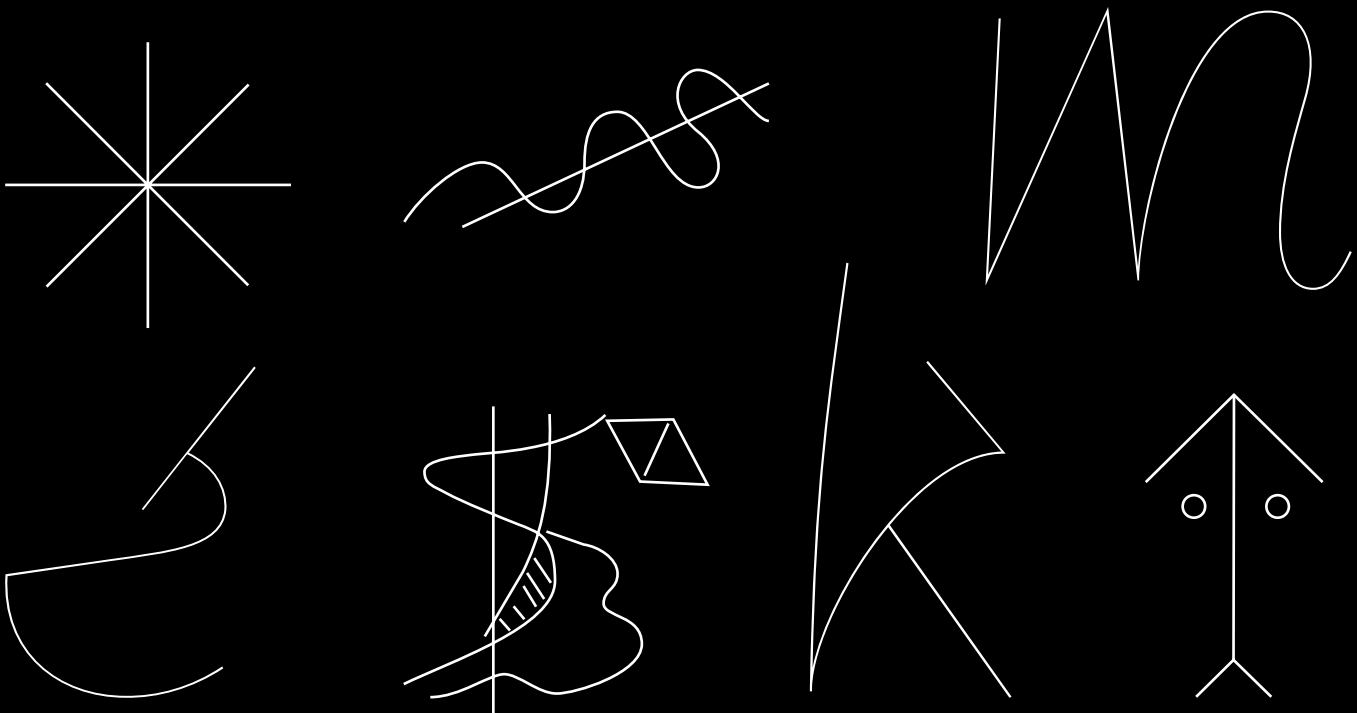
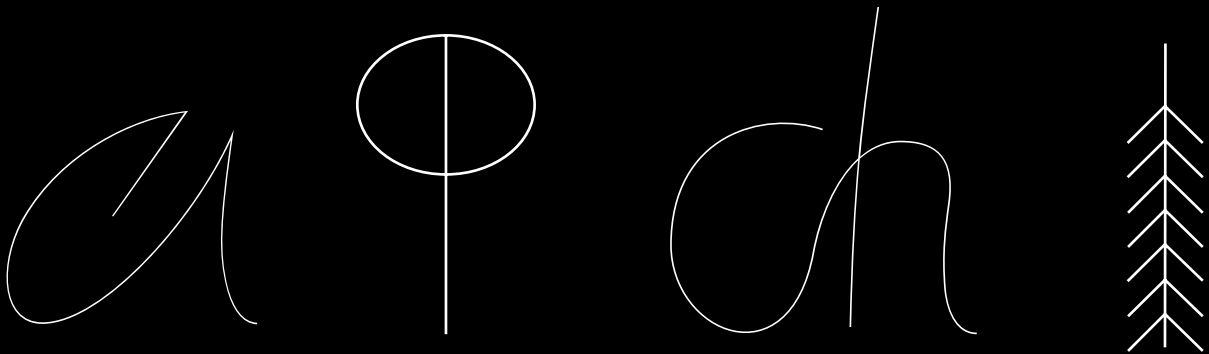


IMAGINARY SCRIPT

FRANCIETTA
CCI FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM 2024



This is a documentation of my art residency supported by the Caribbean Cultural Institute and the Pérez Art Museum Miami, as part of my research on Caribbean graphic systems and their contemporary resonances. Through the following pages, I share a process where drawing, forms, and symbols engage in dialogue with the history, narratives, and cultural practices of the Caribbean diaspora.

From studying Haitian vèvés and Cuban anaforuana to designing a syncretic writing system that blends tradition and innovation, this project aims to bridge memory and futurity, research and creation. This booklet reflects the graphic experiments and inspirations that shape my practice, while opening a space to reconsider writing systems as hybrid, living territories in constant transformation.

01 GENESIS OF THE PROJECT

**02 THE KONGO COSMOGRAM
IN THE CARIBBEAN**

**03 MYTHOLOGY OF CARIBBEAN
WRITING**

**04 REFERENCES, BOOKS,
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07 

GENESIS

THE

OF

PROJECT

GENESIS OF THE PROJET

My project is deeply rooted in my personal journey, beginning with my studies at École Estienne in Paris, where I specialized in calligraphy and typography.

As a native of Martinique, a French Collectivity, I quickly became aware of the limited tools available to deeply explore the history and writing systems of the Caribbean. While enriching, the education I received was primarily centered on Latin alphabets and Western graphic conventions.

This realization sparked a desire to discover and understand how Caribbean populations developed their own forms of graphic communication. The omnipresence of European systems often overshadowed traditions such as Haitian vèvés or Cuban anaforuana, ritual graphics rooted in African cosmology and syncretic religious practices. How did these communities, shaped by colonization, transform beliefs into signs and signs into unique forms of expression?

This question became the driving force of my research, and my desire to explore Caribbean writing intensified as I became increasingly aware of the cultural gap between my academic training and my identity.

During my initial research in 2016, Sémasiography and Cosmogony, I examined two key concepts to understand writing in a Caribbean context:

- **Sémasiography: Unlike phonetic systems, which transcribe sounds, sémasiography represents ideas or concepts. This form of notation enables universal communication, transcending linguistic barriers. For instance, Haitian vèvés or Nigerian nsibidi are sémasiographic forms that encapsulate beliefs, myths, and rituals within graphic signs.**
- **Cosmogony: Cosmogony explores how Caribbean and African peoples have used writing to express their worldview. These systems extend beyond communication, serving as bridges between the visible and invisible, the human and the divine. Examples such as the anaforuanas in Cuba or the ukara of the Ekpé society in Nigeria are fascinating cases, combining mythical narration and ritual function.**

By connecting these two concepts, I highlighted the importance of ritual graphic systems as tools that are both aesthetic and functional. My research established that these forms of writing are not merely static artifacts but living processes that adapt and reinvent themselves, particularly within the diaspora.

This study laid the foundation for my current project, which aims to create a contemporary visual language inspired by this rich graphic history.

A cultural and graphic matrix — The concept of the transatlantic matrix is rooted in the deep connections that unite the graphic and ritual practices of West Africa and the Caribbean, forged through the painful history of the transatlantic slave trade. These connections are not merely remnants of a shared past; they embody a living cultural dynamic—a constant dialogue between memory, resistance, and reinvention.

- In Africa, graphic systems like the nsibidi in Nigeria were used to materialize narratives and concepts. Utilized by secret societies such as the Ekpé, this semasiographic system transcends phonetics to represent complex ideas and stories. These motifs, composed of geometric and pictographic forms, structured social, spiritual, and political narratives while marking the initiates' belonging to an exclusive body of knowledge.
- In the Caribbean, these African traditions were transformed by the social and spiritual realities of the displaced populations. Haitian vèvés, Cuban anaforuanas, and firmas are emblematic examples. These graphic forms, often drawn during religious rituals, embody mythological narratives, spiritual systems, and acts of cultural resistance. By inscribing spiritual narratives into visual forms, these signs become bridges between Africa and the Americas, connecting original mythologies to diasporic realities.

Transcending boundaries — The transatlantic matrix is not confined to static traditions; it is in constant evolution, hybrid and contextual. In the Caribbean, this matrix has absorbed influences from Indigenous, European, and Asian cultures while remaining true to its African roots. It forms a shared visual language, a symbolic space where spiritual and historical narratives intersect.

- Scholars like Robert Farris Thompson, who highlighted the continuities between African cosmograms and Caribbean graphic traditions, have shown how visual forms such as circled crosses or spirals found in practices like Haitian Vodou or Cuban Palo Monte capture spiritual energy and transcend geographical and cultural boundaries.

Exploring the matrix — Confronted with this rich transatlantic matrix, my application for an artistic residency in Miami arose from an urgent need to understand how this matrix continues to exist and evolve within contemporary Caribbean diasporas. Miami, as a crossroads of Afro-descendant and Caribbean cultures, offers a unique context for grounding this exploration and engaging with diasporic communities.

- My approach is not an anthropological study. As an artist, I aim to observe, listen, and feel how this matrix manifests in the daily and spiritual practices of the diaspora. This fieldwork provides an opportunity to interact with members of these communities in their simplest humanity while developing a contemporary artistic interpretation of this matrix.

The transatlantic matrix is far more than a heritage: it is a living force, capable of generating new forms and untold narratives. Through this residency, I aim to foster a dialogue between the spiritual and graphic stories of the past and the contemporary practices of today. By stepping into the role of the artist, I seek to embed this matrix within a creative dynamic, reinterpreting these graphic traditions through my own aesthetic lens and posing the question: how can this matrix inspire universal visual forms in today's globalized world?





THE

KONGO

IN

THE

COSMOGRAM

CARIBBEAN

GRAPHIC WRITING: THE KONGO COSMOGRAM IN THE CARIBBEAN

The Kongo Cosmogram — Bárbaro Martínez-Ruiz's research on Kongo graphic systems provides crucial insights into the transatlantic connections between the visual culture of Central Africa and the Caribbean. At the heart of Kongo cosmology lies the cosmogram, known as *dikenga dia Kongo*, a circular diagram symbolizing the cycle of life, death, and rebirth. Divided into four quadrants representing cardinal directions and phases of existence, the cosmogram embodies the unity of the physical and spiritual worlds, serving as both a guide for spiritual practices and a marker of identity.

In the Caribbean, particularly in Cuba within Afro-Cuban traditions like Palo Monte, the cosmogram evolved into *firmas*, graphic symbols used in ritual contexts to invoke spiritual forces. These signs, while preserving their Kongo essence, have adapted to local realities, blending African, Indigenous, and European influences.

Rock Art — Martínez-Ruiz also highlights the deep connections between Kongo graphic systems and ancient rock art in Central Africa. These carvings and paintings, discovered in caves and open-air sites, feature geometric and symbolic forms that prefigure the signs used in Kongo cosmograms. The continuity between these ancient symbols and contemporary graphic systems reveals a long-standing and deeply rooted tradition of visual communication within Central African culture.

Martínez-Ruiz identifies several primary sources for the graphic systems he studied:

Ancient rock art sites in Central Africa (Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo).

Bidimbu and Bisinsu: Kongo symbols used in both daily and ritual contexts.

Firmas: Ritual symbols from Cuban Palo Monte.

Minkisi and Prendas: Sacred objects inscribed with graphic signs.

The Dikenga dia Kongo cosmogram, the foundation of Kongo cosmology.

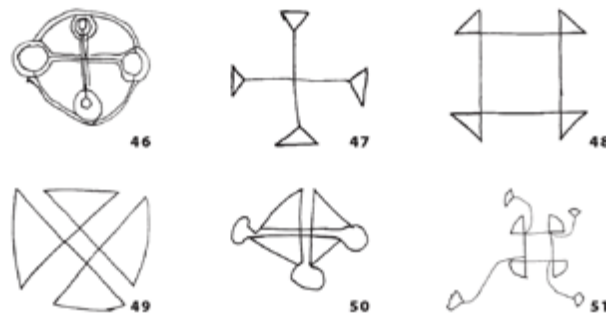
My goal is to experience this transatlantic matrix and engage with it artistically. By adopting the role of an artist rather than a researcher, I aim to explore this graphic tradition through drawing. This practice will allow me to reinterpret the cosmogram and its derivatives from a contemporary perspective while engaging in dialogue with the living narratives of diaspora members.

By reclaiming these ritual symbols, I seek to honor the cultural heritage of this transatlantic matrix.



FIGURE 5 Rupestrian painting from the Kiantapo site, Democratic Republic of the Congo. (Adapted by the author from Henri Breuil and G. Mortelmans, *Les figures incisées et ponctuées de la grotte de Kiantapo* [Brussels: Tervuren, 1952]. Image courtesy of Henri Breuil.)

Angola is arguably attributable at least in part to the lack of access to the region during its extended fifty-year civil war, to the logistical and technical difficulties associated with reaching the sites and conducting high-level visual and sound recordings, and to significant cultural barriers to entry throughout the region.



FIGURES 46–51 Examples of Lovo signs, Lovo rupestrian painting. (Adapted by the author from Paul Raymaekers and Hendrik van Moorsel, "Lovo: Dessins rupestres du Bas-Congo," *Ngongse, Carnets de sciences humaines*, nos. 12, 13, and 14 [Léopoldville, 1962]. Image courtesy of Paul Raymaekers and Hendrik van Moorsel.)

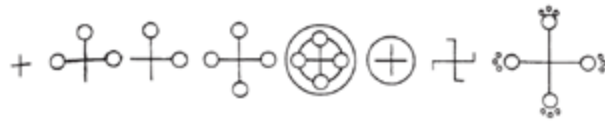
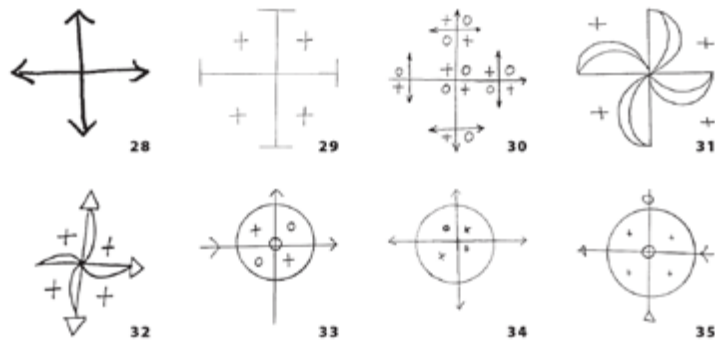


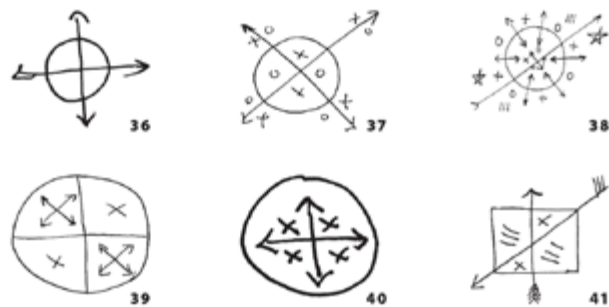
FIGURE 22 Bunseki Fu-Kiau series of signs. (Adapted by the author from K. K. Bunseki Fu-Kiau, *Cosmogonie Congo* [Kinshasa: ONRD, 1969].)



FIGURE 23 Robert Farris Thompson series of signs. (Adapted by the author from Robert Farris Thompson, *The Four Moments of the Sun* [Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1981]. Image courtesy of Robert Farris Thompson.)



FIGURES 28–35 Circle-of-new-life signs in the Palo Monte religion in Cuba. (From Bárbaro Martínez-Ruiz, personal collection, 1988.)



FIGURES 36–41 More circle-of-new-life signs in the Palo Monte religion in Cuba. (From Bárbaro Martínez-Ruiz, personal collection, 1988.)

MYTHOLOGY

CARIBBEAN

OF

WRITING

ASEMIC WRITING

Asemic writing lies at the intersection of writing and art, where the sign breaks free from linguistic constraints to become pure graphic expression. It neither seeks to transcribe an existing language nor convey a precise meaning; rather, it is a writing of the unspeakable, a space where gesture, form, and texture take precedence over sense. It invites a universal and sensory reading experience, where each viewer creates a unique interpretation, liberated from grammatical or phonetic structures.

In my artistic practice, asemic writing serves as a space for exploration, play, and questioning the boundaries of language and the infinite possibilities of the sign. My journey began with the study of Amerindian rock art in Martinique, where ancient carvings reveal a visual script, a silent dialogue between past and present. These archaic forms, oscillating between abstraction and figuration, provided a foundation for me to reinvent a writing system without words but imbued with memory and sensitivity.

My approach is also inspired by the works of several artists and writers who have pushed the boundaries of language:

Mirtha Dermisache, whose creations evoke fictional manuscripts where the act of writing becomes an autonomous artistic gesture, a poetic materialization of the sign.

Henri Michaux, with his drawing-writings that oscillate between chaos and structure, where the energy of the line expresses states of mind and inner visions.

Guy de Cointet, who transformed writing into performance, blending graphic design and theater to explore the enigma of language and communication.

Hanne Darboven, whose works resemble mathematical and temporal scores, questioning systems of notation and codification through their obsessive repetition.

These artists have paved the way for me to think of writing as an infinite territory, where each sign can become a map, a cosmos, or a mirror.

Asemic writing in my practice — As part of my residency in Miami, I aim to deepen this exploration by observing how Caribbean diasporas interpret and transform inherited signs. Focusing on drawing, I will develop a contemporary asemic writing that reactivates the transatlantic matrix in a new form—perhaps even a timeless one, who knows?

Far from functional writing, my asemic works seek to capture the ephemeral, the invisible, and the fragmented. They translate nonlinear narratives and diasporic memories into a free visual language, inviting the viewer to invent their own interpretation.

Asemic writing is a space where ancestry comes alive through gesture, and where signs tell the inaudible.

RETHINKING WRITING SYSTEM

Writing system — In his research, Pierre Déléage introduces a crucial distinction between two types of writing systems: integral writing and selective writing. These concepts broaden our understanding of what writing is, moving beyond the framework of the alphabet.

Integral writing — encompasses systems that fully transcribe the phonetic and morphological units of a language. These writing systems, such as the Latin alphabet or Chinese characters, allow for the faithful reproduction of any discourse by recording all necessary words. They function as complete repertoires where each linguistic unit finds its graphic equivalent, enabling a comprehensive reading independent of oral memory.

- This exhaustiveness makes them universal tools, often associated with societies where writing serves diverse purposes (legal, administrative, scientific), extending beyond purely ritual contexts.

Selective writing — does not aim to transcribe an entire discourse. Instead, it selects only specific and rigorously chosen parts, leaving oral memory to fill in the rest.

- Unlike integral writing, selective writing is closely tied to a specific context. It is an attached writing, designed to frame well-defined discourses. Its function is not to enable universal reading but to optimize the memorization and transmission of particular content.

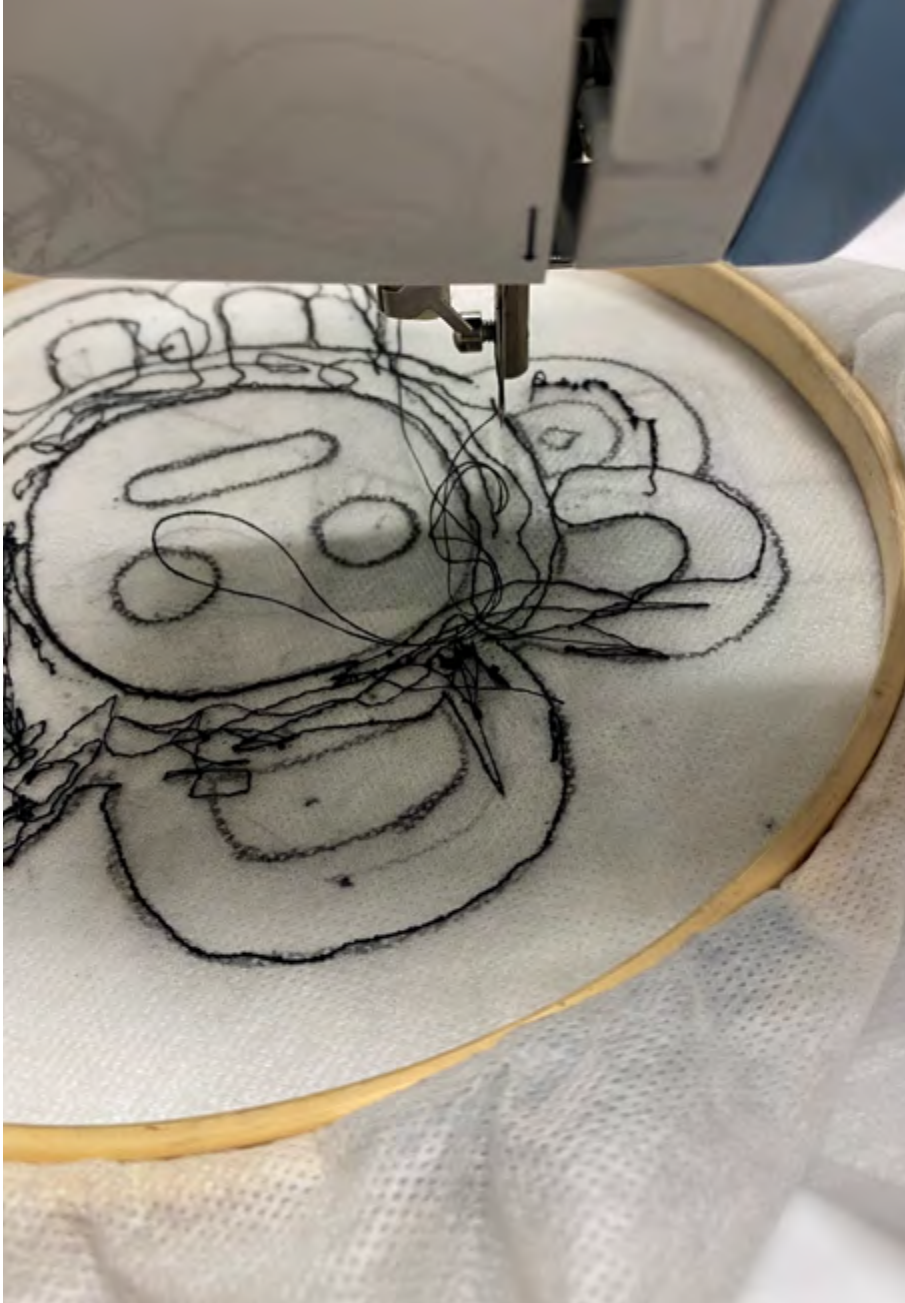
Implications for my research — These two conceptions of writing resonate deeply with my artistic research in Miami, where I question what a Caribbean writing system could be. Rather than integral writing, tied to phonetic or morphological exhaustiveness, I explore the potential of selective writing.

- In certain Caribbean graphic traditions, I perceive the presence of selective writing: each motif is chosen for its symbolic power, ritual role, or capacity to invoke a narrative. These forms rely on a shared network of meanings to bring mythological or spiritual stories to life.

Toward a reimagining of writing — As an artist, I see selective writing as a way to expand the very notion of writing. My work seeks to reactivate this economy of the sign in order to:

- Translate post-Creole narratives, where each motif or fragment becomes an evocation.
- Embed these narratives into material practices (drawing, embroidery, engraving) that integrate both gesture and medium.
- Create works that function as living archives, linking oral memory, graphic gestures, and visual storytelling.

Selective writing thus becomes a method for inventing a contemporary graphy that, while grounded in local traditions, opens itself to a universal and sensory reading experience.



CARIBBEAN WRITING

What is caribbean writing? — The mythology of Caribbean or post-Creole writing transcends the limits of the Latin alphabet to embrace visual, symbolic, and tactile forms drawn from interwoven cultures. Just as the grammar and phonology of Creole languages differ from those of Latin languages, why should their script not also break free from Western conventions? This question opens a field of artistic exploration aimed at creating a form of writing that extends beyond words, embedding itself in the narratives, myths, and cultural traditions deeply rooted in the Caribbean.

Caribbean writing can be conceived as a hybrid language, sustained by a cosmology of signs. It draws from practices such as Haitian vèvés, Cuban anaforuana, and Indigenous Caribbean symbols, reflecting the ingenuity of Caribbean peoples in translating their beliefs, histories, and worldviews into complex visual forms.

Tracing the Invisible — Vévés are geometric patterns traced on the ground with materials such as cornmeal or ash, primarily during Vodou ceremonies. Each vèvé represents a lwa (spirit) and serves to invoke or mark its presence.

- **Symbolism and Function:** Vévés are not merely ritual decorations; they embody a spiritual dimension and act as cosmic maps. Their ephemeral nature reflects a worldview where the sacred is in constant interaction with the everyday.
- **Influence on Caribbean Writing:** These ritual forms, which combine abstraction and narration, offer a way of thinking about writing beyond words. They inspire a script where every stroke carries memory and spirituality.

Anaforuanas — Ritual graphics closely tied to African cosmograms, particularly the dikenga dia Kongo. They serve as sacred languages for transmitting narratives and spiritual messages.

- **Origins and Functions:** Derived from Kongo traditions, anaforuana were reinterpreted in the Cuban context, blending African, European, and Caribbean influences. They are inscribed on ritual objects, clothing, or directly on the ground during ceremonies.
- **Hybridization:** These signs embody the very essence of créolité, where disparate elements merge to create a unique language. They remind us that Caribbean writing is inherently a writing of encounter, bridging cultures and temporalities.

Petroglyphs — Before colonization, the Indigenous peoples of the Caribbean used graphic symbols to express their cosmic and mythological narratives. Petroglyphs, carved into stone, bear witness to this ancient tradition, where geometric and anthropomorphic shapes were used to transmit stories and knowledge.

Examples : Taíno petroglyphs, found in sites like those in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, feature spirals, circles, and humanoid figures that convey mythical narratives and spiritual concepts.

Contemporary echoes — These ancient forms resonate in modern Caribbean writing practices. They emphasize the importance of revisiting these traces to reinvent a contemporary script rooted in collective memory.

ÉCRITURE SYNCRÉTIQUE

Syncretic art is a form of expression that results from the fusion of traditions, styles, beliefs, and practices originating from different cultures or eras. It is not a simple juxtaposition but a true hybridization where each element contributes to a new and coherent creation while retaining traces of its origins.

- This type of art often develops in historical contexts shaped by cultural encounters, migrations, or colonial and postcolonial dynamics. By blending visual, ritual, or narrative elements from various horizons, syncretic art demonstrates the ability to transcend boundaries and transform diverse heritages into a shared aesthetic language.

Syncretic writing is a world-writing, a graphy that intertwines voices, narratives, and gestures to create a new visual poetics. It is:

- Archipelagic, like the islands of the Caribbean, a network of signs that collectively narrate unity in diversity.
- Cosmic, rooted in an intimate relationship with the visible and invisible, the past and the future.
- Ritual, where each trace is a performative act, carrying memory and spirituality.

Rather than erasing distinctions between influences, syncretic writing seeks to magnify them, making the interweaving of cultures, practices, and temporalities visible. It becomes a space where the artistic gesture transforms into a political act, an act of resistance against simplifications and reductive identities.

Assemblage of traditions

Syncretic art incorporates motifs, techniques, or narratives from diverse cultural traditions. For instance, it may include African, European, Indigenous, or Asian influences that combine to give rise to innovative forms.

Dialogue between temporalities

Ancient traditions—whether religious, mythological, or artisanal—are reinterpreted in a contemporary context, resulting in works that speak to both memory and the future.

Between the sacred and the profane

Syncretic art is often tied to spiritual or ritual practices. For example, ritual graphic forms like Haitian vèvès or African cosmograms may be integrated into contemporary works, where they lose their original function while retaining symbolic significance.

Hybridization and technique

It is expressed through the combined use of varied materials or techniques, such as textile and graphic design, embroidery and painting, or digital and traditional media. This hybridity reflects a worldview where boundaries fade.

Aesthetics of relation

True to Glissant's philosophy, syncretic art emphasizes interconnection, where each element engages in dialogue with the others, creating works rich in layered meanings. It celebrates diversity and cultural exchanges while embracing the tensions and contradictions they may produce.

*In syncretic writing, each glyph is a memory, each motif a vision,
and each medium a world. It is a writing of interweaving, an
infinite tapestry of narratives where hybridity is not the exception
but the rule.*

*This is an aesthetic that addresses the challenges of a globalized
world by celebrating cultural diversity while reimagining shared
narratives.*

REFERENCES

CHC

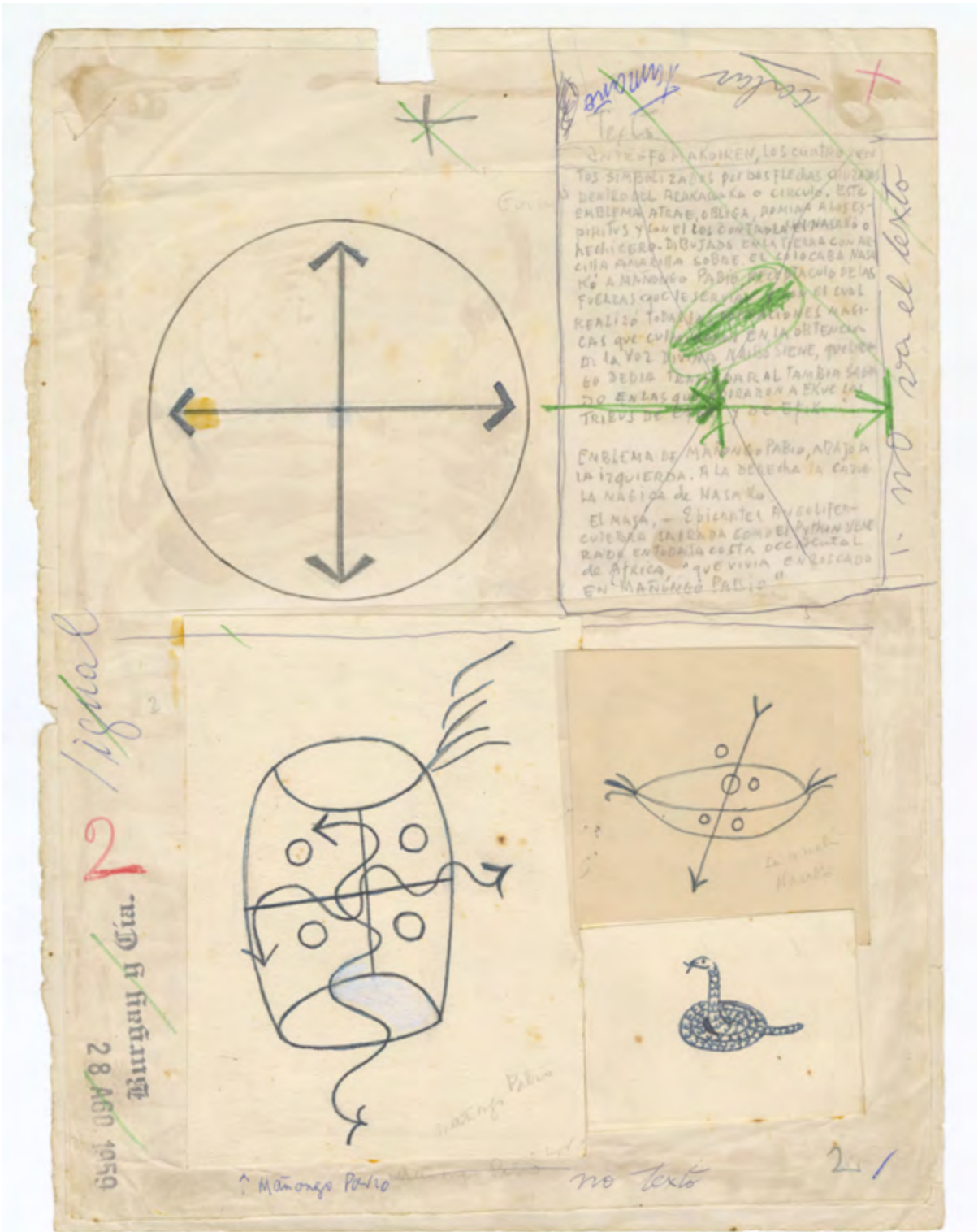
BOOKS

FACSIMILES

**CUBAN
HERITAGE
COLLECTION
& BIBLIOGRAPHY**

During my residency, my research began with an exploration of theoretical and visual texts, primarily in the form of PDF files, creating a comprehensive digital library. Among them, key books and articles on the graphic practices of Haiti and Cuba were central to my reflections.

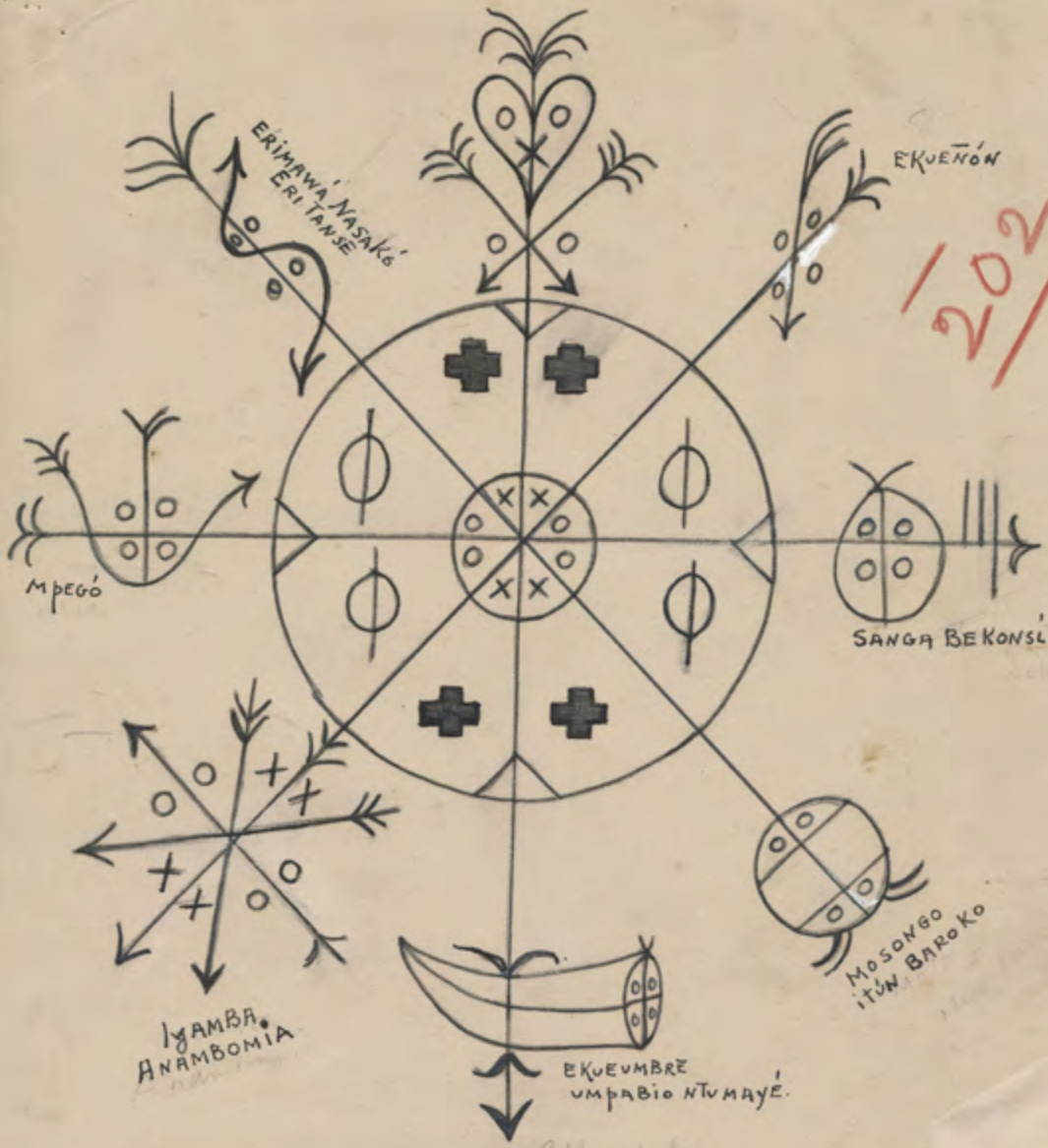
One of the most striking moments of this process was my visit to the Cuban Heritage Collection at the University of Miami and the Lydia Cabrera archives. Delving into these archives, where Cabrera's narratives and studies reveal the nuances of Abakuá graphic systems, deepened my understanding of the relationships between signs, spirituality, and cultural memory. These documents, situated at the intersection of history and myth, provided a vivid perspective on the anaforuana and their role in Cuban ritual practices.



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pag 155 bis bis

Ekue rebian Ekue si (" sin Ekue y sin sol no hay mundo ") ← 6 1/2 →
 nacimiento de Ekue.
 Ekue, el espíritu, animo el BONKO delo Efik. " lo Efik
 turion Ekue."

154



TABLE 3. Comparative analysis of the Kongo graphic writing system (Kongo) and the Kongo graphic writing system (Kongo) in the context of the Kongo graphic writing system (Kongo).

Sign	Meaning	Sign	Meaning
+	+	+	+
✕	✕	✕	✕
—	—	—	—
△	△	△	△
⊙	⊙	⊙	⊙
†	†	†	†
∅	∅	∅	∅
///	///	///	///
♂	♂	♂	♂
♀	♀	♀	♀
↗	↗	↗	↗

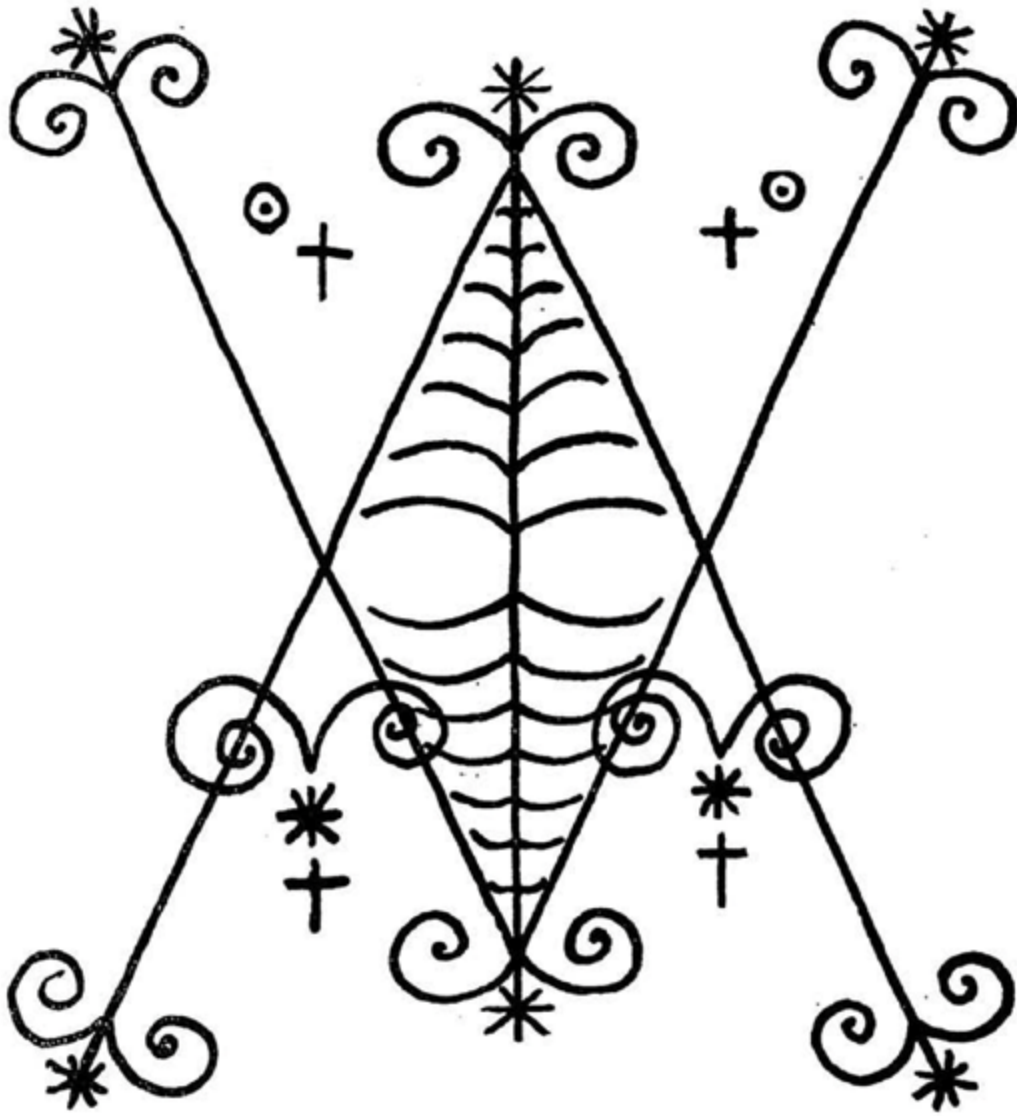
Kongo Graphic Writing and Other Narratives of the Sign
Bárbaro Martínez-Ruiz

TABLE 8 Comparison of the strong similarities among different but related systems, emphasizing their common genesis

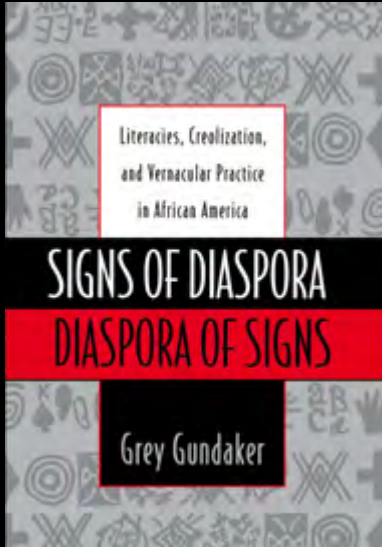
Bidimbu (Mbanza Kongo)	Chokwe Sona (Mário Fontinha, José Redinha)	Lembéta (Clémentine Faïk-Nzujl)	Bidimbu (R. F. Thompson, Bunseki Fu-Klau)



La tradition voodoo et le voodoo haïtien
Milo Rigaud



Ai-Zan



Signs of Diaspora / Diaspora of Signs: Literacies, Creolization, and Vernacular Practice in African America (Commonwealth Center Studies in American Culture)
 Grey Gundaker

Keep your head to the sky.
(Grave marker epitaph,
south central Virginia)

4

Diaspora of Signs

A
Transatlantic
Network

In chapter 3 I reviewed a number of potential resources for the interaction of conventional literacy and vernacular African American expressive practices. In this chapter I take a narrower view, focusing on one network of signs, mainly the in United States, but with additional illustrations from the Caribbean: the interrelated four-eyes, cross-mark, and four moments of the sun signs. This chapter shows that semantic coherence as well as geographic and temporal links obtain among these African American graphic signs and their contexts of use. I explore only a few of many possibilities here. This chapter deals with a vernacular graphic complex, not a “writing” system; the signs I discuss are semantic rather than phonological in orientation.

The illustrations in the chapter come mainly from my fieldwork, often from sites that I visited and photographed before I realized what I was seeing. Later I returned to test my conclusions. But testing conclusions about the meaning of particular signs is not a straightforward business. Often African Americans themselves do not notice or translate the signs, even when neighbors they know well use them. And the signs themselves are deeply implicated in ambiguity and indirection. Those who use the signs consider interpretation self-evident. Persons whose business it is to read the signs already know them; for those who don’t already know, it is rude, even dangerous, to ask too many questions because drawing attention haphazardly to certain signs may bring negative aspects of powers they repre-

en diferentes formas ha desempeñado también un importante papel. Por ejemplo, la zona de Cross River, en Nigeria y Camerún, es famosa por sus textos o pictogramas en *niñbá* autóctonos y antiguos, así como también por las elites *efik* del puerto atlántico de Calabar, con un dominio del inglés alfabético en el siglo XVIII. Basado en estos precedentes, este ensayo muestra suficiente prueba circunstancial para considerar la influencia de los inmigrantes cautivos provenientes de esta región, quienes entraron en las ciudades cubanas de La Habana y Matanzas en la producción de manuscritos durante la colonia española desde principios de los años 1800.

Estos textos contienen información mítica e histórica acerca de la Sociedad Abakuá codificada en el lenguaje de la iniciación, empleando una mezcla de pictogramas y escritura alfabética, así como también detallados mapas «míticos» de la región de Calabar.

El Abakuá había sido fundado en instituciones de la región de Cross River, incluyendo la sociedad «del leopardo» Ekpé, y sus miembros preferían proteger toda la información sobre sí mismos de la observación de las autoridades coloniales y de otros intrusos, por tanto, estos manuscritos estuvieron escondidos para los no miembros durante dos siglos.

Sin embargo hoy, después de veinte años de investigación colaborativa con el autor, algunos líderes abakuá han comenzado a compartir páginas de sus archivos dadas las nuevas posibilidades de comunicación directa con sus contrapartes de Calabar. Así, aunque el aprendizaje en ambos lados del Atlántico se asocia usualmente a la cultura

y formas sociales europeas, el acceso a los manuscritos abakuá permite una comparación en el uso de la escritura en Calabar y Cuba como una herramienta para enfatizar formas de pensamiento y acción no europeas. Estos documentos raris sugieren que los africanos esclavizados en una economía de plantación en las Américas trajeron formas africanas específicas de aprendizaje para sostenerse a sí mismos en un ambiente foráneo.

CALABAR Y SU DIÁSPORA: UNA HISTORIA EN MÚLTIPLES TEXTOS

En la región del bajo Cross River, los líderes comunitarios cultivaron durante mucho tiempo varios sistemas de aprendizaje, siendo los más famosos las «artes comunicativas *niñbá*», que incluían textos y códigos comúnmente vistos en los mantos sagrados *Ukírá*, utilizados exclusivamente por miembros titulares de la sociedad «del leopardo» Ekpé. *Ukírá* muestra símbolos *niñbá* metafóricos para expresar las ideas fundamentales del grupo. En la figura 1 el manto *Ukírá* muestra animales emblemáticos de la región, incluyendo un leopardo, una serpiente pitón, un cocodrilo, un caimán, una tortuga y también una espada para la defensa, cuerdas de manila (dos medios círculos) para la salud, una campana idiófónica de metal doble que simboliza realza, y finalmente el «jefe» sentado sobre el Ekpé, que es, por lo tanto, la autoridad más alta en la comunidad. La comunicación *niñbá* también se manifiesta a través de signos dibujados en objetos o sobre la tierra, a través de gestos, toques de tambor, cantos

y otros.² Los códigos *niñbá* también se muestran durante presentaciones de mascaradas, y cada categoría de vestuario con un diseño específico y adornos, ejecutando movimientos comunicativos según sus ritmos particulares. En épocas más actuales se adicionó el idioma y alfabeto inglés al

sistema de aprendizaje que ya existía en Calabar.³ Todos continúan coexistiendo en la región, y desde los años 1750 han influenciado en la cultura de los pueblos del Cross River, incluyendo aquellos que fueron esclavizados y forzados a emigrar al Caribe, donde se les conoce como caraballés,



Figura 1. Símbolos *niñbá* de Abírba. Fotografía de Ivor L. Miller. Calabar.

² Existe una vasta literatura en *niñbá*, aunque el tema queda por estudiar profundamente, debido a que *niñbá* tiene muchas visiones regionales y el Ekpé *niñbá*, el más desarrollado y complejo, solo es conocido por pocos altos jefes muy hábiles. La literatura en *niñbá* parece tener su inicio con una referencia en Hugh Goldie. *A Dictionary of the Efik Language*, in *Two Parts*. I. Efik (English, English and Efik), p. 215. Ver además Ute Ritscherhalet. *Purchasing Culture: The Distribution of Associations in the Cross River Region of Cameroon and Nigeria*, pp. 158, 136; Paul Lovejoy. «Transformation of the Ekpe Mascarade in the African Diaspora», in Christopher Innes, A. Rastved and Ingerette Bogas (eds.), *Caravel: Theory and Practice*, p. 137.

³ La información sobre Ekpé y el enmascaramiento corporal como símbolos se encuentra en Busay Ekpé Banyi. *Ekpé Efik: A Theological Perspective* (reimpresión del original de 1998). Trinidad Publishing, Victoria, B. C., 2021, pp. 26-27; Bárbara Balboa Casaferriz. *El manto abakuá*. Ivor L. Miller. *Voices of the Leopard: African Secret Societies and Cuba*, pp. 196-197; y Robert Ferra Thompson. *Flask of the Spirit: African & Afro-American Art & Philosophy*, pp. 260-262.

por el nombre de la ciudad portuaria de Calabar.⁴

En Cuba los caraballés y sus descendientes crearon manuscritos que documentan narraciones mítico-históricas acerca de las civilizaciones de Cross River: figuras históricas, comunidades importantes, actividades comerciales, todas en el contexto de la fundación de la sociedad «del leopardo» Ekpé, la forma suprema de gobierno para

cientos de comunidades en el área. Los manuscritos se escribieron en el lenguaje ritual del abakuá, también conocido como «Brikmo-Carabali», con interpretaciones en español. Contienen cientos de ejemplares de *niñbá* (signos) para el enmascaramiento corporal y sus códigos simbólicos. Por ejemplo, la frase abakuá *Nyáwé mágán, mangamangé terent*, interpretada como «lo que está escrito no se puede borrar», se refiere a los

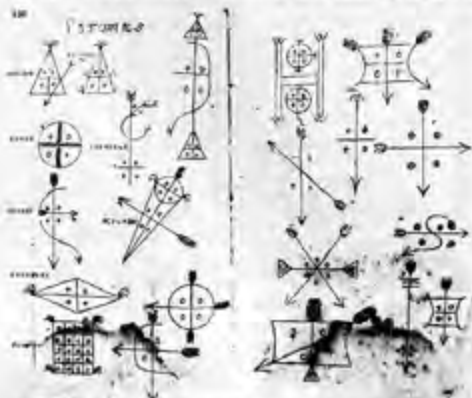


Figura 2. Símbolos *niñbá* de La Habana. Fuente: Manuscrito cubano. Fotografía de Ivor L. Miller. La Habana.

⁴ Los símbolos *niñbá* de la región del Cross River sirven de fuente a los símbolos rituales utilizados en Cuba, Haití, Brasil y Trinidad. Para ejemplos, ver Fernando Ortiz. «La tragedia de los Adigós», *Cuadernos Americanos* 32: 8 (1952), 85; Alfred Métraux. *Voodoo in Haiti*. Grey Gardner. *Signs of Diaspora: Diagrams of Signs, Literatures, Creolizations and Vernacular Practices in African America*. Amanda Gualdon. «*Niñbá* Old and New Scripts», *Inscribing Meaning: Writing and Graphic Systems in Africa Art*. Barbara Martinez Ruiz-King. *Writing Systems and Other Narratives of the Sign*, 2013.

signos dibujados con tiza sobre los cuerpos de los iniciados, lo que implica que la membresía es un compromiso de por vida.⁵ Los manuscritos cubanos documentan las «firmas» derivadas de los signos de la región de Cross River (figura 2). Cada signo se relaciona con un título específico y objeto ritual.

Estos manuscritos también contienen dibujos de bailarines enmascarados típicos de la región de Calabar, que actuaron en Cuba en las pasadas generaciones. En el ejemplo siguiente (figura 3), la página manuscrita reproduce la imagen de un bailarín enmascarado dibujado o visto en 1850 en La Habana. En la nota se puede leer: «Entre Azimfon. Enlázanos eváuge mocraba... Este fue el primer saco o mokónko que se bautizó en África en tierra Obani. Libreta de Antonio Candemco, año 1850, Regla». La frase abakuá *Eryádrása* (junción), *eryáge* (derecho), *mókrá* (bebida del ritual), significa «ingerir la bebida ritual de la iniciación una al miembro con el grupo».

El aprendizaje carabali ha sido documentado en La Habana desde principios del siglo XIX. La utilización de los signos *niñbá* en Cuba es una fuerte evidencia de la continuidad desde África occidental hasta el Caribe. El uso del alfabeto romano es claramente un *débil* argumento, ya que este fue adquirido también en Cuba. Pero la evidencia del uso del inglés del viejo Calabar en términos abakuá indica la presencia de elites de Calabar hablantes de inglés.⁶ Después de revisar las principales fuentes históricas y de examinar importantes manuscritos abakuá en archivos



Figura 3. Bailarín enmascarado. Regla, 1850. Fotografía de Ivor L. Miller. La Habana.

privados, el autor se plantea las siguientes interrogantes sobre la historiografía de esos manuscritos: ¿dónde cuándo existieron?, ¿quién los creó y por qué?, ¿cuánto ha sido su contenido cambiado o aumentado a través de generaciones?, ¿cuál es la relación de estos textos con la tradición oral en el siglo XIX?, y ¿cómo se utilizan en las presentaciones rituales contemporáneas? Estas preguntas no pueden ser

⁵ Rafael Roche y Montenegro. *La política y sus matices en Cuba*, 3ra edición, p. 91. Ver también Lydia Cabrera. *Ob. cit.*, p. 441.

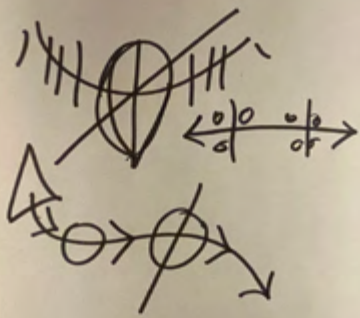
⁶ Para ejemplos, Ortiz documentó un carabali carabali llamado *Isagá*, interpretado efímeramente como una corrupción pronunciada al español de «inglés». Fernando Ortiz. *Glansorio de efonogramas*, p. 233. Desde siempre se refirió al carabali *Ufita*, una corrupción de la pronunciación española «Oli Tonta», también en inglés de la comunidad Obatang de Calabar. Pedro Dechamps Chappaux. «Manturto Blanco: «Obetajo de Ufita»», *Boletín del Instituto de Historia y del Archivo Nacional* (65): 97-109, 1964.

RESEARCH

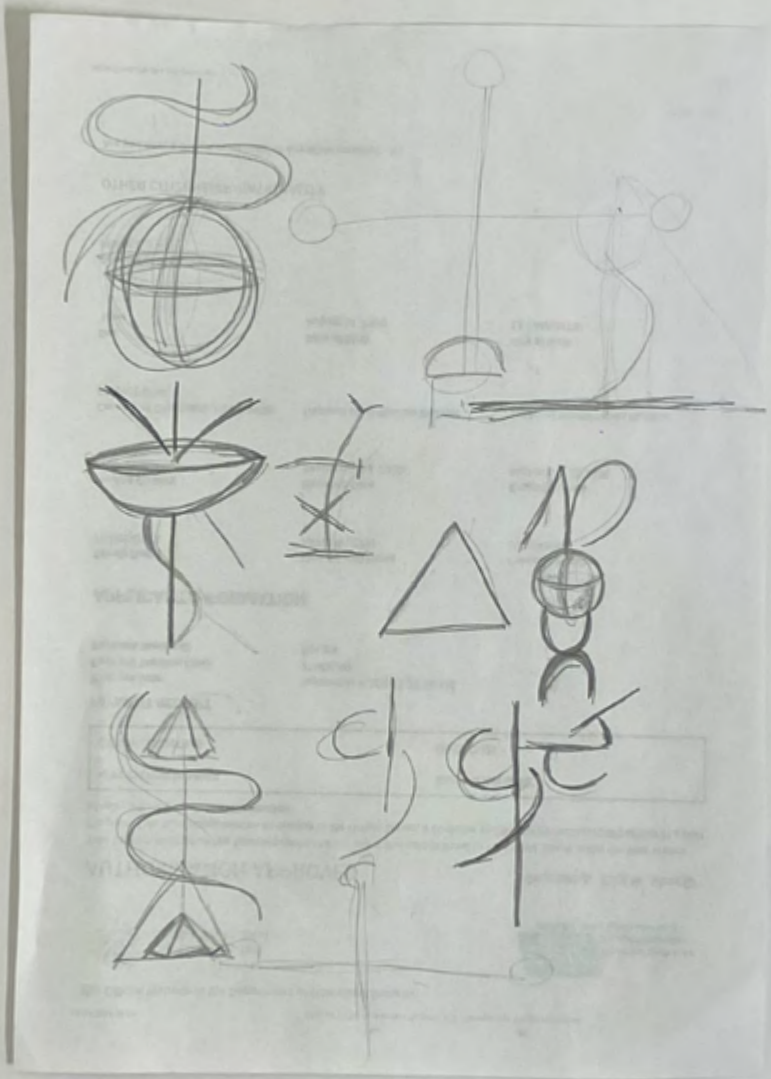
GRAPHIC

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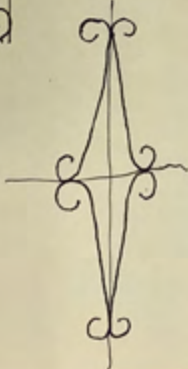


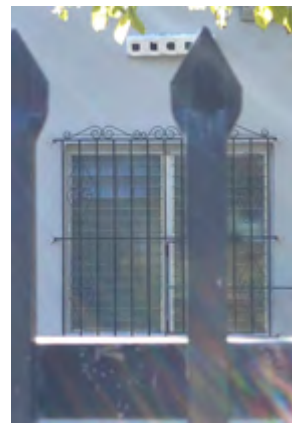


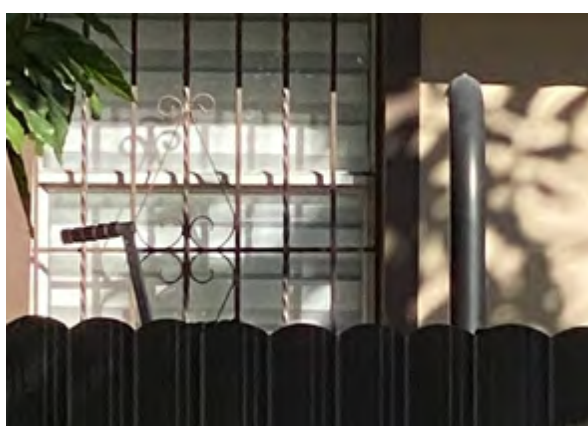


I had the opportunity to walk and cycle a lot in Miami, and I couldn't help but notice the widespread use of wrought iron, much like in Martinique, with patterns that resonate deeply with me. Wrought iron, with its intricate and often organic designs, has a graphic quality that easily evokes the visual essence of Vodou vévés.

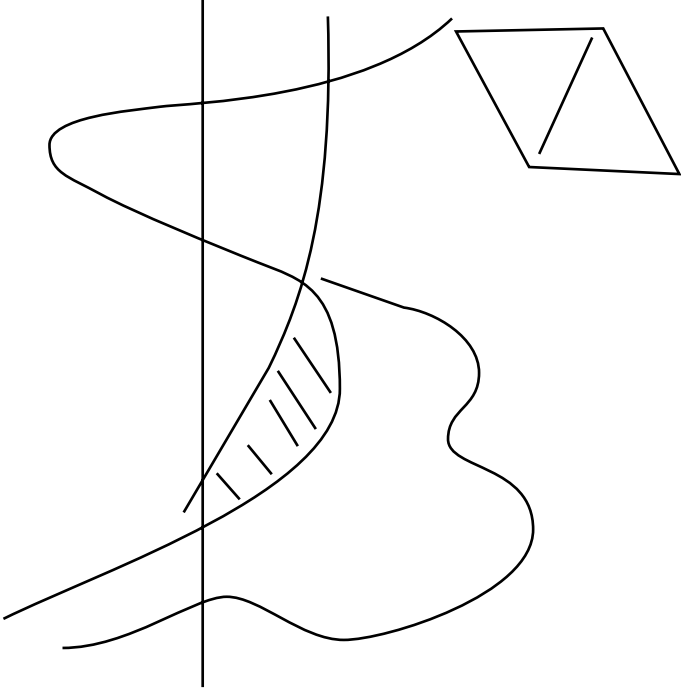
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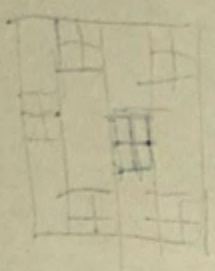
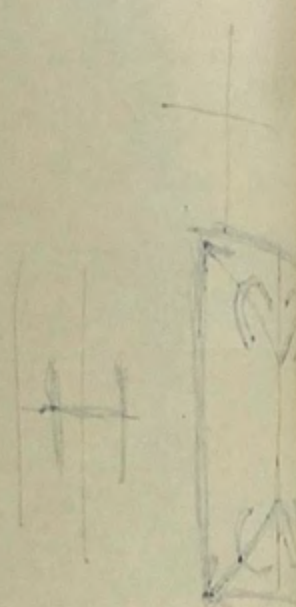
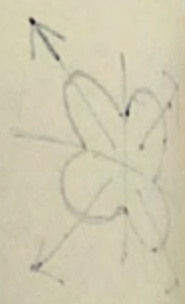
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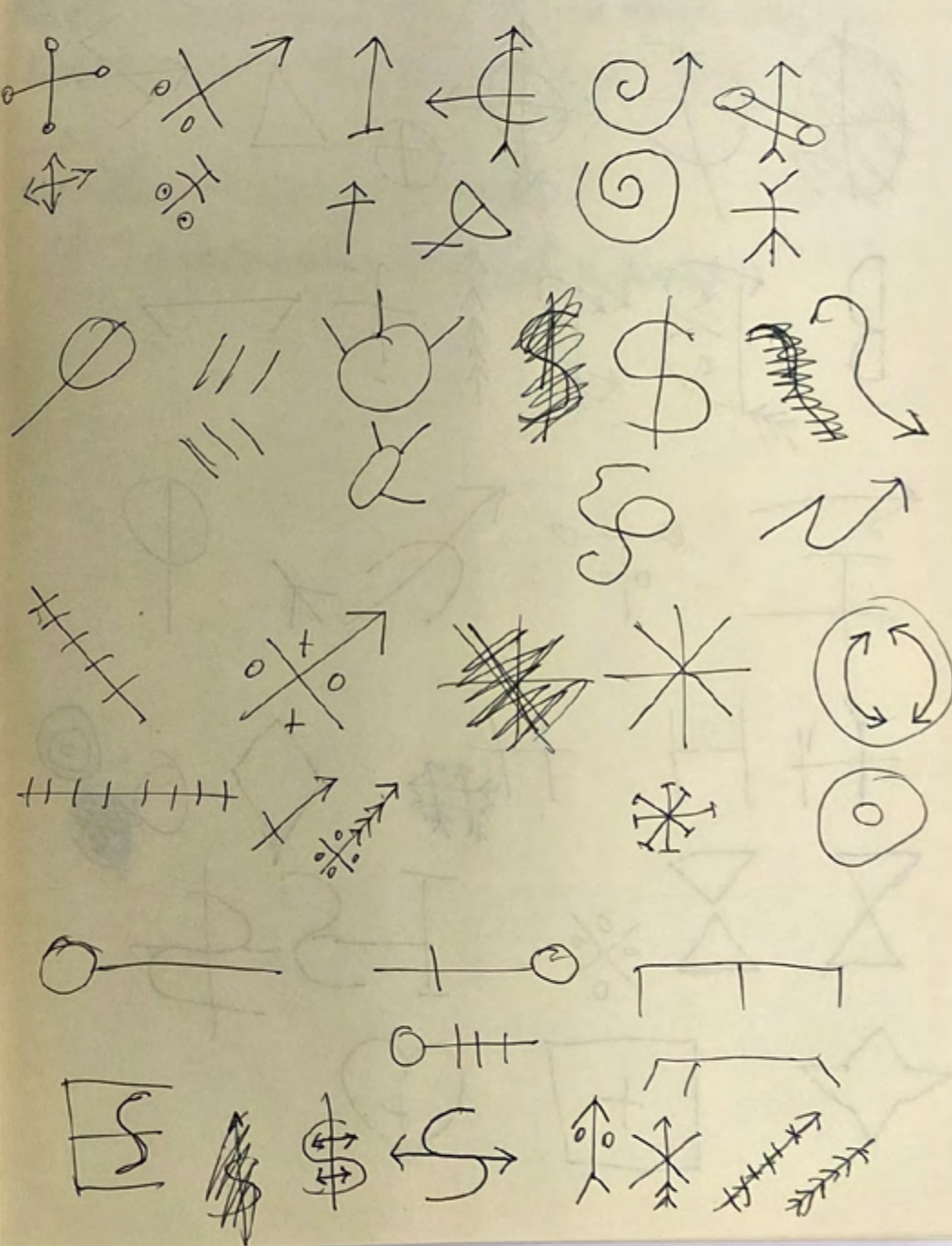
My readings and visual explorations led me to extract a set of geometric forms and recurring symbols from the graphic systems of Haitian vèvés and Cuban anaforuana. This work of analysis and graphic deconstruction highlighted the foundational elements of these signs, such as:

- **Circles, spirals, and intersections, often associated with spiritual energies or directions.**
- **Angular and segmented shapes, used to mark trajectories, narratives, or invocations.**

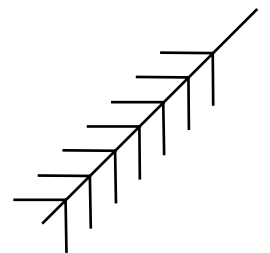
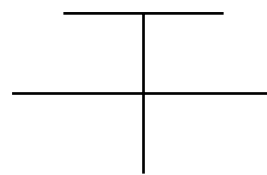
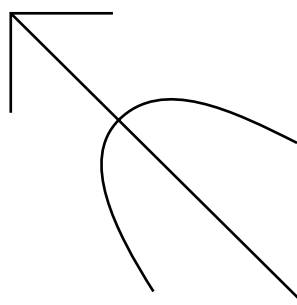
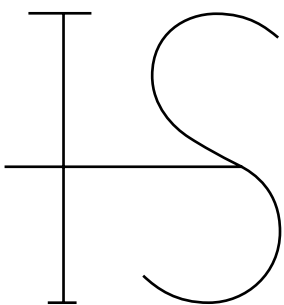
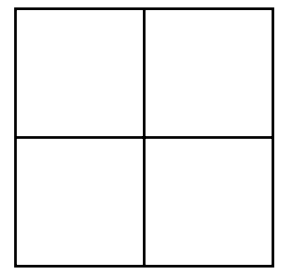
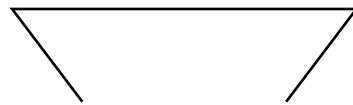
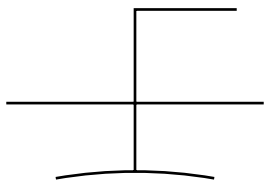
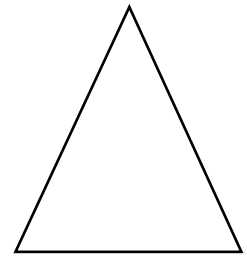
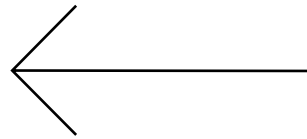
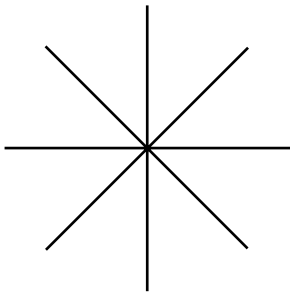
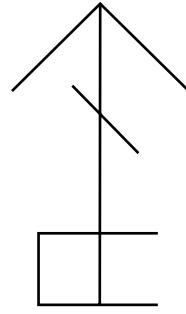
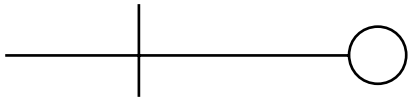
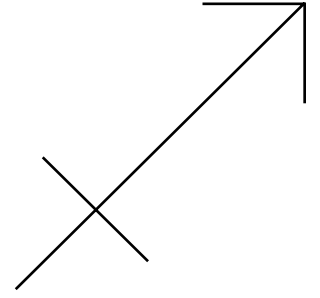
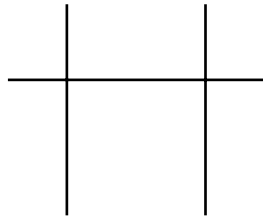
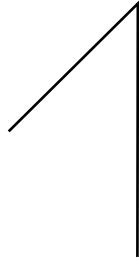
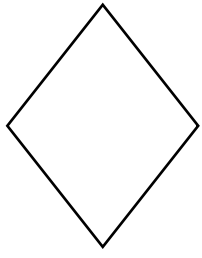
This lexicon forms the basis of a visual register that bridges the richness of traditional graphic practices with a contemporary intention to reinterpret them into a universal visual language.

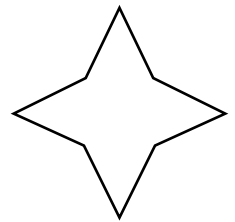
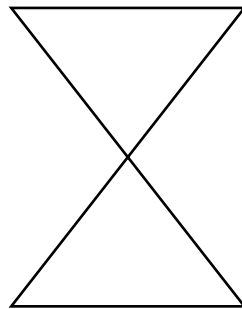
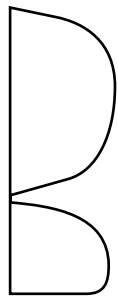
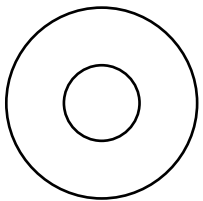
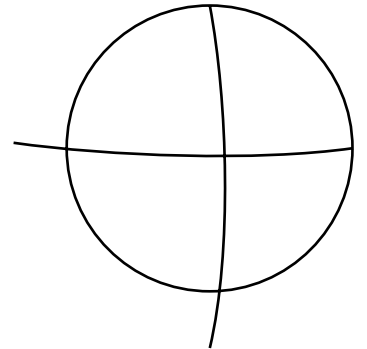
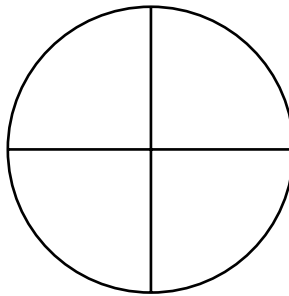
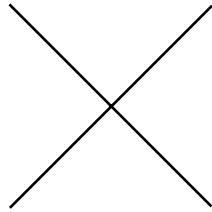
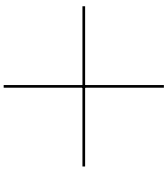
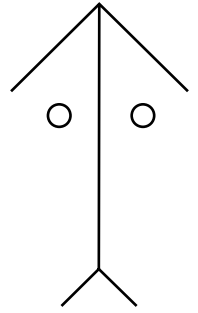
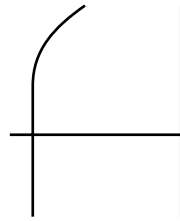
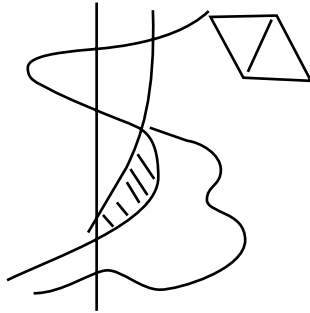
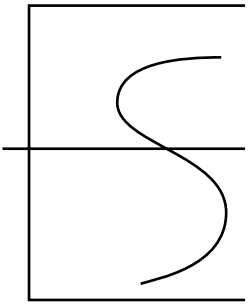
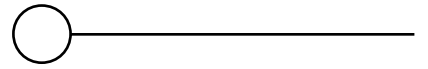
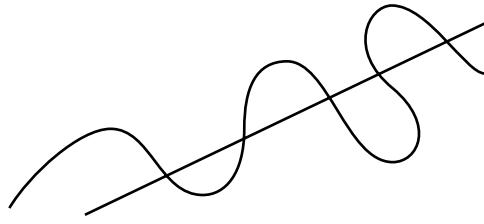
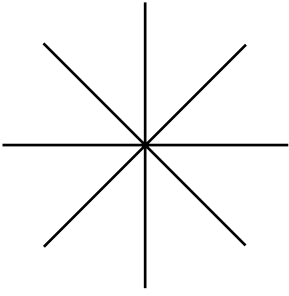
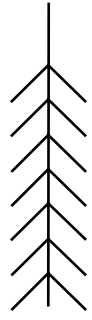
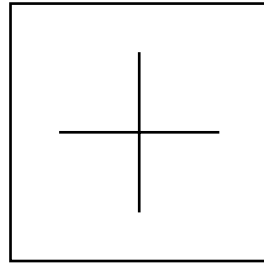
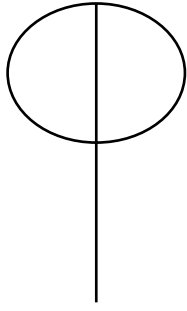
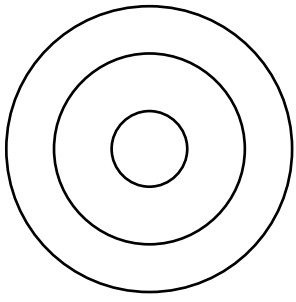


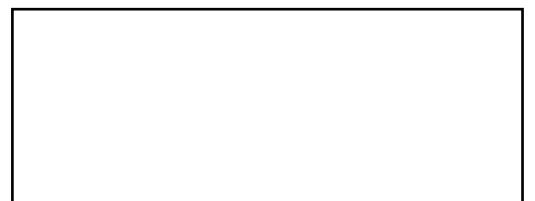
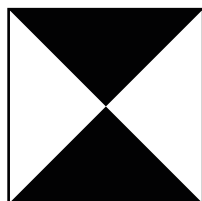
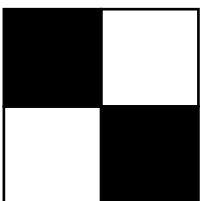
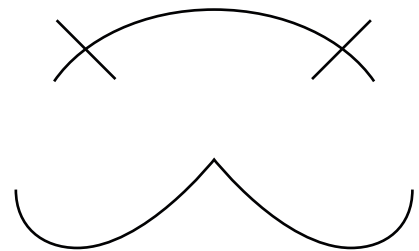
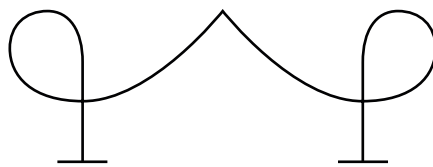
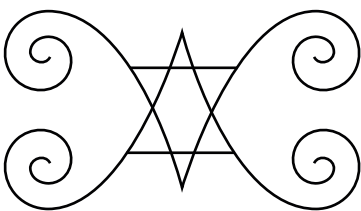
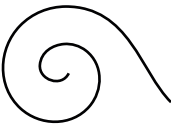
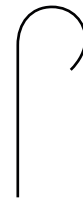
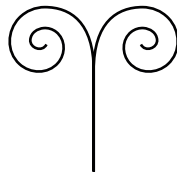
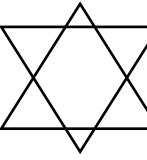
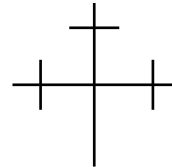
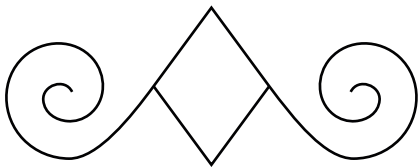
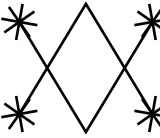
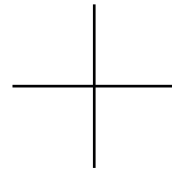
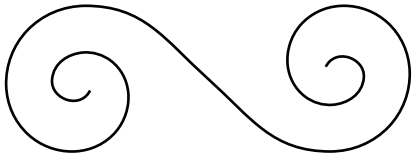
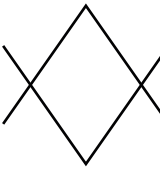
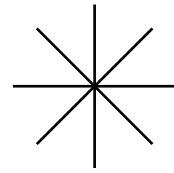
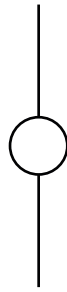
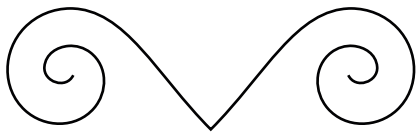
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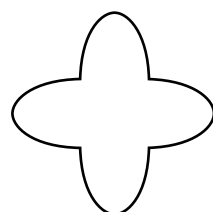
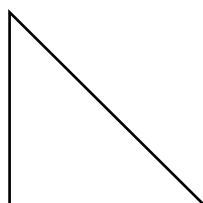
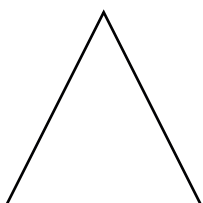
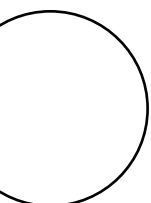
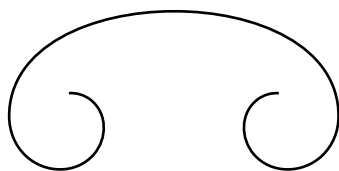
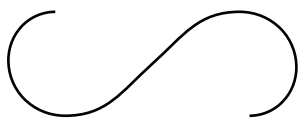
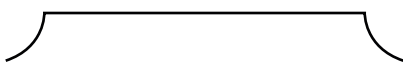
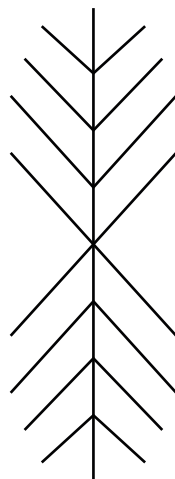
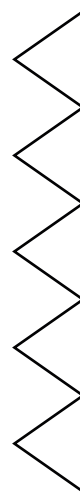
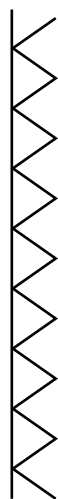
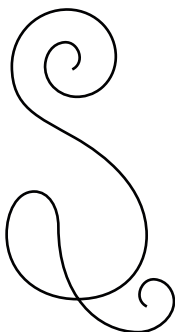
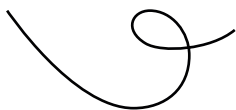
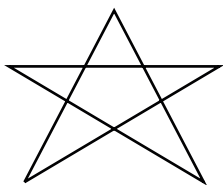
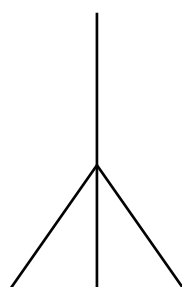
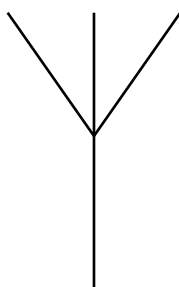
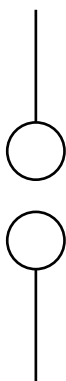
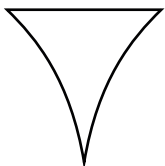
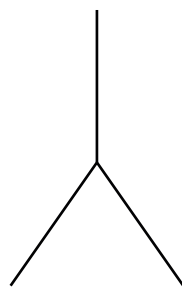
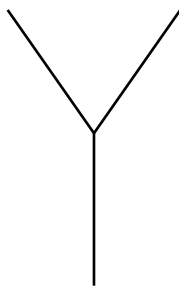
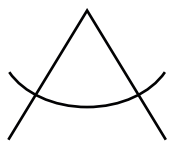


index kongo (cave art)

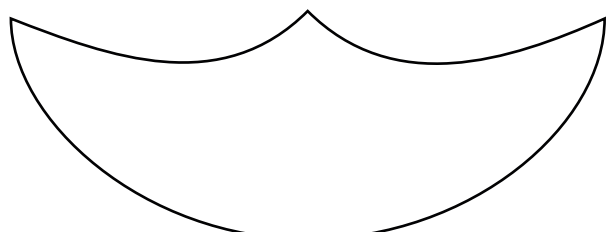
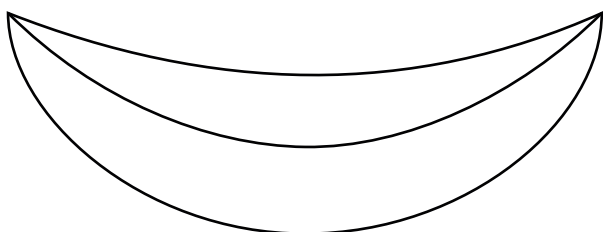
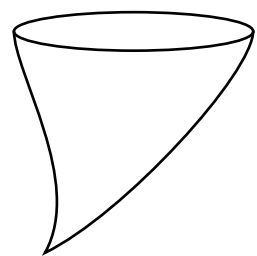
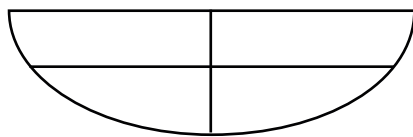
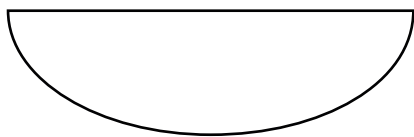
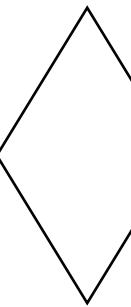
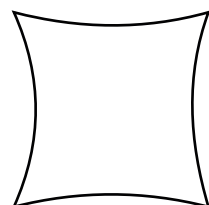
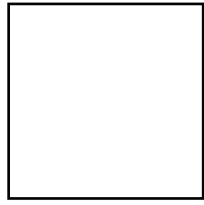
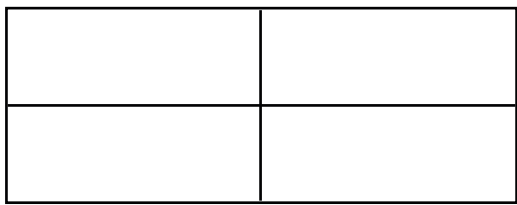
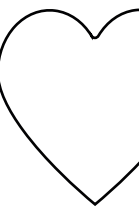
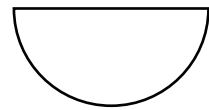
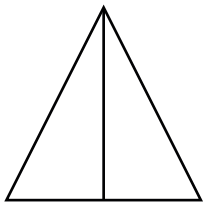
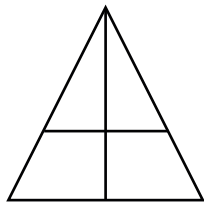
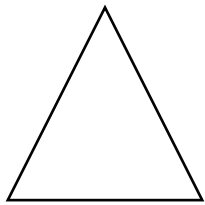
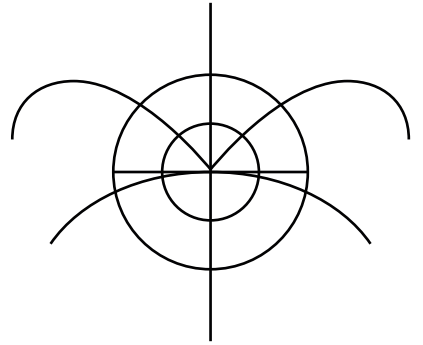
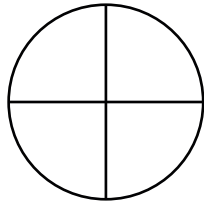
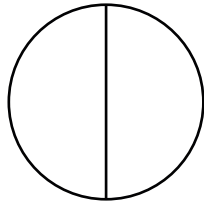
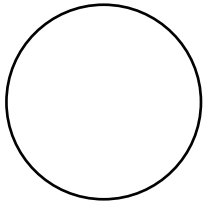
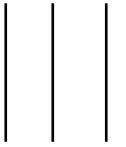
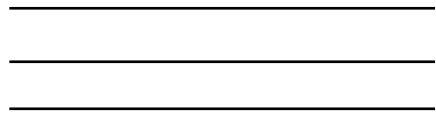
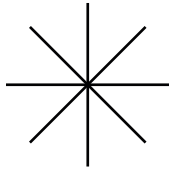
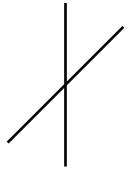
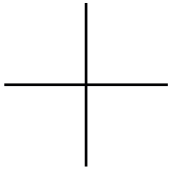


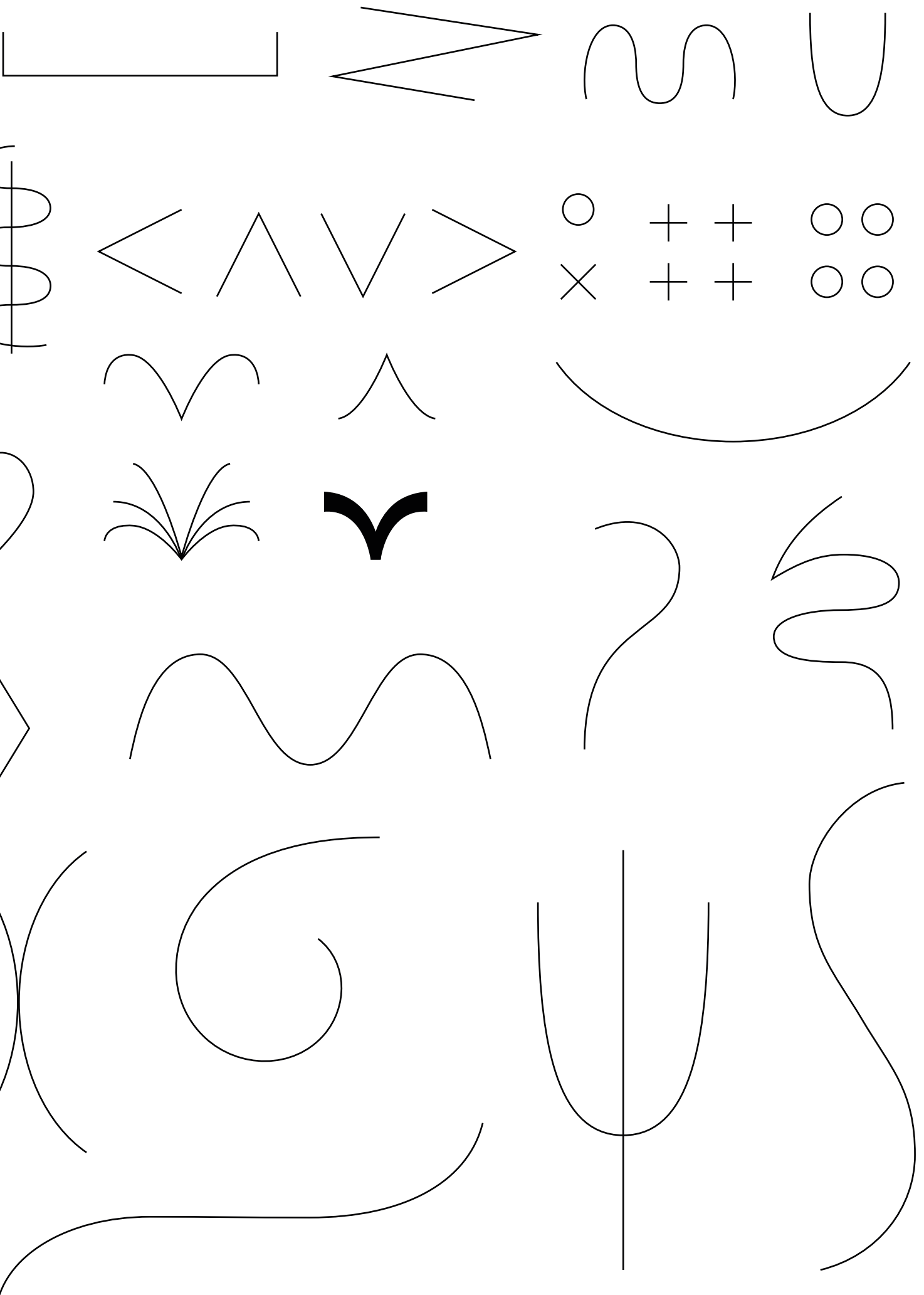


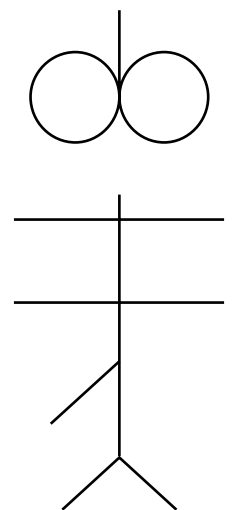
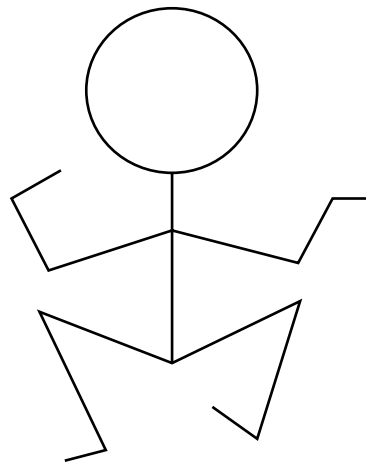
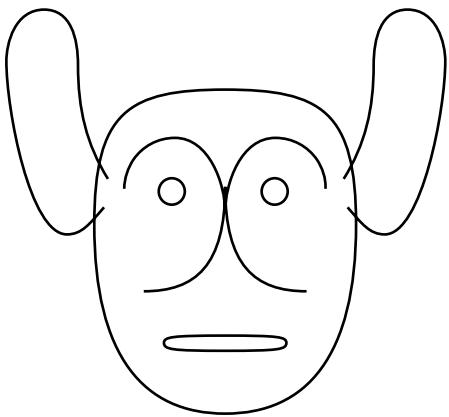
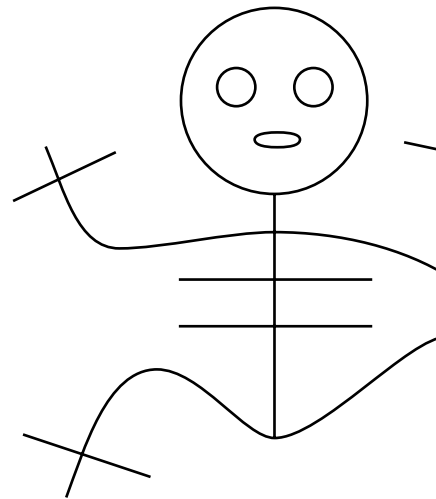
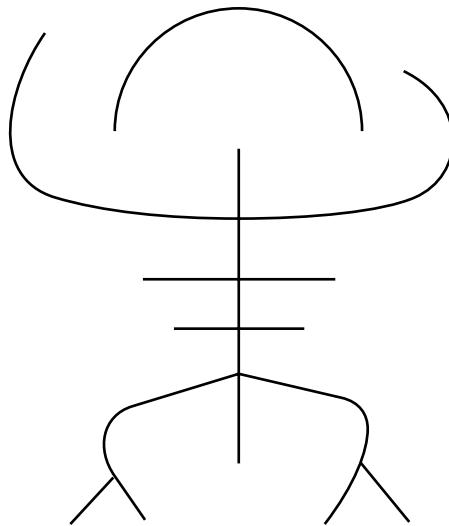
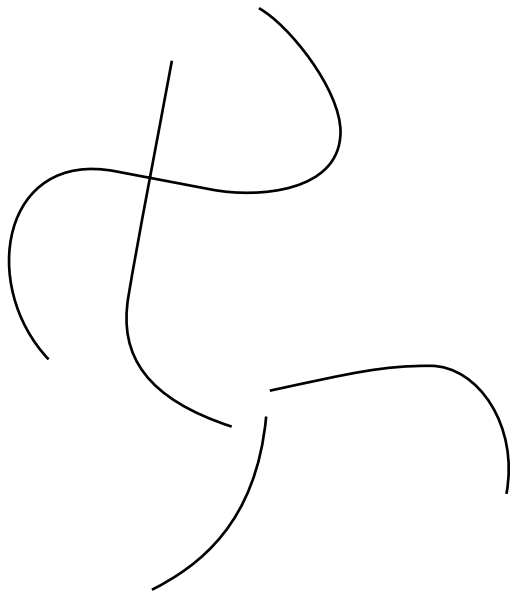
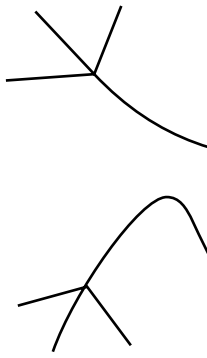
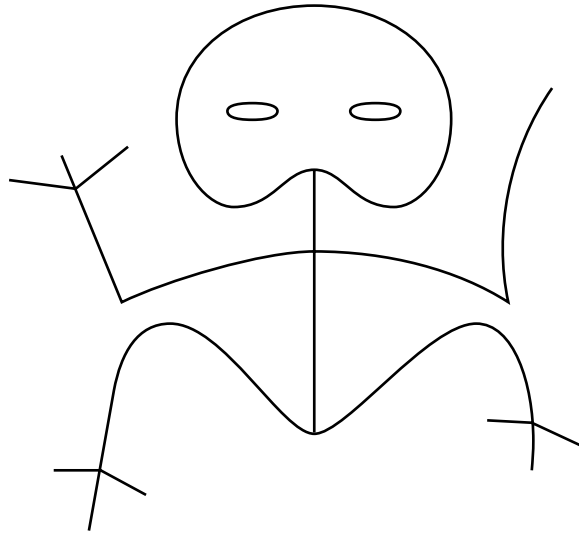
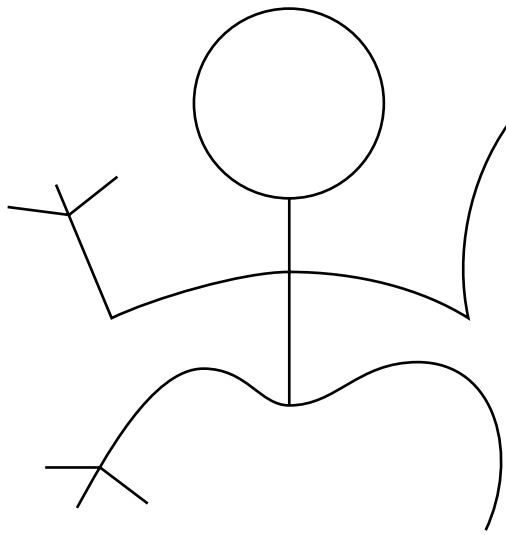


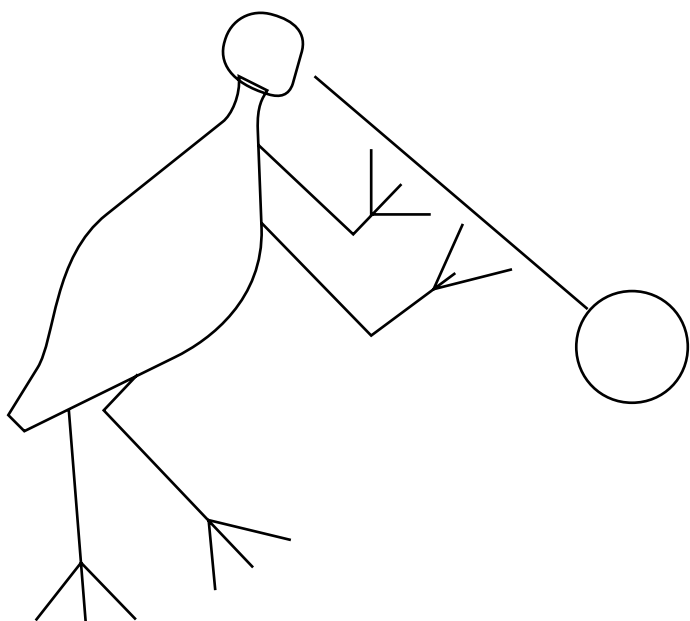
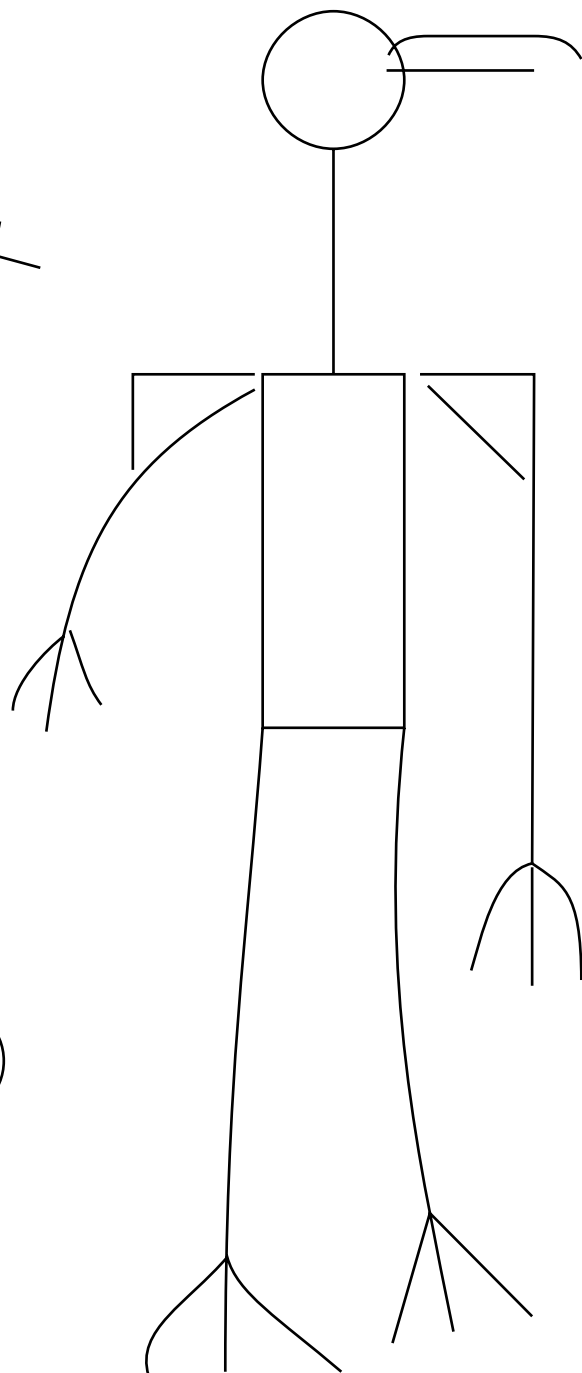
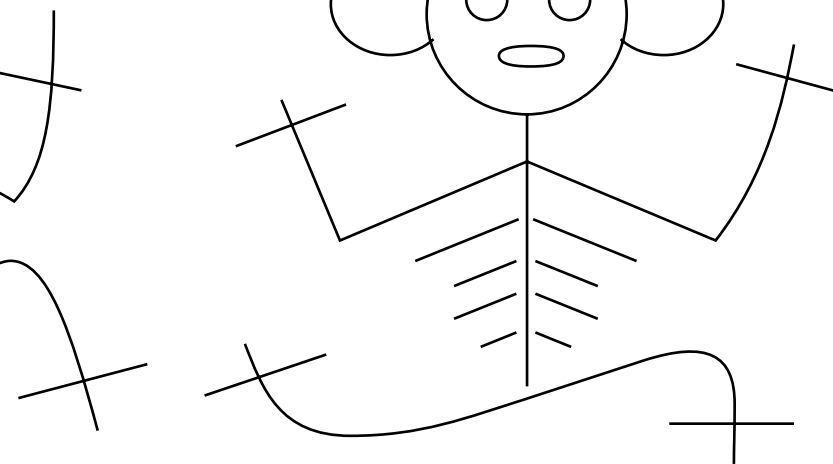
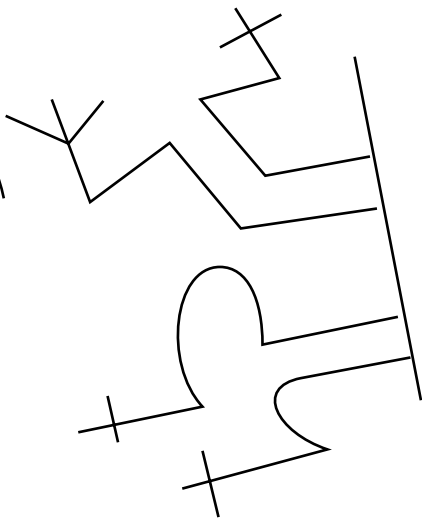
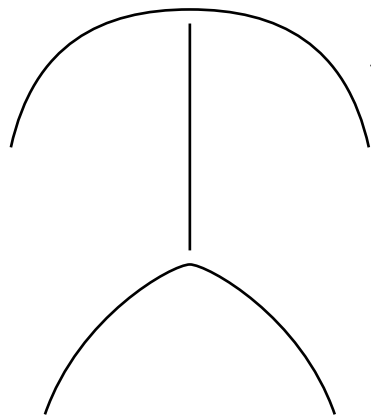
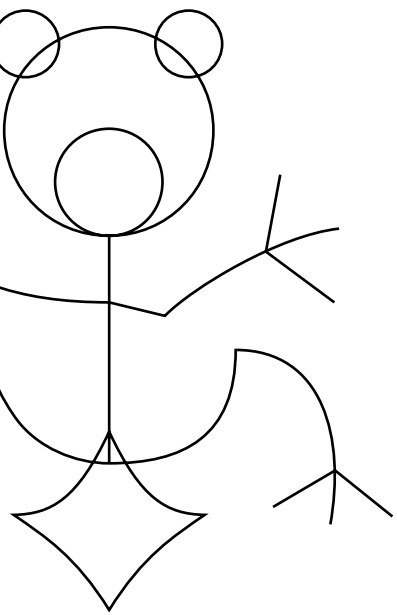


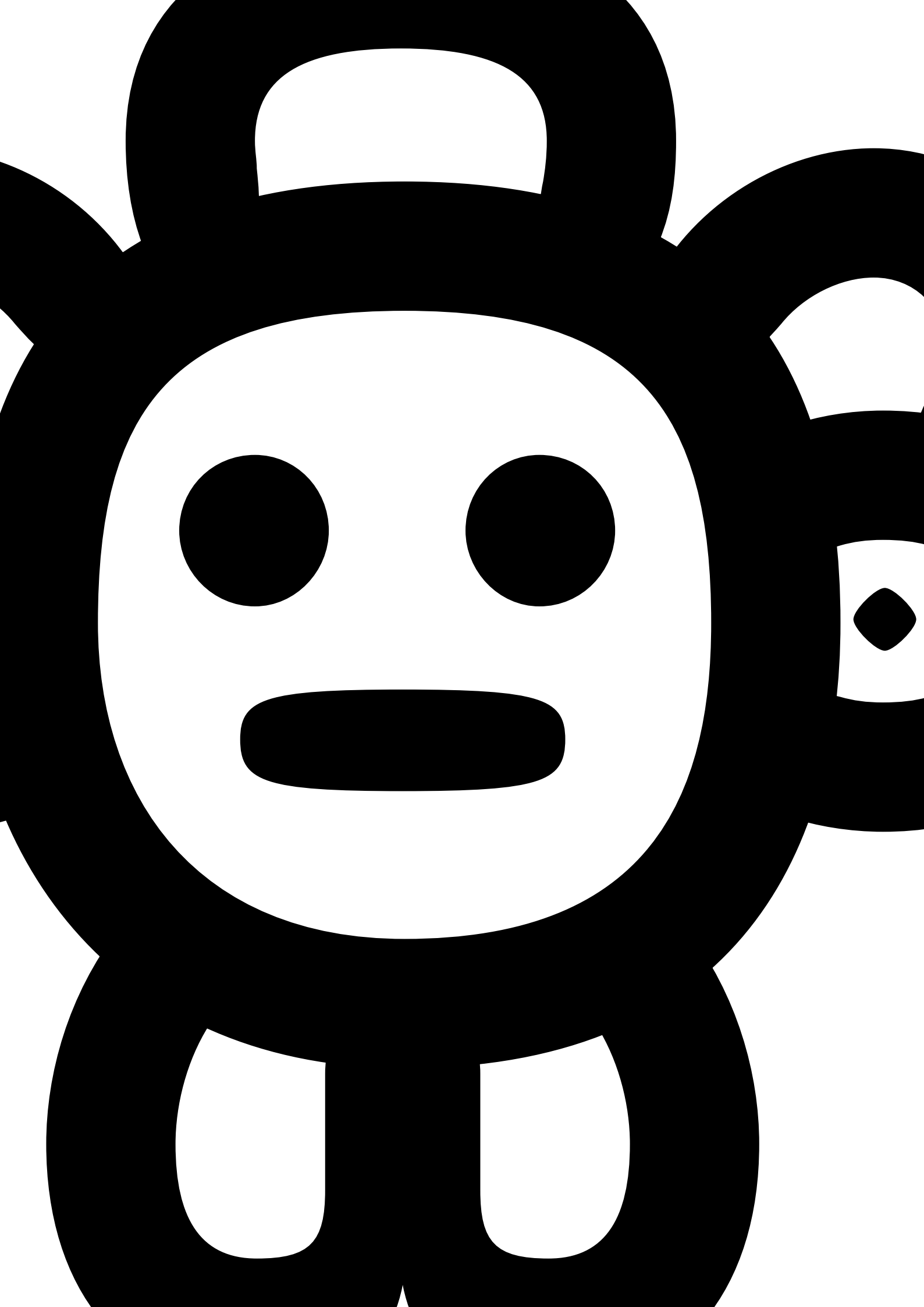
index anaforuana

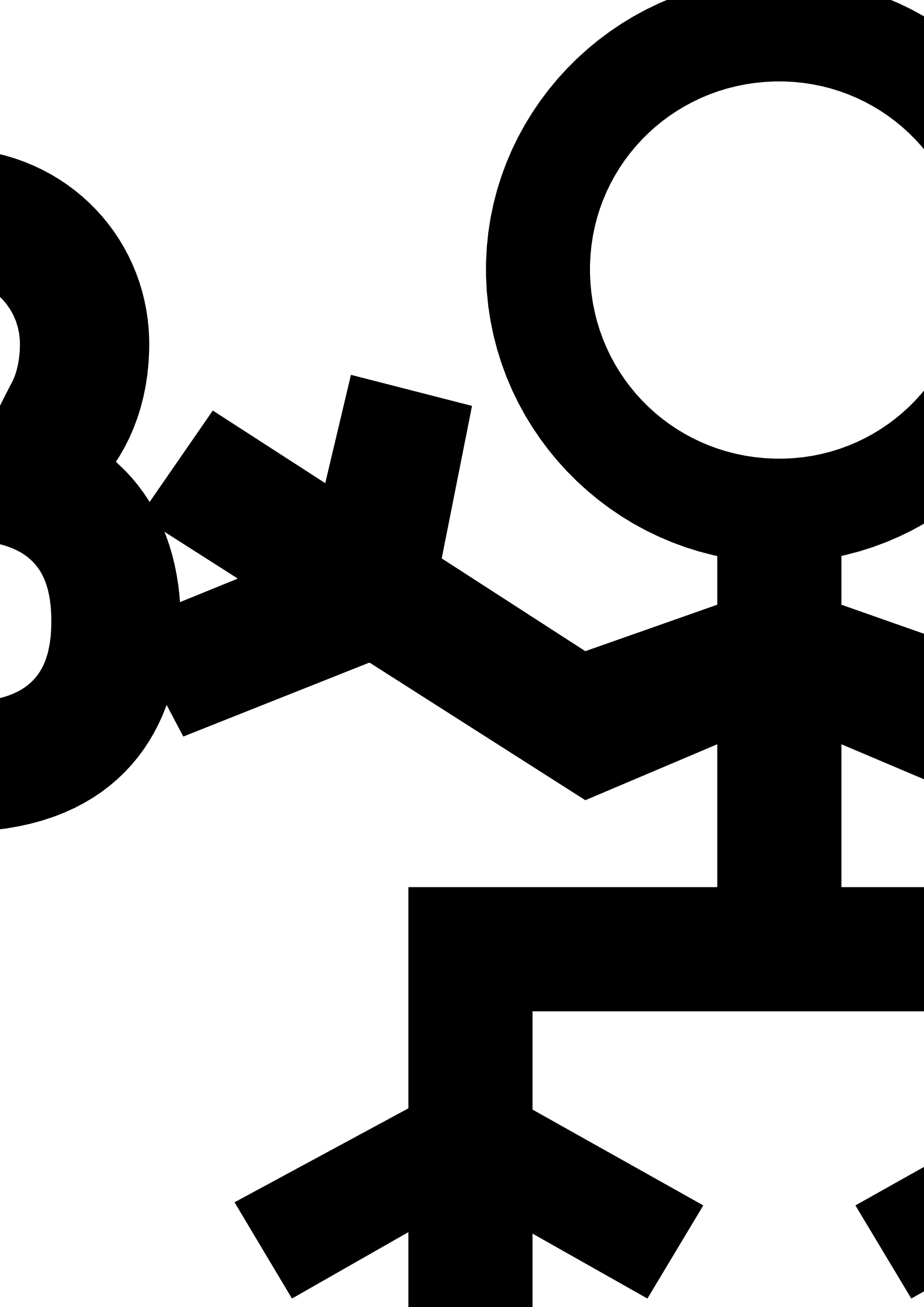










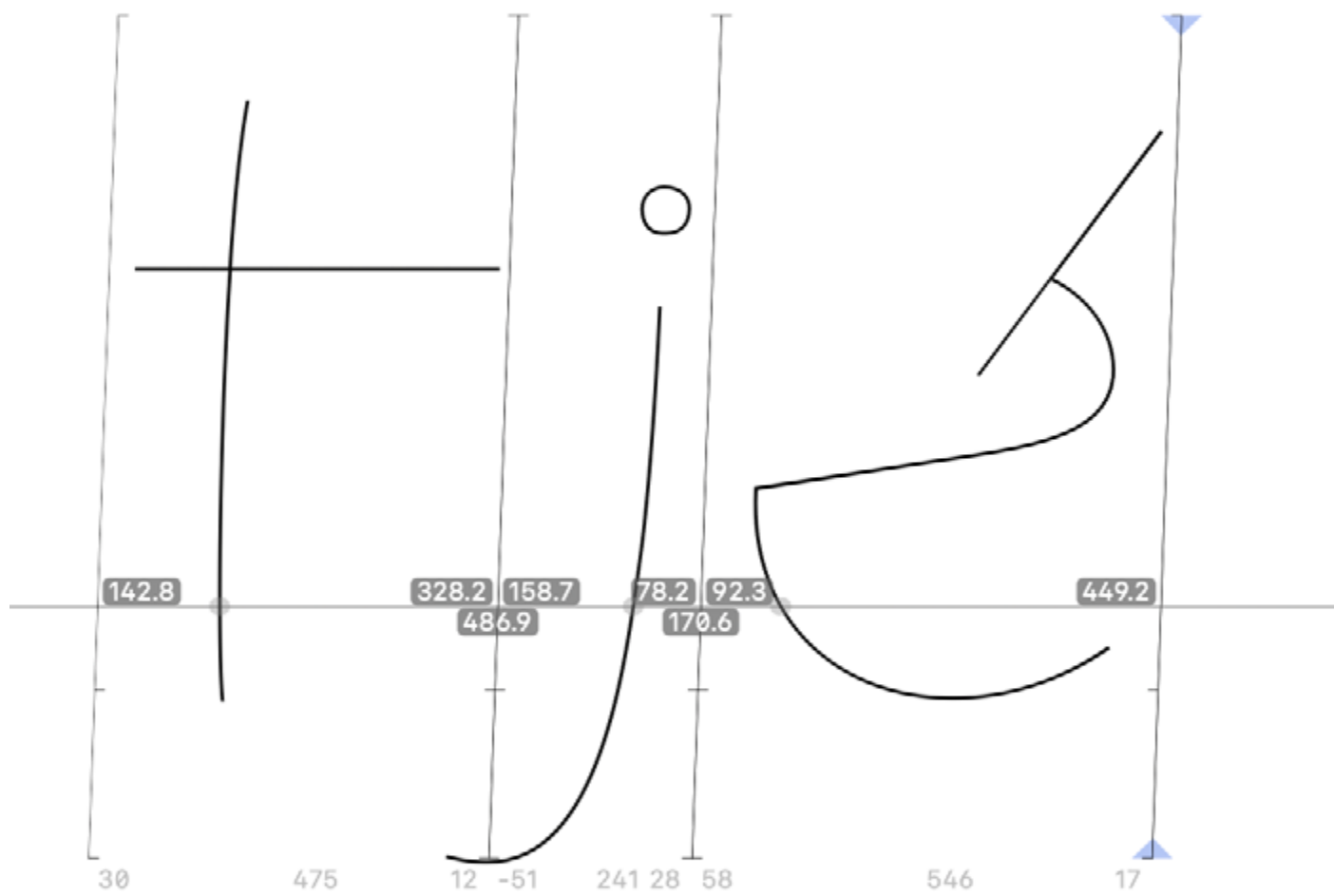


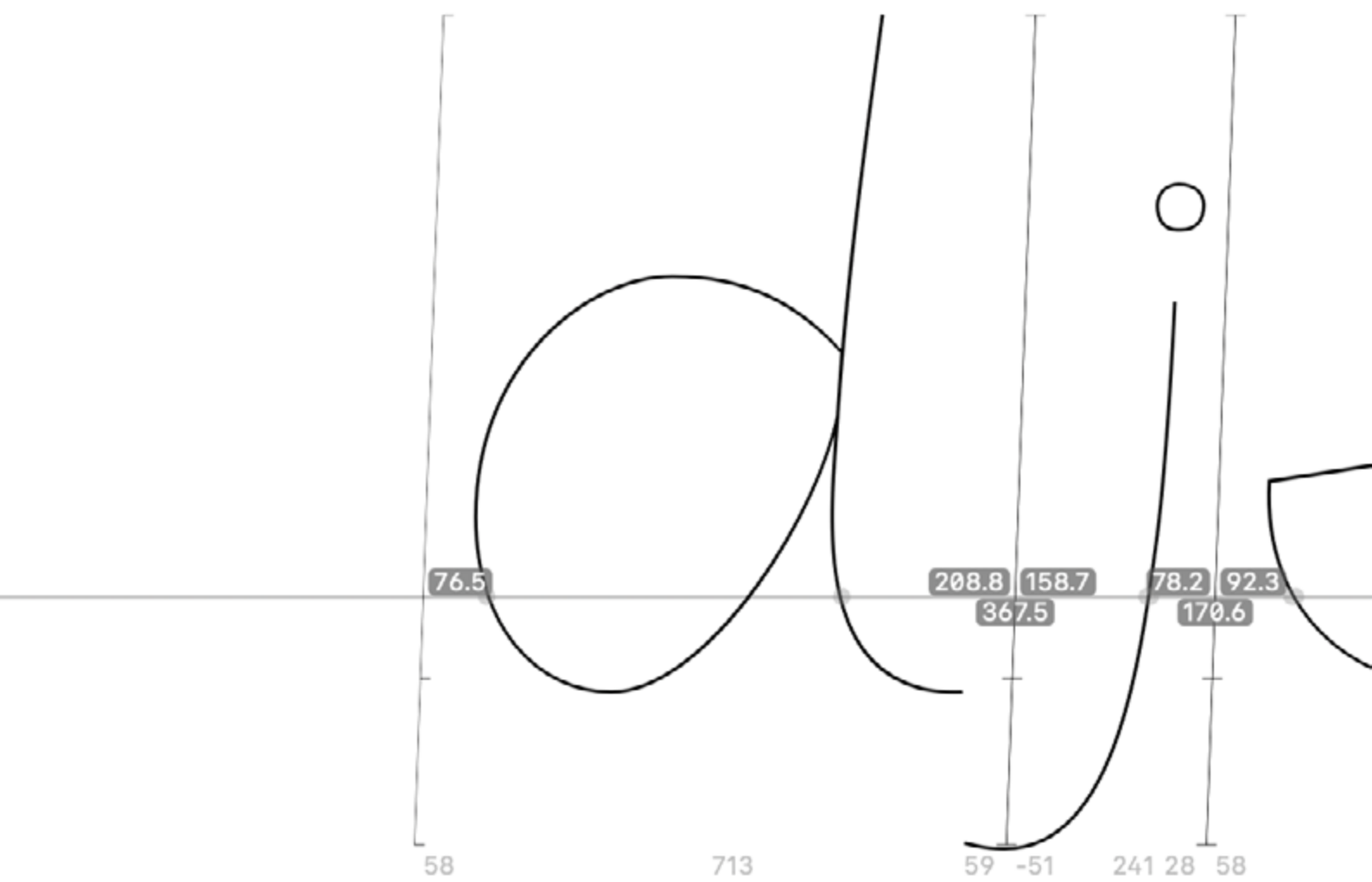
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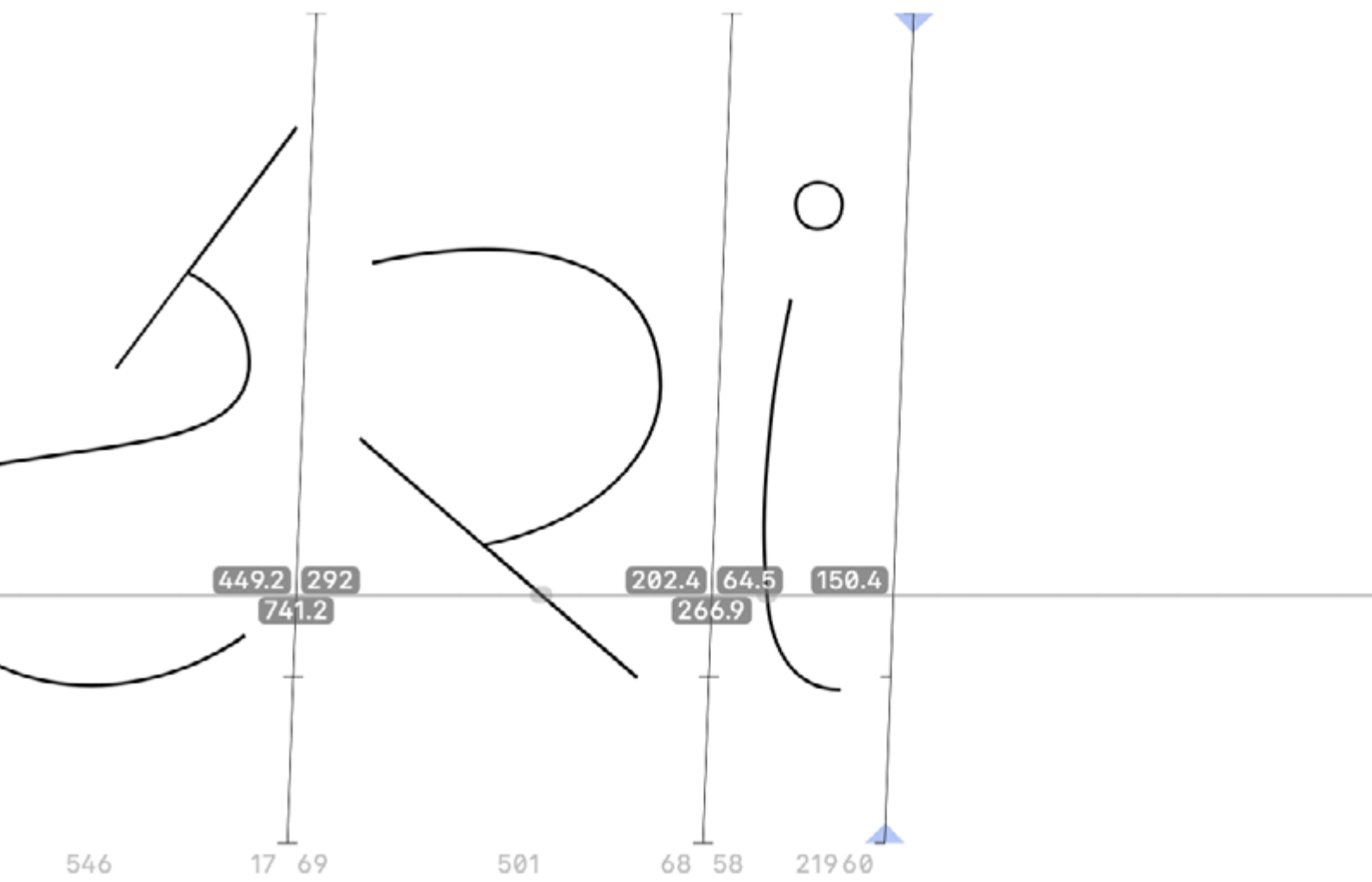
GLYPHS

R A P H Y

LETTERS









A B C D E F

G H I J K L M

N O P R S T

U V W X Y Z

a b c h d e

f g i j k l m n

o p r s t u v

w x y z

le vieu*

sage a

chompis

chéjéu

trés fin

Lésrif

Ziplok

jubilés

If you
will not
praise
me

do not

destroy

my

name

Le ou ka monté
lévé sonjé sa ki
ka espéré ménm
ni sanblaj li épi ch
chaimén y ménm s
kle toulong

**Quand tu grimpes la montagne r le lever du soleil, rappelle-toi que ceux restés en bas qui aspirent à la même clarté ;
chaque cœur trouve son écho, et chaque existence suit son propre chemin, même si nos yeux nous trahissent.**

mon pou wè soléy
rété anba a
limiè a chak kè
ak vini pwop
si zyé pa ka wè

When you climb the mountain to see the sunrise, remember those who stayed below who long for the same brightness; each heart finds its echo, and each life follows its own path, even if our eyes deceive us

Zetwael se
timoun bondie
ki la pou gide
nou dan nwese
ek ka montre
nou chimen
lespwa

The stars, children of the heavens, guide us in the dark, showing us the path of hope.

*yz





At this stage, it is difficult to critically assess my work, as the creative process is still ongoing. This moment of transition, where ideas take shape, deconstruct, and reinvent themselves, is still too fresh to be analyzed with perspective. However, this phase reflects an essential dynamic: that of a constant dialogue between research and experimentation, where each gesture and reflection fuels the creative journey.

Rather than seeking to define my work in a definitive way, I choose to fully immerse myself in the act of creation, allowing forms and ideas to evolve organically. This open and exploratory approach reflects a desire to remain true to the essence of the process: a quest, an opening, a journey.

My project is an attempt to contribute to a broader dialogue about Caribbean cultures and their interaction with the world. Through my graphic and typographic explorations, I aim to reinterpret Caribbean graphic traditions, highlighting their symbolic richness and contemporary relevance. I also seek to create a universal visual language, rooted in Caribbean cultural memory yet accessible to broader narratives, and to build bridges between local and global practices, where each sign and gesture tells both an individual and collective story.

By merging graphic systems from Haiti, Cuba, and other regions shaped by the African diaspora, my work questions notions of heritage, identity, and cultural transmission. This approach does not seek to freeze these narratives but to open them to new interpretations, resonating with contemporary challenges.

I want to express my gratitude to all the individuals and institutions who supported this artistic residency and enriched my journey of research and creation.

Thank you to the Caribbean Cultural Institute and the Pérez Art Museum Miami.

A huge shout-out to Iberia Pérez González: thank you for your support and help. I hope many Caribbean artists will benefit from your expertise in the future.

To the entire Bakehouse team and all the artists who gave me their time and shared their knowledge: Love y'all.

Thank you to the University of Miami and its team for opening the doors to the Cuban Heritage Collection and Lydia Cabrera's archives, an invaluable treasure that enriched my reflections and work.

A special thanks to the Caribbean community in Miami, whose stories, experiences, and generosity brought a human and vibrant depth to my explorations.

To my family: wa sav lamif!

To my love, Léa.

Finally, thank you to all those who, through their work, writings, or creations, inspired me at every stage: researchers, artists, and many more.

Thank you for being part of this adventure.

Zétwàl sé
tìmoun bondié
ki la pou gidé
nou dan nwèsè
ék ka montré
nou chimèn
lèspwa

The stars, children of the heavens, guide us in the dark, showing us the path of hope.