



Kathy Barry: Dimensional Ecologies

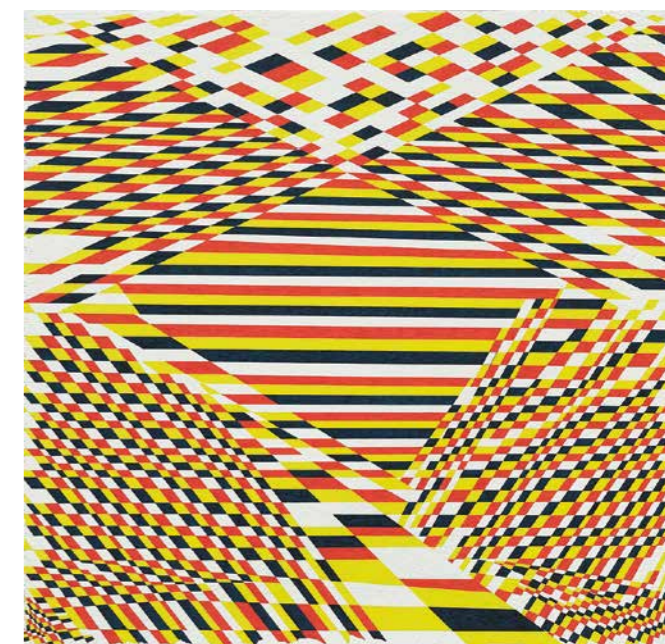
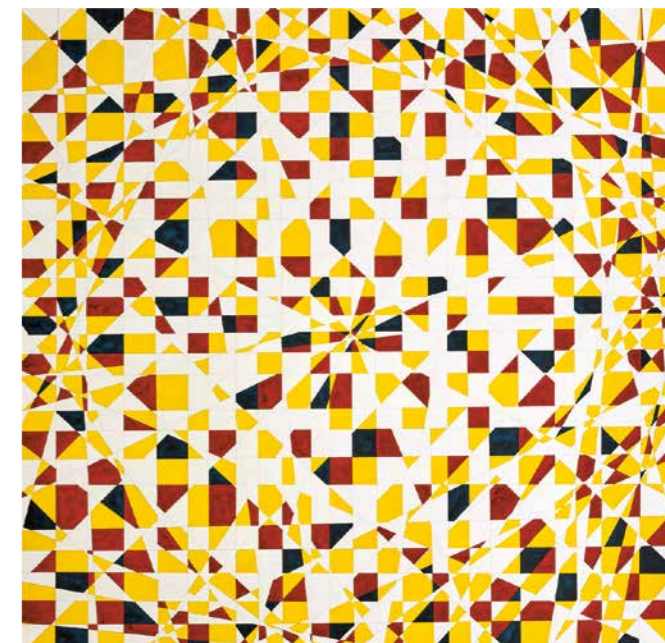
Emil McAvoy on a painter who traverses and maps energies.

In the new cult film *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (2022), Evelyn Wang (Michelle Yeoh), a Chinese woman running a laundromat with her family in the US, is contacted by her life partner Waymond Wang (Ke Huy Quan)—but from another dimension. We learn that the dimension ‘Alternate Waymond’ comes from is one of infinite variations in a multiverse generated by each life choice Evelyn makes. Alternate Waymond needs Evelyn’s help and intervenes in her current life path to show her how to access previously unknown aspects of herself across other dimensions. These alternate realities and timelines coexist in superposition—everything everywhere all at once. Evelyn unlocks her ability to channel skills, knowledge, and wisdom from her alternative selves through ‘verse jumping, in a quest to save the multiverse.

The film provides a vehicle through which to consider the work of Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington-based artist Kathy Barry, which explores multidimensionality. Barry’s labour-intensive watercolour paintings appear as matrix-like formations, where complex geometric abstractions are made by forgoing an artistic agency. While Barry has shown work across Aotearoa New Zealand and in notable overseas exhibitions, important aspects of her work go under the radar here. For one, she is multiversal.

Barry’s work exists in a lineage of visionary artists, such as Hilma af Klint, Emma Kunz, and Georgiana Houghton, who believed they were accessing other dimensions in their lives and in their work. Here in Aotearoa, the resounding influence of the exhibition *Hilma af Klint: The Secret Paintings* at City Gallery Wellington will long be felt. Yet, while art historians and curators flock to engage with the radical implications of af Klint’s innovative work—for the emergence of modernism, abstraction, and ‘the spiritual’ in art, and for what we might call ‘co-creation’—few in this country are aware of closely aligned contemporary artists right under their noses. Kathy Barry is one such artist.

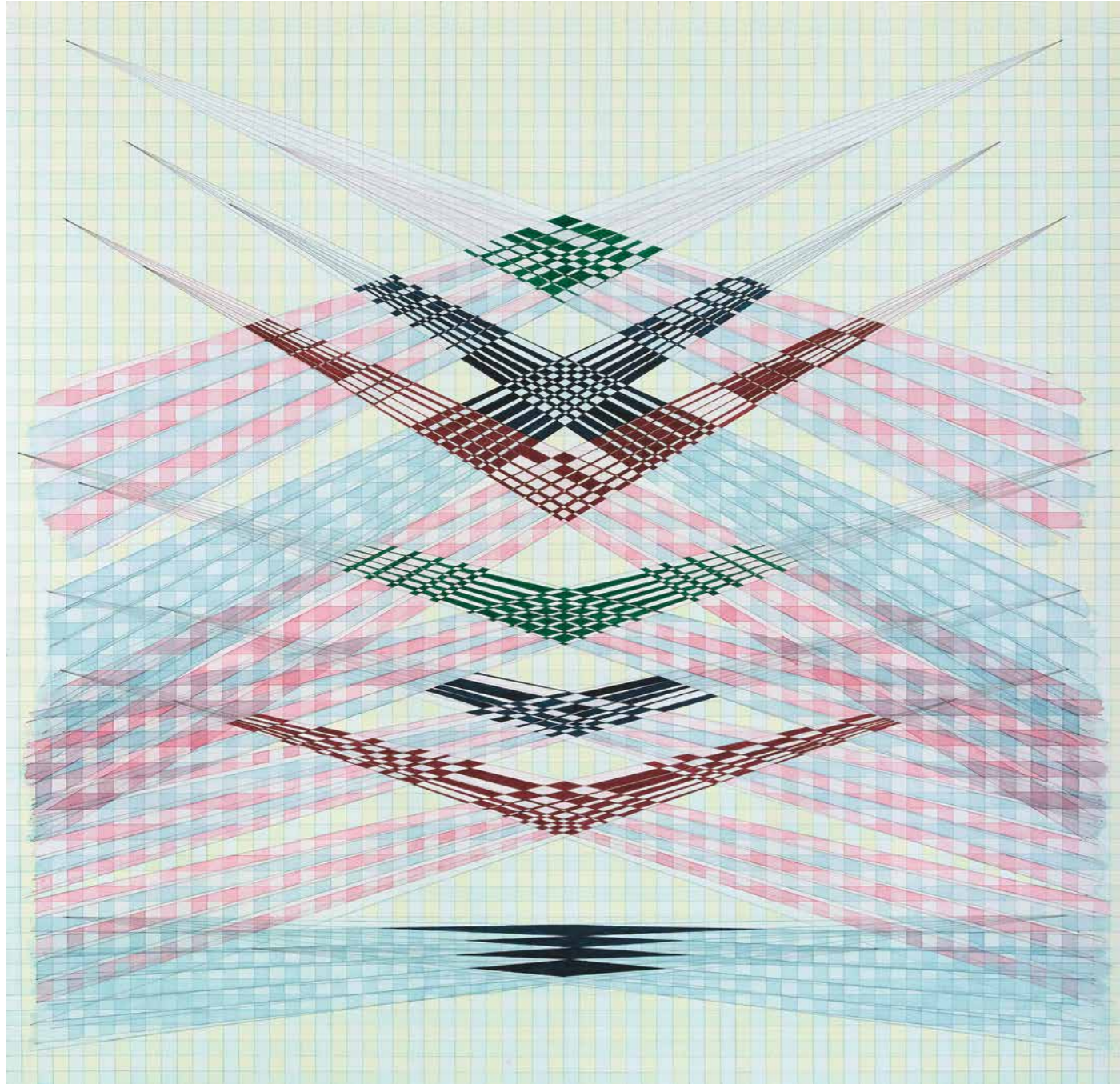
It is crucial, however, to distinguish Barry from others, because she doesn’t describe herself as a medium, channeller, or spiritualist. In the catalogue for *Live Uncertainty*, the 2016 São Paulo Biennale, Lars Bang Larsen notes: ‘Barry emphasises that her artistic method entails forgoing agency by having her conscious self step aside. That does not mean allowing her unconscious to take over (as in the surrealist method of automatism), but



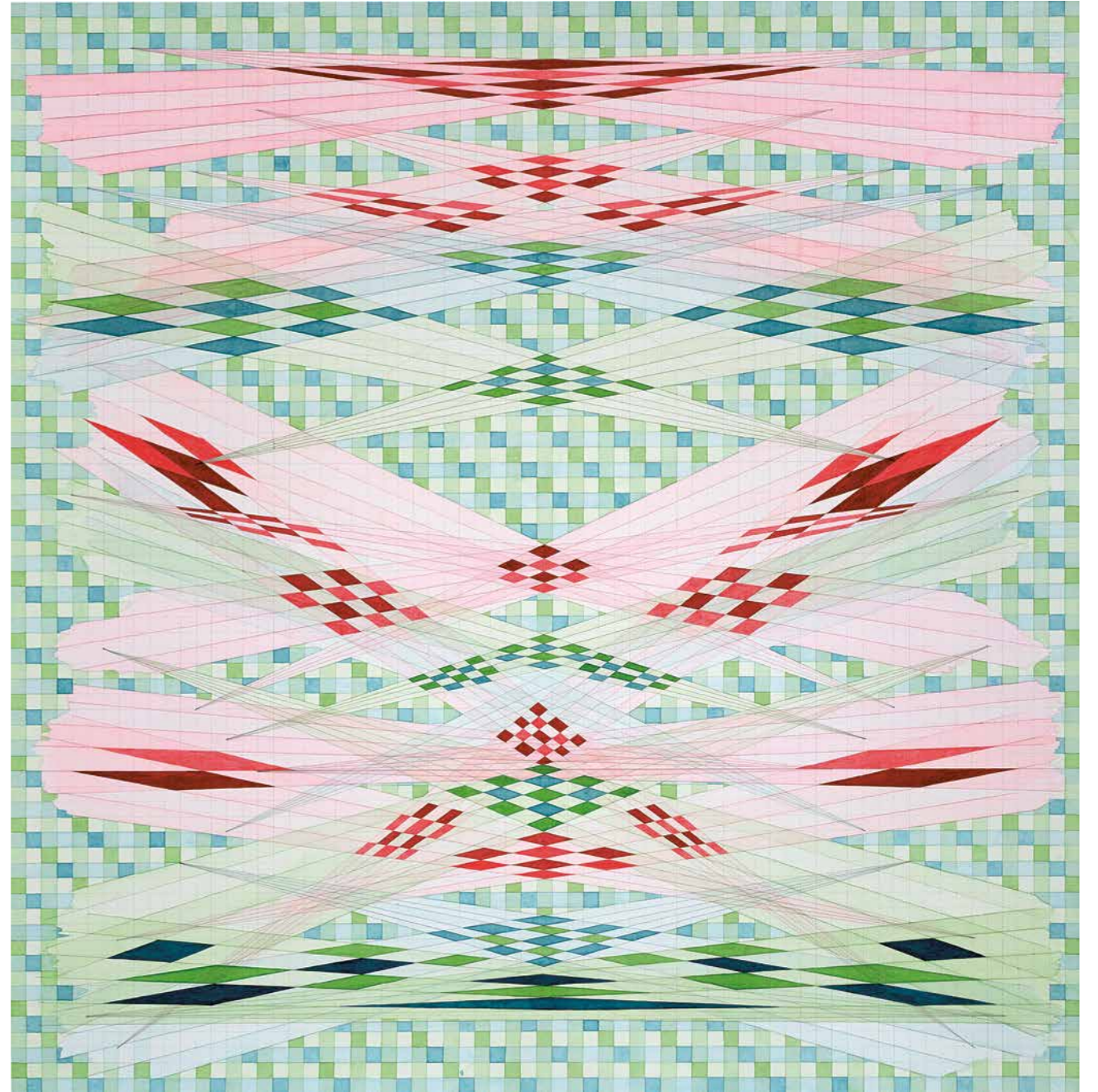
Left: Kathy Barry, from *Twelve Energy Diagrams* 2016, watercolour and pencil on paper, 700 × 720mm.

Kathy Barry, from *Magnetic Fields* 2017–9, watercolour and pencil on paper, 720 × 700mm.

Kathy Barry, from *Twelve Energy Diagrams* 2016, watercolour and pencil on paper, 700 × 720mm.



Kathy Barry *Dimensional Ecologies* 2013,
watercolour and pencil on paper, 700 × 720mm.



Kathy Barry *Star Witness* 2013,
watercolour and pencil on paper, 705 × 609mm.

to accede to an aspect of herself that exists at an energetic level in different dimensions, or in folds and pockets of time and space.'

In conversation, Barry says her work *Dimensional Ecologies* (2013) operates like a diagram to envisage a multi-dimensional self, with stacked diagonal lines representing the idea of selves in higher dimensions connecting with this one. As well as speaking to her singular process, the title evokes a sense of numerous, potentially interdependent dimensions acting in concert and communion. In 2015, Barry showed *Dimensional Ecologies* in the exhibition *Believe Not Every Spirit, but Try the Spirits*, curated by Bang Larsen and Marco Pasi, at Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne. The show also included Georgiana Houghton (1814–84), a largely forgotten yet compelling British Victorian-era spiritualist.

Produced in series, Barry's works are diagrams of layered, pulsating perspectival spaces. Their geometries are complex and, at times, contradictory: sometimes unified, balanced, grounded, and harmonic; other times fractured, deconstructed, organic, and indeterminate. Barry's compositions appear magnetic and holographic, spinning, flickering, and flowing. Beyond being symbolic, or frameworks for raising energy or consciousness, they offer potential energetic responses in the viewer that can be felt in their body. They are energy fields.

In an interview on her work for a forthcoming publication, Barry speaks to the energetic potential of exhibitions: 'I think that the art institution is a suitable context in that it provides a setting where the work can be felt at a bodily level. I don't so much see my work as translating spiritual insights but more as a type of energy work for the viewer. I think that it carries frequencies that affect the viewer viscerally and energetically and in that sense the gallery becomes more like a healing space.'

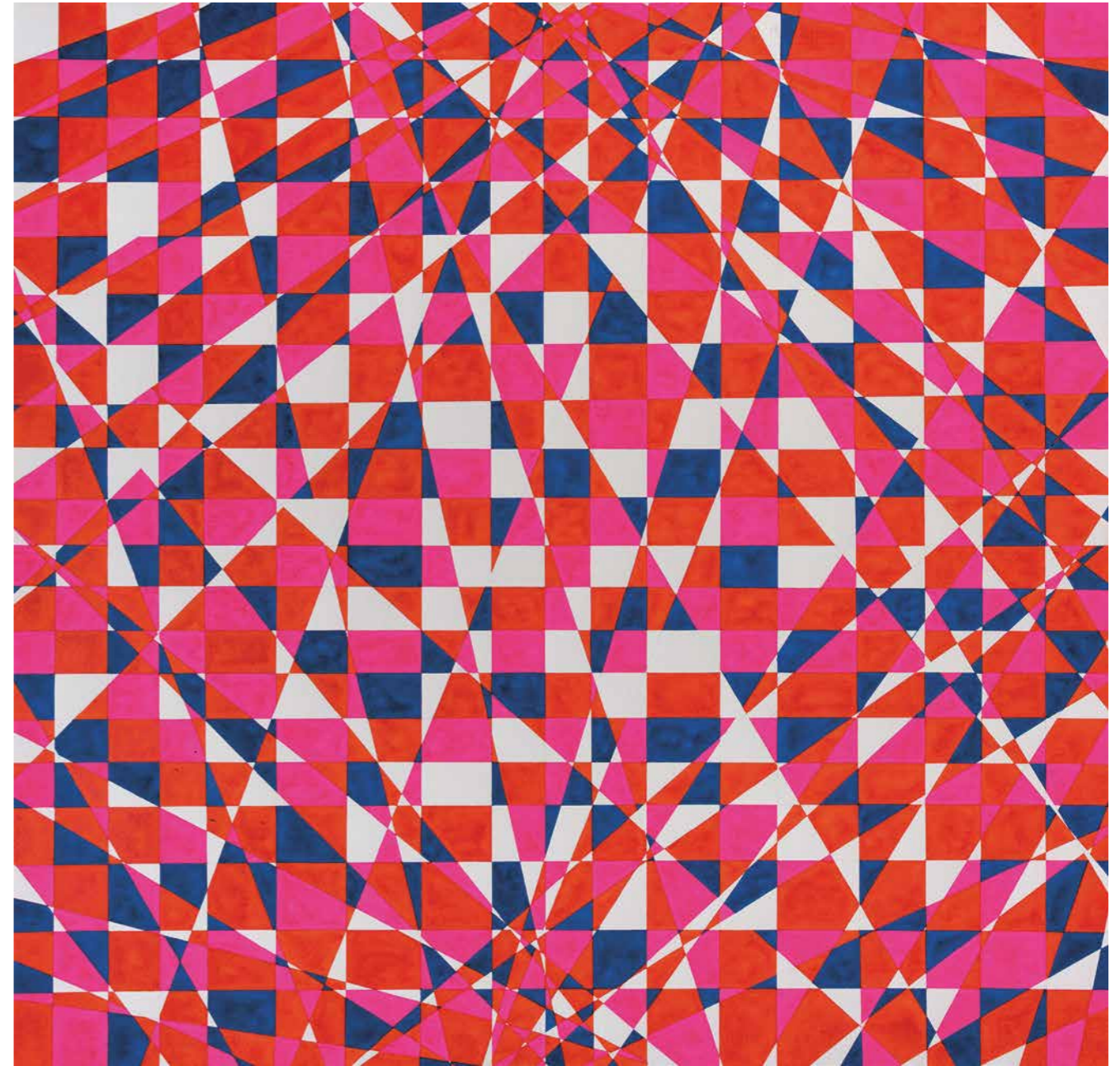
Bang Larsen echoes this: 'Kathy Barry's watercolours aim to work their effects on us by entering into an energetic relationship with our bodily frequencies and with our imagination of what lies outside of the narrow band of human perception. The expanded sense of subjectivity that the watercolours tap into carries a utopian aspiration: in this way, Barry's works are portents of possibility and hope, produced in a multidimensional field of time and space beyond the normal matrixes of power and control.'

Barry says *Twelve Energy Diagrams* (2015–6)—her work in the 2016 São Paulo Biennale—charts the process of building the Merkaba light body. The Merkaba has been part of mystical traditions and world religions for centuries, and is represented in Judaism as the Star of David. It can be understood as part of the 'energetic body' that encases the physical body in a field of charged energy. According to Jewish mystical tradition, the Merkaba energy field surrounds the human energy field and creates a high-frequency energy vortex that allows human consciousness to access higher dimensions and

other moments in time, thereby disrupting linear time. Sufi mystics sought to activate this light body in a ritualised spinning dance, as the Merkaba is considered to be a rotational structure that spins around the body. Barry's series *The Loom of Time* (2017–9) and *Search Engine for Her Future Self* (2020–2) further elaborate on this idea.

Everything Everywhere All at Once concludes with Evelyn Wang acknowledging love as a kind of superpower. In Barry's work, this concept also takes centre stage. While love permeates her practice, it is not romantic or personal, but more akin to an energy field: love as a vibration, frequency, or force that entangles dimensions and opens potential portals or paths between them. In Barry's work, love is evidenced not only by the laborious nature of its making, but also in its suggestion of worlds beyond this visible one, where collaborative forces can be accessed.

Kathy Barry will feature in the exhibition *Energy Work*, Adam Art Gallery Te Pātaka Toi, Wellington, 13 July–25 September 2022.



Kathy Barry, from *Search Engine for Her Future Self* 2020, watercolour and pencil on paper, 720 × 700mm.