LEARNING NOTES:

Emma Kunz



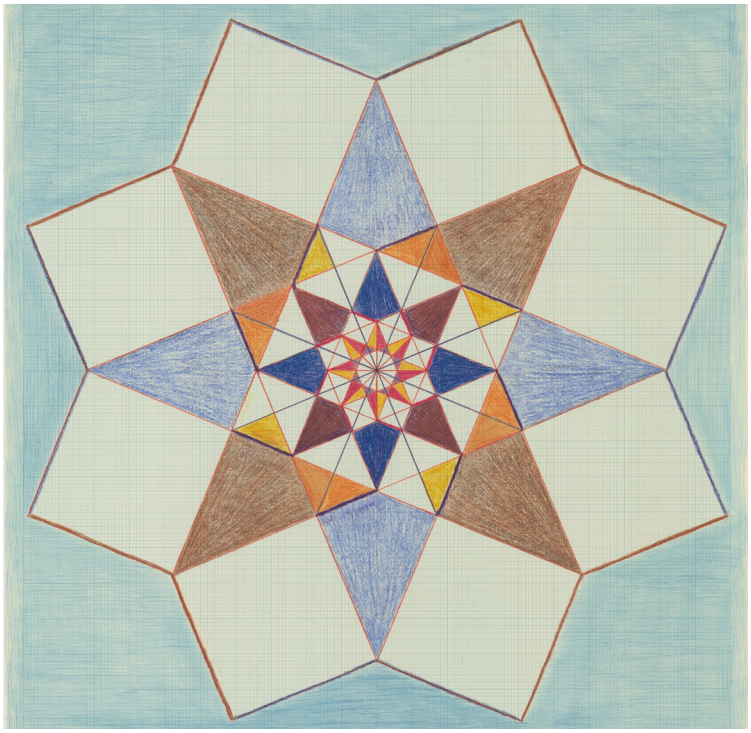
Emma Kunz in her studio, Waldstatt, Switzerland, 1952 – 1953. Courtesy Staatsarchiv Appenzell Ausserrhoden. Photo: Werner Schoch

About Emma Kunz

Emma Kunz (1892 – 1963) was a Swiss artist, researcher, poet and healer whose intricate geometric drawings explore the relationship between nature, energy fields and human consciousness. Kunz considered herself first and foremost a researcher, using her drawings to investigate the underlying principles she believed governed people, nature and the wider world. Produced using graph paper, pencil, oil crayon and a pendulum-guided method, the drawings served as tools for diagnosis, reflection and inquiry within her therapeutic practice.

Today, the practitioners' legacy is preserved by the Emma Kunz Foundation and the Emma Kunz Center in Würenlos, Switzerland. The Foundation houses the largest collection of her work and supports ongoing research into her cultural, intellectual and spiritual practice. In 1953, Kunz self-published two illustrated books that expressed a desire to share her work. While we now know that her artworks encode immeasurable knowledge, given the context of her time, they were never exhibited during her lifetime.

Since the 1970s, Kunz's work has been the subject of major institutional exhibitions internationally, with a renewed attention to her practice, along with fellow pioneering female visionaries. Recent exhibitions have included '3xAbstraction,' The Drawing Center, New York NY (2005), where her work was presented alongside Hilma af Klint and Agnes Martin; 'Emma Kunz: Visionary Drawings,' Serpentine Galleries, London, UK (2019), the first major UK solo exhibition of her work; and 'Emma Kunz Cosmos,' Aargauer Kunsthaus, Aarau, Switzerland (2021). These exhibitions, amongst others, each highlight her contemporary relevance.



Emma Kunz, Untitled (Work No. 285), undated © Emma Kunz Foundation.
Courtesy Emma Kunz Center. Photo: Deniz Guzel

What does her work look like and how did she make her work?

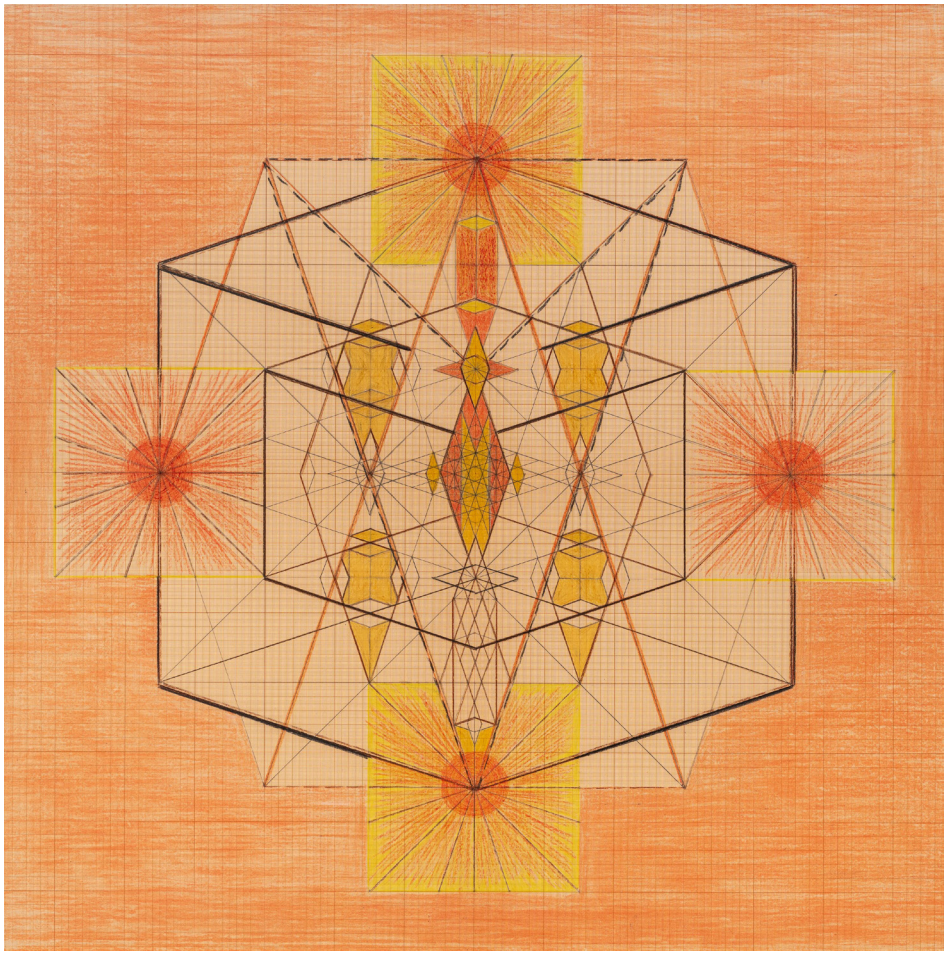
Drawing

From 1938, Emma Kunz created large-scale geometric drawings on graph paper. She described her creative work as ‘Shape and form expressed as measurement, rhythm, symbol and transformation of figure and principle’. The drawings are thought to offer one of the most direct ways of experiencing Kunz’s personality and ideas. Despite beginning to create these works later in life, after years of working as a healer and naturopath in Switzerland, Kunz’s interest in this process can be traced to her early school years.

‘My drawings are designed for the 21st Century. They also convey composition and form as dimension, rhythm, symbol and transformation of numbers and principles.’—Emma Kunz

Using a pendulum-guided technique known as radiesthesia, Kunz worked on graph paper using a pendulum, ruler, compass, pencil, colored pencil and oil crayon. Standing before the sheet and concentrating on a question, she allowed the movements of the pendulum to indicate points, which she marked in pencil. She then used the pendulum to guide connections between these points, developing the composition through line and color and, in her understanding, recording an energetic force on paper.

Kunz created more than 400 geometric compositions, often developed through periods of concentrated observation lasting over a day. Characterized by intricate structures that are both highly precise and subtly irregular, the works reveal a visual language shaped by repetition and ritual. The drawings allowed Kunz to ask social, political and existential questions, while using art as a therapeutic tool to source solutions.



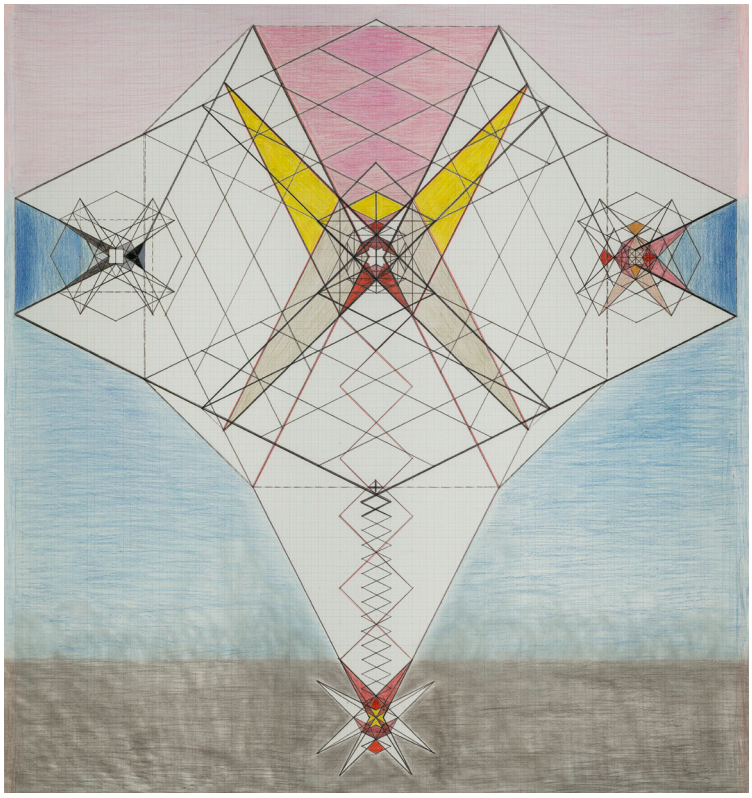
Emma Kunz, Untitled (Work No. 040), Undated © Emma Kunz Foundation. Courtesy Emma Kunz Center. Photo: Deniz Guzel

Scale, color and pattern

Emma Kunz's works vary in scale and chromatic intensity. Having worked in a knitting factory in her twenties, she possessed a natural affinity for grids, patterns and repetition. In her artworks, each color and shape held a precise meaning that mapped her understanding of the world.

Created on a flat surface, the works were made, observed and encountered from multiple viewpoints. Their extraordinary complexity and symmetry are especially apparent when viewed in close proximity. She saw these as spaces you could walk into, images to be unfolded or collapsed back down again, multilayered in their construction.

Rather than representing the visible world, Kunz's drawings offered a means of exploring and expressing underlying patterns and relationships that shaped both her research and therapeutic practice. The final work Kunz completed before her death in 1963, depicts a transcendental portal illuminated in yellow, a color she regularly used in the final stages of a drawing to signal its completion.



Emma Kunz, Untitled (Work No. 012), Undated © Emma Kunz Foundation.
Courtesy Emma Kunz Center. Photo: Deniz Guzel

What are the main themes in Emma Kunz's work?

Natural and supernatural healing

Emma Kunz's work emerged from the landscape and healing traditions of rural Switzerland. As a child she attended the local primary school but had no further formal education or artistic training. Drawn to unusual phenomena, she developed a profound interest in healing and the natural world.

By adolescence, Kunz is thought to have lost several close relatives, including siblings who died in childhood. By age 18, she began to use telepathic abilities and a divining pendulum to investigate people, nature and unseen forces.

Kunz's sister was an important influence, introducing her to herbalism and the plant-based practice of phytotherapy. Kunz later implemented naturopathic approaches into her healing practice, conducting experiments in her extensive gardens to produce herbal remedies she prescribed via her drawings. In the early 1940s she discovers the stone AION A, which begins a new chapter of her explorations between minerals, natural environments and healing.

'May this place of strength become a meeting place where cultural, spiritual and healing accomplishments come together.'—Emma Kunz

Mathematics and the pentagram

Emma Kunz was also known as Penta, a name that reflected her interest in numbers, vectors and energetic forces. A pentagram is a five-pointed star drawn in a single continuous line; offering a powerful symbol of directional movement echoed in the motion of a pendulum, while its five points represent the four elements of fire, water, air and earth, united by spirit.

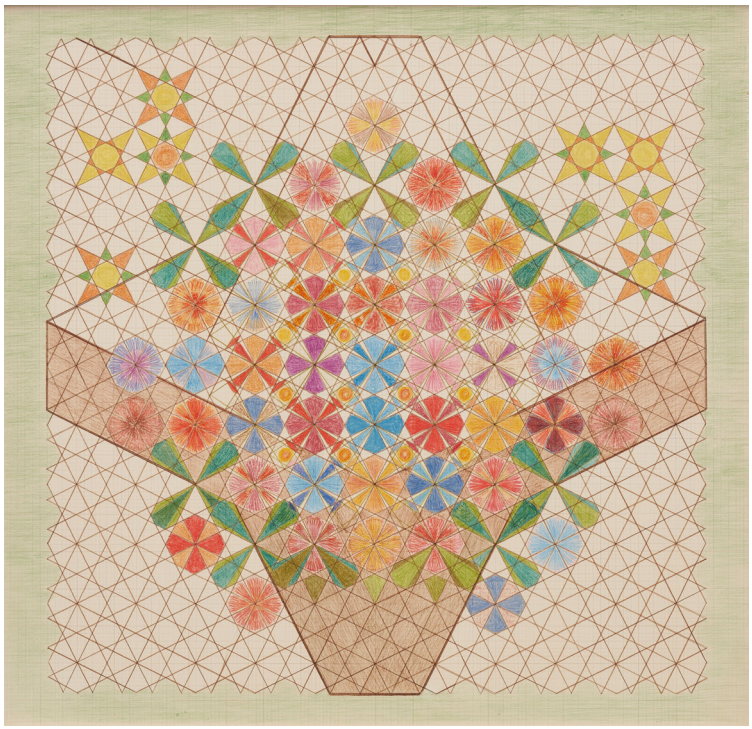
As Penta, Kunz saw herself as a conduit, interpreting and directing forces in search of equilibrium. She understood even numbers as feminine and connected to the ‘unlimited cosmos,’ and odd numbers as masculine, ‘an active force effecting order’. Their interaction of these two energies brought expansion and order into balance, expressed through the symmetry and geometry of her drawings.

Science and new technologies

In 1953, Kunz conducted a pivotal ‘Polarized Calendula Bloom’ experiment in her medicinal garden, bridging the gap between creative expression, mathematics and scientific inquiry.

Creating a model of the desired outcome using copper wire and a central calendula flower, she formed a visual mental and physical vison of what she was aiming to achieve. Using a pendulum and the scientific values of ‘polarization,’ she believed this could influence the plants’ growth and generate additional blooms according to a numerical sequence.

The experiment was a progressive move to create new radial forms, taking place in parallel with the discovery of radio waves, x-rays and photographic developments in the 19th and early 20th Centuries. More broadly, within her drawings, ‘Work No. 020,’ is famed for predicting the development of a world destroying weapon, ahead of atomic and nuclear bomb testing.



Emma Kunz, Untitled (Work No. 107), undated © Emma Kunz Foundation.
Courtesy Emma Kunz Center. Photo: Jon Etter

Glossary

AION A
A natural Swiss healing stone powder discovered in 1941 – 1942 by Emma Kunz in the Roman Quarry in Würenlos, Switzerland. The name derives from the Greek word *aion*, meaning 'without limitation'.

Chromatic
Primarily means relating to or characterized by a color or colors.

Composition
The visual arrangement and balance of shapes, colors, and objects to form an artwork.

Divining pendulum
A weighted object on a chain or cord that swings in response to questions asked to seek spiritual guidance.

Equilibrium
A state of rest or balance due to the equal action of opposing forces.

Existential
Primarily means relating to existence, being alive, or the human experience.

Human consciousness
The state of awareness that allows an individual to perceive, experience and reflect upon their own thoughts, emotions, sensations and surrounding environment.

Medium
Defined as a person who acts as an intermediary or channel between the physical world and the spiritual world.

Naturopath
A practitioner of naturopathy, a system of alternative medicine that uses natural therapies, diet, lifestyle changes and herbal remedies to support the body's self-healing abilities.

Phenomena
Rare, curious or striking events that draw special interest or investigation.

Phytotherapy
The science-based medical practice of using plants, plant extracts or plant-derived compounds to prevent, alleviate or treat health conditions.

Polarization
In physics, polarization is a property of transverse waves where oscillations occur in a specific, restricted direction rather than randomly.

Radial forms
Refer to shapes, patterns or structures that develop, branch, or repeat uniformly outward from a central point or axis.

Radiesthesia
The practice or claimed ability to detect hidden energy fields, radiations or vibrations using handheld tools such as a pendulum, a dowsing rod or a divining rod.

Transcendental
Going beyond the limits of ordinary physical experience, common thought or the material world.

Visionaries are people who have strong, original foresight and the creative ability to imagine how a society, industry, or project can develop in the future.

Questions for discussion

- Spend time observing Emma Kunz's artworks. Reflect on how they combine artistic medium, mathematical technique and scientific data. What subject do you think they relate to the most?
- Emma Kunz's drawings depict things that we cannot see, such as other people's emotions. Find a partner and create a drawing of how they are feeling today. Compare your drawings of each other, are there similarities, emerging patterns or elements that work together symmetrically?
- Several female visionaries and healers from the 19th and early 20th Centuries are now being reconsidered as significant non-traditional artists. What does this renewed interest reveal about the barriers that prevented their work and ideas from being recognised during their lifetimes?

Additional information

- **Emma Kunz Exhibition Page**
- **Emma Kunz Center and Foundation**
- **Emma Kunz, 'The Polarized Calendula Blooms,' Hildegard Press**