

In January 1917, artist Hilma af Klint (Swedish, 1862–1944) announced a new phase in her practice. She had devoted the previous decade to creating an epic cycle of paintings pulsating with organic and geometric forms—among that era’s earliest forays into abstraction. Her approach in these works was motivated by spiritual explorations and informed by instructions from divine messengers. “Lectured to,” however, she began to feel like “a container that is filled from above and which therefore continuously has been overflowing.” Instead, she resolved to “fill the bowl through self-studies” and directed her attention to the natural world.

These investigations culminated in her *Nature Studies*, a portfolio of forty-six drawings that combine traditional representations of flowering plants with enigmatic abstract diagrams. Created in 1919 and 1920, the *Nature Studies* reveal af Klint to be a keen-eyed naturalist, whose expansive botanical knowledge shaped her artistic vision. Such careful observation of the environment, she understood, was inextricable from spiritual discovery: “When we turn our gaze toward the plant kingdom,” she wrote, “it gives us information about the composition of our own being.”

Aspiring “to explain what stands behind the flowers,” af Klint offers guidance in close, vigilant, and generous looking. Beginning with works that attest to her abiding engagement with nature and including resources from her botanical world, this exhibition displays her *Nature Studies* for the first time. In putting representation and abstraction, observation and envisioning, art and botany into dialogue, af Klint recognizes an ecosystem teeming with possibility and asserts a way of being grounded in the interconnectedness of all living things. “This world,” she declared, “is the best textbook.”



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, and Laura Neufeld, Paper Conservator, The David Booth Conservation Department. Realized with the participation of the Hilma af Klint Foundation, Stockholm.

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We invite you to explore the accompanying publication, *Hilma af Klint: What Stands Behind the Flowers*, which is available in the Museum Store.

The exhibition *Hilma af Klint: What Stands Behind the Flowers* continues in the Museum's Sculpture Garden, with special plantings of the botanical species depicted in af Klint's *Nature Studies*.

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