

CONSCIOUS  
COLLABORATION  
WITH SPIRIT

MARCH 5-MARCH 28, 2020  
SOIL GALLERY, SEATTLE

# Conscious Collaboration with Spirit

## SOIL Gallery

Artists have long worked with the spiritual realm. Some collaborate unknowingly and some consciously. Inspiration is the most common mode of collaboration—opening yourself to what ‘wants’ to be made. Sometimes this collaboration is almost unconsidered by the artist, or a mystery to them. Much of the artist mystique is related to artists not knowing how to navigate this relationship with intention and consciousness. Sometimes artists try to access the ineffable by reducing their inhibitions (insecurities, fear, ego’s voice) with substances. Artists have also tried to depict the spiritual realm—mediating the portrayal through their mental models. Many of the first abstract artists were doing this, e.g. Kandinsky, Kupka, Mondrian. The distance created by their mind trying to understand the spiritual realm rather than directly collaborating with it is the difference between their work and the work of Emma Kunz or Hilma af Klint, now recognized as the first abstract painter.

For decades artists have shied away or have been discouraged by critics and curators from talking openly about the connection to the spiritual realm in their work. Maurice Tuchman was the first curator to show af Klint’s work in *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*, at LACMA. In his ground-breaking accompanying text of the same name, Tuchman suggests that the art world has avoided the spiritual since Hitler misappropriated aspects of Theosophy to explain some of his fascist philosophy. While this avoidance is understandable in the frame of history, it has become a habit that doesn’t serve us.

The avoidance hinders our ability to create honestly, bravely, and fully explore possibilities. It’s time that this is healed. It’s time for

artists working in these ways to own the connection of their work to the realm of spirit, so that they can better understand their motivations, practices, and methodology. This understanding will help build scholarship and understanding in an area that has been under-investigated. This exhibition attempts to contribute both to healing this tendency to avoid the spiritual in the art world and to contribute to our understanding of the breadth of practices artists are using to connect to spirit and inform their work.

Each artist in the exhibition engages spirit differently. They call it different names and connect with it differently too. Nicholas Nyland uses a method that may be familiar to many artists, sensing when his work has a life and consciousness of its own. He seeks to make something beautiful that didn't exist in the world before, recognizing something true about the intention, gesture and himself in the work.

Sara Long makes gifts for Nature and Alien beings. By spending extended periods of time alone in nature. Allowing herself to be still and bored, she reaches a state of heightened awareness where she becomes sensitive enough to notice the communications of plants, stones, and alien beings. She forms intimate bonds through this careful listening and reciprocity. With drawing, painting, and installation in nature she records the imprints the beings have left on her emotions.

Emily Counts seeks meaning in her life and explores themes of connectivity in her work. When she begins a piece there is a puzzle of how to create the artwork that needs to be made. She navigates this mystery by asking her higher self to show her the path through. Each step of the process, drawing, sculpting, glazing has its own inquiry process with her higher self. Counts creates quiet moments for her higher self to be able to reveal what is next. She gazes at a work imagining possibilities until the solution reveals itself and sticks in her imagination.

Jean Nagai seeks to provide healing and a sense of peace through his paintings, to illustrate both our uniqueness and our similarity through his constellations, murmurations, skeins of dots that coalesce with individuality and collective strength. Nagai uses meditative, half-waking, between-reality states, outside of incremental time, to connect with and paint the universal.

Hayley Barker draws and paints to create emotional resonances that help people feel less alone in the world. Her works are made with coalescing vibrant marks forming faces, bodies, words and landscapes that feel honest, vulnerable, and fierce. Barker began her collaboration with spirit as a witch and uses both spells and prayer in her work. Spells acknowledge her will in the universe, while prayer surrenders her will to the will of Spirit. Her work incorporates shadow work, residue of dreams, and fears. She experiences these emotions in her body as a direct connection with spirit and integrates them into her understanding of beauty in the world.

Elizabeth Traina creates prismatic geometries that function as gates for awakening. Her collaboration with spirit is inquiry-based, supporting individuals and the collective in remembering their essence. She both asks for assistance from spirit and studies broadly, letting what she learns deepen her understanding and help form the geometries and color choices she paints. Traina says this of her collaboration with spirit, "In the act of asking for help, I am met with an immediate feeling of relief, and that relief brings me into greater harmony with the moment. And in that stronger relationship with the moment, I am able to be a stronger conduit to anchor grace."

My process of connecting with spirit is to ask each member of my team of spirit collaborators to connect with me and then to ask them a complex series of yes/no questions using energy testing to navigate every aspect of my work. This results in highly patterned

geometries that hold coded information for the growth, healing, and evolution of individuals, communities and nature. I am also moved or instructed frequently to use song, dance, or intuition as part of my process. The processes I use result in complete surprises for me. I never know what to expect when I start a painting. I set the intention, but don't know how my team will guide that the intention is met.

While all the artists in Conscious Collaboration with Spirit use different methods to connect and have different goals in making their work, there are common threads. Each method enables the artist to be more open and receptive to levels of energetic information outside of the range of our five senses. This information can be sensed kinesthetically, emotionally, with inner sight or hearing, through symbol, and by noticing resonant meaning in what we observe in the outer world. The goals of the artists' work are to connect us to one another, make us less lonely, find our true identity, give back to the subtle forces that make the world whole, and support our growth and evolutionary journeys. These goals are interconnected parts of the same web, all essential threads that support the movement of humanity to our potential. Art has always helped us understand and imagine ourselves, to see the next path forward. We are at a critical moment in the history and evolution of humanity and Earth. Creating more openness and understanding of the benefits of conscious collaboration with spirit will allow artists a more complete tool box with which to imagine new ways forward for the collective.

Leah Nguyen

Seattle, Washington, February 2020





# Hayley Barker

## Los Angeles, California

Grace must be a fundamental ingredient in painting. If grace is, “unmerited divine assistance given to humans for their regeneration or sanctification,”<sup>(1)</sup> then grace, when it appears, is an unwarranted, elemental force in making. No matter how many times I fail, there is something beyond my seeing that assures me that more will be revealed if I just keep drawing and painting.

I have never felt myself to be very masterful in any sense, or even book-smart/knowledgeable when it comes to painting. It’s more like a habit that I have built over years of just giving myself over to it. And I just do it the way I do it. When I am deep in a painting I feel myself handing it over to something beyond my comprehension. Showing up, I move my hand, mix paint, stand back, take it in, and see if I can learn anything.

What is Spirit but that thing that is awake within us despite the trauma, pain, or loss we endure. What is Spirit but that thing that allows me to jump into drawing or painting, knowing nothing is promised?

If my drawings are diary entries or the residue of dreams, my paintings attempt to enter into relationship with the visceral mystery that is God/dess or Spirit. Grace can show up, can offer renewal, can lend the possibility of communion with strangers via the finished work. To show we are not so alone.

*1. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/grace>*





# Emily Counts

Seattle, WA

My process for developing ideas for sculptures and physically making them includes frequently consulting with my spirit or a higher self. To do so I quiet my busy mind as much as possible and tune in to a clear voice that will provide answers or imagery. Connection to an intuitive or wise spirit may reveal paths through the mysterious and sometimes challenging steps to making art. This is a visual form of meditation used in moments throughout my time in the studio. One of the more important results from this is to ease doubtful or negative thoughts that are distracting. Collaboration with spirit is paired with problem-solving by my rational mind. These are two different ways of working and creating that overlap and are both necessary.

There are generally three parts to my process for making a ceramic object: drawing, sculpting, and glazing. I start with drawings in a sketchbook or sometimes small watercolor paintings. This is a time when I am accessing visions and putting them down on paper, getting a sense of an object I want to see. When working with ceramics, sculpting and building with wet clay, my concentration is on the physical activity and what is happening in the moment. Glazing the ceramics is then a time to make decisions about color and because of the surprising nature of glazes I want to see the results in my mind's eye before I begin. In this way glazing is similar to drawing as it is based on visions of possible outcomes. Overall I try to make space for those images and ideas to be communicated from a higher self. The most satisfaction comes from being surprised by my own work.

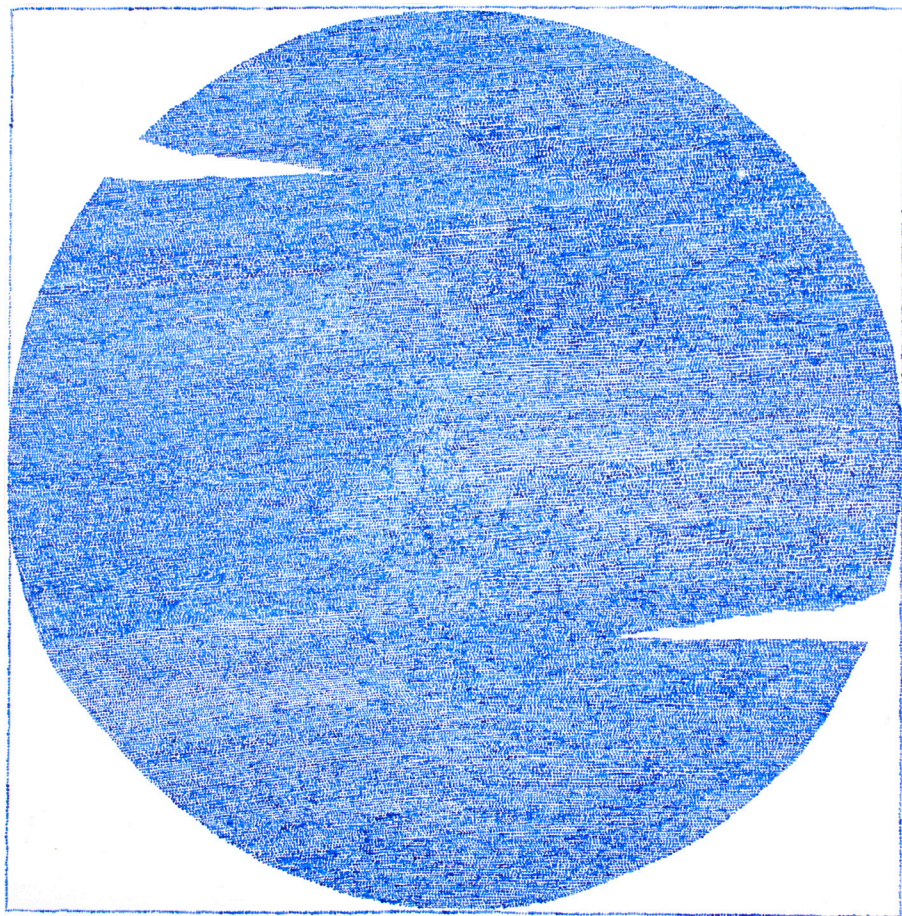
# Sara Long

## Humbolt, California

Make love to the morning light. Marry the Redwoods. Caress and press into the canyons. Cry into the huge swooping Cedars and let them hold you, (remember, rejection is God's protection, darling). Have a coffee and share your daily announcements with the ferns, birds and twigs like you did when you were a little girl. Bake in the desert sun until your skin howls as you transform into a lizard. Don't worry house plants, momma is menstruating next week, you'll feast soon enough! Kiss her spongy bark, it's her mouth, it's how she drinks water. Marigolds are the flower with 400 souls, listen up. Stroke the Jumbo Rocks softly with care as you would your lover's folds - they are pulsing for you.

These observations and experiences are moments when I feel nature is speaking to me - opening up communication - so I can be used as a vessel to paint, draw, write, and make.





# Jean Nagai

## Los Angeles, California

My paintings are primarily influenced by my connection to the landscape that surrounds me. I am also motivated by a spiritual connection to the vastness of the universe that gives me a feeling of peace. I see nature in water, in mountains, but I'm also moved by the sense of nature that is present in say, an ant colony that is in a city, or how I recognize my mother's face in my own. Reflecting on the world this way has taught me that there is a relationship between scale and empathy. Problems don't seem as large or immediate when we pause and appreciate that there are larger (and smaller) forces at work around us. It doesn't mean that pain is not real, but there is some comfort in knowing that life will persist with or without us. The universe contains multitudes and so do each one of us. When I paint a dot, it can represent my friend, and the next dot is their neighbor, and despite their differences in size and color they are also quite similar when seen from a distance.



# Leah Meridoc Nguyen

## Seattle, Washington

I am an artist-healer. My paintings are patterned geometries that hold information for the healing, growth, evolution, and transformation of individuals, communities, and nature. I paint in collaboration with a spirit team particular to the painting I am making. I paint portraits of people's soul energy (Soul Pattern Portraits) that are messages directly from the soul of the person to the human and I create patterns for healing communities and places that are site specific. I use energy testing to ask a complex series of yes/no questions to my spirit team.

I only work in connection with this team. I have worked in this way since 2007 and over this time I have developed a complex question matrix. Most of what my team needs to tell me is found within the possibilities on the matrix, however there are also times when I am instructed to use my intuition, doodling, and even internet searches to help me find what is needed in the next step. Sometimes energy healing, song, or dance is needed as part of the next step. Sometimes an unusual material like calendula petal juice, cigar ash, or clay is asked for. While it may sound like my art process is so prescribed or controlled in this process that there is no freedom I find the opposite is true for me.

I always set the intention of the paintings, and then my team shows me how to best achieve this. They are excellent communicators, giving me the information in the order I need it to comprehend what is needed. I am a collaborator on this team. The paintings come through as patterns and





geometries because of my deep love and lifelong investigation of these forms. Letting my ego and conscious mind serve the higher purpose of the painting and step aside from decision-making is very freeing and results in the delight of being surprised every time I paint.

# Nicholas Nyland

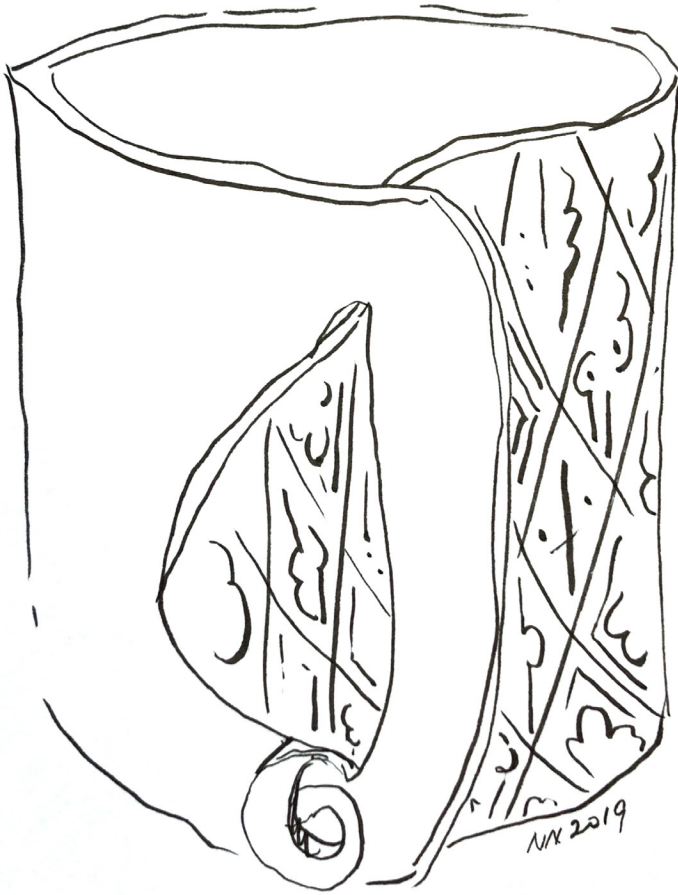
## Tacoma, Washington

Trying to disentangle my relationship with something as close yet hard to define as 'spirit' can send me into spirals. I may not actually be able to separate it out. However, I can say that as unfashionably earnest as it may seem, when I was younger, I'd hoped that I might connect to something beyond myself through the work. I was adamant that I wasn't interested in drawing from life - the mundanity and imperfection of mere people or things offered me little clue to a deeper meaning.

Abstraction, on the other hand, seemed to promise something untainted by corporeal reality. It validated my distrust of representation and a failure to feel myself reflected in any organized religious practice. The obvious alternative, High Modernism (Mondrian, Kandinsky, et al.) presented similar problems; the "universality" didn't feel accessible or relevant to expressing my lived experience.

It's taken me a long time to learn I had it backwards, and what I look for in the studio is to connect to something, I'll call it spirit, within myself. My art practice isn't therapy, but it's not not therapeutic in the sense that it's a way toward wholeness and, in the best of circumstances, authenticity.

In the last few years, I don't think it's a coincidence that allusions to seeing, being seen, and feeling reflected in the work through windows, mirrors, and faces hidden in patterned surfaces have been features of my work. There's a point at which a sculpture or painting takes on a particular life of its own and it's at this point that I can identify I'm conscious of a "collaborative" process. As the work develops, a conversation begins where my intention and what the work "needs" is negotiated through the making process.



The studio isn't a chapel, but it is a generative space where a unique kind of transcendence can occur. This collaborative process is a physical speculation about what might be and an opportunity to propose alternative ways to extrapolate meaning from the world around us.

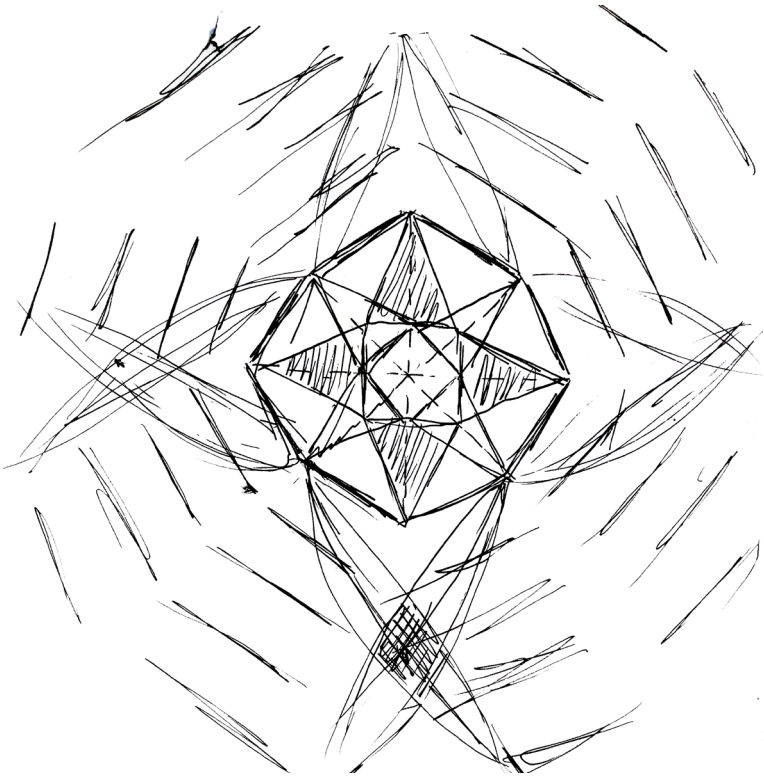
# Elizabeth Traina

## Brooklyn NY

My intention as an artist is to create work that transcends the physical world with a broader vision of awareness, including spiritual or mystical themes. My work is comprised of a geometric light language, where I create prismatic paintings that function as stimulating inter-dimensional portals or gates. Each work intends to serve the viewer and may be helpful in healing or establishing a deeper resonance with our original essence as one with the divine source. My paintings pair with a corresponding text of the way the work is useful for self-actualization.

My art is a devotional practice of a student and a conduit. I accompany my art-making with transcendent music experiences and esoteric studies. I create and receive in a mutual dance. My relationship to spirit is inquiry-based, and the invitation for assistance and collaboration operates as spontaneous enfoldment throughout the day. In this way, I am met with a reverb of goodness, rightness, and creative direction. My artistic practice exists as an ongoing opportunity to deepen my harmony with the moment, in grace with the now.

My paintings each arrive through unique processes. For example, in the making of the *Sovereign Portal*, I was first inspired by the 64 Tetrahedron Grid, one of the most profound sacred geometric structures, a 3D version of the flower of life and the structure of timespace at the quantum scale. My challenge was in rendering this form as light and in doing so, was guided to pair this geometry with other overlapping layers of other more recognizable forms to



create a new grid that supports discovery, interplay, and integration. In the creation of my latest painting *South*, I started my process first by researching the spiritual teachings of the southern quadrant of the medicine wheel. I then directed my consciousness to expand with deep intuition, I translate the meaning of the form with a geometric language that captures the South's unique aspects, as it relates to the other directions, with precise color, light, and form.

My work communicates on a multi-sensory level, beyond physical perception, and through direct inquiry with the portals, the act of passive viewing is invited to transcend into profound experiencing. I welcome you to use my work as a meditative tool for personal investigation and self-actualization.



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Curated by Leah Nguyen

## Artists

Hayley Barker . Emily Counts . Sara Long . Jean Nagai

Leah Nguyen . Nicholas Nyland . Elizabeth Traina

*Cover and back, Leah Nguyen, Daily Meditation for Peace Drawings, 2007*