CHRISTIAN de VIETRI

Ūrmi

MOORE CONTEMPORARY



Ūrmi, 2026
carbon fibre with gloss white marine-grade coat
2400 x 1269 x 967 mm

CHRISTIAN de VIETRI

Ūrmi

14th November - 12th December 2026

Following delivery of several emblematic sculptures in the public realm both locally and internationally, **MOORE CONTEMPORARY** is honoured to present *Ūrmi* — in what is de Vietri's first gallery project in Boorloo/Perth in the last decade.

Christian de Vietri occupies a distinguished place in contemporary sculptural practice. His work exudes a formal refinement and minimalism working with a reverence for geometry and gestural allusion. In public realm contexts his ability to produce work with a grandeur of scale and apparent lightness of being is notable. The co-existence of a non-objective lineage with the discipline that de Vietri has attained through observance and training in the sacred Trika and Śilpa traditions imbues his art with both finesse and rigour.

In this exceptional body of work de Vietri asks: "How does the world come into being, and what is the form of that process? These new artworks in copper and carbon are visual creation stories that embody the founding movement of manifestation; its most subtle shaping."



Akrama, 2026
copper
1 x 1 hasta (838 x 838 mm)

The Swell of the Real

Christian de Vietri

oḷiyē oliyē alai alai nuṇukkam
oliyacai ōcai virinūl uraikkum

Subtle waves of light, subtle waves of sound,
The unfolding thread speaks inner resonance in motion.[1]

Mayan, *Aintiram* 187

1
CREATION

How did something come from nothing? Modern cosmology provides a creation story that edges close to an answer. It reconstructs an early universe in which, some 13.8 billion years ago, the region that would become the observable world was smaller than an atom, hotter than any furnace, and expanding.[2] What, if anything, preceded that expansion, the standard model does not claim to know. It is a reticence worth pausing on, because the popular image of the Big Bang as an explosion in empty space is not what the science asserts. The equations describe the universe from a fraction of a second onwards. Extrapolate them towards the earliest possible conditions, and at a certain point the model ceases to be physically trustworthy. That limit belongs to the model, not necessarily to a thing called 'the beginning'. Steven Weinberg opened his classic reconstruction of cosmic history's first minutes at 'about one-hundredth of a second, the earliest time about which we can speak with any confidence'.[3] James Peebles, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for shaping the standard model of cosmology, is blunter still: 'we have no good theory of such a thing as the beginning'—and the name Big Bang itself, he adds, 'connotes the notion of an event and a position, both of which are quite wrong'.[4]

What the science does describe, with astonishing precision, is a pattern. The early universe was not perfectly smooth. It carried faint unevennesses, variations of about one part in one hundred thousand. In the hot plasma of the first few hundred thousand years, these differences oscillated: gravity drew matter into compression; radiation pressure drove it back towards rarefaction; the cycle repeated. The technical literature calls these acoustic oscillations. So the universe rang with pressure waves (sound, in the plainest physical sense), and when the plasma cleared, the pattern of that sound was pressed into the sky where satellites have now mapped it as the cosmic microwave background.[5] Galaxies condensed along its crests. Surveys of millions of galaxies still detect the fossil wavelength of those primordial oscillations, as if the universe's structure retains the rhythm of its first sound.[6] When cosmologists analyse the ancient sky, they decompose the signal into modes and measure the strength of each. Its angular power spectrum is, in this sense, the early universe written out as a chord.[7]

Told honestly, the scientific account leaves us with a suggestive image: form emerging through oscillation in a primordial plasma. Physics identifies the medium of those acoustic waves and describes their consequences with magnificent detail. It does not thereby decide what reality is in itself, or what consciousness is. Those are different questions. About the ocean, it does not speak; about the one to whom the swell appears, it does not say. What follows is therefore not a proof from physics but a resonance between registers: a physical history of patterned matter and a contemplative account of manifestation. And the question 'how did something come from nothing?' stands where the equations left it—not answered but deferred, handed to whoever can say what it is that vibrates.

The Trika tradition of Kashmir answers without hesitation: what ultimately vibrates is consciousness. Not consciousness as the late-arriving glow of complex brains, like a flicker thrown up by matter after billions of years of insentience, but consciousness as the sole substance there is, prior to matter just as the ocean is prior to its waves. A seminal compression of this claim is the first aphorism of Kṣemarāja's *Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya* (*The Heart of Recognition*), written in Kashmir around the eleventh century: 'Consciousness, absolutely free, is the cause of the manifestation of the universe'. The second aphorism of the same text specifies the method, and it would startle anyone raised on the physics of external causes: 'By the power of her own will, she unfolds the universe upon her own screen'.[8] Her own screen. Here, there is no second substance for the world to be made of, no external canvas for it to be painted on. Consciousness manifests the universe within itself, out of itself, to itself, the way a dreaming mind projects a scene, a setting, a stranger, from nothing but its own luminosity.

From this first principle, the tradition rereads the creation of the world. The *Spandakārikā* (*Stanzas on Vibration*, c. ninth century), a founding text of the Trika school, opens with a cosmogony compressed into a single gesture: 'We praise Śaṃkara, the beneficent one, source of the radiant wheel of energies | By the opening and closing of whose eye the world arises and dissolves.'[9] *Unmeṣa*: the opening of an eye. *Nimeṣa*: its closing. From this point of view, the universe's emergence is not an explosion of matter into pre-existing emptiness, but the dawning of a perception: consciousness opens onto itself, and the opening *is* the world. Likewise, the possible endings cosmologists describe (heat death, collapse, the cooling of the last star) are read here as figures of the eye's closing. In cosmology, the early universe belongs to deep time, reconstructed from evidence that reaches us now. In the Trika, however, *unmeṣa* and *nimeṣa* name more than the endpoints of time: they are phases of a pulse occurring as every moment. Creation did not happen; it is happening. Between a past expansion and a future dissolution, the world appears and withdraws beat by beat, arising fresh in each instant within the one consciousness. Cosmology's earliest boundary remains what it was; the contemplative question is what moves. The beginning is not behind the world; it is beneath it, in the present, as the present.

If creation is in the eye of the beholder, what then of the creator? A century before Kṣemarāja, the philosopher Utpaladeva had already drawn the consequence that concerns an exhibition of sculpture. In his *Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā* (*Verses on the Recognition of the Lord*, c. 900–950 CE), he reaches for an analogy for how the divine creates: like a yogin, an accomplished artist of consciousness, who manifests forms by will alone, without borrowing prior material.[10] If the divine creates just as an artist envisions, then the artist, envisioning, echoes at the human scale the founding act of the cosmos.[11] Creativity, on this account, is not a specialised talent distributed unevenly among individuals. It is the fundamental activity of reality itself (what existence is doing at every point, in every moment) and a human being, creating, participates in it like a wave swelling with the sea. The question 'what is creativity?' receives its most economical possible answer: creativity is what the real does. There is nothing else it does. Nor is the participation reserved for artists. Every act of perception is an *unmeṣa*, the world dawning in the opening of an eye; every withdrawal of attention, a *nimeṣa*. To see at all is already to be engaged in the manifestation process, which is why the tradition proposes that art, made in alignment with the principles of manifestation, does not add an experience to life but reveals the structure of experience as such.[12]

A world made of consciousness may sound like a world diminished to mere appearance through and through, and therefore, one might think, not quite real. The Trika draws the opposite conclusion. This text, and the exhibition it accompanies, turn upon that difference. If consciousness is the sole substance, appearance is not a lesser grade of being; it is being, in the act. Nothing hides behind the world's display, for there is no behind; nothing is lost by appearing, for appearing is what the real does. Every arising—a struck bell, warmth on skin, salt on the lip, jasmine at dusk, a passing thought, the whole of the sky—is the real arriving in person. Manifestation is not a veil over the real. Manifestation is the real, being generous.

2
SPANDA

The Trika has a name for the founding motion of manifestation. *Spanda*: vibration, pulse, throb. The word is glossed with philological care by the tradition itself. Kṣemarāja, commenting on the *Spandakārikā*'s opening stanza, derives *Spanda* from a verbal root meaning slight movement: *kiṃcit calana*, a subtle stir. He immediately sharpens the paradox: absolute consciousness is unmoving, since there is nowhere outside it to move to, and yet it is never without *Spanda*, never inert, displaying the universe within itself 'as a city in a mirror'.[13] So it is a tremor that never departs from itself, and everything departs from it. *Unmeṣa* and *nimeṣa*, the eye's opening and closing, are this tremor seen at cosmic scale; *spanda* is the pulse itself, the quiver of aliveness by which consciousness perpetually leans into form.

Stand still for a moment before this claim. Existence is in rhythm. To be is to vibrate. Nothing static can be experienced, because experience is grounded in the shimmer of self-luminous awareness, contracting and expanding, concealing and revealing. The *Spandakārikā* is a treatise that keeps pointing to the seams of experience where the pulse runs closest to the surface: the first tremor of anger or joy, before it hardens into emotion; the state of extremity when all strategies fail; the precise place from which a new thought springs while its predecessor subsides. That emergence-place, one stanza attests, is *unmeṣa* itself, 'whence another arises', and one should perceive it for oneself.[14] The tradition's word for the instant of aesthetic arrest is *camatkāra*, the wonder that seizes us before a form and briefly stops the commentary of the mind. In that stillness, the pulse can be caught in the act, and whoever catches it stands at the wellspring of worlds.[15]

In 2016 I gave this word a body. *Spanda*, commissioned by the Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority for Elizabeth Quay, rises nine storeys high on the riverfront of Perth, Australia, where the earth and water meet. It is a sequence of six nested arches, each the resonance of the one before, diminished towards, or issuing from, an open centre. The form is a standing vibration, read either as one arch radiating outwards in amplifying pulses or as a vastness condensing towards its origin—*unmeṣa* and *nimeṣa*, one motion seen from two sides. The monument offers a third reading: a map of selfhood, nested in layers, each one subtler and more interior than the last (the world, the body, the breath, the mind, the void) arranged around a centre that is not itself a layer.[16] The six arches bound five nested intervals, the outermost opening onto the world as the layer of things and belongings where identity first goes looking for itself. Whoever moves towards the centre, then, is walking the anatomy of their own selfhood, layer by layer inwards to an open centre. Awareness is not a ring among rings. It is the openness they all surround, the one element of the monument that cannot be made of anything, because it is what every layer is made of.

Materially speaking, the subtle delineation that constitutes the visible form of *Spanda* is built of carbon fibre—strands of woven carbon, the element of all organic bodies, holding its shape mid-air—finished in white, a visual emblem of the gathered spectrum. At its unveiling, the work was described as the largest freestanding carbon-fibre structure in the world, a technical fact with its own metaphysical rhyme: the most contemporary of materials was required to embody one of the oldest of truths.[17] And yet, examined closely, the space-age material is ancient. Carbon fibre is a textile—cloth woven from strands, laid into a mould and set. *Tantra*, the tradition embodied in the work, means before all else 'a loom', the stretching of threads;[18] and the Upaniṣads' oldest question about reality is a weaver's question: on what, asks Gārgī, are all the worlds woven, warp and weft?[19]

Ten years after its installation, *Spanda* returns at a scale of one to one hundred, in an edition of one hundred titled *Spanda 1:100*. The reduction extends the artwork's trajectory. Remember, *Spanda* is *kiṃcit calana*, the slightest motion. The monument withdraws here into a tremor small enough to stand on a table, and the edition disperses it (one pulse, one hundred crests) as a single vibration populates a medium. Divided one hundredfold, and multiplied one hundredfold, the two movements resolve to one: contraction and expansion performed through the work's own form and distribution. The throb of consciousness sows itself as a hundred simultaneous instances: the wheel of energies, in miniature, still turning.

3
ŪRMI

If *spanda* is the tremor at the origin, *ūrmi* is the tremor growing into a wave: vibration becoming form. As far back as the *Ṛgveda*, it is said that a honeyed wave (*ūrmi*) rises from the ocean—which ocean, the hymn does not explicitly say.[20] In the Trika that *ūrmi* becomes precise, even instrumental. Abhinavagupta, Kṣemarāja's teacher and the tradition's greatest exegete, writing in Kashmir around 1000 CE, defines *spanda* in his *Tantrāloka* as a surging or swelling of consciousness within itself (*svātmany ucchalanātmakaḥ*), a subtle motion that is no motion away, and then names it: *ūrmir eṣā vibodhābdheḥ*—'this is the wave of the ocean of consciousness', and without this wave, he adds, consciousness would not be consciousness at all.[21] In his commentary on the *Parātrīśikā*, the *tantra* of the Supreme Goddess, Abhinavagupta gathers the revealed scriptures' own names for this motion: *spanda*, he writes, is a surging-up *whose very nature is wonder* (*camatkārātmikā ucchalattā*), 'indicated in the *āgama*s by words such as *ūrmi* (the wave) and *matsyodarī* (the belly of the fish)'.[22] The belly of the fish: the living quiver of a body that is all one muscle of intention. Wave, quiver, wonder: the scriptures reach for the subtlest motions they know, each a name for the same swell. The swell of the real.[23]

An older verse, quoted by Kṣemarāja from a scripture whose name is lost, gives the wave her proper name: 'The Goddess is ever savouring, ever full, and ever radiant. This is the wave of the ocean of consciousness, the willing power of the Lord.'[24] The wave, that is, is Śakti herself, *icchā*, the will, the first leaning of the absolute towards expression. A wave is not something the ocean produces and releases, the way a factory manufactures an object; a wave is something the ocean does and never stops doing. It has a form (crest, slope, curl) that can be seen, named, even measured; and it has not, for one instant, a single drop of substance that is not ocean. Form and formlessness are not rivals in a wave. They are one fact, seen twice. So the world is essentially the waving of consciousness: distinct, describable, real as form, while remaining nothing but its ocean. The *Spandakārikā*'s commentators (Kallaṭa, Rājānaka Rāma, Bhagavadutpala, and Kṣemarāja) kept a whole lexicon for this one motion, gathered as synonyms of *spanda*: *sphurattā* (the shimmer), *sāra* (the essence), *bala* (the strength), *hṛdaya* (the heart), *ūrmi* (the wave).[25] Consciousness gleams, it insists, it loves, it rises. Many are the names of the one, abundant enough to fulfil them all. The pulse swells beneath every word.

Ūrmi, the central sculpture of this exhibition, is that thought carried into form at the scale of the human body. Measuring 2.4 metres, it is the height of a wave a swimmer might call serious. Self-standing as the swell that it names, the form is caught in the act of arriving. Its surface is nothing but curvature, its curvature nothing but motion held still. Like the *Spanda* it descends from, it is woven in carbon fibre—*tantra* twice over: the teaching and its weave. Unlike the monument, it meets the viewer levelly: one embodied wave before another, two crests of one ocean, briefly face to face.

At its highest point, the sculpture is barely a wave at all. Its ribbon rises to a near-vertical edge, the vibration so subtle that its amplitude fades into an almost pure line at the threshold of stillness. As the form descends, the swell amplifies, the oscillations widen, deepen, slow, gathering breath as they gather world, until at the floor the wave has lain fully down in broad horizontal coils resting on the ground. It streams downwards like a river descending from high country. *Flow soma flow*: so sings the ninth book of the *Ṛgveda* in its long liturgy to Soma Pavamāṇa, the luminous nectar pressed from heaven that purifies itself as it cascades.[26] It is this *soma* that runs through the yogic body as the lunar *amṛta*, dripping from the crown of the head, subtlest at its source and sweetening as it embodies.[27] *Ūrmi* is that celestial current poured into the terrestrial without a join, the statics of the form following its metaphysics. It stands only because it has descended into manifestation; the horizontality of its most pronounced pulsation is the structure's entire footing. The form endures in space because the descent is complete, and the same movement that lays the wave to rest on earth supports the summit into the sky. Heaven and Earth are not two storeys stacked, but one continuum, a single unbroken channel; the higher it reaches, the deeper the rest that holds it. Consciousness stands in the world by arriving in it entirely.

Beneath the form is a mathematics worth unfolding. Two curves make *Ūrmi*. One is the wave itself, the ribbon's rise and fall. The other governs how much the wave swells as it descends (a tremor at the summit, broad coils at the floor) and the same curve trims the sculpture's outline. That second curve is the exponential, the curve of compound growth, in which every increase is proportional to what is already there. Wave and exponential look nothing alike. Yet they are one function seen from two sides.

Picture a point moving on a page. Told to grow, it travels outwards along a line, faster the further it gets. That is the exponential. Told to turn, it moves in a circle, round and round, never nearer, never further; and watched edge-on, from the side, its rising and falling is the sine wave. The two instructions differ only in direction. Mathematicians write this as Euler's formula, $e^{i\theta} = \cos\theta + i\sin\theta$, where i, the square root of minus one, is the turning number: to multiply by it is to turn a quarter-circle.[28] The wave is the exponential run sideways. The circle, closed on itself, never growing, never decaying, is eternity's mathematics. Half a turn of it yields the formula's celebrated special case, $e^{i\pi} + 1 = 0$, often called the most beautiful equation in mathematics, and the reader need not follow the algebra to feel that we are near the heart of things. Growth outwards is time's mathematics: intensification and accumulation along the vector of becoming. And the exponential is the one curve whose rate of change is exactly itself. It generates itself by referring to itself: *svātantrya*, the innate freedom of the absolute, written in calculus.[29]

The *Bhagavad Gītā* gives this function a divine speaker, in a rendering current in this lineage's oral teaching: 'Curving back within myself,' says Kṛṣṇa, 'I create again and again.'[30] Now give the point both instructions at once, turn and grow together, and it traces a spiral that widens with every revolution: the logarithmic spiral, the circle of eternity wound onto the arrow of arrival.[31] That is *Ūrmi*'s curve, a wave whose swelling compounds as it descends. A wave that grows without ceasing to be itself: this is the motion the Trika calls manifestation, and it is the motion *Ūrmi* holds still—the swell in the act of becoming, eternity leaning into time, rising by changing, changed and yet still the same.

Yet the curve of *Ūrmi* was never generated from the equation; it was drawn by hand. The exponential was held in the mind while the hand sought the line. Whatever aliveness the form has lives in that distance. A plotted curve is exact, and inert; a drawn curve quivers, and the quiver is the pulse. Nor is the hand's deviation a concession. An ideal can enter the world only through a body, and the slight departures of the drawn line from the equation are the very motion the equation describes—*kiṃcit calana*, the subtle stir, now at the scale of a wrist. The maker does not execute the ideal; he approximates it, and the approximation is the participation: a wave, drawing the wave.

The drawn curve keeps an ancient discipline. In the account of Indian image-making that Coomaraswamy assembled from the prescriptive texts, the imager does not portray what he observes. He withdraws his senses, quiets the mind, and draws the form to himself from 'the immanent space in the heart', the place, the texts say, where seer and seen concord. He holds it there until self-identification is complete, and that inwardly known form, not any outward model, is what the hand then carries into the material. Even for drawing a horse from life: 'having concentrated, he should set to work.'[32] Whatever the history of those texts, the practice is living: it is how the lineage passed down to me still teaches a form to be found. The *śilpin*'s rule and the drawn line say one thing between them: the form is met within and carried out.

4
VASTU, REVA, VĀSTU

What the Trika articulates as vision, the Śilpa tradition transmits as artistic method. Both lineages stream into the exhibition by the grace of my teachers, and I bring them together here in complementarity: one being a science of recognition, the other a technology of manifestation. The *śilpin* (the traditional sculptor-architect) does more than depict the real; he participates in its swelling, following codified procedures by which a form is grown the way the world comes into being. Ananda Coomaraswamy, the great interpreter of Indian art to the modern West, put the resulting conception of the artist plainly: 'The craftsman is not an individual expressing individual whims, but a part of the universe, giving expression to ideals of eternal beauty and unchanging laws'; his work is 'a sacred mystery, a sacrament, rather than a secular trade'.[33]

At the fountainhead of this tradition stands Mayan (Maya the *ṛṣi*), the artist-sage to whom the Śilpa texts ascribe their science. In the twentieth century, his lineage had a living voice: my guru's guru, Vaidyanātha Gaṇapati Sthapati (1927–2011), hereditary temple architect of the Viśvakarmā community, builder of the forty-metre Thiruvalluvar monument at Kanyakumari. Sthapati spent his last decades expounding the theory hidden inside his family's practice.[34] Its kernel is a *sūtra* from the *śilpin*'s oral tradition, two words folded around a third: *vasturevavāstu*, meaning '*vastu* becomes *vāstu*'.[35] Literally, *vastur eva vāstu* says '*vastu* itself is *vāstu*'; the rendering 'becomes' makes motion audible within that identity. *Vastu*, with the short *a*, is unmanifest substance, the luminous, formless plenum, consciousness as pure potential. *Vāstu*, with the long *ā*, is the same substance embodied: matter, site, dwelling, form. On this reading, the *sūtra* says the second is nothing but the first, transformed. Sthapati liked to write it beside Einstein's equation, energy and matter as two states of one reality.[36] Ordinary Sanskrit language already knows this: in the dictionary, *vastu* is at once 'the real' (the really existing, as against *avastu*, the unreal) and the everyday word for a thing: object, article, goods, property.[37] A single noun spans the unmanifest plenum and its contents. The word *vastu* contains *vasturevavāstu* inside itself—the real, become things, without ceasing to be one word.

Even the phonetics of *vasturevavāstu* carry the teaching: in the mystical linguistics of the Trika, the short *a* is *anuttara*, the primal unstruck sound identified with Śiva, and the long *ā* its expansion into manifestation, identified with Śakti; so the whole cosmogony of the *sūtra* is already accomplished in the lengthening of a single vowel.[38] Nor does the upsurge stop at '*ā*'. In the Trika's phonematic cosmogony, the whole sequence of vowels is the Goddess's first swell, each vowel a phase of one pulse: *a*, the unsurpassable; *ā*, its bliss; *i*, the first leaning of will; *u*, the opening-out of knowing. Its subsiding is the sixth vowel, *ū*, which the *Tantrasāra* names *ūrmi*: the wave, itself a letter, the phase where the swell of knowing comes to rest and, in resting, launches the power of action.[39] Then the pulse resumes through the intensifying phases of action to the *bindu ṃ*, the point of gathered power, and the *visarga ḥ*, the breath of emission that releases the world.[40] The sequence is sealed with a signature: run the alphabet[41] from its first letter to its last (from *a* to *ha*) and add the *bindu*, and the result is *ahaṃ*: 'I'. Abhinavagupta says it with the plainness of revelation: beginning with *a*, ending in the point—*ahaṃ*—'this indeed is the Goddess, creation'.[42] The entire alphabet (that is, the entire manifest world spelt in its seed-sounds) opens out from the first vowel and closes back into the single word for the Self. The wave of speech, completed, is a circle, and the circle's name is I.

The Śilpa science diagrams this becoming geometrically: what the Trika unfolds as differentiated sound, it sets out as differentiated measure—for vibration is extension in space and time, and extension, measured, is a grid. Mayan's *Aintiram*, the treatise whose name means 'the fivefold power', unfolds the process in five phases: *amiḻtal*, to sink; *imiḻtal*, to resound as the sea resounds;

kumiḻtal, to bubble up and gather round; *umiḻtal*, to pour forth; *tamiḻtal*, to settle into definite quality.[43] Read in order, the five verbs trace the anatomy of a wave: the drawing-down of the trough; the sounding surge; the gathering of the crest; the release; the form left standing. Before it is a geometry, then, *vasturevavāstu* is a wave: the real becomes things by swelling, and everything the Śilpa science builds, it builds of that swell.

How does a wave become a grid? By crossing. Sthapati writes: 'the primal pattern of wave is a square formed by four arms—as square waves at subtle level and circular waves at gross level. The former moves in concentric square belts and the latter in circular belts'.[44] The subtle universe is square-waved, the gross universe round-waved, and a single cycle of the square wave is drawn in five strokes: down into the trough, across, up through twice the measure, across, and down again: the *aintiram* in miniature, five acts in every cycle. Where such oscillations cross, structure precipitates. The tradition marks the moment with humanity's oldest diagram of turning, the *svastika* (four bent arms that I read as two square waves crossing at right angles) and the yield of the crossings is the grid.[45]

That yield is the 8 × 8 grid of sixty-four squares called the *maṇḍūkapada*, the Leaping Pattern: consciousness in its subtle state—patterned, poised, not yet poured. As manifestation proceeds, the grid turns in on itself in what Sthapati called 'self-spin', and the square begins to transfigure: first into the octagon, then into the circle, while the grid's density grows from eight to nine to arrive at the 9 × 9 field of eighty-one squares, the *paramasāyikapada*, the Resting Pattern, consciousness 'completely at rest', fully materialised.[46] It is a single process of transformation that can be understood in three phases that carry the primordial qualities of Indian cosmology: *sattva*, *rajas*, *tamas*; luminous being, kinetic energy, consolidated rest; square, octagon, circle.[47] Classical treatises preserve the two grids as the master plans of sacred architecture: the *Bṛhat Saṃhitā*, in the sixth century, prescribes the sixty-four-square plan for temples and the eighty-one-square plan for dwellings, and the *Mayamata* catalogues both among its thirty-two schemes for founding a building on the order of the cosmos.[48] The living oral tradition supplies a reason that the texts themselves do not state: the temple is raised on the subtle grid because its work is to align those who enter with the source; the domestic dwelling on the gross grid, because its work is a life lived well among the manifest. Every temple raised on these grids is, in the tradition's own understanding, a living moment of the manifestation process frozen in time, as time—the world's becoming, arrested in stone at the point of its equilibrium.

Between the two grids runs a secret correspondence. Draw the 8 × 8 and count not its rooms but its crossing-points: nine lines each way yield eighty-one. Draw the 9 × 9 and count its interior crossings: sixty-four. Each grid carries the other latently (rooms of one, points of the other) so that *vasturevavāstu* is not only a sequence but a reciprocity: nothing arrives that was not prefigured; nothing is prefigured that does not arrive. And the step from eight to nine is audible. Read as a ratio of frequencies, 9:8 is the whole tone, the precise interval by which every scale walks; the two grids entire stand in the ratio 81:64—two whole tones, the bright major third of ancient tuning. The subtle world and the manifest world, counted room against room, sound a third apart. [49]

In *Trika Maṇḍala Prakāśa* I have drawn this becoming as a sequence of 128 frames forming a kineograph. It is designed to be flipped by hand, so that the reader witnesses creation unfold in time as well as space, and can run the pages backwards to watch the world withdraw. Its reversibility is doctrinal as well as formal: the sequence begins just after *anākhyā*, the nameless, which no frame can show, and run in reverse it returns there. In bringing the Śilpa sequence into conversation with the Trika's Krama current, I read the reverse movement through the lens of the Goddess Kālasaṃkarṣiṇī, she who draws time back into herself, to Anākhyā.[50] Three copper wall-works in this exhibition are extracted from that sequence: not three objects but three instants of one continuous transmutation, with a fourth that binds their harmonies. Each plate is one *hasta* square, the *śilpin*'s fundamental dimension. The three plates are, in the plainest sense, rulers: one *hasta* each, divided by eight, by nine, and by the octagon that turns one into the other. Three scales of a single measure.[51] And measure, here, is no mere convention. In *māyā* is the root *mā*, to measure: the world-making power of the Divine is the power of measuring-forth, the infinite consenting to proportion—and Mayan, the *śilpi*s say, is the knower of measure, the one who received its science. To make in true measure is therefore to participate in manifestation itself.[52]

The first plate, *Vastu*, is the 8 × 8 square: the Leaping Pattern, the world before it worlds, in subtle state. The second, *Reva*, is the octagon: the turning, neither square nor circle, manifestation mid-phrase. Its name is cut against the grammar, and deliberately. Read strictly, the *sūtra*'s middle word is *eva*, and the *r* is no word at all. It belongs to neither noun nor to any rule of sandhi, which would join them silently as *vastv eva*. The lineage sounds it anyway—*vastureva*—as though *vastu* released a visarga, the breath of emission met above, and the breath hardened into a consonant at the instant it met what follows. The letter exists only at the joining. The plate named by the transition: a name that belongs wholly to neither side and sounds only in the passage. The third, *Vāstu*, is the 9 × 9 circle: the Resting Pattern, the world arrived. The fourth, titled *Akrama*, meaning 'without sequence', translates its three companions into another register altogether: time. Every closed figure, traced at a steady pace, sings. Set a point travelling its outline and plot its height as it goes, and the shape unrolls into a wave, which I consider its signature in time. The circle's signature is the sine curve, perfectly smooth, the pure tone. The octagon's is a faceted wave of eight straight strokes, kinked at each corner (the sine, as it were, spelt out in eight decisive acts). The square yields a plateaued wave whose high and low levels are joined by straight crossings. *Akrama* sharpens this into the square wave proper, the ideal in which the crossings become instantaneous.[53] One full cycle stands in the copper: five strokes, the *aintiram* entire. *Akrama* superimposes the three signatures (square wave, octagonal wave, sine curve) in a single contemplation: *vasturevavāstu* heard rather than seen, its three geometries speaking at once as three registers of one voice—the sequence told not as a melody but as a chord.[54] This is the work's quiet disclosure: let the stages of creation sound together, and what stands forth is *ūrmi*. Once a shape has unrolled into its wave before your eyes, every form you meet has a voice, and looking becomes a kind of listening. Each plate is polished to a mirror, so that whoever stands before the diagram of manifestation stands inside it: the grid of the world's arising, a face moving behind its lines—your own.

Facing them stand three solid copper forms, each 3 × 3 × 3 *aṅgula*s (one eighth of the *hasta*, the measure of a single square of the 8 × 8 grid): a perfect cube, a rhombicuboctahedron, a perfect sphere. They are the wall-works' geometry transposed into three dimensions: the cube the square's solidity, the sphere the circle's, and between them the rhombicuboctahedron, the intermediate solid whose twenty-six faces hold squares and triangles in equilibrium, the octagon's moment of turning given mass. In the Śilpa teaching, the subtle is cubic, and the gross spherical, and they are equal in measure—the square that becomes the circle loses nothing in becoming.[55] Carved identical in dimension and material, the three solids state this conservation in copper: three shapes, one substance, one measure. Their titles are the plates' three names again, in capitals: *VASTU, REVA, VĀSTU*. It is the Big Bang held in the hand, if the Big Bang is rightly understood; for in this tradition the genesis of the world is not an event fourteen billion years behind us but the standing act of every moment, the permanent pulse of the present. An eye that moves from cube to sphere and back tracks cosmogony and resorption in a glance.

The tradition itself has carved this sequence for millennia, hidden inside the most widespread sacred object in Asia. The *śiva-liṅga*, standing in the womb-chamber of every temple so founded, is normally seen only as a rounded shaft; but the Śilpa texts prescribe, and close inspection confirms, that its form transforms as it rises—square in section below the ground, octagonal where the *yoni* holds it, circular where it emerges into view. Square, octagon, circle: the entire manifestation process, *vastu* becoming *vāstu*, is encoded in the one monument, with only its final phase (the world as it appears) showing above the surface. The three copper solids are, in effect, the *liṅga*'s esoteric anatomy spelt out and laid side by side in the light.

Why copper? Within this lineage, all materials are alive with qualities, and copper is treated as one of the worthiest substances for sacred use. *Pañcaloha*, the *śilpin*'s five-metal alloy for icon casting, is typically composed mostly of copper: roughly four parts in five (although formulations vary).[56] *Yantra*s, the geometrical instruments of tantric worship, close cousins of the *maṇḍala*s, are customarily engraved in copper when they are made to last.[57] And when South Asian rulers wished grants of land to outlive them, many were inscribed on plates of copper, the *tāmraśāsana*, the deed that endures when paper and palm-leaf perish.[58] Copper is the tradition's metal of transmission: what must be carried across (sanctity, geometry, law) is committed to copper.

The modern world, knowing nothing of the *āgama*s, arrived at the same verdict in its own vocabulary. Among pure metals at room temperature, copper conducts electricity second only to silver, and heat with the same distinction; it is, in the literal sense, the world's standard of conduction. Since 1913, the conductivity of every wire on earth has been expressed as a percentage of annealed copper, which sits at the definitional hundred.[59] Copper is to conduction what the *hasta* is to the temple: the measure itself. The whole circulatory system of contemporary life runs through it: water through copper pipes, power through copper cables, the voice through a century of copper telephone lines, computation through the copper traces of every circuit board. Notice what copper carries. The mains voltage in the walls of our buildings oscillates at fifty cycles each second in a waveform designed to approximate the sine, the circle's signature; digital clock signals switch between high and low levels in square-like pulses, millions of times faster, along copper traces. The two waves overlaid in *Akrama* are therefore not antiquarian diagrams. They are two of the modern world's working rhythms—the analogue sine of power and the digital pulse of computation—both passing through copper. Somewhere behind the gallery wall, a copper wire is carrying the first; inside the device in your pocket, copper traces carry the second. *Akrama* holds still what the room is already singing.

Why copper conducts is itself a small cosmogram. In the metal's lattice, the outermost electrons belong to no atom in particular: a strict grid of ions stands bathed in a single delocalised sea of shared charge, and it is because the sea belongs to all and to none that current flows. A solid whose structure is a *maṇḍala* and whose inner life is an ocean has been in your hands all your life. Every copper coin, every kettle, is a grid of stillness bathed in a moving sea. This is what it means to say the medium is a *medium*: that which stands between and lets pass.

5
RECOGNITION

Abhinavagupta (heir through one intermediary to Utpaladeva's school, and the classical world's most searching theorist of aesthetic experience) asked, in his commentary on the ancient treatise on theatre, what actually occurs in a person before a work of art. His answer is striking: nothing is added. Aesthetic experience is perception *without obstacles—nirvighnā*.[60] He lists the obstacles with a clinician's care: disbelief in what is presented; imprisonment in one's own time and place, or in someone else's; being at the mercy of one's own pleasures and pains, with their fears of loss and hungers for repetition; dull means of perception; doubt.[61] Everything art is—its conventions, its frames, its refusal of every other use—exists, in his analysis, to remove those obstacles. They fall, and what remains is not a new experience added to life. What remains is consciousness, at rest in its own savour. The work of art is an instrument of subtraction. It takes away what stands between.

The tradition explains itself with a love story. A woman has fallen in love with a man she has never seen. He lives across the water; messengers have carried his words to her until his qualities are dearer to her than her own. Then, at a great festival, in the crowd, he stands

right beside her. She does not know it is him. He is a face among faces. Unrecognised, he leaves her heart quiet. Then someone says: this is he. Nothing about him has changed. Everything has. And her heart consents. This is recognition as Utpaladeva teaches it: a new cognition—*this is that*—which creates no new object. Nothing is added to the man, or to her, or to the day. What falls is a distance that was never made of space. The Sanskrit word is *pratyabhijñā*, a knowing-again that meets its object face to face.[62] So, says Utpaladeva, the Self of all stands nearer than near, unregarded, giving no joy; and it is for the sake of that joy that recognition is taught.[63] His verses contain arguments, inferences, and a whole philosophy of proofs. Yet a proof cannot produce what was never missing. The beloved was already at the festival. The verses are the voice in the crowd: this is he.

So let the claim be stated at its true size. A work of art built on the grammar of manifestation can prepare, invite, intensify. It cannot compel. Recognition, forced, would not be recognition; the woman at the festival cannot be ordered to know her beloved. She can only be stood beside him. Nor does a viewer need one word of Trika or Śilpa teaching for these works to work: the curve is a curve, the copper is copper, and scale, surface, and weight do what they have always done to a body in a room. If something more happens—if the room goes quiet as rooms sometimes do—the tradition has a name for it. The viewer does not need the name. The name is for later.

What, then, is art for? Every age has answered out of its own relation to the image. An age that trusted images asked art to perfect them; an age that distrusted them asked art to break them; an age that mourns the real keeps vigil for it where the image fails. There is an older answer, a more joyful one—not new but recovered; held, for as long as either can remember, in the two traditions woven into these works. Art is for recognition. The *śilpin*'s entire science is a preparation for that meeting: build the form on the grammar of manifestation, and the beholder, meeting it, meets the schema of their own arising. The wave rises, in the end, in order to be known; consciousness longs to experience its own beauty, and manifestation is that longing granted: 'for the sake of beholding', as the Veda says.[64] So the purpose of art, before art was asked to represent the world, or express the artist, or critique the image, was this: to align the made thing with the making of things, so that in its presence the current of creation becomes perceptible to itself, so that the harmonious qualities of source are carried, consciously, into the world of forms.

We asked, at the start, how something came from nothing. The wave's answer is that it never did: there was never nothing, only the ocean, swelling, unregarded. What the work adds, when it works, is no thing at all—only the voice in the crowd: this is he.

Stand before the wave, then, as the wave.

NOTES

1. *Aintiram*, attrib. Mayan, ed. V. Ganapati Sthapati (Directorate of Technical Education, Government of Tamil Nadu, 1986) v. 187; *Mayan's Aintiram*, trans. S. P. Sabharathnam (Vāstu Vedic Research Foundation, 1997) p. 111. This verse more literally reads: 'Of light and of sound, the subtlety of wave upon wave. The elaborate treatise explains this movement of sound, its resonance.' Three of my renderings in the epigraph are interpretive. *Virinūl*, an attested compound meaning 'elaborate treatise' (in older usage, meaning the Āgamas themselves), is here returned to its elements—*viri*, to unfold, and *nūl*, thread. The Tamil word for a treatise, like the Sanskrit *sūtra*, is literally 'a thread'. 'Inner' draws on the register of *uḷḷōcai*, 'the sound from within'. *Ōcai*, whose senses run from the rhythm of verse to the subtle sound-element (*śabda-tanmātra*) from which space itself evolves, is here rendered 'inner resonance' as the vibration upstream of both light and sound. Sabharathnam reads *virinūl* as the Vāstu treatises and *ōcai* as 'the inarticulated sound'; his paraphrase glosses the movement of sound as 'motion without displacement' (vibration in place). The reduplication *alai alai*, 'wave upon wave', is enacted in my English translation by repetition.

2. The Planck satellite's final analysis gives the age of the universe as 13.80 billion years within the standard cosmological model: Planck Collaboration, 'Planck 2018 Results. VI. Cosmological Parameters', *Astronomy & Astrophysics*, 641 (2020) A6 <doi.org/10.1051/0004-6361/201833910>. The size comparison is model-dependent: it belongs to the standard inflationary account, in which the region destined to become the observable universe begins, in Guth's words, 'incredibly small, perhaps as small as 10^{-24} cm, a hundred billion times smaller than a proton': Alan H. Guth, 'Was Cosmic Inflation the "Bang" of the Big Bang?', *Beam Line*, 27.3 (1997) p. 14–21 (p. 18) <slac.stanford.edu/pubs/beamline/pdf/97iii.pdf> [accessed 2026]. NASA's public summary of the WMAP results uses the scale of the text: the universe 'grew from a subatomic size to a golf-ball size almost instantaneously': 'Imagine the Universe News', NASA, 2006-03-20 <imagine.gsfc.nasa.gov/news/20mar06.html> [accessed 2026].

3. Steven Weinberg, *The First Three Minutes: A Modern View of the Origin of the Universe* (Basic Books, 1977) p. 5.

4. P. J. E. Peebles, interview with Agence France-Presse, 2019-11-14 <phys.org/news/2019-11-cosmologist-lonely-big-theory.html> [accessed 2026]. See also P. J. E. Peebles, *Principles of Physical Cosmology* (Princeton University Press, 1993).

5. 'Radiation pressure from the photons resists the gravitational compression of the fluid into potential wells and sets up acoustic oscillations in the fluid': Wayne Hu, 'CMB Introduction' <background.uchicago.edu/~whu/physics/acoustic.html> [accessed 2026]; for the full treatment, Wayne Hu and Scott Dodelson, 'Cosmic Microwave Background Anisotropies', *Annual Review of Astronomy and Astrophysics*, 40 (2002) p. 171–216 <doi.org/10.1146/annurev.astro.40.060401.093926>. The amplitude of the fluctuations is roughly one part in 100,000.

6. Daniel J. Eisenstein and others, 'Detection of the Baryon Acoustic Peak in the Large-Scale Correlation Function of SDSS Luminous Red Galaxies', *Astrophysical Journal*, 633.2 (2005) p. 560–574 <doi.org/10.1086/466512>. The baryon acoustic imprint is a statistical feature of large-scale clustering; it shaped where galaxies preferentially formed, not the later history of any individual body.

7. The map of the microwave sky is decomposed into spherical harmonics—the waves proper to a sphere—and summarised as an angular power spectrum; 'on small sections of the sky … the spherical harmonic analysis becomes ordinary Fourier analysis in two dimensions': Hu and Dodelson, p. 174. In the standard inflationary account, the fluctuations themselves originate as quantum fluctuations stretched to cosmic scale: Alan H. Guth, 'Inflationary Universe: A Possible Solution to the Horizon and Flatness Problems', *Physical Review D*, 23.2 (1981) p. 347–356 <doi.org/10.1103/PhysRevD.23.347>.

8. Kṣemarāja, *Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya*, *sūtras* 1 and 2, ed. Jagadīsha Chandra Chatterji in 'Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies' no. 3 (Research Department of Jammu & Kashmir State, 1911), digitised by Muktabodha <muktabodha.org>, p. 2: *citiḥ svatantrā viśvasiddhihetuḥ*; p. 5: *svecchayā svabhittau viśvam unmīlayati*. The word for 'screen', *bhitti*, is literally a wall—consciousness paints the world on itself.

9. *Spandakārikā* I.1, in *Spandakārikāḥ* with the *Nirṇaya* of Kṣemarāja, ed. Madhusūdan Kaul Śāstrī in 'Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies' no. 42 (Research Department of Jammu & Kashmir State, 1925), digitised by Muktabodha <muktabodha.org>, p. 3: *yasyonmeṣanimeṣābhyāṃ jagataḥ pralayodayau | taṃ śakticakravibhavaprabhavaṃ śaṃkaraṃ stumaḥ*. The stanzas are attributed by the tradition to Vasugupta (by some, to his pupil Kallaṭa).

10. Utpaladeva, *Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā* I.5.7: 'the Lord, whose nature is consciousness, manifests all objects like a yogin, by will alone, without external material cause (*nirupādānam*)'; see *The Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā of Utpaladeva with the Author's Vṛtti*, ed. and trans. Raffaele Torella (IsMEO, 1994) p. 116.

11. The claim is the tradition's own. *Sarvaṃ sarvātmakam*, 'everything is of the nature of everythingness', is a maxim quoted throughout Abhinavagupta's *Tantrāloka* and Jayaratha's commentary; and the Upaniṣads say of the Self: *aṇor aṇīyān mahato mahīyān*, 'smaller than the smallest, greater than the greatest' (*Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 2.20), which V. Ganapati Sthapati summarises simply as 'Macro = Micro'.

12. 'Its ultimate purpose is to align the creative activity of the individual with universal creation, such that the qualities of the infinite, unbounded source of life are consciously brought into the world through art for the benefit of all': Christian de Vietri, *Trika Maṇḍala Prakāśa* (The Magnetic Citadel Press, 2024) p. 44.

13. Kṣemarāja, *Spandanirṇaya* on *Spandakārikā* I.1, KSTS 42, p. 3: *spanda* is so named from the root-sense of 'slight movement' (*kiṃcit calattā*); the Lord is 'never without *spanda*' (*na tv aspandaḥ*), displaying the universe on the screen of his own nature 'like a city in a mirror' (*darpaṇanagaravat svabhittau*).

14. *Spandakārikā* III.9, KSTS 42, p. 62; cf. I.9 and I.21–22, with Kṣemarāja's *Spandanirṇaya*.

15. *Camatkāra* receives its aesthetic definition from Abhinavagupta: the act of the tasting subject, 'immersed in the vibration (*spanda*) of a marvellous enjoyment'—*Abhinavabhāratī* on *Nāṭyaśāstra* 6, trans. in Raniero Gnoli, *The Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta* (Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1968) 2nd edn. / p. 59–60. On *camatkāra* and the aesthetics of the pulse in the Spanda school, see Mark S. G. Dyczkowski, *The Doctrine of Vibration: An Analysis of the Doctrines and Practices of Kashmir Shaivism* (State University of New York Press, 1987) p. 147–149.

16. The map of selfhood is Utpaladeva's. He defines *samāveśa*—immersion into one's own divine nature—as knowing the conscious Self as the one knower and agent, with the layers, from the void down to the body, as its garments: *Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā* III.2.11–12, *mukhyatvaṃ kartṛtāyāś ca bodhasya ca cidātmanaḥ | śūnyādau tadguṇe jñānaṃ tatsamāveśalakṣaṇam*—'the primacy of the conscious Self in knowing and in agency, with the Void and the rest standing as its attributes: this is the mark of *samāveśa*, immersion'. 'Mind' in the ladder renders the tradition's heart-mind (*citta*). Abhinavagupta's *Vimarśinī* (*The Īśvarapratyabhijñā of Utpaladeva with the Vimarśinī by Abhinavagupta*, ed. Madhusūdan Kaul Śāstrī in 'Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies' no. 22, 33 (Research Department of Jammu & Kashmir State, 1918–1921), digitised by Muktabodha <muktabodha.org>) fixes the span of 'the Void and the rest': *śūnyāder dehaparyantasya*, 'from the Void down to the body'. The verses immediately following (III.2.13–15) place deep sleep in the void itself: when 'I'-ness rests in the *śūnya*, 'in which *buddhi* and the rest are absent', that state 'is called deep sleep, resembling the dissolution of the world' (*sauṣuptaṃ pralayopamam*). Kṣemarāja presents the same ladder in his commentary on the *Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya*, KSTS 3, p. 31: consciousness veils itself in deep sleep and in the phases of body, breath and the subtle body (*deha-prāṇa-puryaṣṭaka-kalābhiḥ*). On the layered self and on the semantics of *samāveśa*—at once to enter, to be entered and to merge—see Christopher D. Wallis, *Tantra Illuminated: The Philosophy, History, and Practice of a Timeless Tradition* (Mattamayura Press, 2013) 2nd edn. / p. 92–101, and his 'To Enter, to be entered, to merge: The Role of Religious Experience in the Traditions of Tantric Shaivism' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2014).

17. *Spanda* (2016), carbon fibre, 29 m; commissioned by the Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority for Elizabeth Quay, Perth, Australia. For the description at its unveiling, see 'Spanda', DevelopmentWA <developmentwa.com.au/projects/redevelopment/elizabeth-quay/spanda> [accessed 2026].

18. *Tantra*, from the root *tan*, 'to stretch, extend': 'a loom', 'the warp'—thence system, doctrine, treatise. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, s.v. '*tantra*'.

19. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.6 (Gārgī's questioning of Yājñavalkya: *otaṃ ca protaṃ ca*, 'woven, warp and weft'); Sanskrit text digitised by GRETIL <gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de> [accessed 2026]; cf. *The Early Upaniṣads*, ed. and trans. Patrick Olivelle (Oxford University Press, 1998).

20. *Ṛgveda* 4.58.1: 'from the ocean the honeyed wave has risen' (*samudrād ūrmir madhumāṁ ud ārat*); digitised by GRETIL <gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de> [accessed 2026].

21. Abhinavagupta, *The Tantrāloka of Abhinava Gupta with Commentary by Rājānaka Jayaratha*, ed. Mukund Rām Śāstrī and Madhusūdan Kaul Śāstrī in 'Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies' no. 23, 28, 30, 36, 35, 29, 41, 47, 59, 52, 57, 58 (Research Department of Jammu & Kashmir State, 1918–1938), digitised by Muktabodha <muktabodha.org>; 4.183b–184 (KSTS 30): *spandaḥ sa kathyate śāstre svātmany ucchalanātmakaḥ … ūrmir eṣā vibodhābdher na saṃvid anayā vinā*. Jayaratha's commentary glosses: *spanda* is so called 'because it follows the form of an upsurge consisting of subtle motion' (*kiṃciccalanātmakocchalattārūpānugamāt*).

22. Abhinavagupta, *Parātrīśikāvivaraṇa*, ed. Mukund Rām Śāstrī in 'Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies' no. 18 (Research Department of Jammu & Kashmir State, 1918), digitised by Muktabodha <muktabodha.org>, p. 207–208: *svarūpa eva kramādiparihāreṇa camatkārātmikā ucchalattā ūrmir iti matsyodarīti prabhṛti śabdair āgameṣu nidarśitaḥ spanda ity ucyate—kiṃciccalanātmakatvāt*.

23. The title of this text enters into quiet conversation with Hal Foster's *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (MIT Press, 1996), and names another motion. 'The swell of the real' renders *ūrmi* as the wave of the ocean of consciousness, whose nature is *ucchalana*—a swelling up, a leaping forth, of consciousness within itself. Foster diagnosed a turn in the art of his decade 'from reality as an effect of representation to the real as a thing of trauma' (p. 146): a real, after Lacan, that is encountered only as missed—'the real cannot be represented; it can only be repeated' (p. 132; cf. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (Hogarth Press, 1977) p. 49–55). What returns must first have gone unmet, and comes back wearing the face of catastrophe; what swells was never elsewhere—it is the field of appearances, cresting. Such is the distance between an art of symptom and an art of recognition.

24. Anonymous *āgama* quoted in Kṣemarāja, *Spandanirṇaya* on I.1, KSTS 42, p. 4: *lelihānā sadā devī sadā pūrṇā ca bhāsate | ūrmir eṣā vibodhābdheḥ śaktir icchātmikā prabhoḥ*.

25. The synonyms of *spanda* gathered in the Spanda literature include *sphurattā*, *sāra*, *bala*, *hṛdaya* and *ūrmi*: see Mark S. G. Dyczkowski, *The Stanzas on Vibration: The Spandakārikā with Four Commentaries* (State University of New York Press, 1992) introduction.

26. *Ṛgveda*, *maṇḍala* 9, the Soma Pavamāna hymns. Pavamāna is the middle-voice present participle of √pū, 'to purify': the one purifying himself. The epithet names the self-clarifying flow, e.g. 9.1.1, 'In sweetest and most gladdening stream / flow pure, O Soma, on thy way': *The Hymns of the Rigveda*, trans. Ralph T. H. Griffith (E. J. Lazarus, 1896–1897) 2nd edn. / vol. 2 / p. 269.

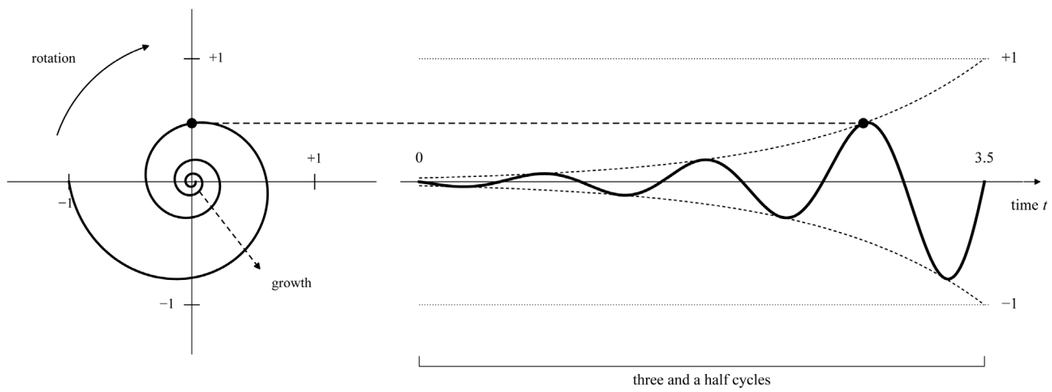
27. *Mālinīvijayottaratantra* 21.2–5, trans. James Mallinson, in *The Khecarīvidyā of Ādinātha: A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation of an Early Text of Haṭhayoga* (Routledge, 2007) p. 22: the yogin is to 'visualise Parā in her own form pouring forth *amṛta* in the sixteen-spoked wheel in the void, whose hub is formed by the moon', and then 'the white heavenly *amṛta*, flowing from the orb of the moon'; what he first tastes is 'slightly salty' and 'smells of iron', and he practises 'until [the liquid] becomes sweet-tasting'. *Soma*, the Vedic stream, is in Sanskrit the moon's own name; the descent from Ṛgvedic *soma* to lunar *amṛta* follows the word.

28. Leonhard Euler, *Introductio in analysin infinitorum* (Marcum-Michaelem Bousquet, 1748) vol. 1 / §138.

29. In the Trika, *svātantrya* is the absolute's self-dependence in acting: consciousness creates out of itself, resting on nothing external—no prior material, no outside cause. In a similar way, the exponential is the unique function (up to a constant multiple) that is its own derivative. A derivative is a curve's rate of change—its 'becoming'. For every other function, the law governing its change is something other than the function itself: the sine's rate of change is the cosine; a parabola's is a straight line. For e^x alone, the law of its becoming *is* itself: at every point, how fast it grows is exactly what it already is. Nothing outside the function drives it; its future is generated wholly out of its present. In the language of the differential equation, $y' = y$—the change of y depends on y and on nothing else.

30. *Bhagavad Gītā* 9.8: *prakṛtiṃ svām avaṣṭabhya visṛjāmi punaḥ punaḥ | bhūtagrāmam imaṃ kṛtsnam avaśaṃ prakṛter vaśāt*—more literally, 'resting upon my own nature, I send forth again and again this entire host of beings'. The rendering quoted in the text, current in the oral tradition, condenses the verse's reflexive turn—*avaṣṭabhya*, 'leaning back upon'—into 'curving back'. In the Kashmiri recension, which carries Rājānaka Rāmakaṇṭha's *Sarvatobhadra* commentary, the verse is numbered 9.9: ed. Madhusūdan Kaul Śāstrī in 'Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies' no. 64 (Research Department of Jammu & Kashmir State, 1943) p. 202. Rāmakaṇṭha glosses *avaṣṭabhya* as *avalambya*: Kṛṣṇa creates resting upon his own nature and 'on no other cause whatsoever' (*na anyat kiñcit kāraṇāntaram*).

31. On *e*, the self-derivative property and the logarithmic spiral, see Eli Maor, *e: The Story of a Number* (Princeton University Press, 1994) ch. 10–11. Turn and grow together: the logarithmic spiral, read in time, is a wave that swells without ceasing to be itself. The diagram below shows three and a half clockwise turns of the spiral (left) unrolled as three and a half cycles of the growing wave (right); the dashed envelope is the exponential; the dot marks one height carried across.



32. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (Harvard University Press, 1934; repr. Dover, 1956) 2nd edn. / p. 5–7: the maker of an icon 'proceeds to visualize the form of the devatā'; the mind 'pro-duces' or 'draws' (*ākarṣati*) this form to itself from 'the immanent space in the heart' (*antar-hṛdaya-ākāśa*), 'the common focus (*saṃstāva*, 'concord') of seer and seen'; 'the imager must realize a complete self-identification with it'; and the form so known 'is the model from which he proceeds to execution in stone, pigment, or other material'. The horse: *Śukranītisāra* IV.7.73, p. 7: 'having concentrated, he should set to work' (*dhyātvā kuryāt*); the rule: *Śukranītisāra* IV.4.70–71, p. 113: the imager should be expert in visual-contemplation, 'since thus, and in no other way, and verily not by direct observation, (can the end be achieved)'. The *Śukranītisāra*'s date is contested. Lallanji Gopal argues the received text is a nineteenth-century composition in 'The Śukranīti—a Nineteenth-Century Text', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 25.3 (1962) p. 524–556 <doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X00069494>. On Coomaraswamy's sources and the making of his visualisation doctrine, see Hiram Woodward, 'Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, Benoy Kumar Sarkar, and the Śukranīti', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 29 (2023). The account is accordingly cited as Coomaraswamy's reconstruction; the living practice of the lineage stands on its own feet.

33. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Indian Craftsman* (Probsthain, 1909) p. 75 and 72. Cf. his rendering of *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 6.27: 'It is in imitation of the angelic works of art that any work of art is accomplished here': *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (Harvard University Press, 1934; repr. Dover, 1956) 2nd edn. / p. 8.

34. On Sthapati's life and works, see V. Ganapati Sthapati, *Building Architecture of Sthāpatya Veda* (Dakshinaa Publishing House, 2008) 3rd edn.

35. V. Ganapati Sthapati transmits the formula in the joined form *vastureva vāstu*: *Building Architecture of Sthāpatya Veda*, p. 127–134; *Temples of Space-Science*, trans. S. P. Sabharathnam (Vāstu Vedic Research Foundation, 1996) p. 18: '"*Vastureva Vastu*"—the scientific and cryptic formula given by Mayan'. His chapter heading segments it *Vastu Reva Vaastu* (*Building Architecture*, p. 127). I retain the formula as our lineage transmits it, not as regular classical sandhi. *Vastu*, 'thing, reality', is neuter; *vāstu*, 'site, dwelling', though the lexica record it as masculine and neuter, stands in the neuter in the *Mayamata*'s own definitions—*tad vastv iti* (2.1); *vāstūni, vastūny eva* (2.3): *Mayamatam*, Sanskrit text ed. and trans. Bruno Dagens (Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts / Motilal Banarsidass, 1994) vol. 1. Before *eva*, classical sandhi would give *vastv eva* or *vāstv eva* (Pāṇini 6.1.77); an *r* would arise from the visarga of a masculine *u*-stem nominative, as in *guruḥ + eva → gurur eva*, but neither noun offers that form here. The sounded *r* is therefore a feature of the received formula—indeed, where Sthapati quotes the *Mayamata*'s definition verse, his text carries the *r* that the critical edition's does not (*Building Architecture*, p. 362–363; cf. *Mayamata* 2.3, ed. Dagens). *Eva* has its ordinary force, 'indeed', 'itself': '*vastu* itself is *vāstu*'; 'becomes' follows Sthapati's own cosmological rendering—'Vastu itself becomes Vastu'—rather than the particle's literal force. Monier-Williams also records a distinct Vedic *éva*, 'going, moving; course', and tentatively relates it to the particle *evá*: a resonance between identity and motion. For a fuller unpacking, see de Vietri, *Trika Maṇḍala Prakāśa*, ch. 3 / p. 41–42.

36. 'The Vaastu formula of *vastureva vāstu* runs parallel, in one sense, to the Einsteinian formula of $E = mc^2$, where E is pure energy (*Vastu*) and mc^2 embodied energy (*Vaastu*)': Sthapati, *Building Architecture of Sthāpatya Veda*, ch. 14 / p. 127.

37. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Clarendon Press, 1899) s.v. '*vastu*': 'any really existing or abiding substance or essence, thing, object, article'; 'the real' (opposed to *avastu*, the unreal); 'goods, wealth, property'.

38. Abhinavagupta, *Tantrāloka* 3.66–68, with Jayaratha's *Viveka*, KSTS 28; de Vietri, *Trika Maṇḍala Prakāśa*, ch. 3 / p. 41–42.

39. Abhinavagupta, *Tantrasāra*, āhnika 3, ed. Mukund Rām Śāstrī in 'Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies' no. 17 (Research Department of Jammu & Kashmir State, 1918), digitised by Muktabodha <muktabodha.org>: *unmeṣa eva hi viśrāntir ūrmiḥ, yaḥ kriyāśakteḥ prārambhaḥ*—'the coming-to-rest of *unmeṣa* is *ūrmi*, which is the commencement of the power of action'. The *Tantrāloka*'s parallel account names the same phase *ūnatā*, 'diminution'—*Tantrāloka* 3, with Jayaratha's *viveka*, KSTS 28: the swell of knowing, having opened towards the knowable, subsides—and the subsiding is the spring of action. The hinge can be observed within one's own awareness: insight settles into stillness, and out of stillness, action is born, as the arrow's flight is born from the drawing back of the bow. *Ūrmi* names the hinge; the form rests on its curvature, like the coils of a spring.

40. The phonematic emanation of the vowels as phases of the one power—*anuttara*, *ānanda*, *icchā*, *unmeṣa*, the four phases of *kriyā*, *bindu* and *visarga*—is unfolded in Abhinavagupta, *Tantrāloka* 3.66 ff., and throughout the *Parātrīśikāvivaraṇa*.

41. 'Alphabet' is used here as a word for the ordered inventory of sound-units—what the Sanskrit tradition calls the *varṇamālā*, the garland of phonemes—not for a system of writing. The scripts that carry Sanskrit and Tamil are, in the linguist's taxonomy, neither alphabets nor syllabaries but alphasyllabaries: their written unit is the *akṣara*, the 'imperishable' syllable, in which a consonant bears an inherent or marked vowel. The distinction is micro-doctrine: the inventory of sounds is the subtle level, and the syllable (vowel installed in consonant) is its manifest combination.

42. *Parātrīśikāvivaraṇa*, KSTS 18, p. 207: *akāram eva āditayā … binduṃ dadatī aham ity eṣaiva bhagavatī sṛṣṭiḥ*—'beginning with a … bestowing the *bindu*: *ahaṃ*—this indeed is the Goddess, creation.'

43. *Aintiram*: 'the fivefold powers'. The five phases, with Sthapati's operational glosses—*amiḻtal* 'withdrawal', *imiḻtal* 'overflowing', *kumiḻtal* 'clustering round in an order', *umiḻtal* 'emitting', *tamiḻtal* 'resulting into a well defined form'—are given in V. Ganapati Sthapati, *An Overview of Mayonic Aintiram*, 'Shilpi Speaks' Series No. 1 (Vāstu Vedic Research Foundation, 1992) p. 9–10; cf. de Vietri, *Trika Maṇḍala Prakāśa*, ch. 3 / p. 43. The water-senses in the text are the verbs' ordinary lexical values: *Tamil Lexicon*, 6 vols (University of Madras, 1924–1936) s.vv. *amiḻ*, *imiḻ*, *kumiḻ*, *umiḻ*; the lexicon gives *tamiḻ* no water-sense, and the fifth gloss is Sthapati's own. The two registers converge: the lexicon supplies the element, the tradition the kinematics.

44. Sthapati, *Building Architecture of Sthāpatya Veda*, p. 120–121. The passage continues with the gross register: the circular waves are those of 'a small stone … dropped on a still sheet of water giving rise to orderly waves of circles expanding right from the centre'.

45. The *svastika* as the mark of the primal turning is drawn at Frame 4 of the kineograph: de Vietri, *Trika Maṇḍala Prakāśa*, ch. 3 / Frame 4 of 128 / p. 49; on the wave-trough and the svastika, see Jessie Mercay, *Fabric of the Universe: The Origins, Implications, and Applications of Vastu Science* (Dakshinaa Publishing House, 2006), discussed in *Trika Maṇḍala Prakāśa*, ch. 3 / p. 43.

46. Sthapati, *Building Architecture of Sthāpatya Veda*, p. 54, 103, 281; de Vietri, *Trika Maṇḍala Prakāśa*, ch. 3 / p. 44.

47. de Vietri, *Trika Maṇḍala Prakāśa*, ch. 3 / p. 44.

48. Varāhamihira, *Bṛhat Saṃhitā* 53.42 (the dwelling on eighty-one squares), 53.55–56 (sixty-four admitted as an alternative for dwellings) and 56.10 (the temple 'always' on sixty-four): *The Brihat Samhita of Varaha Mihira*, trans. N. Chidambaram Iyer (South Indian Press, 1884); *Mayamata* ch. 7, ed. Dagens, vol. 1. On the two grids in temple practice, see Stella Kramrisch, *The Hindu Temple* (University of Calcutta, 1946) vol. 1 / p. 46–50; and Michael W. Meister, 'Maṇḍala and Practice in Nāgara Architecture in North India', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 99.2 (1979) p. 204–219 <doi.org/10.2307/602657>.

49. The counts are elementary: an $n \times n$ grid of rooms is bounded by $(n + 1) \times (n + 1)$ points, so the 8×8 has $9^2 = 81$ crossings, and the 9×9 has $10^2 = 100$ points, of which 64 are interior; laid concentrically at the same unit, the two lattices are dual, each grid's room-centres falling on the other's crossings. The whole tone as 9:8—the excess of the fifth (3:2) over the fourth (4:3)—is the foundation of Pythagorean interval theory; Plato constructs the world-soul by filling the fourths of the cosmic scale with tones of 9:8: *Timaeus* 35b–36b; the filling of the fourths with tones of 9:8, remainder 256:243, at 36a–b: ed. R. D. Archer-Hind (Macmillan, 1888) p. 109. The ditone 81:64 is $(9/8)^2$.

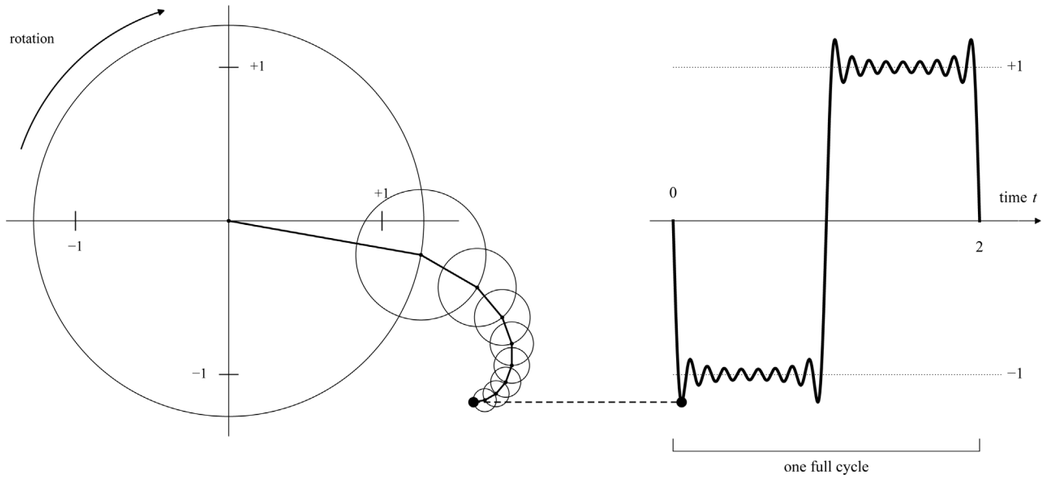
50. de Vietri, *Trika Maṇḍala Prakāśa*, ch. 3 / p. 42–46. Kālasaṃkarṣiṇī, 'she who draws time back into herself', is the supreme Goddess of the Krama current of the Trika.

51. The measure is not architecture's alone. V. Ganapati Sthapati, *Building Architecture of Sthāpatya Veda*, p. 52, defines the tradition's science as the science of *iyal*, *isai*, *nāṭam*, *śirpam*, *kaṭṭiṭam*, 'poetry, music, dance, sculpture and architecture'; and p. 116: '*Tālam* as time-measure is used in poetry, music, and dance, and *Tālam* as space-measure, is applied in architecture and sculpture … Through the grammar of the *Tālam*, the Shilpi creates and his feelings take forms. Through the grammar of the *Tālam*, the Divine Shilpi creates His own objects of the universe. Indeed their scale is one and the same!'.

52. The derivation of *māyā* from the root *mā*, 'to measure', is traditional: Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Clarendon Press, 1899) s.vv. '*mā*', '*māyā*'.

53. Strictly, a square traced at constant speed does not yield a square wave but a trapezoidal one: the horizontal edges become high and low plateaus, while the vertical edges become straight crossings between them. If the path is parameterised by arc length s, then $(dx/ds)^2 + (dy/ds)^2 = 1$, and therefore $|dy/ds| \le 1$. If its speed is $v = ds/dt$, the chain rule gives $|dy/dt| \le v$: no continuous traversal at finite speed can leap instantaneously from one level to another. The square wave proper is therefore a limit-object. Release the constant-speed condition, allowing the point to spend progressively more of each cycle upon the horizontal edges and progressively less upon the vertical ones, and the ramps steepen as their duration tends towards zero. No continuous finite-speed motion attains the limit, but its form is exact: pure alternation between two levels. At that limit, geometry hands everything to timing. It is in this precise sense that the square wave is called the square's signature here—not the literal record of its outline, but the ideal towards which that record tends. Its aptness as an emblem of the subtle lies here: the square wave holds as an exact limit an instantaneous crossing that finite motion can only approach, just as the 8 × 8 square of *vasturevavāstu* holds, gathered and latent, all the powers and phases from which its structure has arisen.

54. The three signatures are not merely juxtaposed; they are interconvertible. Any periodic form can be built from circles—the sine is the circle seen edge-on—and the square wave in particular is the limit of the odd harmonics stacked: $(4/\pi)(\sin x + \sin 3x/3 + \sin 5x/5 + \cdots)$. The roundest of signatures, compounded on itself, generates the most cornered: the two termini of *vasturevavāstu* pass into one another through infinite superposition. Joseph Fourier, *Théorie analytique de la chaleur* (Firmin Didot, 1822) art. 418, p. 555; for the square-wave series, Gilbert Strang, *Computational Science and Engineering* (Wellesley-Cambridge Press, 2007) §4.1. Nine spinning circles, stacked, approach the square wave. Infinitely many would attain it; the tremor at the corners is the signature of the finite. The diagram below shows the first nine odd harmonics as nested spinning circles (left), their tip tracing one full cycle of the near-square wave (right); the dashed line carries the tip's height across.



55. 'The subtle energy is a square two dimensionally and a cube tri dimensionally … but spherical at gross level. Measurewise they are one and the same'; 'the square turning into circle without undergoing any change in its spatial measure': Sthapati, *Building Architecture of Sthāpatya Veda*, ch. 14 / p. 127–133.

56. On the Swamimalai founders' recipe (82 per cent copper, 15 per cent brass, 3 per cent lead, with traces of gold and silver), see Aruna V. Iyer, 'Where the gods are born', *The Hindu*, 13 April 2012 <thehindu.com/features/metroplus/where-the-gods-are-born/article3310846.ece> [accessed 2026]; on the hereditary Swamimalai workshop, see also Thomas E. Levy, Alina M. Levy, D. Radhakrishna Sthapathy, D. Srikanda Sthapathy and D. Swaminatha Sthapathy, *Masters of Fire: Hereditary Bronze Casters of South India* (Deutsches Bergbau-Museum, 2008).

57. Gudrun Bühnemann and others, *Maṇḍalas and Yantras in the Hindu Traditions* (Brill, 2003) p. 34 (cf. p. 4). Textual prescriptions admit a range of supports; copper is the customary material for durable *yantra*s.

58. D. C. Sircar, *Indian Epigraphy* (Motilal Banarsidass, 1965) ch. 5 ('Copper-Plate Grants') / p. 103–201.

59. Copper is 'second only to silver in thermal and electric conductivity': 'Copper', *Encyclopaedia Britannica* <britannica.com/science/copper> [accessed 2026]. The International Annealed Copper Standard, adopted by the International Electrotechnical Commission in 1913, sets annealed copper at 100 per cent: United States Bureau of Standards, *Copper Wire Tables*, Circular No. 31 (Government Printing Office, 1914) 3rd edn.

60. Abhinavagupta, *Abhinavabhāratī* on *Nāṭyaśāstra* 6 (the *rasasūtra*), trans. in Gnoli, *The Aesthetic Experience*, p. 59–62: *rasa* as 'simply and solely a mental state which is the matter of cognition on the part of a perception without obstacles and consisting in a relish' (p. 62); 'the different words *camatkāra*, immersion (*nirveśa*), relish (*rasanā*), tasting (*āsvādana*), enjoyment (*bhoga*), accomplishment (*samāpattī*), lysis (*laya*), rest (*viśrānti*), etc., mean nothing but a [form of] consciousness completely free from any obstacles whatever' (p. 62). Utpaladeva was 'the master of the master of Abhinavagupta': Gnoli, p. XLV–XLVI.

61. Gnoli, *The Aesthetic Experience*, p. 62–63: the seven obstacles—unsuitability, that is, lack of verisimilitude; immersion in temporal and spatial determinations perceived as exclusively one's own or another's; being at the mercy of one's own sensations; the defective state of the means of perception; lack of evidence; lack of a predominant factor; the presence of doubt—with Abhinavagupta's account of the theatrical means by which each is removed.

62. *Pratyabhijñā*, from *prati* (back, in return) + *abhi* (facing, toward) + *jñā* (to know). On recognition as a cognition that adds nothing to its object—'a cognition is not created but only the blur that prevented its use, its entering into life, is instantly removed'—see Torella, *The Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā of Utpaladeva*, introduction, p. XXXV.

63. Utpaladeva, *Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā* IV.17 (numbering varies by edition): *tais tair apy upayācitair upanatas tanvyāḥ sthito 'py antike kānto lokasamāna evam aparijñāto na rantuṃ yathā | lokasyaiṣa tathānavekṣitaguṇaḥ svātmāpi viśveśvaro naivālaṃ nijavaibhavāya tad iyaṃ tatpratyabhijñoditā*. Abhinavagupta's *Vimarśinī* supplies the scene: the beloved from across the water, won by messengers, met by chance at a festival, standing beside her in the same pavilion.

64. *Ṛgveda* 6.47.18: *rūpaṃ rūpaṃ pratirūpo babhūva tad asya rūpaṃ praticakṣaṇāya*—'form by form he became the counter-form; that form of his is for the beholding'. The verse is taken up at *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.5.19: see *The Early Upaniṣads*, ed. and trans. Patrick Olivelle (Oxford University Press, 1998). The Śilpa lineage expounds the verse as a teaching on *rūpa*, *arūpa* and *pratirūpa*—the formed, the formless and the counter-formed: V. Ganapati Sthapati, *Who Created God? A Scientific Inquiry*, 'A Shilpi Speaks' Series No. 12, trans. S. P. Sabharathnam (Dakshinaa Publishing House, 2006) 2nd edn. / p. 183.



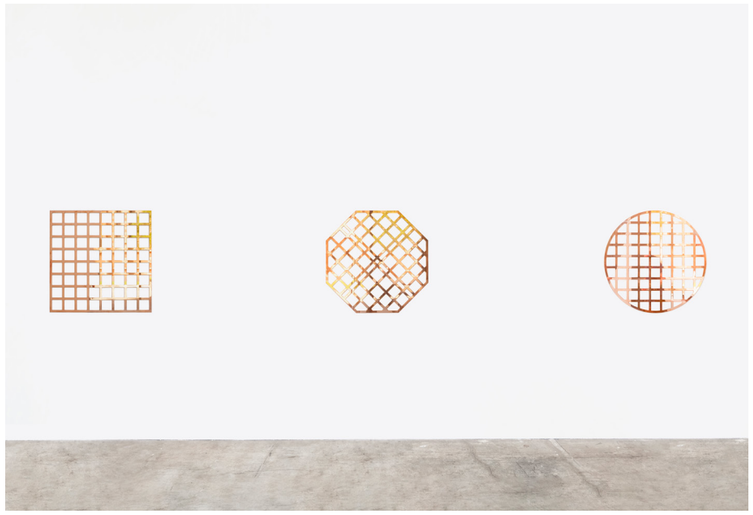
Born 1981 in Kalgoorlie, Western Australia, **Christian de Vietri** is a sculptor whose practice has developed across Australia, Europe, and the United States over the past two decades. Formally subtle and materially refined, his work emerges from extensive training in Śilpaśāstra—India's sacred science of artistic creation—and sustained engagement with Śaiva Tantra. He has completed several major public commissions, including *The Gathering* (New York), *Ascalon* (Perth, in collaboration with Marcus Canning), *Spanda* (Perth), *Between Heaven and Earth* (Zhengzhou), *Karlkurla* (Kalgoorlie), and *Nityodita* (Perth).

De Vietri studied at Curtin University in Perth, the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris, and the École des Beaux-Arts de Marseille before completing his MFA at Columbia University in New York. His work is held in the collections of the Art Gallery of Western Australia, the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art, Artbank, Curtin University, and private collections in Australia and internationally.

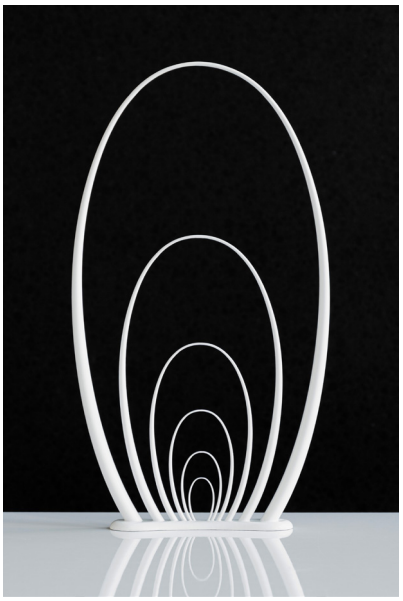
Christian de Vietri with *Spanda* at Elizabeth Quay, Perth.
Photo: Bianca Woolhouse



VASTU, REVA, VĀSTU, 2026
copper
three parts, 3 x 3 x 3 aṅgula (105 x 105 x 105 mm) each



Vastu, Reva, Vāstu, 2026
copper
three parts, 1 x 1 hasta (838 x 838 mm) each



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Spanda 1:100, 2026
powder-coated aluminium
305 x 171 x 30 mm
edition of 100

Artwork photography throughout:
Robert Frith, Acorn Photo