

30+

Listening to the Balance and Homage to Brahman
Two Series of Large-Scale Drawings

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This paper, with art images, explores work from two series of large-scale drawings completed 30+ years apart. In thirty years, the subject matter or content of my work has evolved. However, there is an underlying thread that exists beyond the transformation: the idea of balance, equilibrium, wholeness—where relationship and possibilities exist but are netted in harmony or unity. In the earlier series *Listening to the Balance* the topic was dealt with using figurative references and imaginary-scapes; in the later series *Homage to Brahman*, the theme is conveyed through geometries and imaginary worlds. Both are large format multi-media works on paper. Although this approach is not characteristic, working in this way 30+ years apart provides the opportunity to compare the two series—situated like two ends of a spectrum, two expressions either side of a gap, two entities facing opposite directions linking interstitial space/time in between.

The series of five, large format two-dimensional works entitled *Listening to the Balance* was completed in 1985 in Iowa, USA. In the same year, the works were exhibited at the Institute for the Creative Arts¹ in Fairfield. Using a range of media including charcoal, oil pastel, dye, crayon, paint—these works drew from historical art and architectural themes, my writing and writings of others, to convey an inner idea of balance. Imagery referenced included female portraits, ancient Roman sculpture, and ancient Egyptian survey devices, the painting *Summer Sunlight* by American artist Beatrice Witney Van Ness, and various recurring motifs in my work. *Summer Sunlight, 1936*, fascinated me when researching the collection of Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay. Wilhelmina Cole Holladay founded the National Museum of Women in the Arts with its unique collection in Washington D.C. (Bonshek, 1986, pp. 26-27). During those earlier decades my interests extended to women in art, contemporary art practice, (Bonshek, Cox, & Knoblock, 1984, pp. 147-161; Bonshek 1987, pp. 118-129, 1990, 1991, pp. 285-290, 1995, 1996, pp. 46-49, 1997a, 1997b, 1998a, 1998b; Bonshek & Fergusson, 1988), later, to publishing on my creative process (Bonshek, 2004a, 2004b, 2007, pp 343-360), and Veda, consciousness and art theory (Bonshek, 2001, 2007)—as I continued to engage in art making, teaching and writing.²

Three decades after creating *Listening to the Balance*, in 2015, I returned to large format, multimedia drawing, in a series called *Homage to Brahman*. After being fully immersed in the

¹ The Institute for the Creative Arts was established by founding Director, artist Greg Thatcher.

² For example, I was contributing Iowa reviewer and editor for the Chicago art journal *New Art Examiner* in the 1990s.

design and build of a *Maharishi Vāstu*³ (Bonshek, 1989, 2001, pp. 179-184, 2007, pp. 225-270; Maharishi Vedic University, 1998) home and studio, I found that, spontaneously, when living in Maharishi Vāstu, new ideas and inner vision emerged. Maharishi Vāstu creates something beyond building; it is part of oneself. This experience instigated work on the *Homage to Brahman* series, a work-in-progress. I concurrently created an open-ended print series entitled *Ten Structures of Knowledge*. Selections from *Homage to Brahman* and *Ten Structures of Knowledge* were featured in *Breathing Universe, 2017* at Impress Printmakers Studio and Gallery, Brisbane, Australia—an exhibition with artist and printmaker Kay Watanabe. As distinct from *Listening to the Balance*, *Homage to Brahman* conjures up mathematical geometries, structure, floating forms and the evocation of unending space, but connects with the former work in ways that will be revealed.

In this essay, *Listening to the Balance* and *Homage to Brahman* will be described in the context of my reflective practice. An unspoken part of this process is an activity I began around the time of creating *Listening to the Balance* which enriches my creative life⁴.

Listening to the Balance: A Dedication to Women

In working on *Listening to the Balance*, each day I was absorbed in drawing and writing; I had already begun to explore larger format works—using charcoal and ink—in my previous pieces from the *Unconditional* series consisting of three works: *Unconditional #1: Recital, 1985*, *Unconditional #2: Echo, 1985*, and *Unconditional #3: Recital, 1985*⁵ (see Figures 1 and 2).



Figure 1: *Unconditional #1: Recital, 1985*, Anna Bonshek, Charcoal, pen, on paper, 1.5 m x 2.85 m

³ Maharishi Vāstu—also known as *Maharishi Vedic Architecture* or *Maharishi Sthāpatya Veda*—is a complete system of architecture and planning according to the solar, lunar and planetary influences on the earth, with reference to the north and south poles and the equator. Maharishi Vāstu connects individual life with cosmic life, and is one of 40 aspects of the Veda and Vedic Literature. See <https://www.maharishivastu.org> for more detail.

⁴ I learned the Transcendental Meditation and TM-Sidhi program in the mid-1980s and have continued to regularly practice both. I was attracted to Transcendental Meditation for several reasons; it is part of a long tradition brought to the world by the respected teacher, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, and the practice creates peace in society.

⁵ The *Unconditional* series was featured in the exhibition *Works by the Faculty of the School of Fine Art—Queensland College of Art*, at Brisbane City Hall Museum and Art Gallery in 1985.

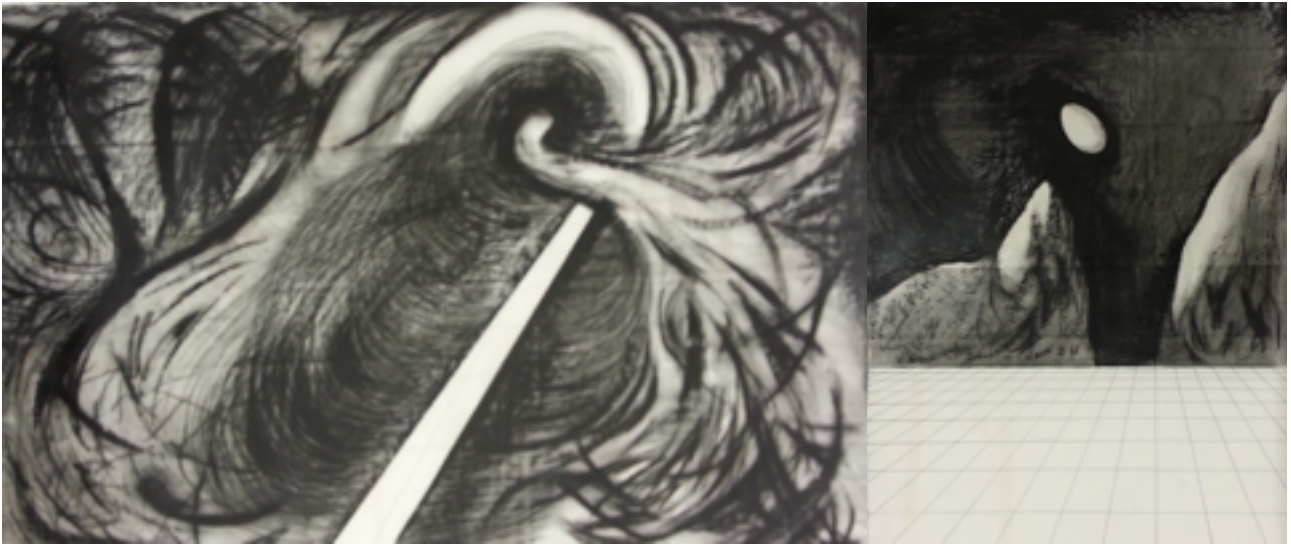


Figure 2: *Unconditional #3: Template*, 1985, Anna Bonshek, Charcoal, pen on paper, 1.5 m x 2.89 m

Throughout art making I capture ideas in notes and small sketches or working drawings, often in journals, and from these develop complex work. The notes and sketches as visual ideas contain compact information of the initial thought. As valid statements in themselves, collectively they speak as a whole. Only a few are selected to work up into more elaborate works. In the case of the series discussed here, the final five works were created through layering and accretion of detail, for a rich visual effect and multivalent meaning.

When deciding to create *Listening to the Balance* objects from ancient history had caught my attention, both for their original use and how meaning could be derived from their re-presentation. Despite this, the overarching motivation was to create a set of drawings around the sense of equilibrium. For me, this was, and is, something quite palpable. I felt that this quality, or state, could be discerned or intuited within myriad competing tendencies, as a harmony or balance. It could be apprehended in the fullness of clear insight and a steady, unmovable experience—a sense of knowingness.

Passionate about art, at that time I frequented exhibitions, museums and collections in England, Scotland, Wales, The Netherlands, Italy, France, Australia, and, in North America—Toronto, Montréal⁶, New York and Washington D.C. Among objects I made note of were ancient Roman sculptures and ancient Egyptian devices used in architecture—the latter for proportion and alignment. While these devices were vital to the accurate construction of pyramids, when sketched, drawn and re-presented in *Listening to the Balance*, they assume a new role as signs or symbols. Not only acting visually as strong compositional anchors, they also play a part in articulating a narrative. Thus, they help facilitate 1) the creation of potent meaning, 2) reference to an historical value and intrinsic purpose, and 3) compositionally, the provision of a two-dimensional artifice of visual orderliness, symmetry and geometry. Sketches for the first drawing in the series featured two heads facing each other with a third, ghostly, face in between. These occupy architectonic and landscape spaces above a swirling, energetic wave phenomena—similar to that appearing in the *Unconditional* series. The final large format drawing featured these three faces. *Listening to the Balance #1*, in this way, comprised two sections (see Figure 3).

⁶ For example, *The Great Pharaoh Ramses II and His Time: An Exhibition of Antiquities from the Egyptian Museum, Cairo* was featured at the Palais de la Civilisation, Montréal, June 1-September 29, 1985.

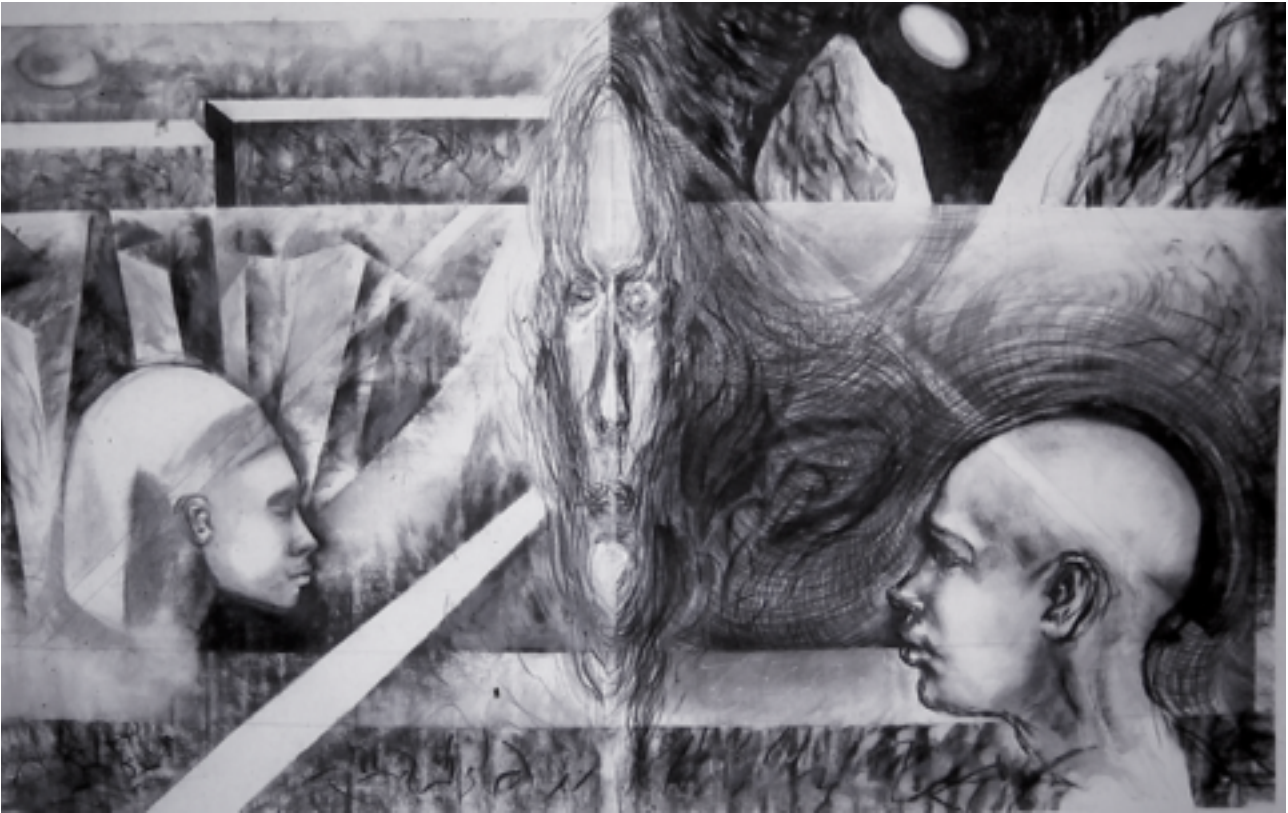


Figure 3: *Listening to the Balance #1*, 1985, Anna Bonshek, Charcoal, crayon, paint, ink on paper, 1.29 m x 2.01 m

One, on the left, has architectonic forms, a floating, transparent, smoking, oval seed shape, and dynamic, straight, linear elements that divide space, in front of which is located a sculptural, female head. The second, on the right, reveals rocky, mountain forms with a falling, ovoid moon/seed shape and another female head—more visceral, less sculptural—facing inwards. The two halves are both divided, and connected by, a slim, Giacometti-esque, ethereal face, which sits along the vertical mid-point like the spirit of a wise elder. This layout is compositionally tethered by a drawing of an ancient Egyptian level and square.

The Egyptian level and square are made of a wooden ‘A’ frame set at ninety degrees, with a central pivot point at the top, and a cross bar and plumb bob suspended from the pivot point. (see Figure 4, sketches) This device was used for precise calculations in building large pyramidal structures thousands of years ago, such as the great pyramid of Cheops, or Khufu, on the Giza plateau. The architectural structure was calculated and built with respect to the proportion of its patron—measured in cubits. A cubit is a length of 52.5 centimetres and is described as representing the measure from a man’s elbow to the tip of his middle finger. So the unit of measure was directly related to the human body.

In the case of the great pyramid of Khufu, the original height was 280 royal cubits and a base side length 440 royal cubits. In the process of planning and surveying, ancient Egyptian survey crews would use appropriate measuring rope, plumb bobs, sighting and levelling instruments for astronomy and triangulation. Critical to the construction of the pyramid was the accurate determination of the slope of a surface relative to the horizontal. This could be secured by the use of the Egyptian level and square.

In *Listening to the Balance #1* the shape of the device, a dominant triangular form, situates ‘A’ centre stage. ‘A’ can be read as the first letter and vowel of the alphabet—or the beginning of sound.

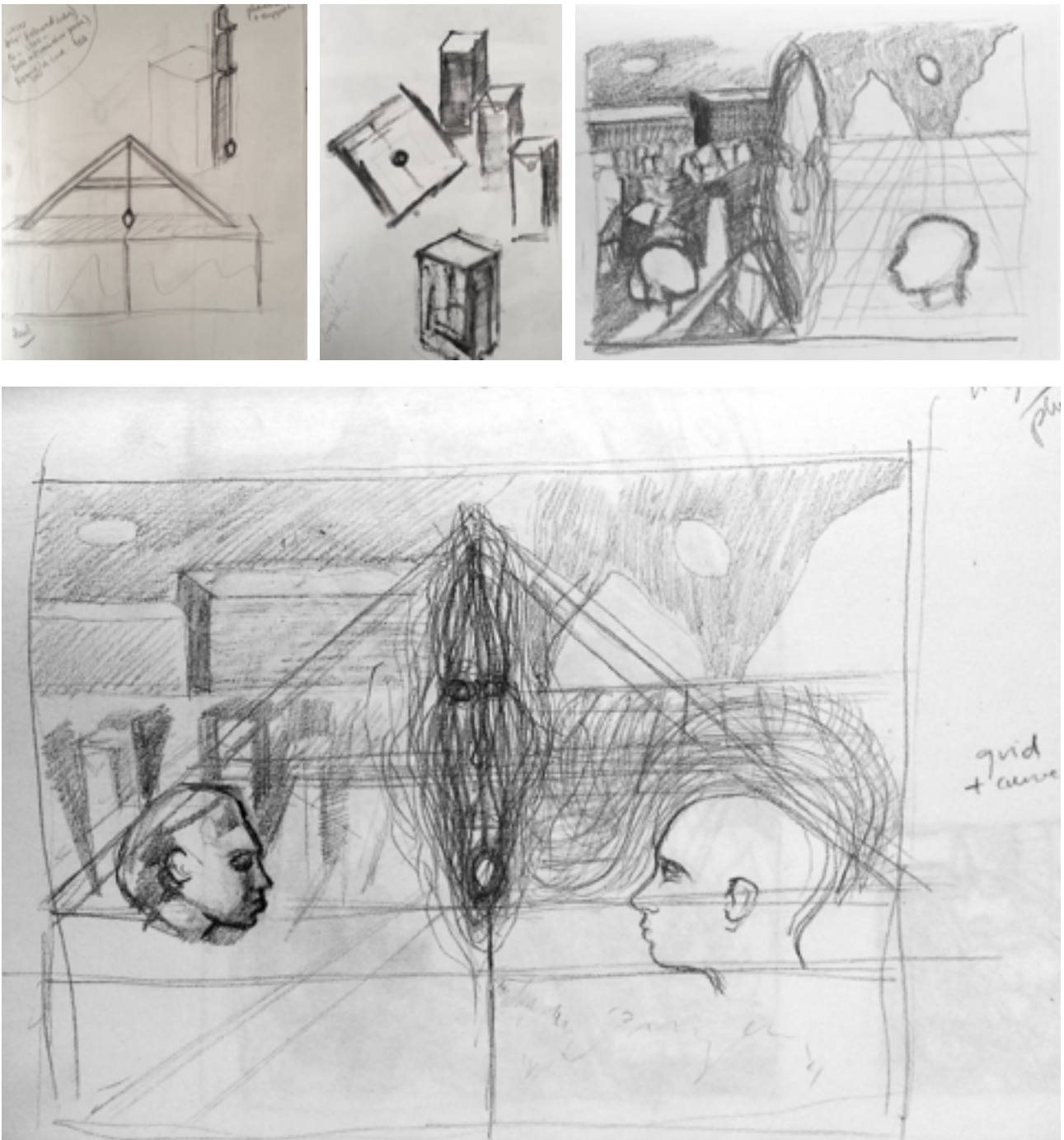


Figure 4: Sketches of survey devices including Ancient Egyptian level and square (above left and centre), and drawings for *Listening to the Balance #1* (above right and below), from pages of 1985 sketchbook, Anna Bonshek, Pencil, charcoal on paper

The second drawing in the series, *Listening to the Balance #2* takes the imagery of the first drawing and re-presents it as if it were a mural or scene on a wall in a room. This scene now sits behind a male torso, inspired by Roman sculptures in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (see Figure 4).

The drawing is reflected, again, on another wall of the room that the torso inhabits. This interchange between two-dimensional imagery, apparent sculptural form and illusory space, creates a play or drama around what is seen, posing questions: What symbolises the imaginary and, conversely, the real? and is there a connection between the two? The new composition continues to emphasise strong symmetries and directional movement. Swirling, gestural marks overlay a grid/plane and imply dynamic forces are at work across a silent floor or vector.

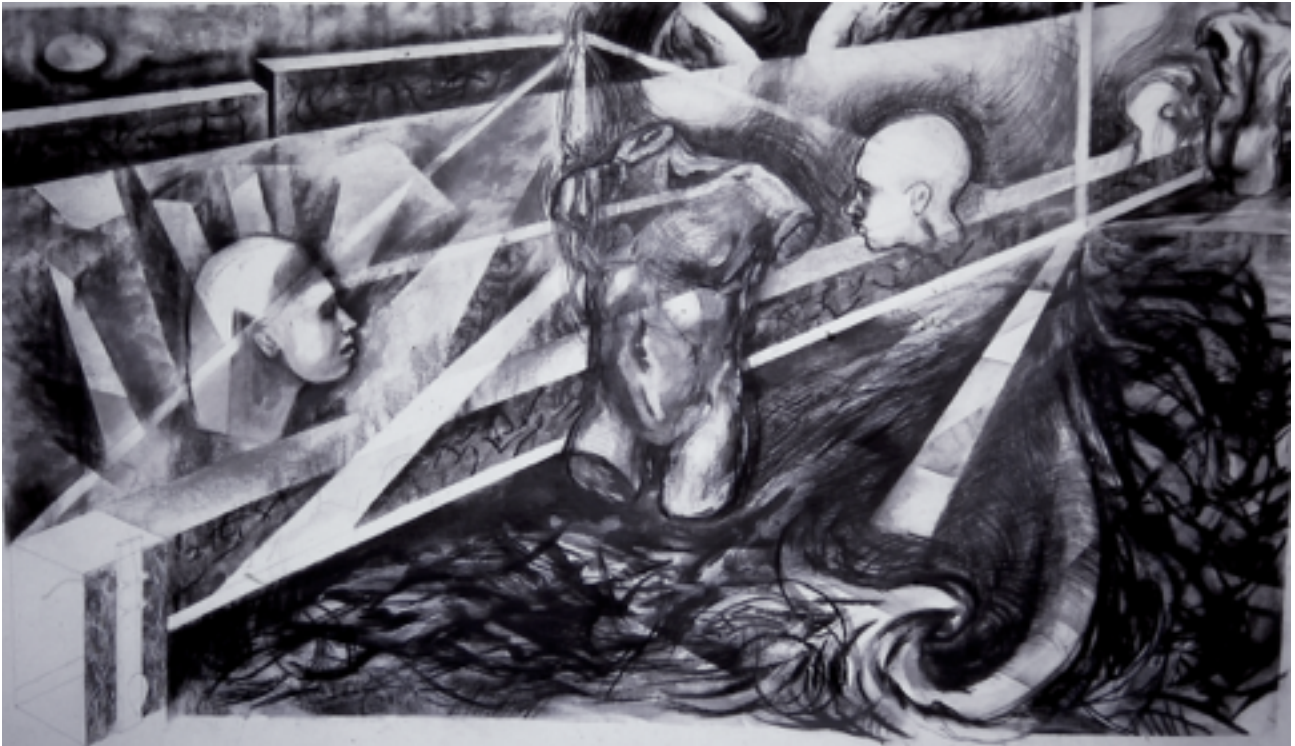


Figure 5: *Listening to the Balance #2*, 1985, Anna Bonshek, Charcoal, crayon, ink on paper, 1.29 m x 2.2 m

There is a semi-transparency to the torso—the idealised, yet truncated, male form—that belies the notion of solidity and strength associated with masculinity. In the lower, left-hand foreground is a drawing of another ancient Egyptian device for determining precision in building: a level and plumb bob. Again, this makes reference to mathematical accuracy and the idea of order and balance, not only in architecture but in relation to the human form.

This step from the first drawing, *Listening to the Balance #1* to this next *Listening to the Balance #2* (see Figures 5 and 6) allows the viewer to encounter a shift from a picture, to a recreation or copy of that picture in another space occupied by a sculptural presence. Two-dimensionality moves onto three-dimensionality—as if more present, inhabitable. Like a flat architectural drawing, without losing its original status, it expresses multi-dimensionality.

Next in the sequence, *Listening to the Balance #3* (see Figure 7) introduces richer colour. It is longer than the previous two drawings and has a dynamic liveliness. The symmetrical composition and A-shaped device re-occur. Now, the idealised male torso introduced in the second work is front and centre. Embedded within/upon it is a colour drawing—reproducing the curious painting *Summer Sunlight* by Beatrice Whitney Van Ness (see reproduced image, inset, on page 8).⁷ The small copy of the painting asserts the two-dimensionality of the drawing—reminding us of its flatness. It sits suspended, yet held, in crossing diagonals.

Summer Sunlight features two females, one standing and another seated on a bench, wearing a large hat. A swimsuited male with his back to the viewer, sits opposite the hatted woman. The trio is enjoying a day by the beach. The woman standing to the left offers a piece of tropical fruit, a banana, to the female seated under the shade of a large umbrella. There is a light, calm feeling to the composition with its bright, fresh colour.

⁷ Born in Massachusetts in 1888, Beatrice Whitney Van Ness studied at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, USA.

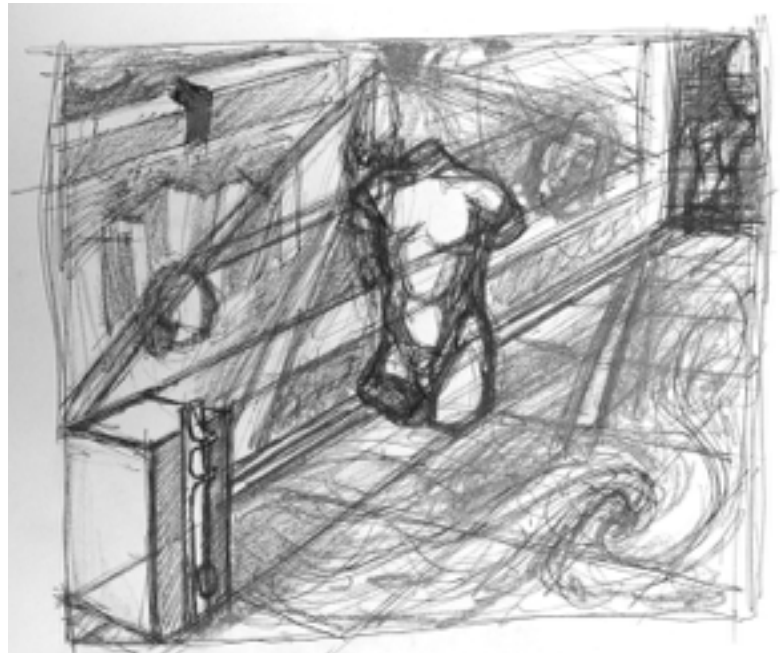
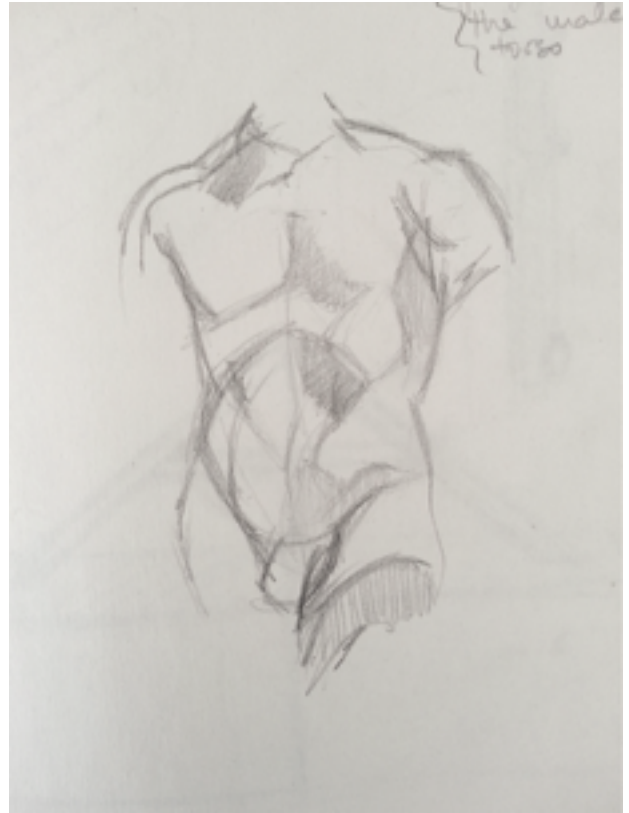


Figure 6: Male torso, mid-Imperial, Hadrianic or Antonine marble sculpture of a youth (ca. 118-161), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (above left); Sketch of male torso (above right) and working sketches for Listening to the Balance #2, (below left and below right), from pages of 1985 sketchbook, Anna Bonshek, Pencil and pen on paper

The atmosphere is charming. While more will be revealed about this work, in featuring the image I wanted to honour women artists and the spirit of the painting, which, at the time for me, embodied a female sensibility.



Figure 7: *Listening to the Balance #3*, 1985, Anna Bonshek, Charcoal, oil crayon, ink, paint on paper, 1.29 m x 2.93 m

Although, in scale, small in size, by placing this reproduced image (see inset below left) over the male torso it gives preference to it—as if to say, this modest work might quietly take pride of place,



as the fulcrum of the piece. Again, the entire drawing reproduces aspects of the previous works in various ways: on the vertical plane of a far wall, in mountains emerging from cavernous space to the right, and so on. In this drawing, however, there are three distinct vertical sections. These are identified by three panels of hand-written text inscribed and drawn over—almost invisible in the primary colours: red (on the left), yellow (in the centre) and blue (on the right). The text presents excerpts from various writings, including poetry and theory. The Egyptian level devices

again make an appearance, such that the whole composition creates mystery while retaining a powerful equilibrium and stability.

Following this in the sequence, *Listening to the Balance #4* (see Figures 8, 9 and 10) now takes the previous drawing and flips it up to create a floating horizontal plane, disappearing into space. Below are two halves of a split male torso. The two female heads now look in opposite directions. They no longer face one another or a central face but look away. However, now they share a brain; they are wedged, like two facets of one entity—reminiscent of Janus, the Roman god of door-portals, of beginnings, time, and duality.

Each face coexists with the other. Each looks towards a torso fragment. The heads are now unified while the torso has become divided—floating in between the lower registers. As with the previous drawing, there is another three-fold division, but in this case, across the horizontal plane.

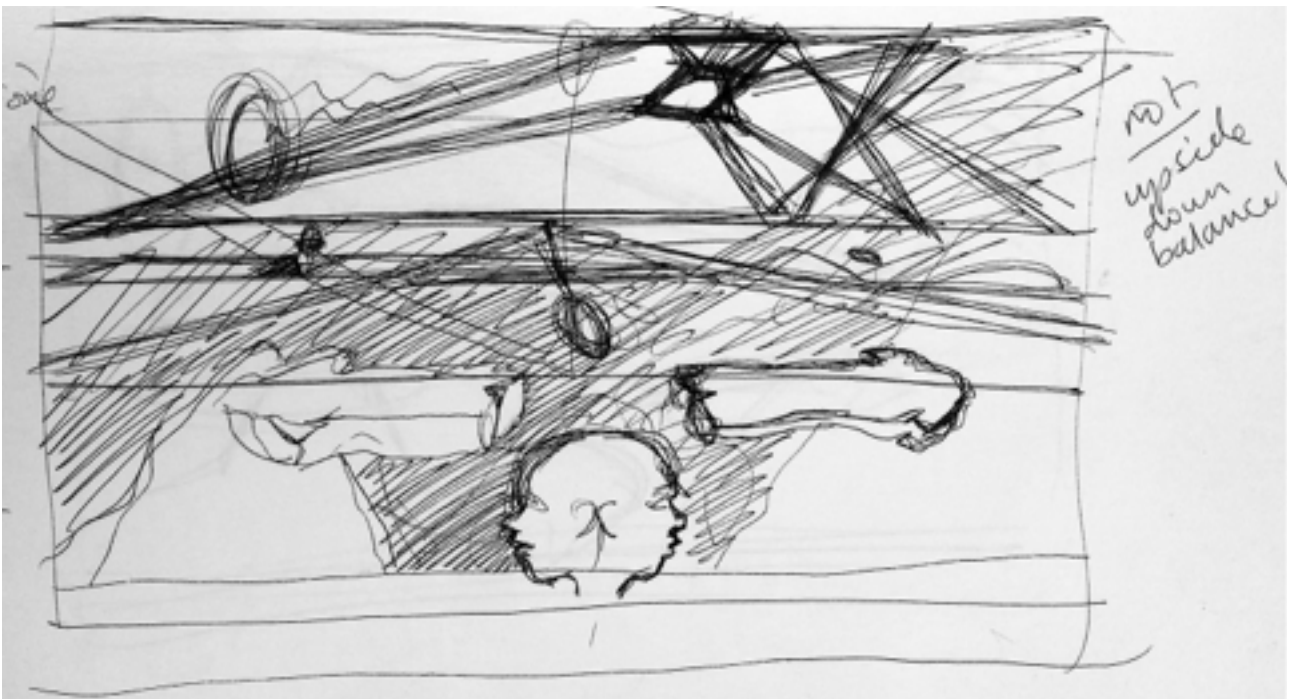
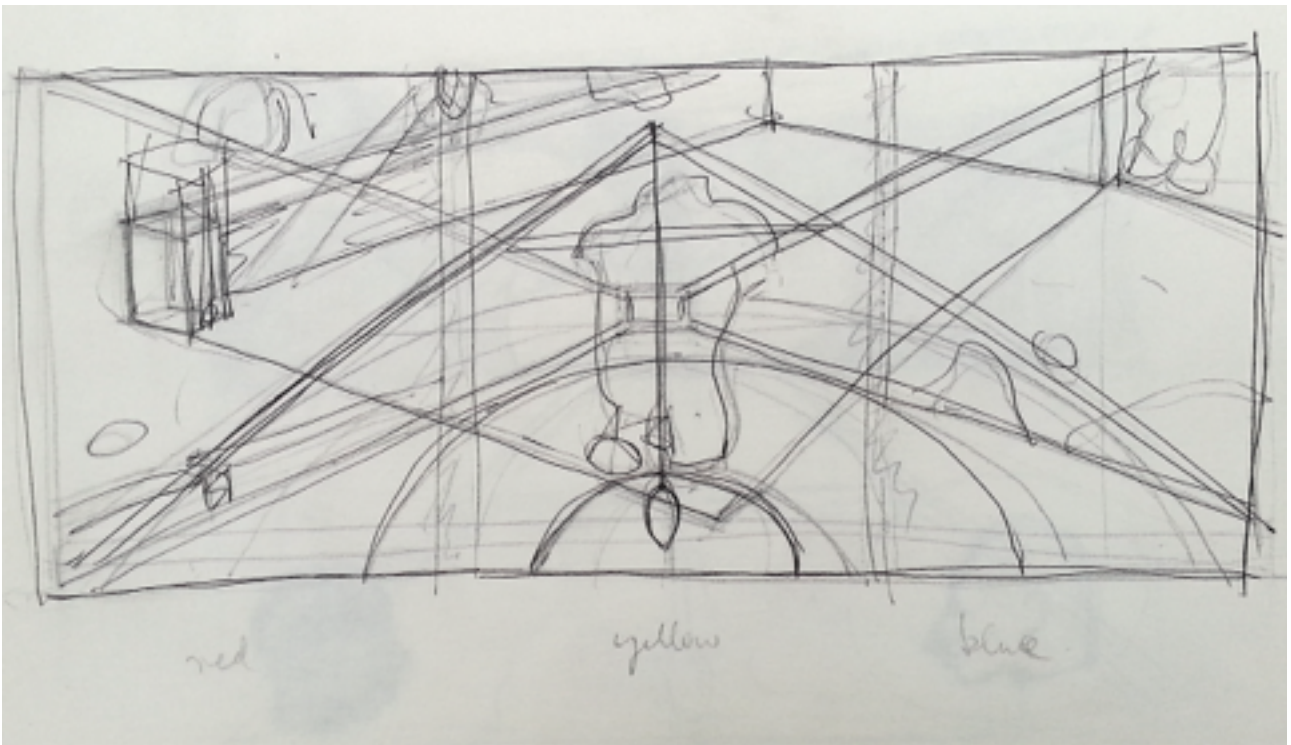


Figure 8: Sketches for *Listening to the Balance #3* (above) and *Listening to the Balance #4* (below), from pages of 1985 sketchbook, Anna Bonshek, Pen on paper

The top tier, or third, shows a re-presentation of the previous work as a thin rectangular, illumination flying off into space. The second tier echoes earlier architectonic forms to the left, and mountains to the right (as in *Listening to the Balance #1*). The ‘balancing’, levelling device reiterates and reasserts centrality and symmetry. In the lower tier (and between this and the one above) with the two heads becoming one, duality is unified. However, in this progression, the idealised torso has split like two halves of a seed, creating another kind of bifurcation,

diversification or separation. Albeit on an angle that evokes perspectival space and a vanishing point, the 'A' shape remains central. Revealed on the inner surface of both torso halves, are another two 'A' frame levels, signifying the generation of yet further iterations of balance. Beneath the overall layered composition, indecipherable text traverses the diagonal.



Figure 9: *Listening to the Balance #4*, 1985, Anna Bonshek, Charcoal, crayon, paint, dye on paper, 1.29 m x 2.82 m



Figure 10: *Installation, Listening to the Balance #4*, Anna Bonshek: Institute for the Creative Arts, Iowa, 1985

While *Listening to the Balance #4* brings the viewer through a complex transformation, *Listening to the Balance #5* concludes, leaving the viewer with a re-presentation of Beatrice Whitney Van Ness' *Summer Sunlight*. In this way, the final work in the series, *Listening to the Balance #5*, blows up

and redraws the central panel from *Listening to the Balance #3* in black and white. The picture appears with a partial reflection. *Listening to the Balance #5* also stages a recreation of *Listening to the Balance #1*, the first drawing in the series, this time appearing as small panel in the centre—now in colour. Although occupying the central focal point, it is dwarfed into insignificance by the larger scene. This last work recreates the drama of the figures in *Summer Sunlight*. The gaze of the seated female in the wide-brimmed hat, facing the viewer, seems fixed on the male who has his back to us. The robed woman on the left, would be all but incidental if not for her outstretched, extended arm offering fruit. This gesture brings her squarely into the dynamic. As it transpires, the painting is a depiction of a family event.



Figure 11: *Listening to the Balance #5*, 1985, Anna Bonshek, Charcoal, crayon, paint, dye on paper, 1.29 m x 2.82 m

Documenting a gathering at her island home in Bartlett Harbour, Maine, Beatrice Whitney Van Ness's *Summer Sunlight* presents her older daughter (seated female), her nephew, Winthrop Stearns (swimsuited male) and her neighbour, Barbara Allen (standing woman). The interaction between the three is painted in such a way as to frame that frozen moment, like a capsule in time. The colour and high key tones used in the original painting exude the pleasure of a bright summer's day. Saturated, rich hues (yellows, oranges, blues, greens) and a strong composition with emphatic diagonals and recurring, shapes—defines this intimate, enchanting beachside interlude. This painting is as much about light and the beauty of the season, as the artist's family and friend. However, in *Listening to the Balance #5*, colour has been dispensed with and the painter's nephew and daughter are reflected in a ghostly wash to the right; this isolates the two. In this, another mirrored trace is born.

Pivotal to the work, in the middle asserting the picture plane, is a colour rendition of *Listening to the Balance #1*—now miniaturised. The viewer is reminded of the first drawing in the series—with two female heads and other-worldly face—where all three seem to reflect a different aspect of one entity. In this way, by referring back, we are invited to start over again, to re-engage in an attempt to unlock deeper significance and levels of meaning on successive viewing. The series, *Listening to the Balance*, suggests an interplay of relational and cyclical possibilities within a balanced equilibrium. A sense of balance exists by virtue of a unifying, yet evolving, mysterious narrative. From one image to another, key elements recur, drawing from ideas, history, memory and art. The works suggest transformative identities and relationships, by reframing these references,

and positing new imaginary worlds. Visual ideas in this series were shaped by my experience as a female artist, my interest in identity, knowledge, and the co-existence of stability, balance and all possibilities.

Homage to Brahman: Acknowledging Vāstu

30+ years later, since completing *Listening to the Balance*, I have taken up an approach where the inner creative process is given complete emphasis. Having an image come up in awareness, maintaining it on an abstract, subtle level of the mind or awareness and creating from there, is the focus. This establishes a connectivity between the innermost impulse and art. For me, this brings deep inner creativity to the artwork, it brings liveliness. Clearly, engaging in art making involves creativity and ideally, any artist wants to tap into maximum creativity. How to access maximum creativity and artistic vision are discussed in the publications *The Unmanifest Canvas* (Fergusson & Bonshek, 2014) *Mirror of Consciousness* (Bonshek, 2001), *The Big Fish* (Bonshek 2007), *In Sight—Cognition or Darshana—A New Perspective on Artistic Vision* (Bonshek 2016, 41-93), and in relation to educating artists in *Consciousness-Based Education and Art* (Beaufort, 2011). Inspiration for the work *This and That, 2000*, the idea of creativity within a liminal realm or gap is also explored in *Transformations within the Gap* (Bonshek, 2000). Creativity and the creative process are a main preoccupation in my life and art and continue to be of enduring interest to me. Indeed, with respect to media choice in art making, that is also driven by the initial concept or inner vision. How the image comes up in awareness has a lot to do with the form it will take—whether video, digital media art, ephemeral art, sculpture, installation, printmaking, painting or drawing.

There is also the influence of place: how where one is when creating influences art-making—the process, ideas, materials, and the work. Thirty years after exhibiting *Listening to the Balance*, my vision for *Homage to Brahman* came up while living in Maharishi Vāstu⁸; the series is in response to the *experience* of Vāstu. Along with the cumulative effect on my creative life of meditation, my creative process is enhanced by being in Vāstu. For me, meditation brings inspiration, a sense of expansion and deep connections. In the interstitial period between the works discussed here, I have spent tens of thousands of hours practising Transcendental Meditation. A simple practice, it allows experience of a silent level of functioning of the mind, which can be described as a state of non-action. This practice is, arguably, the most creative performance one can engage in (Bonshek, 2007, pp. 115-160; 2018). Justifiably, my reflective framework for creating and discussing my work has continued to develop within this and milieu.

The following consideration of *Homage to Brahman* proceeds on the basis of my experience, inner vision, enjoyment, analysis and appreciation of how, having and seeking to manifest that inner vision impacts my art. Being a series-in-progress, only selected pieces of the planned, ten, 1.5 by 2.7 metre works are featured here. Five were completed by 2018 and a set of ten working drawings finished in 2016. As the title indicates, the series pays homage to the principle of Brahman which can be understood as totality, or the total knowledge of the full range of life (Bonshek, 2001, pp. 85-86). It can also be understood with respect to a state of awareness called *Brahmi Chetanā* (Brahman Consciousness) when individual awareness has reached its apex.

Brahman is the source, course and goal of life, the creative intelligence of nature, that intelligence that governs creation, and *Brahmā* is the Creator of the universe. Although seemingly

⁸ As stated at the beginning of this essay, my interest is in Maharishi Vāstu, which brings out the relationship between consciousness, the individual, and influence of the celestial bodies—connecting individual intelligence with cosmic intelligence. There are many offerings in the market place but my interest and study of Maharishi Vedic Science has led me to Maharishi Vāstu.

abstract and unattainable, in the Vedic tradition⁹ (as preserved in India) it is understood as a practical reality. It embodies total creativity. While Brahman can be understood with respect to the development of creativity within our own consciousness and our life, it is also relevant to architecture and planning. Designed and built according to Vāstu, the principle of Brahman or Brahmā—total creativity or wholeness—can be said to be lively within the building, complex, or city. In Maharishi Vāstu the locus or designated point of the structure, site, or geographic area, is called the *Brahma-sthān*—the seat of wholeness, the central point. From this point wholeness expands (Bonshek, 2001, p. 183).

In a Maharishi Vāstu city, ideally, there is a central square, also called the *Brahmasthan*, around which roads run north-south, east-west; buildings face east, aligning perfectly with the cardinal directions and celestial bodies. That value of wholeness or creativity takes into its range individual to cosmic, human to celestial, including the planetary bodies. Here, it is an expression of totality in the broadest sense. With respect to planetary impact, Vāstu acknowledges that the most powerful influence on our life is from the sun; it takes into account the changing values of the different qualities of the sun at various times of the day. It situates one in relation to the movement of the earth with respect to solar and lunar influences and the north and south poles and the equator, in such a way that the house operates akin to an observatory. One always knows where one is; there is a sense of orderliness and always being in touch with diurnal, lunar, and annual cycles, the seasons and location in space.

Relevant to contemporary architectural practice, Vāstu not only determines the building's orientation, but also placement of rooms and proportions, based on ancient mathematical formulas of *Vāstu Vidya* (Bonshek 2001, p. 332). Vāstu creates a balanced, and balancing, site and place of habitation where the site is an expression of totality. Becoming more widely appreciated outside of India, the value of Vāstu in general has been discussed recently with respect to *Vāstu Purusha Mandala* (VPM), a diagram used as a human ecologic framework for designing living environments. Applicable to contemporary architecture, compared with liveability guidelines developed for high-rise living¹⁰ VPM is found to be a “meaningful interpretation of *Vāstushastra*” (Venugopal, 2012, p. 870) (Vāstu Shastra is the science of Vāstu).

The second part of this paper discusses how living in Maharishi Vāstu has influenced my recent art. Inhabiting this perfectly oriented and proportioned structure and space, stimulated an impetus to respond to the phenomenon in an innocent way. Emerging images for *Homage to Brahman* included a sequence of simple geometries: point to circle; circle to lines/planes; planes to triangle; triangle to square, and so on. The drawings present complexifying geometries. Incorporated into imagery are diagrams and features evolved in earlier work—dealing with themes of knowledge and creativity. In this way, the drawings do reference elements developed in my preexisting work as will be seen. In contrast to the monochromatic, bold, chiaroscuro effect of *Listening to the Balance*, *Homage to Brahman* displays subtle but evocative colour, high key tones, fine lines, and delicate shading. Depth and volume are achieved via layering. The tools used for this include: coloured pencils, graphite, dyes and pastels. Despite this, the commonalities between the two series can be observed in compositional approach, repeated elements, and the development of the logic of the work. For example, both employ: symmetry, two-, three-, and four-fold divisions, perspectival lines, vanishing points, floating forms, and an underlying, sequential theme.

⁹ See Bonshek (2001, pp. 1-5) for an introduction to Maharishi Vedic Science—a complete science of consciousness and its expressions and holistic understanding of Vedic knowledge as brought to light by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.

¹⁰ These have been developed by the Centre for Subtropical Design, Queensland University of Technology (QUT), Queensland, Australia.

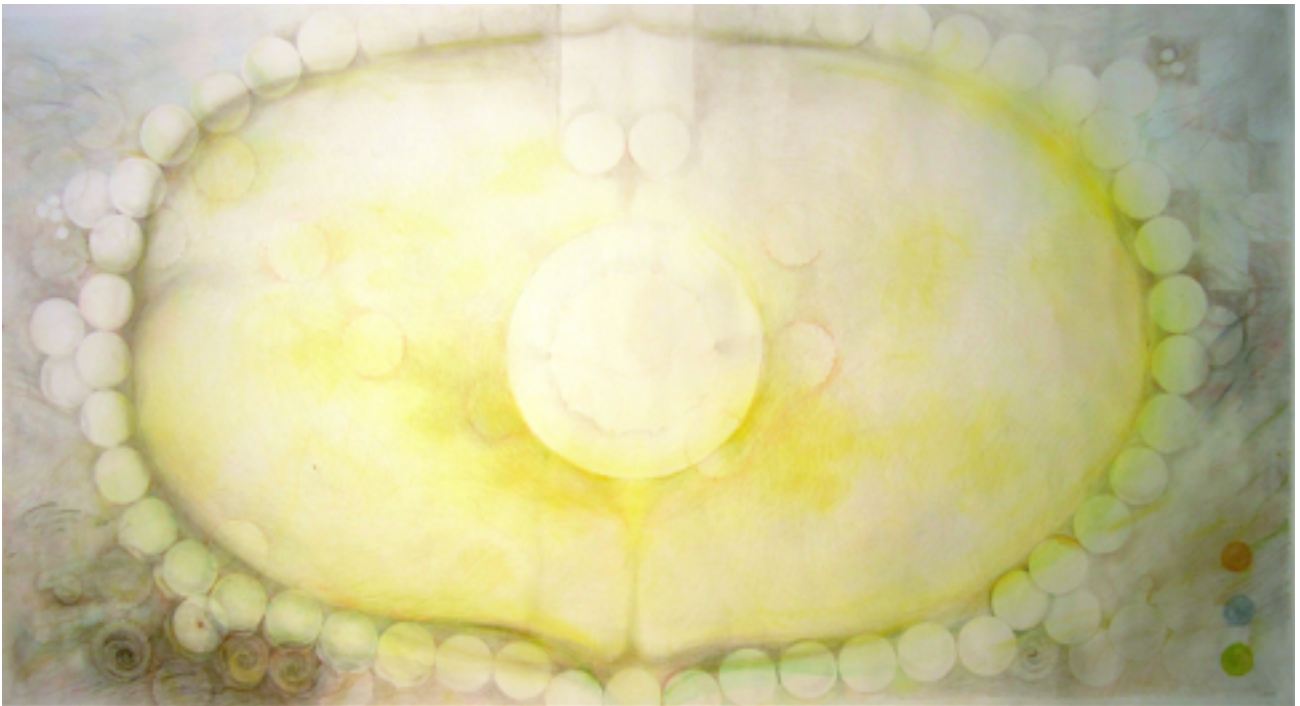


Figure 12: *Homage to Brahman #1*, 2016, Anna Bonshek, Mixed media on paper, 1.5 m x 2.7 m

The first in the series, *Homage to Brahman #1* (see Figure 12), presents a large cosmic seed form with a white, mandala, not-entirely-empty, void space in the middle. Above is a light shaft of white, unworked paper running off the top centre. At the base of this shaft are another two white, circular forms. The circle speaks of stasis, indestructibility, perpetual motion and infinity. It acts as a model for the universe or universes in seed form. Vibrantly organic, the piece has symmetry.



Figure 13: *Homage to Brahman #2*, 2016, Anna Bonshek, Mixed media on paper, 1.5 m x 2.7 m

Around the periphery are numerous circular and spherical shapes, like molecules, atoms or sub-atomic particles (if read as microscopic), or clustering objects, even galaxies in space (if read as macroscopic). The image signifies a beginning—nothingness and, simultaneously, full potentiality. Awash in stillness it is poised, presaging the eventuality of generative futures. In this, it embraces the principle or basic notion of bi-directionality. In *Listening to the Balance #4* a bi-directionality was indicated symbolically, there embodied in the Janus-like two-headed presence. Coming back to *Homage to Brahman #1* we see barely-visible shapes hovering in an indeterminate universe, alongside distinct, elaborate, embedded elements. Some, multifaceted as if crystal-edged, are contained within mandalas. Even with this organic piece, brought to life with dye washes, pastel smudging and fine graphic shading—overall symmetry is maintained, evoking a sense of balance. It's not entirely clear if a progression follows an upward or downward move, or both, but the central whitish-gold circle embraces a feeling of wholeness from where wholenesses might expand.

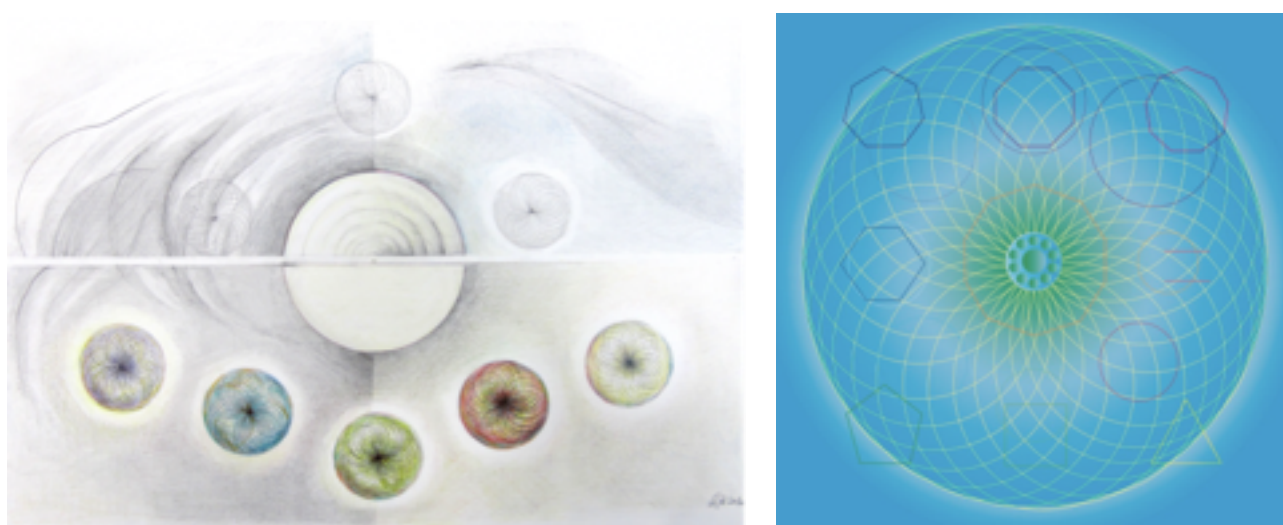


Figure 14: *Homage to Brahman #2*, 2016, (left) Anna Bonshek, Working drawing, Mixed media on paper, 33 cm x 56.5 cm
Ten Structures of Knowledge, #19, 2016, (right) Anna Bonshek, Limited-edition Piezo print, 56 cm x 61 cm

From this cosmic seed image, the next in the series *Homage to Brahman #2* (see figures 13 and 14) presents a central circle again, now with two parallel lines cut across the horizontal—creating a gap in between. In the upper half three, almost invisible circles float above a large semi-circle with shaded indents—defining diminishing semi-circles collapsing into the centre. In the lower half are five additional haloed, spinning circles/spheres, bringing substantive energy into being. These three (above) and five (below) present eight spheres across the two registers. Each one is defined by a web of mini circles within, that mark their own centres—the point around which those smaller circles connect and radiate. In each case, the central point represents a nexus where creation begins; it is that point from which the mandala/universe is born. The central point is analogous to the point of totality, Brahman. This image is captured in the limited-edition Piezo print *Ten Structures of Knowledge, #19, 2016* (featured in the exhibition *Breathing Universe*) (see Figure 14, above right) that likewise celebrates the point and circle. Here, it is surrounded by ten circles within another, and additional circles and geometries, in an illuminated field of pure colour. This basic form of *Ten Structures of Knowledge, #19* re-appears as the eight circles in *Homage to Brahman #2*. In addition

to this, as well as a horizontal division, *Homage to Brahman #2* has a vertical division. The resultant four quadrants serve as underpinnings for the idea of direction in space.

Third in the series, *Homage to Brahman #3* (see Figure 15), sports an impressive triangle or reflected pyramidal structure, like two sails, mounted astride the narrow, horizontal, gap in between. Below this gap sit six circles—three to the left and three to the right of a central semi-circle. Each contain three inner, interlocking circles in a three-fold play or intersection. The lower tier presents these in six variations. All are connected by a thread or strand that runs via the larger central form at the base of the triangle/pyramidal structure.

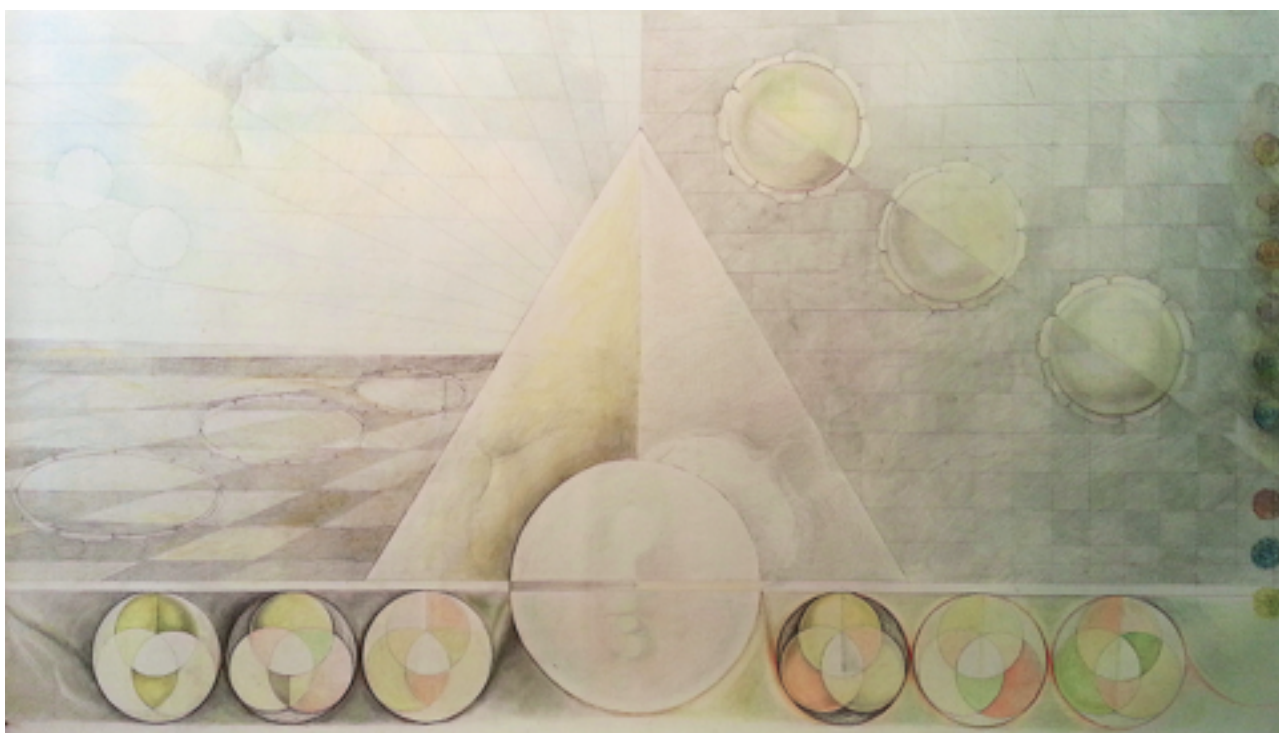


Figure 15: *Homage to Brahman #3*, 2016, Anna Bonshek, Mixed media on paper, 1.5 m x 2.7 m

Featured in a number of my earlier artworks, the three-circles-in-one diagram occurs severally in a group entitled *Reverie*. As observed previously, three apparent aspects of one entity appeared in *Listening to the Balance*. However, in this case, the concept can be thought of as an abstract principle loosely indicated here by the diagram in question. This diagram was used in *Reverie II* and *Reverie II—Trajectory* (both parts of *Project Reverie, 2001*¹¹—a collaboration with Australian composer Corrina Bonshek, exhibited in India, Russia and USA). It appears in video animation sequences, performance and choreographic organisational maps, and art installation elements.

The following pages give insight into the work and diagram in these instances (see Figures 16, 17, and 18). Described as hauntingly beautiful, *Reverie II* “deals with infinity and its relationship to time and space” (Halls, 2003, p. 15). Ashrafi S. Bhagat (2004) writes about the dominant imagery of *Reverie II* at the installation site in Chennai at *DakshinaChitra*, observing

¹¹*Project Reverie, 2001*, was an *Akshara Productions* work in collaboration with Australian composer Corrina Bonshek and a team of dance/performance artists: Catherine Wells and Vershawn Sanders-Ward, digital filmmaker Roland Wells, instrumentalists—Eleanor Lewis, Linda Jelacic, Christine Mitchell, and Leigh Giles. *Project Reverie* was featured at the Visual Arts Gallery—India Habitat Centre, Delhi and at DakshinaChitra Museum, Madras Craft Foundation, Chennai, India, in 2004 and *Temporary Identities: aniGma-2006, The 3rd Novosibirsk International Festival of Digital Imaging Animation & Video Art*, at Novosibirsk State Art Museum, Russia, in 2006.

the large circle incorporating three inter-related minor circles within. The video film...captures the metaphoric cosmic imagery of earth, water and light. There is no complexity involved in conveying the dominant idea of 'cognisant consciousness' since the language of natural forms as well the choreography of the dancers is non-confrontational, simple yet evocative. It is this dimension of subtlety that makes this video installation mystical and contemplative. The multimedia orchestration of the dancers creates numinous expressions suggesting awareness of recognition of our 'being' within the constellations of the mathematics of the universe. The colours are equally significant, symbolic and emblematic with blues, yellows, purples and browns. Within the video presentation a feature that attracts attention was the division of the frame into a series of squares...

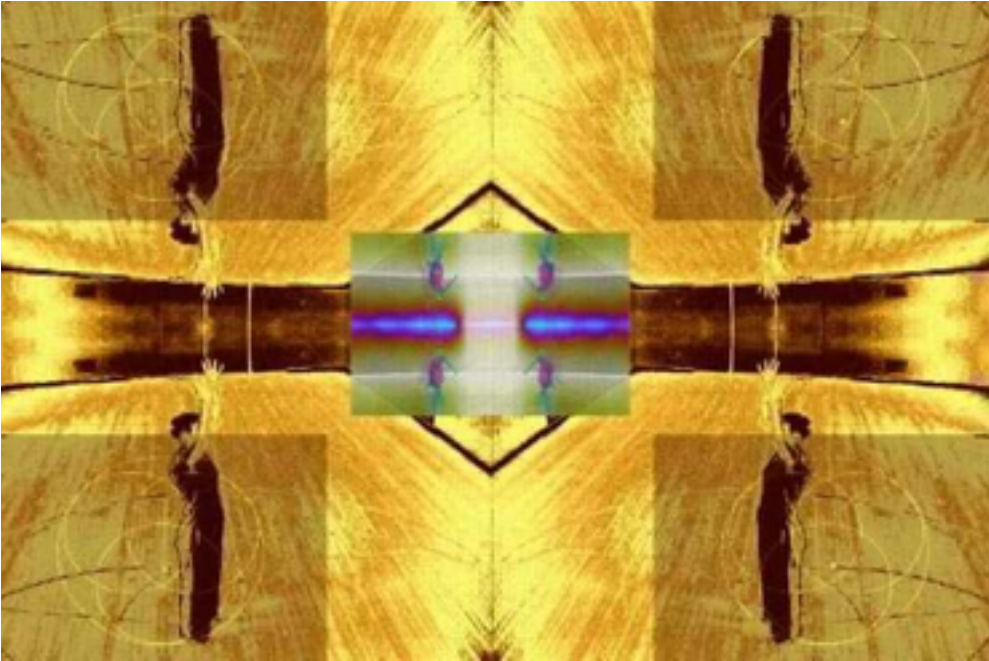


Figure 16: Reverie II—Trajectory, 2001, Anna Bonshek, Still frame digital print on paper, 21 cm x 30 cm (above and below)—from a series of 64 laminated digital prints on paper, 1.6 m x 2.25 m, From Project Reverie, 2001, Principle collaborators: Anna Bonshek and Corrina Bonshek, Akshara Productions

Here, Bhagat notes that *Reverie II*, in performance and visual presentation, recognises our being within the constellations of the mathematics of the universe, highlighting the relationship of individual consciousness to the orderly play of the cosmos. As mentioned, this relationship is also acknowledged in design, architecture and city planning according to Vāstu.

Reverie I,¹² *Reverie II*, and *Reverie II—Trajectory* are three parts of *Project Reverie*, including two video projection works and the installation of 64 prints with a six-metre diameter, floor diagram demarcated by marigold and rose petals (see Figure 17).



Figure 17: *Reverie II*, Installation photo, Visual Arts Gallery—India Habitat Centre, Delhi, India, 2004, video projection, 64 digital prints, floor diagram of petals (6 x 1 m), Anna Bonshek and Corrina Bonshek. Floor diagram consists of rose and marigold petals used for ceremonial purposes—in centre was placed a ceremonial lamp for the opening event.

For *Reverie II*¹³ performances took place in various locations; in each case the three-circles-in-one diagram was inscribed on the site ground or surface—beach, rock, studio floor—as a choreographic map. Video sequences of the performances were edited and digitally manipulated in the final work. Animation sequences using the same diagram were added over scene sections and served as notations or memory markers for the performance trajectory and location in space. These appear in the four corners of the nine-fold grid on the video screen and in the still frame prints (as seen in Figure 16).

In his consideration of reflective art practice, Meyer-Dinkgräfe (2005, p. 147) singles out this work emphasising, “as exemplified by *Reverie II*, theory and practice are no longer separate entities: they become two aspects of the same phenomenon. Anna Bonshek does not only write about consciousness and the arts (theory) but expresses what she writes about in her art (practice). Knowledge is no longer theoretical and hypothetical, and practice is no longer somehow devoid of any conceptual background or basis”. In this endeavour, experience, inner vision, excogitation, analysis, performance/action, observation, response, documentation and written expression are part of the creative process that feeds into reflective practice. The drawing of diagrams, visual maps, and symbols can be as much about notations for creative play within awareness, as models for that reflective practice on various levels.

¹² For a discussion of *Reverie I* and the sonic design and composition of the piece, with a reading incorporating a Deleuzian notion of sensation, see C. Bonshek (2007).

¹³ For a discussion of *Reverie II*, and the choreography, planning and diagrams used, with illustrations, see A. Bonshek (2007, pp. 343-360).



Figure 18: *Reverie III*, 2011, Anna Bonshek, Swell Sculpture Festival, Australia, Sand, wood, panels, rocks, 6 m x 6 m x 1 m

Again, the three-circles-in-one diagram features in other sculpture installations, namely: *Reverie III*, 2011 (see Figure 18) and *Reverie IV*, 2011, respectively installed at *Swell Sculpture Festival*, Currumbin Beach, Queensland and *Passion*, Byron Bay Writers Festival, NSW, Australia. The former includes this diagram built of sand, as well as text on metal image panels (poetry, data, and drawings), twelve wooden posts, and twelve basalt rocks surrounding the outer sand circle. It is worth mentioning that basalt, a local rock, formed from solidified lava originally flowing from an erupting shield volcano over 23 million years ago. The panels in *Reverie III* also refer to parts of the body, an ancient labyrinth, and, twelve zodiac constellations or *Rashis* as they are called in Vedic terminology.

Oriented east—‘facing’ the Pacific Ocean (seen in figure 18 above)—the installation honoured a principle of Vāstu. Printed on the panels, the poem *I Stands Out* commenced at the most easterly point on the outer circle and continued to proceed clockwise. The central point of the installation was identified by an inverted-tree post with a wooden disc and wedge (acting like a *gnomon* or sundial) on top. The post, with painted vertebrae, was gilded in gold-leaf and either face of the wedge-sundial had a brain painted on it. *Reverie III*, due to its materials, location, size and text, invited interaction. Viewers stopped to read the text and children walked on the sand circles and climbed on the basalt rocks.

While this possibility for interaction allowed for a physical connection with the piece, the three-circles-in-one diagram nevertheless referenced and related back to the idea of three aspects of creativity—in this instance, also with respect to the individual, the body, place and celestial realm. The notion of the three, separate but unified, can extend from innermost to outermost extremities of life. Although different in context to earlier work, in principle this was not without association to the metaphor found in *Listening to the Balance* where the ‘three’ related to identity, as i) self, ii) self as other, and iii) self as connector, looking both ways, positing that these are inherent and might be glimpsed via self-reflection and, ultimately, through meditation.

As with *Listening to the Balance*, in design and content *Homage to Brahman* entertains such themes as: holding together opposites, order and balance, the progressive transformation of an initial state, world or reality, into a more complex state, world or reality—inherent within is that which has gone before. In *Homage to Brahman*, these worlds are devoid of figures but are not a cry for Abstraction. They do not dwell on emptiness in the flatness of a picture plane but speak of a profusely pregnant, potentially dynamic calmness, embodying order and liveliness. While some similar visual devices are used in *Listening to the Balance*, in *Homage to Brahman* they define a path to extended possibilities. For example, in *Homage to Brahman #3*, looking at the top tier, the viewer sees grids and perspectival lines defining planes, different directions, and vanishing points. However, there are also lotus-petal curves and soft, pale hues giving a feeling of delicate, atmospheric space, not seen in the 1985 works. The image heralds complex iterations, transformations and mathematical forms.

Taking the viewer to a four-fold structure, *Homage to Brahman #4* (see figure 19) introduces the square and cube. Within the central square is the circle/mandala born in *Homage to Brahman #1*. The square is made up of nine divisions (3 x 3 inner squares), triangles, (also in *Damaru* shapes), and eight lotus-petal divisions or wings around the inner circle. The *Damaru* is associated with *Śiva* (infinite silence) and sounds that create and maintain the universe. It can be seen simply as two triangles meeting at their points and also as a drum. Shapes such as this occur in traditional Warli painting in India.¹⁴

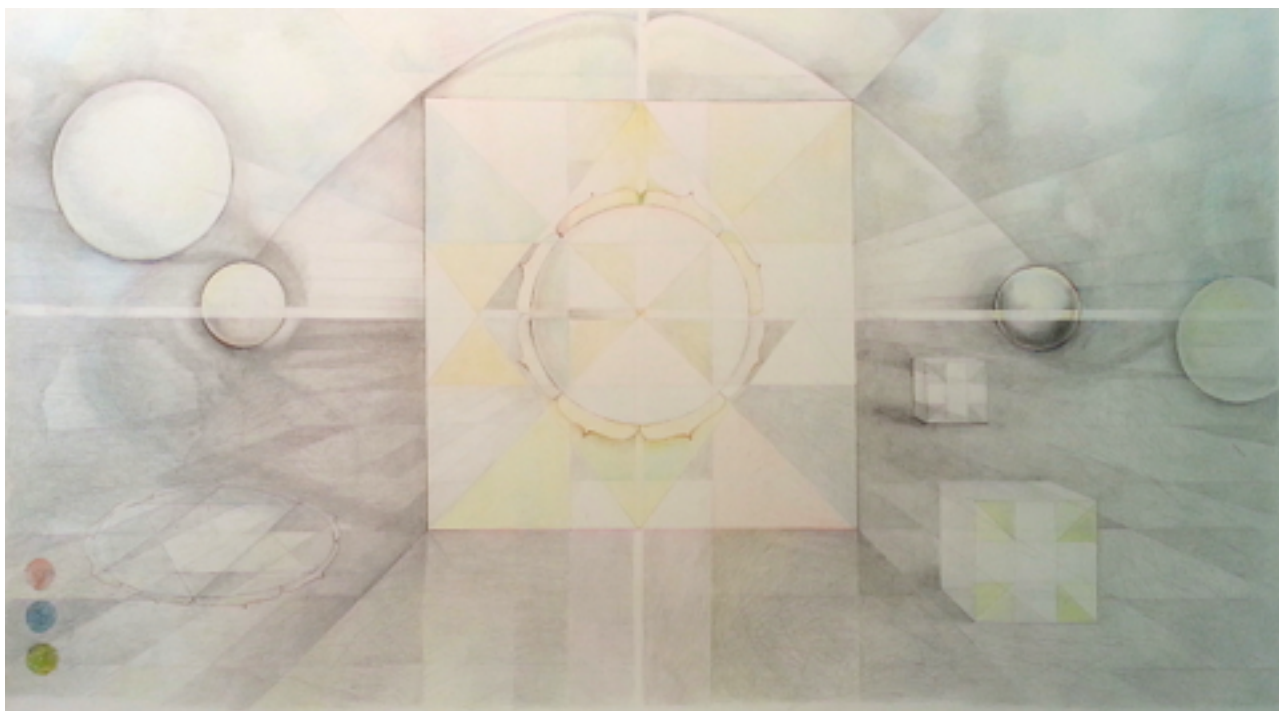


Figure 19: *Homage to Brahman #4*, 2017, Anna Bonshek, Mixed media on paper, 1.5 x 2.7 m

Some Warli paintings are communally created by women and used during wedding rituals (Rossi, 1998, pp. 45-51). In one example of a 1986 work by Devu Rama Dhodhade, the body of the goddess is depicted accordingly as two slightly intersecting triangles (Rossi, 1998, pp. 48-49). The intersecting triangles present a compelling generative symbol. As for the grid/square (as the nine-

¹⁴ Warli people live in Maharashtra in parts of the Thane district north of Mumbai.

fold grid), this echoes *Reverie II*'s digital print compositional format (seen previously) and can also be read as a model for the universe (as in the VPM). The grid appears on two cube forms to the right of the central square in *Homage to Brahman #4* (see figure 19). Overall, the square symbolises the emergence of cardinal directions and direction in space—locality, site, and, correspondingly, built form, and architecture and art. With the grid we can imagine placement, orientation, and proportion—the building blocks of architecture and core principles of Vāstu.

Ideal proportions and measurements have been used in art, applied not only in architecture but in the depiction of the human form. Ancient Egyptians sought to create a structure whose proportions embodied the human physiology, using measurements expressed in cubits. The notion of mathematical proportions, measurements, and orientation as connecting the individual with the cosmic is not new. Having said this, *Homage to Brahman*—as an artistic response to the experience of living in Vāstu—is just one individual artist's celebration of the creative principle of Brahman operating in architecture, expressed in art. For me, in this case, this happened to involve intuited geometries, sequence, imaginary space and a sense of cosmic worlds.

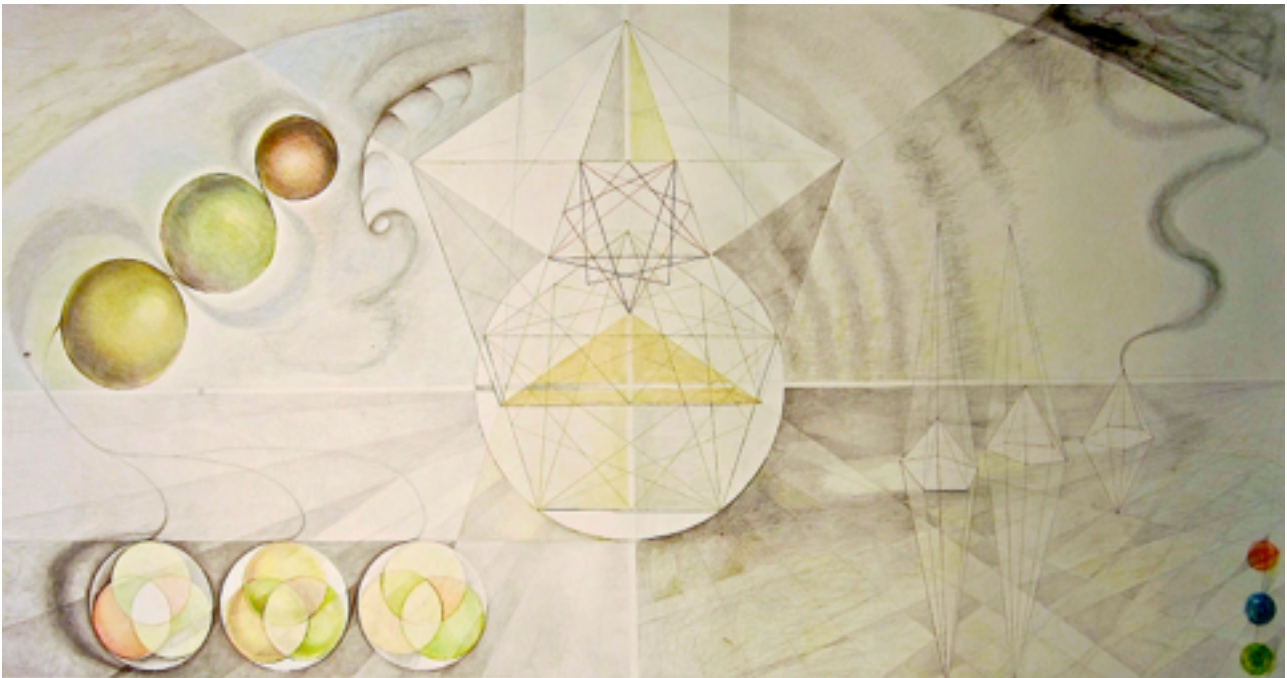


Figure 20: *Homage to Brahman #5*, 2017, Anna Bonshek, Mixed media on paper, 1.5 m x 2.7 m

In the final example in the sequence, *Homage to Brahman #5* (see figure 20) presents us with pentagons within, and born from, a central circle. Connecting lines across these pentagons create a delicate play, within and upward, to a central shaft of light at the top. The work harks back to the previous drawings while also indicating the emergence of the next stage. Again, circle diagrams, as in *Homage to Brahman #3*, feature lower left, now connected to three suspended spheres attached by threads of shaded pencil strands.

On the right sit three pentagonal shapes—linear, transparent, with elongations extended above and below. Again, there are multiple points of infinity and the entire drawing is full of detail and nuance. Through various progressive stages, the drawings attempt to capture the notion of the fullness of Brahman. This fullness expands. Becoming ever more elaborate and diversified, it nevertheless also contains fullness at every stage and at every point. Having come this far in the

series of *Homage to Brahman*, the journey has already brought us from the beginning of emergence of form and space, to an elaborate interplay of interactions and elements that create both worlds within a world, and a world within worlds.

While these works were born out of the experience of living and working in Maharishi Vāstu, the series is not a documentation of Vāstu. It is an acknowledgement of creative experience emanating from being in such a unique structure and space. The accretion of motifs, ideas, experience and memory, stored in the mind, form part of the material that any artist may draw from. However, in these works the intention was to create an image as close as possible to that which came to mind—unfiltered, in silent moments—from a quiet level of awareness.

This paper has discussed two series of drawings framing 30+ years. *Listening to the Balance* and *Homage to Brahman* speak for the two extremities either side of this gap. As we have seen *Listening to the Balance* brought figuration, imaginary landscapes, historical and art references together to create a narrative in celebration of balance, equilibrium, the feminine and women in art. In *Homage to Brahman*, the creative process itself became a focus. Following a unique procedure, this process captures that which comes up within awareness—that vision on the innermost level of the mind. This process, I feel, assists in more closely embodying the quality of experience in the image or sequence of images. In this case, that vision emerged while living and working in a home and studio designed according to Maharishi Vāstu.

One could say that writing about such experience of art and creativity, is no substitute for the doing or interaction with art. It is like writing about the experience enjoyed in the vision of reflections on the shimmering surface of a vast lake—of light that has travelled 149.6 million kilometres in 499 seconds (8.3 minutes) from the sun to the earth, to our eye. Or the experience of looking up into the night sky at the inky expanse of the Great Celestial Emu¹⁵ and the Milky Way, and beyond this, envisioning the ‘immense heaven’ galaxy supercluster that is home to our Milky Way and over 100,000 other galaxies.

With its imaginary worlds, identities and celebration of women in art, *Listening to the Balance* presents the idea of listening, awakening or becoming alert to an inner order or equilibrium that may unfold hidden narratives. *Homage to Brahman* entertains an expanded theme: it starts with a cosmic seed, progresses to the emergence of an interstitial space, and goes on to give birth to universal relationships revealed as geometries—point, circle, triangle, square, pentagon and so on. Artistically, *Homage to Brahman* innocently attempts a humble acknowledgement of the deep mathematical dynamics and fundamental elements that create our universe and universes—as wholeness moves and expands into multiple wholenesses and multiple infinities.

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¹⁵ The Great Celestial Emu is the dark clouds of our Milky Way seen as an emu in the sky in Indigenous Australian Aboriginal astronomy.

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