

ENERGY WORK
KATHY BARRY/
SARAH SMUTS-
KENNEDY

Curated by Christina Barton

Te Pātaka Toi Adam Art Gallery

13.07.2022 – 25.09.2022

Introduction

Christina Barton

Kathy Barry and Sarah Smuts-Kennedy have each developed a visual, material, and formal practice that redirects our understanding of abstract art. Rather than positing the higher truth of ideal form, or expressing the artist's inner self, or giving shape to the drives of the unconscious, they suspend artistic intention to allow unseen energies and dimensions to take shape. How they do this is particular and personal, indeed their physical bodies are integral to their process, but each relinquishes control to allow something else, something larger and less intangible, to show itself through them.

Since 2012, Kathy Barry has focused her practice on producing watercolour drawings, using a paper size that suits a working methodology that entails the careful ruling of lines and colouring in of shapes to produce densely patterned paintings. These stretch and test our understanding of the grid as a compositional device that traps the eye on a coloured surface delimited by a framed edge. What we see bends and warps with strange undulations and unexpected points of intensification. Barry describes these morphing spatial vortexes as “energy fields.” They picture what she feels flowing through her, forces that open and connect her to what she calls a “multi-dimensional universe.” Gradually, over time, and with profound effort, she has trained herself to enter a state of conscious surrender. Miraculously, or perhaps inevitably, the energies that are delivered take forms – like the Buddhist chakras, the Judaic Merkaba, or the toroidal field – that have both spiritual and mathematical precedents. These, like the colours she is told to apply, perform symbolically, linking her to a history of arcane wisdom that undergirds and exceeds the dimensional domains within which reason prevails.

Sarah Smuts-Kennedy works in a studio built on a slope above the garden north of Auckland she has nurtured for several years that flourishes due to her application of biodynamic principles which derive from an understanding of the entwinement and interdependency of all living things. She has

set herself the task of “seed[ing] and manifest[ing] a field of joy, a space that supports and nurtures life.” This aspiration carries over to her constructions and installations through her choice of materials and her manipulation of space, and, in her drawings, through mark making and colour. Prior to presenting her work at the Adam, she spent many hours with her pendulum to determine the placement of her drawings and sculptures, a procedure she uses to optimise the effect they will have as generators of positive energy. Like Barry, she suspends conscious decision-making in favour of attuning herself to the invisible energies inherent in her environs. These are held in her works between a palpable spaciousness, an openness and poise, and points of tension and concentrated gesture. Together these convey the humming shimmer of the physical world, in both its immaterial and material dimensions.

Both Barry and Smuts-Kennedy have a deep sense of purpose. They see their practices as literally doing good. By selflessly opening themselves to the world in all its dimensions and manifesting energies that lie latent, they allow us to envisage different and deeper relations between mind and world, spirit and nature that decentre and reorient us.

This exhibition was generously supported by Chartwell Trust and patrons of Te Pataka Toi Adam Art Gallery.

Notes by Kathy Barry



Installation view of *Energy Work* with *Epic Whirlpool*, 2012 (left) and *Star Witness*, 2013, *Aiona*, 2013, and *Dimensional Ecologies*, 2013 (right), all watercolour and graphite pencil on paper, courtesy of the artist and Bowen Galleries, Wellington

Epic Whirlpool was the first painting I made using a process where I am able to forego artistic decision making. I take the lead from a guidance system that is very Other but feels too like an aspect of myself that is beyond a usual understanding of self. When I am guided in this way, I have no idea of outcome and there are no preliminary drawings. I become an observer of my own process. This comes out of a meditative practice and an understanding that the mind is dual in nature: there is the thinking mind and the mind of awareness.

Being present to a process that I can only understand by allowing a set of circumstances to unfold is like watching an organic event – the spinning of a spider’s web; a bird’s nest being built; a butterfly emerging from a suspended chrysalis – taking place in nature. This has its own innate intelligence and logic. I now understand this process to be an activation and expansion of what I would call ‘the human light body’. This is an energetic anatomy the structure and system of which has been overlooked in Western culture but which has been integral to certain traditions especially in the East, where philosophical and artistic systems to support it have developed.

While there is an artistic output associated with this process of allowing an energy body to develop, I have also allowed this guidance to come through to assist others to find this in themselves. Without a formal methodology that I can draw upon, I have simply referred to this as ‘Energy Work’, and while I wouldn’t make any claims for healing, I have seen people derive benefit, both in their lives and by accessing the type of support that I draw from.

The painting *Epic Whirlpool* provides a way of envisaging the chakra system in the body. It also highlights the role of hands in Energy Work. They can emit and magnetise energy, redirecting it from the field to allow flows of energy to come in and rejuvenate the body. The charkas can be felt in the body as rotating vortexes of energy that draw in energy from the environment as well as discharge it. The use

of colour has a symbolic role to denote the various energy frequencies in the field, blues for the cosmos, greens for the Earth and reds for the body and heart. This system of colour-coding is used throughout the bodies of work in this show, where yellows and oranges designate light, and pinks have a soft energy to suggest unconditional love for the self and others.

Star Witness expands the idea of loving the self as an important part of loving the world and is essential for healing. Sending love to and simply being with the wounded self provides a release of energy that allows for the flow of new energy to come through. It is important to note that other cultures have designated words for the type of energy that I speak of, such as Qi, Prana or here in Aotearoa: Mauri. I understand these terms to encompass everything from life-force energy, light, intelligence, or even love. When used with intent as with Energy Work, it can be transformative and healing in nature.

My title references the work of Emma Kunz, an artist whose life and practice was devoted to research into the human energy field and whose artistic output was the outcome of her practice and research. *AIONA* suggests the space or field of energy created in an Energy Work session, where a charged field allows the body to release unwanted or stagnant energy to allow a flow of new energy to circulate through the chakra system.

Dimensional Ecologies suggest a way of understanding how this work can come into being. It proposes a multi-dimensional self, or a self that resides in the third-dimension but can access parts of the self that reside in higher dimensions. The horizontal lines at the bottom of the page function diagrammatically to denote this dimension, while the criss-crossing diagonal lines above suggest the self as it expands out and taps into frequencies beyond the bandwidth of this dimension.



12 Energy Diagrams, 2015, watercolour and graphite pencil on paper, 12 parts, 700 × 720 mm each, courtesy of the artist and Bowen Galleries, Wellington

12 Energy Diagrams focuses on the process of activating the Merkaba light body. This is a system that lies dormant in the energy body but can be activated with various meditative processes. The Merkaba has been recorded since early Christianity and has appeared in early Christian paintings. It is also referenced in various ways in many other world religions, in particular the Judaic Star of David. The Merkaba is comprised of two intersecting tetrahedrons – hence its star-like representation. These tetrahedrons are energetic in nature and comprise zones of intensification, where focused energy is drawn from the sky and Earth and intersect in the human energy body.

The series can be divided up into two components. The first is the stage of activating the tetrahedrons through a process of sustained Energy Work, and the second is the experience of an embodiment of this expanded energy structure that surrounds and permeates the body. It is said that the Merkaba can carry consciousness outside of time and dimension, hence it has been otherwise known as the Chariot, or *Hekhalot* in Hebrew. The tenth painting in the series suggests a type of wormhole through which pockets in other dimensions of time and space might be reached.



12-Minute Movement, 2016, single channel digital video, 12 mins 12 secs, courtesy of the artist

The video work *12-Minute Movement* was commissioned by the Bienal de São Paulo to accompany the painting series *12 Energy Diagrams*. While it doesn't necessarily demonstrate the process of activating a Merkaba, it comes close in the sense that it attempts to evoke a process where energy is intensified and felt in the body and in the environment. The spinning movement in the work evokes the rotational tetrahedrons of the Merkaba and the spinning of the chakras when activated. Both these motions reflect the ways in which energy can be activated, harnessed, and released, but also how energetic structures can be felt through a process of attunement.



The Loom of Time, 2018–19, watercolour and graphite pencil on paper, 16 parts, 700 × 720 mm each, courtesy of the artist and Bowen Galleries, Wellington

The Loom of Time follows directly from *12 Energy Diagrams* and charts the activation of the Toroidal energy flows around the body. It is said that all living things are held within Toroidal structures which can be pictured as donut-like shapes where energy pours through a vertical axis into the structure from above and below and spills out into circular tubes in a constant flowing motion. The title of the work has been taken from a section in *Moby Dick* that to me evokes a sense of being outside of linear time: a moment of presence where the flow of time is suspended and replaced with a spaciousness like the sea itself. I picture the works in this series, as with all the work in the show, as operating very much like diagrams and here these diagrams take a bird's eye perspective to look down onto the energy body to envisage the spiralling flow of energy into the centre of the Torus. The first drawing in the series maps out the process like a preface in a book, while the last painting shows the ever expanding Toroidal field around the human body.



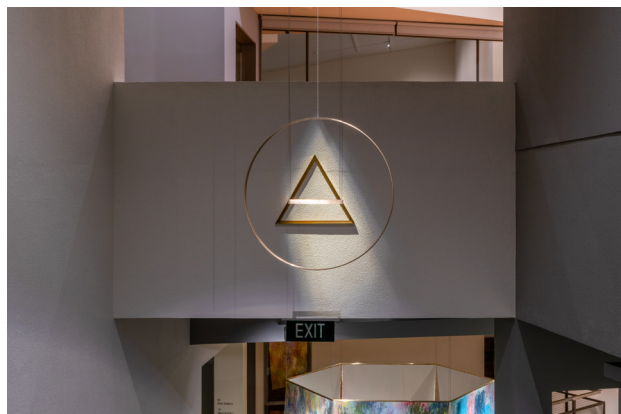
Search Engine for her Future Self, 2020–22, watercolour and graphite pencil on paper, 12 parts, 700 × 720 mm each, courtesy of the artist and Bowen Galleries, Wellington

Search Engine for her Future Self continues on from *The Loom of Time* and interweaves the energy structures pictured in the previous work. The rotational Merkaba and the surrounding Toroidal fields act here like containers that can move consciousness through time and space unhindered by the constraints of physicality and linear time. The diagrams pictured in this series envisage the idea of consciousness enmeshed in a quantum field where moments in time can be accessed.

Like a search engine, information can be gained outside of lived experience. To me, the title suggests the idea of an internal search engine that can access knowledge from selves in other dimensions, through the activation of technologies that lie latent within the human energy body.

Kathy Barry is based in Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington. She has a MFA from Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland (2004) and a Postgraduate Diploma in Art History from Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington (2001). While Barry has been exhibiting her work since 2001, her practice took its current turn in 2012, when she began producing watercolour drawings that captured the energy fields she began to see and feel that have structured the series she has produced since that date. Her works have been included in the 32nd Bienal de Sao Paulo in 2016, and in *Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits*, at Monash University Museum of Art (MUMA) in Melbourne in 2015. She staged *Homeworld*, a two-person exhibition with Isobel Thom, at Te Uru Waitākere Contemporary Gallery in 2014, after completing the artist residency at the McCahon House in West Auckland in 2012. She has regularly exhibited her work in solo exhibitions at Bowen Galleries in Wellington since 2013.

Notes by Sarah Smuts-Kennedy



Structure for the House of I, 2016, brass, stainless steel, 550 × 550 × 120 mm, three parts, courtesy of the artist

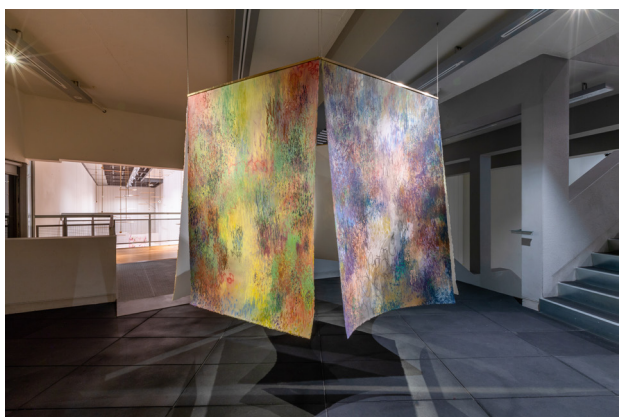
This sculpture was first presented in *Point to Periphery* at Sophie Gannon Gallery in Melbourne in 2016 and was included in *Light Language* at Te Uru Waitākere Contemporary Gallery as part of my post McCahon House residency exhibition in 2017.

Structure for the House of I uses the ancient energy tools of geometry (triangle, square and circle) and material (brass, which is a conductor). Each element came into being separately over a period of time. It was surprising to discover that they worked perfectly together, where the shapes neatly intermeshed. Part of my process requires me to follow instructions I don't understand, having faith in the process and trust in myself. Surrendering to this system continues to generate surprising outcomes that I do not anticipate or foresee. Feeling like an archaeologist of my own practice I slowly come to understand what each work is doing with a growing sensation that there is a larger logic at play that wants to bring beauty and harmony into the physical plane.

I placed this work so that it interacts with and connects the Earth's energy field, the architecture of the Adam Art Gallery, and the human body. With this architectural arrangement I seek to produce a balancing effect on multiple levels within the energy field. To determine the placement of this and the other works in my presentation I have utilised a system I have deployed for decades which entails the use of a pendulum. I use a process called Divination or Radiesthesia. The turn of the pendulum provides me with simple 'yes' (clockwise) or 'no' (anti-clockwise) answers. This allows me to slip into a 'surrender-in-real-time' state that requires focus but no will, which I refer to as 'heart thinking'. Using my own vibrational field I access an expanded sense of mind that slips between me as a singularity and me as part of the wider whole. The question is held in my mind. It elicits either a positive or negative charge which is translated through my body and results in the direction of the swing. Divination is still used to locate water aquifers and mineral deposits. There is a history of artists using pendulums to bridge levels

of consciousness. The most formative for me is Swiss artist Emma Kunz (1882–1963). She began using her pendulum in 1938 to ask questions on a variety of topics as well as to generate her art work, which she treated as a healing tool.

The perfect viewing position to experience the geometric alignment within *Structure for the House of I* is just above floor level at the base of the wall facing the window gallery. A brass notation has been placed there to mark the central axis of this work, introducing a 'point' into my geometric arrangement.



Discharge, 2022, six *Joy Field* drawings (pigment pastel on 640 gsm cotton rag paper, each panel 524 × 1067 × 25 mm), brass, stainless steel wire, dimensions variable, courtesy of the artist

Discharge is a new work created specially to anchor the installation at the Adam Art Gallery. It comprises six new large-scale *Joy Field* drawings hung from the ceiling in a hexagonal formation that can be read as a clockwise flow. This synthesis of materials, shape, colour, rhythm and intention activates the inherent energetic qualities of wider perceptual and invisible fields, generating an intense energy system at the heart of the installation circuit that runs through the Gallery.

The *Joy Field* drawings are dry media works on paper held by brass bars that allow them to float in space. Here, they are linked together with brass angles to complete the subtle circuit around the hexagonal framework. I think of these artifacts as constructed fields of energy. Thresholds are crossed through the process of materialising these fields of coloured marks, where a thing becomes more than the sum of its parts. It is not something I can manage through mind. It is something that occurs through surrendering to the process: by focusing on being, rather than doing. These works affect me in tangible and unspoken ways, which I can sense through shifts in my heart rate and biochemistry.



Harmonies, 2016, 13 brass rods, glass, Herkimer diamonds, dimensions variable, courtesy of the artist

Harmonies is a sculptural work originally exhibited in *Point to Periphery* at Sophie Gannon Gallery in Melbourne. It was later included as the central work for my solo presentation *Frequency of the Earth* at Artspace Aotearoa in Auckland in 2017. I think of it as an instrument emitting non-audible sound.

Pythagoras was the first to introduce to the western world the ancient Egyptian way of correlating musical qualities with quantifiable, numerical values. The golden ratio of 1.618, expressed as the ultimate proportion of harmony, beauty and spirituality, was used in the design of sacred buildings to produce energy that facilitated connectivity with spiritual realms through resonant prayer. Popular among spiritually significant shapes are pyramids and hemispheres such as domes. The rhythm of *Harmonies* is held along brass rods intersected by solid brass notations and glass domes embedded with double terminated quartz crystals called Herkimer diamonds. The pressure of the glass amplifies the crystals' specific qualities, which are said to purify the energy within the field and open up dimensional pathways. The dome shape creates a lens that controls the refraction and direction of how this energy emanates into space. This arrangement at the Adam Art Gallery produces a unique sound that radiates silently.



Light Language 1-21, Methodist Church, Pitt Street, 2017, 21 drawings, pigment pastel on 640 gsm cotton rag paper, 695 × 495 mm, each sheet, courtesy of the artist

These twenty drawings were created in 2017 in the Methodist Church in Pitt Street in Auckland. They were first shown at Te Uru Waitākere Contemporary Gallery in the exhibition I made at the conclusion of my McCahon House residency. These works generated a site-specific activation at the church as they were drawn. Now framed and presented in grid formation, their notations trace an energetic clearing over the twenty beats/drawings that tap into the Earth's telluric grid.



Ten Parts Whole, 2014, brass, stainless steel, dimensions variable, courtesy of the artist



Pieces on Earth, 2020, 36 brass rectangles, nine *Joy Field* drawings (pigment pastel on 640gsm paper), stainless steel wire, dimensions variable, courtesy of the artist

Ten Parts Whole was first exhibited in *Field Work* at Sophie Gannon Gallery in Melbourne in 2014. Its distinct formation emerged out of a collaboration with the field as part of a much larger installation that was focused on raising the vibration in the gallery for the duration of the installation. The placement of this work in the Adam has in part been chosen by the height and shape of the stairwell space, which is like the building's spiralling spine.

Pieces on Earth is the largest single work I have yet made. It uses a strategy I first began testing in 2012, when I began exploring the non-visible materials within space while still completing my MFA at Elam School of Fine Arts in Auckland. Comprised of 36 brass rectangles and nine largescale *Joy Field* drawings suspended from the ceiling with stainless-steel wire, it notates the air at various heights. Horizontal brass frames and vertical stainless-steel lines create energetic eddies in the atmosphere in the same way rocks do in a river, as they impact on the flow, movement and sound of the water. This hovering striation of unseen volumes by these energy-repelling metal parts are situated in relation to mineral mark-making on 640gsm paper, an organic substrate which absorbs energy. The mark-making arrangements in mineral pigments give expression to a certain quality of vibration that has been generated through me, using a specific system that allows me to function as a tool between the field and the substrate. Here, in the installation, they remain static as rhythm transcribed to paper, yet they move off the plane and into the subtle field of the environs as vibrations. The juxtaposition of metallic and organic materials, hard-edged geometries and angles alongside gestural marks gives rise to a certain subtle charge being activated within the space.

My purpose in increasing the vibration of the field is to create an opportunity for the viewer to sense how information impacts atmospheric energy and the positive and negative spaces we inhabit. Working with the Earth's grid, the gallery's framework, thought forms and the pendulum, I have create a composition to harness and amplify certain qualities from within the void to resonate in a way that supports and nurtures life.

Sarah Smuts-Kennedy completed her MFA at Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland in 2012. Her practice is focused on a research-based investigation into fields of energy as they engage with conceptual thinking both within art-based languages and other intuition-driven modes of enquiry. Her biodynamic, permaculture teaching garden, 45 minutes north of Auckland, functions as a central axis for her research and allows her to explore the potential of syntropic systems thinking. She was the McCahon House Artist in Residence between September and December, 2016. Her works are housed in private and public collections in Australia and New Zealand. Recent solo exhibitions include *Joy Field*, Sumer Gallery, Tauranga, 2021; *Light Language*, Te Uru Waitākere Contemporary Gallery, Auckland, 2017; *Frequency of the Earth*, Artspace Aotearoa, Auckland, 2017; and *Shape Analysis*, RM, Auckland, 2013. Her social sculptural commission *For the Love of Bees*, 2016–ongoing, has triggered a resurgence of regenerative organic urban farms and community compost hubs across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Sarah Smuts-Kennedy acknowledges the generous support of Creative New Zealand Toi Aotearoa in the production of her work.

This exhibition guide was made on the occasion of *Energy Work – Kathy Barry / Sarah Smuts-Kennedy*, Te Pātaka Toi Adam Art Gallery, 13.07.2022 – 02.10.2022.

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