these subjects became the province of “outsider” artists, whether they considered themselves as such or not. In the 1960s many of these ideas migrated into popular psychedelic culture and importantly, experimental film. Two important figures who kept the esoteric flame burning during these years were Harry Everett Smith (1923–1991) and Jordan Belson (1926–2011). Friends and colleagues, both fell under the spell of Kandinsky’s treatise *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1912), which set the course for their creative lives. Both artists moved from painting into animated film, where kineticism and sound could be added to the palette, but both stayed true to non-objective principles, with the mandala and sacred geometry at the basis of their work. Fortunately, by the end of the 1980s prevailing aesthetic hierarchies were radically disassembled due to the arrival of a new generation of artists, largely from Europe. Most important from the perspective of this discussion was Francesco Clemente, whose relevance to Despont’s work is discussed at the outset of this essay.

9 Roger Lipsey. *An Art of Our Own: The Spiritual in Twentieth Century Art* (Boston: Shambala, 1989), 2.

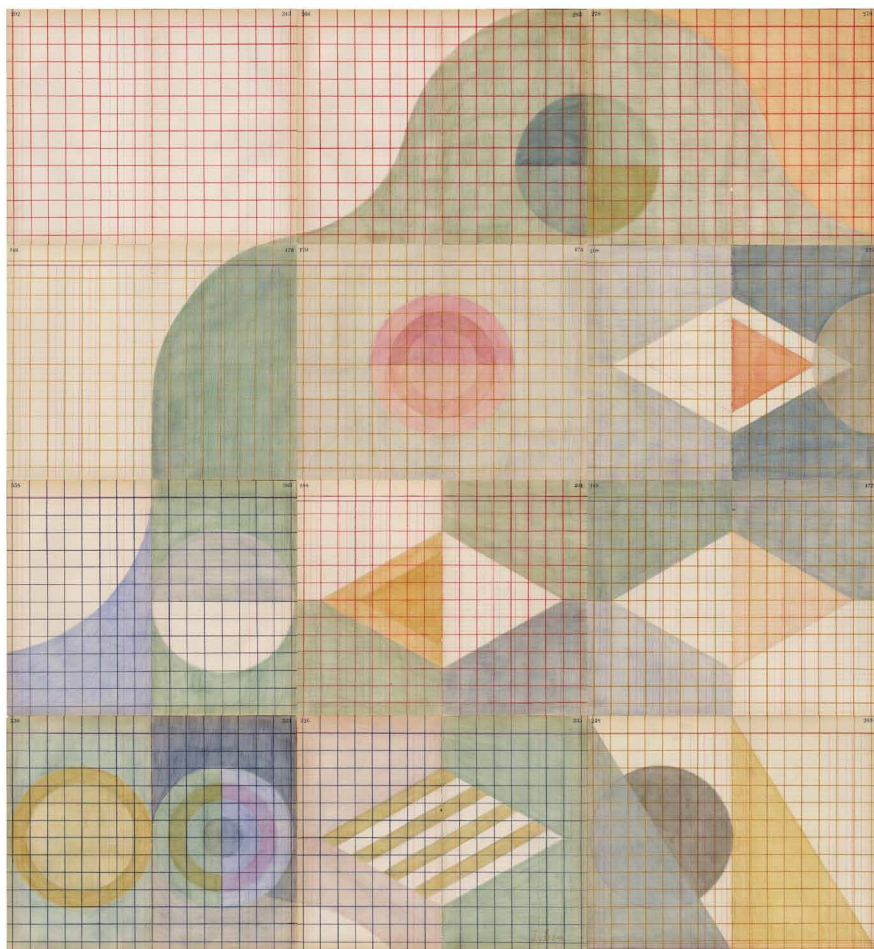
which is a world body being here and now which is history . . . and you.”¹⁰ This statement could serve as an epigram to Despont’s monumental commission for The Drawing Center.

¹⁰ Philip Whalen, “Statement of Poetics,” *New American Poetry Anthology*, ed. Donald Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960), 420. This statement first appears titled, “Since You Ask Me,” as the conclusion to Whalen’s book *Memoirs of an Interglacial Age* (1960) and was created as a press release for a reading tour Whalen and Michael McClure went on in 1959.



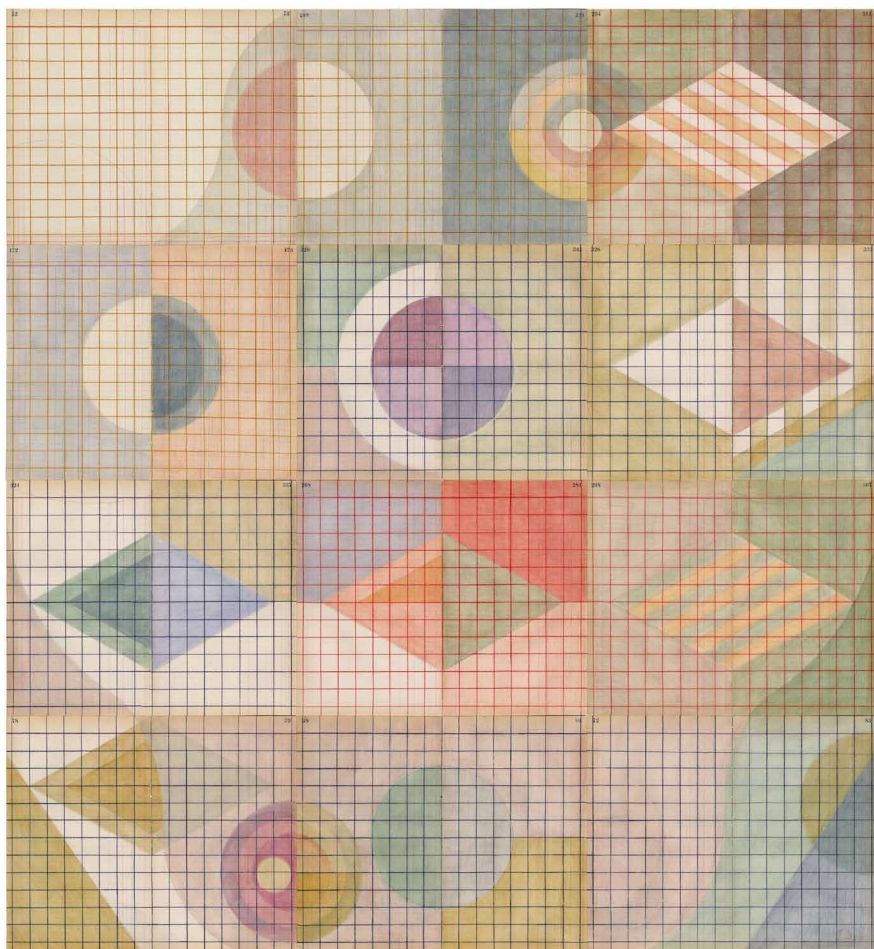
PL. 1

Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture (Balancer No. 1), 2015



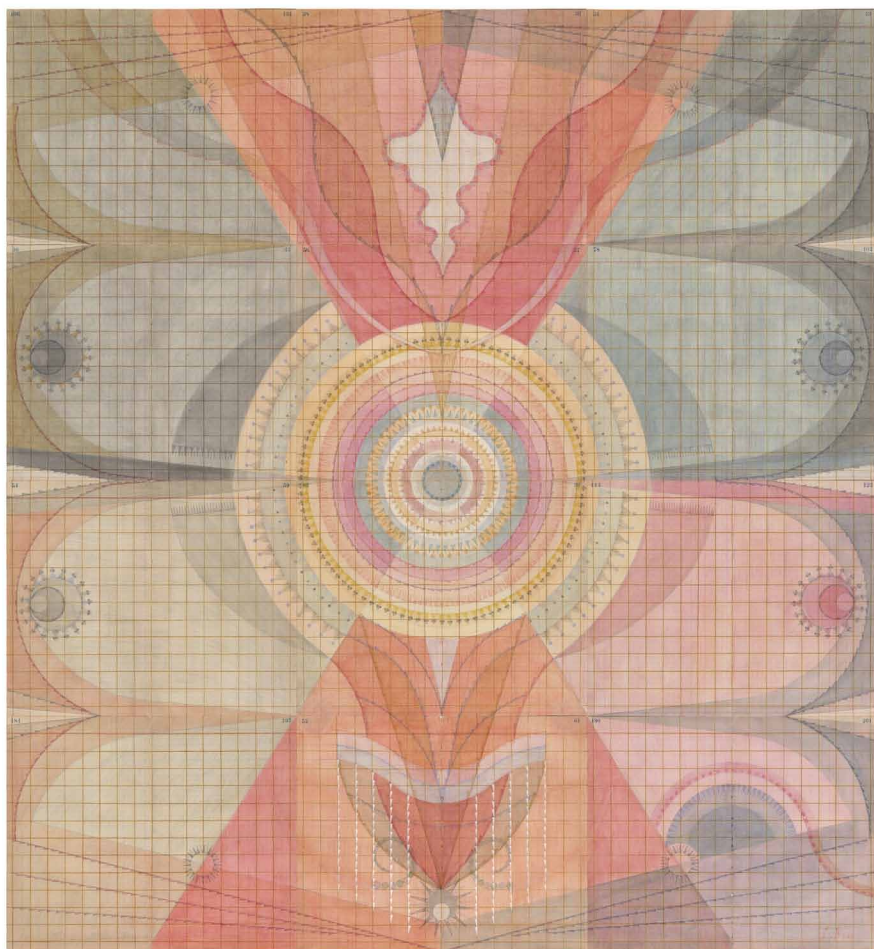
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Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture (Pure Potential No. 1), 2015



PL. 3

Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture (Pure Potential No. 2), 2015



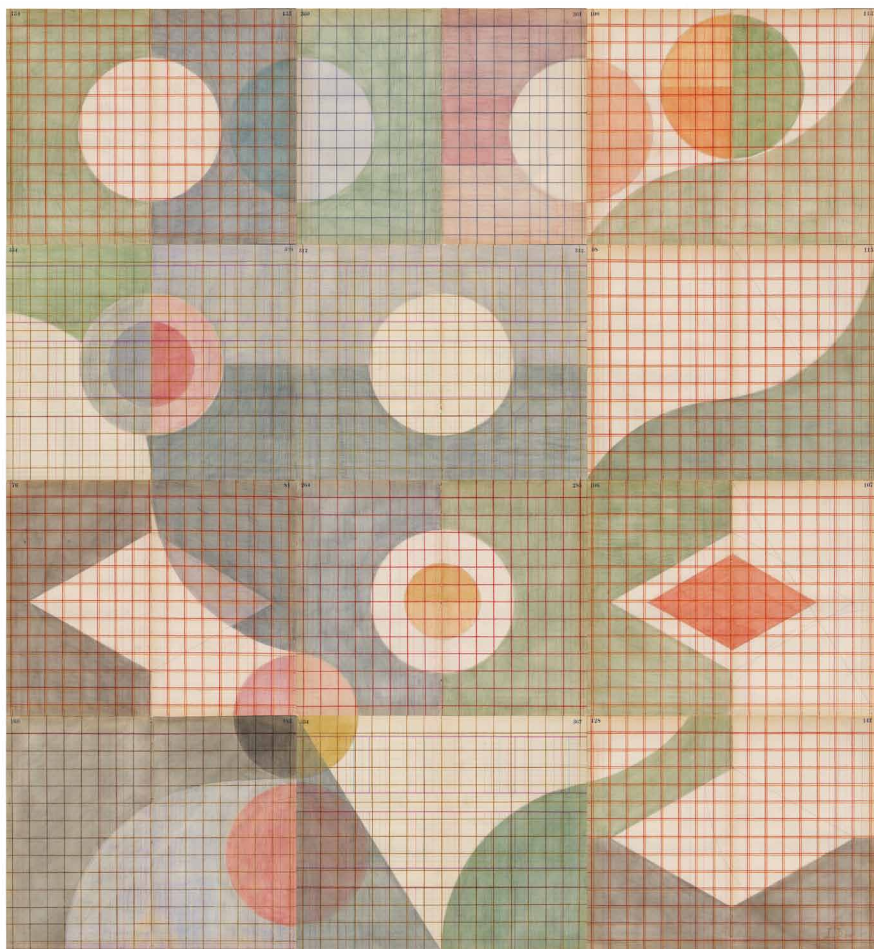
PL. 4

Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture (Fertilization), 2015



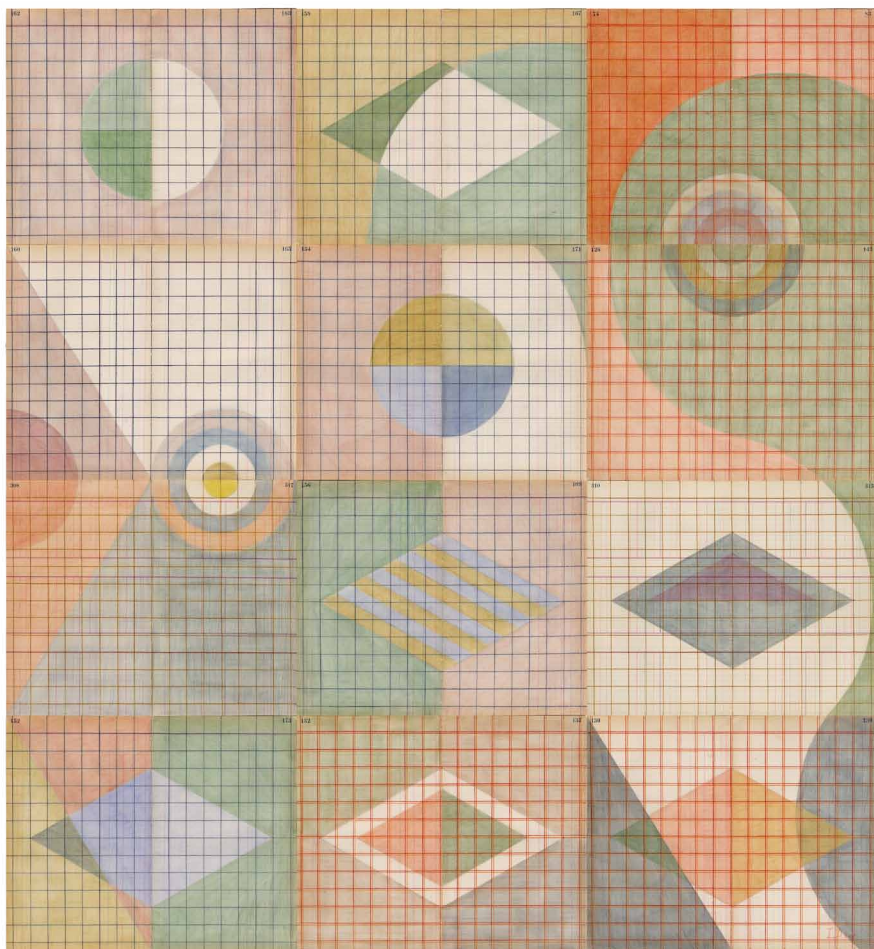
PL. 5

Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture (Embryo), 2015



PL. 6

Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture (Pure Potential No. 3), 2015

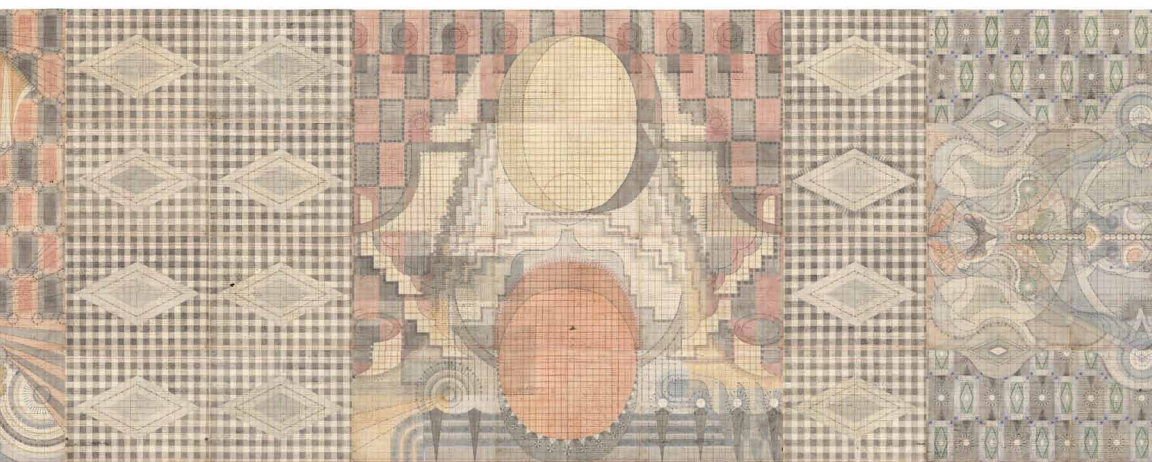


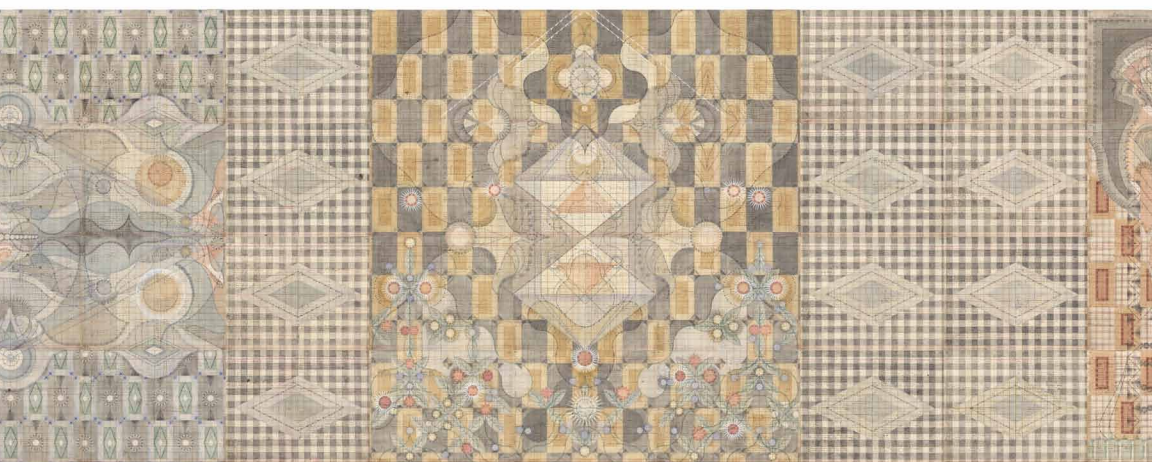
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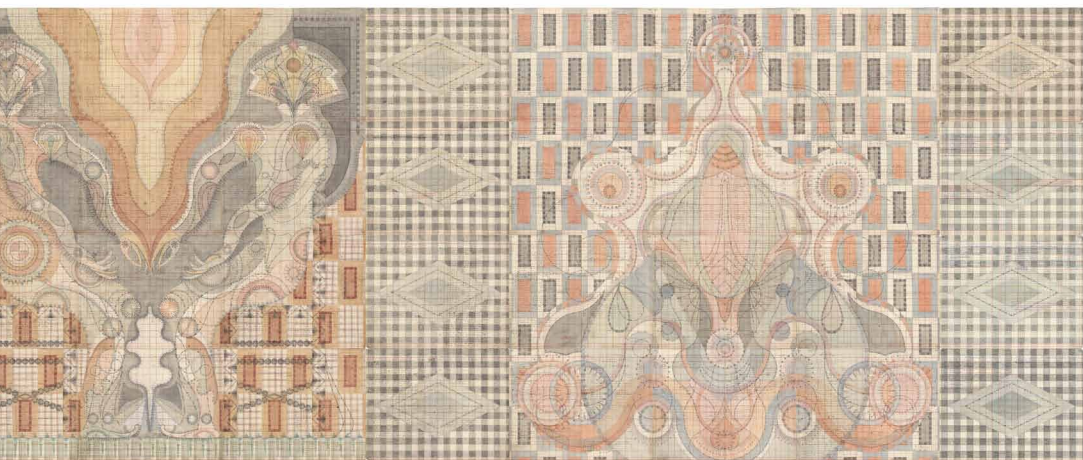
Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture (Pure Potential No. 4), 2015











Interview *with* Louise Despont
by Brett Littman

Brett Littman: You are primarily known as someone who draws. Have you made sculpture? Are you interested in performance or video in relation to your practice?

Louise Despont: I never considered performance because what I like most about making work is the ability to disappear behind it. I have made sculpture and film in the past but what has made my relationship with drawing so strong is that there are no obstructions, technicalities, or intermediaries between me and the process. Sculpture requires a variety of materials, space, tools, mess, and the ability to assemble and construct. Filmmaking requires endless hours of pre-planning, equipment, relying on the help of others, and lots of technical headaches. With drawing you just pick up a pencil, and you can immediately access this energy. The whole process is included in the final result, and it's so simple and direct—perhaps this is why I never tire of it. That's not to say I won't return to filmmaking or sculpture at some point, but drawing has continued to captivate me for all these years. I always feel excited about what's next.

How did you come to use antique ledger paper as a substrate for your work? What did it offer you that a blank piece of paper could not?

Although I went to Brown, I took two years of painting at the Rhode Island School of Design. I was a little traumatized by the experience of being at art school. That's actually why I stopped painting and started making films. I became really self-conscious about the marks of my hand: it felt like everything had to be so cool. I'm happy for the experience because it gave me a clean break with what I had been doing up to that point and allowed me to enter new territory. When I stopped painting, I started drawing a lot in my class notebooks, which happened to be old ledger books that I found in a local Portuguese market. The intimately scaled, used pages filled with lists of accounts were surfaces that didn't possess the psychic pressure of freshly stretched blank canvases or art-store-bought sheets of paper. Also, the book format and the details of these account books really informed my way of drawing. I fell into making inkblots, which were the catalyst for working with symmetrical forms and pairs, and the lined pages were already a kind of scaffolding for working with geometric forms. Over the course of several years, I must have filled

fifteen books with inkblots, collages, and drawings. During that time, I found my first architectural stencil and began making very simple geometric compositions in the books.

What materials do you use to draw? Has that been consistent over the years?

I work with colored pencil, graphite, architectural stencils, French curves, compasses, and rulers on the pages of the ledger books. Occasionally, I use white ink and gold or copper leaf. I love how something that seems very limited can end up opening onto vast possibilities. Stencils and pencils have been the most remarkable restraint, and I still feel like I'm going deeper into what they can do. My use of colored pencil has almost crossed over into painting territory; I rub the pigment into the paper with tissue until it begins to look like a wash of watercolor, then I play with layering and mixing. One major difference between working in this way and painting is that I do not pre-mix colors on a palette. Instead, the color is mixed on the page. Each successive change that happens, then, in the drawing is a command or thought that is executed later. The mark does not come from a physical or emotional impulse. There is a period of time between each change that takes place on the page, and this allows space for contemplation.

Your father is an architect. Did you grow up looking at architectural drawings? Did that have any influence on how you construct your own drawings?

Yes, definitely. My father always had an amazing collection of books on art and architecture and these beautiful old watercolor plans in his office and in our apartment. They seemed so mysterious because they contained symbols and information that I was unable to read. I also liked that the space was defined by the contrast between organic and geometric forms. Later, I felt that my attraction to architectural drawings was related to my discovery of Tibetan thangkas and Indian mandalas. The stylized symbols of these maps of both real and imagined spaces are a sort of writing that only the adept can decipher. I like images of spaces that can be entered and moved through visually. Flattened spaces, frontal and overhead

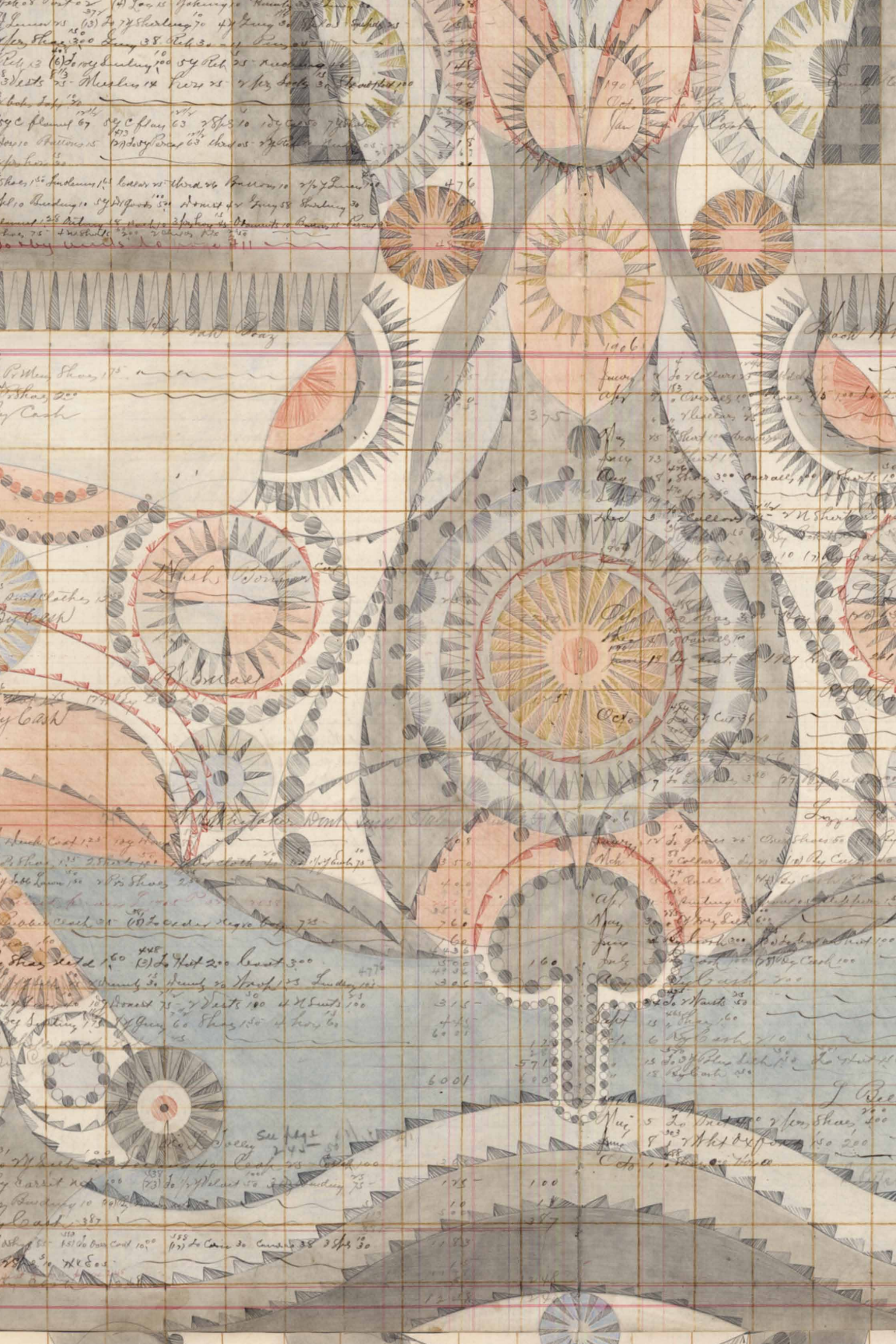
views, and the symmetry of a theater stage are also portals into other realms. The power and beauty of geometry is deeply embedded in our consciousness, and I'm amazed at how information and energy can be visually communicated so directly in this way. How nice to bypass language and thought and directly access emotion and experience.

You often start a new work without any pre-conceived compositional strategy. Can you describe how you end up with such complex-seeming graphic systems without planning them?

That question used to really worry me. I would finish a work and feel like there was no way I could ever find my way through that maze again. I think what has changed for me is that now I'm comfortable with this process. There is the part that I do control, and there is the part that I do not control. I trust in this back and forth. I don't want to over mystify it, but I also don't want to discredit a process that really is beyond my understanding. There seems to be a handful of different ways the drawings develop, and sometimes I can recognize a pattern, but I enjoy it most when I am totally surprised by the work. With certain drawings I have to erase a lot. Other times, I don't have to erase anything. It's a process of putting one foot in front of the other. Each decision is a step toward a more focused drawing, and the work unfolds itself.

Many of your early works were made on the open leaves of a double ledger page. When did you start to combine pages to make large compositions? Was Winter's Telephone, 2008, the first work like this? Why did you feel that you needed to scale up?

With all my drawings I can clearly remember what was happening in my life when I was making them because the energy is so deeply embedded. Looking at the drawings can almost be like looking at a photograph of myself. *Winter's Telephone* is the first work that is larger than a single page, but I wasn't dealing with space and form when I made it. It was like working on a musical score, and I was still just scratching out verses. That piece seemed to take forever, maybe four or five months during a particularly solitary winter. At that point, silence and solitude were teaching me to work. The next significant and large-scale work I made was *Bluemoon, Pondicherry*



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Keatman

1906

C. A. Pedersen

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in 2009 while living in India. This work marks the most important period of growth and discovery for me in drawing up until that point. I had just fallen in love, and this dissolved so many limitations in my mind and opened my heart. Suddenly I knew how to draw in a way that was so much more confident and vibrant. *Bluemoon, Pondicherry* also marked my first tentative steps into color. Love removed fear from my work and was one of the best drawing teachers that I've had. As for the importance of "scaling up," it just seemed to happen naturally. The larger works feel like deeper waters and there are different creatures that live at different depths.

Let's talk about your site-specific commission for The Drawing Center. Can you talk about the title, Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture?

Before I begin a drawing, the first thing I do is graph the paper. The title of the show is about the magnetic capabilities that this grid has when it is imagined as scaffolding. When I look at the blank graphed pages, I see three scales of graphs: a small scale graph, which is a one-inch hand drawn line; a second graph, which is each ledger page divided by the center crease; and the third and largest, which is the individual pages. These three scales of the graph are a scaffold that attracts energy and allows me to visualize form at multiple scales simultaneously. So, the title comes from the process of making the work but it also refers to the human body, which is also a form of Energy Scaffolding. We receive this scaffold of a body at birth and our life is a process of accretion that results in our very particular architecture. Our bodies and energy fields are full of information organized into this amazingly complex and yet fragile structure. This is our great moment of specificity but also just a brief pattern in time before we return again to formless energy—to pure potential.

What do you think the commission has allowed you to explore that you haven't been able to in your other exhibitions to date?

I was really excited about the opportunity to create an architecture in which I could take the entire experience of the space into consideration, including the floor, walls, lighting, and sound. Scale is one of the most interesting things this project allows me to explore.

As I was working on the oval room, there was a very interesting snowball effect because the energy continued to grow and become stronger as the project progressed. The completed sections of the work informed and pointed to the beginning of each subsequent section, clarifying and reinforcing the direction of the work. Because this series is read as a sequence, there is a new sense of rhythm and an ever-deepening sense of narrative in the project. My studio floor is only about twenty feet long, so I was never able to lay the whole work out at once, but every few weeks I placed different sections of the piece next to one other to see how they communicated. As I did this, I looked for something in the more completed sections that could suggest necessary moves in the newly started pieces. I appreciated the opportunity to discover drawings that existed to the left and right of each piece. It was a bit like tearing down the walls around a drawing so that the work is no longer just a window into another dimension, but actually a place I can enter. I had a sense that this kind of expansion was potentially limitless. I always felt that I could draw what is above or below each of my drawings if only I was not constrained by time or space. I'd like to continue working in this way, because the journey in making these large works has been so much more profound.

How did you come up with the idea of constructing a rectangular wooden room and an oval room made of sheetrock and plywood within The Drawing Center gallery? How do you see these architectural forms affecting the way the viewer takes in the drawings?

I went through several variations before I decided on two very simple and contrasting structures in which I could establish a basic polar relationship. The oval is large, light-filled, and smooth, while the *Pure Potential* room is small, spiked, and dim. Both rooms trace the different processes by which energy transforms and moves from form into formlessness and vice versa, but the work in each space exists in different realms. Drawings in the *Pure Potential* room represent a preconscious state, a state that is on the cusp of becoming physical, while the oval room contains drawings of experiences that relate to the human mind-body complex. The structure of the oval room is essentially an “eye of awareness” with a bench for the resting pupil.

The oval room is something I have wanted to do for years, ever since I visited Monet's *Nymphéas* at the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris. I loved the experience of being with Monet's work in a room without right angles. It's a dreamlike space where the borders between the painting and the viewer are dissolved.

Because I designed the rooms before making the work, this past year has been a process of discovering what would actually be inside of the spaces I envisioned. I started with only the vaguest idea and the architecture became like my stencils in that the drawings grew from the limitations of the architectural space. In both spaces, the drawings are hung unframed. This is the first time I've ever attempted this. Works on paper are fragile, especially works on paper that are more than one hundred years old. Because this is the case, these drawings can only be installed in this way for a short period, but I think the experience will be much more personal and direct.

Can you describe the works in the wooden room? Why do you call it the Pure Potential room?

The room is a space for formless energy at the point when it transitions into form. It is a womb whose spiked exterior is a protective surface. The end grain floor tiles are the veins and circulatory system feeding the work. I think this quote from Bruno Schulz's *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass* is actually a good description of the *Pure Potential* drawings:

There are things that cannot ever occur with any precision. They are too big and too magnificent to be contained in mere facts. They are merely trying to occur; they are checking whether the ground of reality can carry them. And they quickly withdraw, fearing to lose their integrity in the frailty of realization.

Can you tell me more about the sequence of images in the oval room? There seems to be a very specific narrative to the drawings—moving from discrete male and female forms to the eventual merging of the male and female polarity principles. How are we supposed to read these images?

I wouldn't want to say there is any one way to read the images because my hope is that the viewer is free to have a personal experience in

the space with whatever pattern or energy is most relevant to him or her. That said, there is a narrative progression through the oval room, but there could have been infinitely more stages added between each section, so what we really have is a very brief outline. The oval room is an exploration of the human form, the circulation of energy, and our capacity to exist and connect to more subtle planes. The background of each section is the same checkered, rectangular pattern whose variations reflect various realms.

The first and second sections establish the male and female physical body, showing circulatory paths as well as channels and pathways of energy that flow through and around the body. These sections are in a physical realm, but there are markers of connections and openings into subtle energy fields everywhere.

The third section is the mental body. In this panel you can see two large ovals. The top oval shifts horizontally, while the bottom one shifts vertically. These are the divisions of the mind. The ovals sit above the waters of the unconscious, surrounded by stairs and tunnels. To visualize the merging of these ovals is to unify and still the mind.

The fourth panel is the breath body. It depicts a horizontal figure whose body is translucent above the ocean. It incorporates all the elements of the three preceding drawings, the outline of the physical body and the large ovals of the mental body, and the whole figure is held in the same large diamond (the symbol of pure awareness) that is seen in the center of each checkered panel. It is the center point of the oval room—the axis of balance, based upon the relationship of inhalation and exhalation. It is tranquility, sleep, expansion, and dissolution.

The fifth panel is source energy. It is the source of all creation and it is Love. Like the sun, source energy gives life to the flowers and plants that surround it. There are four symmetrical doves pointing toward the center. The current emitting from the central crystal shape is burning off a shadow layer. It is the divine pulsating current, which is the source of all that is.

The sixth panel is the transition of energy at death. The physical form returns to formlessness, and this process is guarded by a male

and female figure. The colorful V-form at the top of the drawing is a release of energy, and the white form at the bottom center is Spirit.

The seventh panel is the union between the male and female polarity principles. It is the meeting of two perfectly matched architectures. It is communion and communication, which once again becomes the beginning of the creative cycle.

What do the checkerboard interludes in the oval room represent?

The checkered pattern is inspired by *kain poleng*, a pattern that is synonymous with Bali, where I've been living for the past year. This textile is seen everywhere. It is hung from the base of shrines, wrapped around sacred trees, and worn by men during ceremonies. The pattern is used to honor the spirit of a particular location. It also represents the sacred balance between light and dark. The *kain poleng* is used as a reminder of the importance of maintaining our sacred responsibilities so that we can remain in the light, sustain our clear vision, and keep ourselves from falling into darkness. My mother is also a healer. She works with flower essences. There is always a moment toward the end of her process when she asks, "which balancers and stabilizers are needed?" I chose to use this pattern for all these reasons—to recognize the impact of Bali on this work, to honor the spirit of the space, as a reminder of sacred balance, and as a balancer or stabilizer for the drawings.

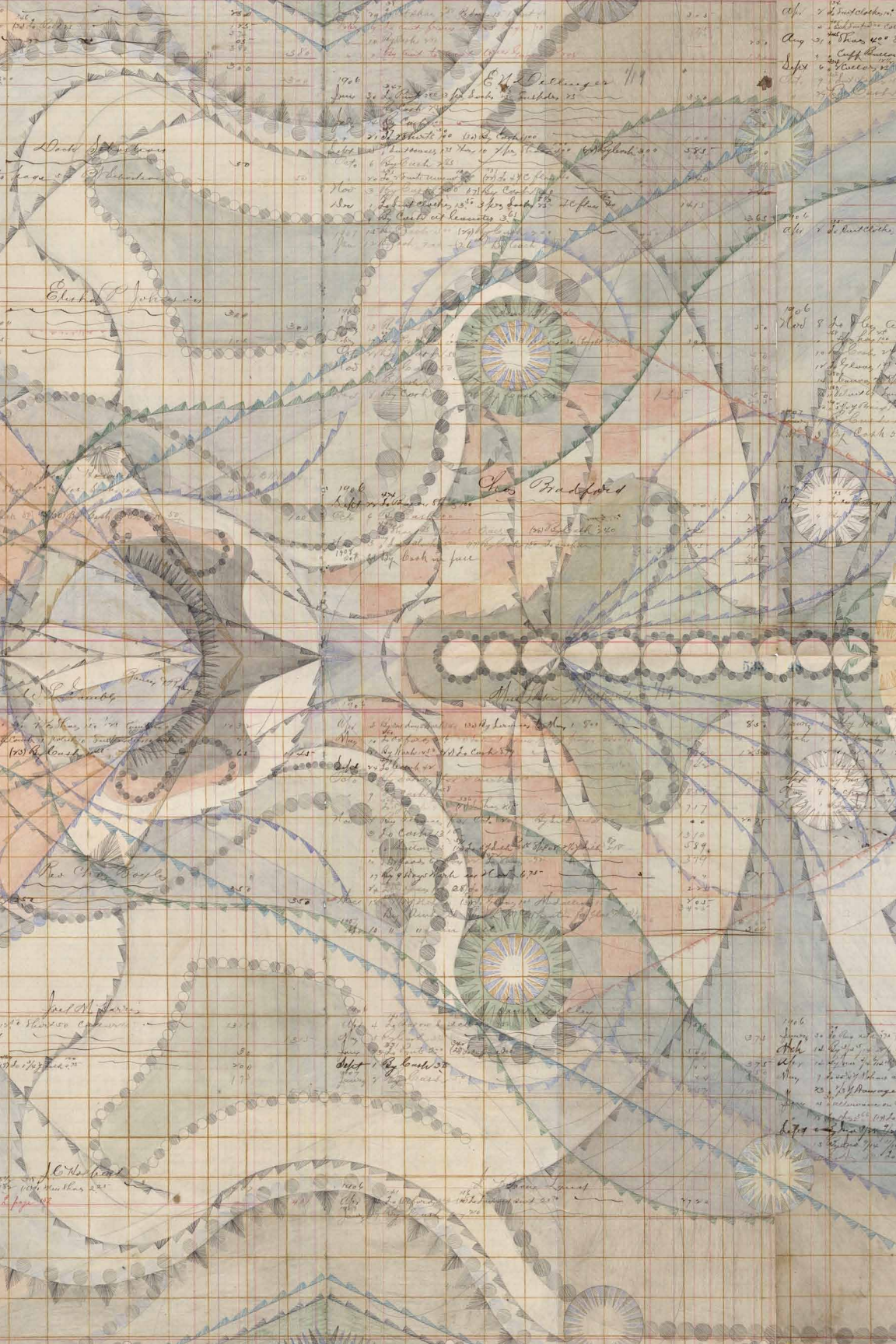
How has your time in Bali changed you as a person? And how has that affected the work that you have made for The Drawing Center?

There are so many aspects of Bali that have had a powerful influence on me, and it is no exaggeration to say that I have been transformed by my time here. I grew up in New York City and have spent most of my life in big cities. In Bali, I really discovered how much I love village life. Its scale and speed feels like a huge relief for me. I have been living in a house that is only reachable by a small path that is just wide enough for a motorbike. The path turns into a tiny dirt footpath that leads through rice fields. Being in a remote area and disconnected from a road has been essential for the drawings in this exhibition. Living in Bali has been a chance to break away from a

non-stop stream of outside influences and really have the earth below and the stars above. When I walk home at night, the moon is the only light source. I walk through the rice fields using my cell phone as a flashlight, stepping over frogs and hoping not to see the occasional snake. Experiencing this deep silence stirs up an interesting fear, one that I have come to appreciate: the fear of being in the dark, of being alone, the fear of both the silence and the sounds heard in the night. These intuitive fears are almost childlike, yet they are still so powerful. Walking home at night is like entering the studio or beginning a new drawing, because I am confronted with a silence that could be either terrifying or a space of real clarity and insight, depending on my relationship to fear.

The Hindu culture of Bali is also totally singular, and their extensive practice of daily offerings and ceremonies has the effect of creating an energy that is unlike any other place I've ever experienced. The constant stream of daily offerings makes you aware of a reality that is larger than yourself and creates a space that is very much alive with communication. I feel so grateful to the Balinese people who have been so generous in the way they share their culture and wisdom. I have been invited to attend astonishingly complex mass cremation ceremonies, water temple purifications, marriages, tooth filings, and visits to Balinese healers. Their ceremonies and rituals mark the important transitions in life and offer so many lessons and so much healing. And finally there is the spirit of the place itself. If you ask anyone who has spent a significant amount of time there, they will tell you that Bali can embrace you or spit you out, but that it will always show you the very thing that you need to see.

I've also felt a strong connection to the textiles of Indonesia. There is a vast range of techniques across the islands, all of which tell a particular cultural story, convey a belief, or recount a history of trade influence. I had the chance to visit the island of Sumba and found an interesting correspondence between my drawings and Sumbanese weavings. I realized that the warp and weft (the vertical and horizontal threads used on a loom) create a structure that is similar to the gridded ledger paper, and I recognized how this limitation (or scaffold) invites a certain kind of form and symbolic language to develop. Even just within the island of Sumba, there is a wide range



The image shows a page from a historical ledger or account book, featuring a large, intricate drawing of a ship's hull and rigging in the background. The page is filled with handwritten entries in cursive, organized into columns. The entries include dates, names, and numerical values, likely representing financial transactions or inventory. The paper is aged and shows signs of wear, with some ink bleed-through from the reverse side.

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of *ikat* (a dyeing technique and weaving style) that are all still made with the same ancestral techniques and natural dyes that have been used for hundreds of years. The *ikat* patterns are made by tying and dyeing the threads before weaving, and the imagery of these textiles can be nearly psychedelic with a level of figurative detail that seems impossible to achieve. The Sumbanese textiles tell stories about ancestral worship, travels to the afterworld, funeral rites, weddings, and sacrifices all in a language of symbols and geometric forms that move between abstraction and figuration in a way that resonates with my work. Most textiles are made for ceremonial use, which means they mark important moments of transition and transformation, and this is what I was focused on while drawing this body of work.

In the process of working on the installation you have decided to collaborate with Aaron Taylor Kuffner, who builds electronic gamelans or gamelatrons, as he calls them. Why include these instruments in the installation? How do you see them operating in the space? Do you plan to compose scores for them?

The gamelan is essentially the soundtrack of Bali. Its songs animate all important temple ceremonies and dance performances. It is common to see local groups practicing in the *banjars* (shared community spaces), and at night I can hear the sounds of late night ceremonies drifting through the rice fields from my home. Its hypnotic and meditative sound is ever present, so when I learned about Aaron's project, his robotic gamelan orchestras and site-specific compositions, I reached out to him about collaborating. Those sounds and vibrations feel embedded in the drawings. It felt essential to have an element of sound to harmonize and unify the space in order to complete the work. Aaron will compose several scores directly in the space based on his reading of the installation.

There are many references to Indian, Tibetan, and Theosophical traditions in these new works. How has your reading and study of the art from these traditions affected your thoughts about the subtle, or energy, body?

Those references and inspirations have been there since I began drawing nearly ten years ago, but in this show the work has taken

on a much more pointed focus. It all began in 2007 when, after discovering the work of Emma Kunz, I traveled to Würenlos in Switzerland to visit her home and view her drawings. I had recently graduated from college and felt this need to see her work in person. When I stood in the space surrounded by her drawings, I felt a sensation of finally seeing the images I had been waiting to see all my life. It felt like receiving a remedy, and this was the true beginning of my interest in drawing the subtle body, energy patterns, and vibrations. I felt deeply connected to Kunz's language, and viewing her work was a reminder of the very serious power of art to change you. On that trip I also hitchhiked to Rudolf Steiner's Goetheanum, which piqued my interest in Anthroposophy and then Theosophy and the *Thought-Form* drawings of Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater.

You also went to India...

That's right. In 2009 I lived in India for nine months on a Fulbright scholarship and also traveled in the region. During that time, I had the chance to visit many temples, but the Ajanta and Ellora caves, the Jain temple in Ranakpur, and the Buddhist monasteries in Nepal left a particularly strong impression. My experience of these sacred spaces connected me to the same element that I felt while visiting Emma Kunz's home, which was an ability to be transported in time and space. I experienced a feeling of respite through this connection with something eternal, a deep, deep silence, and a sense of awe at the devotion that could create such impossible beauty.

In 2014, I was invited by a friend and collector to attend a symposium on the work of Hilma af Klint at the Louisiana Museum in Denmark. The exuberance of her suite of large works gave me this tremendous energy and started to make me think seriously about the possibilities of pushing scale in my work. That same summer, I saw an exhibit at the Rubin Museum called *Bodies in Balance*. I was interested in the Tibetan Buddhist illustrated medical texts that blend medical and spiritual sciences. I was intrigued by the mappings of birth, illness, and death and how these internal processes were visualized before modern science and medicine, when there was still space for energy and spirits, winds and demons. There is something about the way visual language is used to categorize, classify, and map these unseen

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processes that felt like fertile ground. What better way to access these spaces than to visualize them? It was just around this time that the possibility of creating a site-specific installation at The Drawing Center came up.

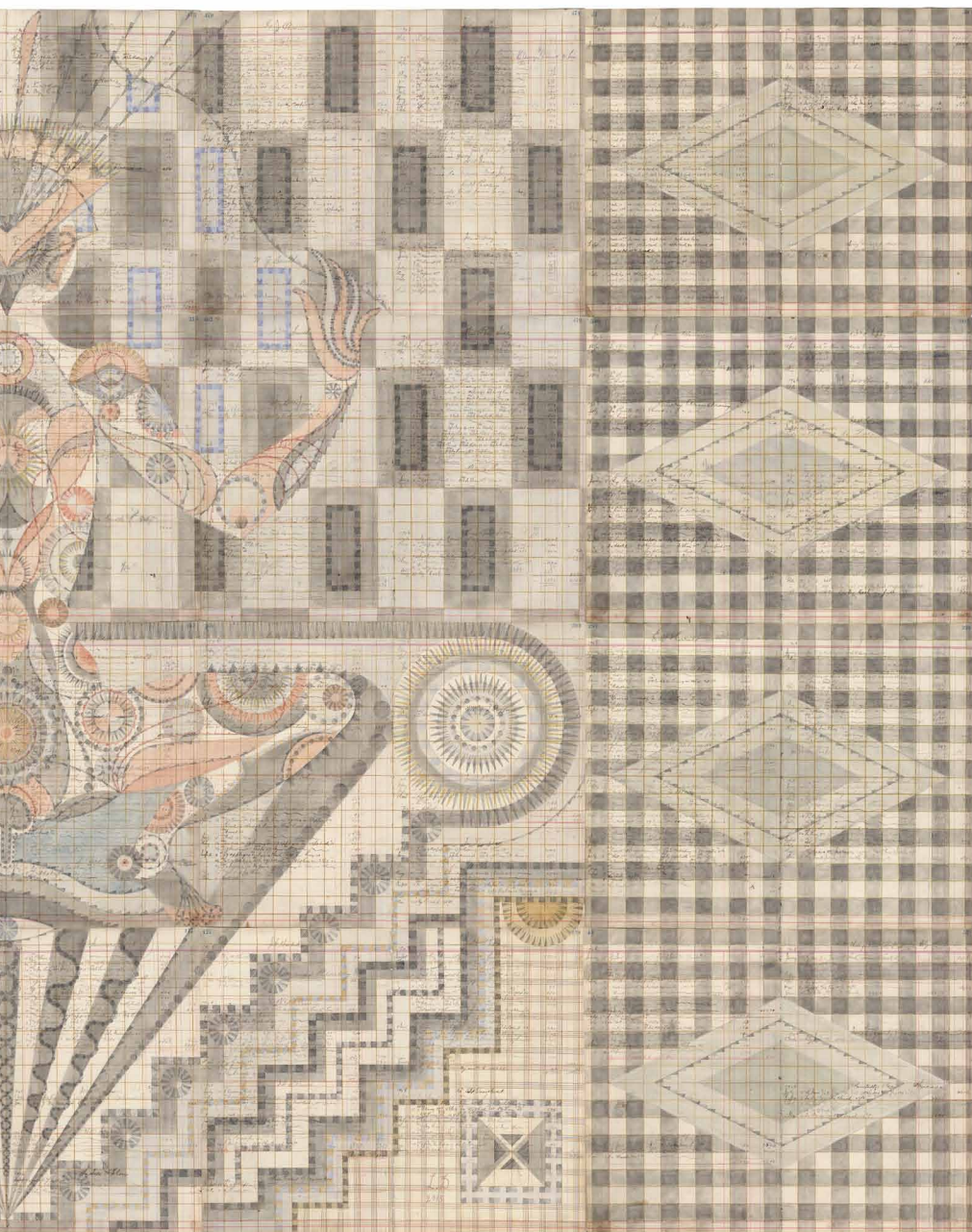
The chain of connections from artists, to temples, to mandalas and thangkas, and illustrated medical texts (to name only a few links) is a thread I have been following for many years. All of these artists and traditions visualize energy and represent complex spaces that exist between mind and body and between humans and the divine. What was most profound for me in The Drawing Center commission was the experience of really entering the space of the work and being enveloped in an explicit architecture. I wanted to attempt to make a space of my own that would offer a connection to these spaces of silence and contemplation.

There are many different traditions that go into great detail about the subtle body, and while I was interested in studying them, I knew I didn't want to illustrate any one concept. Instead, I wanted to discover what the subtle body meant to me through the act of drawing. The drawings in this exhibition are the result of my personal experiences, my relationships, my practice of yoga and meditation, and experiments with consciousness and perception. The necessity of honing sensitivity is at the root of these subtle body practices, which for me is also what drawing has always been about. In our culture we've moved so far away from appreciating sensitivity, because people have to be fairly desensitized in order to function in today's world. This means we're more and more removed from experiencing the information, communication, and knowledge that exists at the edges of our sensory capabilities. Approaching the drawings for this exhibition was about asking the following questions: What exists between the mind and the body? How can I visualize the unseen aspects that connect us to each other, to nature, and to the divine? What is the intelligence of the body? What is the relationship between the physical, the emotional, and the spiritual? How can awareness and intention potentially offer us greater access to the unfolding of these processes, change our experience, and affect the world around us?



PL. 10

Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture (Subtle and Circulatory, Male), 2015

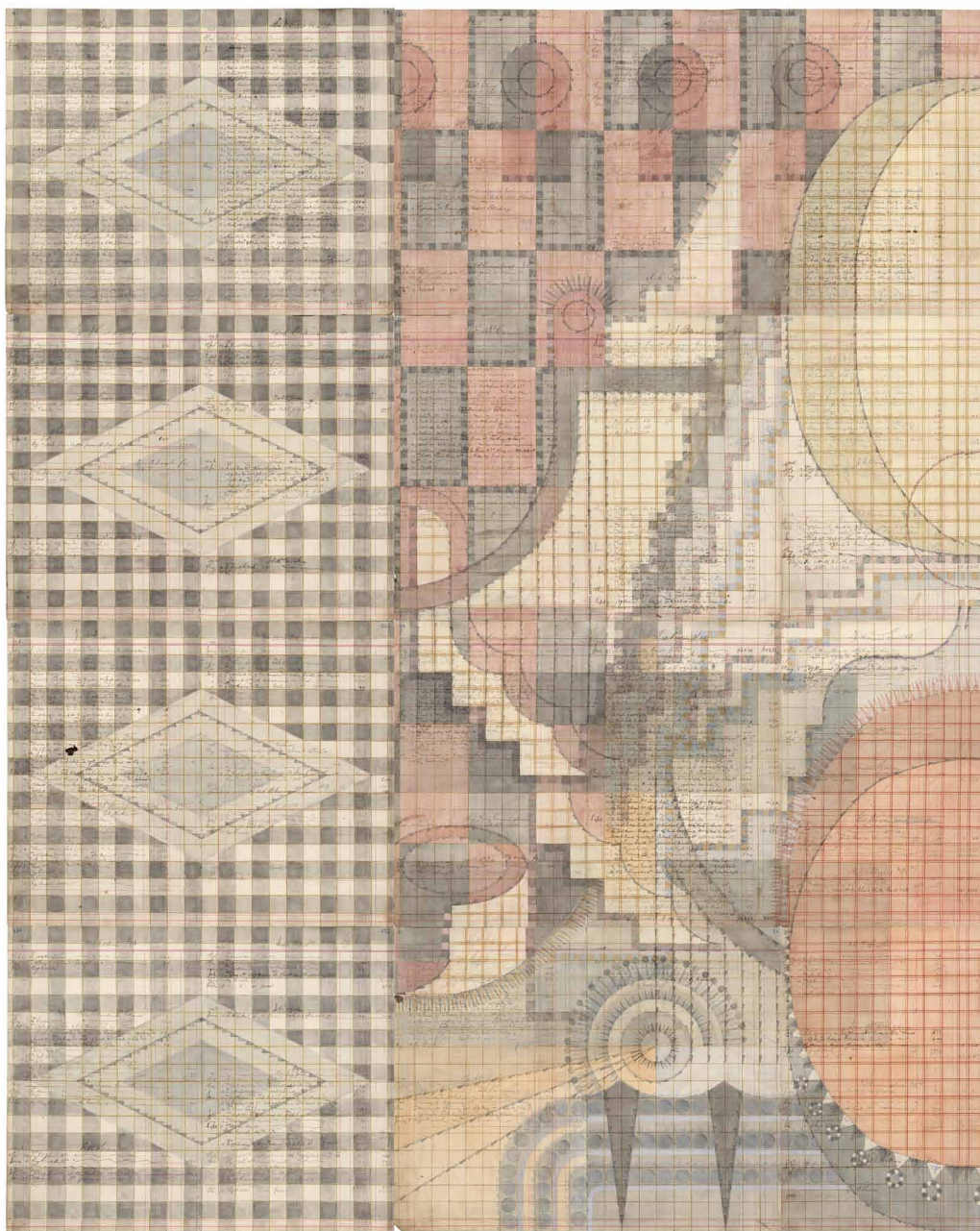




PL. 11

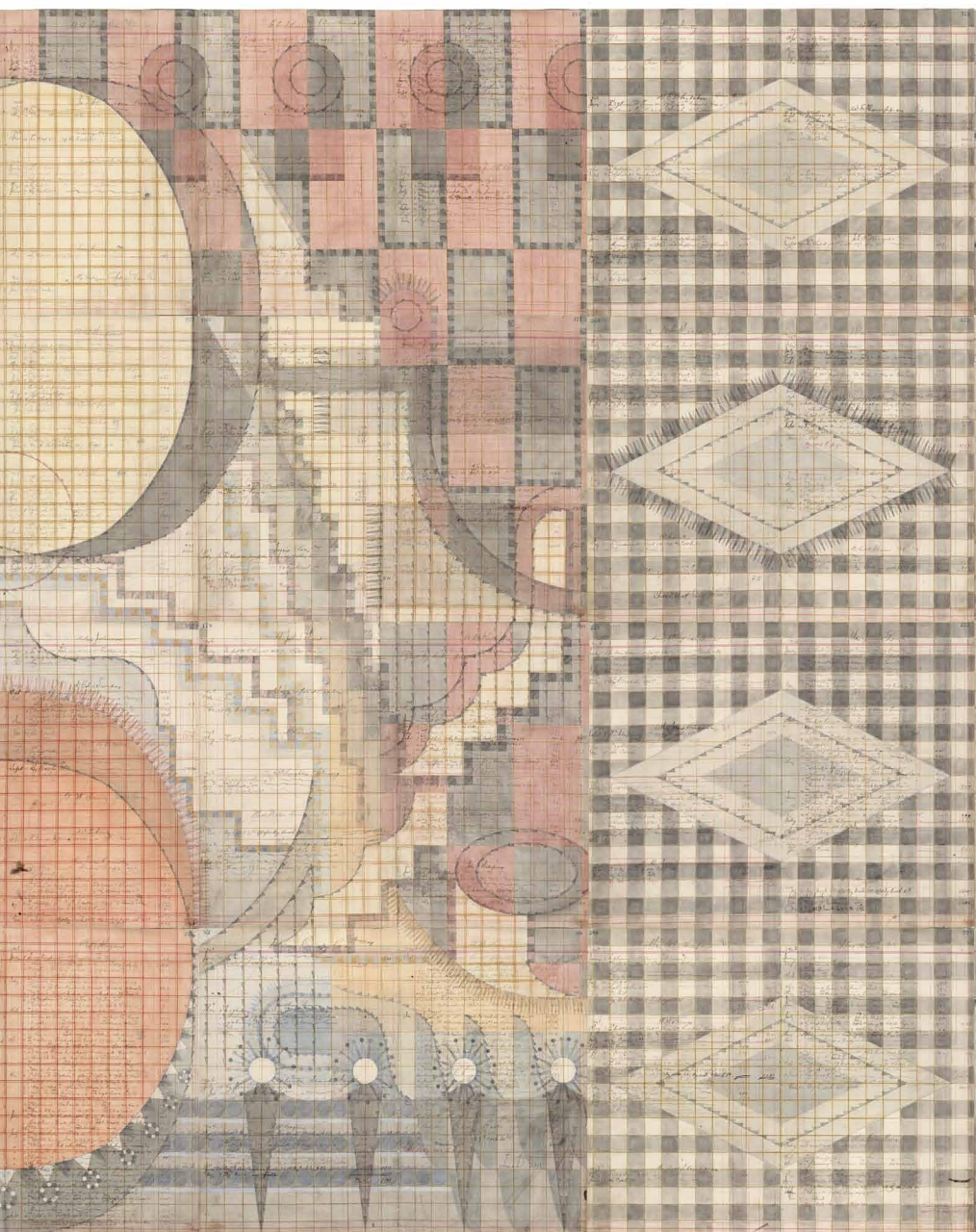
Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture (Subtle and Circulatory, Female), 2015

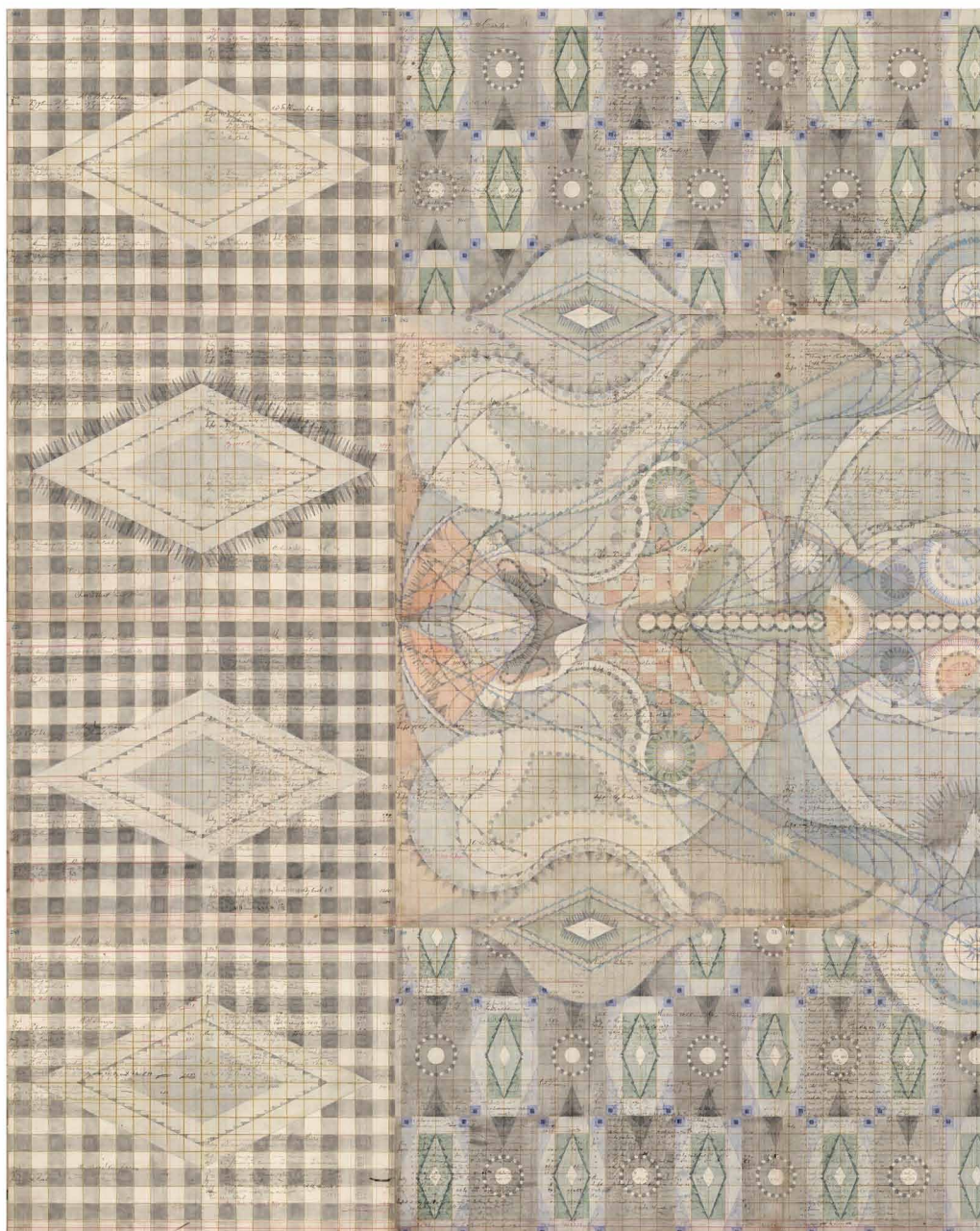


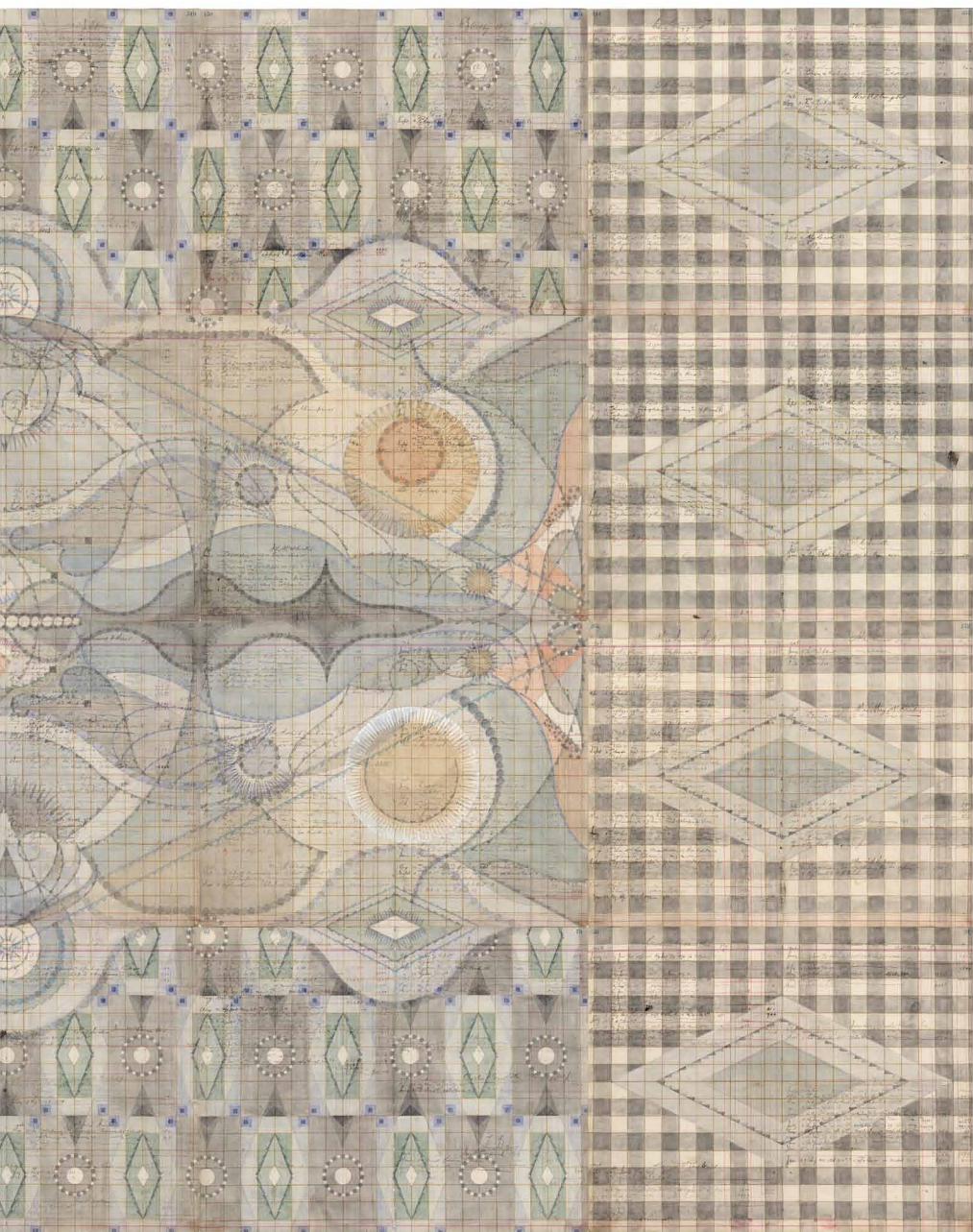


PL. 12

Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture (Mental Body), 2015

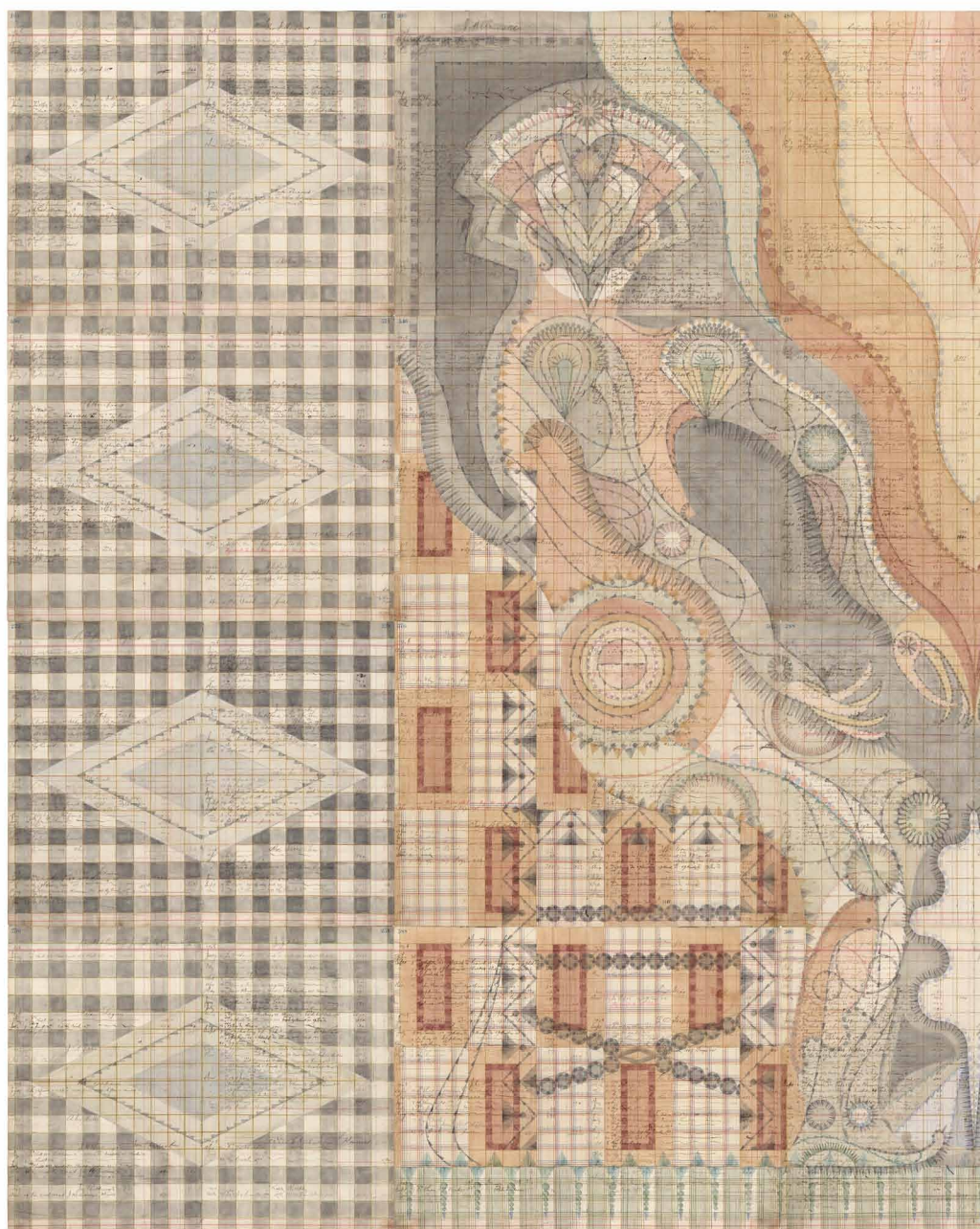






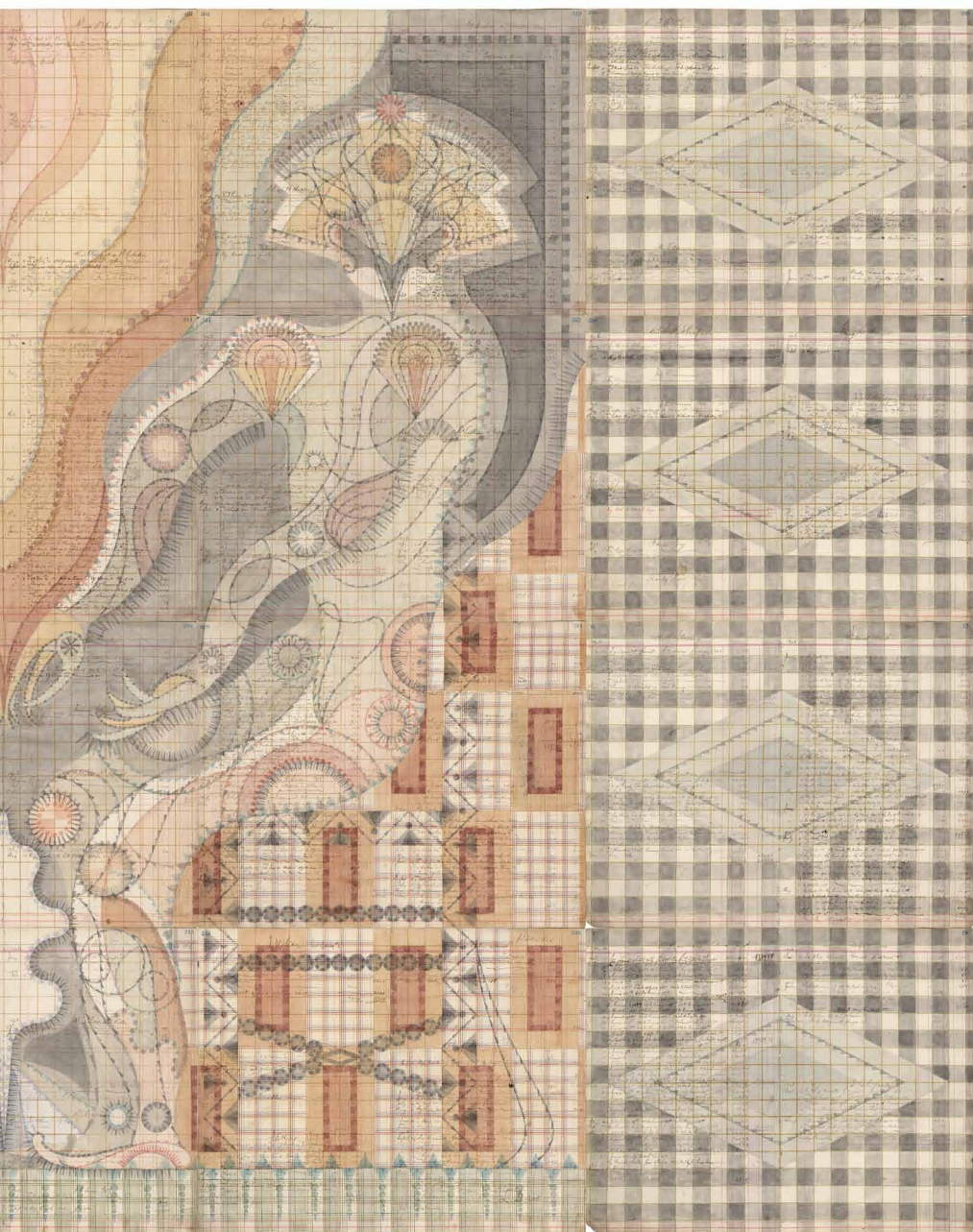






PL. 15

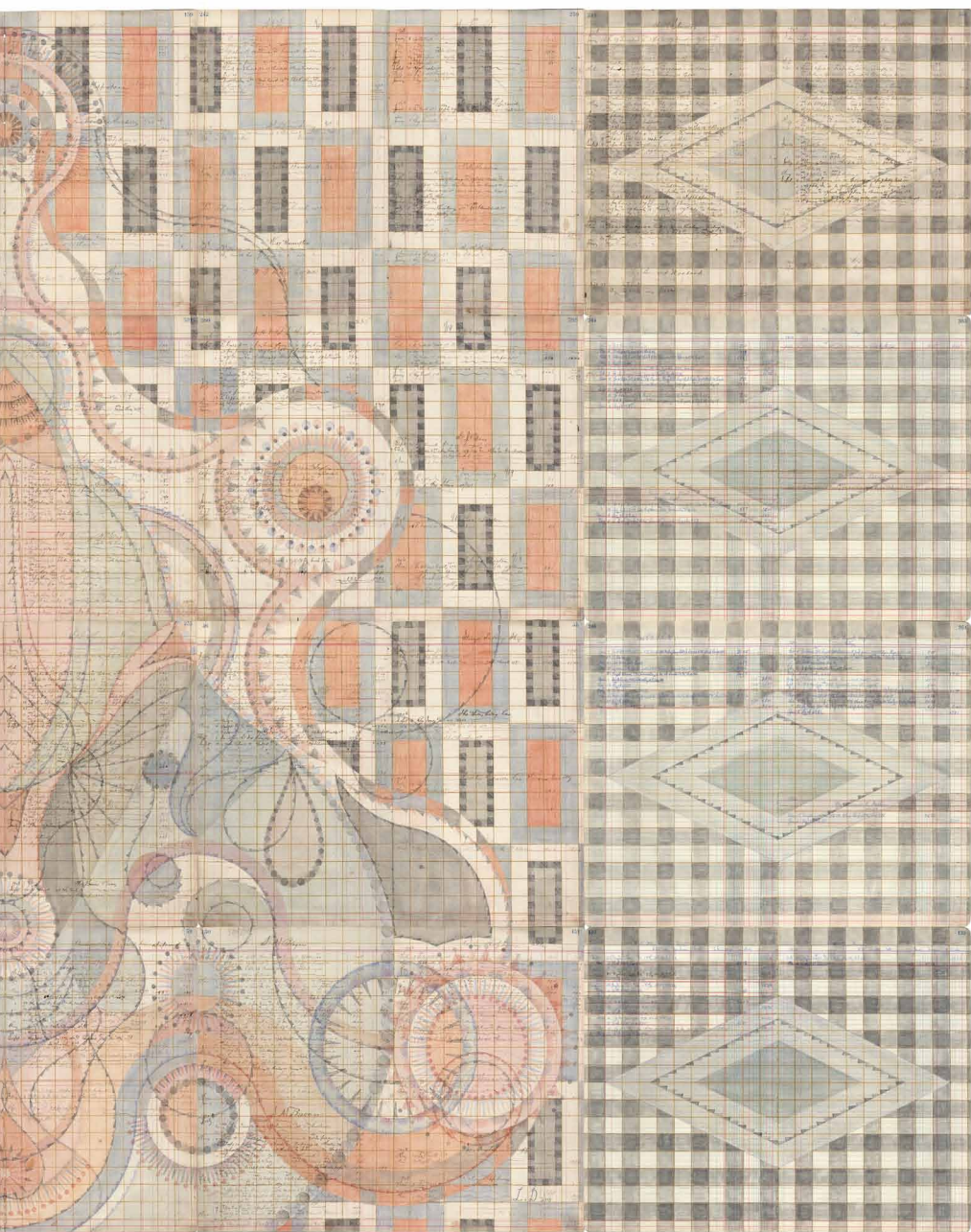
Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture (Return to Formlessness), 2015





PL. 16

Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture (Creation), 2015



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by Martin Parsekian

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Aaron Taylor Kuffner
Gamelatron Roh Ageng, 2013
Bronze Javanese gongs on powder coated
steel mounts with robotic mallets
Courtesy of the artist and
Sundaram Tagore Gallery
Exhibition installation photograph
by Martin Parsekian

PL. 1

Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture
(*Balancer No. 1*), 2015
Graphite on antique ledger book pages
54 1/2 x 50 1/2 inches (12 ledger book pages)

PL. 2

Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture
(*Pure Potential No. 1*), 2015
Colored pencil and graphite on antique
ledger book pages
54 1/2 x 50 1/2 inches (12 ledger book pages)

PL. 3

Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture
(*Pure Potential No. 2*), 2015
Colored pencil and graphite on antique
ledger book pages
54 1/2 x 50 1/2 inches (12 ledger book pages)

PL. 4

Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture
(*Fertilization*), 2015
Colored pencil, graphite, and ink on
antique ledger book pages
54 1/2 x 50 1/2 inches (12 ledger book pages)

PL. 5

Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture
(*Embryo*), 2015
Colored pencil, graphite, and ink on
antique ledger book pages
54 1/2 x 50 1/2 inches (12 ledger book pages)

PL. 6

Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture
(*Pure Potential No. 3*), 2015
Colored pencil and graphite on antique
ledger book pages
54 1/2 x 50 1/2 inches (12 ledger book pages)

PL. 7

Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture
(*Pure Potential No. 4*), 2015
Colored pencil and graphite on antique
ledger book pages
54 1/2 x 50 1/2 inches (12 ledger book pages)

PL. 8

Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture
(*Child*), 2015
Colored pencil, graphite, and ink on
antique ledger book pages
54 1/2 x 50 1/2 inches (12 ledger book pages)

PL. 9

Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture
(*Oval Room*), 2015

Colored pencil, graphite, and ink on
antique ledger book pages

71 1/2 inches x 713 inches (124 ledger
book pages)

PL. 10 / COVER

Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture
(*Subtle and Circulatory, Male*), 2015

Colored pencil and graphite on antique
ledger book pages

71 1/2 x 115 inches (20 ledger book pages)

PL. 11

Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture
(*Subtle and Circulatory, Female*), 2015

Colored pencil, graphite, and ink on
antique ledger book pages

71 1/2 x 115 inches (20 ledger book pages)

PL. 12

Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture
(*Mental Body*), 2015

Colored pencil and graphite on antique
ledger book pages

71 1/2 x 115 inches (20 ledger book pages)

PL. 13

Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture
(*Breath Body*), 2015

Colored pencil, graphite, and ink on
antique ledger book pages

71 1/2 x 115 inches (20 ledger book pages)

PL. 14

Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture
(*Source*), 2015

Colored pencil, graphite, and ink on
antique ledger book pages

71 1/2 x 115 inches (20 ledger book pages)

PL. 15

Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture
(*Return to Formlessness*), 2015

Colored pencil and graphite on antique
ledger book pages

71 1/2 x 115 inches (20 ledger book pages)

PL. 16

Energy Scaffolds and Information Architecture
(*Creation*), 2015

Colored pencil and graphite on antique
ledger book pages

71 1/2 x 115 inches (20 ledger book pages)

All works courtesy of the artist and
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otherwise.

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