




Amy  
Myers

POMONA COLLEGE MUSEUM OF ART



PROJECT SERIES 24 POMONA COLLEGE MUSEUM OF ART

OCTOBER 23 - DECEMBER 19, 2004

I would like to thank my mother Carlene Myers. With her mind-boggling generosity and unerring love, she has made possible for myself and others a view of the universe as unbounded and divine as her love.

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I dedicate this catalogue to Steve Martin whose unwavering belief in me has enabled my work to march ever forward....

allowing me to expand and create the uncharted and fantastic realms of what is possible in art.

I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Amy Myers

# Foreword

Amy Myers creates intricate, monumental drawings that merge the microcosmic with the macrocosmic in a visionary blending of art, mathematics, and physics. Myers links sensuous materiality with an intellectual rigor, exploring through evocative drawings the most illusive terrain of the most profound scientific explorations.

Raised in an environment steeped in scientific inquiry – her father is a particle physicist – Myers grew up comfortable questioning the unpredictability and interconnectedness of nature and the universe. Since these formative discussions, Myer's work has incorporated and integrated esoteric notions of quantum physics, mathematical equations. and, most fundamentally, the evidence of an unmitigated experience of the possibilities of the human imagination in the mysteries of the universe.

The formal qualities of Myer's work reflect this inventiveness of scientific investigation combined with a spiritual, intuitive, and artistic vision. In finely executed drawings of graphite and gouache, Myers creates highly complex and loosely symmetrical networks of forms and systems of activity that shift in perspective and scale. The imagery – impossible to pin down, but as delicate and refined as lace, as infinitely spectacular as galaxies, as dizzying as an orbit through outer space. and as intricate and perfect as a strand of DNA – could refer to obscure mathematical principles and systems – in fact, the work does reference specific mathematic equations – as well as visionary models of altered states of consciousness. The work's enigmatic nature – its slippage between the sublime vastness of cosmic scale and the incredibly intricate realm of sub-atomic particles – demonstrates how a visionary artistic process parallels the creative investigations of scientists. Both involve a similar exploration into the unfamiliar and unknown.

For this exhibition. Myers presents a new body of work based on the original Heliocentropy of 1999. The work builds on itself as each monumental drawing further expands the scope of her project by adding mysterious new layers of meaning and more complex devices of scale. The Opera Inside of the Atom (2004) is the impetus behind her forthcoming opera of the same name, which is based on the four known forces – the strong, the weak, the electromagnetic, and gravity – and moves back in time beyond the moment of the Big Bang, to the time of our original ten-dimensional supersymmetrical universe.

Amy Myers' exhibition is the twenty-fourth in the Pomona College Museum of Art's Project Series, an ongoing program of focused exhibitions that brings to the Pomona College campus art that is experimental and that introduces new forms, techniques, or concepts. I am grateful to Amy Myers for her incredible drawings; to Robert Sobieszek for his perceptive essay; to the Steve Martin Charitable Foundation; to Susanne Vielmetter, Los Angeles Projects; and to Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, Texas for support of the publication; to the University Art Museum, Long Beach for a generous loan; to Jaeger Smith for the catalogue design; to Mark Wood and Don Pattison for editing; to the Pasadena Art Alliance and Sarah Miller Meigs for their support of the Project Series; to Professor Mercedes Teixido for her assistance with this exhibition and its related programs; and to the staff of the Pomona College Museum of Art.

Rebecca McGrew, Curator

# Fearful Symmetries

## Amy Myers' Epic Paradigms by Robert Sobieszek

Symmetry can be beautiful; it can also be frightening, which may be just a delirious aspect of the sublime. What symmetry can never be, though, is picturesque and quaint; it always commands a certain scale and a certain *tembilitas*. In a series of large graphite, ink, and gouache drawings on paper, artist Amy Myers portrays nearly symmetrical figures of inordinate force and complexity. The figures are unrecognizable as anything even remotely known, their overall abstract shapes punctuated by teasingly innumerable details, and their rough bilateral symmetries made even more dramatic by being posted slightly off-center. Nothing, from the largest gestalt to the smallest detail, yields any sense of their nature. They are, in short, fantastically alien and sublime at the same time.

Myers's figures appear as nothing less than epic machines or cosmic engines measureless in size and incomprehensible in scale. Leeuwenhoek or Hubble? Submicroscopic or galactic? Neutron particles or neutron stars? Infinitesimally small and rhapsodic or macroscopically huge and operatic? Vibrational harmonies of superstring theories or a Pythagorean music of the spheres?<sup>1</sup> Is *The Opera Inside the Atom* (the title of one drawing) conducted in B-flat just like the basal tone emanating from supermassive black holes in space; and what exactly is the libretto? While they suggest much and generate many questions, the drawings and their often playful titles offer no concrete answers.

Still, the figures defy easy dismissal. Despite complete unfamiliarity and all their alien characteristics, they command attention and, once attended to, delight and surprise with their vertiginous shifts of perspective and scale, transparency and opacity, fluidity and stasis. These incommensurable visions are frightful in their overall glory and their iconic insistence. Another drawing's title, *Fearful Symmetry*, is decidedly more than appropriate and telling. Echoes from the high poet of Romanticism, William Blake, might be considered relevant throughout. Where - in exactly what "distant deeps or skies" - are these figures located? And who - exactly what "immortal hand or eye" - may suggest what they signify?<sup>2</sup>

Drawing illustrates; and it expresses what cannot be verbalized. Drawing focuses; it isolates; it

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Brian Greene, *The Elegant Universe: Superstrings, Hidden Dimensions, and the Quest for the Ultimate Theory* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000). esp. Part III.

<sup>2</sup> William Blake, 'The Tiger,' in *Complete Writings with Variant Readings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 214

chooses what is of value. As such it always narrates a moral imperative. It is an "incisive medium for separating clear from confused, worthwhile from worthless phenomena," according to theorist Barbara Stafford, who also characterizes straight and curved lines as possessing the "normative imperative of statistics."<sup>3</sup> In short since aesthetics is inseparable from knowledge, drawing facilitates a certain regimentation of cognition. And through drawing Amy Myers formulates a silent language of seeing and description unshackled by the encumbrances of language, either-or logic, and Newtonian physics - a strictly regimented, highly imaginative visual language of a new science.

Drawings delineate, articulate, and substantiate the understanding of things visual, either seen or imagined. They certainly are able to transcend language; they can even render, at times, the fundamental certainties of mathematics mute and, if not unnecessary, at least redundant. In Tom Stoppard's play *Arcadia*, set alternately in pre-Victorian and contemporary England, the character of Thomasina, a highly precocious teenage girl, conceives of chaos theory a century or so before it is actually invented. Utterly dismissed by her tutor as indulging in fiction rather than science, her work is in turn completely validated from today's perspective when the modern character Valentine exclaims, "She didn't have the maths, not remotely. She saw what things meant, way ahead, like seeing a picture."<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Amy Myers leap-frogs the mathematical details of current theory and envisions images that for her substantiate the meaning of what they represent. These images, in turn, are then not-so-simply narrated by her as pictures.

Picturing things and what they mean has always been the mandate of drawing. Well before language and mathematics, the ancients drew what things meant to them on the interior walls of their caves. Well before fractal geometries were even imagined, Leonardo da Vinci rendered cataclysmic tsunamis inundating landscapes with both microscopic complexity and macroscopic monumentality. Well in anticipation of advanced meteorological models, John Constable conflated the rigors of scientific observation and the expressive sensations of art in delineating unstable atmospheric phenomena. And well before relativity and quantum mechanics were fully assimilated within our social consciousness, M. C. Escher delighted in illustrating the logical worlds of non-Euclidean geometries and improbable dimensions.

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<sup>3</sup> Barbara Stafford, *Good Looking: Essays on the Virtue of Images* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1996), 134.

<sup>4</sup> The character Valentine in Tom Stoppard, *Arcadia*, in *Plays 5* (London, Faber and Faber, 1999), 131.

In her utterly remarkable drawings Amy Myers delights in depicting unimaginable spaces and improbable systems as well. The things she pictures do not exist in any material sense, in three dimensions and time, or outside of theory. While based on close readings of fact and theory, the drawings are, for the most part, fabrications, imaginings, fictions of science. They are the perceived realities of a new physics with roots extending back to Thomasina's time, a physics that currently considers general relativity and quantum mechanics as mere details of its foundations. For the past six years, Myers has visually explored some of the most progressive formulations of contemporary cosmology, and has produced immaculate renderings of systems and events that until now have only been described by those "maths" of the highest order.

Born in Texas, Myers studied art and received her BFA from the Kansas City Art Institute in Missouri and her MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in Illinois. Her family life was instrumental in contributing to her passion for the sciences. Her father is a physicist, her childhood recollections are dominated by images of molecular models, and her early memories concern "experimentation – and the "notion that everything is a combination of something else."<sup>5</sup> And as in science, so in art. Artists from Leonardo on have understood that the creative imagination is composed heavily of "fantasia," a Renaissance term suggesting an "ability to recombine images or parts of images into wholly new compounds or ideas."<sup>6</sup>

Continually inspired by contemporary physics, Myers recombines and reorders its formulations, descriptions, proofs, and rhetoric. But that is just the beginning:

"I start out with certain narratives, zones of characters, functions, and locations. The characters find function and relate to one another. Then you need an environment. The images are created through narratives and symbols. I don't preconceive the finished image because the image is only the evidence of complex interactions of systems."<sup>7</sup>

And like science building on and modifying prior experiments, Myers finds that her drawings are frequently serial, one drawing suggesting another, a set of systems predicating a slightly

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<sup>5</sup> Amy Myers, in Mary-Kay Lombino, "An Interview with Amy Myers," *Amy Myers: Centric 60*, exh. cat. (Long Beach: California State University Art Museum, 2000), 5.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Carmen C. Bambach, "Introduction to Leonardo and his Drawings," *Leonardo da Vinci: Master Draftsman*, exh. cat. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2003), 26.

<sup>7</sup> Myers, in "An Interview with Amy Myers," 12.

different set, an unresolved detail yielding a beginning of another, and so forth - fantasia at its best.

Combined and integrated systems, "areas of activity" as she calls them, are fundamental to her constructed fabrications.<sup>8</sup> Thirty-three distinct systems, for instance, appear in *Heliocentropy*, most of them in the radiating arms that emanate from a spot deep above the center of the drawing. In 1597, Johannes Kepler published his *Mysterium cosmographicum*, arguing that Copernicus's heliocentric universe demanded a fluid cosmos filled with moving bodies in infinite space. Incapable of visualizing how this might appear, Kepler had the solar system engraved as five planets reduced to fixed, Platonic solids stuffed into individual spheres.<sup>9</sup>

Myers's heliocentric cosmos is the exact opposite: vastly expansive and in flux, fluid to the point of indeterminacy, and infinite to the point of transcendence. Instead of an old, static, and mechanical universe, she proposes a new vision of fluid, dynamic openness. Visual seeing, and thus thinking, outside the spheres, as it were.

There are Platonic forms. and then there are Dyson spheres – ringworlds, hyperal planes, and the macrocosmos. Myers' universe (or might we say multiverses) is (or are) comprised of incredibly esoteric things for the most part: four elemental forces, black holes and event horizons, branes and Calabri-Yau spaces, extended-dimension objects and curled-up dimensions, wormholes and Quantum tunneling, supergravity and supersymmetry. Einstein's comforting three dimensions of space with an added component of time have given way to M-theory and eleven "space-time" dimensions. In conversation, phrases like "orbifold and torus... "heterotic string series... "anatomy of cosmogony," and "totality is a point... flow effortlessly off the artist's tongue.<sup>10</sup> This, then, is the nature that Myers is depicting, one filled with elegant and mysterious objects that are truly unconventional and unrecognizable: "I believe that these objects do exist," she affirms, "but they are unfamiliar to us."<sup>11</sup>

The arcane and unfamiliar worlds of science are so convincingly charted by Myers that her work might as well be considered a visual art of both the new physics and science fiction. "Even though my process is grounded in science," she admits, "it is still a serendipitous kind of

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<sup>8</sup> Myers, in "An Interview with Amy Myers," 12.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Dennis Cosgrove, "Cosmology and Cosmography, 1450-1650," in *The Universe: A Convergence of Art, Music, and Science*, ed. Jay Belloli, exh. cat. (Pasadena: The Armory Center for the Arts, 2001), 28-30.

<sup>10</sup> Amy Myers, in conversation with the author, May 5, 2004

<sup>11</sup> Myers, in "An Interview with Amy Myers," 11.



adventure."<sup>12</sup> An adventure, indeed. The scientific concepts and things on which Myers bases her work do not materially exist; they are conceived by theoretical refinements and definable only by certain "maths." Yet that does not mean they cannot be envisioned and pictured; Leonardo, after all, never saw an actual tidal wave. Myers's subjects may consist of imagined worlds, invented constructs, and fabricated artifacts; but her drawings of them are like the finest scientific drawings - "information-rich" and so attentive to details in their execution that the artist seems to vanish into the "evolutionary triumph" of the things themselves.<sup>13</sup>

After all the math and science, however, after all the "information," there is a decidedly romantic streak in Myers's art. William Blake, a favorite of the artist, witnessed otherworldly conversations conducted in "Visionary forms dramatic." "Creating Space. Creating Time according to the wonders Divine / Of Human Imagination."<sup>14</sup> Such conversations are, to be sure, not entirely dissimilar from how the new physics creates what Tom Stoppard called the "freaky stuff" of modern science, stuff that is "turning out to be the mathematics of the natural world."<sup>15</sup> And certainly this is not unlike what Amy Myers has achieved by depicting all the unconventional and "freaky " stuff of contemporary physics - exquisitely rendered fictions of time and space, marvelous fables of the new physics. the best visual story-telling of visionary forms dramatic .

Robert A. Sobieszek

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<sup>12</sup> Myers, in "An Interview with Amy Myers," 17.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Douglas Crase, *A Portrait in Two Parts* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004), 60.

<sup>14</sup> William Blake, *Jerusalem*, in *Complete Writings with Variant Readings*, 746.

<sup>15</sup> Valentine, in Stoppard, *Arcadia*, 65.

The perspective of  
particle physics is one of  
a universe without “stuff.”

All particles exist  
with the potential to combine  
with

and become  
different particles.

They are intermediate states  
in a network of interactions  
and are based upon events,  
not things.



**Ground of Universe, Veiled**

2003 88 x 90 inches graphite, gouache, and conte on paper | Collection of Jerry Jones, Jnr., Dallas, Texas |



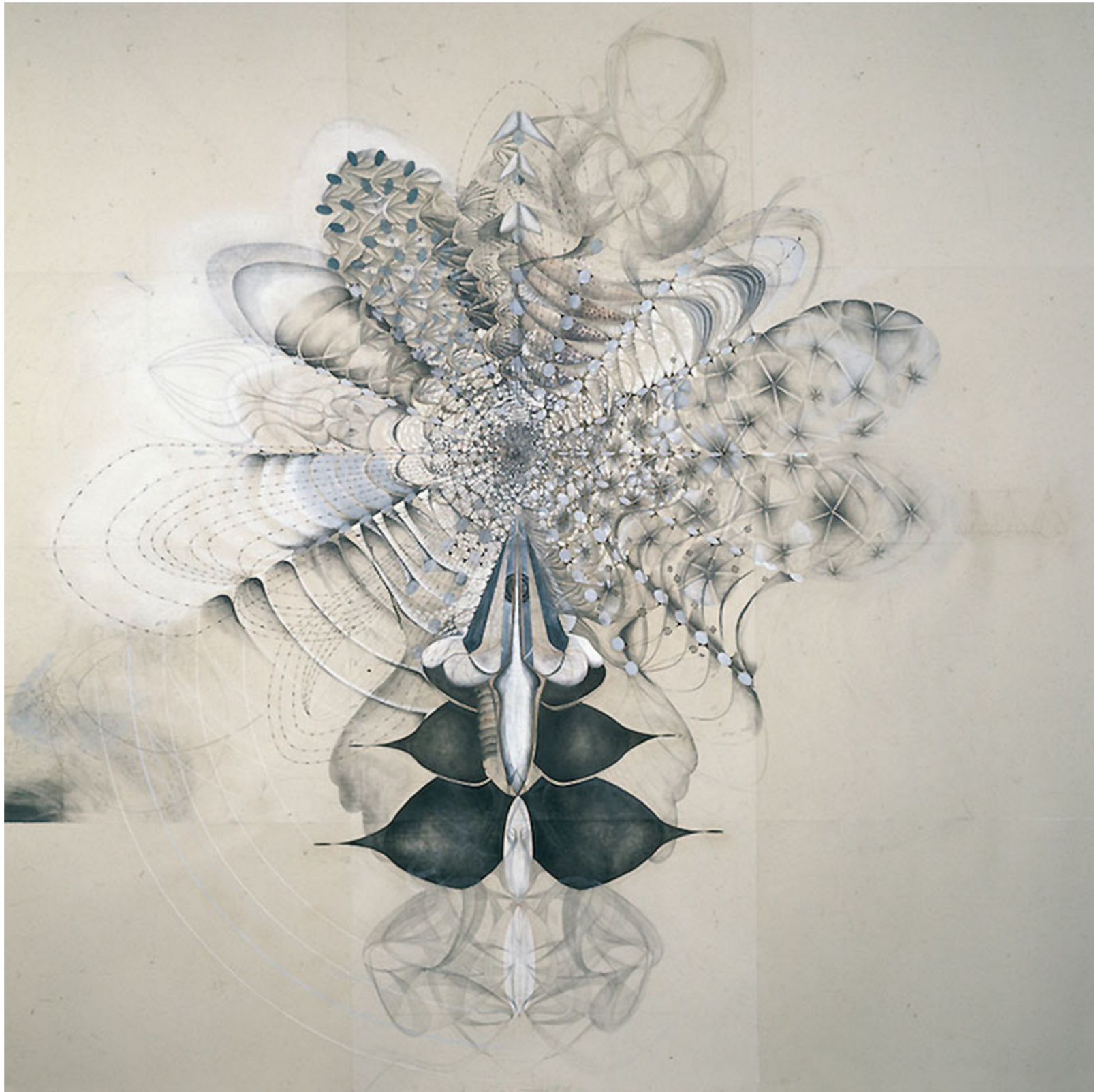
**The Opera Inside of the Atom**

2004 132 x 120 inches graphite, gouache, and conte on paper | Collection of Amy Myers |



**Fearful Symmetry** | detail |

2002 88 x 90 inches graphite, gouache, and conte on paper



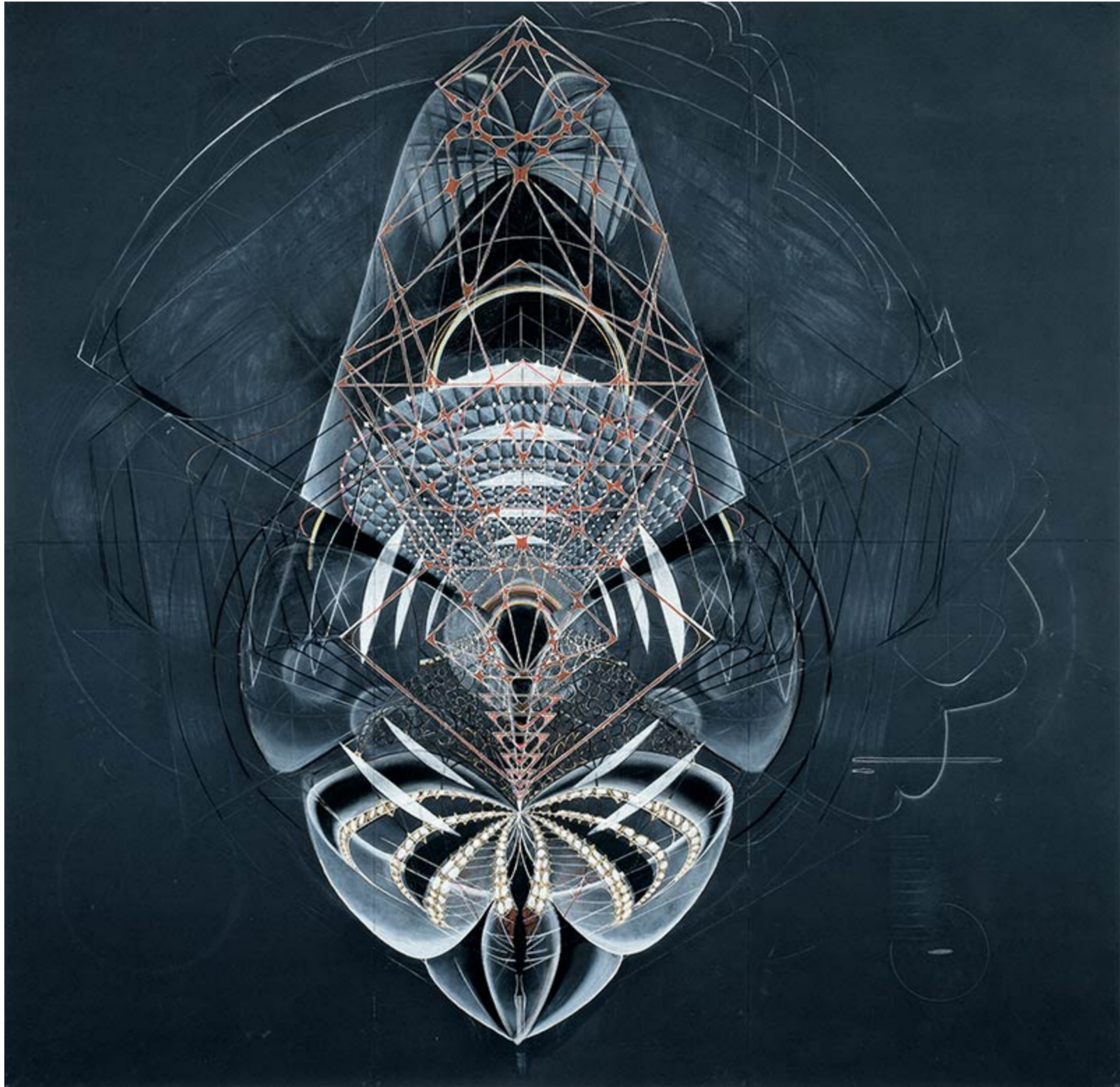
**Heliosyntropy**

1999 120 x 133 inches graphite, gouache, and conte on paper | Collection of University Art Museum, CSULB, gift of Artur Axelrad and Charles and Elizabeth Brookes |



**Circumphase: Satellites and Origins of the Universe**

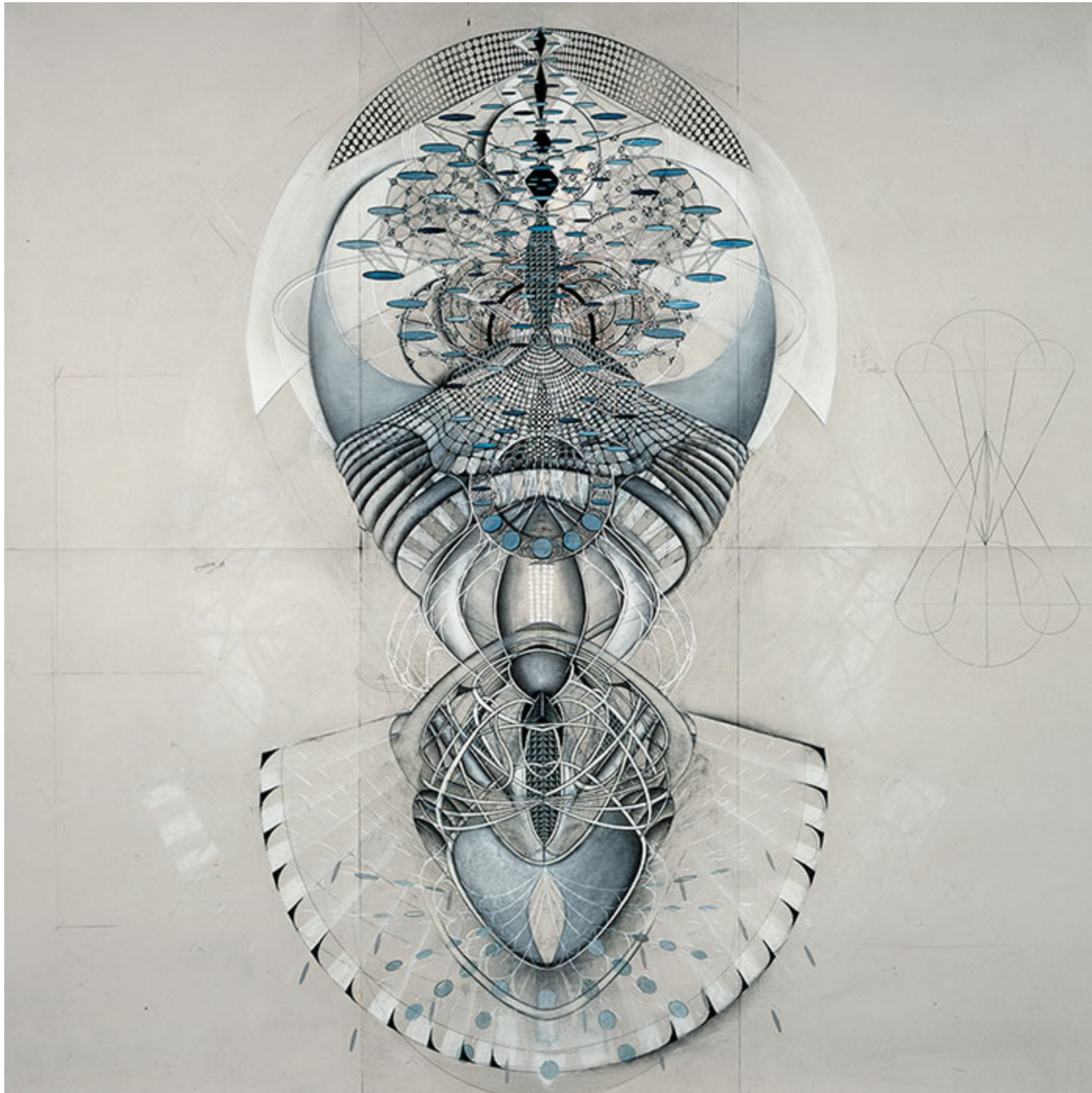
2002 88 x 90 inches graphite, gouache, and conte on paper | Collection of Steve Martin, Santa Barbara, California |



**Satorin's Constant**

2001 88 x 90 inches graphite, gouache, and conte on paper | Collection of Amy Myers |





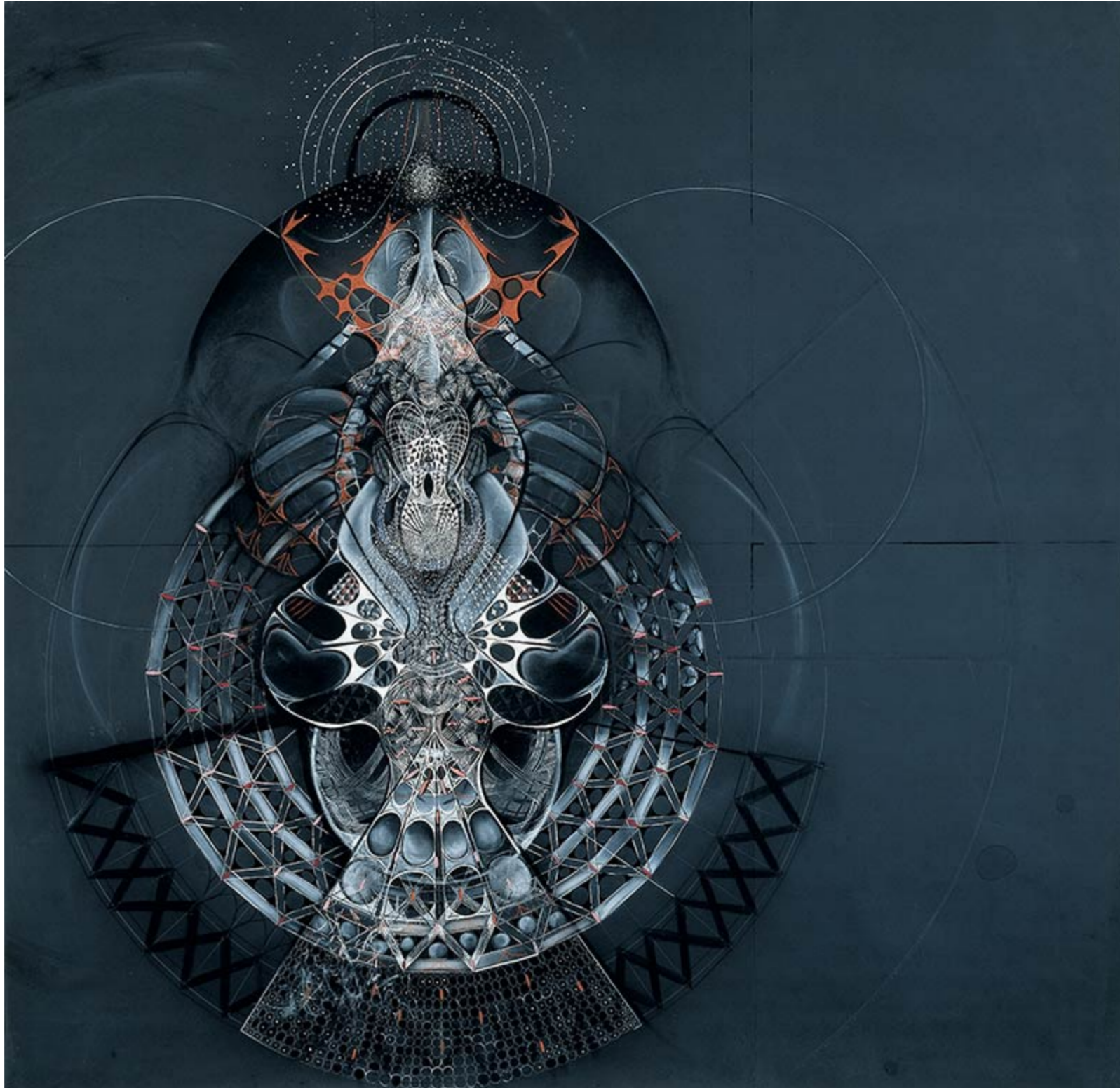
**Heterotic String Series – From the 26th Dimension**

2002 88 x 90 inches graphite, gouache, and conte on paper | Courtesy of Suzanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects |



**Dirac Vedam**

2001 88 x 90 inches graphite, gouache, and conte on paper | Collection of Leigh Tyler, Dallas, Texas |



**Heterotic String Series – From the 10th Dimension**

2002 88 x 90 inches graphite, gouache, and conte on paper | Courtesy of Suzanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects |

# Amy Myers

## Education

- 1999 MFA. The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, IL 1995  
1995 BFA, Kansas City Art Institute, MO

## Solo Exhibitions

- 2005 "The Opera Inside of the Atom," Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum, Santa Barbara, CA  
2004 Pomona College Museum of Art, Claremont, CA  
Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, TX  
Suzanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects, Los Angeles  
2003 "String Series: The Handheld Universe." Danese, New York  
2002 "Heterotic String Series." Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas. TX  
2001 Mary Boone Gallery, New York  
2000 University Art Museum. California State University, Long Beach. CA  
Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago, IL  
1999 "The Virtual Underground." Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco, CA

## Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2005 "Brides of Frankenstein." San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, CA  
"Infinities." The Brewery, Los Angeles  
2004 "New Math: Contemporary Art and the Mathematical Instinct," Tweed Museum of Art, University of Minnesota, Duluth, MN  
"5th Anniversary Exhibition," Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, TX  
"Summer Painting and Drawing," Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago, IL  
Summer Show, Danese, New York  
2003 "Black/White," Danese, New York  
"Flip," Dunn and Brown Contemporary, Dallas, TX  
"Online," Feigen Contemporary, New York  
"Under Glass: Works on Paper 1960-2000." Anthony Grant. Inc., New York  
"Art at the Edge of Science," Sun Valley Center for the Arts, Ketchum, ID  
2002 "Big and Beautiful." H&R Block Art Space, Kansas City, MO  
"Collecting: A Community Dialogue." Ackland Art Museum, Chapel Hill, NC  
"The Accelerated Grimace," Silverstein Gallery, New York  
"Paintings and Works on Paper." Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago, IL  
"National Invitational Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture," American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York  
2001 "Cyborg Manifesto." Laguna Art Museum, Laguna Beach. CA  
"Blurry Lines." John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, WI  
2000 Society of Contemporary Art. Art Institute of Chicago. Chicago, IL  
1999 "New Space/New Work." Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco, CA  
1997 "Works on Paper." Berkeley Art Center, Berkeley, CA  
"Perspective: Kansas City," Johnson County Gallery of Art. Overland Park, KS

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## Selected Collections

American Express Corporate Collection  
California State University Art Museum, Long Beach. CA  
Fort Wayne Museum of Art. Fort Wayne. IN  
Greenville County Museum of Art. Greenville. SC  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York  
Laguna Art Museum. Laguna Beach. CA  
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX  
Steve Martin,. Santa Barbara. CA  
Anthony Grant, Rye, NY

## Checklist

### **Heliocentrophy**

1999 120 x 133 inches graphite, ink, and gouache on paper

[ Collection of University Art Museum. CSULB, gift of Artur Axelrad and Charles and Elizabeth Brooks ]

### **Satorin's Constant**

2001 88 x 90 inches graphite, gouache, and conte on paper [ Collection of Amy Myers ]

### **The Opera Inside of the Atom**

2004 132 x 120 inches graphite, gouache, and conte on paper [ Collection of Amy Myers ]

### **The Hand Held Universe, Dirac Vedam**

2001 24 x 24 inches graphite, gouache, and conte on paper [ Collection of Steve Martin ]

This catalogue was published  
in conjunction with the exhibition

### **Project Series 24: Amy Myers**

October 23 - December 19, 2004 Pomona College Museum of Art

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front cover image: **Dirac Vedam** 2001 88 x 90 inches graphite, gouache, and conte on paper  
[ Collection of Leigh Tyler, Dallas, Texas ]