

Polina Alamaa

Exploring the Enigmatic Unconscious: An Automatic Approach.



MA Thesis

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An Automatic Approach.**

Polina Alamaa — Master of Arts Thesis

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Illustrations and Cover Art: Polina Alamaa

Editing: Eleonora Rossetti

Proofreading: Gurden Batra

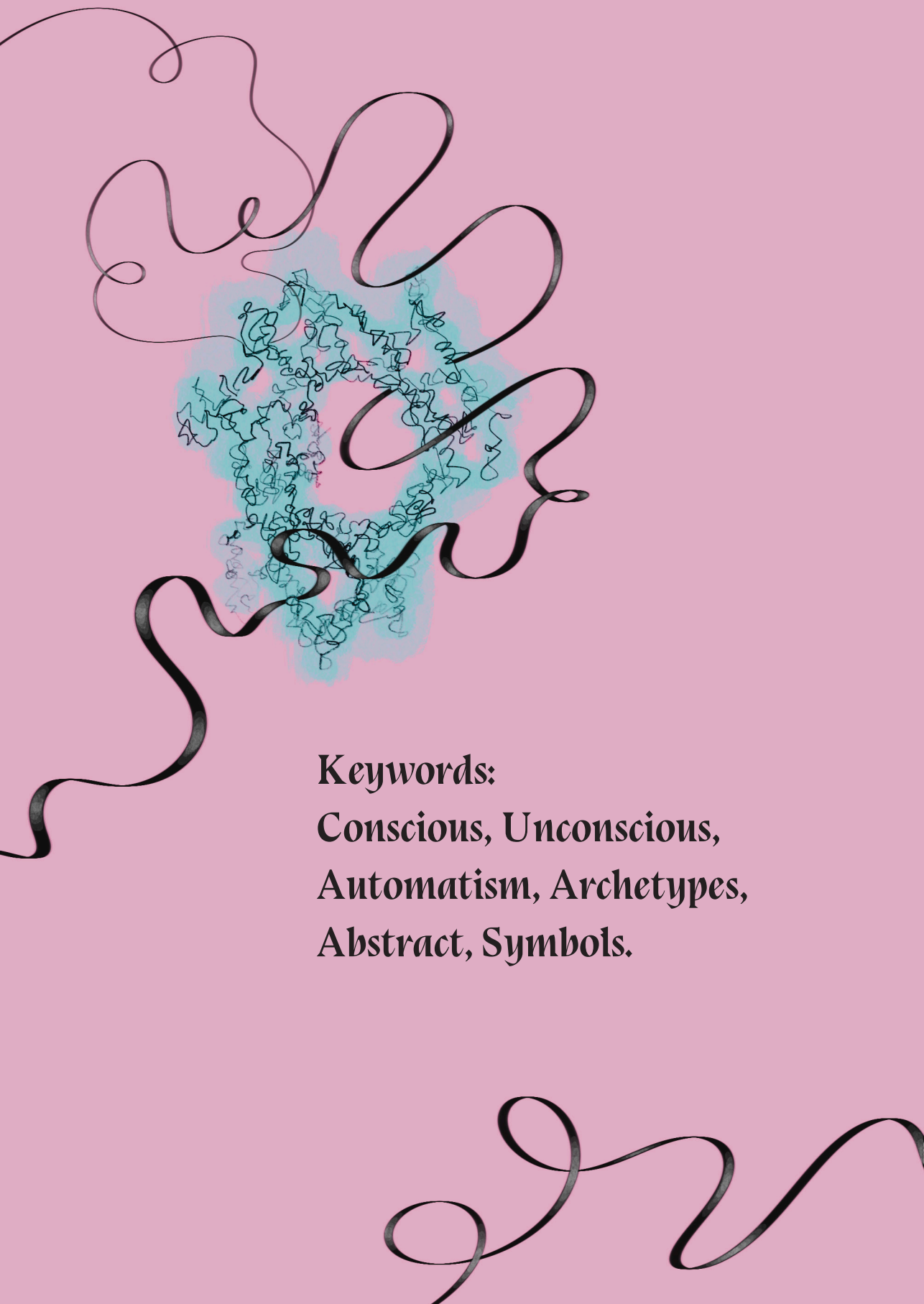


Department: Art and Media

Degree Programme: Visual Cultures,

Curating and Contemporary Art

Year: 2022



Keywords:
Conscious, Unconscious,
Automatism, Archetypes,
Abstract, Symbols.



Abstract

The enigma of the Unconscious mind has baffled many psychologists and artists alike, yielding entire Art movements, such as Surrealism and Abstract Art. Its mystery continues to excite modern thinkers and inspire creative professionals to this day. As a visual artist influenced by the Abstract and Surrealist genres, I gravitate towards the ambiguous nature of the Unconscious, and its connotations in the artistic field.

Since self-awareness is one of our defining qualities as a species, there is an unease in our lack of understanding when it comes to the inner workings of our psyche. This thesis explores said paradox by analysing the role of the Unconscious in my artistic process, as well as its implications for the viewer. In approaching these topics via artistic inquiry, the project aims to illustrate the significance of employing the Unconscious in visual art.

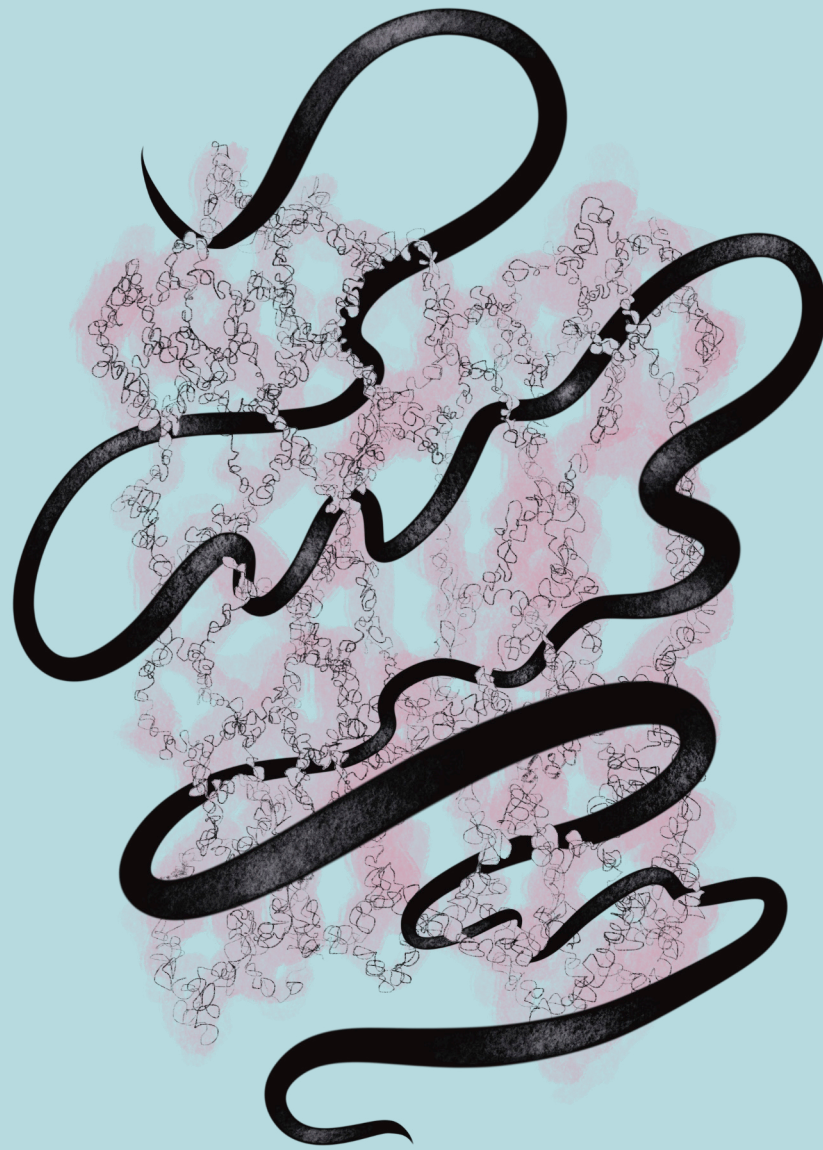
The present study focuses on automatic methods of production as a means of communication between Conscious and Unconscious states. The aim is to succumb to the intuitive process so that the outcome may be unfiltered and uncorrupted by active decision-making; thereby allowing Unconscious thoughts to emerge and depict themselves in the form of symbols. This artistic research points to the precision of Jung's theories about Archetypal Imagery as a means of interpreting symbols in our Unconscious.

This exploration of automatic techniques cultivated into the form of an art exhibition, the goal of which was to avoid deliberate intention, but instead, allowing to be guided by immediate instinct and chance. This project reveals that in doing so, the work can expand in scope of interpretation, which offers me immense artistic freedom. The fruits of the automatic method are often more insightful and imaginative than those forged from meticulous forethought. The Unconscious should therefore be exploited as a catalyst for creativity.

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Acknowledgements

The completion of my thesis would not be possible without the guidance of my Supervisor Pia Euro, who has supported me in this process and continued to encourage me throughout my degree. Your positive attitude has uplifted me every step of the way.

I extend my deepest gratitude to Eleonora Rossetti, whose graphic design expertise made this thesis possible. I am indebted to your digital knowhow; you have elevated this project above anything I could imagine, I truly could not have done it without you. Grazie mille amore mio! Also, thank you to Gurden Batra for proof-reading, and overall advice throughout this project.

I would also like to thank my *fiancé* Bailey Polkinghorne for cheering me on, not only in my academic endeavours but in every aspect of life. Your unwavering support has led me to where I am today. I love you and appreciate you beyond words.

For the opportunity to study here in Finland, I owe my thanks to Aalto University. Its vibrant community of peers and teachers has been my support network for the past three years. A special thanks to Laura Maria Beloff for her thesis seminars, which offered invaluable advice in academic writing. Thank you to Hanna Saarikoski and Kristina Jansson for their Contemporary Drawing course, and their effort in developing my drawing skills.

Thank you to my family - Anna, and Agata - for their continued care and support. You have inspired me to follow my dreams, and motivated me to achieve them, so I thank you for always believing in me. Finally, I want to acknowledge my amazing friends, both old and new. Your ongoing encouragement, and active participation in my art projects, means the world to me. Thanks to everyone who has attended my thesis exhibition, your insights have helped me immensely.



01. Introduction

1.1 Purpose and Inspiration for Thesis

The unknown, mysterious, and intangible have always been the driving force of my artistic curiosity; the more elusive the subjects, the more likely I am to find artistic value in it. The same is true in my everyday life, I am motivated by the endless pursuit of an ineffable quality – a certain “*je ne c’est quoi*”. For these reasons and more, I have devoted much of my practice to studying the Unconscious. David Parker (2008) has said it best «what takes place in the studio, and subsequent reflections on the activity and its outcomes, appears to be deeply connected to a vital personal need to engage in some form of highly altered state of mind». In this statement from his essay *The Abstract Unconscious in Painting* he perfectly summarises the drive behind creating artistic work, especially in the case of artists who work intuitively, such as myself. It is indeed that intense hunger for the transcendent feeling of getting lost in the work, which fuels my artistic appetite.

In much of my previous work, the mystical yearning for something extraordinary revealed itself in my choice of subject matter: aliens, spirits, UFOs, and various other supernatural phenomena. I have dedicated my bachelor’s dissertation to studying the phenomenon of things seen in the sky over Wiltshire - a local area commonly associated with crop circles and reports of flying saucers. I carried out investigations in the field, as well as online, and in talking with the locals - trying to gather as many speculations and urban legends as possible. I discovered that the stories themselves feed the myth, yet somehow reveal an ultimate truth about us (humankind) - that we are curious, creative, and we can fantasise and invent. These fictions are as important to us as our reality, essential even. For me, this space somewhere between seen and unseen, where fantasy and reality interact, that interesting things begin to happen. I knew then that I want to explore this artistically. As a result of these amateur investigations, my final degree piece became a series of paintings titled *How to Leave Earth, When You Don’t Leave Your Room* featuring my everyday life at home as an alien.

It is evident in these choices that I crave to grasp something more than meets the eye, such as, another realm, an alternate dimension or state of consciousness. While the outcome of these endeavours has been mostly successful, I must explore these interests further as they evolve along with my practice. Afterall, it is no coincidence that the shift from my bachelor's studies to Master's, brought with itself a new abstract direction. Abstraction serves as a deconstructive tool in much the same way the unconscious mind does. By this I mean blurring the boundaries of what is known by switching perspectives, or finding new unexpected connections. Within my previous projects is a fundamental lack of structure, and understanding, within my processes. At this stage in my work, I seek to turn my attention to the production process and delve into its significance for me as an artist. How does work attain meaning throughout various stages of my production processes?

Firstly, I want to address my mediums and techniques. I achieve my work through intuitive drawing, occasionally figurative and abstract painting, and sometimes sculpture and installation. It varies depending on my immediate inspiration and area of interest at the time, and each process serves a specific and distinct function.

In drawing, I find freedom and ease, in which the act of mark-making guides me towards the final product. I also tend to associate drawing with the use of primitive tools, such as charcoal or pencil, which are not only readily accessible, but extremely versatile. When an idea occurs spontaneously, I reach for a pencil to jot down the sketch, in that regard drawing is a very immediate working method.

Painting allows me to be expressive with colour and marks, in a way that conveys emotion. The bold and versatile language of paint serves as a method of communication between my conscious and unconscious mind. One way this happens is the image arises intuitively and comes into existence via intentional placement of the paint. Or vice-versa, the process of painting

itself becomes an improvised dance, in which the resulting image is not the guiding force, but something that can be discovered by mere chance. For me, this tension between intentional and circumstantial is particularly important in painting.

Sculpture, on the other hand, offers a more intimate relationship with the material as I render my subject matter in three dimensions. The physicality required for building and sculpting, acts as another tool to materialise the content of my psyche, all while collaborating with the material and allowing it to have its own voice.

Finding the advantages of these mediums is crucial for the development of my artistic direction, as well as, establishing a more meaningful relationship with these traditional methodologies in my practice. I want to get acquainted with my mediums so that I can skilfully utilise them for the purpose of exploring my Unconscious, and successfully communicate my findings to my audience.

Perhaps, I seek more honesty out of my work; for something unfiltered, and untarnished by my aesthetic bias to emerge. It is apparent that I seek something beyond the extraordinary image. I strive to find the psychological source of these images and gain a meaningful insight into their message. To do this, I must study the Unconscious and its role in my artistic practice. Why am I possessed by these stories and scenes? What is happening inside my mind and how does it manifest in my art? What can I learn from my artistic output? How can my artistic process facilitate communication with the Unconscious?

Through investigating these questions, I hope to expand my theoretical and artistic knowledge, which will contribute to my ongoing study on the unknown. It is my hope that the Unconscious will reveal both my artistic, and personal truths. Parker (2008) addresses this «What then perhaps needs to be addressed from the outset, concerns what such implied inner needs might be, as it seems that these needs drive the initial intention to

physically create an image and to act this out imaginatively through a highly specific process of change and development».

As an artist, understanding my work, and conveying my intentions is essential. It is important to know the essence of my practice, so that I can competently explain the work to my immediate audience, but also to progress the work further in the future. Though, it is also true that the work can be left to interpretation and thus offer more freedom to the viewer. My aim, however, is not to limit my work to a one-dimensional interpretation, but to study my artistic process as the main subject. Much of that study will involve questioning my creative process, as it may offer great insight into my own psyche. Analysis by means of inquiry into the Unconscious is certainly one way to do this.

1.2 Thesis Goals

The main goal of this thesis is to comprehend my artistic practice in a theoretical sense via an in-depth analysis of my intuitive drawings and paintings. As well as, to explore the relationship between automatic drawing, the Unconscious, and abstraction, which could offer insight into my creative ideologies and agendas. I want to identify the important elements of my practice through experimentation, and careful consideration of each stage of my working process. Why do I choose to work in certain ways, and what does my labour convey to my audience?

At this stage I should clarify what I mean by the term “Unconscious” - the Unconscious in this thesis implies the underlying content of one’s mind, which one is not consciously aware of, yet which manifests itself in one’s actions and feelings. In this instance, I want to explore how my Unconscious reveals itself in the content of my artwork, whether it be in the form of symbols, narrative, or methodological sense. The key question here is how I

can gain a better understanding of the creative process via the unintentional imagery that appears in my work.

I will inquire into the Unconscious via the research and theories of Carl Gustav Jung (1875 – 1961) and Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939). Their pioneering research will provide a foundation for unpacking some of the key themes in this thesis, which I will later build on by referring to modern thinkers, as well as my artistic project and personal reflections. I intend to explore Jungian Archetypes and unconscious manifestations within my own practice, delve into their meaning, and apply this knowledge to further illustrate the enigma of our psyche.

Overall, I hope to gain a deeper understanding of the Unconscious and its implications within contemporary art. I believe this subject to be incredibly valuable for creatives because the Unconscious is said to contain one’s true feelings and desires, which certainly plays a crucial role in any successful art piece. It is also widely considered to be the initial source of all creative ideas. Whether or not this claim is true, this essay aims to investigate the role of one’s Unconscious in an artistic context. Although the Unconscious has been discussed at length in various fields, it remains an enigma and thus the subject of great controversy. It is my intention to contribute to this ongoing discussion, offering my personal perspective as a creative professional.

Whoever denies the existence of the unconscious is in fact assuming that our present knowledge of the psyche is total. And this belief is clearly just as false as the assumption that we know all there is to be known about the natural universe. Our psyche is part of nature, and its enigma is as limitless (Jung, C.G. 1978).

Throughout my practice, I had noticed reoccurring themes, which I had unknowingly pursued for many years – these themes will be crucial to my analysis, as they could potentially be subliminal messages from my Unconscious. Understanding these patterns, and their source, will be my main objective in the production of art for this thesis. Although, it is often challeng-

ing to gather tangible evidence of one's artistic motivations; especially when talking about one's own work. As Dostoyevsky (1868.) famously wrote - "the causes of human actions are usually immeasurably more complex and varied than our subsequent explanations of them". I find this particularly true for my practice, as I have always found it difficult to explain my artwork verbally, or in writing, it feels as though I run the risk of binding the conceptual value of the work. It is the process itself that fascinates me and drives my work, so it is indeed the process that demands more attention, rather than the outcome of the work. For this reason, I want to take a closer look at my artistic process and develop a deeper comprehension of my practice in a wider context. By analysing symbolic imagery in my work, I hope to gain a deeper insight into my own psyche, as well as develop my future work conceptually. This thesis is also about the process of art production, more so than the resulting work, so I will be focusing on the exploration of my personal style and artistic methodology. It is an artist's virtue to perpetually question their own work because questioning is undoubtedly the first step to learning.

1.3 Research Methodology

I will conduct this thesis via inquiry into my practice by means of experimentation, analysis, and self-critique. I will produce a series of artistic experiments based on chance, automatism, free association, and other techniques designed to channel the Unconscious in art. I will then be reflecting on the outcome in relation to the Unconscious, from the theoretical standpoint of Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung, whereby I will analyse and interpret the symbolic nature of the work. Early 20th Century automatism utilised by the Surrealists will serve as a basis for my methodological approach. I will also be referring to Abstract Art as a relevant interface between the Unconscious and visual art.

It was E. H. Gombrich and Ernst Kris who first understood that «since art is in part a creation of the mind, and mind is a series of functions carried out by the brain, the scientific study of art must include neuroscience as well as cognitive psychology» (Kandel, E. 2012.). Kris particularly focused on art as a means of unconscious communication between the artist and the beholder, in which the beholder re-creates the artwork in his or her Unconscious (Kandel, E. 2012.). It is this core function of our Unconscious that I would like to focus on in this thesis. It is essential to see the work from the viewer's perspective, and to allow for an external interpretation of the work, which can exist outside the bounds of my own creative agenda. The viewer possesses a completely different world view to my own, as well as their own thoughts, opinions, and life experience, which would embellish the artwork with additional meaning. This is something Alois Riegl, an Austrian art historian, coined the "beholder's involvement", and his disciple Ernst Gombrich later called the "beholder's share" (Kandel, E. 2012.).

With the turn towards psychology, the theory of art began to take cognizance of the difference between the physical world and its appearance, and, subsequently, of the further difference between what is seen in nature and what is recorded in an artistic medium. The importance of formative factors inherent in the person, or acquired by experience and historical tradition, was increasingly stressed: What is seen depends on who is looking and who taught him to look (Arnheim, R. 1962).

It is precisely the ability to look and see, and to teach others to see, which I currently lack, and which motivates me to expand my knowledge of the Unconscious, and its role in my creative process. To achieve this, I must explore the connection between creativity and the unconscious processes that take place in my work as an artist. Research shows that from our current understanding of the human mind and brain, it is apparent that creative activity stems from the Unconscious, when one's mind is free to roam uncensored (Andreasen NC. 2011). The implications of these findings within my artistic work are crucial, not to mention fascinating to me personally.

1.4. Approaching the Unconscious in my Practice

I will approach the practical aspect of my research by utilising two distinct methods of uncovering the Unconscious within an artistic work. The first, and most common method, is based on automatism. The second, is a more specific approach, based on Jungian Archetypes. I hope that in experimenting with two, opposing methods, I can compare the artistic output, as well as my first-hand experience in producing the work, to piece together a comprehensive understanding on the function of the Unconscious in art.

According to the first method, I will produce and study automatic drawings, to develop a method of intuitive painting. The idea is to utilise the automatic drawing method, and adapt it within the discipline of painting, whereby the painting emerges freely, and instinctively. Although, this method is not perfect and would require a certain criticality towards the final image, «...keeping actively and imaginatively involved in the space of the painting is crucial – avoiding any conscious desire to close down the imagination too soon by tying the imagery to overtly obvious figurative expressions» (Parker, D. 2008). On the other hand, painting can offer a unique insight into the psyche - Parker goes on to say, «As an empirical and essentially plastic medium, painting follows its own laws – laws that provide imagination with a material basis in which to express what is, in effect, a state of constant “being” and “becoming” for the active psyche. There is a clear parallel here to Jung’s active imagination – though this is critically embedded in the materially based activity of painting».

So, to adapt automatism within painting, one must consider the material complexity of paint – its texture, viscosity, opacity, and finish are all easily manipulated, which poses a plethora of possibilities to the artist. How to mix the paint, how to apply it, how to seal it etc. The artist must face more decisions in painting, than in traditional drawing, for example. There is also the variety of paints available, all of which, behave differently to one another.

In fact, much of the painting process, at least for me, requires thorough planning – from the choice of paints to the application technique, the paint demands certainty from the artist. It is only after these essential choices, when I hold the brush, that I truly dissolve in the process of painting. In my opinion, the more choices are made, the harder it is for something to emerge “automatically”, without conscious input, unless one employs an element of time restraint or chance. Having the pressure of time allows for snap judgments - these faster decisions are more likely to stem from the Unconscious, because the brain is not given the time to process the content thoroughly. Employing chance, however, excludes any possibility of conscious interference, replacing it with a passive gamble, which may or may not relate to the artist’s Unconscious.

Chance, on the other hand, becomes a more interesting tool for the Unconscious, when we analyse its outcome. The Rorschach Test, for example, is a remarkably simple method of psychological testing, in which the patients’ interpretations of the ink blot are analysed; all the while, the ink blot is a product of chance, which acts as a catalyst for association. It is the ambiguous nature of the ink blot, which allows for such varying elucidations, revealing the subject’s inner thoughts and feelings, by retrieving them from the Unconscious. This technique bares a lot of similarity to the interpretation of Abstract Art, in that the abstract image is equivocal, it poses more than one correct answer, and therefore, what is seen within the image is, at least in part, a projection of the onlooker.

To contrast this, I will utilise *The Book of Symbols: Reflections on Archetypal Images* by The Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism (ARAS) - an abundant archive of mythological, ritualistic, and symbolic images from all epochs, all over the world. The ARAS archive was founded by spiritualist, theosophist, and scholar Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn, and later acquired by the C.G. Jung Foundation of New York. This vast collection contains around 18,000 photographic images, each of which is cross-indexed and accompanied by

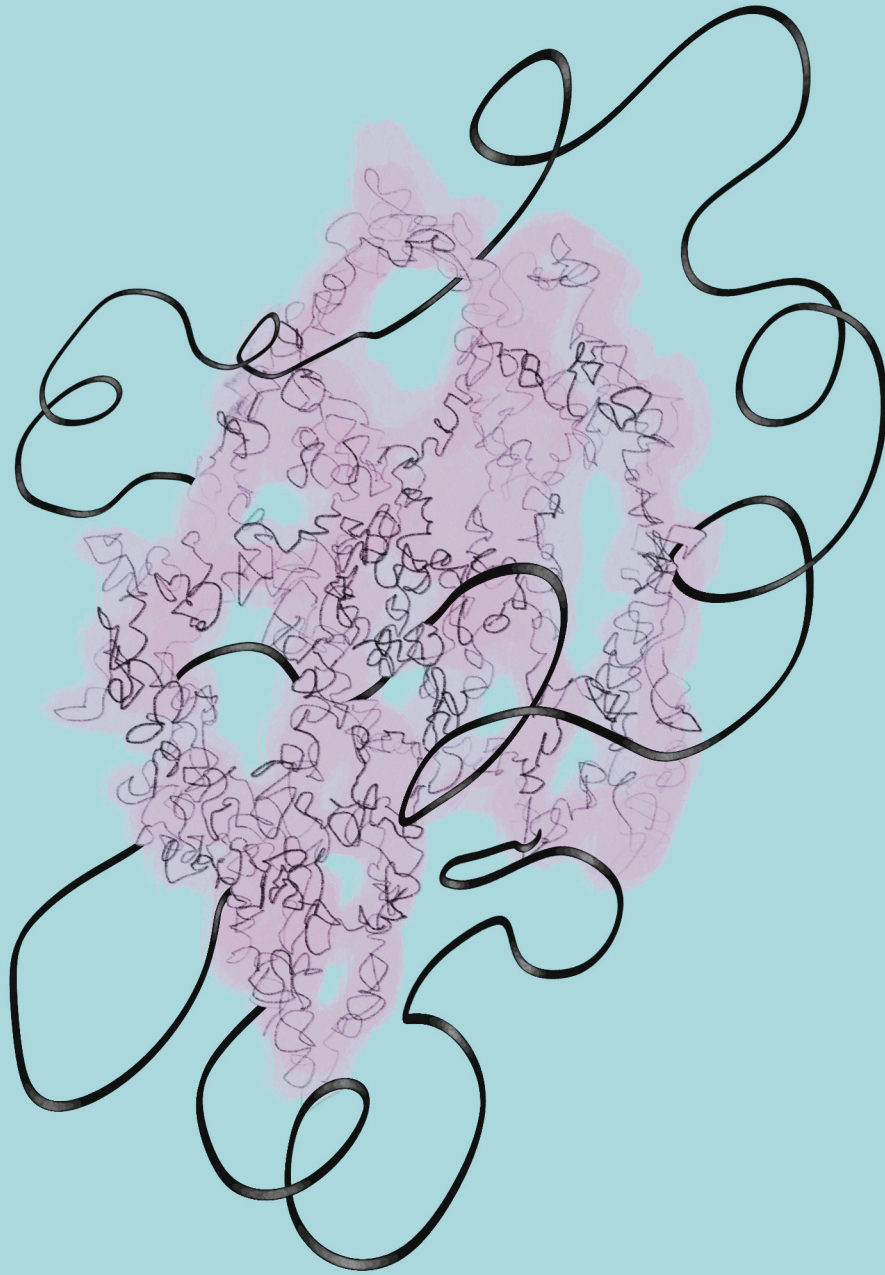
scholarly commentary. Focusing on one image at a time, the archive was able to analyse their archetypal nature in a cultural, historical, and geographical contexts, as well as their modern psychological and symbolic implications. I hope to apply this when reflecting on the automatic images.

Perhaps, I could find a way to combine Jungian Archetypes with my own artistic and unconscious standpoint. One way to accomplish this, is to analyse reappearing forms in my works, to pinpoint any common images or themes that arise within my practice. Finding a trend, such as a reoccurring image, would imply an unconscious attachment to the subject of that image - studying archetypal symbolism could reveal the source of this attachment. Or else, it may simply highlight the relationship between my aesthetic preferences as an artist, and the quality of the artistic outcome, based on its unconscious content. This process could reveal the so sought after meaning, or even expose something more.

In relation to painting both as process and product, what we think and feel and the intensity of aesthetic engagement, is proportional to the depth of its unconscious content, and by implication, its imaginative texture – that which cannot be fixed in meaning and yet is capable of moving the viewer psychologically away from the temporal (human) present and towards the universal (divine) or archetypal constant (Parker, D. 2008).

With the turn towards psychology, the theory of art began to take cognizance of the difference between the physical world and its appearance [...]. What is seen depends on who is looking and who taught him to look.

— Arnheim, R. 1962



2. Key Themes

To proceed with this thesis, it is crucial to identify and define the key themes. The Unconscious, for example, is a broad concept, which can be understood differently in varying contexts. And since I cannot cover all the intricate aspects of each term, it is important to highlight the most relevant elements in the context of my project. I have selected five focal points, which have propelled this research and my subsequent artistic outcome. Below is a list of these key themes, and their implication in my project, as well as my personal understanding of them.

Consciousness

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, Consciousness is «the state of understanding and realising something» as well as «the state of being awake, thinking, and knowing what is happening around you». I should clarify that in this thesis I will use the term consciousness and awareness interchangeably, and both will refer to intention within my work. My interest lies in the unconscious, so consciousness in this case implies solid intention and rationale in my working method; as opposed to the unintentional, irrational, or impulsive. This may also refute the dictionary definition of “being awake” because I view consciousness as a stream, in which our minds are not perpetually focused, or aware. On the contrary, much of our waking time is passive and unconscious. Therefore, the term consciousness in this text should be treated as an indication of intent behind my actions – doing with purpose.

On the other hand, one cannot ignore the spiritual connotation of the term. It is in this context that “conscious” typically means to be aware, or to be present. In some religious text consciousness is the key to understand oneself and in turn understanding the divine. *Advaita* (Sanskrit word meaning “non-duality”) is Vedanta school Hindu philosophy, which clearly outlines the various states of consciousness. The first is the dreaming state (*Jagrat*), the second is the waking state (*Svabpa*), and the third is deep sleep (*Sushupti*). The essential part of the teaching is understanding that there is one awareness – the witness consciousness, which observes all three states. This philosophy highlights that one’s essence, or the true self, is not the dreaming you, or the waking you, or the deep sleep you, but the you that is aware of all three phenomena yet remains untouched by it. And thus, you are not inside your mind and body, but your mind and body are in you. This is referred to as *Atman*, which in Sanskrit means inner self, spirit, or soul. It is pure, undifferentiated consciousness; it is infinite and eternal.

«The state of being awake,
thinking, and knowing what is
happening around you».

The Unconscious

The Unconscious refers to a part of the mind of which one is not fully aware, but which contributes to one's actions and feelings. It is the immediate, unfiltered content of the mind, which always persists beneath the surface. Though the term is strongly associated with the medical field, and thus attributed to the state of sedation or deep sleep, this thesis will focus on The Unconscious from the psychological perspective, referring to the suppressed content of one's psyche. It may present itself as a nagging thought lurking in the mind, awaiting recognition, or it could be an image or a feeling.

Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939) - an Austrian neurologist and founder of psychoanalysis, used the term Unconscious to describe most of our mental activity, including thoughts and memories. He argued that humans are unaware of most of their mental processing's unless they make a conscious effort to pay attention to their occurrence. «Most mental life is unconscious much of the time; it becomes conscious only as sensory precepts – words, images, and emotions» (Kandel, E. 2012).

For the purpose of this thesis, I will unpack the term via the compelling theories of Carl Gustav Jung - a 19th century, Swiss psychoanalyst. In this instance of the unconscious, Jung sometimes refers to it as “personal unconscious” as it is personal to everyone and experienced differently by every individual. That is the unconscious that is made up of one's life experience, suppressed memories, and individual history, hence its elusiveness and openness to interpretation. This term is used in contrast to “the collective unconscious”, which I will elaborate on further in this text.

It is difficult to assess the exact workings of the unconscious as it cannot be directly observed. If it is true that we rely on our conscious minds for comprehension and reflection; yet the unconscious, by its very nature alludes other means of processing information, then the unconscious is a paradox; a realm accessible only through itself but interpreted by its opposite. Regarding this, Jung (1968) has speculated that there must be some

2. Key Themes

consciousness within the unconscious – an ego to which the contents relate, though it would be impossible to prove or illustrate. Alas, the enigma of the unconscious persists.

...even when our senses react to real phenomena, sights, and sounds, they are somehow translated from the realm of reality into that of the mind. Within the mind they become psychic events, whose ultimate nature is unknowable (for the psyche cannot know its own physical substance) (Jung, C.G. 1978).

One of the earliest examples of this theory, is that of Plato (ca. 429-347 BCE), a classic Greek philosopher, who is commonly regarded one of the most influential thinkers of all time. Plato talked of inspiration as something irrational and elated, which compels the artist to create. He has identified and compared this feeling to dreams, where one cannot reason or manufacture, the content arrives at its own accord and may conflict with the dreamer's rationale (Weber, J-P. 1969).

Nowadays, many artists refer to this state as “the zone”, due to the sensation of “zoning out” when one is concentrating on the production of one's art. I too, find myself losing track of time and sense of place while working intensely – I dissolve in the act of doing. So why is this state so valuable to artists? According to Jung, the unconscious plays a dominant role in our decision making, overriding our conscious minds, and often making the wiser choice. What one might consider a gut feeling, or intuition, Jung calls “perception via the unconscious” (1968). Could this be the artist's most valuable tool?

Collective Unconscious, sometimes referred to as “objective psyche”, is a concept originally defined by Carl Gustav Jung. He used the term to describe the part of the psyche that is genetically inherited, as opposed to formed by a personal experience. In contrast to the “personal unconscious” the collective unconscious cannot be formed, as it represents a deeper layer, one that is innate and universal.

While the personal unconscious is made up essentially of contents which have at one time been conscious but which have disappeared from consciousness through having been forgotten or repressed, the contents of the collective unconscious have never been in consciousness, and therefore have never been individually acquired, but owe their existence exclusively to heredity (Jung, C.G. 1968).

According to Jung (1968), the collective unconscious resides in all human beings and is responsible for our deeply rooted beliefs and instincts. This includes our understanding of life and death, our spirituality, sexual behaviour, and more. In Jungian psychology, the Collective Unconscious represents a universal and eternal truth for all beings.

«While the personal unconscious is made up essentially of contents which have at one time been conscious but which have disappeared from consciousness through having been forgotten or repressed, the contents of the collective unconscious have never been in consciousness, and therefore have never been individually acquired, but owe their existence exclusively to heredity».

— Jung, C.G. 1968

Archetypal Imagery

Arche or “first principle” suggests the creative source, which cannot be seen or represented directly. *Tupos*, or “impression”, points to any one of the many manifestations of the “first principle” (Henderson, J. 1991) The Archetype possesses numerous meanings and thus difficult to confine to one definition. However, for the purpose of this thesis I will define the Archetype by means made available to me through the *Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism* (primarily their website and articles), as well as the writings of Carl Gustav Jung.

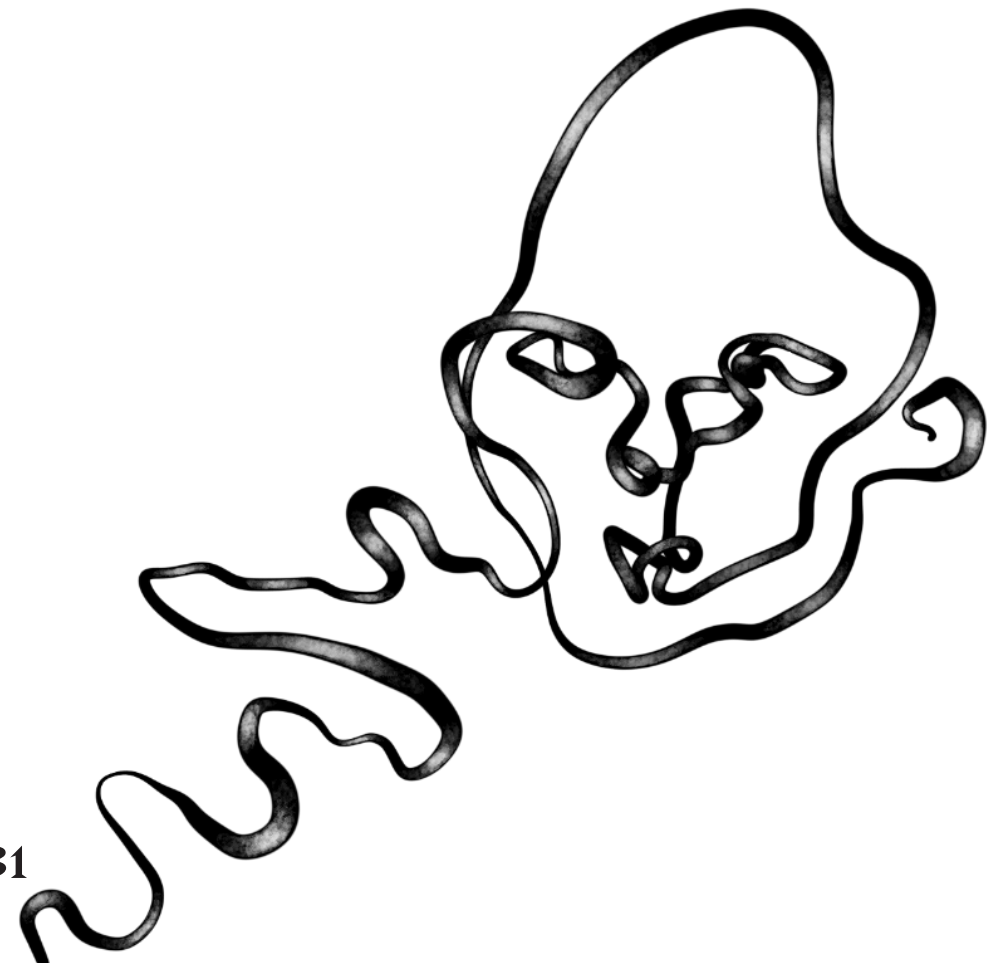
Archetypes are derived from the collective unconscious and are defined as universal, archaic symbols. It is the vague, baseline knowledge, acquired over the course of human history, which exists within all of us. In other words, forms or ideas that are recognisable and relatable to every single human being. Although, it is worth mentioning that Jung was not the first to discuss the notion of Archetypes. Anthony Stevens (1982) explains how Jung acknowledged his debt to Plato, describing Archetypes as «active living dispositions, ideas in the Platonic sense, that perform and continually influence our thoughts and feelings and actions». Jung, however, focused heavily on how Archetypes may emerge as images or motifs in our dreams.

Their immediate manifestation, as we encounter it in dreams and visions, is much more individual, less understandable, and more naïve than in myths, for example. The archetype is essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes its colour from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear (Jung, C.G. 1968).

Jung talks about archetypal events, figures, and motifs. These primordial images can be identified in folk stories and even modern pop culture. Though one must be cautious not to oversimplify this concept, or to confuse Archetypes with stereotypes. Jung’s texts should be referred to for a more insightful analysis of the term and its implications in psychoanalysis.

2. Key Themes

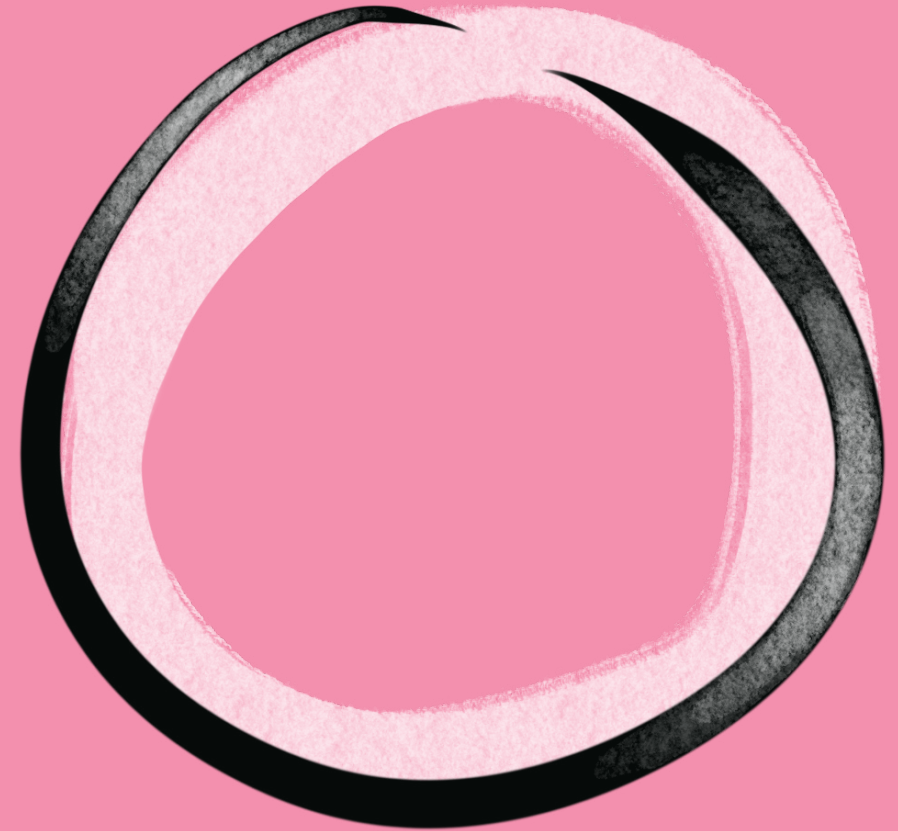
However, I perceive these ideas through the lens of an artist, so their importance in my work may present itself differently. For example, Andreassen NC (2011) suggests that the creative process takes on its own archetypal narrative, which can be narrowed down to four stages: preparation, incubation, inspiration, and production. In artistic work I would describe preparation as the accumulation of core skills, such as drawing. Then incubation, a pondering period where I am not making art, or consciously working on a project, until eventually the inspiration strikes. Finally, production, which for me is the stage of making art.



The Self

The Self is a term used by Jung to describe the psyche as a whole – both ego consciousness and Unconscious. Hence, the Self is an Archetype of totality or wholeness. Jung advocated that the Self is a union of the conscious and Unconscious, and that realising the Self is the ultimate goal in the process of individuation. The process of individuation refers to the process of becoming a psychological “in-dividual” or whole. (Jung, C.G. 1968) Jung talks about experiencing the Self as an almost religious encounter; a divine revelation akin to meeting God, which could explain why he stressed the importance of individuation. The exact methodology of the process is cryptic and uncertain, Jung stated that there is no given recipe, that on the contrary - «It is an irrational life-process which expresses itself in definite symbols» (Jung, C.G. 1968). Since The Self embodies a psychic wholeness for Jung – the totality of mind and spirit, it must therefore be the origin of creativity and imagination. For example, in the book *Man and his Symbols* (Jung, C.G. 1964), he refers to the Self as «the inventor, organizer and source of dream images». It is for this reason that the term is necessary for this essay, as the self is the artist, I wish to utilise within me.

2. Key Themes

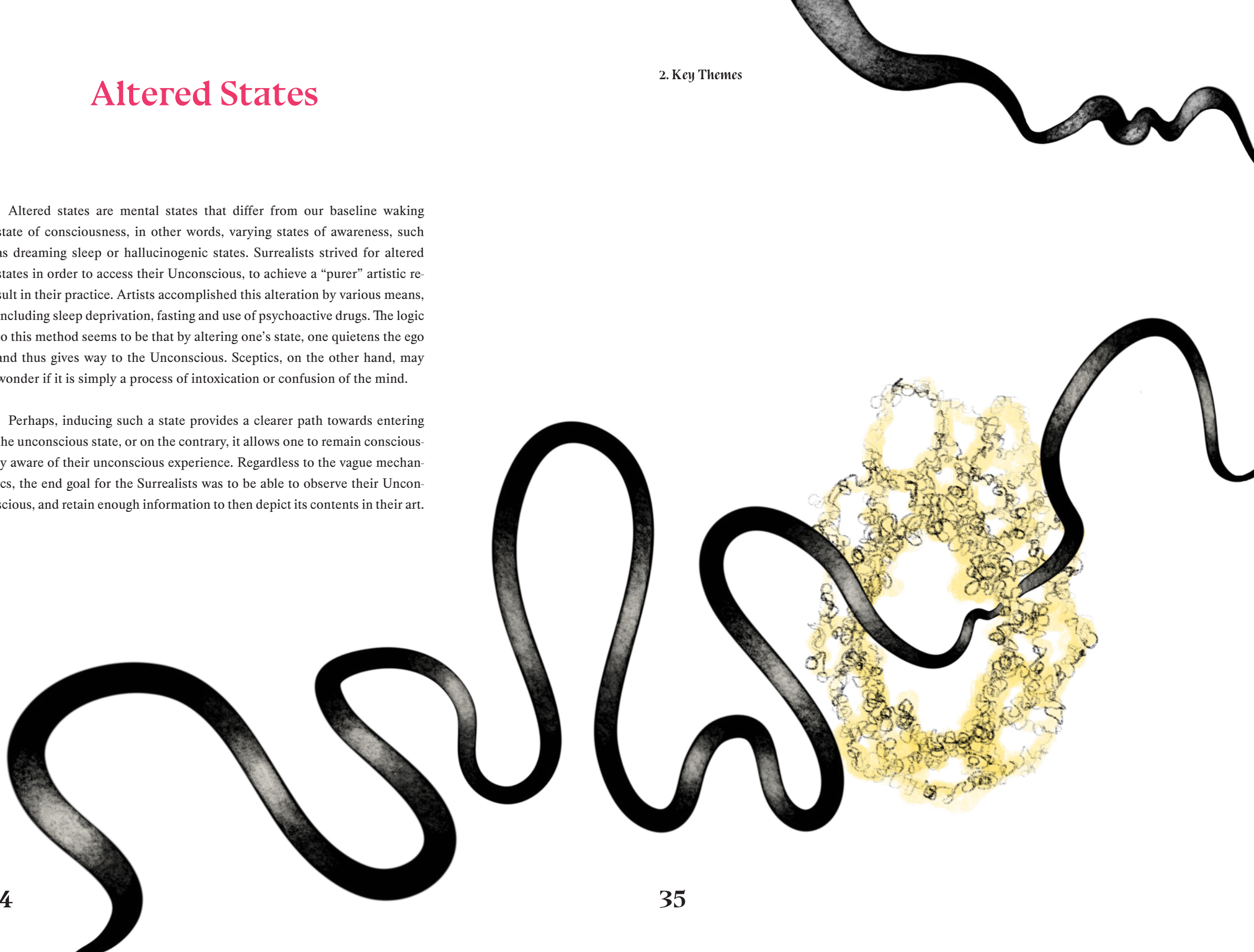


Altered States

2. Key Themes

Altered states are mental states that differ from our baseline waking state of consciousness, in other words, varying states of awareness, such as dreaming sleep or hallucinogenic states. Surrealists strived for altered states in order to access their Unconscious, to achieve a “purer” artistic result in their practice. Artists accomplished this alteration by various means, including sleep deprivation, fasting and use of psychoactive drugs. The logic to this method seems to be that by altering one’s state, one quietens the ego and thus gives way to the Unconscious. Sceptics, on the other hand, may wonder if it is simply a process of intoxication or confusion of the mind.

Perhaps, inducing such a state provides a clearer path towards entering the unconscious state, or on the contrary, it allows one to remain consciously aware of their unconscious experience. Regardless to the vague mechanics, the end goal for the Surrealists was to be able to observe their Unconscious, and retain enough information to then depict its contents in their art.





03. The Unconscious in Art

When considering the Unconscious in an artistic context, I would like to focus on the following: Surrealism, Abstraction, and Automatism.

The Surrealist movement was an experimental approach to exploring the Unconscious Mind, popularized between the First and Second World War. Its fruits were a milestone for future icons in the art world, such as Salvador Dalí, whom I always looked up to. It was Surrealist art that first introduced me to the Unconscious mind and inspired my ongoing artistic research on this topic.

Abstract Art and abstract ideas alike, are both present in Surrealism. The cryptic nature of abstract images seems fitting for the purpose of Surrealist art. And in my opinion, abstraction is inevitable when it comes to automatism – a technique favoured by the Surrealists, in which the artist works intuitively to avoid conscious decisions. In my personal experience, I find that spontaneous images, unfiltered by conscious thought, almost always feature an abstract element, which sometimes evolves into recognisable forms, and other times remains nonrepresentational.

In this section I will elaborate on these terms and their significance in my practice, as well as relevance to the overall discussion surrounding the concept of the Unconscious.

3.1 Surrealism and The Dream World

Surrealism – a 20th Century *avant-garde* movement in art and literature, which pursued the creative potential of the Unconscious Mind. The movement followed Dadaism soon after the First World War and became a symbol of the Modernist Period in art and culture.

The term Surrealist (“beyond reality”) was devised by the French poet Guillaume Apollinaire in a play written in 1903 and performed in 1917. However, the Surrealist movement was defined by the French writer André Breton, who was inspired by Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis. Breton and Yvan Goll wrote the first Surrealist Manifesto, which conceptualised Freud's theories in the artistic field.

Inspired by automatic writing – a spontaneous process of writing without editing – the idea required a dramatic shift in artistic perspective and methodology, making the Surrealist philosophy even more appealing to rebellious Dadaists. They had already begun to reject societal norms and challenge them with their nihilistic art, embracing the chaos of the Unconscious minds seemed well suited.

The Surrealists were particularly interested in Freud's research in the field of free association, dream analysis, and the Unconscious. Many Surrealists, like Salvador Dalí for example, claimed that their work is rooted entirely in their dreams. And many relied on altered states to achieve “pure automatism” within their work. Both methods aim to suppress the artists' conscious minds and instead allow the Unconscious mind to guide them.

The Surrealist aesthetic intended to activate the Unconscious through imagery by juxtaposing contradictory realities. Much like the content of dreams – free of natural laws, Surrealist art is not concerned with logic, or accurate representation. To me this is precisely what makes Surrealism so

exciting. It offers a new perspective, one that is not bound by the rational mind. There is a freedom that exists in the Unconscious because it is not tied down by logic or reason, which allows for unexpected connections. When this freedom is observed, as we do in our dreams, we can reflect on the uncensored content of our minds. Dreams are just one way we can see behind the conscious ego to begin to understand the full extent of our inner world.

Surrealists wanted to employ the Unconscious Mind as a creative tool by focusing on automatic expression, as well as dream imagery. Nonsensical, abstract scenarios paired with beautifully rendered realism, created a confusing narrative for the viewer to interpret. Cryptic meaning in their works echoed the principles of Freud's dream analysis. In doing this, they hoped to tackle the mystery of the Unconscious, and relay the subject of psychoanalysis to the average layperson.

3.2. Automatism: The Unfiltered Artist

Another tool to consider (for discerning our Unconscious thoughts) is automatism; originally a physiological term describing involuntary actions, such as breathing or dreaming, it is also another way of saying intuitive, when talking about art.

Automatic drawing, for example, exploits the tactile process of drawing freely, as opposed to drawing from memory or a live subject. The technique requires one to suppress any conscious thoughts, which can be challenging, especially for longer periods of time. Nevertheless, Sigmund Freud utilised automatic drawing and writing to psychoanalyse his patients based on a process he called “free association” which, according to him, was a direct way to access the Unconscious Mind.

Carl Jung has stated that the autonomy of the Unconscious begins where emotions are generated (1968). It has always been clear to me that art and emotion are inseparable, so perhaps the Unconscious artist has access to emotion yet unexplored.

Freudian ideas were extensively studied by André Breton, and interpreted in the *Surrealist Manifesto* (1924), where he described the Surrealist movement as “pure psychic automatism”. Breton pioneered the automatic technique, along with other notable figures like Jean Arp.

Max Ernst, another noteworthy Surrealist, invented a form of automatism achieved through collage. He would cut words and images from magazines, books, and various other media, combining them intuitively to create a single composition. This became the first form of automatism in visual art. Several other forms of automatism followed, including automatic paintings by artists such as Joan Miro and Andre Masson.

Automatism is strongly associated with 20th Century Surrealists, however, the concept has been explored prior. Just one example is Austin Osman Spare, an English artist, who pioneered automatic drawing and discussed his method in a chapter titled *Automatic Drawing as a Means to Art* in his book *The Book of Pleasure: The Psychology of Ecstasy* (1913). Unfortunately, Spare’s role in Surrealism has been grossly overlooked, which is surprising considering his shared beliefs and interests with the Surrealists: that accessing the Unconscious (or sub-conscious as he called it) unleashes genius.

The automatic method in my art practice will serve as the interface between my conscious and unconscious states, and hopefully decrease the chance of any artistic censorship on my behalf. At the same time, I strive to expand the idea of automatism in my work by including the element of chance, or coincidence. For example, I would consider found objects within my work as another automatic element because I do not seek out the me-

dium, but rather the medium finds me. Since the objects, tools, and visual stimulus surrounding me are random and out of my control, I am limited to options. This leaves me with only the ability to select out of these choices and decide where and how to apply them artistically. Often, this means that I am influenced by these tools, mediums, and surroundings to such an extent that they dictate the direction of my projects. This spontaneity and flexibility are important aspects of automatism for my practice.

3.3. Abstract Art and Its Surprising Symbols

I found I could say things with colors and shapes that I couldn't say in any other way – things that I had no words for (O'Keeffe, G. 1976).

Cubist and Fauvist movements have paved the way to what we now call Abstract Art. The movement owes much of its philosophies to the group of post-impressionists who were concerned with symbolism and mysticism (Tuchman, M. 1986). Abstract Art was pioneered by the likes of Piet Mondrian, Wassily Kandinsky, Frank Kupka and Kazimir Malevich from about 1910.

Although, it is worth stating that Hilma af Klint was creating abstract paintings, which were based on automatism, as early as 1906. Her approach was informed by Theosophy and Esoteric teachings, though she often had no explanation for her resulting works. Klint had simply worked automatically and accepted the artistic outcome for what was. For me, Hilma af Klint is a particularly inspiring figure because her technique was rooted in «a dialogue between the unconscious and the conscious...» (Fant, A. 1986).

The word “abstract” means to separate or withdraw, in the context of art it implies the withdrawal from the visual world as the focus is taken away from accurate representation. The term can be applied to works based on an object, which has been simplified or otherwise interpreted, or to works

based entirely on geometric shapes, marks, and colour, which are not necessarily representative of an object. Some artists refer to the latter as pure abstraction and favour the terms: concrete or non-objective art, presumably to highlight the non-representational nature of their artworks.

Art will become the product of another duality in man: the product of a cultivated externality and of an inwardness deepened and more conscious. As a pure representation of the human mind, art will express itself in an aesthetically purified, that is to say, abstract form. (Mondrian, P. 1919).

It appears that the debate stems from the artist's desire to separate outside and inside influences, or to distinguish between external and internal sources of inspiration. For this thesis, I will be using the term abstract and abstraction to describe all non-figurative, non-naturalistic art.

If abstraction is ought to be no-representational, how does it convey meaning? Abstract Art does not seek to depict the visible, but instead to reveal that which cannot be seen via direct perception. Medieval psychology proposes to classify the hierarchy of perception as follows: «The lowest type is corporeal vision, direct perception of the material object; the next higher type is spiritual vision, based on recollection and imagination; and intellectual vision, the highest form, is contemplative and disregards all likeness» (Ringbom, S. 1986).

I am especially interested in Abstract Art as a powerful semiotic tool, which I can utilise for my project. The roots of this concept can be traced back to the use of primary forms in the visual vocabulary of French Occultism: cross, circle, square, triangle (Welsh, R. P. 1868). It is no coincidence that these shapes were popular with late 20th century Abstract artists. They had adapted sacred geometry to express mystical and spiritual ideas within visual art. «...the purification of natural into abstract forms implied the proposition that geometric configurations function as paradigms of spiritual enlightenment» (Welsh, R. P. 1986).

«I found I could say things
with colors and shapes that
I couldn't say in any other
way – things that I had no
words for».

(O'Keeffe, G. 1976)

3.4. Briefly on Jung and Freud

Carl Gustav Jung (1875 – 1961) was born in Kesswil, in the Swiss Canton of Thurgau. In 1895 he took up studying medicine at the University of Basel. Upon graduating in 1900, Jung moved to Zürich and began working at Burghölzli psychiatric hospital as assistant physician to Eugen Bleuler. Five years later, he was promoted to a permanent position as senior doctor at the hospital, as well as lecturer at Privatdozent in the medical faculty of Zürich University. Jung's thinking is closely related to his methodologies, such as trance speech, automatic writing, and crystal reading, which he used as a means of communication with the Unconscious. Knowledge and interpretation of symbols was integral to his studies. In this sense, Jung's approach was very intuitive, and experimental.

Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939) was born in Freiberg, Moravia (today Příbor, Czech Republic) and is well known for being the founding father of psychoanalysis. Freud focused on the dynamic Unconscious – ideas repressed from consciousness. He argued that the Unconscious was not illogical but is in fact a system functioning on its own set of laws. He identified the following characteristics of the Unconscious:

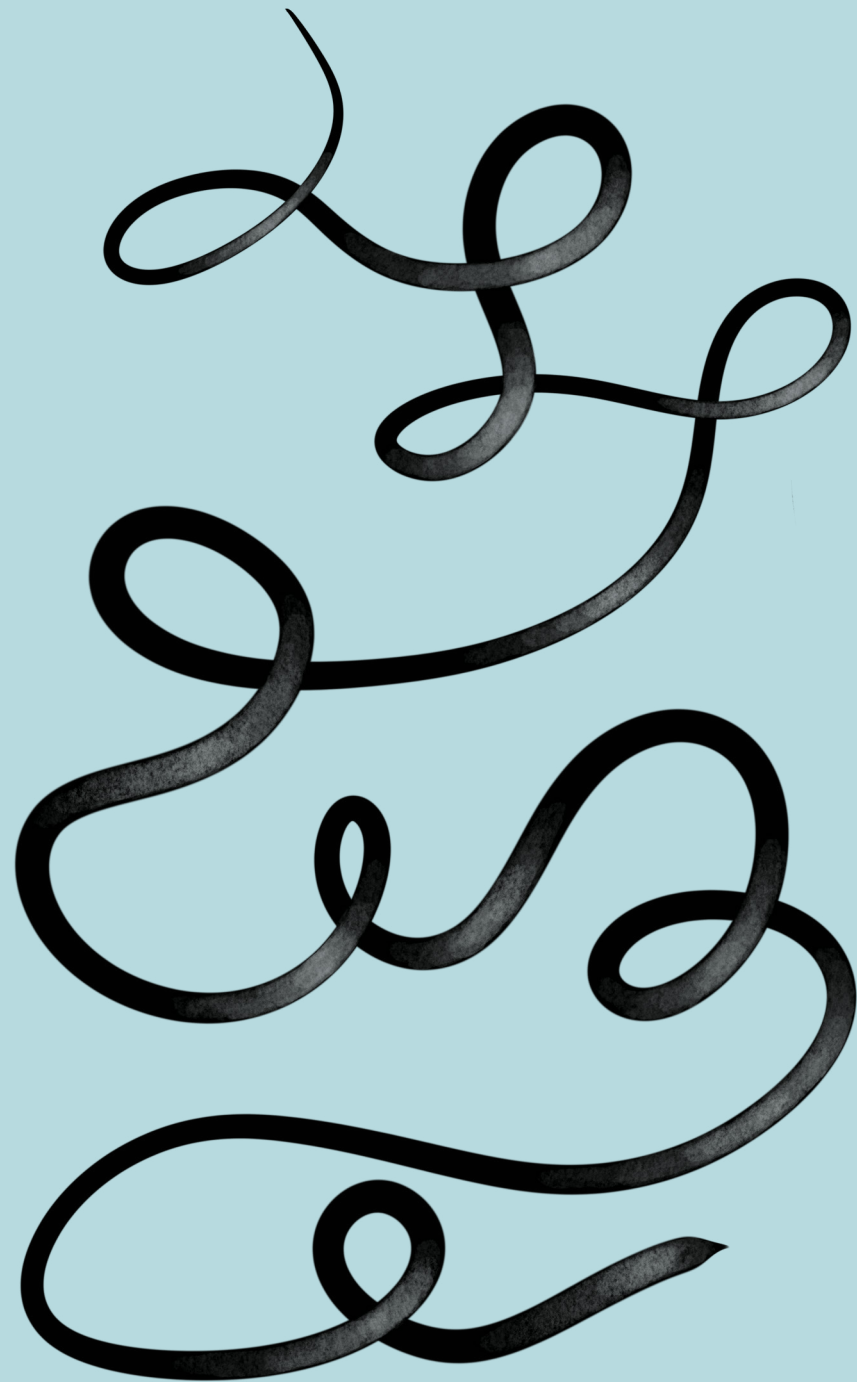
1. It allows contradictory ideas to coexist side by side,
2. its contents do not have degrees of “certainty” in the way that conscious ideas do,
3. unconscious ideas are not arranged in any chronological order.

(Freud Museum London. 2018)

Jung was widely regarded as Freud's most notable student, and later, friend. They both had a passion for studying the Unconscious and spent many years exchanging correspondence about their theories and findings. However, eventually they found themselves in disagreement, in which their points of view clashed, and divided them. Contradictory to Jung, Freud did not ex-

plore the Unconscious via intuition, but in assessing everyday occurrences, such as dreams, or casual slips of the tongue (Freud Museum London. 2018).

For me, the most prominent difference between them is that Jung was predominantly interested in collective consciousness rather than that of the individual. He focused on Archetypes and their role in assessing the human psyche, which is also why I regard Archetypal Images a relevant tool for understanding the Unconscious in art. I closely relate to Jung's approach to the Unconscious because he utilised intuitive methods of working, much like I do in my practice.



04. Experimentation and Observation

In this section I will discuss some of my production process, its progression, and ultimately - the resulting art works. Even at this early stage of work production, I must evaluate each outcome and draw conclusions about the work's successes, downfalls, and potential for future development. To judge these credentials, I will analyse individual examples of my work in relation to the Unconscious.

I began my enquiry into the Unconscious by producing a multitude of automatic drawings. In the spirit of spontaneity, I refrained from predetermining any conditions, such as materials or colour palettes; I just began drawing with whatever was at hand, whenever the mood strikes. This method produced a diverse, and frankly overwhelming set of results, from doodles of napkins to detailed illustrations on canvas scraps, which eventually turned into paintings. I quickly discovered that this approach was going to be too broad and incoherent for the purpose of this thesis.

My next idea was to arrange some limitations within the automatic process to focus my attention on the drawings. I started by limiting my colour palette to black and white, meaning that I could only use a black pen or marker on white paper. I had deliberately opted for pen over pencil because the latter can be erased, and since my project is all about capturing the unintentional, pencil seemed too contradictory. Using a ballpoint pen or a permanent marker ensured that I cannot remove any marks, but only build on them.

Restricting myself to monochromatic drawing has illuminated some of my drawing habits, such as employing a lot of curved shapes, subtle shading, and contrasting line weight. Noticing these aspects of my automatic drawing is imperative for understanding my visual language, as well as post-rationalising my work.

Having produced a series of monochromatic drawings, I progressed with my initial idea to employ painterly techniques within drawing. This involved

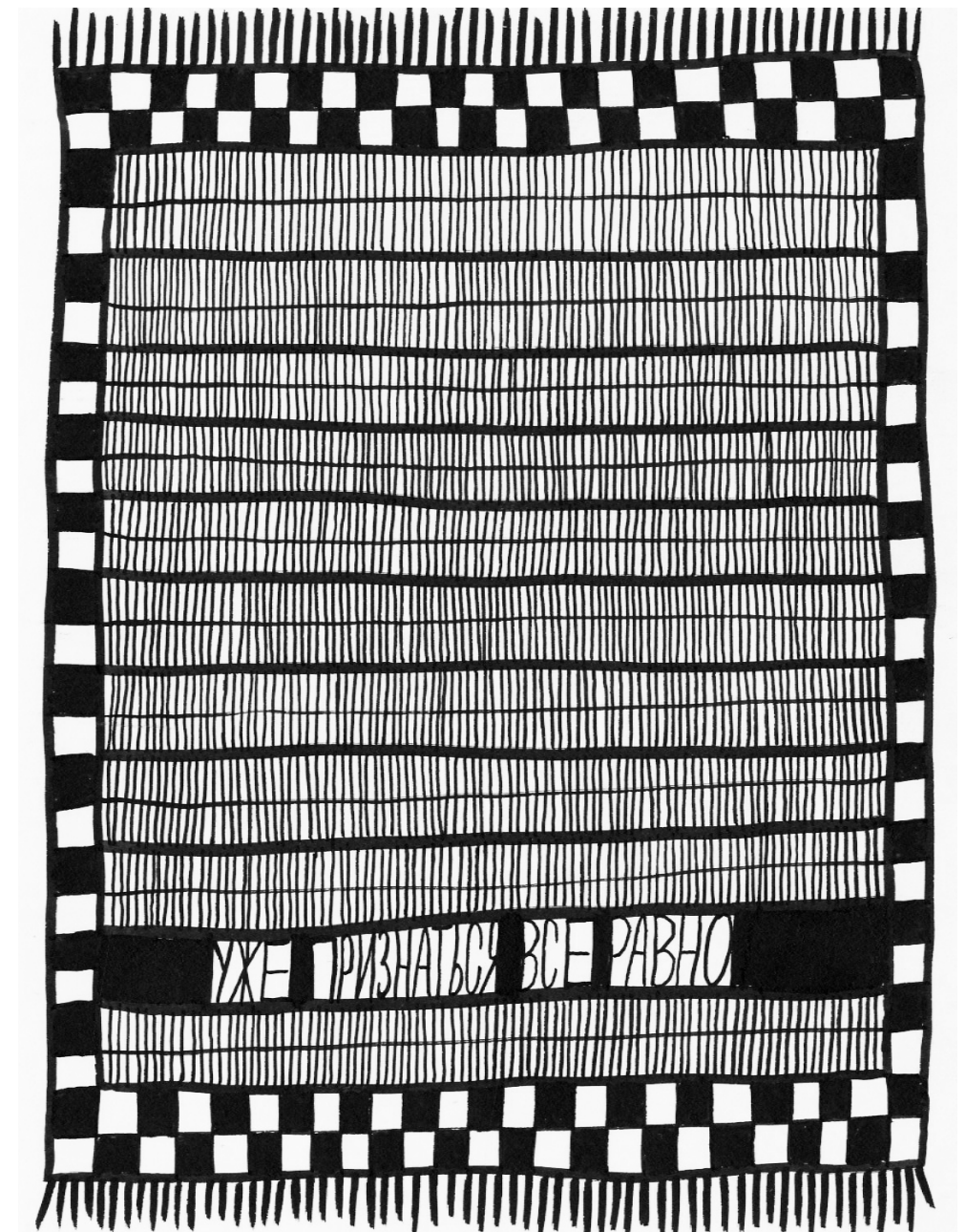
the merging of materials that could mimic of process as painting. One of these materials is soft pastel, which can be extremely versatile independently, but especially so when used in combination with other materials. This discovery has led me to developing a series of canvases and drawings featuring Abstract forms, which allowed me to identify some of the symbols appearing in my work.

In this chapter I will elaborate on my experimentation with pastels and discuss two automatic drawings at greater detail: analysing their physical properties, as well as possible meaning and relation to the Unconscious.

4.1. Automatic Drawing Analysis no.1

I have produced a small-scale, black marker drawing on white paper, featuring a collection of lines and squares, forming a design that resembles a patterned rug, or carpet. The rug is completed in intricate line work, creating striped and checked patterns, apart from some writing at the bottom of the drawing. The quote on the rug reads «Уже признаться всё равно», which roughly translates to “Frankly I’m indifferent”, and was manifested through my constant inner monologue, or in this case - recital of song lyrics (Russian rock band – *Kino*. Poetry by Viktor Tsoi). It may be appropriate to mention now, that I am a Russian native speaker, hence my inner voice is usually speaking Russian.

Some immediate associations that come to mind, when thinking of a rug or carpet, are warmth, comfort, and cosiness. I think of my grandmother’s house, and her grandmother’s house, where a carpet is always the centrepiece of every room. It is common in Slavic culture to display carpets on the wall, to supply extra insulation, as well as decoration. This iconic image of the carpet on the wall, would trigger similar association amongst many fellow Russians, even more so than myself, because I grew up in the United Kingdom and so my ties to Russian culture are less prominent. Regardless,



IDC Black and White

2021

Marker on paper.

17 x 24 cm



this initial association is by no means exclusive to me but shared amongst other people who also remember carpets in their grandmother's house. The immediate association of my grandmother's house can be explored further, and on a more personal level, as there are associations with my grandmother that follow – the smell of her cooking, the memories I have of her as a child etc. If this automatic drawing has indeed carried over some Unconscious content, like Freud claims they do, then one could deduce that my motives were in seeking comfort and nostalgia.

The patient, intricate, devoted work required in the making of a carpet is also what it takes to achieve the paradoxical capacity to transcend consciousness and at the same time to hold one's ground (Ronnberg, A. Martin, K. 2008).

Having contemplated the rug as symbol of homeliness and comfort, as well as a Russian wall décor staple, I decided that it may not even be a rug. It could be a mere stacking of lines and shapes, creating a satisfying pattern, which configured itself into a rug after I have concluded that it should be a rug. In other words, I had imposed the idea of the rug onto my drawing as it progressed. The drawing had started out as a mindless doodling activity and then adapted the characteristics of a rug when I recognised the doodles as something more than just a pattern. Afterall, our brains are association machines, and are therefore hardwired to see familiar objects in the most basic of shapes. This could be a prime example of the Unconscious guiding the artist (me) throughout the drawing process, until suddenly, the conscious mind cannot help but interject. It could, just as likely, be a result of pure chance that the shape and size of paper dictated a rectangular motif, or that my marks aligned in a certain way on the page created a pattern, and that all these chances combined result in an image, which my brain cannot help but recognise as a rug.

When I posted a photograph of the drawing on social media, a fellow artist pointed out a resemblance between my rug pattern and Gurunsi earth houses of Burkina Faso. Burkina Faso is a small country in West Africa, where mud huts and thatched roofs are standard housing. However, the architecture and design of the huts varies within various ethnic groups, one of the most notable examples are the earth houses of the Kassena people, located in southern Burkina. The Kassena ethnic group are part of the larger Gurunsi tribe, who similarly paint their huts in northern Ghana. Their dwellings are meticulously decorated with the tribe's motifs. The art is competed in coloured mud and chalk, and then embossed with rocks and markings, to further define the designs. Aesthetically, the designs are bold and energetic, featuring squares, triangles, and simple lines, which act as a foundation for most of the motifs. The lines are drawn freehand and are therefore wavy and irregular, which gives the design a sense of movement.

Observing the hut drawings, the construction of the motif becomes apparent - one square became two, and then three, and so on. The patterns appear to have been built from the ground up, both literally and figuratively, in a manner that could be described as intuitive. The lines curve and meander as the next row of shapes merges with them, creating a beautiful, trembling collage of shapes. The earth hut artists' methodologies are not dissimilar to my own, at least in comparison to this specific drawing. I recognised motifs that appear in both the huts and my drawing, such as the black and white checked pattern. And in both cases, I can see how the hand travelled around the surface to build shapes on top of one another, like a chain reaction or indeed, a chain of intuitive thought.

For the tribes these shapes, as well as the shape of the hut itself, reflect the social status of its inhabitants. For example, square houses are for families, whereas circular huts are for unmarried people. This seems ingenious, considering the symbolic role of shapes both in our everyday lives and deep in our Collective Unconscious. These primitive geometric forms appear consistently throughout human history, so it may be expected that they appear as art and decoration in various parts of the world. They could be described as the building blocks of our society, and the most immediate tools for communication and mutual understanding. This could suggest that abstract forms can possess some utility, as well as aesthetic value.

I wonder if this potential utility of abstract shapes, serves a universal function. If I were to introduce the Kassena people to the works of Jeff Koons for example, would they find any relevance in his highly polished, metallic balloon animals? It is fair to assume that Koon's sculptures would not be personal enough in their otherness - too abstract to find relevance in their experience. It is interesting to consider the social and cultural differences that may influence how we perceive art. This could be one reason that Abstract art is often described as "pure" - because shape, form and colour surpass any cultural boundaries. It is not dissimilar to the "purity" of math-

ematics, whose language surpasses any human notion, it is a universal truth.

An obvious example of universal art language is landscape art, one of the most popular subjects in art, and unsurprisingly so; we all experience landscapes in one form or another, so we have this universal understanding of a landscape. What if we were to consider a landscape as an Archetype? Let us speculate that the archetypal image of a landscape would involve either a mass of land or water, a horizon, and a sky. This would be true for all landscapes, real or unreal, so long as they fit this formula, we know that it is a landscape. This system is also true for geometric forms - we see three lines connect, so we know it is a triangle. Certain connotations may vary, however, like in this example of hut décor, where geometric forms can symbolise social status. For me personally, these shapes do not carry the same meaning, so their appearance in my drawing does not serve the same practical purpose.

Circling back to the method of my drawing, I certainly tried my hardest to allow the work to emerge automatically, however, somewhere along the way my ego formed an association, and acted on it. I unintentionally developed the shapes into an object (a rug) because that is what the brain naturally wants to do - make sense of things and find patterns. Whether or not this reveals some universal truth is up for debate. On one hand, I produced something primitive and uncomplicated, which indicates honesty and purity. Out of all the things I could have drawn, I produced basic squares and triangles, something that is integral and universal in a human's visual vocabulary. An argument could be made, that this exercise worked and I indeed, managed to channel my Unconscious, or even the Collective Unconscious within the drawing. However, it would be impossible to prove and therefore, it could just as likely be a simplistic doodle with no underlying personal, or collective narrative.

4.2. Experimenting with Pastels

In my search for automatism within the realm of painting, I decided to experiment with pastels as I see them as a mediator between drawing and painting. Soft pastels have a fluid quality when they are smudged, colours can be blended into each other to create complex tones, much like in painting. When drawing with soft pastel, I do not perceive my marks to be final, they are an underpainting of sorts, which are later developed and blurred into my desired image. Oil pastels on the other hand, are more permanent and though they can be blended, the colours have a stiff quality. I noticed that these contrasting qualities can be combined and serve as a training tool for automatic drawing.

Soft pastels can be layered thick, or wiped away, it can also be applied on top of or underneath another medium to achieve various textures. I have experimented with soft pastel in combination with oil pastel, acrylic paint, ballpoint pen and watercolour. I particularly enjoyed working with soft pastels on canvas, which was primed with Acrylic, and brushing the pastel marks out using a hard bristled brush.

In this pastel drawing, I began by painting my canvas one solid colour, using acrylic paint. After the paint has dried, I used soft pastel to place areas of colour on the surface of my canvas, and blended them out softly, creating a colourful haze. Concentrating on my canvas, I could see that certain shapes begin to reveal themselves from amidst the mist of colours. I accentuated these shapes with additional soft pastel markings, this time not blending them out, but allowing the lines to be more prominent. I repeated this process again using oil pastel, defining clear shapes within the existing composition. Like a blurred camera lens coming into focus, the drawing gradually became clearer, until a vivid image emerged.

The outcome is a colourful composition, mostly consisting of circular shapes, surrounded by spirals and curved lines. I noticed that these types of



Pastels Drawing - Experiment I

2021

Acrylic and Soft Pastels on canvas paper.

42 x 29.7 cm

circular drawing tend to happen when I create automatic drawings of larger than A4 scale – it is as though my hand wants to travel the perimeter of my work surface to define its boundaries, then it begins to travel in smaller, tighter gestures. These initial large movements seem to alleviate any fear of the blank page and break down the large surface area.

The result of this pairing created a smooth haze of colouration, which I thought is reminiscent of lens flare or a foggy landscape. I was pleased with this outcome because I thought it relayed the feeling of a dream or memory, where things are not entirely clear. This bears a resemblance to dream analysis; one observes the hazy image (the dream) and finds focal elements, usually something recognisable, and tries to derive some meaning from these tangible forms. Similarly, I can study the indiscernible beginnings of a work and pick out forms that appear to me, make them clearer and bolder, until the image has substance. Acting instinctually, in this case, creates a dialogue between my conscious self (the drawer) and the Unconscious Self (the observer). This creates an interesting paradox, because I am simultaneously observing what is drawn, and drawing what I observe. The two states coexist on the canvas and depend on each other; hereby the work becomes its own subject, and context.

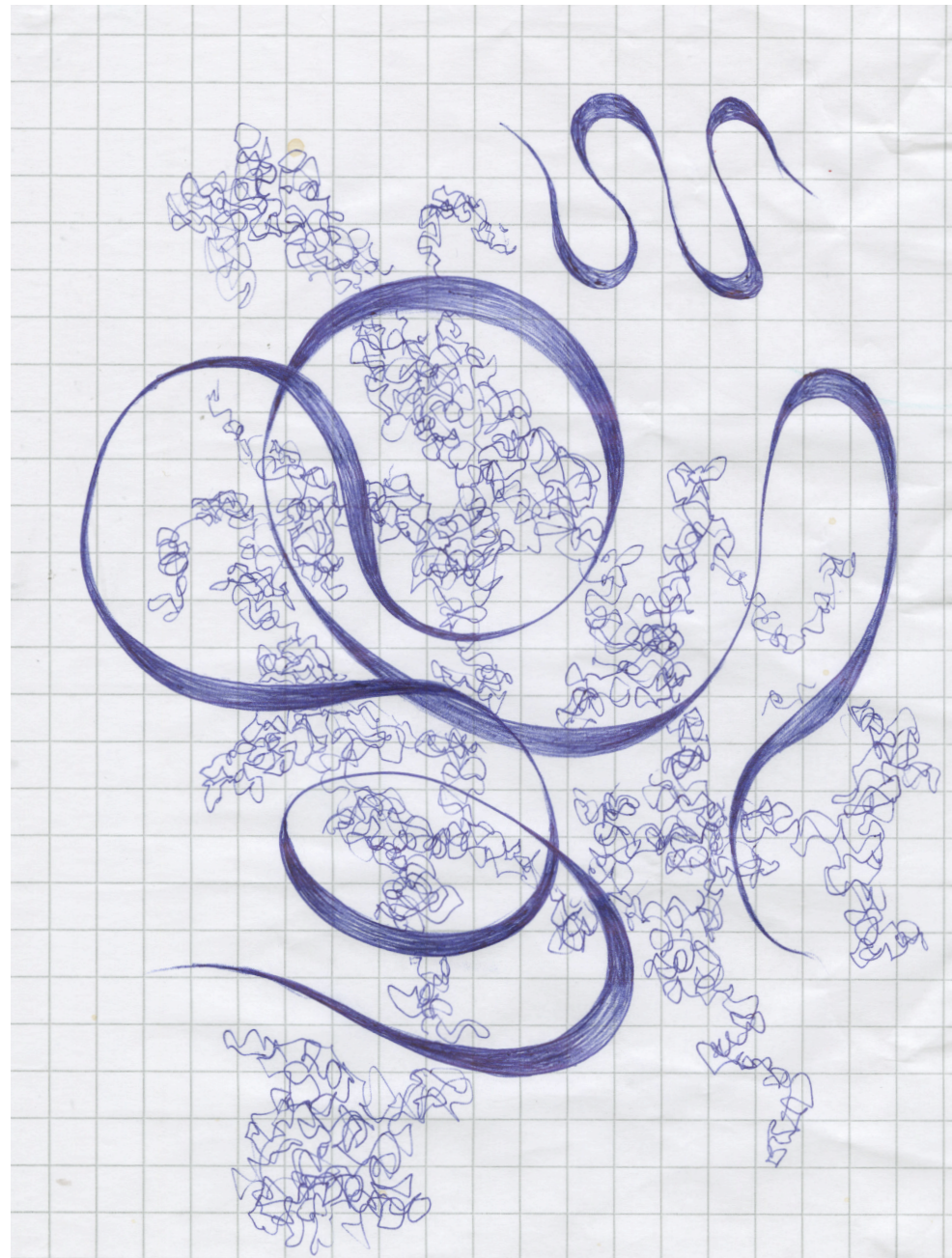
4.3. Automatic Drawing Analysis no.2

This pattern emerged spontaneously during my work break, in just shy of fifteen minutes. The available doodling equipment consisted of a blue Biro pen and A5 grid paper, which I often utilised by colouring the squares to form a checkerboard pattern. These types of doodling sessions typically serve to kill time, as much as they do relaxation. Thus, it is often simple designs, such as the checkerboard, and other basic shapes that I tend to favour. On this occasion I ignored the grid and opted for organic shapes instead. I guided my pen in small repetitive gestures that formed masses of imperfect

circles, which then grew and spread out like a web. As the web grew, it tore as though by tension, leaving circular gaps between clusters of marks. The effect resembles something of a sea foam, extending outwards on the surface of water. In many ways, I have created another type of grid; one that was loosening and detangling, though I have noticed this only after the fact. I built upon the drawing by adding an overlapping layer of large, swirling marks with rapid movement of my pen. I later embellished these with shading to give depth – so the line bared resemblance to a ribbon. In hindsight, this ribbon looks like an amplified version of the previous, circular grid, unfolding even more. There is a sense that this ribbon will eventually become a straight line, because of the almost animated nature of the story: grid, web, ribbon, line.

Something about the densely packed, circular marks, in contrast with the large, fluid motion of the “ribbon” motif, create a sense of depth. I noticed that through this, the two-dimensional surface of the page can relay vastness, which I find useful for portraying the grandeur of the Unconscious. The shapes within the drawing could be of any scale, as there is nothing tangible depicted in the drawing, and thus nothing to compare scale with. As a result, these ambiguous structures create an atmosphere of otherness, and mystery.

When looking at the overall image, the composition induces a sense of calm in me. Perhaps because the process of drawing it felt much like a meditation, in which my mind was quiet, and my movement autonomous. Though, I also see the tranquil qualities of the drawing, even when observing them purely on an aesthetic level. There is a satisfying sensory quality to the image, due to the combination of textures, and their contrast to each other. There is a harmony in this specific arrangement of densely packed, and loosely drawn lines; looping around one another, overlapping, and vanishing from sight. To me personally, they illustrate a feeling of weightlessness, and somehow both abundance and emptiness – which I strongly associate with the unconscious state. Allow me to explain - the paradox of the Un-



Automatic Sketch I
2021
Biro on paper.
13 x 20 cm

4. Experimentation and Observation

conscious is its ability to be present, yet unnoticed most of the time. The Unconscious is always active yet appears passive because it is autonomous; meaning that most of the time we are not consciously observing or evaluating its behaviour. When I am deeply focused on drawing or painting, I enter a state in which my mind is completely quiet; utterly fixated on what I am doing, yet absent of any conscious thought. This is the precise state in which my works are typically generated, so that must mean there is indeed a thought process guiding me – a subconscious one.

I trusted said process and continued to generate more automatic drawings following the previously mentioned technique. I filled paper, after paper with similar yet distinctive drawings. I seemed to have found a definitive visual language, accessible to me while working automatically. It may be ironic that I found success (in my automatism) in an unintentional doodle, spawned abruptly out of context, and not in my meticulously arranged automatic experiments. This drawing was the first result I could consider truly automatic, simplistic, and yet significant in meaning. I felt certain that I have finally accessed the Unconscious content of my psyche and materialised it in image.

To rationalise and try to understand these images I must perceive them from afar, and transition from artist to observer. For me this happens immediately after I stop/finish a drawing, when I put down my tool, step away, and look at my work. I must look at it for the first time as a whole entity. This process occurs quite naturally when looking at other artists' work, however the product of my own labour is just that – my labour, so detaching myself from the work poses a contradiction. Sometimes, spending some time away from a finished piece, or placing it in a different environment can help in perceiving with fresh eyes.

I noticed that viewing this collection of drawings together provided some objectivity, because together they created an atmosphere that I could feel.

Whereas focusing on each individual piece I was only seeing its technicalities. This realisation was a significant step in beginning my exhibition plan, as I understood how to pair my works for the wider picture to emerge. I felt as though it could be a metaphor for fragments of my Unconscious, which combined, give a fair representation of my inner unconscious processes. Meanwhile, the experience remains dependent on my audience's own perceptions, and personal insights.

4.4. Development and Work Selection

This brings me to work development, and selection for my final exhibition. At the beginning of this project, it was critical to create works in abundance to allow myself a good chance of landing at productive demonstrations of my automatic process. Having experimented with a range of techniques, and produced a diverse assortment of works, it was time to filter and refine. I started by grouping images with common symbols or other recognisable forms. I also paid attention to the harmony of materials, and techniques used in each work.

During this filtering process I noticed three reoccurring symbols: head/face, circle, and spiral. It occurred to me that the symbol of the head is highly relevant in my project since it indicates awareness. «The uppermost part of the body, it contains the brain, eyes, ears, nose and mouth, all essential elements of human awareness, inspiration and expression.» (Ronnberg, A. Martin, K. 2008). Considering the portraits from this point of view, I could explore the images further to find patterns; for example, the eyes are usually depicted closed, and the faces bare some resemblance to me. Could they be self-portraits? I interpreted these images as an act of looking inwards, which was precisely my intention for this project. Hence, the reason I selected these portraits for my final exhibition.

4. Experimentation and Observation

A substantial portion of my drawings depicted overexaggerated, circular heads. Circles also appeared entangled in the web of pencil lines and floating among ribbon-like spirals in my automatic drawings. I view the circle as a metaphor for the Self because it represents wholeness. It is also a shape that occurs persistently and inevitably in all my drawings, so I felt like it is necessary to include it in my final work selection.

The same is true for my selection of the spiral «...golden or logarithmic spiral that is the most widespread shape found in the natural world. [...] Spiral motifs appear worldwide in the symbolism of religion, art, dreams, folktales and mythology» (Ronnberg, A. Martin, K. 2010), which correlates to some of the themes I mentioned previously. In addition, the common occurrence of the spiral in the natural world would suggest an interesting duality between automatism and nature. I wanted to emphasise this natural automatic pattern in my exhibition.

For the final exhibition I selected works where these symbols are especially prevalent, or where these symbols overlap and are consistent with the framework for my project. This meant that some of the works had to be excluded from the selection, because they appeared isolated from my overall body of work. Instead, I wanted to curate works that harmonize with each other, and build on each other conceptually.

While grouping works and experimenting with their pairings, I continued to produce additional art works in keeping with the themes I mentioned previously. I found it useful to elaborate on the successful aspects of my experimental works because they provided a narrower framework to build upon. By exploring the ideas within my initial automatic drawings, I was able to improve upon them technically and refine their content. At this stage I could apply what I have learned from automatic drawing to creating fully realised artworks, which are then able to illustrate the ambiguous nature of the Unconscious and offer insight into its mechanisms.

The last stage of exhibition preparation consisted of curating the works. For this I had to interpret each drawing or painting closely to determine its key focus, from there I could experiment with how I combine the works to provide the optimal experience for my audience. Although, some of my editing decisions were instinctual and did not require much deliberation. For example, some artworks were clearly related to one another, either aesthetically or conceptually, so I intuitively regarded them as one.

I also had to consider how the works will be perceived in the gallery space; focusing specifically on lighting and layout, because most of my drawings are of a small scale, and faint in colour. I paid attention to the distance between the display work and my audience, so that they were able to view the work in full, without missing any detail. One of the ways in which I did this was by suspending some of the artworks using string, which created a space between the work and the wall, therefore bringing the works closer to the viewer. On the other hand, some works required a more intimate interaction, such as the sketchbook for example, so I placed these works on plinths. I hoped that this would invite the viewer to approach the plinth and observe the work from above, in the same way I do when I produce them. The viewer can then become the subject and form their own relationship with the work.

To summarise, I have selected a total of fourteen artworks for the final exhibition, including the automatic drawing sketchbook, which consists of 104 drawings. This final selection serves as a representation of my artistic enquiry into the Unconscious, but also of me as an individual, due to the personal nature of this project. My intention is to relay this highly personal content to the viewer, and hopefully offer them a glimpse into their own psyche.





05. Exhibition

My exhibition *Understanding the Unconscious* took place at Beta SPACE Gallery, which is located at the Undergraduate Center of Aalto University, Espoo, Finland. Designed by the eminent Finnish Architect Alvar Aalto, the space is a 32.6-meter hall, flooded with light beaming from large windows. The marble walls of the venue particularly enticed me because they offer a fresh alternative to the mundane, white cube, which is considered the golden standard for many art shows. Somehow, the dark veins on the white marble walls reminded me of pencil marks on paper, which I found unexpectedly fitting for my project, because the random nature of these patterns is akin to my own use of chance within drawing. In my mind these walls were not a mere backdrop for my work - they performed as an extension of my automatic drawings, creating a unified and immersive experience.

Beta Space floor plan
and positioning of
featured works:

1. *Bubblehead.*

2. *Droplet.*

3. *Headspace.*

4. *Pink Brain, Blue Face.*

5. *A Wandering Mind I.*
6. *A Wandering Mind II.*

7. *A Wandering Mind III.*

8. *A Wandering Mind IV.*

9. *A Wandering Mind V.*

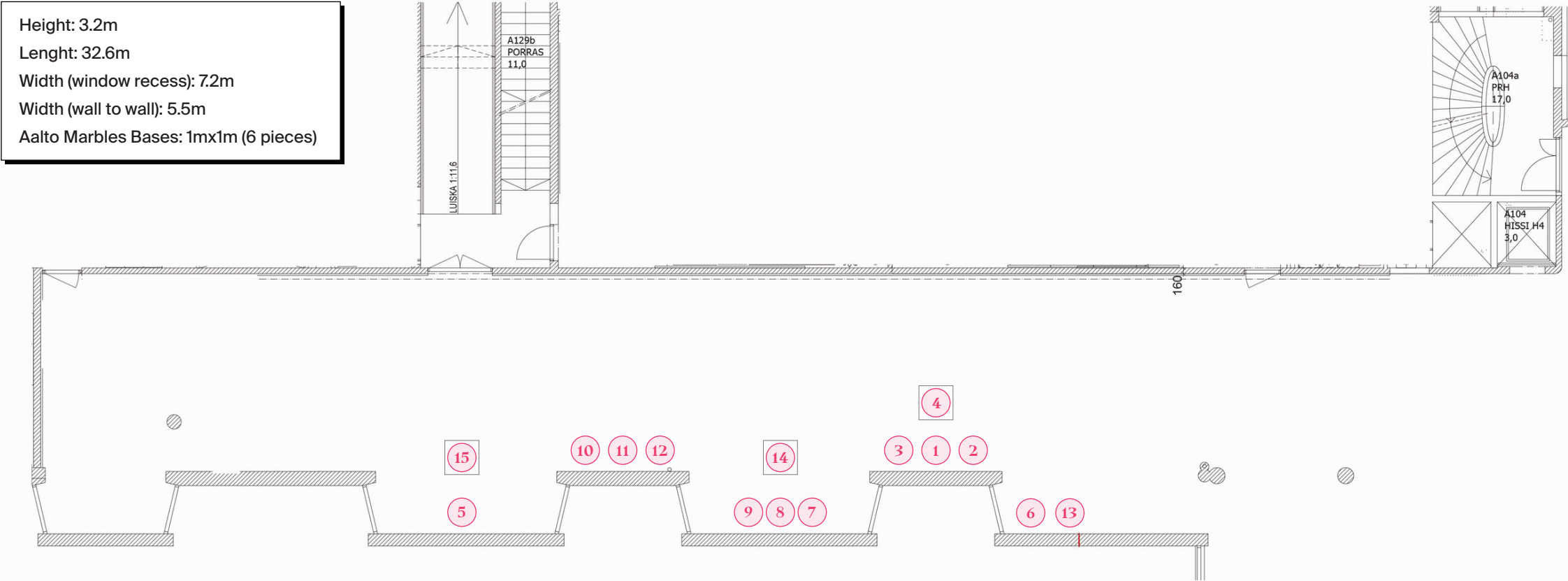
10. *Conscious/Unconscious.*
11. *The Ego.*

12. *The Self.*

13. *The Body.*

14. *Automatic Drawing Sketchbook.*

15. *Project Sketches*



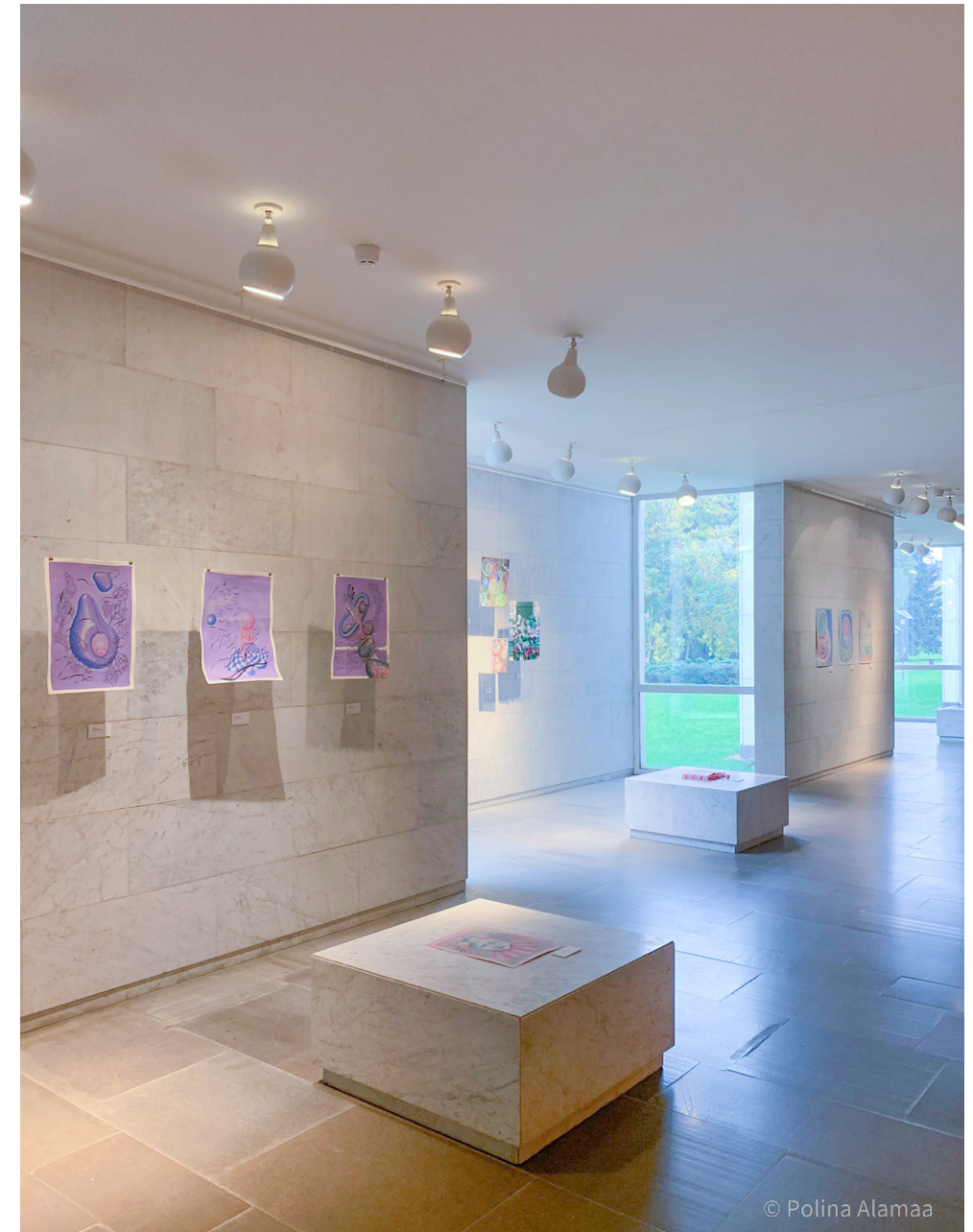


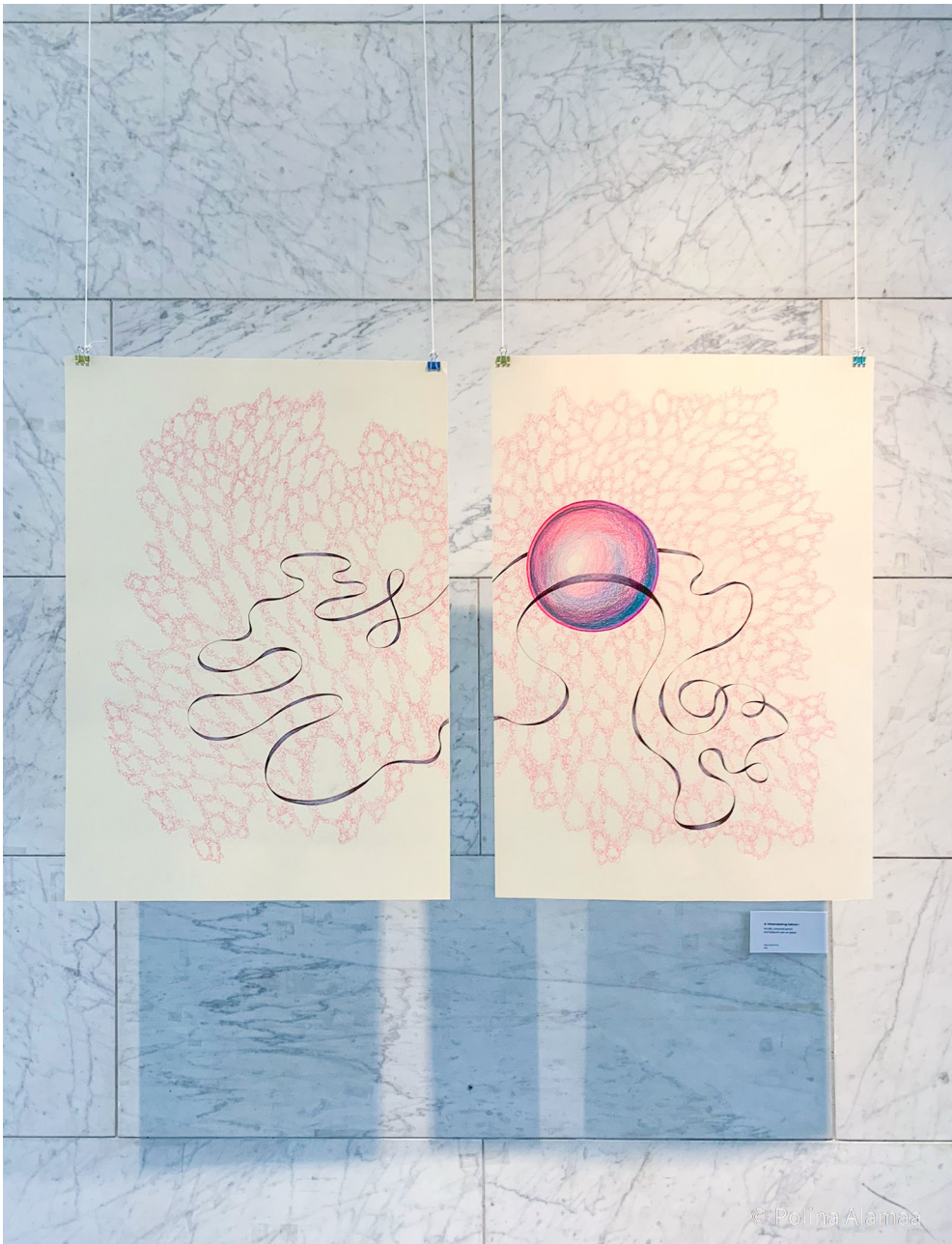
↑ Installation view of works
7,8,9,10,11,12 and 14 (see graph
on pp. 62-63).

→ Installation view of works 1,2,3,4
(see graph on pp. 62-63).

↓ (pp. 68) Installation view of works
6 and 13 (see graph on pp. 62-63).

↓ (pp. 69) Installation view of work 5
(see graph on pp. 62-63).







↑ Installation view of works 1,2,
and 3 (see graph on pp. 62-63).

→ Installation view of works 10,11,
and 12 (see graph on pp. 62-63).



Understanding the Unconscious

Po Alamaa – MA Thesis Show



5. Exhibition

5.1 Exhibition Statement

Inspired by the theories of Carl Gustav Jung, Sigmund Freud, and 20th Century Surrealist automatism, the project explores the Unconscious via intuitive methodologies. The exhibition features a collection of drawings, paintings, and mixed media works questioning awareness, and the relationship between different states of Consciousness.

The Unconscious refers to a part of the mind of which one is not fully aware, but which contributes to one's actions and feelings. It is the immediate, unfiltered content of the mind, which always persists beneath the surface.

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, Consciousness is «the state of understanding and realising something» as well as «the state of being awake, thinking, and knowing what is happening around you».

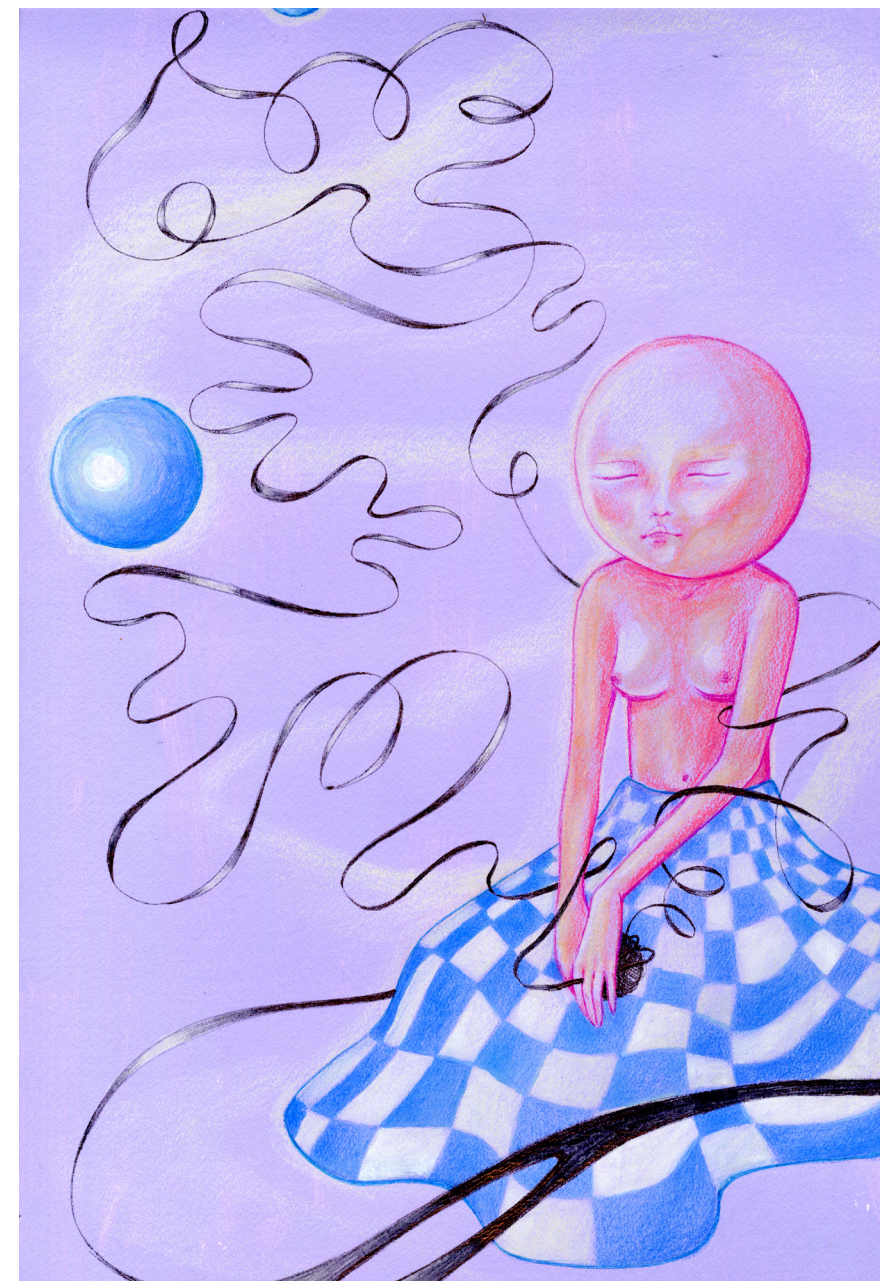
Consciousness, in this case, implies solid intention, or deliberate working method; as opposed to the accidental, or impulsive. In my work I want to address consciousness as something more than just being awake, but rather, view it as a stream, in which our minds are not perpetually focused. On the contrary, one could argue that much of our waking time is passive.

Most mental life is unconscious much of the time; it becomes conscious only as sensory precepts – words, images, and emotions Kandel, E. (2012).

For me, drawing and painting is a tool to retrieve this unconscious content, since actions of the Unconscious Mind precede the arrival of a conscious mind, action precedes reflection. By creating these vulnerable works, I gain an insight into my personal psyche, by interacting with my Unconscious in a tactile, material way.

5.2 Works Featured

For the final exhibition I have featured 15 works, which were on display from 1st – 8th October 2021. The exhibition opening was held on the first day at 6pm and was attended by approximately fifteen people. The catalogue of the featured works is as follows:



Bubblehead (detail)

2021

Acrylic, coloured pencil,
and ballpoint pen on paper.

39 x 53.5 cm



Droplet (detail)

2021

Acrylic, coloured pencil,
and ballpoint pen on paper.

39 x 53.5 cm



Headspace (detail)

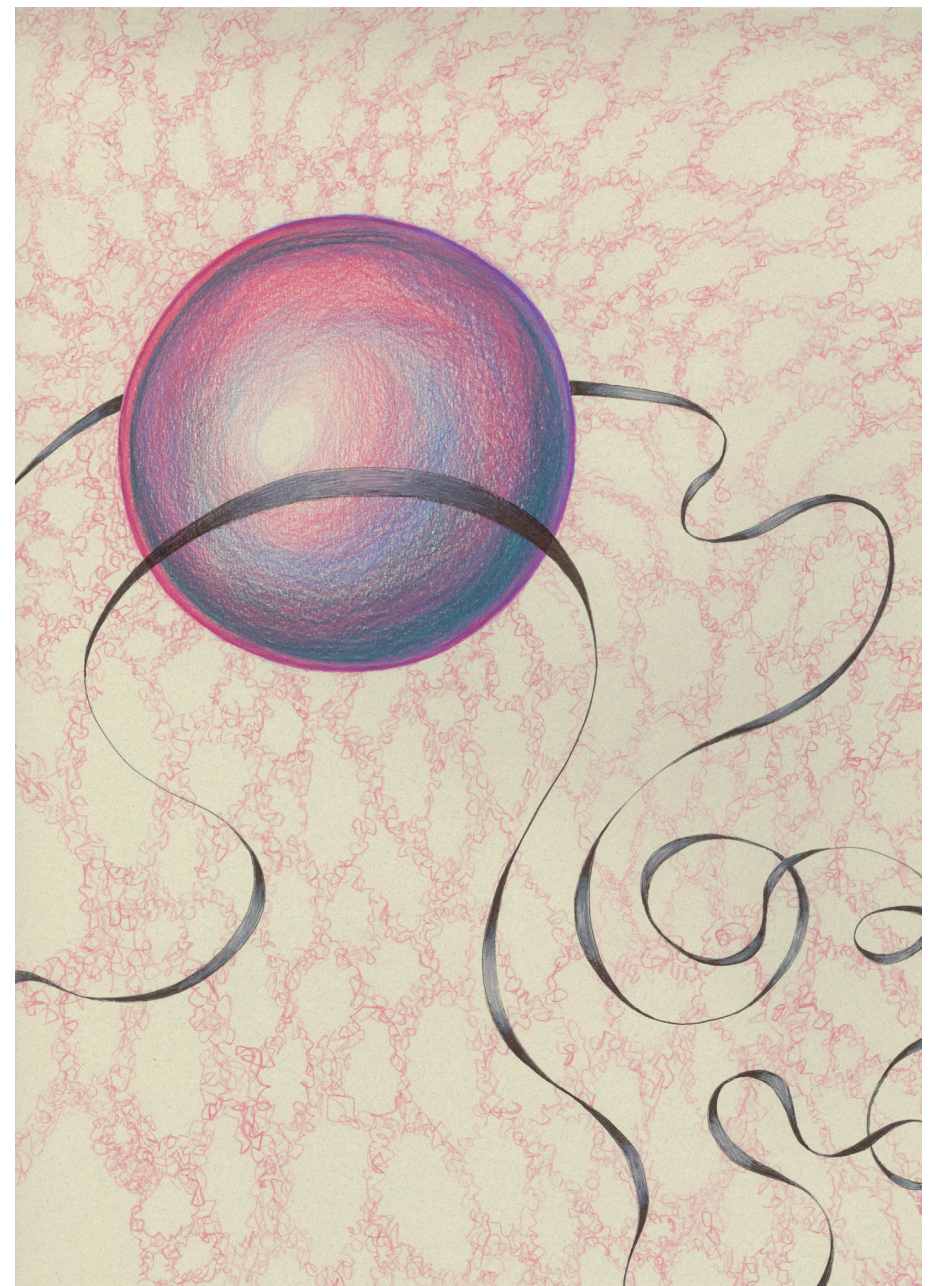
2021

Acrylic, coloured pencil,
and ballpoint pen on paper.

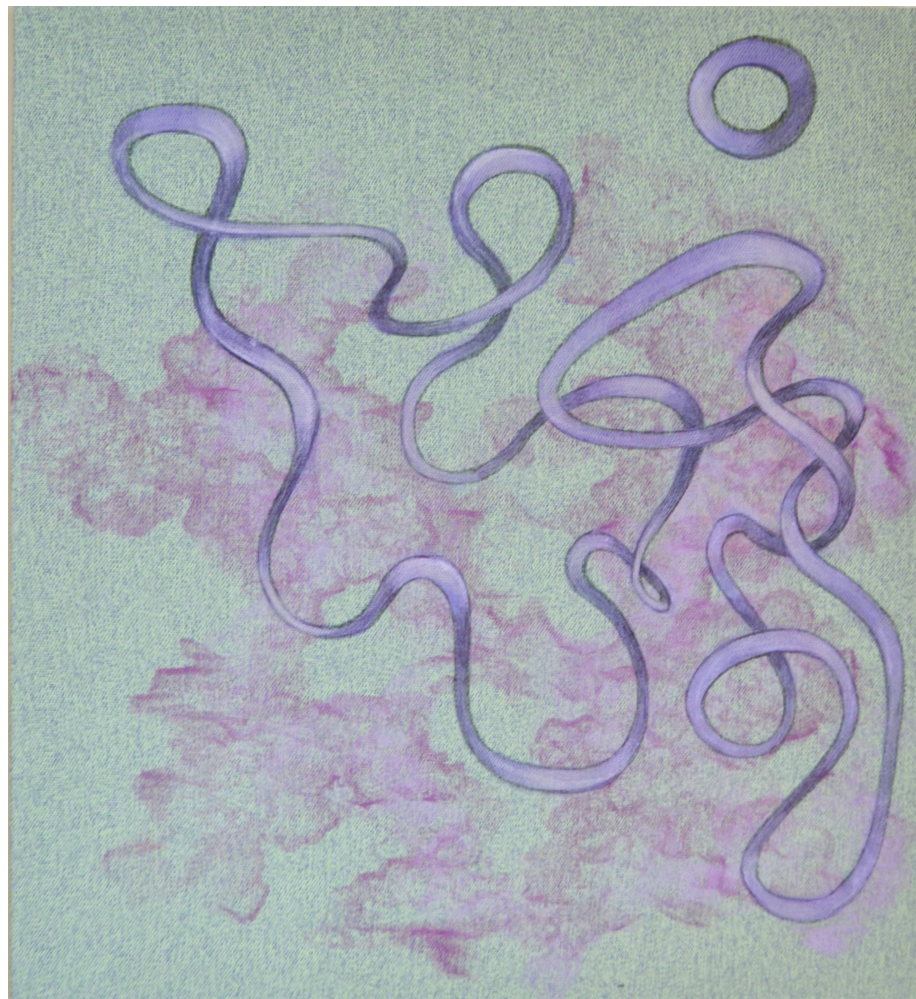
39 x 53.5 cm



Pink Brain, Blue Face
 2021
 Acrylic, coloured pencil,
 and ballpoint pen on paper.
 30.5 x 40.5 cm



A Wandering Mind I (detail)
 2021
 Coloured pencil,
 and ballpoint pen on paper.
 44.5 x 64 x 2 cm



A Wandering Mind II (detail)
2021
Oil pastel, coloured pencil,
and ballpoint pen on syntetic canvas.
46 x 50 cm



A Wandering Mind III (detail)
2021
Acrylic, oil pastel,
and soft pastel on canvas board.
38.5 x 44.5 cm



A Wandering Mind IV (detail)
 2021
 Acrylic, oil pastel,
 and soft pastel on canvas board.
 20 x 31 cm



A Wandering Mind V
 2021
 Mixed media: yarn, fabric, etc.
 46 x 55 cm



Conscious/Unconscious (detail)
2021
Coloured pencil on paper.
50 x 65 cm



The Self (detail)
2021
Soft pastel, coloured pencil on paper.
50 x 65 cm



The Ego (detail)

2021

Coloured pencil on paper.

50 x 65 cm



The Body

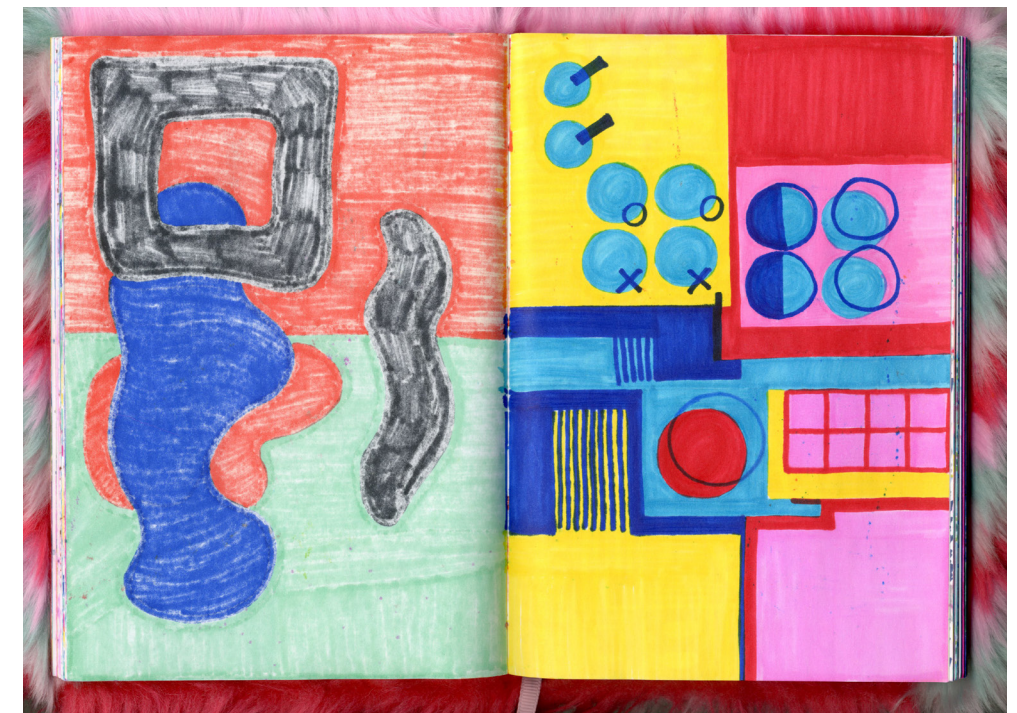
2021

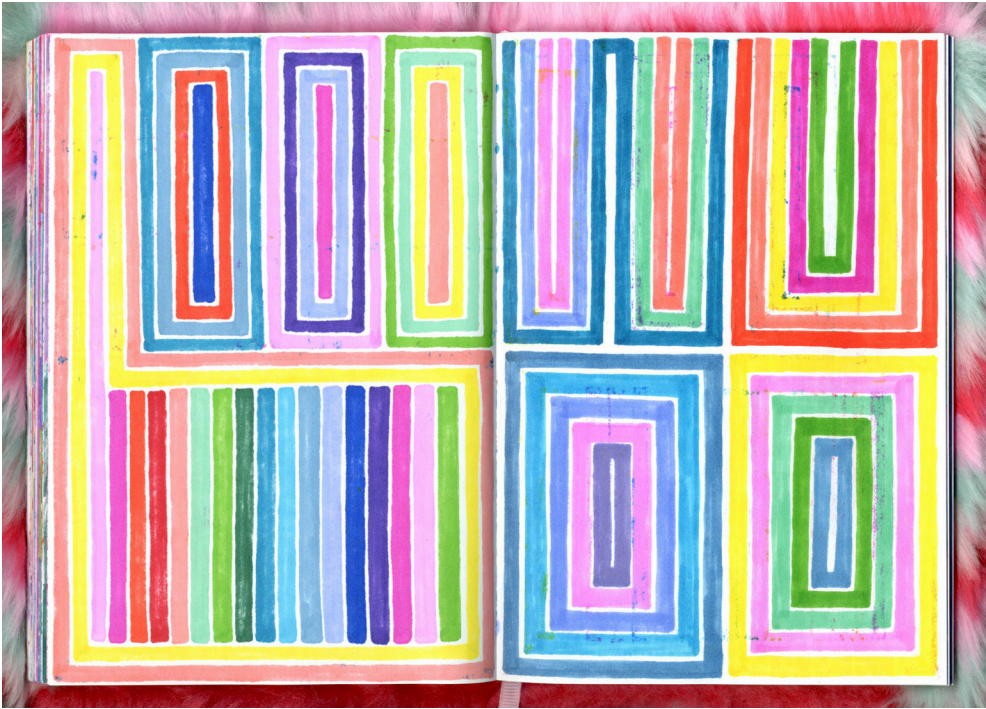
Found objects: hare bones, doll parts, fabric, string etc.

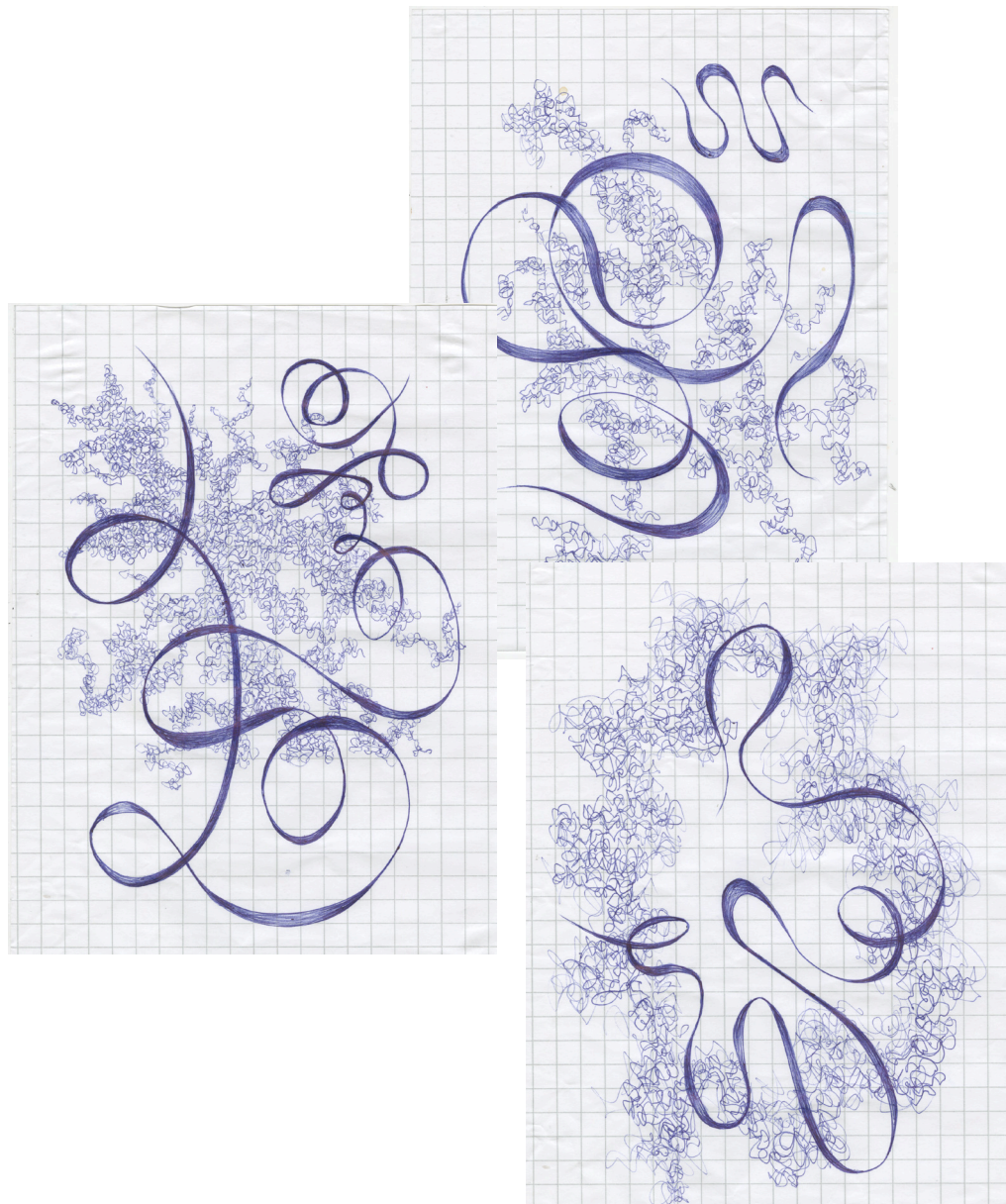
Dimensions variable.



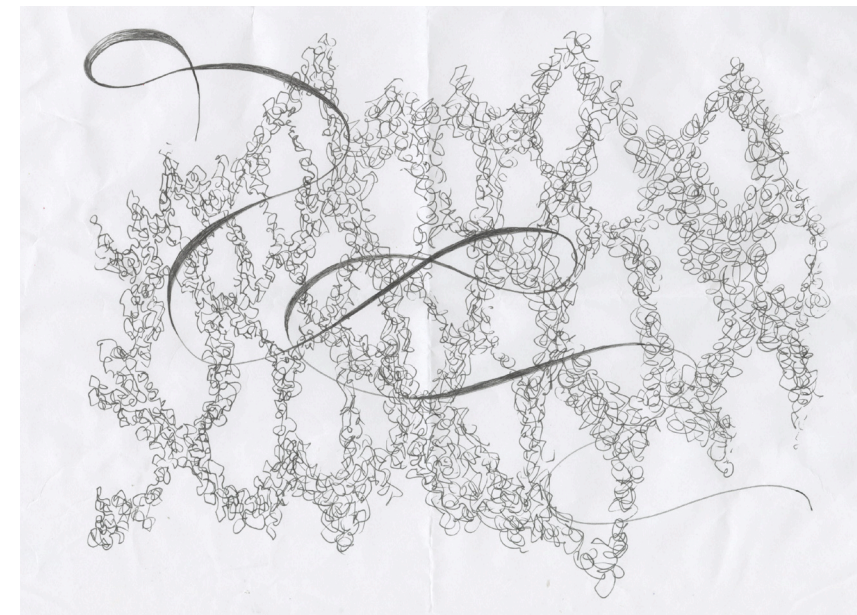
Automatic Drawing sketchbook (selected pages)
2019 - 2021
Sharpie markers, gel pens,
ballpoint pens etc.
Sketchbook size: 14 x 20.5 cm, 104 pages.







Project Sketches
2021
Biro on paper.
13 x 20 cm (3x)



2021
Gouache, Marker, Pencil,
and Ballpoint pen on paper.
17 x 24 cm



2021
Pencil on paper.
21 x 29,7 cm

5.3 Reception and Feedback

The crowd favourite, (judging by both feedback, and physical proximity to the work) proved to be the humble sketchbook, which I almost decided not to show. This two-year-old sketch book has served me as a meditation device, a place to draw mindlessly, and ground myself in the present. I filled its pages with colourful, spontaneous motifs using Sharpie markers for over a year. It was not until much later that I realised it was the most extensive automatic drawing collection I have ever produced.

Po sei la migliore artista che abbia mai incontrato ♥
ti voglio tanto bene (Flr)

An amazingly psychedelic exploration into the
styles of this amazing artist ♥ — Ami

The sketchbook is absolutely fantastic! Such Brilliant
work.

I love how there are so many recurring motifs in your work — it
all comes together beautifully and coherently.

Izjemno! Prekrasna in dih vsemajpca razstava.
Čestitke Po ♥ — Anže

Wonderful! I especially love the psychedelic
sketchbook and 'The Body' — Chiara

Прекрасная выставка, но! нужно было предупредить, что
для её просмотра нужны наушники.
(возвучивать на твоем аудиозаписи выставки)

Kiitos ihanasta näyttelystä Po ♥

Thanks for inviting us into your unconscious, going through
the notebook I could see the intricate thoughts,
feelings and everything else which lead to this exhibition.
And through your art, we were forced to face our
own unconscious side. Love

bynd

++v/a Nay++ELy

Amazing work Po ♥ Thank you for this lovely
and very inspiring exhibition. — Heini

Congratulations, Po ♥♥♥ — Stella

Dear Po!

Thank you for a cool insight of unconsciousness.
I loved the colours you've used and I'd love
to build a bunny bone doll with you. Inspiring
indeed, thanks for being a fun and smart
friend.

— Sandra Mirka 06/10.2021

Your unconscious is beautiful.

— Tooni, 06-10-21

Dear Po,

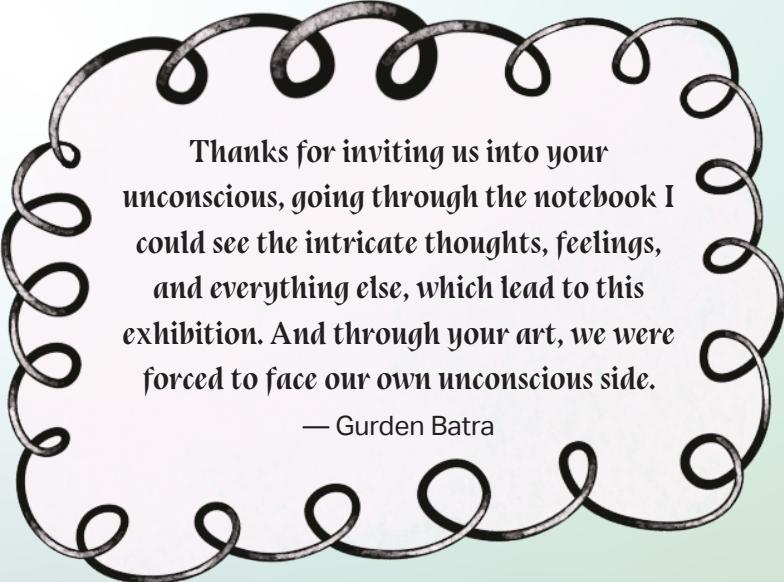
Thanks for showing your fancy unconscious world to
the public. I really enjoy the intuitive journey you made.
Good job! Rodd 2021

Visitors approached me to discuss various patterns they found within the book's pages, and how fragments of these patterns can be spotted in my larger works. Many have pointed out hidden images within the colourful abstractions that have gone unnoticed by me: landscapes, bacteria, organs, faces, genitals... the list goes on. At any given moment there was a meeting around the sketchbook, and the viewers eagerly discussed their interpretations of what is inside. Perhaps this guessing/play aspect of the sketchbook is the reason for its success during the show opening. I was thrilled that my collection of automatic drawings was being treated like an unhinged version of the Rorschach Test, though it is hard to discern whether the test was for me or for them.

Overall, I was pleased with the reception and audience feedback because it reflected my intentions for the exhibition. The audience interacted with works as I intended and offered fascinating insights into the presented concepts. Although, at first, I was intimidated by the idea of showing such ambiguous works to the public, but it was necessary for the project and ultimately, I felt seen and understood as an individual. For me, the exhibition opening served as a strong bonding experience between myself and my audience, as we shared intimate discussions about our dreams and unconscious thoughts.

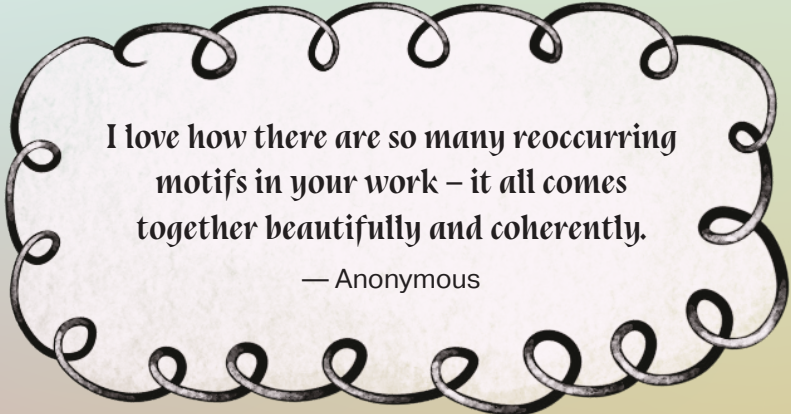
5.4. Self-evaluation

Presenting my work, it was important to consider the environment, in which the art is experienced, and the dynamics created within it. Practical aspects, such as how the works are positioned, can completely alter the viewers' experience of said work. British philosopher Alain de Botton considers that grouping paintings with a similar "agenda" facilitates the audience to better appreciate the art (The Wolfe Review, 2017). I followed my instinct when it came to grouping works with similar aesthetic, or energetic values in their sections of the hall. Entering from the main set of doors, the first section you would encounter is *The Wondering Mind II* and *The Body*.



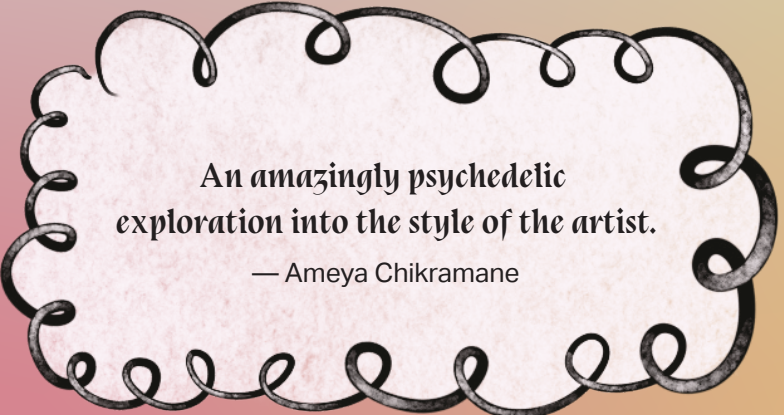
Thanks for inviting us into your unconscious, going through the notebook I could see the intricate thoughts, feelings, and everything else, which lead to this exhibition. And through your art, we were forced to face our own unconscious side.

— Gurden Batra



I love how there are so many reoccurring motifs in your work – it all comes together beautifully and coherently.

— Anonymous



An amazingly psychedelic exploration into the style of the artist.

— Ameya Chikramane

The first is an abstract drawing on synthetic canvas built from found wood and fabric. The second is a doll made from found objects, such as porcelain doll parts and hare bones. Both pieces are suspended from the ceiling using string, so they cast a slight shadow behind them, and the doll moves eerily with the passing breeze. There is an additional synthetic canvas in the shape of a circle, which resembles a sun or full moon, turning the overall composition of these three elements into an improvised landscape.

I am particularly satisfied with the production element of these works because most of the materials were chance finds, and deciding to collect them felt like a personal, and intuitive process. I had intended for scavenging to become another means of automatism in my work, and I feel like I have successfully done so. However, upon displaying the works together I realised that they enrich each other in unexpected ways. The semiotics of the works changed due to the added context of each found object. Take for example, the relationship between the moon-like canvas and the hare bone doll. According to *The Book of Symbols* (Ronnberg, A. Martin, K. 2010) the word rabbit or hare is commonly linked with the moon.

Both the moon's and the rabbit's existence reflect in high relief the cyclical nature of life, the ever-recurring conjunction of darkness and light, death and rebirth. (Ronnberg, A. Martin, K. 2010).

Incredibly, this symbolism is apparent in the aesthetics of my sculpture, demonstrating the potency of archetypal images and our innate ability to interpret them. Some interpretations were surprising to me as they are less common in my cultural sphere. For example, in Japanese folklore it is said that «a rabbit living on the moon is constantly making mochi» (Ronnberg, A. Martin, K. 2010), which is a beautifully surreal image to think about. As an Eastern European I am more likely to associate rabbits with Western traditions like Easter.

Due to their fertility and association with regeneration, rabbits act as a symbol of eternity. This meaning extends to the bone as a material since bones remain even after the death of bodily flesh. «The Latin os, bone, refers not only to the substance of the skeleton, but metaphorically to one's inmost part, one's soul...» (Ronnberg, A. Martin, K. 2010). In the doll sculpture, her core is both the literal torso, as well as the bones within her fabric body; together they juxtapose fragility and eternity.

To me what is so exciting, is that these connotations were apparent prior to learning of the symbolism contained within the work, which would suggest that there is some innate knowledge involved. These unconscious judgements occur instantaneously and while we may not be able to identify the reasoning behind them, they do appear to originate from a collective understanding or, as Jung calls it “the Collective Unconscious”.

Going forward, I am excited to continue working with Archetypal Imagery because it offers a unique dialogue with my audience via the medium of visual art. It has also proven to be a practical method of understanding my own work, whereby I can interpret the Archetypal content of my work to gain a deeper understanding of the unconscious processes that are otherwise inaccessible. In that sense I treat the artwork as a means of recording the unconscious creative process.



06. Conclusions

I have found that work attains meaning through the viewer, regardless of my intention as an artist. This artistic research stands in agreement with Jung's theories about Archetypal Imagery as a means of interpreting symbols in our Unconscious. I have implemented these ideas into my artistic practice and discovered that indeed: since, the Unconscious transcends logic, it can find unexpected connections, which the analytic mind can interpret to draw meaning. My final exhibition serves as an example of this.

The goal was to not have intention, but instead, to be guided by immediate instinct and chance. Revealing that in doing so, the work can expand in scope of interpretation, which offers me immense artistic freedom. It would also appear that the automatic approach positively impacts the artwork's relationship with the viewer, as they are challenged to make subjective judgements about the work's narrative.

Our Collective Unconscious provides a wide framework in which automatism can relate to our collective experience. Somewhere in these experiences, the individual can recognize aspects of themselves, and this is where an image can evolve into a message. From this perspective, abstraction within automatic drawings behaves much like a language that speaks to the Unconscious self.

In exploring the Unconscious and learning to utilize it as an artistic tool, I found that my work is primarily concerned with my artistic methodology, as much as it is with the outcome of said processes. The resulting artwork can serve as a documentation of the unconscious expression that takes place when painting or drawing. By observing and analysing these outcomes, I can begin to understand the mechanics of creativity, and the role of the Unconscious in visual art.

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