

The Museum of Modern Art

MoMA ANNOUNCES *HILMA AF KLINT: WHAT STANDS BEHIND THE FLOWERS*, AN EXHIBITION FOCUSING ON THE ARTIST'S EXPLORATION OF SPIRITUALITY IN NATURE

The Exhibition Will Feature a Portfolio of Botanical Drawings and Recently Discovered Studies by the Artist

NEW YORK, December 12, 2024 — The Museum of Modern Art announces an exhibition showcasing MoMA's recent acquisition of *Nature Studies*, a portfolio of 46 botanical drawings by the Swedish artist Hilma af Klint (1862–1944), which will be on display for the first time. On view from May 11 through September 27, 2025, *Hilma af Klint: What Stands Behind Flowers* explores af Klint's engagement with the natural world. Created during the spring and summer of 1919 and 1920, the *Nature Studies* portfolio presents the wonders of Sweden's flora and showcases the artist's keen botanical eye. Af Klint combines her renowned approach to abstraction with traditional botanical drawing, juxtaposing detailed renderings of plants discovered in her surroundings with enigmatic abstract diagrams. Examples include a sunflower paired with concentric circles, a narcissus crowned by a pinwheel of primary colors, and tree blossoms accompanied by checkerboards of dots and strokes. Through these forms, af Klint seeks to reveal, in her words, "what stands behind the flowers," reflecting her belief that studying nature uncovers truths about the human condition. *Hilma af Klint: What Stands Behind Flowers* is organized by Jodi Hauptman, The Richard Roth Senior Curator, Department of Drawings and Prints, with Kolleen Ku, Curatorial Assistant, and Chloe White, Louise Bourgeois Fellow, Department of Drawings and Prints. Realized with the participation of the Hilma af Klint Foundation, Stockholm.

The exhibition focuses on the years 1917 to 1922, contextualizing the MoMA portfolio and highlighting a pivotal shift in af Klint's practice. In 1917, no longer satisfied with only receiving direction from spiritual guides, af Klint embarked on a path of self-study, culminating in the *Nature Studies* drawings. The exhibition opens with this new approach, seen in her adoption of an abstract diagrammatic vocabulary in works like the 1917 Atom series, one of many key loans from the Hilma af Klint Foundation in Stockholm. This section also highlights in landscapes and botanical drawing her ongoing dedication to observation. As af Klint noted, "First, I shall try to penetrate the flowers of the earth; use as a point of departure the plants of the earth." The second section focuses on the *Nature Studies*, along with related notebooks that allow visitors to experience af Klint's reflections on the plants she studied, as well as botanical source materials. The final section presents her ongoing interest in exploring the connection between nature and spirituality, but with a new method. In the 1922 series *On the Viewing of Flowers and Trees*, af Klint employs a wet-on-wet watercolor technique, using vibrant color to express the spiritual power of plants.

“While we often think of artists of the early 20th century as focused on new technologies—and the hustle and bustle of modern life—for many, the natural world was a crucial touchstone. MoMA’s *Nature Studies* reveal af Klint as an artist uniquely attuned to nature. We hope that attunement—her demonstration of careful observation and discovery of all that stands behind the flowers—encourages our audience to look closely and see their own surroundings, whether here in the city or beyond, in new ways,” says Hauptman.

The exhibition reveals, for the first time, the extent of af Klint’s plant knowledge and the ways her botanical experience shaped her artistic vision. Through research for this exhibition, seven previously unknown drawings by af Klint of mushroom species, commissioned by the renowned Swedish mycologist M. A. Lindblad, were discovered in the archives at the Swedish Museum of Natural History. They will be loaned to MoMA, and shown in the US for the first time, to demonstrate af Klint’s commitment to close observation of the natural world and her drawing within a scientific context. The discovery was made through the research collaboration of Dr. Lena Struwe, director of the Chrysler Herbarium at Rutgers University and professor at the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences, a contributor to the exhibition and its catalogue; and Dr. Johannes Lundberg, curator in the Department of Botany at the Swedish Museum of Natural History, who identified this previously unknown group of drawings. Further, as a crucial element of the exhibition’s research, MoMA associate conservator Laura Neufeld conducted the first-ever technical analysis of af Klint’s methods and materials on paper.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a catalogue and a limited-edition facsimile. The lavishly illustrated catalogue, *Hilma af Klint: What Stands Behind the Flowers*, will present the 46 drawings alongside contextualizing artworks and translations of the artist’s previously unpublished writings. An overview essay by Jodi Hauptman will explore af Klint’s portfolio and the circumstances of its creation, and essays by Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, Laura Neufeld, and Lena Struwe will unpack the imagery, materiality, and botanical knowledge of these works. 272 pages, 160 color illustrations. Hardcover, \$55. ISBN: 978-1-63345-168-1. *Hilma af Klint: Flora* will be a deluxe facsimile of the full portfolio, published in a limited edition of 500. Each of the 46 drawings will be presented on its own sheet at full scale, and the collection will be enclosed in a luxe clamshell case. \$500. ISBN: 978-1-63345-169-8. Both editions are published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and will be available at MoMA stores and online at store.moma.org.

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