

Title of Project

The Esoteric & Abstraction: Women, Spiritualism and Painting

Applicant's Name

Ashley Kuhn

Applicant's Rank

Assistant Professor

Applicant's Department

Visual Arts

Amount of Funding

\$7000.00

FINAL REPORT

I. Description of the project

This faculty development project supported an ongoing visual research and studio practice focused on the feminist history of women artists working with spiritual, esoteric, and intuitive frameworks, with a specific emphasis on the work of Hilma af Klint.

The project investigates how abstraction, geometry, symbolism, and intuitive image-making have historically functioned as tools for women artists to access spiritual and metaphysical knowledge systems. Hilma af Klint's use of geometric structures, symbolic form, and diagrammatic composition serves as a central reference for the development of a contemporary body of drawings, paintings, and animated work.

During the funded period, the project combined historical research, in-person exhibition research, and sustained studio experimentation. The resulting drawings function both as completed works on paper and as preparatory visual research for a forthcoming series of paintings and animated works.

This project seeks to expand knowledge of and engage in dialogue with women artists working within spiritual traditions whose practices have been historically marginalized, and to situate those histories within contemporary abstraction.

II. Goals and objectives for the project

The primary goal of this project was to produce a series of visual artworks, including drawings, paintings, and digital and animated studies that reference spiritually relevant works using the conceptual and formal framework found in the work of Hilma af Klint and other women artists engaged in spiritual abstraction.

Specific objectives included:

- producing drawings as preparatory and research-based works for a larger body of paintings and animated compositions;
- investigating geometric and diagrammatic structures as symbolic and spiritual systems;
- developing a visual language informed by intuitive and meditative processes similar to those present in Hilma af Klint's studio practice;
- creating a body of work suitable for exhibition proposals and future external grant applications.

III. Outcome of the project

During the funded period, I completed a focused series of graphite drawings that function both as finished works on paper and as preparatory visual research for a larger body of paintings and animated work currently in development.

The completed drawings explore:

- symmetrical and axial compositions derived from spiritual and diagrammatic structures;
- layered triangular and circular forms referencing sacred geometry and symbolic cosmologies;
- spatial relationships that suggest movement between spiritual states or planes of perception;
- repeated spherical and linear motifs inspired by Hilma af Klint's use of symbolic abstraction and visual systems.

Formally, the drawings investigate the relationship between geometric order and intuitive mark-making. Particular attention is given to tonal layering, transparency, and spatial structure in order to translate spiritual and symbolic systems into contemporary abstract compositions.

Conceptually, the drawings operate as contemporary responses to Hilma af Klint's use of abstraction as a spiritual and communicative language. Rather than functioning as purely formal compositions, the works employ geometry as a symbolic framework for mapping transformation, balance, duality, and transitions between visible and invisible realms.

Although the larger painting and animation components of the project are continuing beyond the funded period, the completed drawings represent a critical stage of the research and development process. They establish the visual and conceptual framework that will directly inform the next phase of painting and animation production.

Research conducted through exhibition visit:

As part of the funded research activities, I conducted in-person visual and contextual research at the Hilma af Klint watercolor exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. This research trip directly supported the project's focus on Hilma af Klint and spiritual abstraction as outlined in the original proposal and the travel and research budget.

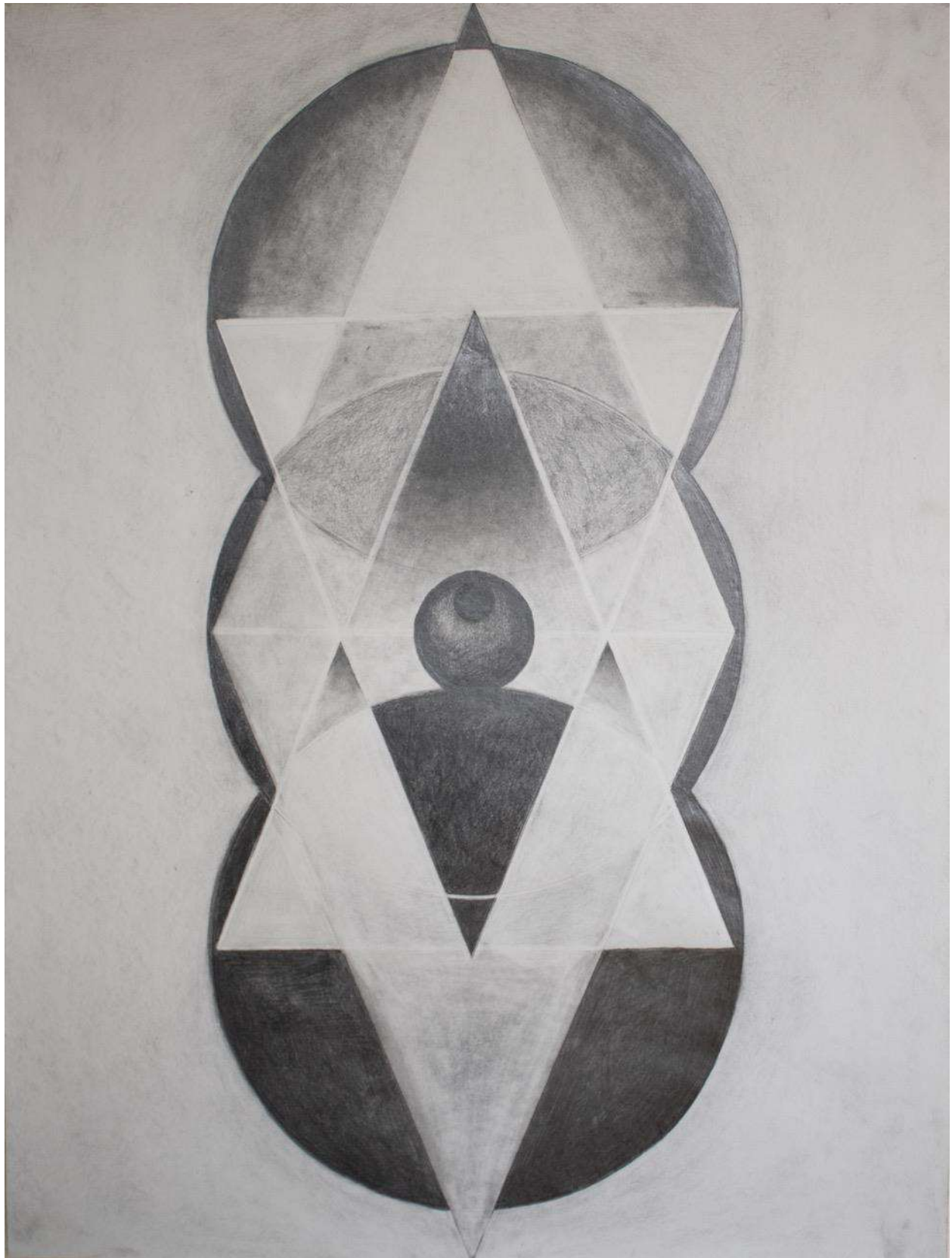
Viewing the works in person provided critical insight into Hilma af Klint's use of scale, material surface, tonal transparency, and compositional structure that is not fully accessible through reproduction. In particular, observing the layered watercolor washes, subtle tonal transitions, and the physical presence of diagrammatic and geometric structures within the exhibition informed my approach to tonal layering, symmetry, and spatial organization in the completed drawing series.

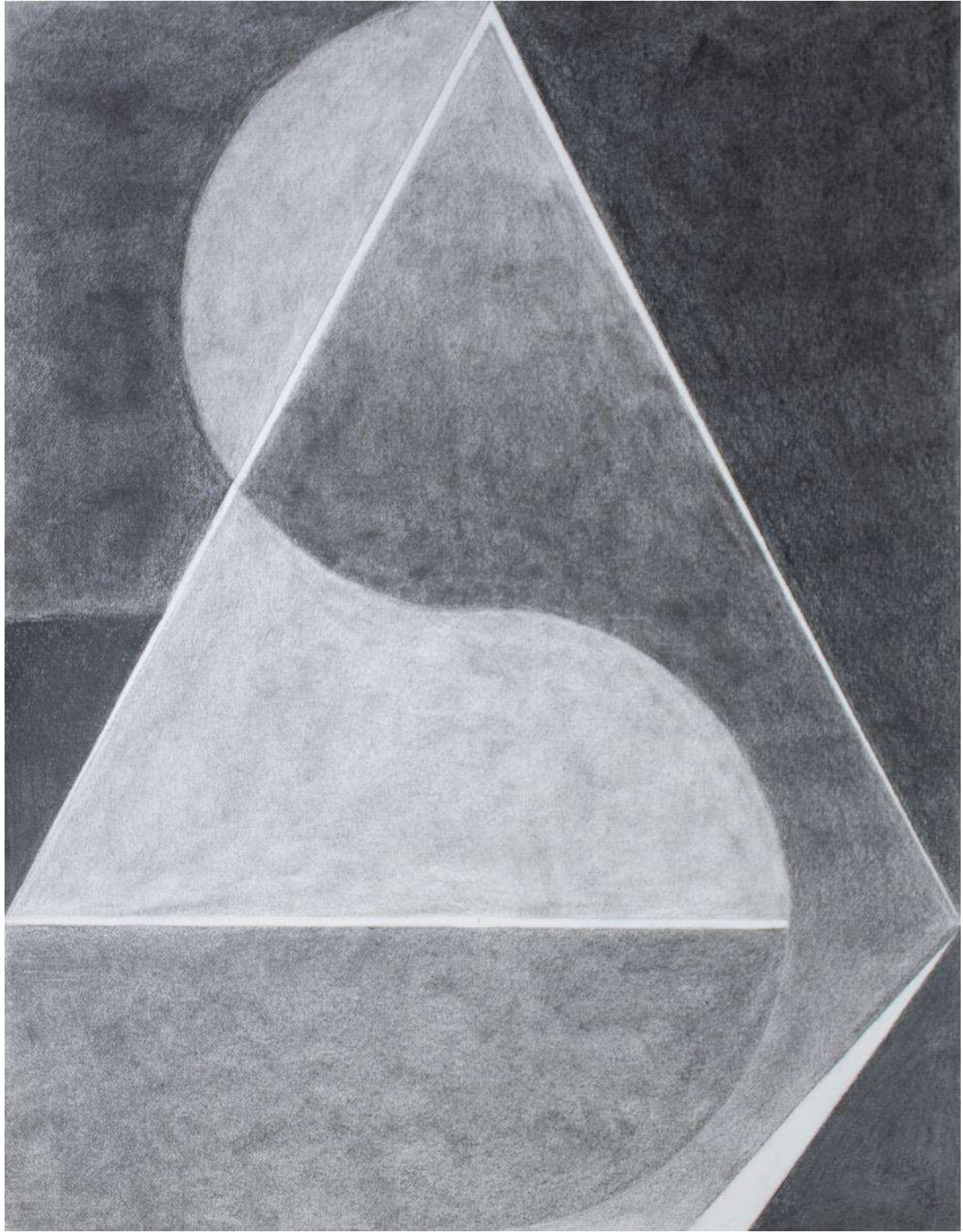
The exhibition visit also deepened my understanding of how Hilma af Klint's visual language functions as a symbolic and spiritual system rather than as purely formal abstraction. This research directly influenced the compositional strategies and conceptual framework of the drawings produced during the funded period, which adopt similar diagrammatic organization and geometric structures as a means of exploring spiritual and metaphysical concepts through contemporary abstraction.

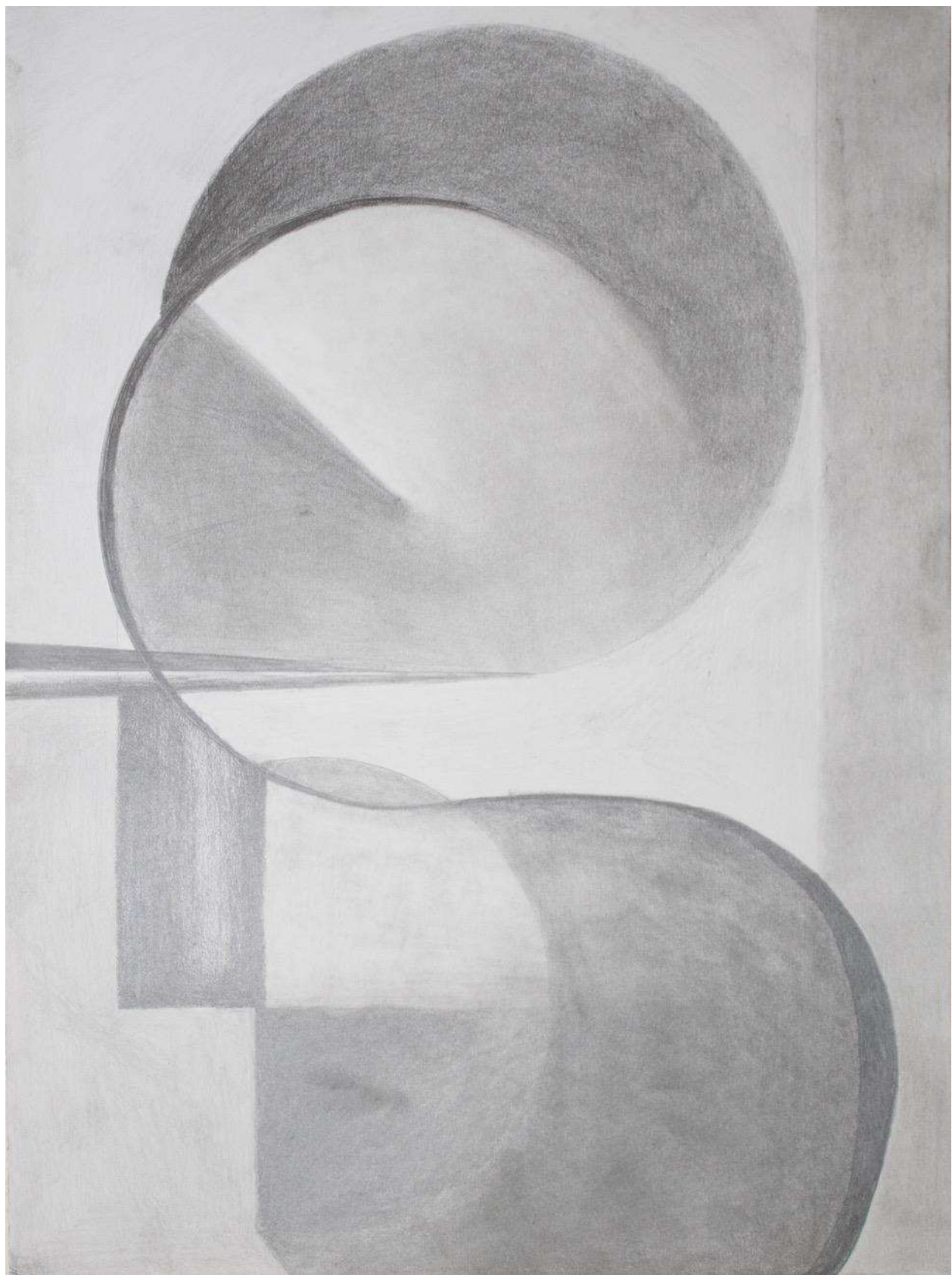
IV. Dissemination and future outcomes

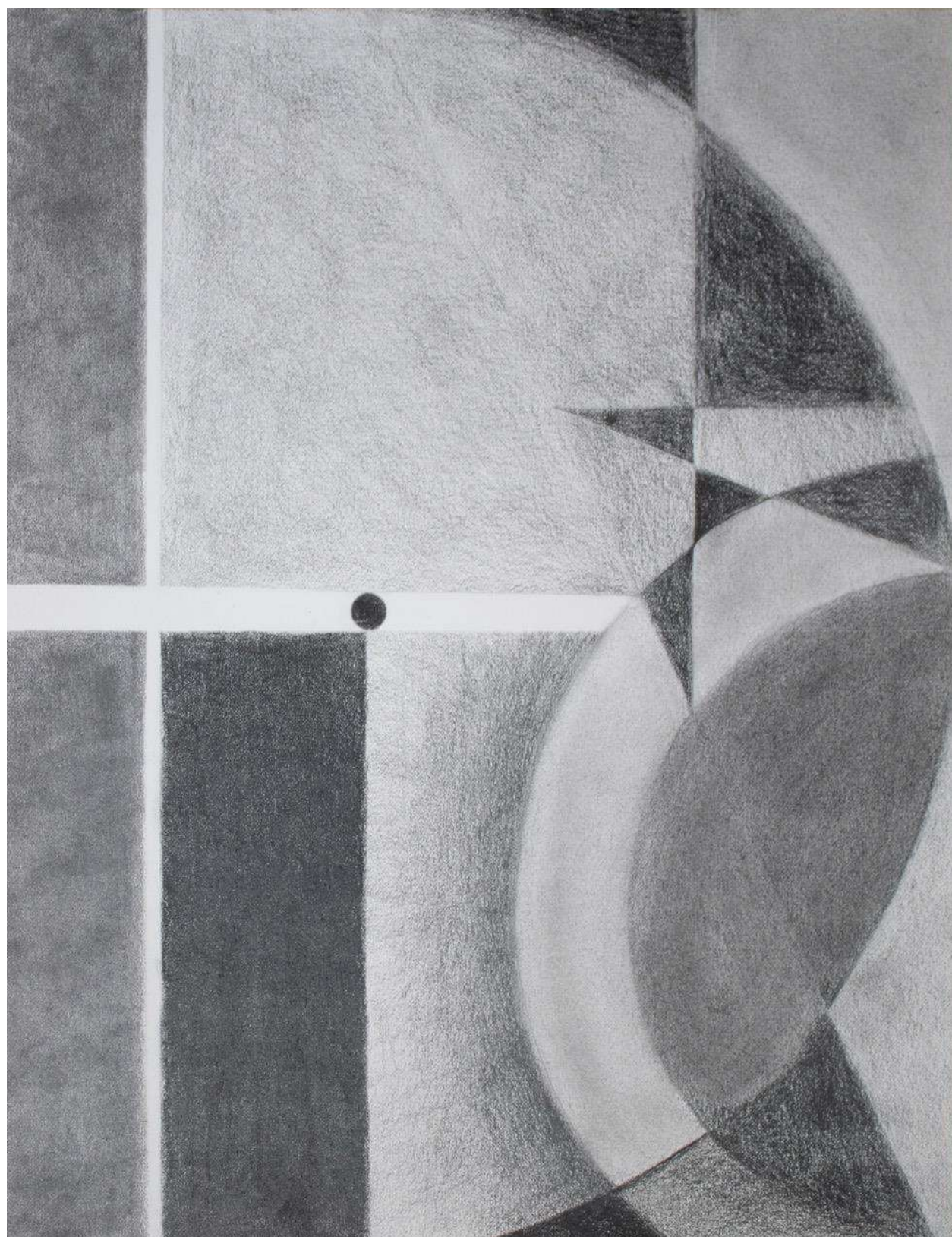
The completed drawings will be framed and prepared for exhibition and will be included in forthcoming exhibition proposals and external grant applications. The works will also serve as visual and conceptual foundations for the continued development of the painting and animation components of the project.

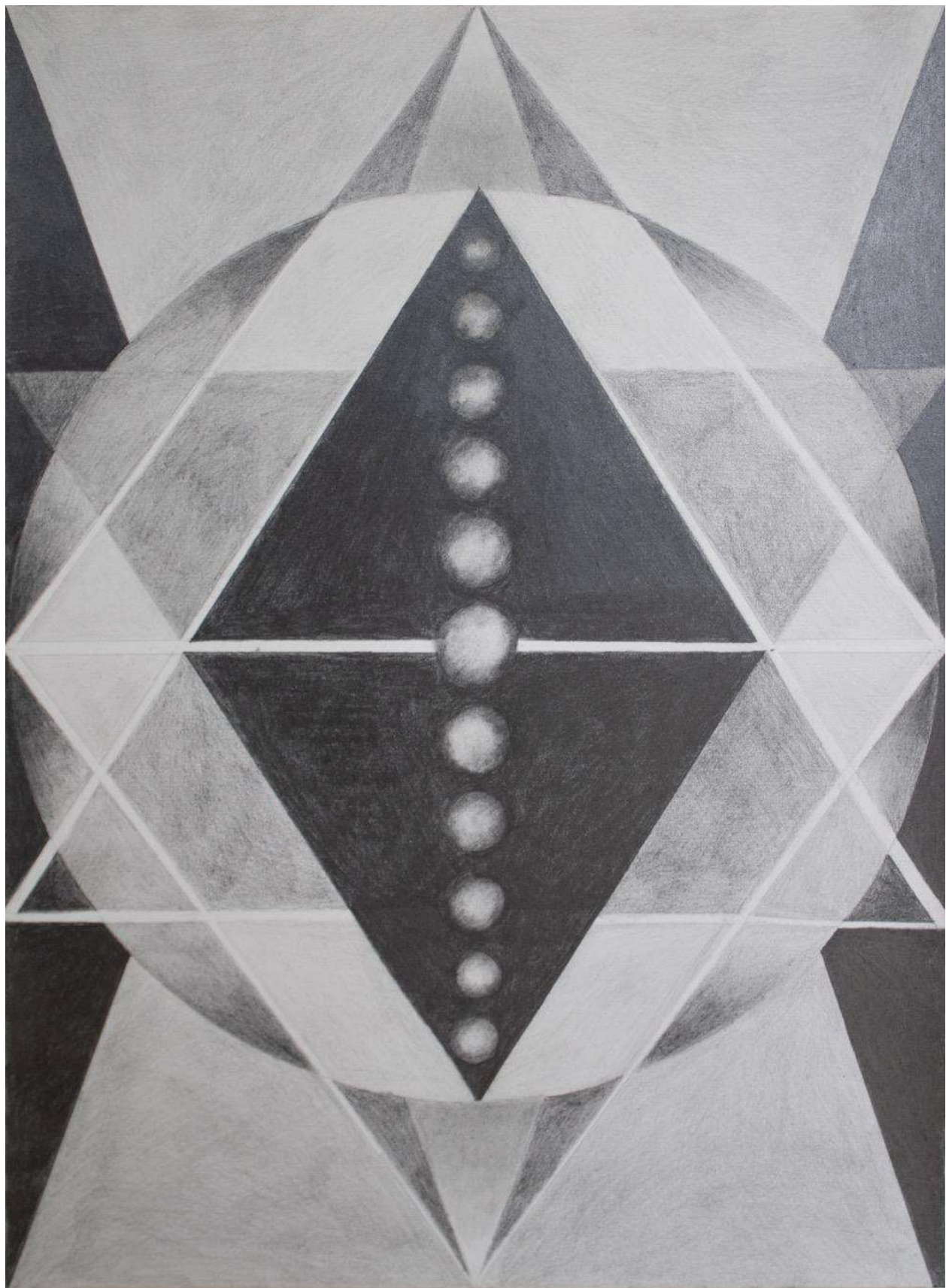
The outcomes of this project will be shared with the Lincoln University community through faculty development presentations and will inform future course content in painting and drawing, particularly in assignments addressing abstraction, symbolism, and research-based studio practice.











Appendix: Hilma Af Klint Exhibition: MoMA 2025

