Spiritualist Art in Early Twentieth-Century Aotearoa New Zealand: Minnie Chapman, Sophia Garland Allan and Berta Sinclair Burns

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Spirit drawing, as a means of channelling and expressing communications with spirit entities, has been marginalised in definitions of art as well as in art history. This essay contributes to ongoing and historical conversations in which new religious movements are considered in conjunction with histories of feminism and art, exploring the work of three medium artists: Minnie Chapman (1856–1949), Sophia Garland Allan (1867–1959) and Berta Sinclair Burns (1893–1972). This essay shows how the three artists share spiritualist sensibilities and practices and a visual language of abstraction, decorative expression and particular "universal" biomorphic forms, inviting speculation at the intersection of material culture and esoteric thought.

Introduction

I began this project aiming to seek out evidence of a history of visual art within the new religious movement of spiritualism in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Aotearoa New Zealand. My primary research in public records and the algorithms of Papers Past led me to the work of three women who were associated with spiritualism in the early twentieth century and for whom spirit drawing, or the later term physic art, was a significant practice. While there is general evidence of this practice being widespread across associated religious communities, Minnie Chapman, Sophia Garland Allan and Berta Sinclair Burns emerged with enough material evidence to carry the research, and with clear evidence of a shared aesthetic across international practices in this form, including the recently much-admired work of Hilma af Klint (1862–1944).

The mediumship of Chapman, Allan and Burns contributed to a form of religious practice that, for Chapman and Burns, also sometimes garnered contemporaneous awareness and engagement from local and national art communities. Their work contains visual commonalities. Specifically, I am interested in the visual language of the abstract, the botanical and the biomorphic—widely applied terms in art history. Underpinning this project is also an interest in the art historical relationship between feminism and new religious movements more generally. I also recognise the way that material culture disseminates thought, while also implicitly acknowledging the commonly occurring loss of material culture to posterity.

The main body of this article attends to the historical, biographical and thematic contexts of these three visual medium practitioners. I present the studies chronologically, beginning in 1905 and focusing particularly on the 1930s. These women demonstrate attitudes that were of their time: generationally and thematically, their collective practices both overlap with each other and exemplify pockets of the development of spiritualism in the early twentieth century. I conclude with a reflection on shared themes and characteristics, making note of relevant international scholarship, and how Chapman, Allan and Burns relate to other more well-known figures of their time, such as af Klint.

Historical Context: The Material and Visual Culture of Spiritualism

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the Spiritualist church was officially established in 1924 through an Act of Parliament, but its first wave is documented in the 1870s and 1880s in Dunedin,

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significantly influenced by the Melbourne spiritualist scene. As a new religious movement, with both Christian protestant and occult origins, it was radical in embracing a political, scientific and religious modernism.

A burgeoning literature attests to growing interest in the history of the spiritualist movement in this country. Shaun Broadley's research on the nineteenth-century context notes spiritualism's significance beyond explicitly religious communities, including its scientific and sociopolitical significance. Relevant for my study, occultist Linda E. Hampton's 2013 book, *Wise Women: New Zealand Women's Alternative Spirituality & History,* provides a sense of the shape of spiritualism in Christchurch and features the work of prominent women in the movement.[1] Occult historian Robert Ellwood's 1993 classic, *Islands of the Dawn: The Story of Alternative Spirituality in New Zealand*, is now accompanied by Andrew Paul Wood's 2023 publication, *Shadow Worlds: A history of the Occult and Esoteric in New Zealand*, in providing useful historical overviews of alternative spirituality in Aotearoa New Zealand.[2]

In the early twentieth century, a proliferation of literature, books, periodicals, newsletters and anecdotal testimonies was significant in terms of the activity and communication of the movement, notably in Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia.[3] The long-running Melbourne spiritualist periodical, *The Harbinger of Light*, was especially influential. Locally produced periodicals and newspapers also frequently printed stories related to the movement, "[indulging] readers with stories of ghosts, haunted houses, clairvoyance and the activities of celebrated mediums and conjurers abroad."[4]

During the heyday of spiritualism, lectures and counter-lectures by local and international proponents of the movement drew large crowds of both naysayers and adherents. Emma Hardinge Britten, a well-known English medium, travelled to New Zealand in 1879. While also connected to the founding of Theosophy, she is credited with defining the seven principles of spiritualism used as a form of creed to this day. Other notable visitors include, in the early days, the American spiritualist J.M. Peebles in 1873, and, during the later wave of interest in spiritualism after the First World War, Arthur Conan Doyle, who visited New Zealand in 1920.

The historical material and visual culture of spiritualism is varied and contentious: precipitated spirit paintings and portraits spiritually manifest imagery without artistic intervention at all; the portrayal of spirits or of the deceased is another category, including the spirit photography that garnered attention concurrent with its technological advancement in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But the visual work in focus for this article is a form of drawing or painting, through mediumship, commonly called spirit drawing or psychic art.[5] Such work is often attributed to spirit guides or specifically identified and named spirits where the question of authorship is suspended.

Minnie Chapman (1856–1949)

Minnie Chapman (née Baird) was born in Lanark, Scotland in 1856. She came to Aotearoa New Zealand in the 1860s with her parents, and married Joshua Reuben Chapman in 1875.[6] The couple had three sons in Dunedin, moved to Christchurch around 1880 and had four daughters. They were Presbyterians.[7] Joshua Chapman was choirmaster of St. Peter's Presbyterian church and was involved in local bands and orchestras.[8] In 1893 Minnie Chapman signed the suffrage petition.[9] Evidence of her art and spiritualism can be traced primarily through newspaper articles with references to activity from 1906 until 1911, and then in 1930 a widely circulated feature article that included images (figs. 1, 3 and 4).[10]

Figure 1. “Mrs Chapman, of Linwood, sitting at her easel.” In “Astounding Artistic Talent: Woman’s Mysterious Power,” *NZ Truth*, 8 May 1930.

Chapman was introduced to spiritualism by a friend around 1905, when she was almost 50 years old, and began to make drawings.[11] She refers to a specific moment of exhortation, while meeting in a circle, that marked the beginning of this practice, and she carefully kept a record of the encounter on a faded folded piece of paper.[12] In 1930 she reflected that she had become a “long time adherent” of spiritualism, while claiming to “not delve deeply into its teachings,” nor to “let it become an obsession.”[13]

Chapman’s first mention in the newspaper, in 1906, was a police notice in reference to an “alleged illegal raffle” of her drawings at “the old German Church in Worcester Street” (fig. 2).[14] A subsequent reference to “Spirit Drawing” in 1907 offers us a concise glimpse into the shape of her practice.[15] The article tells us that she travelled from Christchurch to Dunedin for spiritualist conventions, and that on occasion she demonstrated and exhibited her work. It refers to an already large collection of drawings and attests that individuals in the art community were aware of her work and had noted its accomplishment.[16] The article also refers to a common practice of the monetisation of mediumship, while emphasising Chapman’s resistance to this. A description of spirit drawing in action is included:

> Mrs Chapman then sat before a blackboard on which was pinned a large sheet of clean white paper, over which the medium's hand moved smoothly and surely, and in a short space of time a very lovely piece of work—a floral design—was perfectly executed. Mrs Chapman claims that her hand is guided solely by her controlling guide, and that she has no notion of what she is drawing. Be this as it may . . . her work could be accomplished only by a master. Other specimens of her freehand drawing were on view, all fashioned after the ancient Egyptian designs—mummies, fans, and architecture—which she says, were done in an hour.[17]

Figure 2. Deutsche Kirche (the German Church), corner of Montreal and Worcester Streets, Christchurch, 1898. Christchurch City Libraries, CCL-KPCD12-0033.

Two years later, in April 1909, Chapman visited Dunedin again, and this time an *Otago Daily Times* article refers directly to Chapman's spirit guide as "a Persian gentleman who departed from this mundane sphere some three or four thousand years ago," adding, more specifically, that the "deceased gentleman was a designer of barbaric ornamentation in an ancient temple."[18] This article also provides us with some quantitative data: "Some 50 people—mostly ladies—gathered in the rooms of the Spiritual Science Association, in Moray Place, last evening, to witness an exhibition of the art of this ancient craftsman."[19] The work is described, in the vernacular of that time, as follows:

> The result was unique from the artistic point of view, and although unfinished owing to the supply of colouring pencil having run out, showed a degree of culture to have been possessed by the ancient Persian. In general contour there was a circle, with various by-the-way manifestations. Inside the circle there was a coloured fantasia, and various minor projections, more or less grotesque, completed the drawing so far as it can be described.[20]

The next reference to Chapman's work, in 1911, is in the context of the fifth annual convention of the National Association of Spiritualists in Dunedin. A complete write up of the content and proceedings of the convention was published, providing a detailed record of the names, figures and topics of discussion at the time. A sense of optimism and enthusiasm for the modern movement of spiritualism is evident, along with key issues related to liberal progressive politics

and a strong sense that, in dialogue with science, this movement had a lot to offer: "spiritualism was the only religion in the world that supplied proof of what they believed," Mrs Schultze, a delegate from Melbourne, Australia, remarked.[21] Chapman is named as performing or exhibiting in a public meeting on the last night of the convention.[22]

We do not hear from Chapman again until 1930,[23] in a feature-length article published in the newspaper *New Zealand Truth*.[24] It includes an interview with Chapman, a detailed description of her practice and some of the only images of Chapman's work that I have been able to locate thus far (figs. 3–4).

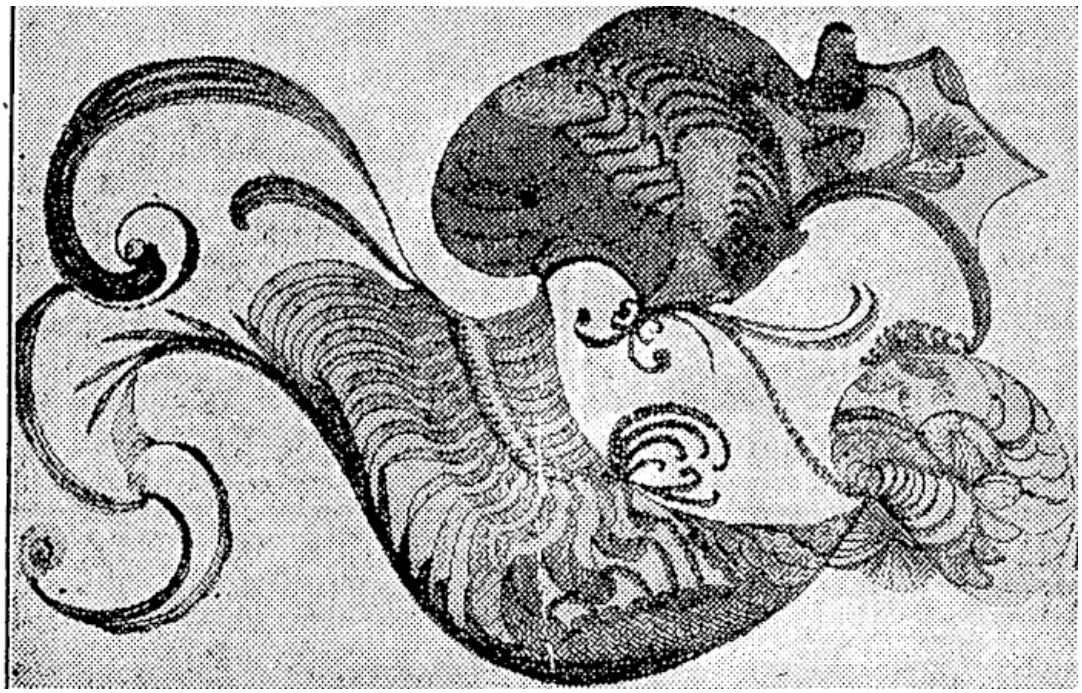

Figure 3. "An unusual design in eight colours, drawn by [Minnie] Chapman." In "Astounding Artistic Talent: Woman's Mysterious Power," *NZ Truth*, 8 May 1930.

Figure 4. Minnie Chapman, floral design. In "Astounding Artistic Talent: Woman's Mysterious Power," *NZ Truth*, 8 May 1930.

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Seventy-four years old at the time, Chapman was described as a "canny" and "unassuming, clear-thinking woman"; she seemed younger than she was, had a sincere and open-minded approach to things spiritual and was "someone who did not take too much for granted."[25] Chapman's works were reported to be generally large in scale and rendered in pencil and crayon. Writers of the time placed a good deal of emphasis on the importance of proving that the drawing activity was a spiritual phenomenon: for example, an *Evening Post* journalist noted that Chapman would wear glasses to do needle work or sewing, but she did not need to wear them when drawing. [26] Also emphasised was her apparent lack of training in art. Drawing was "as foreign to her as was the impulse from which she performed her sketching tasks."[27] Chapman's images are variously described in terms of "a vast mass of most delicate tracery,"[28] and "the faithful balance of their lay-out and design and their weird character."[29] Echoing the earlier descriptions of Chapman's methods in 1907 and 1909, the 1930 *Truth* article offers another comprehensive account:

> [Chapman] sat in a pensive mood for a few minutes concentrating her gaze on a picture hanging on the wall to the right of the easel. Without removing her eyes from where they were fixed, her hand aimlessly wandered into a box containing some hundred or more crayons, picked one up and then, without making any impression on the paper before her, described a number of circles before it found a starting off point near the bottom of the sheet. Then with surprising speed, the crayon literally careered over the paper describing fantastic curves and angles, the completed outline suggesting an early century floral design. . . . she never used the same colour twice . . . After each crayon has been used the hand drops limply from the easel and without any searching another crayon is lifted . . . from the box and it quickly commences its exercises over the paper . . .[30]

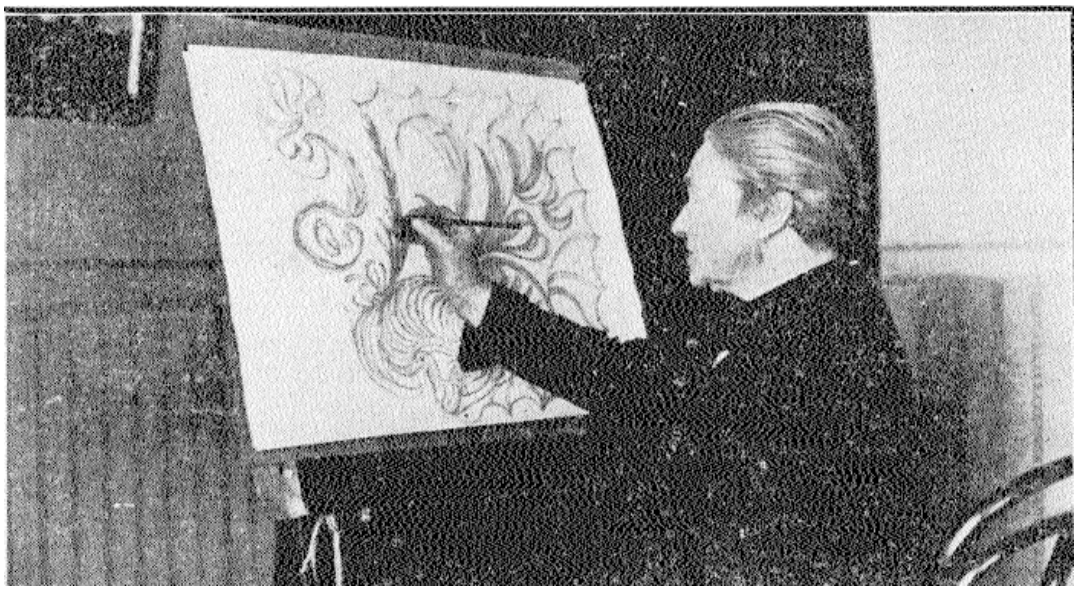

Figure 5. "Mrs M. Chapman, of Linwood . . . Spirit Hand as Guide for Drawing," *Star* (Christchurch), 9 May 1930.

The newspaper reports on Chapman provide descriptions of mark-making and insights into her process. The spirit guide named in 1930 as Hyrziel is presumably the same ancient Persian referred to in the 1909 newspaper article previously mentioned. Chapman refused to sign the drawings because she did not consider them her own.[31] Her work was employed at times as evidence of the authenticity of spiritualism (included in conventions and for audiences to witness) and we know she travelled with it. An abstract biomorphic form is a recurring feature

in written descriptions and the limited visual evidence of her work. On 5 March 1949, at 26 Effingham Street, New Brighton, Minnie Chapman died aged 92.[32]

Sophia Garland Allan (1867–1959)

Sophia Garland Shury was born in 1867 in Dunedin.[33] In 1891 (aged 24) she married William Allan in Dunedin.[34] Following electoral roll records, we find them living in Kaiapoi in 1896. Records show they subsequently moved to Christchurch, then Ashburton.[35] In 1910 their only daughter Helen Grace (Nell) died at the age of 18 and a half.[36] On 7 July 1921 William Allan died aged 56.[37]

In 1925 Sophia Garland Allan was in her late fifties and living in Quamby House, 123 Fendalton Road, Christchurch ,[38] a secondary residence to Holly Lea, which was established by the wealthy philanthropist Allan McLean "as a home for women of refinement and education in reduced or straitened circumstances."[39] Sophia remained at Quamby for the remainder of her life.[40] She died on 3 November 1959 at age 93.[41]

The Macmillan Brown Library at the University of Canterbury have in their collection two albums and a series of 24 drawings and writings by Allan.[42] The drawings are abstract designs contained in large (380 x 550 mm) and small (250 x 310 mm) drawing books, noted as received from "Caxo, Priest of the Temple of Isis" through the medium of Sophie Garland Allan. Her work was deposited by way of the Christchurch Psychic Research Society and the Bycroft Library, presented to Edgar and Gertrude Lovell-Smith by Allan herself in 1944. Edgar Lovell-Smith, the brother and brother-in-law of the artists Colin and Rata Lovell-Smith, was one of the founding members of the Christchurch Psychic Research Society and, along with his wife, acquired a significant library on alternative and occult materials. Allan's drawings (figs. 6–8) are dated from 1930 to the 1940s and constitute one of the only accessible collections of spiritualist practice in Aotearoa New Zealand.[43]

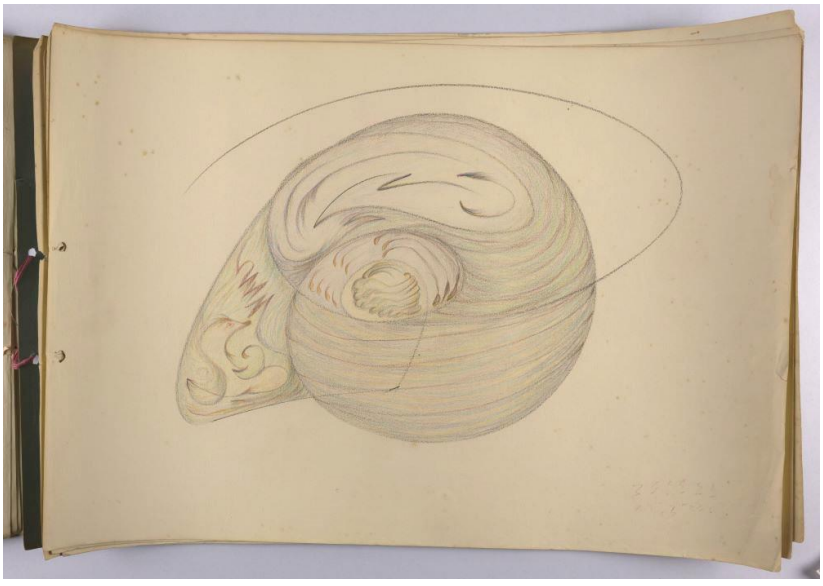

Figure 6. Sophia Garland Allan, drawing signed "26 June 1941 from Caxo by Sophia Garland Allan, Christchurch." Sophie Garland Allan papers, Macmillan Brown Library Te Puna Rakahau o Macmillan Brown.

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According to the dates of these works, we can be confident that sometime in the years Allan lived within the community of women at Quamby house, she was in some way connected to spiritualist circles. I have found no records of this, and the drawing books mostly predate the founding of the Psychic Research Society in 1940. I have not been able to cross-reference her name in any materials on public record or within records associated with the Psychic Research Society.

Allan's drawings are remarkably precise and detailed. In terms of imagery, we find botanical and organic forms, spiral forms and feather-like or leaf-like forms, often presented as a single object on a blank page. There is a sense of dynamism to the images, but each work also has a contained integrity or compositional cohesion. The use of colour is restrained but encompasses a spectrum, with repeated colour combinations in thin lines or strata. This indicates to me a deliberate order to the process of drawing; the mark-making must have included a specific sequence of events and colour selection process.

Figure 7. Sophia Garland Allan, drawing signed "from Caxo by Sophia Garland Allan, Christchurch." Sophie Garland Allan papers, Macmillan Brown Library Te Puna Rakahau o Macmillan Brown.

Allan commonly refers to a figure or spirit guide named Caxo, "A Priest of the Temple of Isis," as a source of communication, and many of the drawings are "from Caxo" or "through Caxo," signed and dated in often faintly legible pencil. The drawings also tend to be accompanied by spirit writing (automatic writing or, to use the more contemporary term, light language) on the front or reverse sides.

Accompanying one of the images (fig. 8) is a transcribed interpretation of the drawing as "an embellishment of a panel in the Temple of Isis."[44] In this instance, an additional entity, Hermes the Egyptian, is responsible for the interpretation of the drawing, and Caxo for the the spirit writing on the drawing's reverse side. Hermes the Egyptian presents an associated message of warning that "things are not always as they seem" and "therefore to be watchful and alert for

evil under the cloak of goodness or beauty."[45] A translation of the accompanying spirit writing reads as follows: "Much could be said about the drawing . . . but enough has been indicated to show the value of the teaching of the Egyptian mind. It is of equal importance to those living at the present time, and we would emphasise the message which the picture contains."[46] Caxo, offering comfort before signing off, refers the reader, "for guidance and protection," to "the picture of the Holy Spirit with the embodied teachings connected with it."[47] This whole account is enigmatic and presents a layered and reciprocal form of mediumship. In this case we can also see evidence of a Christian context, with reference to both the Holy Spirit and a deceitful "Evil One" cloaked in beauty.[48]

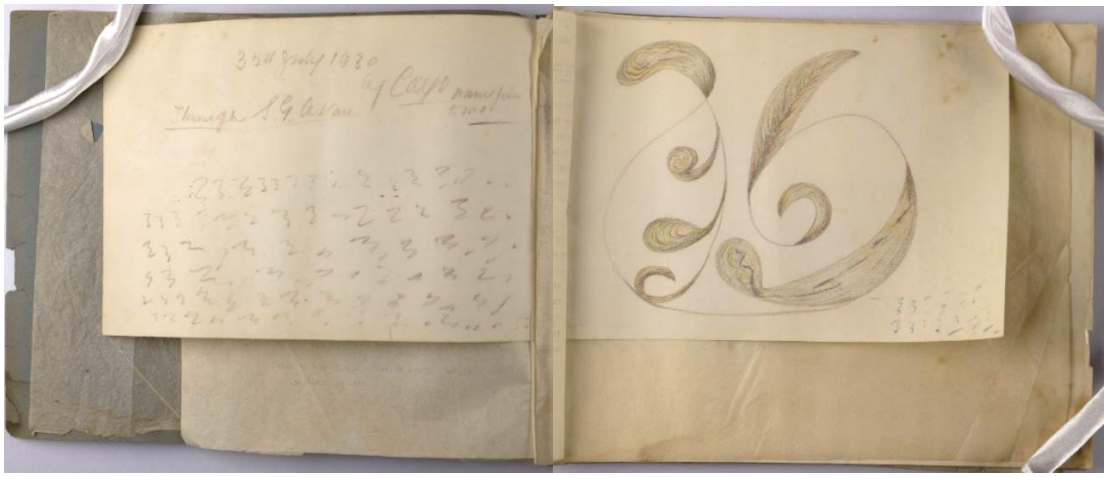

Figure 8. Sophia Garland Allan, drawing signed "3 July 1930. Through S.G. Allan by Caxo." Sophie Garland Allan papers, Macmillan Brown Library Te Puna Rakahau o Macmillan Brown.

Berta Sinclair Burns (1893–1972)

Berta Sinclair Burns, née Violet Alberta Jessie Watson,[49] was a journalist, editor and political activist. She was born in South Canterbury, grew up in Temuka, married a farmer, John Wisely, in 1913, had three sons and worked as a schoolteacher. In 1927 she moved to Christchurch and began to write for the children's pages of the *Christchurch Star* and the *Christchurch Times*, while her husband continued farming. During her time in Christchurch, she was the editor of the SPCA Junior League Journal and president of the Christchurch Practical Psychology Club.[50] Berta and John Wisely divorced in 1933 and she married John Sinclair Burns in 1934.

In 1936, the new couple moved to Wellington and Berta became involved in the collective-run (with Communist Party origins) journal, *Woman To-day: A Monthly Magazine for Women*, subtitled "for peace, freedom and progress" with additional aims outlined in an early volume: the "Advancement of women's rights" and "Friendship with Women of all Nations."[51] Burns, named as the chairman and literary editor, resigned from the editorial committee in July 1937 after only a few monthly editions.[52]

In the 1940s Burns went on to campaign for the New Zealand National Party. An accomplished speaker and debater, in 1949 she unsuccessfully stood against the Labour prime minister Peter Fraser for the Brooklyn seat (fig. 9). As a member of the National Council of Women of New Zealand, and campaigning as the "housewives' champion," she sought to foster the involvement of women in politics and to represent those "'who believe in a spiritual approach to life, as opposed to atheistic materialism.'"[53] At the time she was publicly ridiculed by Fraser for her spiritually alternative thinking, and her response was "that 'he was leading people down

the path to suppression of freedom of religion and the arts.'"[54] Burns comes across as a strong-minded, politically-motivated woman with intellectual aptitude. Documented in 1939, Burns refers to a lifelong clairvoyance and a more recent clairaudient ability, making links to her "Scottish Celtic" heritage.[55] Her ability to make psychic art emerged in 1932, when she was still married to Wisely and living in Christchurch.[56]

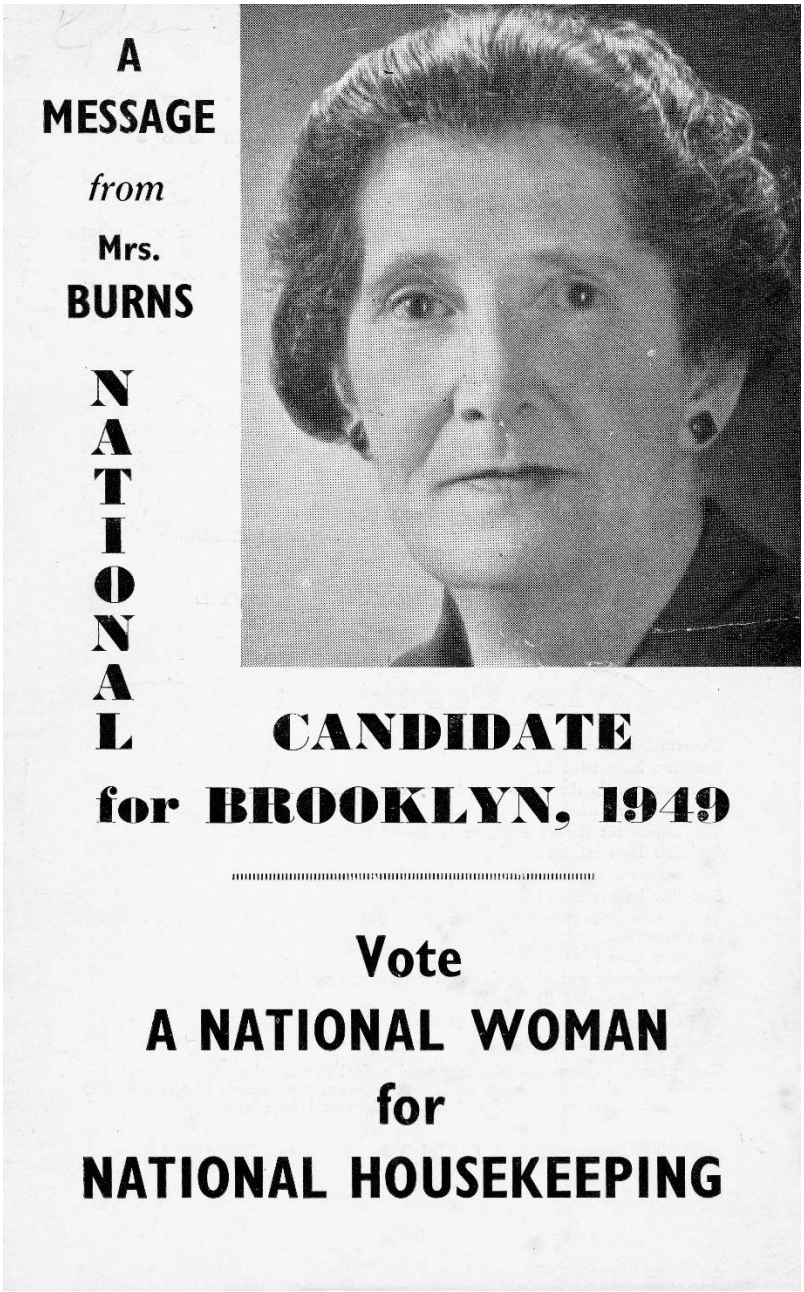

Figure 9. New Zealand National Party election campaign material: National candidate for Brooklyn, 1949. Alexander Turnbull Library, Eph-A-NZ-NATIONAL-1949-02.

Burns features as a minor figure in accounts of spiritualism in Aotearoa New Zealand.[57] Yet her role as president of the Psychic Research Society in Wellington between 1939 and 1940, her work as an editor of the periodical *Aquarius* and the exhibition of her psychic art at the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts present her as a significant participant and inspiration to others in the spiritualist scene of the late 1930s.

Burns's first recorded association with spiritualism is unreliably documented in association with the organisation of an exhibition of psychic art in Auckland in 1924.[58] More concrete evidence comes later with recorded evidence of Burns's direct involvement with the inauguration of the Psychic Research Society in Wellington in August 1939.[59] Forty-three people attended the first meeting of the Society, with the intention to address the absence of such a group in the community "where interested people might gather to discuss and study the evidence for the survival of man, and the nature of life after death."[60] Burns's husband, John Sinclair Burns, was in the chair, but Burns's leadership was apparent from the start:

> Mrs. Burns spoke on the interest evident in this topic basing her remarks on her knowledge of the situation as revealed by the circulation of "Aquarius," the psychic magazine of which she is the editor. It was arranged that Mrs. Burns be the speaker at the next meeting on the subject of "Methods of Communication."[61]

The periodical *Aquarius* was devoted to "Spiritualism and creative thought." It likely ran in the late 1930s and was said to have been initiated after the death of William Charles Nation in 1930, who had been responsible for a previous periodical, *The Message of Life*.[62] I have not located any complete copies of *Aquarius*; the journal does not appear to have been deposited for posterity.

In addition to Burns's interest in psychic phenomena, she is remembered as an accomplished artist medium and is featured in a report on spiritualism in New Zealand at the 1948 World Centenary Celebration of Modern Spiritualism in the USA.[63] Burns contributed to the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts in 1939 and 1940.[64] Some significant aspects of her work, including her own views on its interpretation, were recorded in newspaper articles in 1939 and 1940 (mostly associated with the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts exhibition), as well as in the minutes of Psychic Research Society meetings: Burns's practice emerged in the context of daily life;[65] her spirit guide "Zara" was "an Egyptian artist who lived some six thousand years ago";[66] the drawings were executed at a "'terrific speed'";[67] the meaning of the work, for Burns, was centred in the experience of conducting the drawings;[68] on occasion she relinquished authorship;[69] and she had never trained in art.[70]

Burns's spirit guide, Zara, "came naturally into her life" and "suddenly requested" Burns to draw in 1932, while the years 1939 and 1940 are recorded as a focused season of activity.[71] Burns refers to the insistence and persistence of her guide, while also being initially taken aback by the experience: after the first drawing, "scientifically-minded Mrs. Burns scoffed to herself, 'What utter rot!' and pitched the queer thing into the wastepaper basket." [72] The nature of Burns's relationship with her spirit guide appeared to be remarkably matter-of-fact in nature, and the experience of making the drawings included a combination of both accuracy and speed:

> Mrs. Burns works in any medium, fine pencil, charcoal, or oils, at great speed and with very definitely supernormal draughtsmanship. In her many years of the practice of this gift no eraser has ever been used and not a single wrong line has ever been made.[73] Those who have seen Mrs Burns under the control of "Zara" have been astonished at the fluent accuracy of her hand, which does not hesitate for a second, but continues at top speed, until the drawing or painting is finished.[74] Mrs Burns can gossip to neighbours cheerily while she executes these amazingly beautiful drawings. The only condition necessary seems to be that she shall not concentrate on what she is doing once the spirit takes control of her hand.[75] To show that she did the drawings under quite normal circumstances, without going into a trance or otherwise appearing in any way unusual, Mrs Burns gave a demonstration of her technique. Her pencil, guided she said by Zara, flew over the paper rapidly, tracing an elaborate and unpremeditated design

> with never falter or error, and executing without even a preparatory flourish or practice stroke geometric whirls and curves which many accomplished artists would be unable to draw freehand with a single movement. While she was drawing Mrs Burns sat in full daylight and continued her conversation. Her pencil, however, was directed not by her own will, but by the spirit, she said. "You wouldn't think there was a spook there, would you?" she asked.[76]

Like Chapman, Burns held demonstrations of her psychic art from time to time, and in association with some of her exhibitions. This activity seems fitting, given Burns's emphasis on the meaning of the work being experientially focused as well as her interest in psychic research more generally.[77] At one point she experimented "nightly for about three months, being interested in the research aspect of the fact,"[78] and at another point she refers to experimenting "blindfolded and in the dark, but could obtain no results."[79] Her insistence that the designs were never planned in advance was intended to prove the reality of psychic phenomena.[80] Along these lines, Burns had devised a specific demonstration or experiment that drew on audience participation and made use of irregular shapes of paper. Participants were asked to prepare the drawing surfaces that Burns then used.

> The demonstration of drawing was given by Mrs Burns last night [on 2 July 1939] to a group of invited guests, including press representatives. [She] executed two charcoal drawings, taking only a few minutes over each. One was upon a sheet of paper which had been torn into an irregular shape. The design adapted itself to this, firmly-executed curves running into all the corners.[81]

Burns's drawings are described as geometric and botanical in nature. She refers to her first drawing as "a curious little flower" (fig. 10).[82] Her work appears to be generally "abstract" with "some . . . faces and animals."[83] The clearest accounts of her work are associated with the 1939 exhibition at the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, listed and exhibited in the Drawings, Etchings, etc. section as follows: Original Diamond Design (Pencil Drawing); Original Rhythmic Design (Pencil Drawing); Original Motif Design (Pencil Drawing); and Original Circular Design (Pencil Drawing).[84] A number of newspaper articles include helpful descriptions. Here I refer to the *Evening Star*, 17 May 1939:

> The drawings are purely abstract designs, suggestive of leaves, fruit, and foliage. They show a high degree of technical perfection, originality, and strong feeling for rhythm. They were selected by the Hanging Committee for their artistic merit, and not for their psychic origin.[85] All are similar in matter and treatment. One, however, is diamond-shaped in outline, one circular, and the other two irregular, the latter being labelled respectively rhythmic and motif design.[86] Mrs Burns said that she was advised by Zara to submit the works to the Academy. They were specially done, the most striking of them having been carried out the morning after her decision to exhibit.[87]

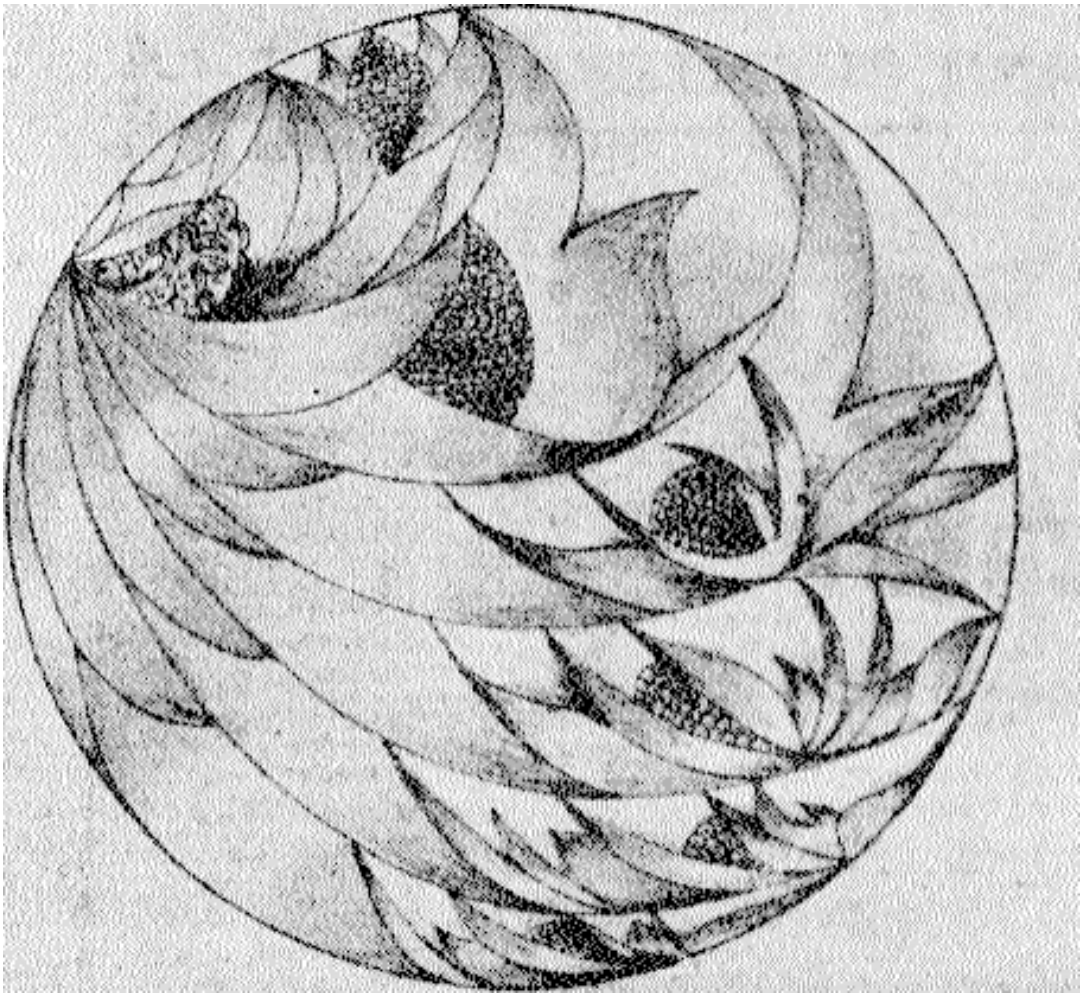

Figure 10. Berta Sinclair Burns, *Original Circular Design (Pencil Drawing)*, 1939. In "PSYCHIC ART. A design stated to have been executed by Mrs. B.S. Burns while under the influence of psychic guidance. It is one of four accepted for hanging in the forthcoming Autumn Exhibition of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts in the National Art Gallery, Wellington," *Nelson Evening Mail*, 17 May 1939.

After the successful reception of her work at the Academy in 1939, Zara "instructed Mrs. Burns to buy some pots of 'cheap ticket paint.'"[88] A subsequent exhibition was held at the Quest Club in Swanson Street, Auckland, at the end of June 1939.[89] This exhibition received a write up in the *New Zealand Herald*:

> Much of the work consists of intricate curvilinear designs in pencil or charcoal, some entirely abstract and others containing suggestions of floral forms, but all drawn with extraordinary sureness and sustained rhythm. The paintings, carried out in poster or oil colours, are of brightly-hued flowers and plants, more or less reminiscent of actual varieties, but fantastically different from anything known to botanists or gardeners. A few attempts at animals, birds and human faces are much less successful.[90]

In 1939, Burns also exhibited at the Spiritualist Church in Wellington, first in mid-April and then early May.[91] Documented material presents a picture of Burns's interest and participation primarily with the Psychic Research Society, and she is named as a guest speaker at a spiritualist church in Wellington.[92] In 1940 Burns again exhibited in the annual New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts exhibition, with only one contributed work this time: *Abstract Flower Study (design)*.[93] In November 1940 Burns resigned from the Wellington Psychic Research

Society due to her departure from the city;[94] it can be assumed that she went to Christchurch, where she also assisted in the set-up of its sister society.[95] She appears again in the public record in early 1941 in Christchurch, authoring an article on adolescent crime,[96] and as the new secretary for the Women's Auxiliary of the Canterbury Manufacturers' Association.[97]

The last we hear of Burns's direct involvement with psychic art is in an enigmatic notice pasted in the pages of the Wellington Psychic Research Society meeting minutes: it is an undated invitation to contribute to an "Exhibition of Psychic Art" in association with the Psychic Research Society in Christchurch:[98]

> The Psychic Research Society of Christchurch is proposing to hold an important Exhibition of the work of several combined psychic artists and also actual demonstrations of the work being done. We are appealing for samples of this branch of Art, together with details as to how it was obtained etc. to be hung in Christchurch during November. We would greatly appreciate your practical help. All care will be taken of the exhibits, and an early reply will be appreciated. Will you help? We feel you will.—Berta Sinclair Burns (President)[99]

Discussion and Conclusions

Minnie Chapman, Sophia Garland Allan and Berta Sinclair Burns provide points of discussion to explore across historical and geographical contexts. Burns began drawing in 1932 and she actively exhibited in 1939 and 1940. Allan's drawings are dated from the early 1930s to the 1940s. Chapman was active from 1905, with a feature article on her work in 1930. Chapman, Allan and Burns were all middle-aged (40–60 years old) when they pursued spirit drawing. Records on all three women converge in the early 1930s: Burns and Allan began their practices at this time and Chapman's life's work received public attention in a feature length newspaper article. Chapman and Burns both specifically refer to being untrained artists. All three artists relinquished authorship in different ways, either by not signing their works or, in Allan's case, signing them by proxy.

While Chapman, Allan and Burns all lived in Christchurch at one time, I have not been able to place them in the same room at the same time. Allan's drawings were deposited in the Bycroft Library post-1944 when they were given to Edgar Lovell-Smith.[100] Chapman would have been in her mid-80s when the Christchurch Psychic Research Society was established.[101] Burns would also have been known to the Lovell-Smiths through her connection from the sister society in Wellington and, as previously established, she was president of the Christchurch society at some point in the early 1940s. We know that Chapman had an association with the spiritualist church and can be linked with the Christchurch Spiritualistic Association that rented the Lutheran Church on the corner of Worcester and Montreal Streets.[102]

It is unknown if the women were connected to the Theosophical Society,[103] although Burns is listed as lecturing at the Wellington branch of the Theosophical Society in 1939, at a time her psychic art was gathering public interest.[104] The close relationship between spiritualism and theosophy should be noted, and it includes a wealth of literature through which to consider esoteric influences or thought systems attached to these women's practices. The Bycroft Library reveals manifold interests which combined in the spiritualist experience at that time.[105] The Christchurch Psychic Research Society was non-sectarian and not only interested in mediumship, although that was a founding focus. It also encouraged the "study and interest in Psychic Science, Psychology, Comparative religion, Philosophy and the Survival or otherwise of Human personality after death, and of all other subjects related thereto."[106]

Regarding the interpretation of the art itself, recurring named spirit guides suggest a shared belief system and historical context. Allan and Burns refer explicitly to ancient Egyptian religion and aesthetics through the lens of spiritualist or early twentieth-century religious thought and practice. For Burns, Zara is named as "an Egyptian woman who died centuries ago"[107] or "an Egyptian artist who lived some six thousand years ago."[108] For Allan it is Caxo, Priest of the Temple of Isis, and Hermes the Egyptian. For Chapman, Hyrziel is "A Persian gentleman who departed from this mundane sphere some three or four thousand years ago," and more specifically, the "deceased gentleman was a designer of barbaric ornamentation in an ancient temple."[109] In earlier instances of Chapman's work, we find references to ancient Egyptian designs: mummies, fans and architecture.[110]

The interpretation or meaning of the art is approached by Chapman and Burns in terms of the practice itself. Chapman did not seem worried to have not "the slightest knowledge of the significance of the symbols . . . of what they are or what they mean."[111] Burns reflects this opinion in another way:

> She did not think the drawings had any meaning or interpretation. Their significance was not so much in their subject matter as in the manner of their presentation, which was an endeavour on the part of someone on another plane to give proof of the existence of a "fourth dimension" or a spirit world.[112]

Perhaps Chapman's and Burns's reticence mirrors a reluctance to engage deeply with spiritualist practice, and it does seem to correspond to descriptions of their matter-of-fact personalities. Allan's work, in contrast, contains an example of specific interpretive endeavour. Early in her practice she refers to two spirit guides, Hermes the Egyptian and Caxo, who together provide interpretive guidance for both a channelled drawing and its accompanying spirit writing.

Between Chapman, Allan and Burns is a broadly described Egyptological-esoteric-spiritualist aesthetics that might be approached within the field of ancient Egyptian studies and reception histories. Modern material and literary culture and intellectualism, and the ideologies and thought systems associated with the new religious movements of theosophy and spiritualism, were all receptive to the dissemination of discoveries about ancient Egypt.[113] The identity of the spirit guides discussed above is a nebulous and complicated area to explore, in terms of historical context and the development of alternative spirituality. Neither an understanding of these guides as named individuals or genuine spirits of people from ancient times, nor an understanding of the contextual theologies and ideologies of spiritualism are easy lines of enquiry. Yet there is clear primary evidence of the influence of ancient Egypt on shared religious experience in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Equally pervasive is a botanical sensibility across the work of all three medium artists: floral forms, the rosette, shells, spirals and the tendril (a self-propagating organic form that contains a generative force). "Floral designs" are common descriptors used by Burns and Chapman. For Burns, "The drawings are purely abstract designs, suggestive of leaves, fruit, and foliage. They show a high degree of technical perfection, originality, and strong feeling for rhythm."[114] For Chapman, it is "early century floral designs"[115] and "a vast mass of most delicate tracery."[116] For Allan, the drawing is "an embellishment of a panel in the Temple of Isis."[117]

Flowers have wider associations within spiritualist material culture and practice. Flower psychometry was a common divination practice that involved reading flowers (in the manner of tea leaves or tarot cards). The medium Kathleen Philpott was a known practitioner in the

1940s in Auckland. She was also known to produce spirit drawings or psychic art and appeared to be a priest or speaker for several congregations.[118] This botanical spiritual landscape is as broad as it is inclusive of Egyptological sensibilities and can be traced across historical and material cultural settings.

To illustrate this point, I draw on the David Lomas's scholarship on Hilma af Klint, particularly his work on the lineage and iconography of plants in relation to alternative spiritual traditions. Lomas provides a historical overview: from natural philosophy and life science, to Helena Blavatsky's interpretation of evolution as a foil to the pure materialist form, to the "animating spark" of nineteenth century vitalism, to Rudolf Steiner's "The Spirit in the Realm of Plants" (1910) and his later 1922 work on the aura of plants, to the ornamental motif of the tendril (from Egypt to Islam),[119] to Goethe, to Art Nouveau, to the applied arts, and finally to Hilma af Klint's "intense pantheistic immersion" in nature.[120] Also significant is af Klint's case, is her training in botanical illustration and "the depth of her engagement with science and natural history, in her day as much as in ours a discourse powerful in shaping, indeed transforming, conceptions of reality."[121] Lomas's survey exemplifies how saturated with nature-based spiritualism the visual culture of that time was, and the cultural ubiquitousness of flowers in general. This preoccupation with flowers "seems to be a feature of spirit drawing more broadly," Lomas notes,[122] drawing on a slightly acerbic comment by André Breton to punctuate the point: "[he] who had no truck with spiritualist beliefs, noted with evident distaste in mediumistic drawings 'a ceaseless borrowing—to the point of nausea—of subjects, adventitious nor not, from the vegetal world.'"[123]

This botanical sensibility is also locally contextualised by Emma Hardinge Britten (1823–1889).[124] Britten toured Australia and visited New Zealand in 1879, visiting Auckland, Wellington, Nelson and Dunedin.[125] One of her lectures in Dunedin was titled "The Wonders of the Age We Live In," and alongside witnessed scientific inventions of the day, such as electricity, spiritual science was named as one of these wonders: it was "the blossom of the ages, the fruitage of all time."[126]

While Burns and Chapman did not directly interpret the meaning of their images, af Klint and another artist Georgiana Houghton (1814–1884) did do so, and in strikingly similar ways. In af Klint's early work with her spiritualist circle, The Five, we see the emergence of botanical imagery, which would ultimately take a more monumental form.[127] In a notebook of af Klint's early automatic drawings is a reference to "the secret growing": "for just as invisible hands help and tend every plant on this green Earth, so every budding sprout of goodness is tended and shaped and protected by invisible powers and when the time comes your eyes will be open and you will see the beautiful plant that grew in secrecy."[128] Houghton's definitions appear related in sentiment:

> Spirit Flowers: Simultaneously with the birth of a child into the earth life, a flower springs up in spirit realms, which grows day by day in conformity with the infant's awakening powers, expressing them by colour and form, until by degrees the character and life stand revealed in the floral emblem; each tint, whether strong or delicate, being clearly understood by spirit beholders; each petal, floret, fibre, and filament, shewing forth like an open book the sentiments and motives, however complicated, of the human prototype.
>
> Spirit Fruits: The fruit, which corresponds to the earthly term of the heart, represents the inner life, with its passions, sentiments, and affections, and is covered with minute fibres, indicating the thoughts . . .[129]

Houghton's spirit drawings, beginning in 1861, resemble botanical illustrations, with detailed webs of multiple curved lines that apparently also contain symbolic value depending on their direction. Early in her practice she made "flowers" of relatives and friends, which developed into more intricate and abstract works, such as *The Eye of God* (1862) and *The Glory of the Lord* (1864). Akin to Allan's work, there is an associated Christian frame of reference to her work. While af Klint and Houghton provide interpretative depth to an understanding of a spiritualist kinship with botanical imagery, their specific views do not necessarily align with Chapman, Allan and Burns. Aesthetically and experientially, however, they were working in the same vein.

All the examples of spirit art discussed here are by women. For recent scholars working across gender studies and spiritualism, such as Ann Braude, Diana Basham and Alex Owen, spiritualism is celebrated as a political movement that promoted women's suffrage and a wider array of progressive causes. More recently, in the work of Molly McGarry, Native American rights, censorship debates and queer politics come to the fore.[130]

Spiritualist women orators and lecturers were actively participating in public life from the late 1870s.[131] Taking his cue from Basham's assertion that "Whatever spiritualism was or was not, the role played by women was central to it, whether as instigators, mediums, or advocates on its behalf,"[132] Broadley considers the history of spiritualism in Aotearoa New Zealand in relation to feminism. He notes a "religious dimension in liberal and feminist thought, and places spiritualism and female spiritualist orators in the context of a wider evangelical desire for social regeneration."[133] Spiritualism, Broadley argues, shares its heritage with evangelical Protestantism and broader liberal thought.[134]

The role of women in spiritualism tended to be associated with a "belief in the immense regenerative power of the female gender."[135] Broadley conflates this belief, integral to the intellectual history of feminism and gender politics more generally, with the idea that women have an especial role as "a conduit between the material and spiritual realms, and a vehicle for the realisation of a heaven on earth," and, by extension, utopic belief in the progress of civilization.[136]

> Spiritualists expressed, in radical form, a feminist notion popular among settlers: that New Zealand might be a site where women would achieve emancipation and guide society toward a more advanced level of civilisation. More generally, feminism among spiritualists formed part of a political consensus in society over the desirability and expectation of transformative progressive reform.[137]

Broadley's thesis tracks a historical optimism not evenly shared or agreed upon. In the context of Christchurch communities post World War I, in particular, the occultist Linda Hampton notes that while "women were in the majority where platform readers were concerned (and still are), their status was not high [and they were regarded as] only useful for their psychic talents."[138]

Over thirty years separates Chapman's early involvement with spiritualism and Burns's activity in the late 1930s, and their activities reflect their historical contexts. Burns was clearly politically minded, and there are recorded links between her activism and alternative spiritual life. She took up leadership roles: editing, lecturing and governing. In the year Burns was born, Chapman had signed the 1893 women's suffrage petition and in 1911 was attached to conference proceedings that listed socio-political concerns of the spiritualists of the day (the abolishment of capital punishment, free education, concerns over the Anglo-German arms race

and the engagement of spiritualism with science, for example).[139] Newspaper articles in which Chapman featured reveal an indirect form of agency: public demonstrations of mediumship, introduced and explained by chairmen.[140]

Chapman, Allan and Burns contribute to a complicated and incomplete historical record in which the local context cannot be generalised, but where important points of departure can be noted. The cultural contexts in which each of these women lived and worked, the different roles they played in public life, the conditions and requirements of their practices as mediums and the associated ideological knowledge systems of spiritualism, both personal and political, all contribute to an understanding of their work.

Questions emerge on their agency as women, spiritualists and artists, linked uniquely by the way their visual practices were very much spiritual practices. Possibly in all cases, these women relinquished authorship of the work by choosing not to sign it and attributing authorship to the spirit realm. They all referred to a source of power that was, in turn, a form of authorisation to speak, again bringing into focus the question of where agency is situated.[141] The images themselves exhibit a dynamic biomorphism and appear to adopt a visual language that is immanent; sensation, intuition and immediacy are privileged modes of communication. Drawing on art historian Catherine de Zegher's thoughts on the sensibilities of Hilma af Klint, Emma Kunz and Agnes Martin and their associated image worlds, "an emotional model of relinquishment (the renouncing of egotism) and response (the recovering of reciprocity)" is a suitable description too for the work of New Zealand's women spiritualists.[142] Their work is relational—an exchange between medium artist, spirit guide and audience.

In conclusion, the visual language represented here (the botanical, experiential, intuitive, dynamic and unknown) engenders a sense of immanence: a spirituality that enfolds material reality. The shared concerns of these artists, from the botanical to the Egyptological, also represent a local confluence that invites speculation on the historical origins of these artistic and religious practices: on the one hand, perhaps espoused by the more esoteric among us, is the idea of universally shared experience, symbols and forms, and on the other, there is a dynamic diffusion of material culture shared within communities and across continents.

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[1] Linda E. Hampton, *Wise Women: New Zealand Women's Alternative Spirituality and History* (Leeston: Linda Hampton, 2013).
[2] Andrew Paul Wood, *Shadow Worlds: A History of the Occult and Esoteric in New Zealand* (Auckland: Massey University Press, 2023). Robert S. Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn: The Story of Alternative Spirituality in New Zealand* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993).
[3] See Simone Natale, "Spreading the Spirit Word: Print Media, Storytelling, and Popular Culture in Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism," *communication +1* 4, no. 1 (2015), https://scholarworks.umass.edu/cpo/vol4/iss1/12, DOI: https://doi.org/10.7275/R5GF0RF9.
[4] Shaun Broadley, "Science, Spiritualism and Nineteenth-Century New Zealand," *Australasian Victorian Studies Journal* 2 (1996): 118.
[5] Inspirational drawing and automatic drawing (distinguished from, although, depending on the context, related to the automatic drawing associated with surrealism) are other associated terms. See, for example, Tessel M. Bauduin, "Psychic Automatism in Early Surrealism," in *Hilma af Klint: The Art of Seeing the Invisible* (edited by Kurt Almqvist and Louise Belfrage, Stockholm: Bokförlaget Stolpe and Axel and Margaret Ax:son Johnson Foundation for Public Benefit, 2020), 123–36.

[6] Richard L.N. Greenaway, "Bromley Cemetery Tour," Christchurch City Libraries Ngā Kete Wānanga o Ōtautahi, June 2007, n.p. https://christchurchcitylibraries.com/Heritage/Cemeteries/Bromley/BromleyCemetery.pdf.
[7] "Astounding Artistic Talent: Woman's Mysterious Power," *NZ Truth*, 8 May 1930, Papers Past, National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa.
[8] Greenaway, "Bromley Cemetery Tour," n.p.
[9] "Minnie Chapman," *New Zealand History Nga korero a ipurangi o Aotearoa*, accessed 30 January 2024, https://nzhistory.govt.nz/suffragist/minnie-chapman and https://nzhistory.govt.nz/files/documents/suffrage-pdfs/176.pdf.
[10] "Astounding artistic talent." Anecdotal evidence of Chapman's practice is also recorded in Greenaway, "Bromley Cemetery Tour," n.p.
[11] "Astounding Artistic Talent."
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid. For Chapman, the term "obsession" possibly had spiritual connotations associated with spirit possession. See also "Persian Patterns," *Otago Daily Times*, 15 April 1909, Papers Past, National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa. "A Persian gentleman who departed from this mundane sphere some three or four thousand years ago, has obsessed the material arm and hand of Mrs. M. Chapman of Christchurch."
[14] "Spiritualists in Trouble: Alleged Illegal Raffle," *Star (Christchurch)*, 4 September 1906, Papers Past, National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa.
[15] "Spirit Drawing," *Evening Star*, 5 April 1907, Papers Past, National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa.
[16] The individual referred to is not named: "but when the master of the Christchurch School of Art saw her work he said that her drawing was better after eighteen months' study than that done by many who had been at it all their lives." Ibid. Potentially, Sydney Thompson was the referenced unnamed master; alas, the only proof of that point is that the dates coincide.
[17] Ibid.
[18] "Persian Patterns."
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] "National Association of Spiritualists: Convention Concluded," *Otago Witness*, 19 April 1911, Papers Past, National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa.
[22] Ibid.
[23] In the interim years there is the probable death of her father, David Ninian Lang Baird, in 1915, and the death of her husband, Joshua Reuben Chapman, in 1922. See Christchurch City Council Cemeteries Database, accessed 14 January 2024, https://heritage.christchurchcitylibraries.com/Cemeteries/interment.asp?id=92976.
[24] "Astounding Artistic Talent." This article followed a previous reference to Chapman's work in association with press coverage of the death of W.M. Atkinson, known for his spirit drawing and association with Arthur Conan Doyle. It appears that Atkinson's death spurred an interest in seeking out spirit drawing practitioners. See "Artist's Death," *Dominion*, 14 April 1930, Papers Past, National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa. Another article that circulated at this time featured the practice of Mrs. E. de Cossey, of Remuera, a spiritualist who began drawing in 1920. "Spirit Control: Auckland Woman's Belief," *Auckland Star*, 17 April 1930, Papers Past, National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa.
[25] "Astounding Artistic Talent."
[26] "Spirit-Guided?" *Evening Post*, 2 May 1930, Papers Past, National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa.
[27] "Astounding Artistic Talent."
[28] "Spirit-Guided?"
[29] "Astounding Artistic Talent."
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.

[32] Christchurch City Council Cemeteries Database.
[33] Parents: Augustus Hatton Shury and Janet Chapman. See Sophia Garland Allan (born Shury). MyHeritage, accessed 13 January 2024, https://www.myheritage.com/research/record-40001-508594184/sophia-garland-allan-born-shury-in-familysearch-family-tree.
[34] Registration number: 1891/3801. Bride's Given Name(s) Sophia Garland. Bride's Family Name: Shury. Groom's Given Name(s): William. Groom's Family Name: Allan. Births Deaths and & Marriages Online, accessed 13 January 2024, https://www.bdmhistoricalrecords.dia.govt.nz/Search/Search?Path=querySubmit.m%3fReportName%3dMarriageSearch%26recordsPP%3d30#SearchResults.
[35] "All New Zealand, Electoral Rolls, 1853–2010 results for Sophia Garland Allan," Ancestry, accessed 13 January 2024, https://www.ancestry.com.au/search/collections/1836/?name=Sophia+Garland_Allan&name_x=1.
[36] Registration Number: 1910/8122. Family Name: Allan. Given Name(s): Helen Grace. Date of Birth / Age of Death: 18Y. Births Deaths and Marriages Online, accessed 13 January 2024, https://www.bdmhistoricalrecords.dia.govt.nz/Search/Search?Path=querySubmit.m%3fReportName%3dDeathSearch%26recordsPP%3d30#SearchResults.
[37] Registration Number: 1921/4219. Family Name: Allan. Given Name(s): William. Date of Birth/Age at Death: 56Y. Births Deaths and Marriages Online, accessed 30 January 2024, https://www.bdmhistoricalrecords.dia.govt.nz/Search/Search?Path=querySubmit.m%3fReportName%3dDeathSearch%26recordsPP%3d30#SearchResults. *Ashburton Guardian* XLI, Issue 9554, 7 July 1921, 1, https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AG19210707.2.2.1 (accessed 30 January 2024).
[38] "All New Zealand, Electoral Rolls, 1853-2010 results for Sophia Garland Allan," Ancestry, accessed 13 January 2024, https://www.ancestry.com.au/search/collections/1836/?name=Sophia+Garland_Allan&name_x=1.
[39] *The Architectural Heritage of Christchurch: 3. McLeans Mansion* (Christchurch: Christchurch City Town Planning Division. Christchurch City Council, 1983), accessed 13 January 2024, https://christchurchcitylibraries.com/Heritage/Publications/ChristchurchCityCouncil/ArchitecturalHeritage/McLeansMansion/McLeansMansion.pdf.
[40] "Holly Lea: 123 Fendalton Road," Christchurch City Council Libraries Ngā Kete Wānanga o Ōtautahi, accessed 13 January 2024, https://my.christchurchcitylibraries.com/holly-lea-123-fendalton-road/.
[41] "Deaths," *The Press*, 4 November 1959, Papers Past, National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa.
[42] Sophie Garland Allan papers, Collection: MB 847—Sophie Garland Allan papers. Date of Creation: 1930. Description: [MS 311] "Mrs. S.G. Allan's psychic writings" [manuscript]. Letter to S.G. Allan by B. Worsley accompanied by "translations." Macmillan Brown Library Te Puna Rakahau o Macmillan Brown, Te Whāre Wānanga o Waitaha University of Canterbury (hereafter MBL), accessed 30 January 2024, https://kohika.canterbury.ac.nz/opac_canterbury/scripts/mwimain.dll/144/Description/Web_desc_det_rep?sessionsearch&fld=SISN&exp=74054. Sophia Garland Allan is recorded in the catalogue system as "Sophie."
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid. Transcription: "Coloured drawing No. 3. July 3rd. 1930. July 28th. 1930. [date of document]." "Hermes the Egyptian gave the undermentioned translation of the meaning of the drawing. vix.--- The drawing before you represents an embellishment of a panel in the Temple of Isis. It is meant to express the cunning and beauty of the Evil One. It brings to the mind of the worshiper, to be always on the watch, and look below the surface, in other words to remember that things are not always what they seem, therefore to be watchful and alert for evil under the cloak of goodness or beauty. The writing on the back of the drawing was translated as follows.--- Much could be said about the drawing on the other side, but enough has been indicated to show the values of the teaching of the Egyptian mind. It is of equal importance to those living at the present time, and we would emphasise the message which the picture contains. For your guidance and protection we refer you to the picture of the Holy Spirit with the embodied teachings connected with it. Signed Caxo. Priest of the Temple of Isis. With my Blessing."

[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] See 2 Corinthians 11:14.
[49] Burns, Violet Alberta Jessie; Burns, Berta Sinclair; Burns, Betty; Watson, Berta; Watson, Violet Alberta Jessie. Jocelyn Chalmers, "Burns, Violet Alberta Jessie," *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (1998), Te Ara—the Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, accessed 9 January 2024, https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/4b51/burns-violet-alberta-jessie.
[50] "Psychology Club Meets," *Star (Christchurch)*, 29 April 1932, Papers Past, National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa.
[51] See "Editorial," *Woman To-Day* 1, no. 3 (1 June 1937): 49.
[52] Elsie Locke, "About Women Today," *Turnbull Library Record* 29 (1996), 47–58. The reason for Burns's resignation is not officially recorded. The minutes of Women Today on 9 August 1937 refer to the reading of a "letter declining to give reasons for her resignation." Elsie Locke later recalled Burns's belief that editorial oversight was required, but this view conflicted with the collective nature and intention of the editorial committee.
[53] Chalmers, "Burns, Violet Alberta Jessie." Chalmers cites Baughan, B. E. Miscellaneous papers, 1969–1971. In B. E. Baughan. Papers. MS-Papers-0198-6. WTU, or National Party. Miscellaneous election material, 1948–1963. 91-236-5/3. WTU.
[54] Ibid.
[55] "'Spirit' Drawings: Their Acceptance for Academy, Wellington Woman Claims Psychic Guidance," *Evening Star*, 18 May 1939, Papers Past, National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa.
[56] "Remarkable Drawings," *Manawatu Times*, 2 January 1940, Papers Past, National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa.
[57] Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn*, 59.
[58] Harold S. Sell, *A Guide to Modern Spiritualism* (Auckland: Spiritualist Church of New Zealand, n.d. [c. 1975], 17. According to the Spiritualism Association, Sell was commissioned in 1974 to write this account. I have not been able to locate records of the exhibition. Sell's text reads as follows: "From the 18th April to the 22nd April, 1924, the first exhibition of psychic art was held in the country in Auckland and later the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts accepted for hanging, a number of designs drawn through the mediumship of Mrs Bertha Sinclair Burns. This lady was also the Editress of a magazine 'Aquarius' which was devoted to Spiritualism and creative thought."
[59] Esther M. Nelson, Psychic Research Society of Wellington: President's Annual Report, 7 April 1941 [in review of 1940]. Psychic Research Society of Wellington: Minute book 1. MS-Papers-2279-1. Alexander Turnbull Library. Andrew Paul Wood tracks the Christchurch society founding in 1940, by Edgar Lovell-Smith. Wood, *Shadow Worlds: A History of the Occult and Esoteric in New Zealand* (Auckland: Massey University Press: 2023), 213. Records at the Macmillan Brown make 1941 the inauguration date. See the document titled "Psychic Research Society of Christchurch (Inc.) A Brief History of its foundation, development and function." Burns's association is not directly mentioned and aside from the Lovell-Smiths, no other names are mentioned. Psychic Research Society of Christchurch New Zealand Inc. records.
[60] Psychic Research Society of Wellington: Minute book 1, MS-Papers-2279-1, Alexander Turnbull Library.
[61] Ibid.
[62] "For many years the late [William Charles Nation (1840–1930)] edited his Message of Life. After his death, Mrs. Sinclair Burns published Aquarius. Unfortunately the Global War finished this fine effort." Alice M. Richards, "Spiritualism in New Zealand," *Grand Souvenir Book, World Centennial Celebration of Modern Spiritualism, 1948* (San Antonio: Federation of Spiritual Churches and Associations, 1948), 183. *The International Association for the Preservation of Spiritualist and Occult Periodicals*, accessed 30 January 2024,

http://iapsop.com/ssoc/1948__anonymous___world_centennial_celebration_of_modern_spiritualism_souvenir_book.pdf. Sell's records make note of a journal that ran until 1934. Sell, *A Guide to Modern Spiritualism,* 16. The only records of *Aquarius* I have been able to locate are a few pages from the 21 June 1939 edition pasted in Edgar Lovell-Smith's Psychic Research Society scrapbook on pages 120–28, and excerpts on the account of Jane Elizabeth Harris-Roberts, "The Mater" of New Zealand Spiritualism, have been reproduced from *Aquarius* (21 October 1939), Appendix 1 Autobiographical Writings of Jane Elizabeth Harris-Roberts. Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn*, 205–212.

[63] Richards, "Spiritualism in New Zealand," 183.

[64] Robin Kay and Tony Eden, *Portrait of a Century: The History of the N.Z. Academy of Fine Arts 1882-1982* (Wellington: Millwood Press, 1983), 201. See also *The New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts (Incorporated): Autumn Exhibition, 1939* (Wellington: National Art Gallery, 1939).

[65] "Remarkable Drawings."

[66] Minutes of a Meeting of the Psychic Research Society, 1 November 1940, Channing Hall, Lambton Quay, Wellington. Psychic Research Society of Wellington: Minute book 1. MS-Papers-2279-1. Alexander Turnbull Library. See also "Remarkable Drawings."

[67] "Remarkable Drawings."

[68] Ibid.

[69] Curiously, "whereas Zara had signed all her other artistic achievements, she declined to do so [for the works contributed to the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts], the four pictures remaining unsigned. Mrs Burns said she would not sign them, as she did not regard them as the product of her own mind." "'Spirit' Drawings."

[70] Ibid.

[71] "Remarkable Drawings."

[72] Ibid.

[73] Richards, "Spiritualism in New Zealand," 183.

[74] "Remarkable Drawings." A "staggering speed" is also referred to in Minutes of a Meeting of the Psychic Research Society, 1 November 1940, Channing Hall, Lambton Quay, Wellington. Psychic Research Society of Wellington: Minute book 1. MS-Papers-2279-1. Alexander Turnbull Library.

[75] "Remarkable Drawings."

[76] "'Spirit' Drawings."

[77] In the Psychic Research Society of Christchurch scrapbook is a reference to an invitation for Burns to participate in an experiment titled "Victoria University College Tests in Clairvoyance," which involved long-distance tests in clairvoyance for people outside of Wellington "who feel that they have clairvoyant powers." According to the invitation, each week a selection of cards (similar to playing cards) was randomly selected and placed in a line face down. Participants were asked to make a list of cards as they "see" them from afar. Psychic Research Society of Christchurch New Zealand Inc. records, MBL.

[78] "Remarkable Drawings."

[79] "'Psychic Drawing' Wellington Woman's Work Many Strange Designs," *New Zealand Herald,* 3 July 1939, Papers Past, National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa.

[80] "Remarkable Drawings."

[81] "Psychic Drawing." This experiment is also recorded in the minutes of a meeting of the Psychic Research Society. Minutes of a Meeting of the Psychic Research Society, 1 November 1940, Channing Hall, Lambton Quay, Wellington. Psychic Research Society of Wellington: Minute book 1. MS-Papers-2279-1. Alexander Turnbull Library.

[82] "Remarkable Drawings."

[83] "'Spirit' Drawings."

[84] The New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, *Autumn Exhibition 1939*, Art Gallery, Buckle Street. Burns's work is listed under Drawings, Etchings, etc.

[85] "Spirit Influence Claimed: Highly Rated Drawing Designs: An Untutored Artist," *Evening Star,* 17 May 1939, Papers Past, National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa.

[86] "'Spirit' Drawings."

[87] Ibid.

[88] "Remarkable Drawings."
[89] "Exhibitions," *Auckland Star*, 28 June 1939, Papers Past, National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa.
[90] "Psychic Drawing."
[91] "Advertisements Column 5," *Evening Post*, 15 April 1939; "Advertisements Column 6," *Evening Post*, 6 May 1939; "Advertisements Column 7," *Evening Post*, 10 June 1939, Papers Past, National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa.
[92] "Advertisements Column 5," *Press*, 20 January 1940, Papers Past, National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa.
[93] Berta S. Burns, no. 307 in The New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, *Catalogue of the 52nd Annual Exhibition*, 1940. The exhibition ran 12 October–9 November.
[94] Nelson, Psychic Research Society of Wellington: President's Annual Report, 7 April 1941 [in review of 1940].
[95] Burns lived at 30 Jacksons Road, Riccarton, Christchurch in 1941 and 1943 (also living there in 1938 before they moved to Wellington) and, along with her husband, now enlisted as an airman, at 2 Albert Road, Auckland East, Auckland also in 1943. "All New Zealand, Electoral Rolls, 1853–2010 results for Violet Alberta Burns." Ancestry, accessed 13 January 2024, https://www.ancestry.com.au/search/collections/1836/?name=Violet+Alberta_Burns&name_x=1.
[96] Berta Sinclair Burns, "Adolescent Crime," *Greymouth Evening Star*, 25 January 1941, Papers Past, National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa.
[97] "Current Notes," *Press*, 28 February 1941, Papers Past, National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa.
[98] Psychic Research Society of Wellington: Minute book 1. MS-Papers-2279-1. Alexander Turnbull Library.
[99] Violet G. Barker (Hon. Secretary) is also listed. Psychic Research Society of Wellington: Minute book 1.
[100] MB 847—Sophie Garland Allan papers, MBL.
[101] I located one reference in Lovell-Smith's papers: a Mrs Chapman is named at the top of a loose piece of paper that documents a meeting held by Lovell-Smith on Tuesday 9 October 1928. The message received that day was: "look out for the papers next week. They will have something for you." Lovell-Smith Family Papers ARC 1988.88, Box 5, Folder 26, Item 285, Canterbury Museum.
[102] Hampton, *Wise Women*, 105.
[103] At the time of writing, the library records of the Christchurch branch of the Theosophical Society are inaccessible for administrative reasons.
[104] "Advertisements Column 7."
[105] "A Psychical Library," Southern Spirits digital exhibition, Te Whāre Wānanga o Waitaha University of Canterbury, accessed 15 January 2024, https://www.canterbury.ac.nz/about-uc/what-we-do/uc-in-the-community/exhibitions-and-collections/southern-spirits/a-psychical-library.
[106] "Psychic Research Society of Christchurch (Inc.): A Brief History of its foundation, development and function," Records from 1940: Newspaper Cuttings and Extracts, Psychic Research Society of Christchurch New Zealand Inc. records, MBL.
[107] "Spirit Influence Claimed."
[108] Minutes of a Meeting of the Psychic Research Society, 1 November 1940, Channing Hall, Lambton Quay, Wellington. Psychic Research Society of Wellington: Minute book 1. MS-Papers-2279-1. Alexander Turnbull Library. See also "Remarkable Drawings."
[109] "Persian Patterns."
[110] "Spirit Drawing."
[111] "Astounding Artistic Talent."
[112] "'Spirit' Drawings."
[113] See, for example, Eleanor Dobson and Nichola Tonks, "Introduction: Ancient Egypt in Nineteenth-Century Culture," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 40, no. 4 (2018): 311–315, https://doi.10.1080/08905495.2018.1484606.
[114] "Spirit Influence Claimed."
[115] "Astounding Artistic Talent."

[116] "Spirit-Guided?"
[117] MB 847—Sophie Garland Allan papers, MBL.
[118] See "Advertisements Column 2," *Auckland Star*, 28 August 1943, Papers Past, National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa. See also Richards, "Spiritualism in New Zealand," 183. Richards also refer to a Mrs Buick and Donald McLean, both of Christchurch, working in sculpture and carving respectively.
[119] Lomas refers to art historian Alois Riegl in this instance. David Lomas, "Roots to Abstraction: Hilma af Klint and Botany," in *Hilma af Klint: Seeing is Believing*, ed. Kurt Almqvist and Louise Belfrage (Stockholm: Bokförlaget Stolpe and Axel and Margaret Ax:son Johnson Foundation for Public Benefit, 2020): 116, 119.
[120] Ibid., 115–29.
[121] Ibid., 115.
[122] Lomas, "Roots to Abstraction," 115.
[123] Ibid., 119.
[124] See Karin Althaus, Matthias Mühling and Sebastian Schneider, eds., *World Receivers: Georgiana Houghton, Hilma af Klint, Emma Kunz, and John Whitney, James Whitney, Harry Smith* (Munich: Lenbachhaus : Hirmer).
[125] See Shaun D. Broadley, "Spirited Visions: A Study of Spiritualism in New Zealand Settler Society, 1870–90" (PhD thesis, University of Otago, 2000), 156.
[126] "Freethought Lectures," *Otago Daily Times*, 7 May 1879, Papers Past, National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa.
[127] David Adams, "The Esoteric Botany of Hilma af Klint: From a Lecture Delivered by David Adams, Ph.D., March 8, 2020, at Lightforms, Hudson, NY," 3, accessed 30 January 2024, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ced44211046fc000115a804/t/5e8cb3298e92871e73abf17f/1586279211614/EsotericBotany+of+HilmaafKlint-DavidAdams.pdf.
[128] "These four loose sheets were found slipped into the notebook of The Five … It is not known to whom this is addressed." "The Five notebook KaK 1522, 1904," in Christine Burgin, ed., *Hilma af Klint: Notes and Methods* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 29.
[129] Georgina Houghton, quoted in *The Spiritual Magazine* 6 (1871): 266, https://books.google.co.nz/books?id=vPkDAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA266&lpg=PA266&dq=%22glorious+hues%22+houghton&ots=653gkwTQoy&sig=ACfU3U0yJkPdp2ivpLdbmCucs2LzpbINEA&hl=en&sa=X&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=%22glorious%20hues%22&f=false. See also Allison Meier, "Georgiana Houghton Visualized a World Beyond Death," 28 September 2019, https://medium.com/nightingale/georgiana-houghton-visualized-a-world-beyond-death-f3666dddd9ef.
[130] Ann Braude (1989) *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1989); Diana Basham, *The Trial of Women: Feminism and the Occult Sciences in Victorian Literature and Society* (New York: New York University Press, 1992); Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Molly McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008).
[131] See Broadley, "Spirited Visions," 155–56.
[132] Basham, *The Trial of Women*, cited in Broadley, "Spirited Visions," 152.
[133] Broadley, "Spirited Visions," 165.
[134] Ibid., 167.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid., 167, 174.
[137] Ibid., 174.
[138] Linda Hampton, email correspondence with the author, 21 July 2022. Hampton adds: "This was the definite tone of the letters by Church Secretaries (men) to the platform Mediums—verging on patronising at times. One mentioned to another Church Secretary 'she seemed sensible.' A lot of the women having been widowed after WWI were living from hand to mouth—relative to relative—job to job."

[139] "National Association of Spiritualists," 3.
[140] "Persian Patterns"; "Spirit Drawing."
[141] Branden W. Joseph, paraphrasing Ann Braude, writes that "authorisation from the spirit realm proved key for producing the very notion of an autonomous public, female subjecthood." Branden W. Joseph, "Knowledge, Painting, Abstraction and Desire," in *Hilma af Klint: Seeing is Believing*, ed. Kurt Almqvist and Louise Belfrage (Stockholm: Bokförlaget Stolpe and Axel and Margaret Ax:son Johnson Foundation for Public Benefit, 2020), 134.
[142] Catherine de Zegher and Hendel Teicher, eds., *3 X Abstraction: New Methods of Drawing* (New York: The Drawing Centre and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 24.