

Myth, Math & Magic The Totems of Benjamin Lowder

MARCH 21  JUNE 19, 2026

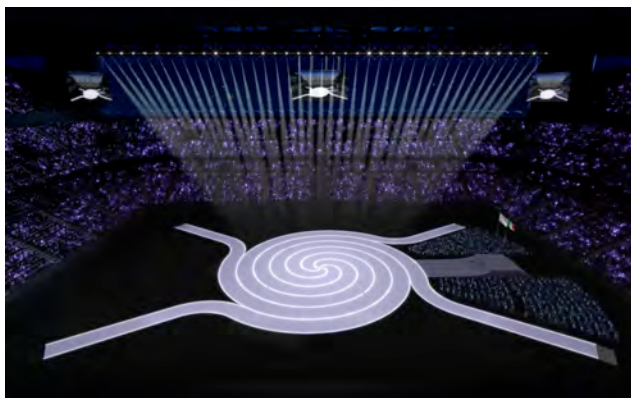
This paper posits two models of Sacred Geometry; one, based on mathematical objects (circle, square, triangle, etc.), the other, the Urform based on organic life forms.

Etymologies reveal that “geo-“ is Earth, and “-metry” is measure.

Earth can also signify the mortal body of man or woman — as distinguished from soul, spirit. Earth supports Life and Man/Woman; and Man/Woman take the measure of all things. Being the earthly measure of all things has responsibilities, as well as recompense.



Benjamin Lowder's art, like Balich's Winter Olympics center stage, makes strong and communicative use of mathematical sacred geometrics. *Babel*, 2016, vintage metal signage, reclaimed wood, 4x8ft



Sacred Geometry took center stage at the Winter Olympics Milano Cortina 2026. The worldwide archetypes of the Circle, the Four Cardinal Points, and the Spiral symbolically represent the Games. Design by Balich Wonder Studio, Milano, Italy

Urform is a primordial form; an archetype, that in the visual arts refers to an organic form, typically from nature, that an artist reworks into his or hers idiosyncratic stylizations signifying visual representations

of unseen, but felt, dimensions. As artists explored these archetypes in 20th-century modern art and abstraction, organic Urforms represented the biomorphic equivalents of sacred geometries' circles, squares, and triangles.



“Because Anselm Kiefer’s mission is so large, he exhibits a deep disdain for current events, preferring the realms of the mythic, eternal, and sacred time.” Mark Rosenthal, *Anselm Kiefer*, 1987. Like Motherwell, Kiefer makes strong use of the organic Urform version of sacred geometry.

The Waves of Sea and Love, 2017, oil, acrylic, lead, 6x12ft



Motherwell's oeuvre “is broad, ranging from Zen-like calligraphs to elaborately worked fugal compositions; from complex networks of angular and biomorphic shapes to severe rectilinear geometry.” Jack Flam, *Robert Motherwell*, 1983. Every Motherwell painting need not attain the spiritual, but all strive to imply transcendence. *Elegy to the Spanish Republic (with Blood)*, 1989, acrylic, oil stick, 17x25ft



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ABOVE Benjamin Lowder, *Borderlines*, 2024, vintage metal signage and reclaimed wood

Borderlines begins with the hallowed archetype of the circle which embraces the Lowder integrated systems of natural wood, triangles, chevrons, the three primary colors of red, yellow, and blue, all in a unified composition emphasizing upward movement.

BENJAMIN LOWDER INTRO & THE 90TH DAY CONFERENCE

Benjamin Lowder is the Director of the Center for Spirituality and Sustainability—a Buckminster Fuller designed geodesic dome—located on the SIUE campus. Lowder also serves on the trustee board of the Fuller Dome Home at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

Lowder began helping restore the SIUC Dome Home in 2010 drafting communication materials to raise preservation funds. The Dome Home was successfully restored and opened for tours.

The Center for Spirituality and Sustainability is a multi-faith nonprofit offering spirituality and sustainability programming on the campus of Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

The International “90th Day Conference and Symposium” organized by Ben Lowder.

Rusty Freeman attended the 90th Day Conference at SIUE on March 31, 2025 for the day long Symposium on Fuller. Attendees came as faraway as Columbia, South America and Toronto.

Symposium presenters: Bonnie DeVarco, author, curator, designer, with an academic background in Cultural Anthropology, Dance Ethnology, and Archives Management, and writes on Design Science, visualization technologies, and virtual worlds.

Peter Meisen, founded the nonprofit Global Energy Network Institute in 1986 to study the idea of the economic, environmental, and social benefits for a global electric energy grid.

Curt McNamara, educator, practicing designer, and faculty member of the Minneapolis College of Art and Design. McNamara’s talk had many applications for Art History: Design Science. Adjacent and Overlapping Systems. Internal and External Contexts. Trim-tab. Super-System/ System/Sub-System.

Elizabeth Donahue, President of the Fuller Dome Home Museum and Assistant Director of the University Honors Program at Southern Illinois University Carbondale and serves on the University’s Sustainability Council.

Joseph Clinton, in 1970, worked in the School of Technology at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, when Fuller taught there. Founded Clinton International Design Consultants, an interdisciplinary design and consulting firm based on “the structures field of Design Science.”

Miss Vivian, Miss Walker, and musician friend, all performers from East Saint Louis were the most vital contingent presenting. Vivian literally danced the allegory while Ben demonstrated the jitterbugging hexoctahedron.

John C. Guenther, Architect, FAIA, LEED AP, holds a fellowship in the American Institute of Architects, and taught in the College of Architecture, Washington University, St. Louis.

The five-day conference and symposium situated on the 90th meridian presented Fuller’s still viable teachings and concluded on the 90th day. ❖

Sacred Forms of the Organic & Geometric

Rusty Freeman, Director of Visual Arts

We begin simply with a definition: Sacred Geometry Art functions as material evidence representing mystical/metaphysical awareness. Because Math as a form and language of Science corroborates material geometry, artists and others can assert tangible, visible evidence for mystical/latent/spiritual dimensions.

Sacred Geometry becomes more and more compelling as models can be found throughout Nature.

By developing these models, visual artists, poets, musicians put sacred geometry to good use representing the human condition and its relationships between nature and spirit.

The study of geometry took academic root in the Medieval Curriculum of the Quadrivium; the scholarly study of Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, and Astronomy.

Sacred Geometry differs from textbook geometry by emphasizing the *symbolic* values of the circle, square, or triangle. These symbolic relationships found in numbers (e.g., arithmology, numerology, gematria) and geometry reach back to ancient cultures and their creation myths.

An excellent example is the Number One itself. Consider these various symbolic values and



Tibetan School, *Mandala of the Amitayus Buddha*, 19th century, paint on wood, 12x12in, Rubin Museum of Himalayan Art, NYC
The Celestial Circle encloses the Square and four Cardinal Points of Earth. A mandala (Sanskrit for circle), an aid for meditation, with the main object of veneration—in this case *Amitayus*—in the center, and symbol of higher realities.

meanings that have long been associated with the number one, 1: God, Unity, The Great Spirit, Permanence, and more. The number one can represent the Circle, the Center, or the purest music Tone. The Circle is one of the great primordial archetypes and universal cultural symbols of humankind.

Further definitions: “Numbers in Space” is termed Geometry; “Numbers in Time” is called Music. Music though mathematical, is also, an organic, biomorphic, Ur-sound model in the sense of being human-voiced, human-structured, and essential.

The following mathematical genres feature visual or aural models that appear throughout nature and science: Pythagoras’ theories, Euclidean and non-Euclidean geometries, the Golden Ratio, the Golden Spiral, the Fibonacci Sequence, Fractals, Melody-Rhythm-Harmony, Music scales, Harmonic patterns, and Architecture worldwide. These genres of Sacred Geometry is where it gets interesting for artists of any discipline.

THE ARTISTS OF MODERN ART & SACRED GEOMETRY

Ancient cultures and their leaders, priests, shamans began the use of sacred geometries to signify their communities' shared values and goals. For example, Lascaux cave paintings feature animals and geometric signs. The art forms and practices of antiquity were adopted, modified, and continued by subsequent generations.

Sacred Geometry is a visual art genre; it serves as an ideological bridge between the natural and spiritual dimensions, *putting visual emphasis on mathematical order that reflects spiritual harmony.*

The four founding artists of Western Modern Art Abstraction—Kandinsky, Malevich, Mondrian, and Kupka—understood the cultural importance of sacred geometry. Their artistic innovations were not founded on sacred geometry, yet, its presence in their art is evident. All four pursued spiritual topics.



The important point about Kandinsky, Malevich, Mondrian, and Kupka, they all regarded abstract art, like this Kupka painting, to represent spiritual dimensions. František Kupka, *Discs of Newton (Study for "Fugue in Two Colors")*, 1912, Philadelphia Museum of Art. Kupka referenced Sir Issac Newton to show science played a role in legitimating sacred geometry symbolism. Fugue suggests a music analogy to visual color.



František Kupka, *The Way of Silence*, 1900, pastel, Narodni Galerie, Prague. His deep study of Nature was influenced by Symbolism and Theosophy; he was widely read, and mastered a wide variety of art media. When WWI began, Kupka volunteered for military service and fought on the Somme, and rose to the rank of captain.

Western Modern Art is a multi-faceted movement with artists of differing and opposing sides under its banner. Aspects of Modern Art were denigrated as having no regard for spiritual values. However, within Western Modern Art, there were a select number of artists and writers who pursued spiritual themes.

The 1885-1910 Symbolist Movement was literary and artistic, characterized by its rejection of poetic convention, favoring symbolic reference, visualized emotions. Elusive, mystical intuitions were put to paper and canvas. Symbolists established the aesthetic and philosophical foundations for much of twentieth-century modern art. Paul Gauguin and Stéphane Mallarmé are key to the Symbolist movement.

Symbolist Art established the key features of spiritual abstract painting: sacred geometry, duality of opposites, cosmological signs, visual resonance, and bodily synesthesia.

The Nabis Group, a 1890s Paris sub-set of Symbolist painters, pursued a mystical art in which sacred geometry played a role. The Nabis (prophet) were influenced by Gauguin. Paul Sérusier and Paul Ranson were key Nabis artists.

The Swedish modern art artist Hilma af Klint devoted herself to spiritualism, meditation, and painting in the 1890s. Klint was exceptional as an artist. She practiced art-making outside the mainstream of Symbolist circles, studying mystical and occult ideas, creating a unique and original body of work all her own. Born in 1862, Klint was interested in mathematics, botany, and painting. At 17, she became seriously involved in spiritualism. She formed a spiritualist group with four other women known as the Friday Group. They met regularly and had seances with Klint as their medium. Klint painted off and on, taking years off to perhaps fulfill the requests/demands of others. Klint considered duality of oppositions to be the central theme of her oeuvre. She believed the struggle between man and woman is an expression of creation; and that this struggle was the fundamental idea behind all creativity. Klint died in 1944. Klint paintings were first seen in the US, in Los Angeles in 1986.



Hilma af Klint, No. 1, 1906, oil, 19x14 in., Stiftelsen Hilma af Klints Verk

The American Abstract Expressionism (1940s-1950s) of Jackson Pollock, Robert Motherwell, Barnett Newman, and others was powered by an aspect, or another dimension of Sacred Geometry, the Urform, the Urtext, this Ur-dimension considered as an organic, biomorphic version of sacred forms.

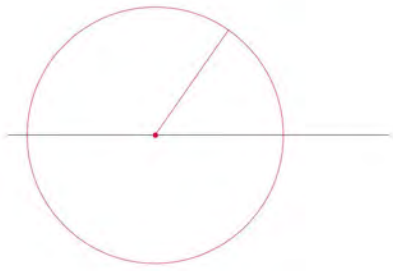
The Abstract Expressionists were, at first, misunderstood. Barnett Newman explained that, “the present feeling [of art critics] seems to be that the artist is [only] concerned with form, color and spatial arrangement. This reduces art to a kind of ornament.”

Newman emphasized artists are “concerned not with his own feelings, but with the penetration into *the world mystery*; to dig into metaphysical secrets. To that extent art is concerned with *the sublime*. It is a religious art which through symbols will catch the basic truth of life.

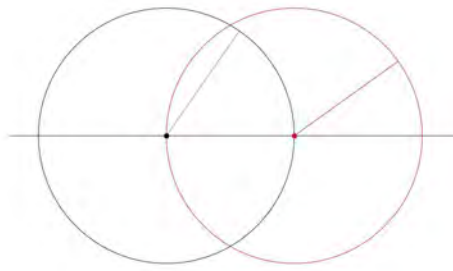
The artist tries to wrest truth from the void.”



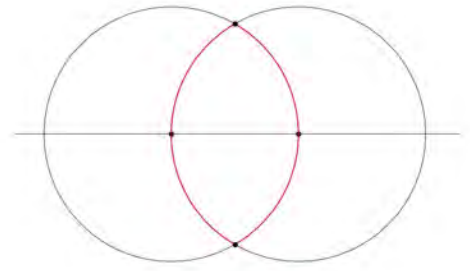
Barnett Newman, *Cathedra*, 1951, oil, magna, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. Cathedra- Greek for chair, the symbol of a bishop or the Pope. Newman’s literary, mystical abstract paintings are based on religious readings with a focus on the sublime.



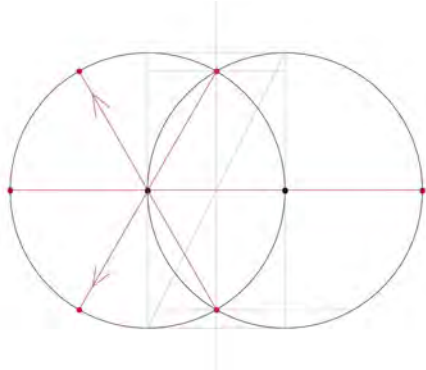
Geometry begins with the point, line, and circle.



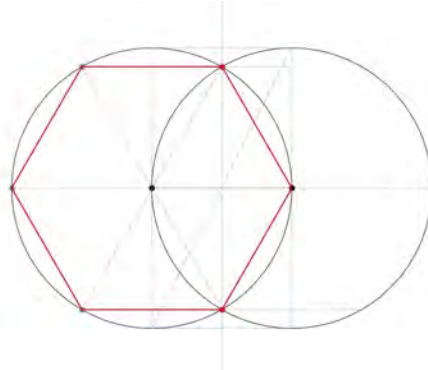
Creativity begins with a second set of point-line-circle overlapping the first.



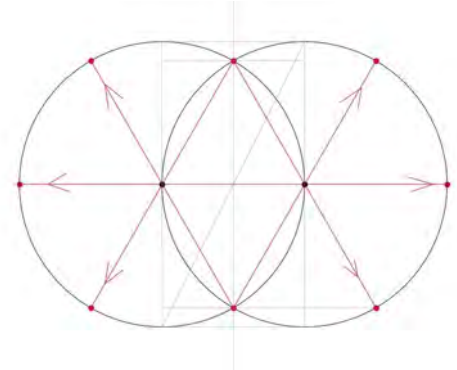
A new form emerged, the *vesica piscis*. Also known in art history as the *mandorla* (Italian for almond). Medieval architects created the pointed arch in Gothic cathedrals using this form.



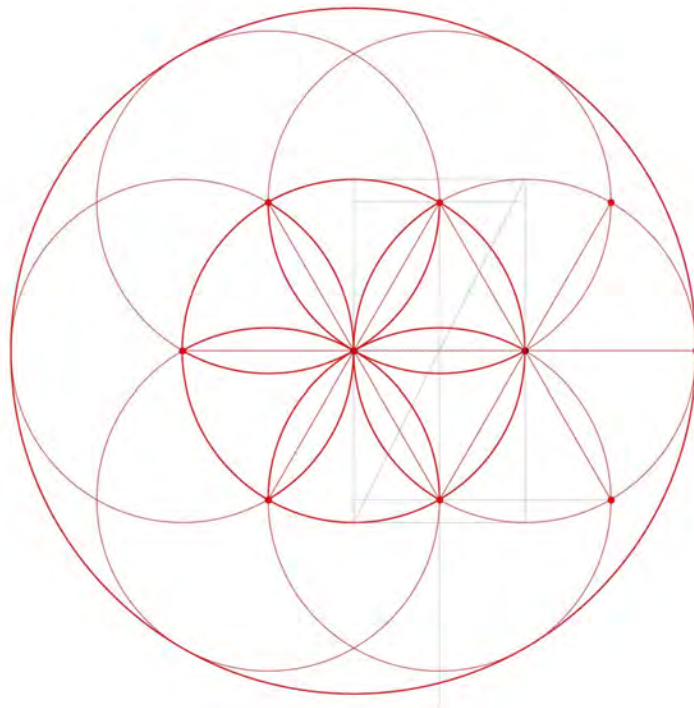
From the vesica piscis, six equidistant points are placed on the circle's circumference...



... the hexagon is formed.



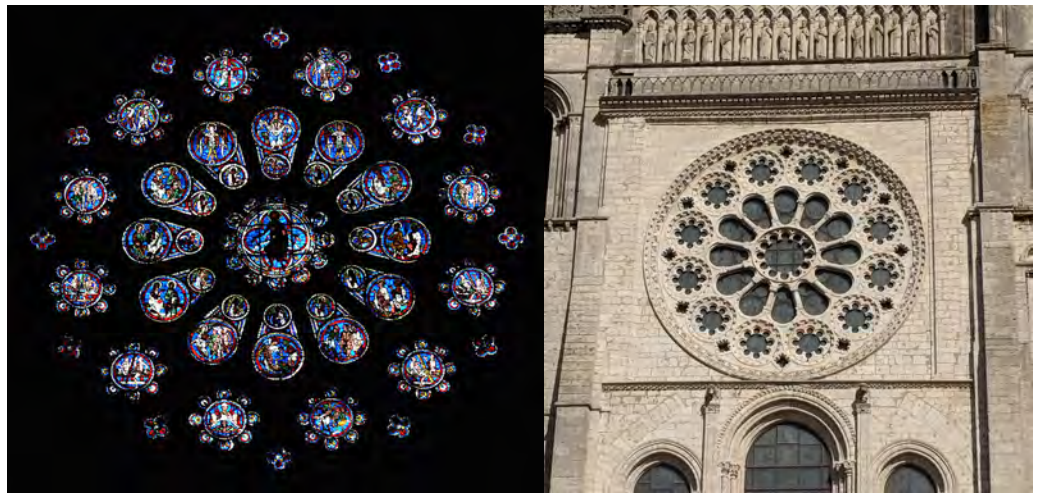
Using the six-sided hexagon, any number of patterns may unfold.



This patterning is known as "the seed of life."

These seven drawings courtesy of Chris Hall, *The Carpentry Way*. <https://thecarpentryway.blog/category/geometry-and-mathematics/vesica-piscis/page/2/> (New captions by Freeman).

Cathedral of Chartres, France, Rose Window, West façade, interior, exterior, begun 1140. Romanesque period, Northern Europe



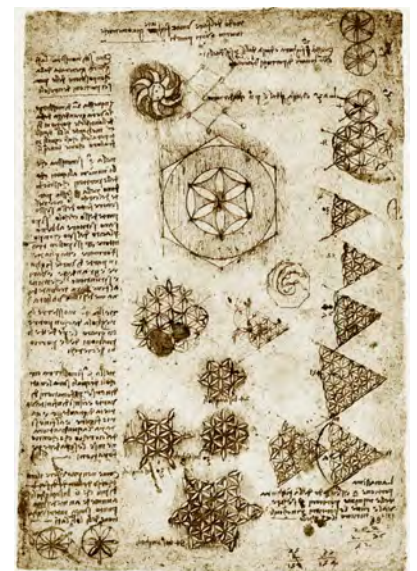
The *Missale Gothicum* is thought to be a 7th-century manuscript of 264 “leaves” (here, two-page spread, Vatican) representing the Gallican liturgical rite. It is studied within universities specializing in medieval studies, liturgy, and history. This manuscript first surfaced in Paris in 1575.



Detail of “seed of life” manuscript illumination, above.



Detail of “vesica piscis” (Latin for fish bladder) manuscript illumination, above.



Leonardo da Vinci, sketching “seed of life” ideas, *Codex Atlanticus*, 1478, pen&ink

The inspirational sources for the 1940s Abstract Expressionists came from the paintings of Northwest Coast Native Americans; Zen being introduced to America by D.T. Suzuki, and Carl Jung's psychology of the mythological archetype and the collective unconscious.

THE SACRED TOTEMS OF BENJAMIN LOWDER

Benjamin Lowder, an adept in semiotics, in the alphabetic and the numeric systems of representation, and the teachings of Buckminster Fuller, relies on all four systems to enrich his art-making.



In the Cedarhurst Motherwell, the fragment signature is unidentified. In art, a fragment signifies a ruin. A ruin in turn becomes an allegory, a history from the past. The signature fragment represents a moment from real life, an earthly foil to Motherwell's blue, white, and black Ur-forms which stand for inexpressible voids visualizing sublime dimensions.

Untitled, [Blue Abstract] 1991, combination print: lithograph, screenprint, linoleum. Cedarhurst Collection, Gift of John H. Walter & Joy Thornton-Walter, Champaign, IL



Ouroboros defines this archetype, the snake eating its tail. Signifying eternal recurrence, or eternity, it is found in ten or more distinct world cultures and belief systems. Originating around 1600 BCE in Egypt, it is recognized globally, from the Mediterranean to the Far East, Africa, and the Americas. Benjamin Lowder, *Ouroboros*, 2023, vintage metal signage

As director of the SIUE Center for Spirituality and Sustainability, Lowder utilizes the power of the Humanities to address the pressing issues of the day. With his art Lowder seeks to blaze a positive trail forward in the 21st century.

Los Angeles art critic Shana Nys Dambrot wrote, Lowder's "recombinant visual aesthetic is painterly without gesture, literal without imagery, abstract without disorder, and animated by the symbols of man and nature."

His palette puts into service repurposed wood salvaged from the Midwestern ruins of barns, elevators, and mills, which are then dialectically juxtaposed with vintage metal signs of bygone advertising displays. This unexpected juxtaposition critically engages the duality of oppositions—natural wood with typographies of advertising—both melded into an aesthetic complex by sacred geometries.

The question we should ask is "Do the artworks work aesthetically?" That is all that matters, and any properly aesthetically functioning abstract artwork based on a solid spiritual philosophy may be traced back to Kandinsky and cohorts. And certainly Lowder's art can be.

Lowder takes great care to indicate the elusive transcendental sense hidden within his hand-crafted geometries. When his paintings work, *they work subtly*.

To suggest how Sacred Geometry works, I will use letters and words to stand in for geometry's points, lines, and planes.

Single letters by themselves have no meaning; however, they can be ordered to form meaning: r-t-e-u-a-n; into *nature*. Letters, properly ordered, now have socially vibrant meaning. Something like this occurs with point and lines in geometry, once the points and lines are *ordered* into a circle or pentagon or hexagon.



Benjamin Lowder, *Geodesic Guardian*, 2014, reclaimed wood, crystal, (detail pentagon)

Letters are socially-constructed *abstract* symbols which have useful meaning only when arranged properly to form words. Words are combined with more words to create ever higher levels of social meaning.

Over centuries, mathematicians have shown how the components of geometry—points, lines, and planes—when *combined* have miraculous properties of relationships that echo throughout earthly nature and into the stars.

In Lowder's art, one system (sacred geometry) is merged with another symbolic system (natural, organic wood). The natural wood system symbolizes life itself- asymmetrical, with undulating colors- vibrant here, fading there, physically fluctuating (decaying) in time and space. These two systems, as defined by Lowder's art, work together in unison. Academically, we could call Lowder's unison "the duality of oppositions."



Benjamin Lowder, *Rapid Oxidation I*, 2025, vintage metal, reclaimed wood

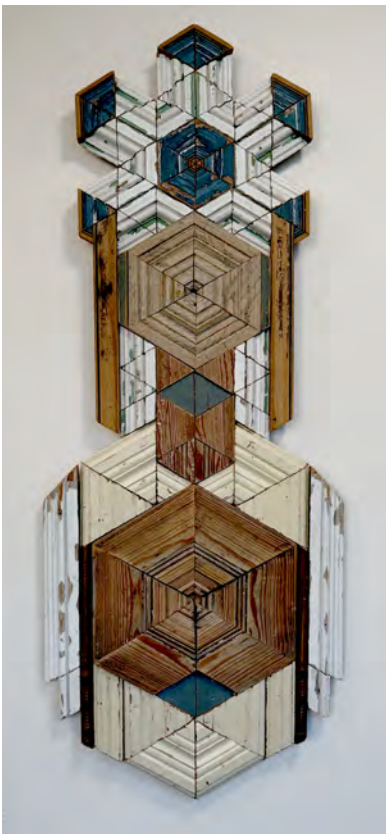
Lowder has placed within some of the wood hexagons—carefully chosen objects—which aid the viewer in understanding what his works of art attempt to accomplish. Where simple hexagons do symbolize the revealing visions of mathematics, Lowder's carefully selected rocks, minerals, crystals, or marbles placed inside indicate a more direct sign of the otherwise hidden powers of sacred geometry.

For my reading, the crystals stand as a sign of culmination, which I find relatable, or analogous to the mathematician's, as well as Lowder's, mapping of geometries which release or stimulate psychological energy as their end result.



Benjamin Lowder, *Emissary of the Six Directions*, 2024, reclaimed architectural elements (detail hexagon)

Using crystals as markers, Lowder makes tangible the intangible goal of sacred geometry. It is tantamount to placing a sign within a sign, a totem within a totem.



Benjamin Lowder, *Emissary of the Six Directions*, 2024, reclaimed architectural elements

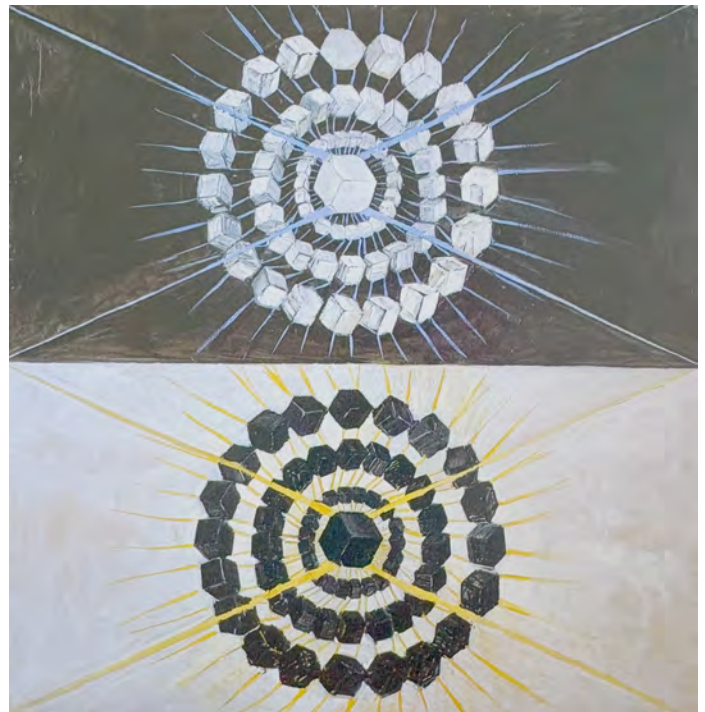
Sacred Geometry compels one to look for the latent signs within its manifest system.

Sacred Geometry brings into view, a conception, an understanding that miraculous dimensions exist beyond the naked eye. The steps from points and lines to circles and triangles, like the steps from letters to words, leads to a better understanding of how symbols suggest higher meanings beyond mere face value.

Lowder art works are painstakingly hand-crafted. Each piece of wood and metal is cut by hand. He disassembles the metal signs to recombine them with carefully cut and restored sections of wood.

Like Hilma af Klint, Lowder's opposition of two systems—one mathematical, the other organic— is key to his message.

Lowder art works are traditional in the sense of requiring quiet repose and study to discern and reveal their aesthetic secrets and prophetic themes of mystery and the sublime.



Hilma af Klint, *Untitled No.8, from the series SUW/Swan*, 1914, oil, 59x59in. Stiftelsen Klints Verk

Barnett Newman too, offered analogies for those artists, as Benjamin Lowder does, who seek an uplifting blazing trail forward. Newman was keenly interested in representing the world's mysteries, its metaphysical secrets. Visual artists continue the long historical quest for the sublime to be represented in paintings, to wrest truth from the void. See Bruce Nauman, next page.

Lowder encourages: "Remember the forgotten truths of our ancestors who knew how to live in this world without bending it to their will through technology."

"Art is the fertile soil from which our culture grows and I want to invest my time and energy into making art that begins to move us back to that garden."

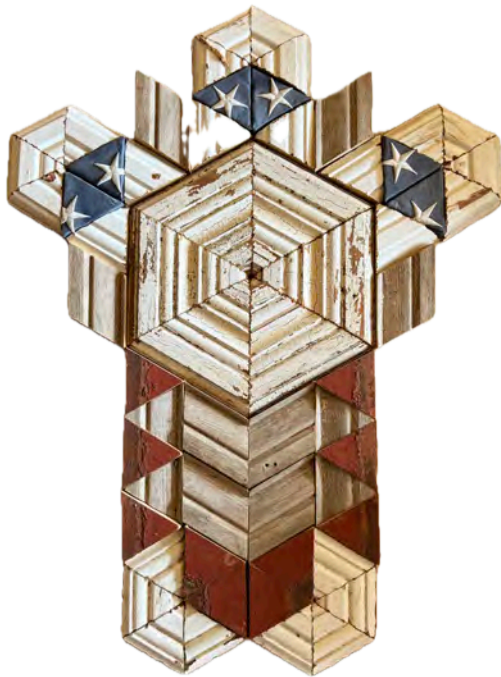
Notwithstanding the potential social and cultural efficacies which may or may not occur through Benjamin Lowder's paintings and sculptures, Lowder demonstrates beyond all reasonable doubt, the primal significance of making the works of art in the first place, in order for his aesthetic objects to simply *begin*, and thereby, unveil their mystical magic. ○

**Recommended Books referencing
Sacred Geometry by Rusty Freeman
Director of Visual Arts**

Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, 1988, originally Doubleday, be sure to get the illustrated edition.

Maurice Tuchman, et.al., *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Abbeville Press, NY. 1986.

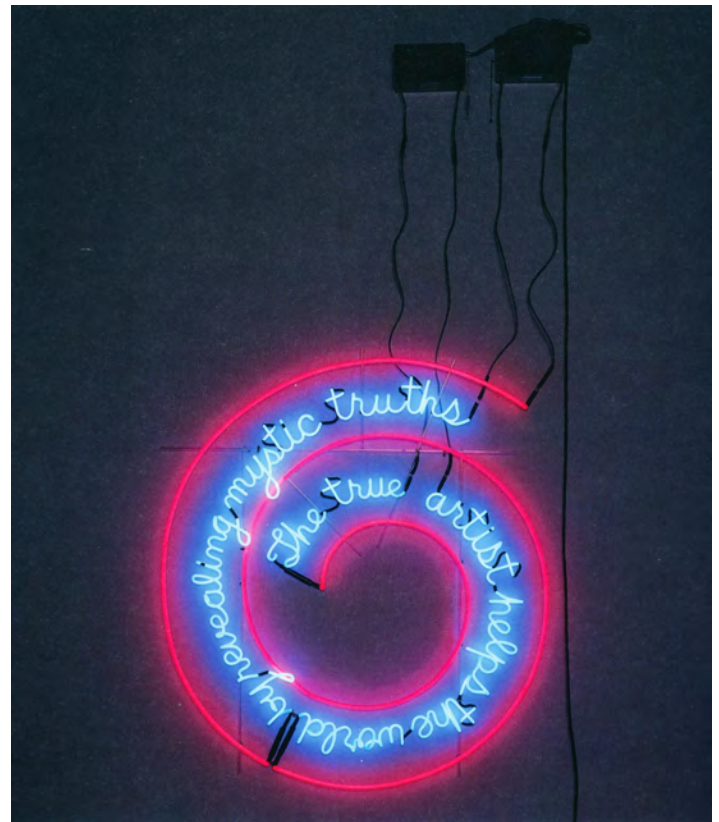
Miranda Lundy, et.al., *Quadrivium: The Four Classic Liberal Arts*, 2020, Wooden Books, UK; Walker & Co., NY. ■



Symbolisms bloom this tree of life totem with the dominant hexagon as the focus. A second symbolic system enriches the composition through its home grown colors of red, white, and blue.

[Benjamin Lowder, *La Merica*, 2023, vintage metal signage and reclaimed wood](#)

Mathematical and Organic systems merge—accented by the geodesic hexagons of Buckminster Fuller—in the architecture of the [Salvador Dali Museum, St. Petersburg, FL](#).
[HOK Architects, St. Louis](#)



Like Lowder, Bruce Nauman layers two or more contrasting systems: the Urform archetype spiral shaped with technology from advertising with an embedded inspirational epigram. [Bruce Nauman, *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths* \(Window or Wall Sign\) 1967, neon tubing, clear glass tubing, 59x55x2 in., Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo, Netherlands.](#)





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Snowflakes are based on the hexagon.

<https://www.snowcrystals.com/science/science.html>

North Dakota native Kenneth G. Libbrecht is a professor of physics at the California Institute of Technology (Caltech), and author of the website.