

# The Dinner Party

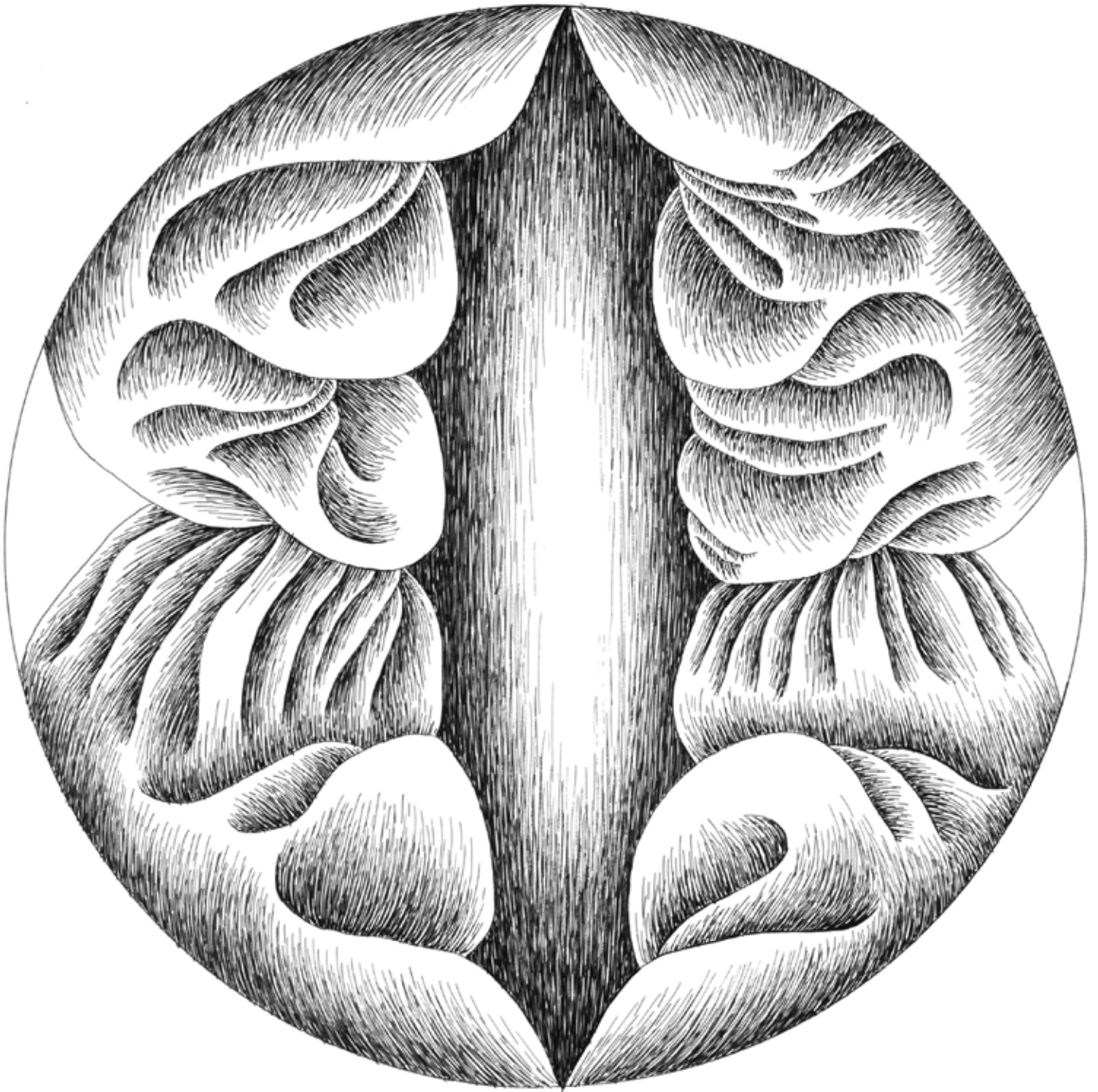
## Plates

## Judy Chicago

*The Dinner Party* (1974–79) is a monumental work of art that employs numerous mediums, including ceramics, china painting, and an array of needle and fiber techniques, to honor women's achievements. Its central component is a massive banquet table in the shape of a triangle, representing equality. Each of the 39 women

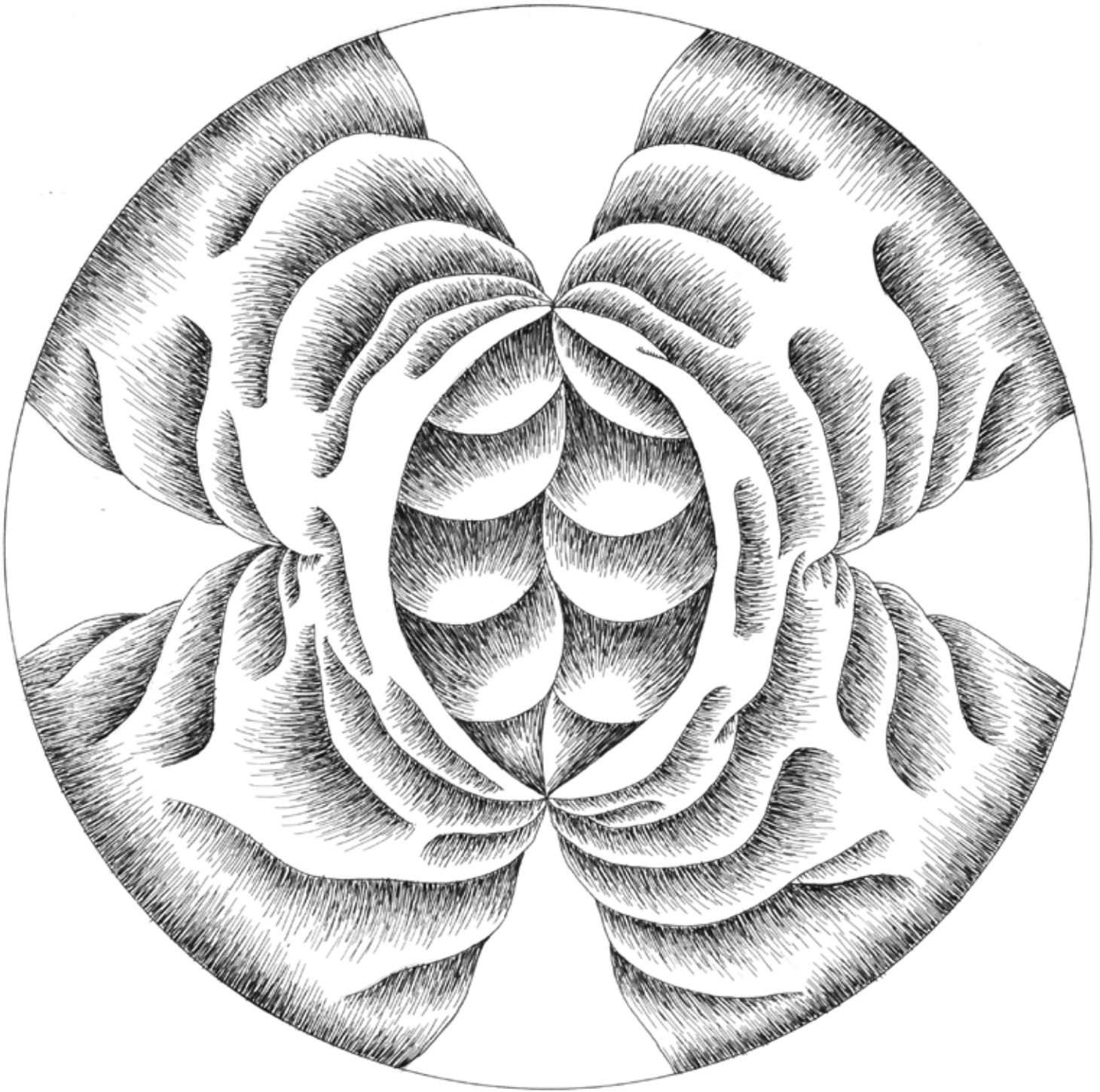
honored at the table (thirteen on each side) is represented by a fourteen-inch china-painted plate presented on an intricately needleworked runner along with a gold ceramic chalice and utensils, and a napkin with a stitched edge. Both the plates and the runners incorporate motifs and needlework techniques related to the time in which each woman

lived. A vulvar form recurs in the plates to emphasize the point that—despite the many differences among the women—the one common factor is that their achievements were underrecognized owing to their gender.



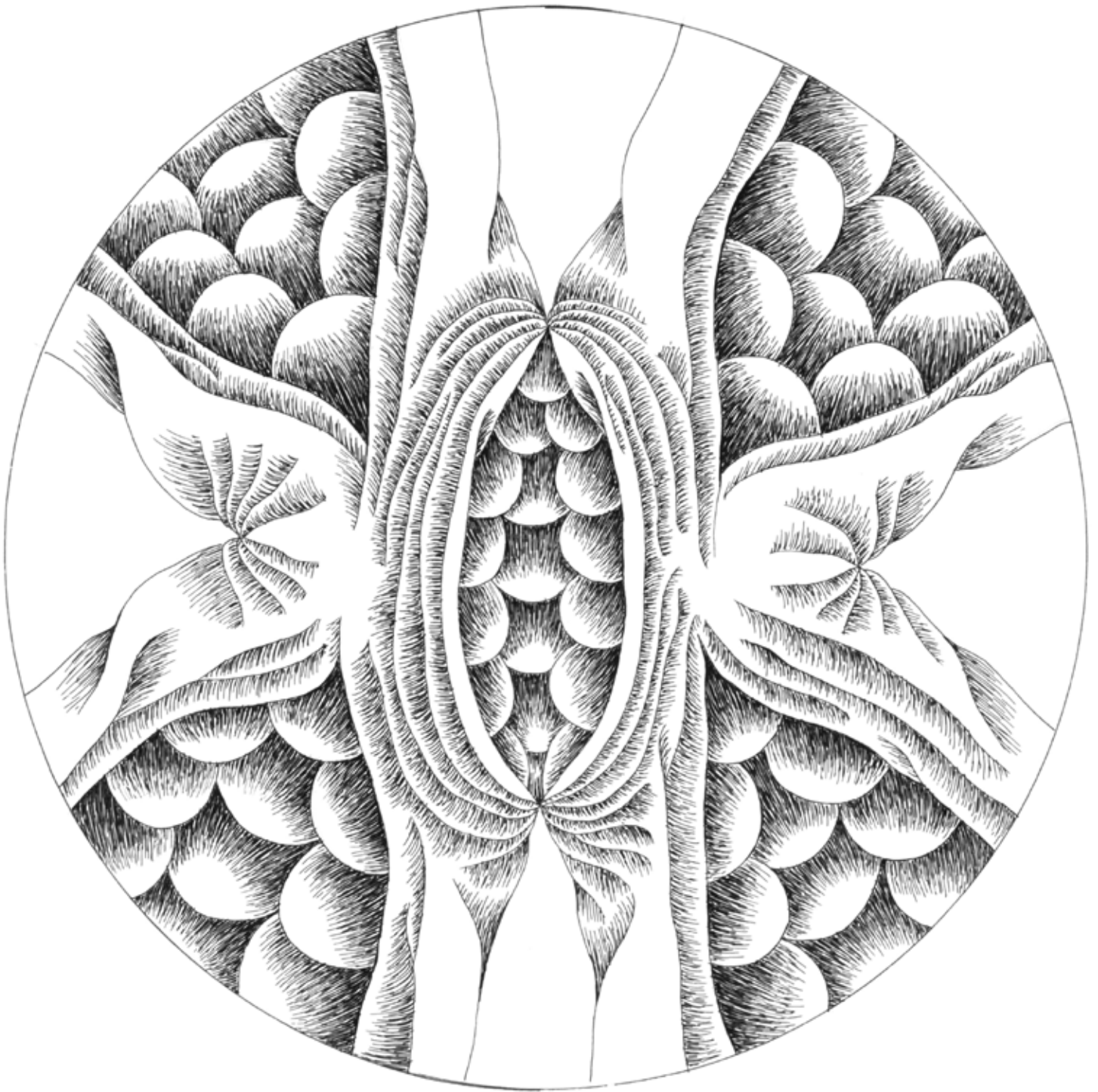
## Primordial Goddess

Represents the original female being, in ancient religions, from whom all life emerged—the Earth Mother.



## Fertile Goddess

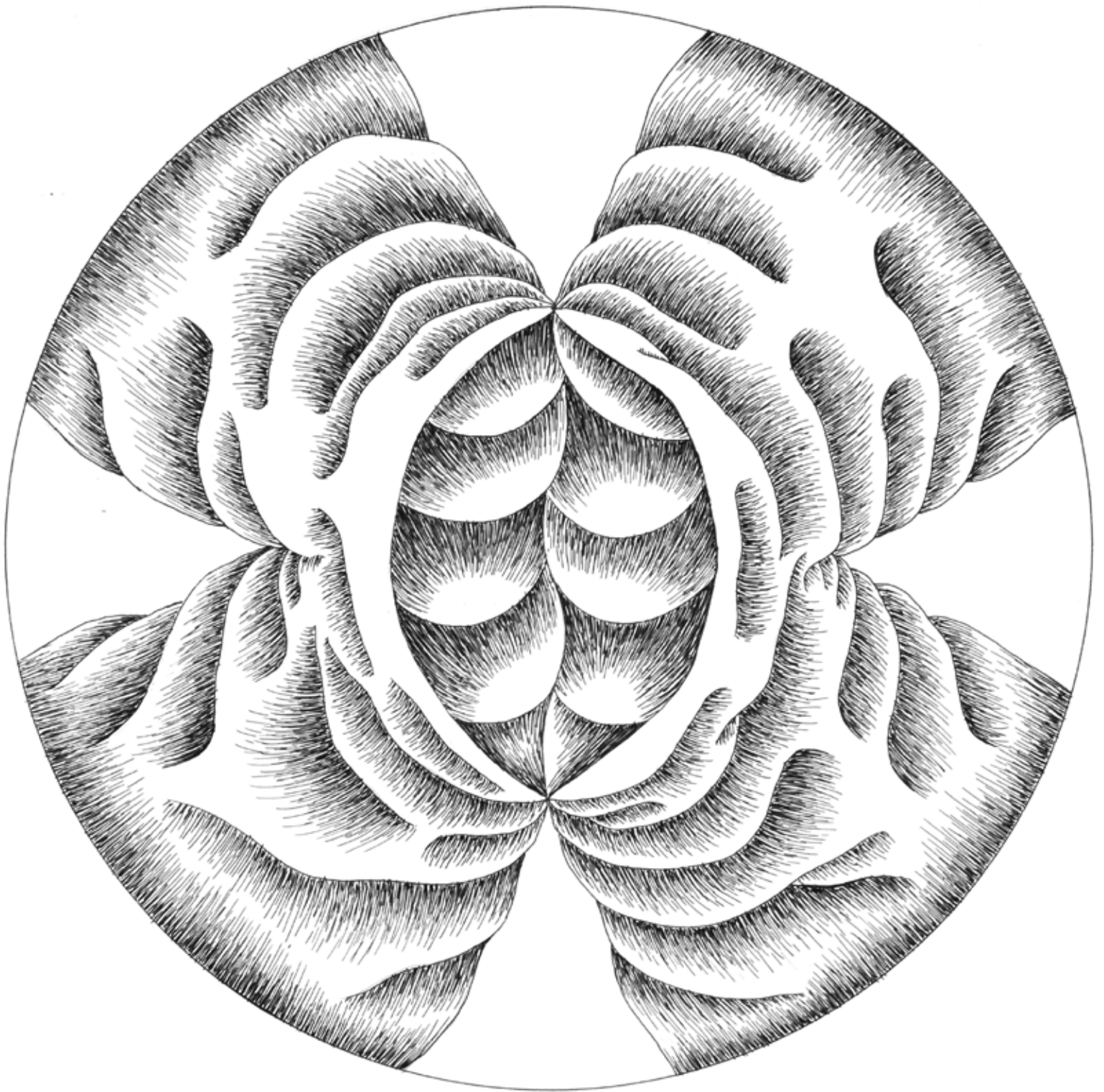
Symbolizes woman as the source of creation, fecundity, nourishment, and protection as found in early goddess worship.



## Ishtar

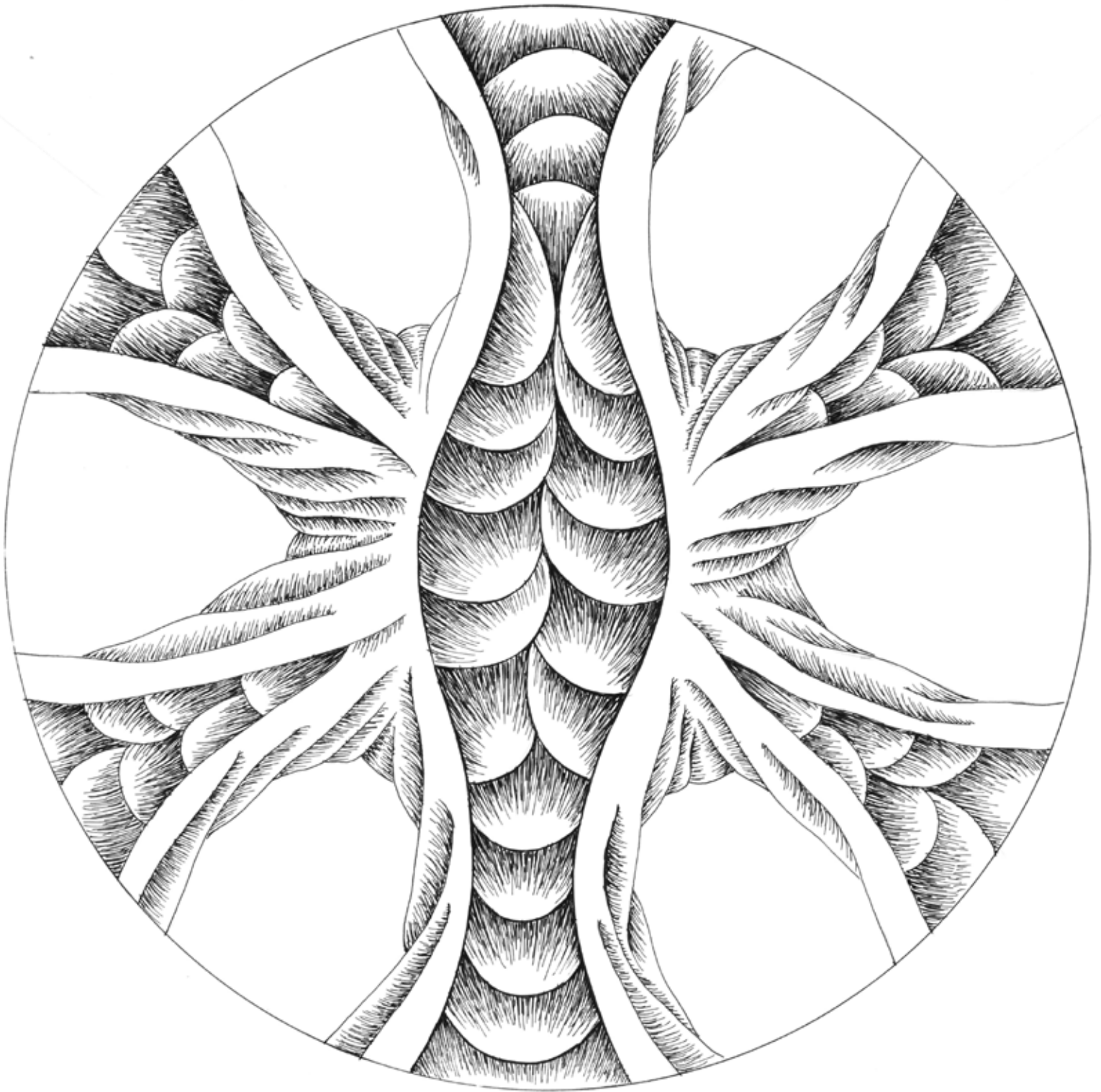
Great goddess of ancient Mesopotamia with infinite power; she takes three main forms: the goddess of love, the goddess of war, and the planet Venus.





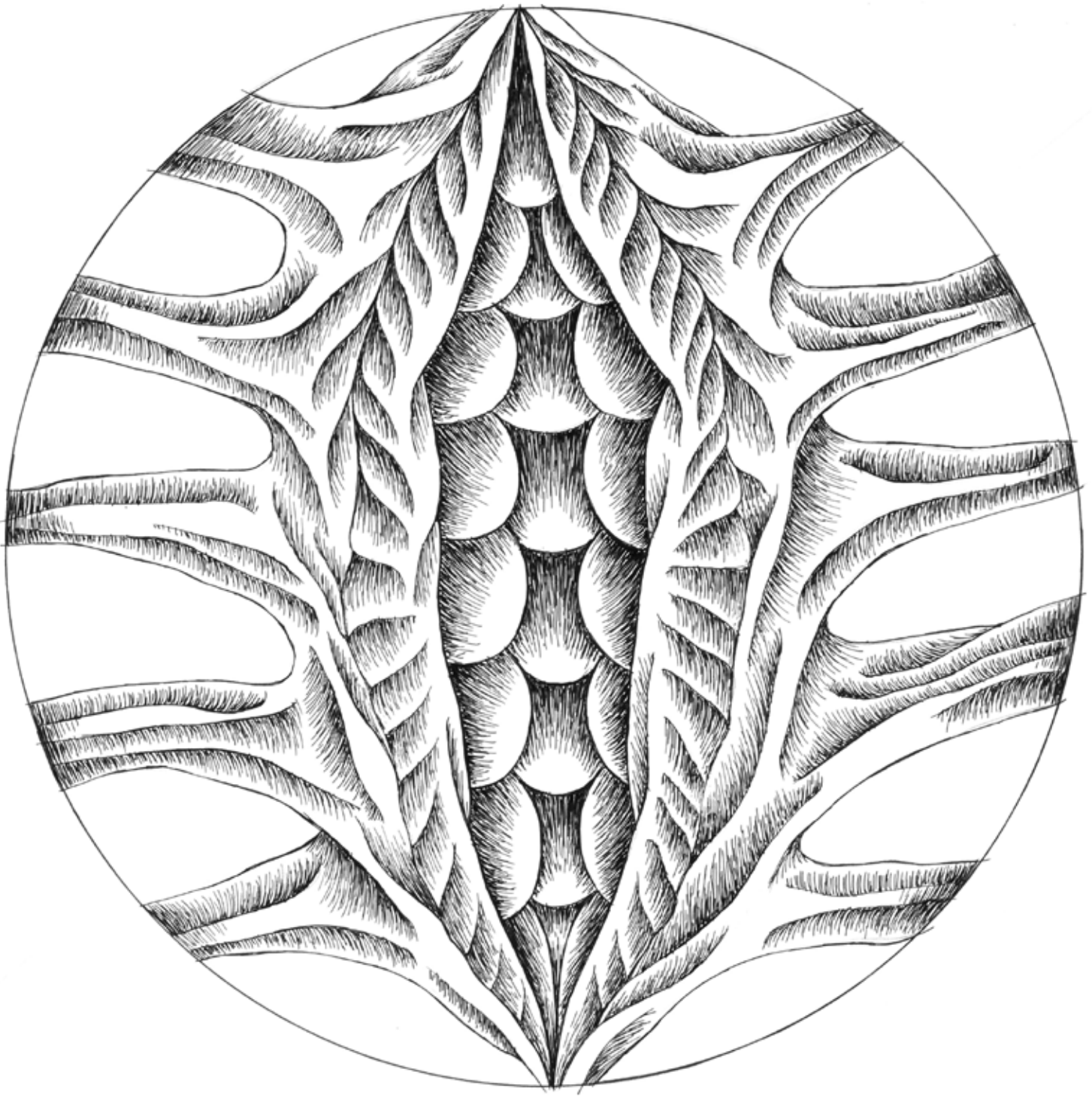
## Kali

Fierce manifestation of the Hindu mother goddess; her powers are associated not only with destruction but also with creation and restoration.



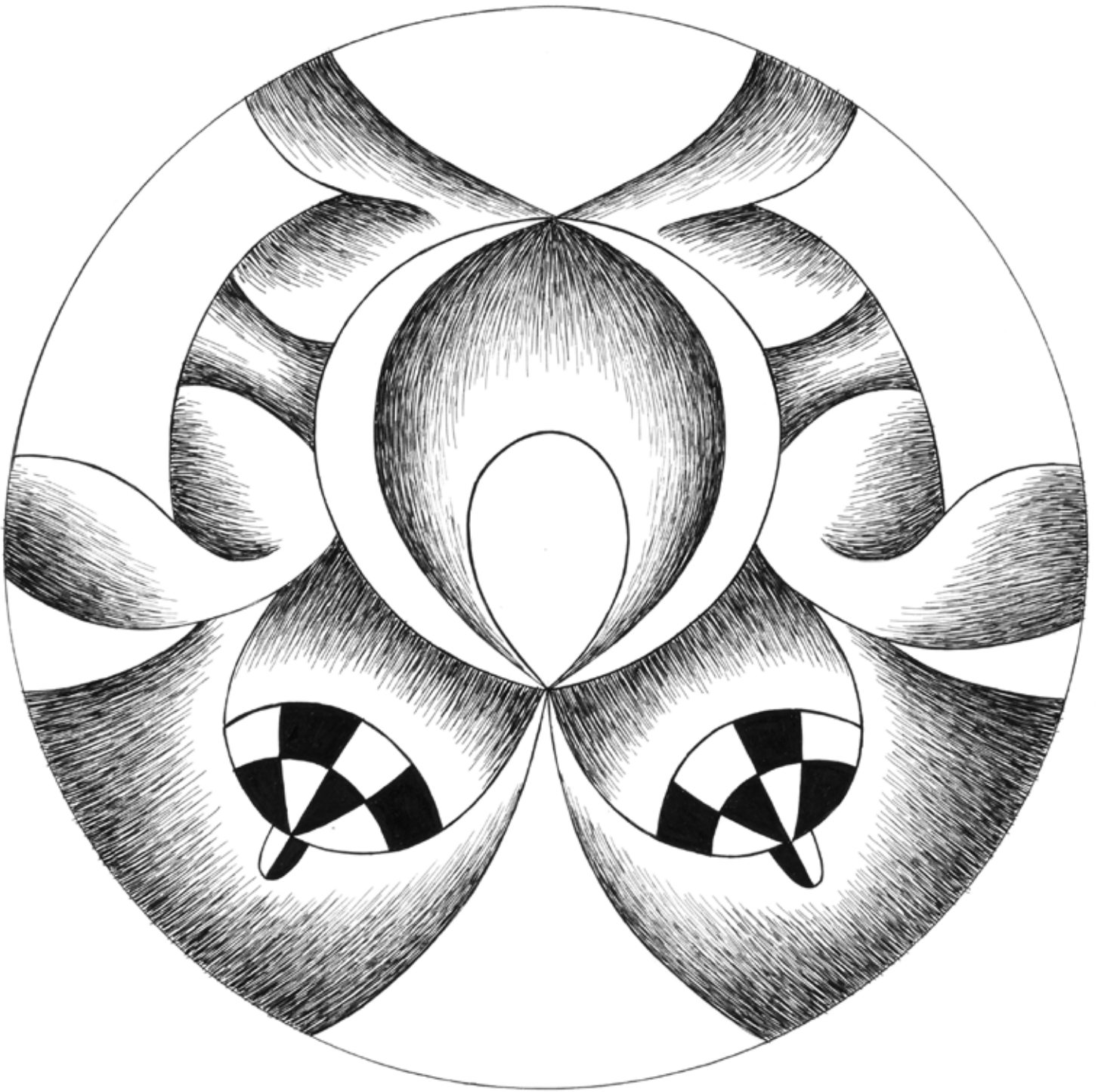
## Snake Goddess

Associated with the matriarchal religion of Minoan civilization as represented by the snake-holding goddess figurines discovered in Crete.



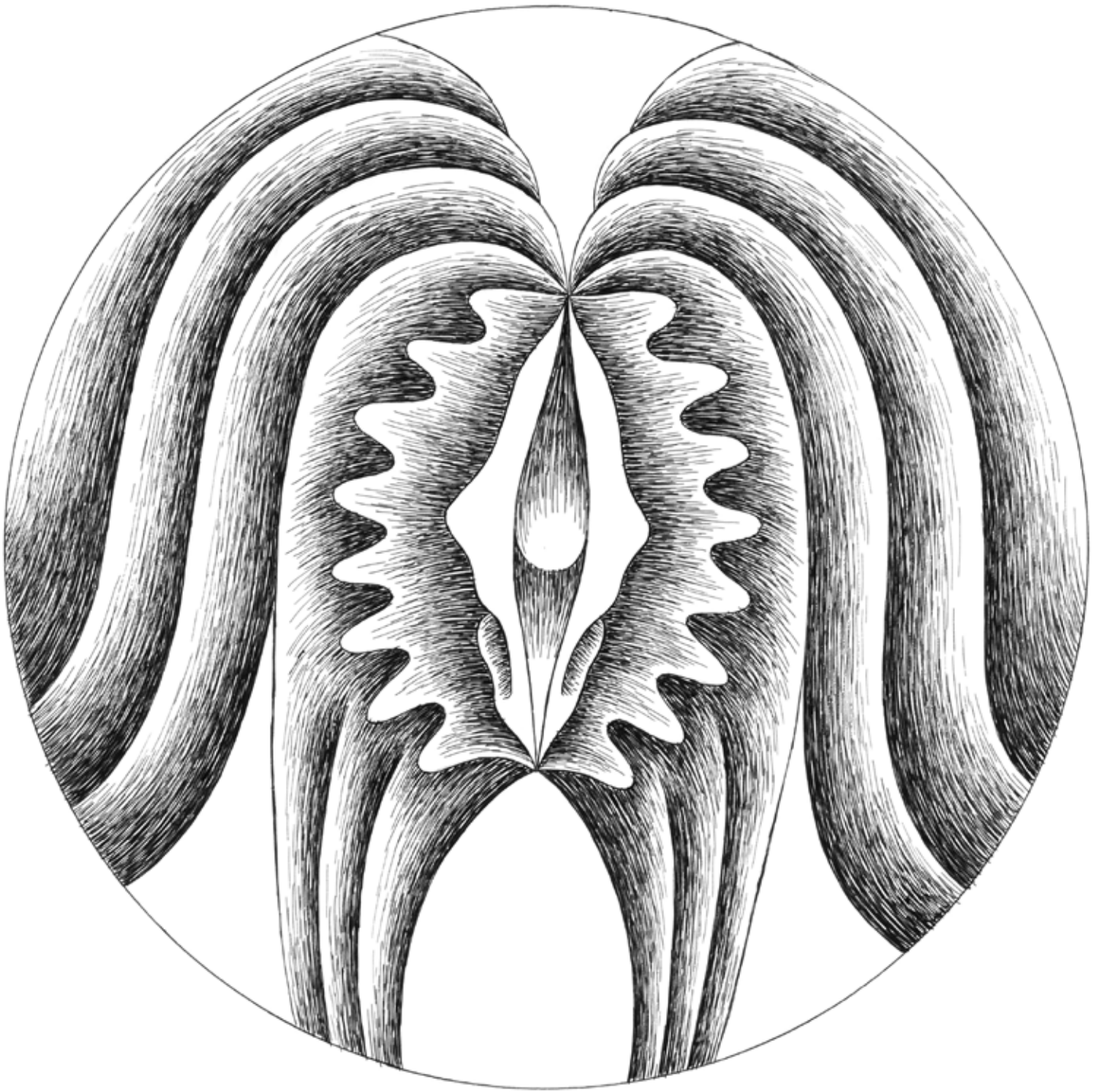
Sophia

A spiritual representation of female wisdom as interpreted by or integrated into various religions.



Amazon

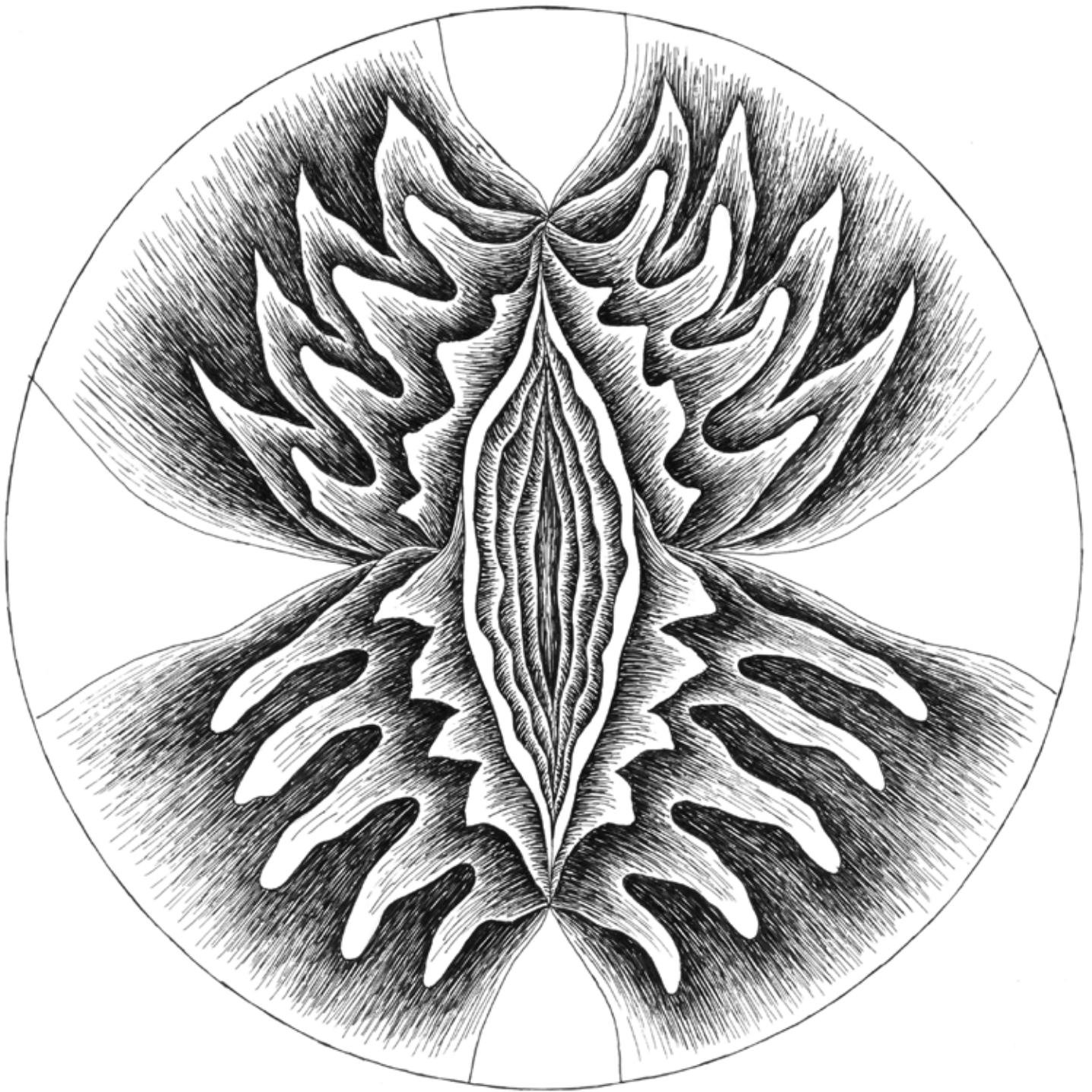
Embodiment of the society of powerful warrior women described in ancient Greek mythology.



**Hatshepsut**  
(15th century B.C.E.)

A renowned pharaoh of ancient Egypt who achieved peace and prosperity.

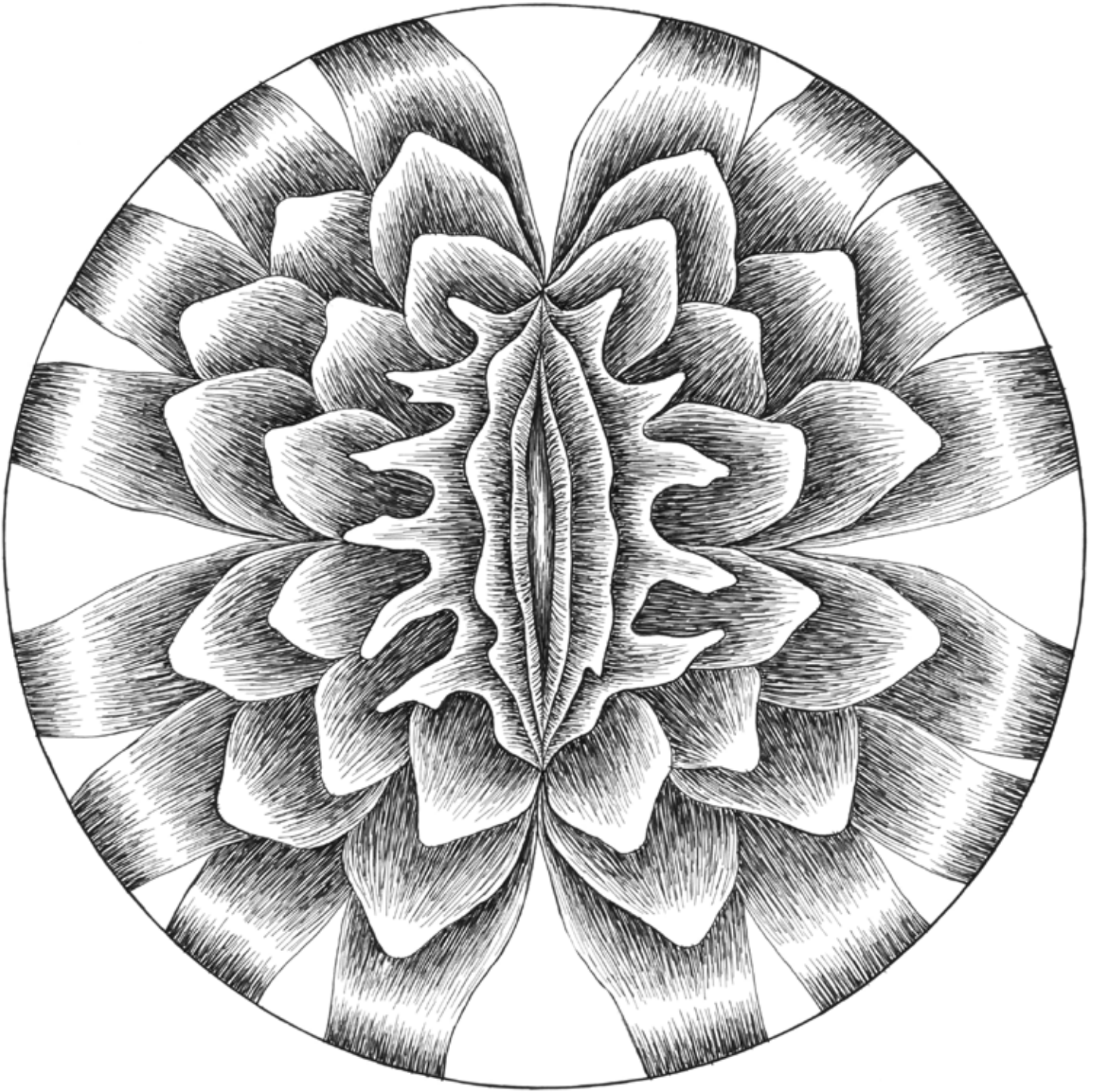




## Judith

A biblical Jewish heroine known for slaying the Assyrian general Holofernes after he conquered her city and persecuted its people.

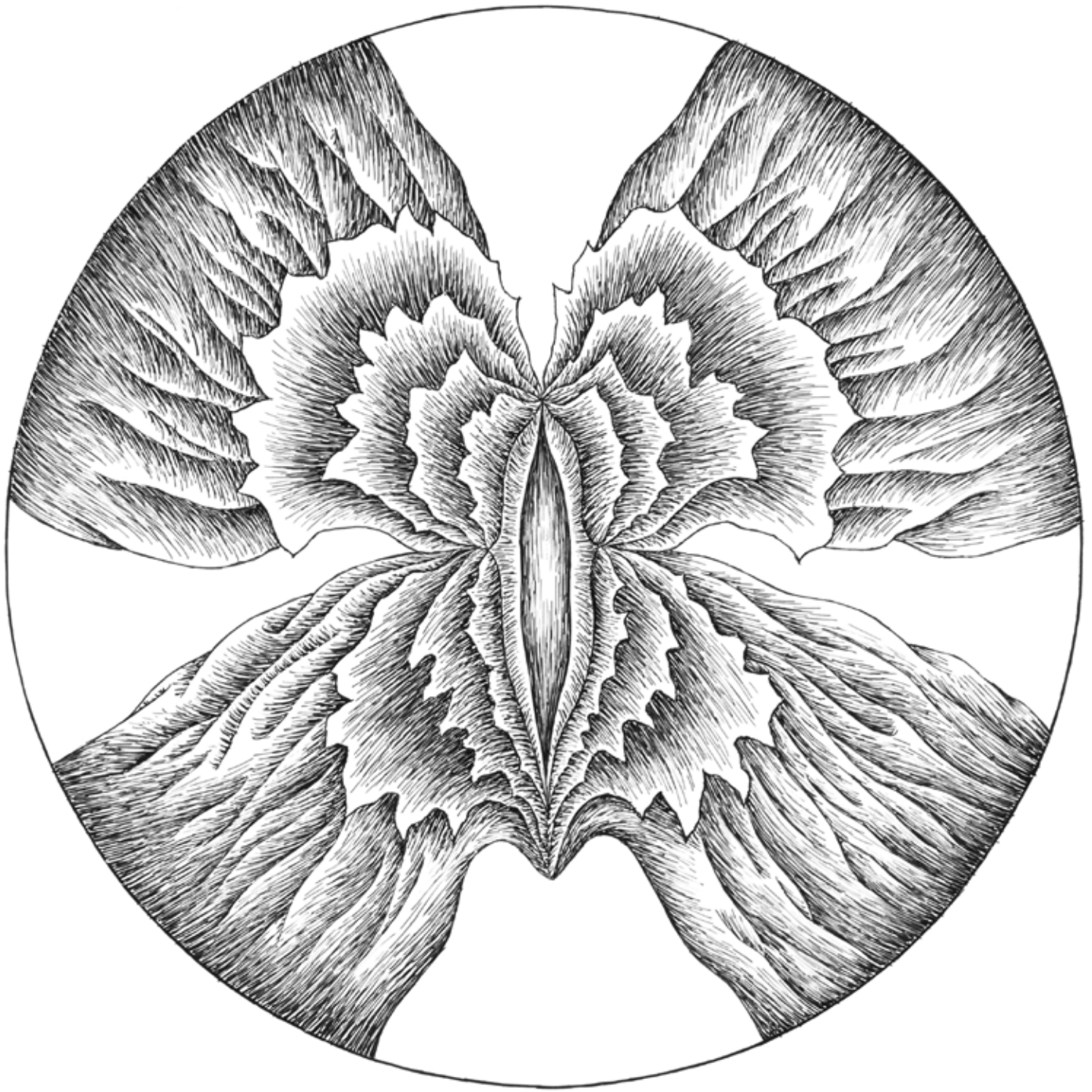




## Sappho

(625–570 B.C.E.)

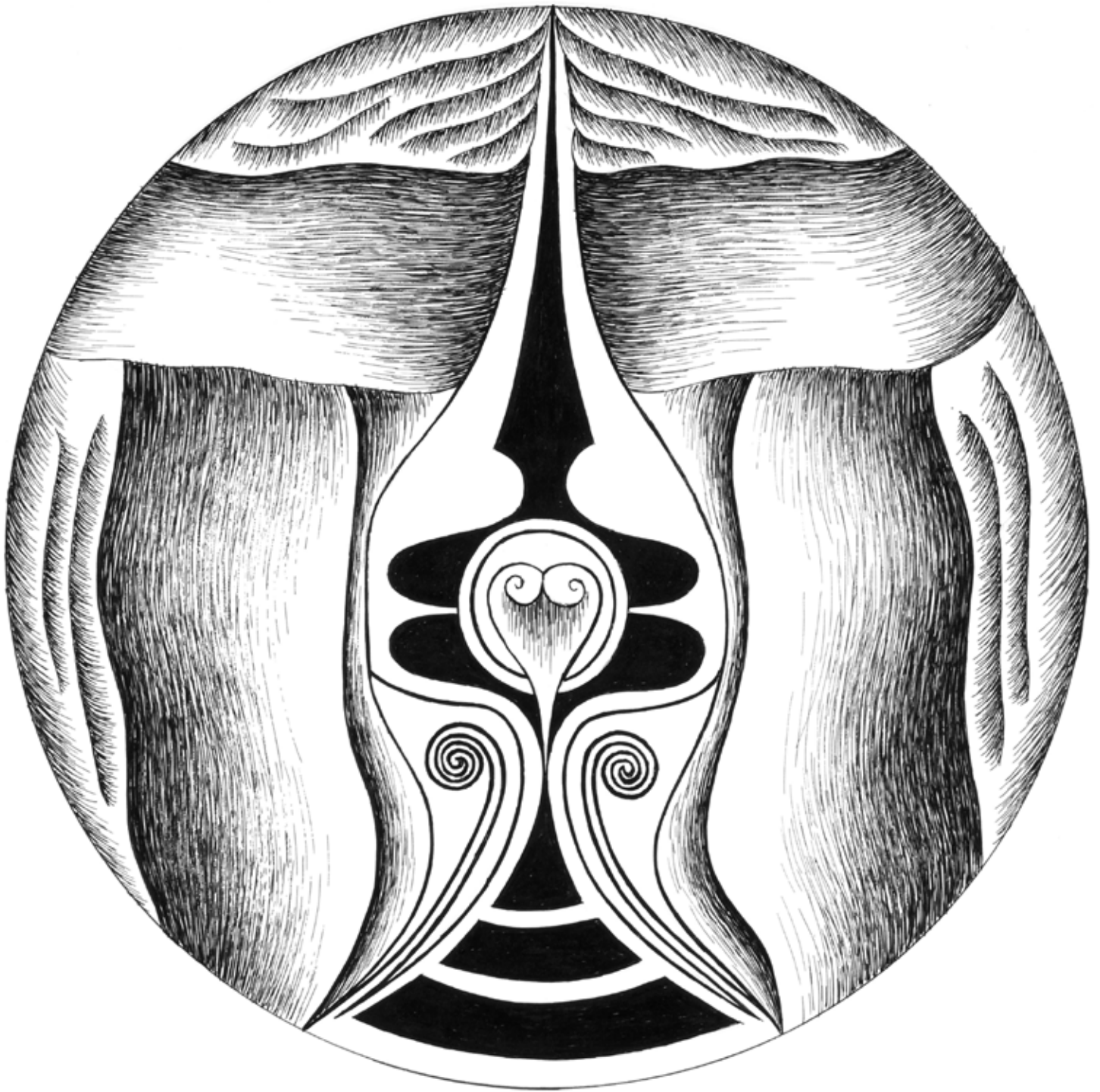
Prolific lyric poet from the island of Lesbos; most of her work was destroyed by the church in the 4th century because of its erotic and lesbian themes.



## Aspasia

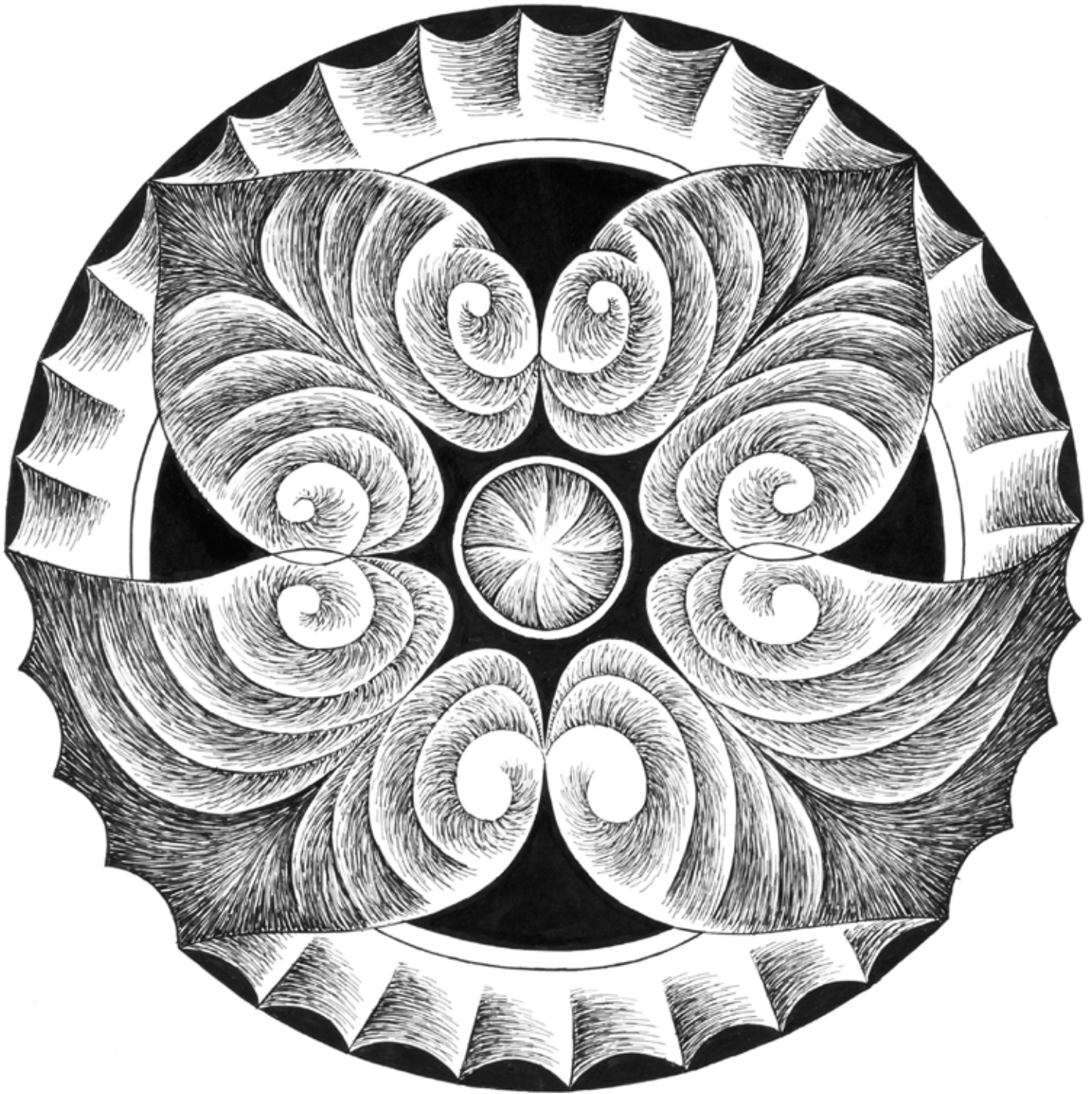
(circa 470–410 B.C.E.)

A philosopher who organized academic centers for women in Greek society who had few rights; she was also a noted orator and instructor of rhetoric who taught Socrates and Pericles.



**Boadaceia**  
(circa 25–62)

British warrior queen who led her people in battle against oppressive Roman forces.

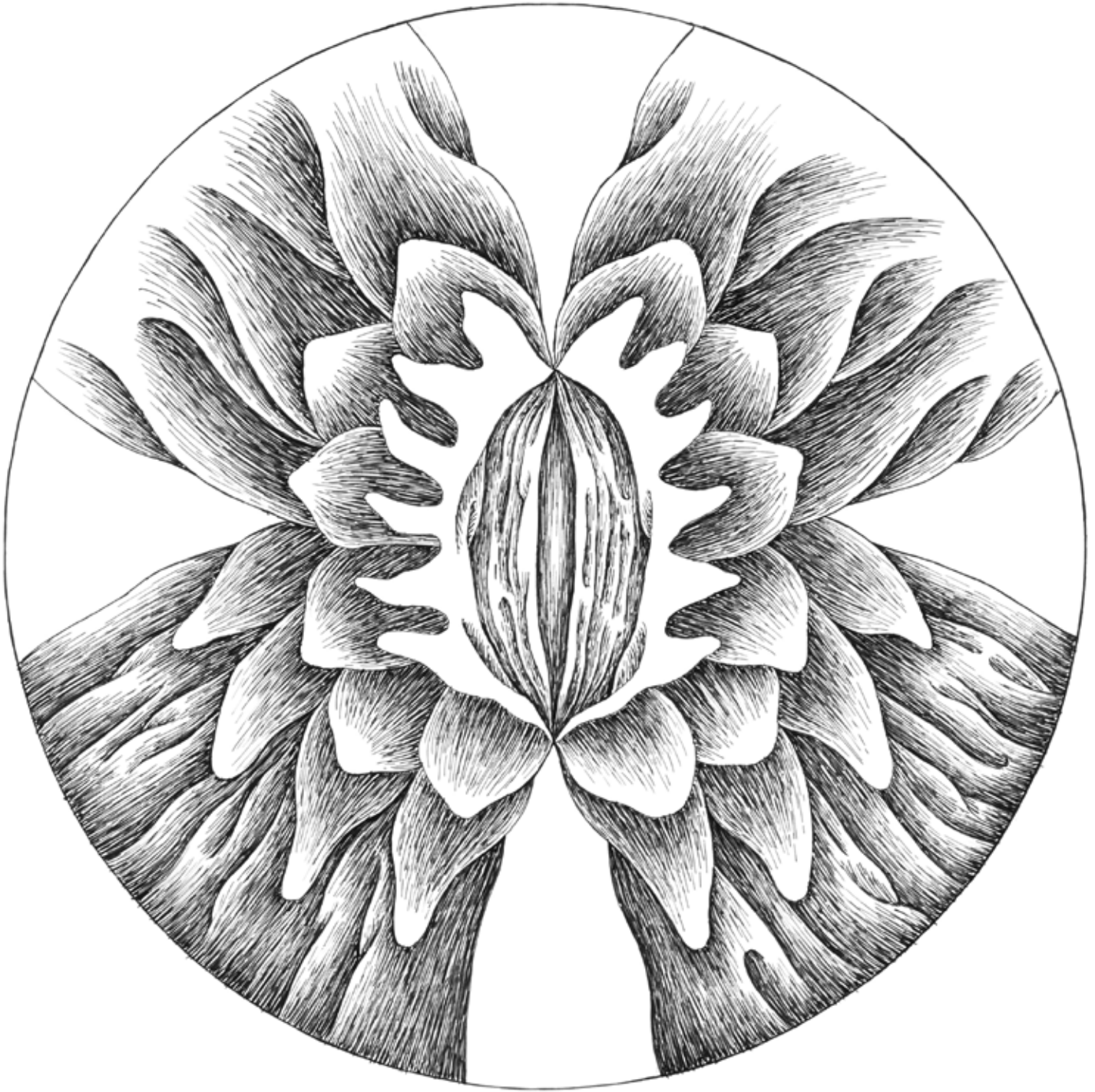


## Hypatia

(370–415)

Roman mathematician and philosopher in Alexandria, Egypt; she was brutally murdered for her teachings that challenged the Christian Church.

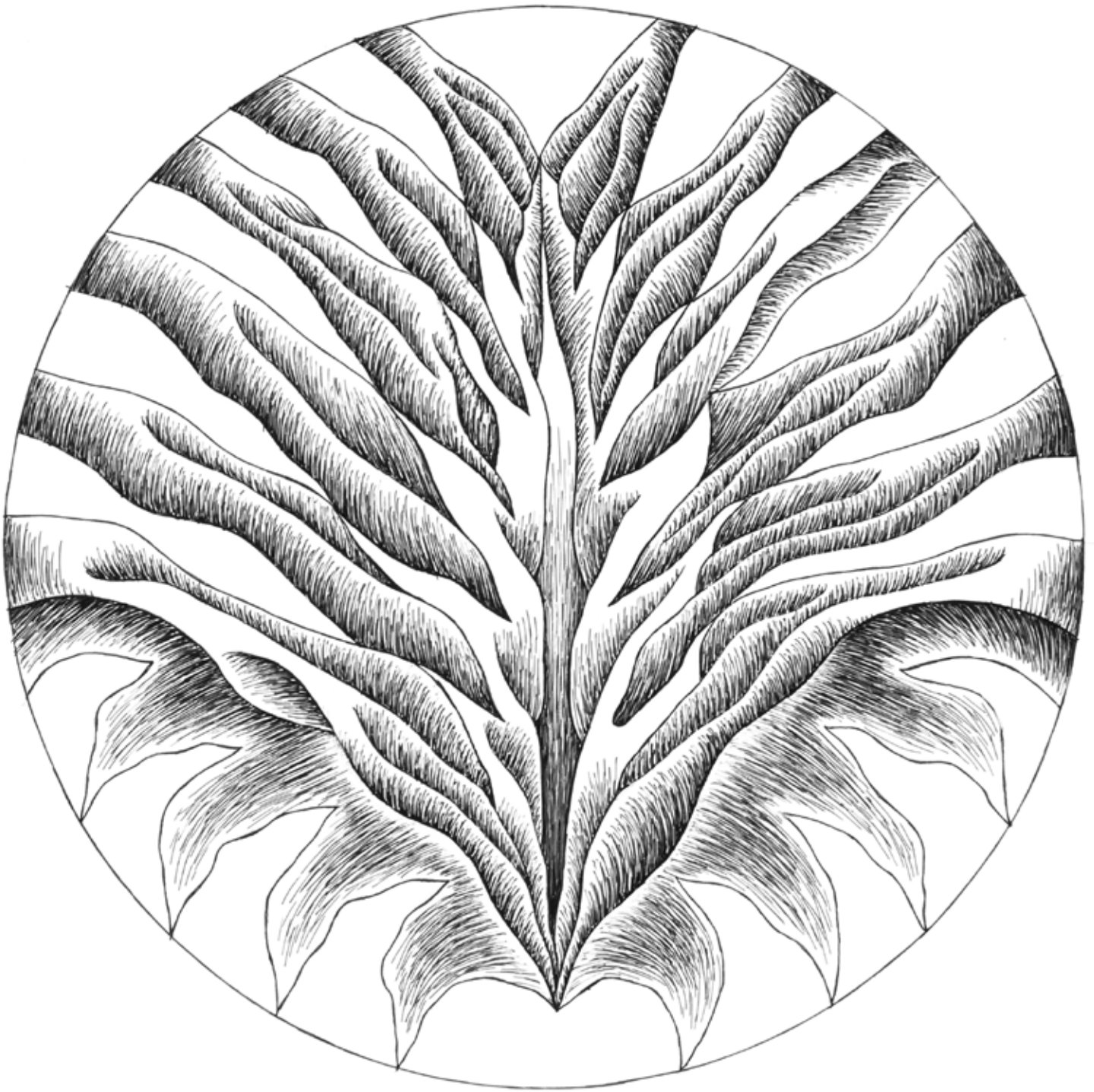




## Marcella

(circa 325–410)

Founded the first Christian convent in Rome, providing a safe haven for women dedicated to religion and charity; later declared a saint for founding the Christian monastic movement.

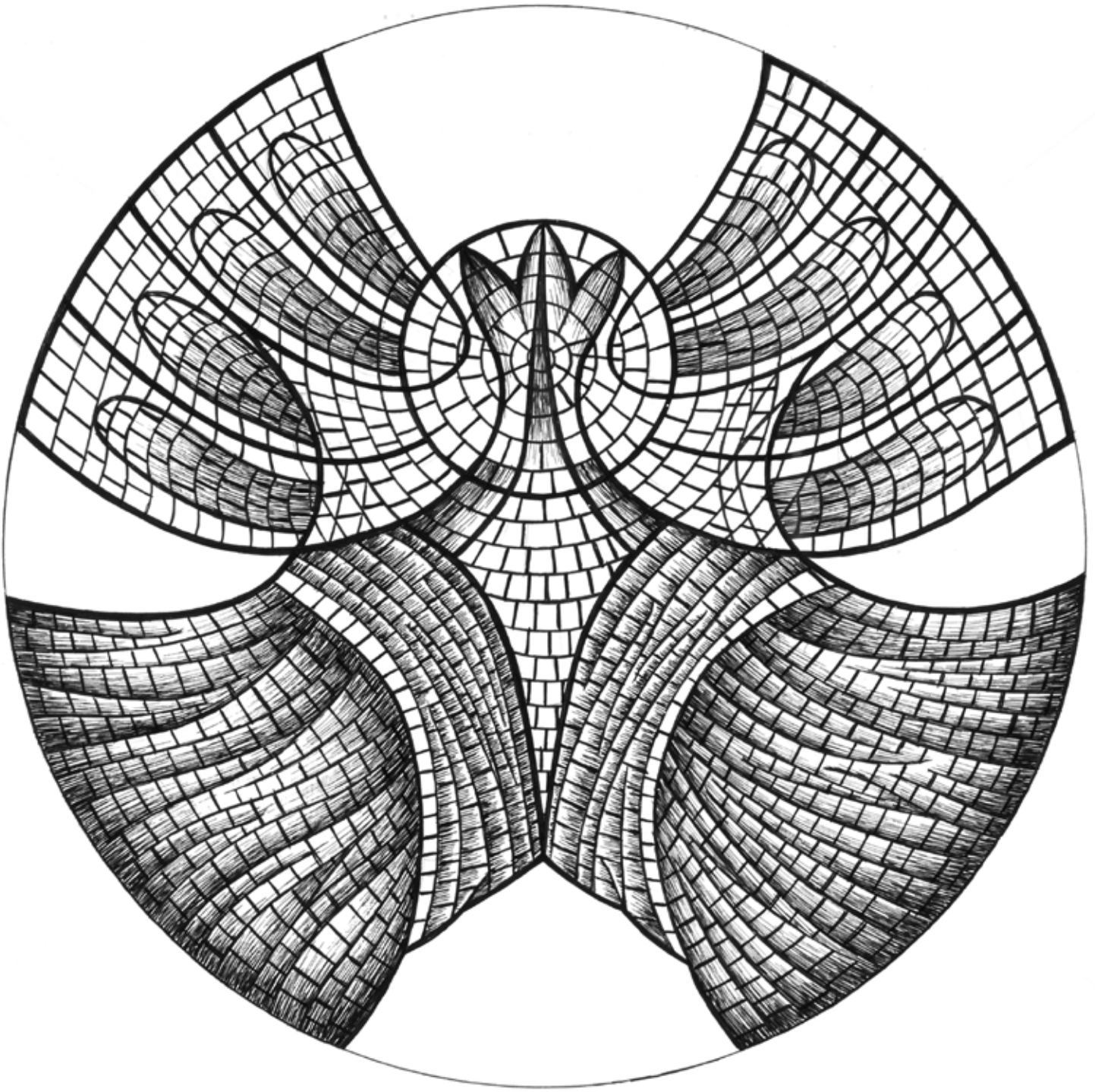


## Saint Bridget

(453–523)

Founded the first convent in Ireland and the monastic movement throughout the country; a Christian saint, her association with the Celtic goddess Brigid represents the merging of the pagan and Christian faiths.

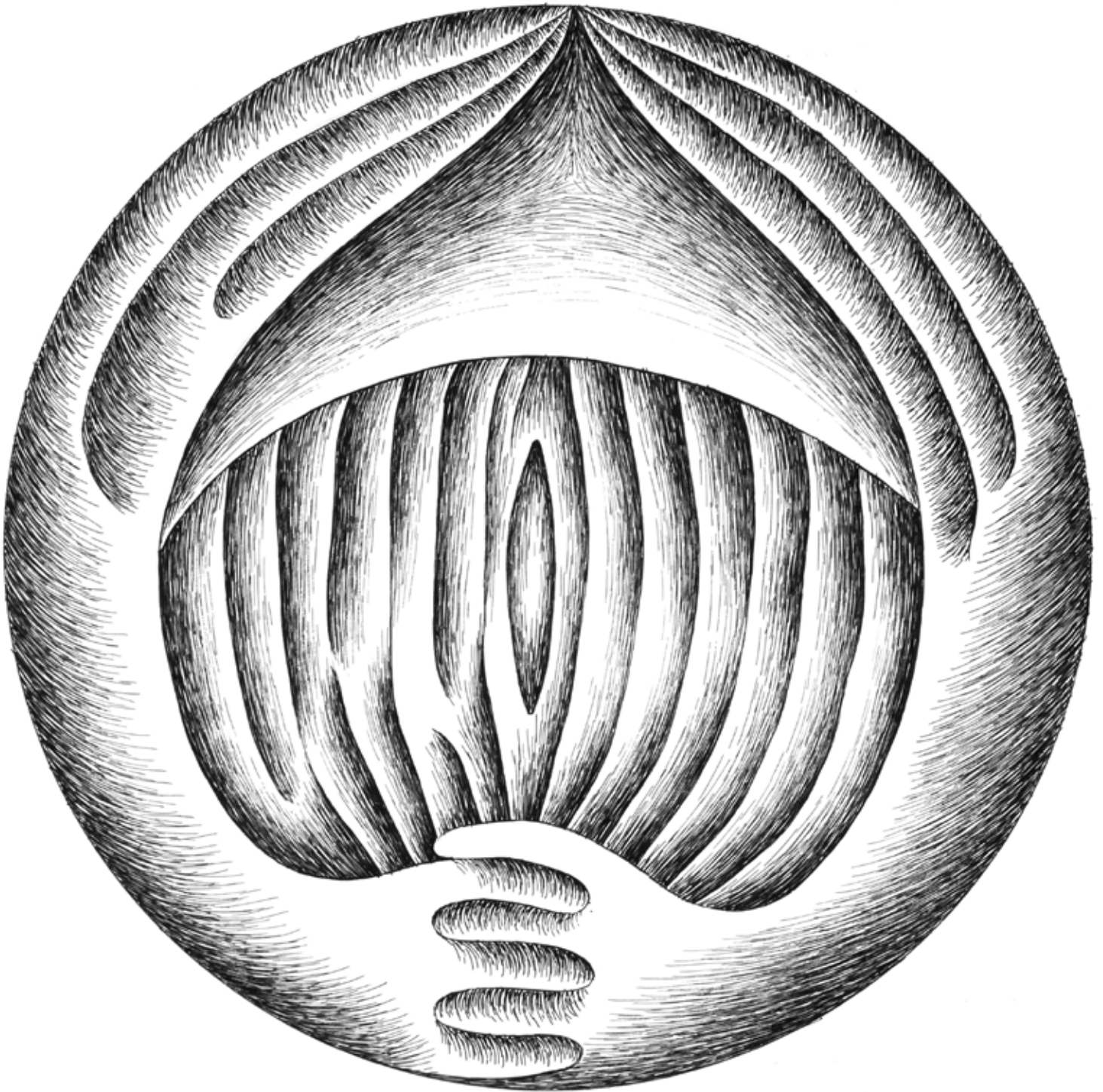




## Theodora

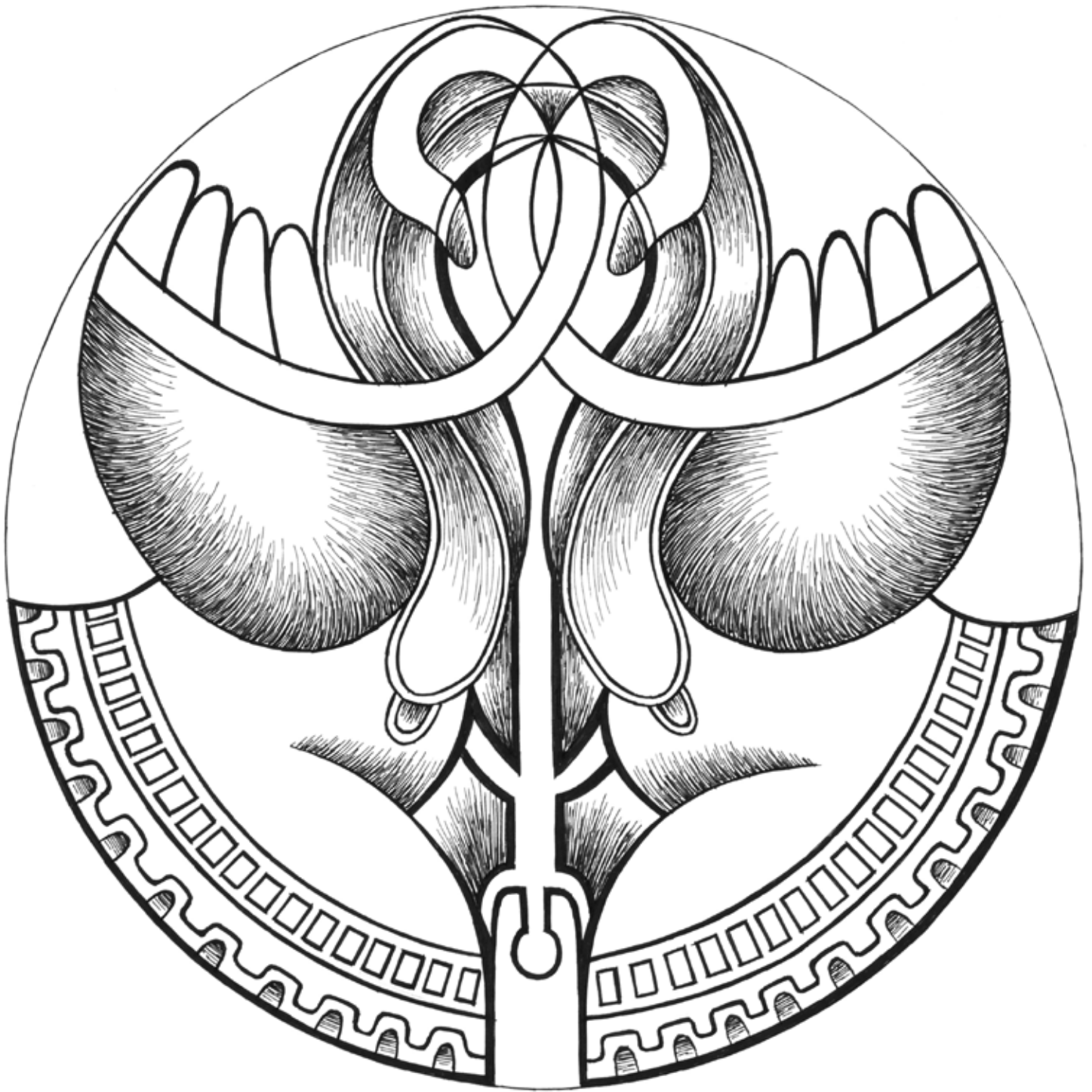
(500–548)

Byzantine empress who initiated reforms for women, helping to prevent their mistreatment while affording them greater rights.



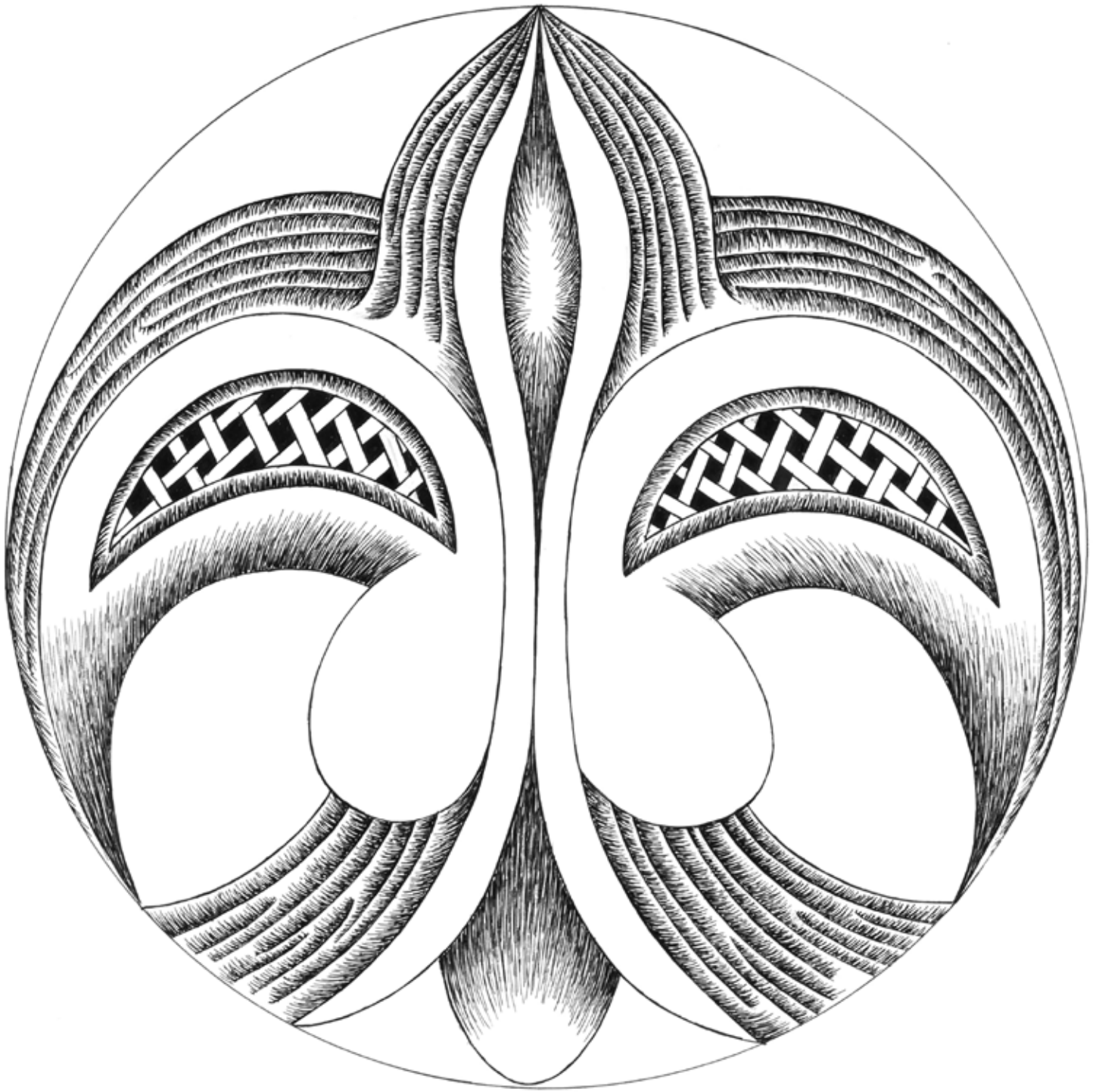
**Hrosvitha**  
(circa 935–1000)

The earliest known female poet in Germany, she was also a playwright, historian, and nun.



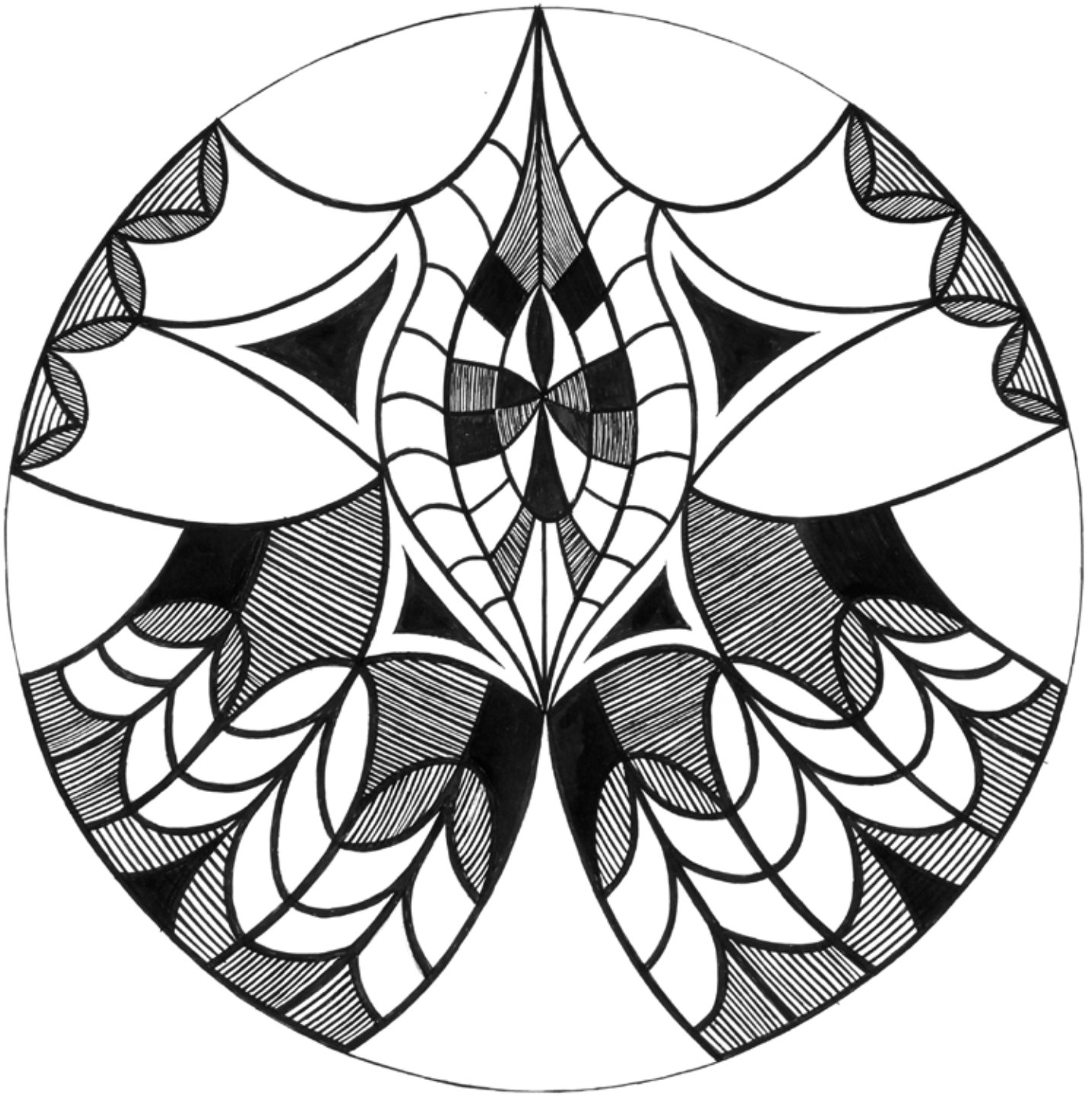
**Trotula**  
(11th century)

Italian physician specializing in gynecology and obstetrics; she wrote a treatise on women's diseases that remained in use for centuries after her death.



**Eleanor of Aquitaine**  
(circa 1122–1204)

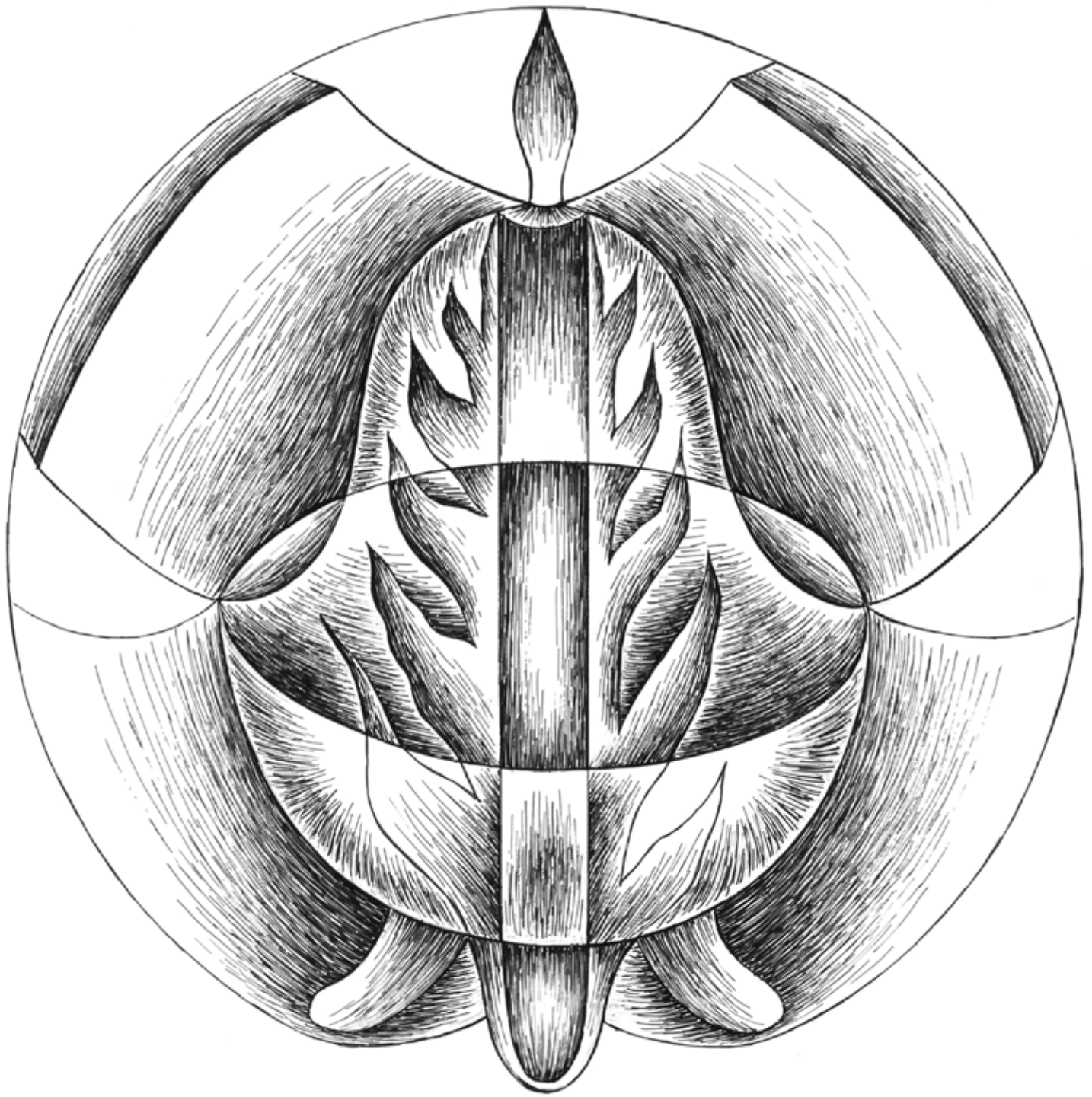
Medieval queen of France and then of England who was imprisoned by her husband Henry II for sixteen years.



**Hildegarde of Bingen**  
(1098–1179)

Visionary German nun, writer, medical scholar, composer, and artist; her work emphasized the relationship between human and divine.





**Petronilla de Meath**  
(circa 1300-1324)

Burned as a witch in Ireland, she represents the many women tried and convicted of witchcraft during the Middle Ages.





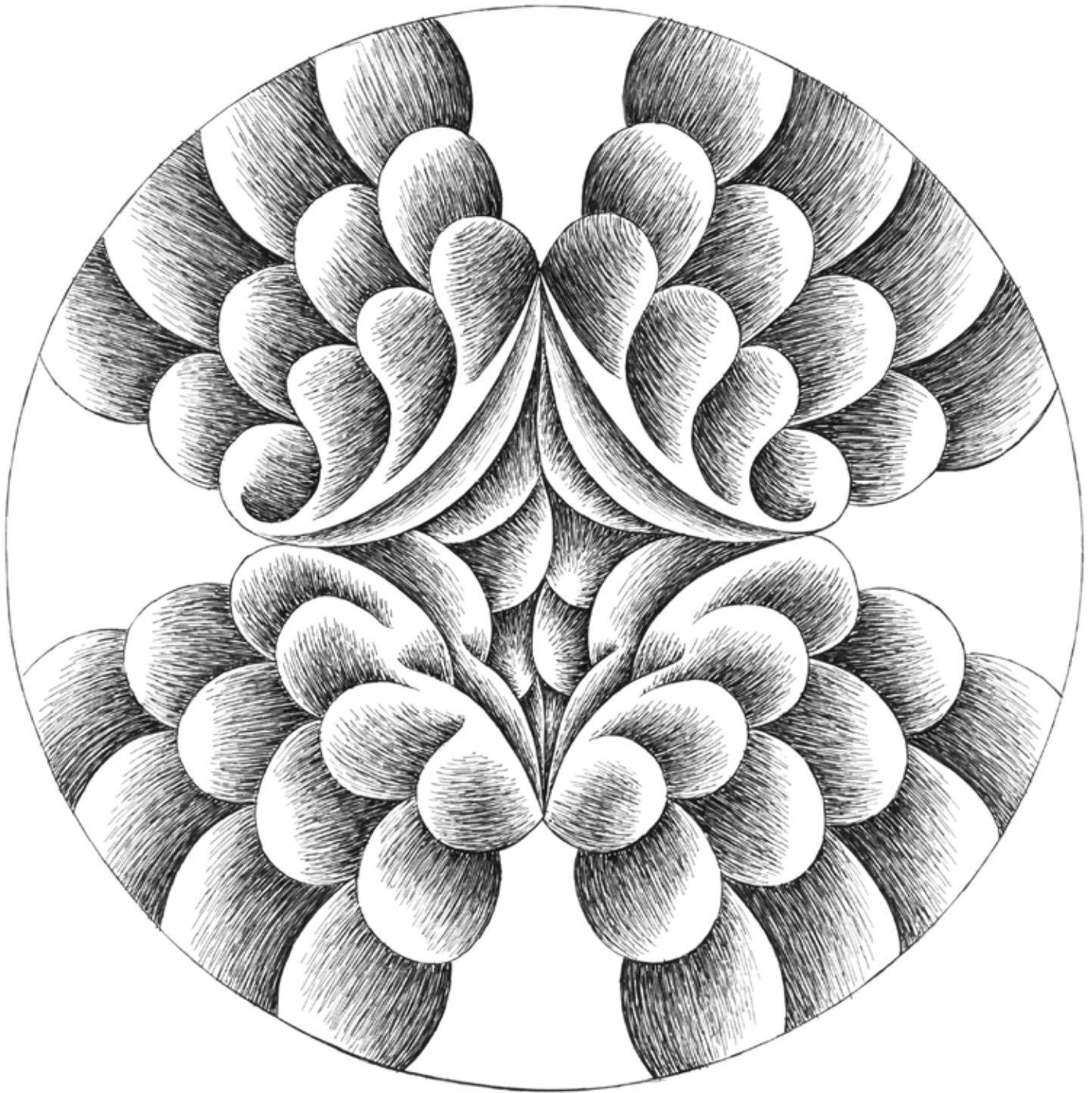
**Christine de Pisan**  
(1364–1430)

Considered the first professional female author in France, she wrote protofeminist works, including a book about a mythical city populated by the greatest women in history.



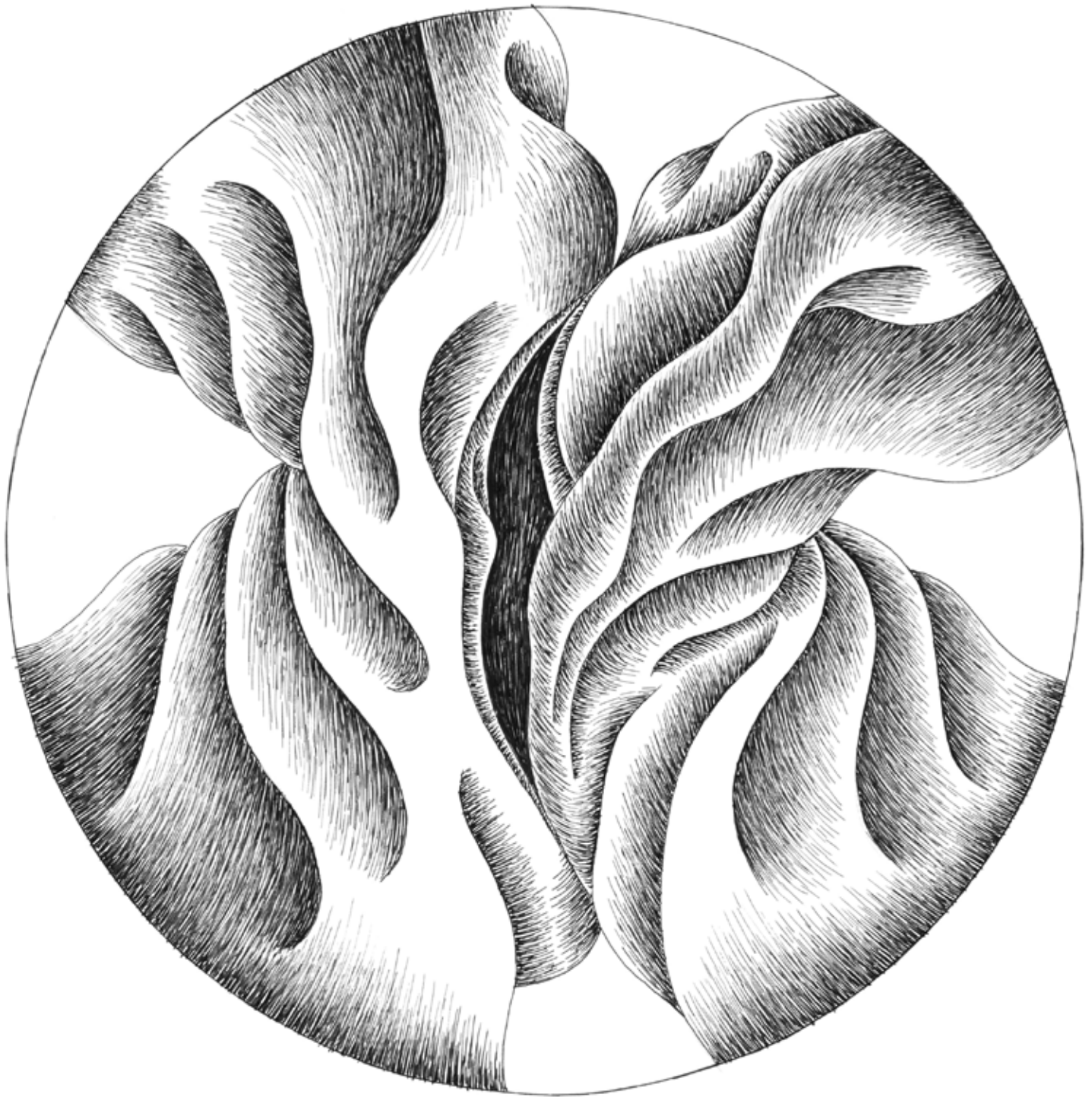
**Isabella d'Este**  
(1474–1539)

Italian noblewoman, scholar, patron of the arts, and political figure who served as a popular ruler during the Renaissance.



**Elizabeth R.**  
(1533–1603)

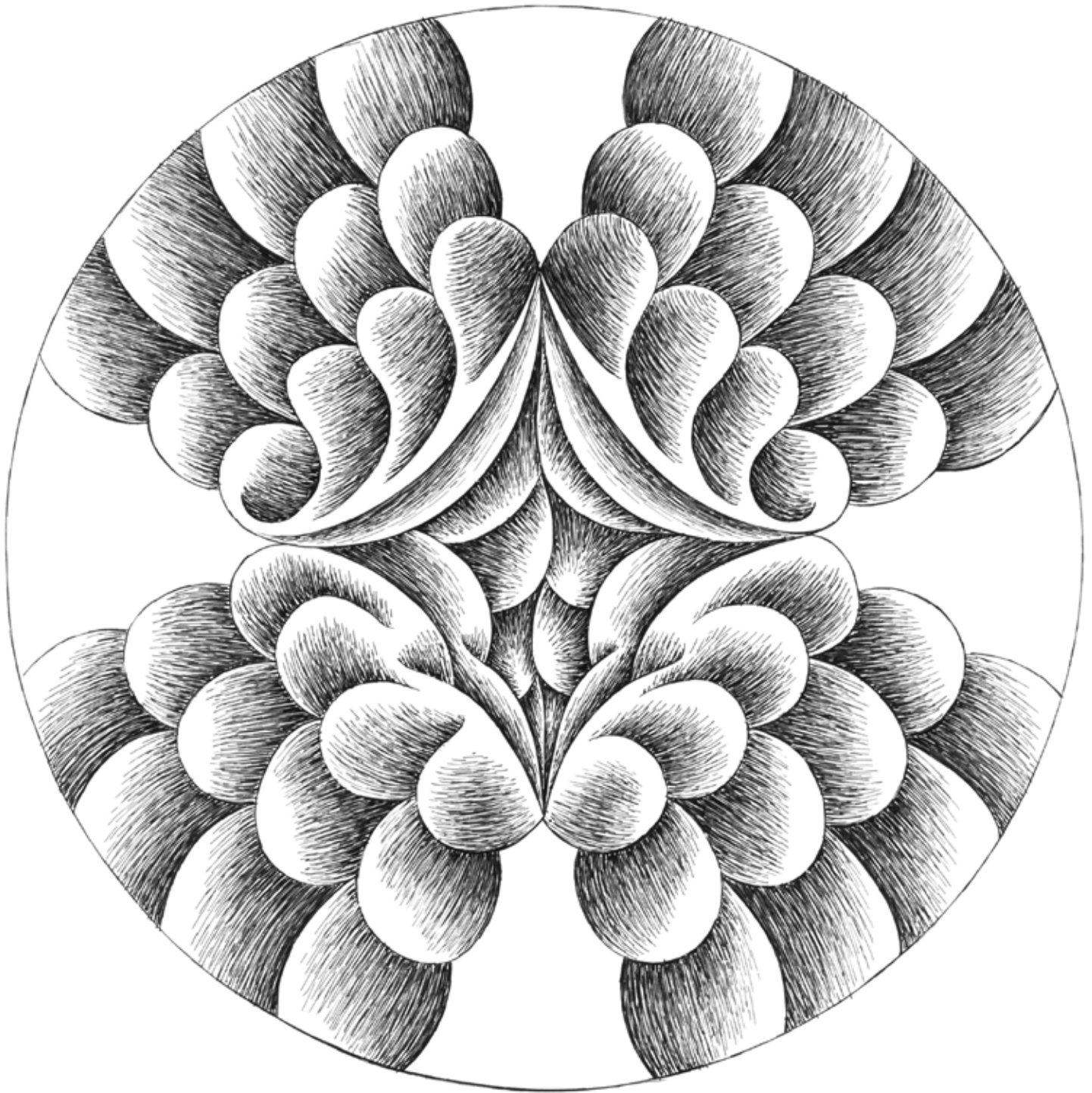
Queen of England whose long and successful rule led her country to cultural, economic, and political prosperity; she asserted her independence by refusing to marry.



**Artemisia Gentileschi**  
(1593–1652/3)

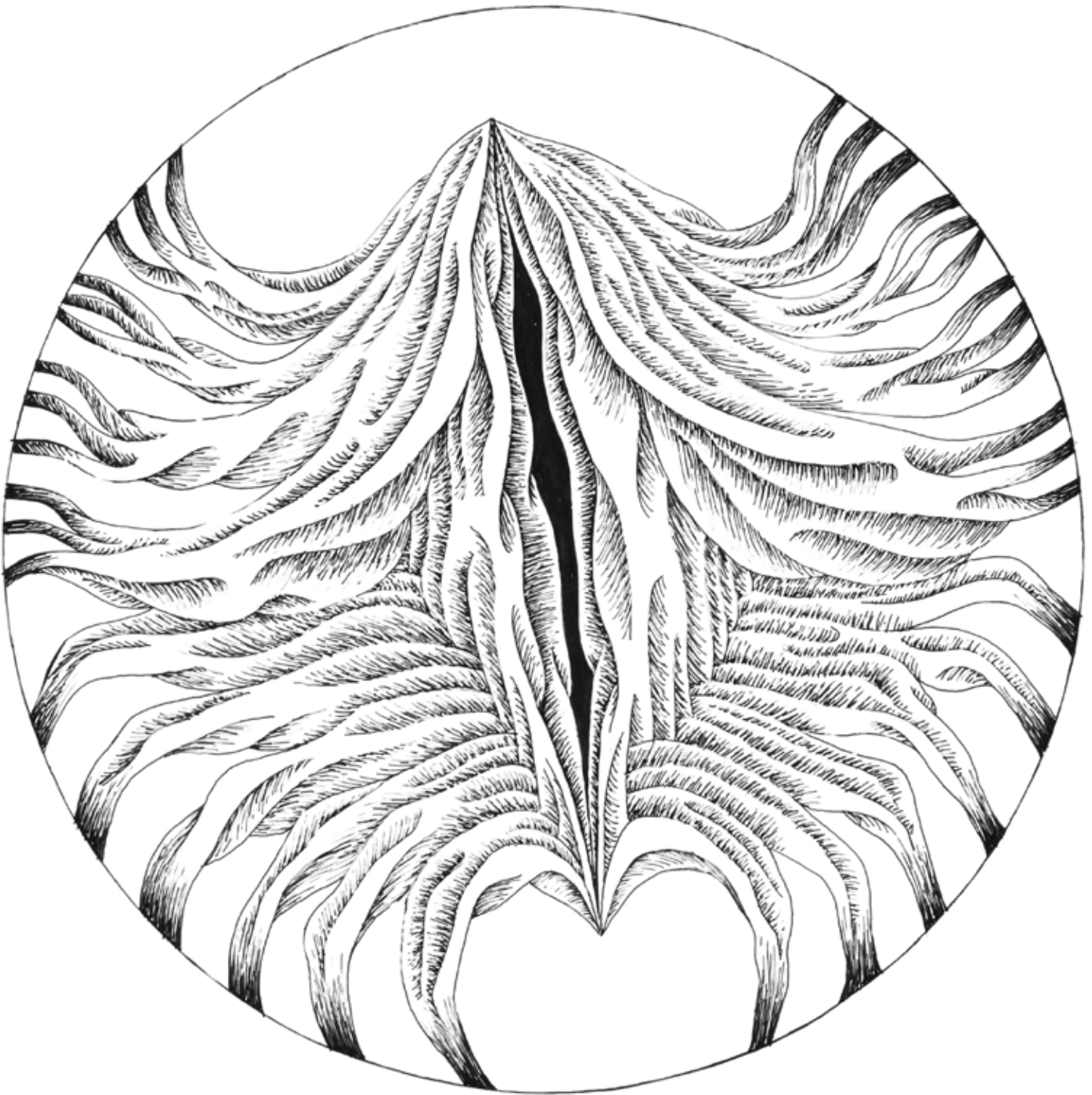
Successful Italian painter when artistic training was virtually unavailable to women; she sympathetically depicted female characters from biblical and secular history.





**Anna van Schurman**  
(1607-1678)

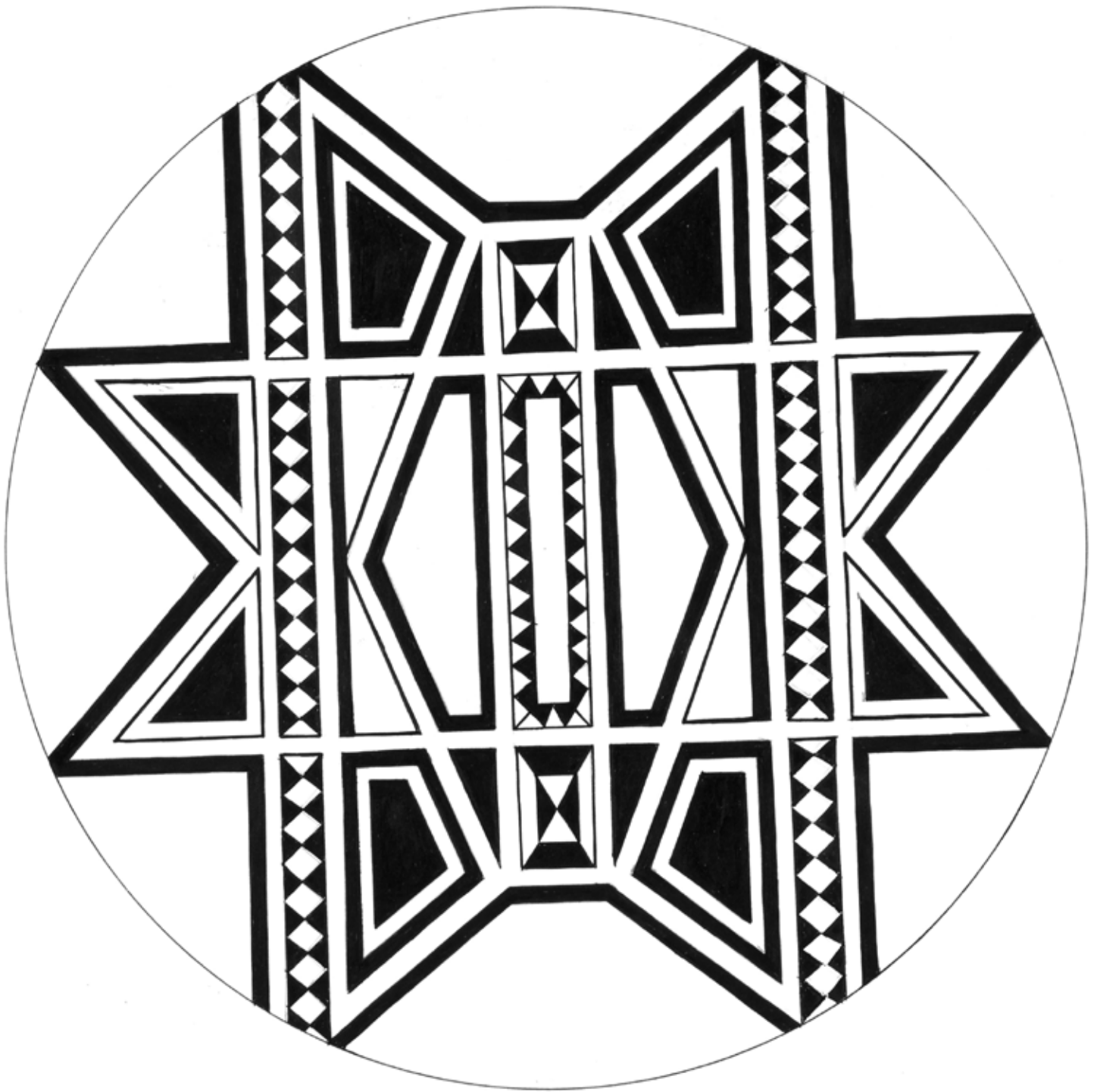
Dutch artist, linguist, theologian, and the author of a book proposing that women be given an education equal to men's.



**Anne Hutchinson**  
(1591-1643)

Colonist who challenged Puritanical doctrine and was excommunicated and banished for her beliefs.

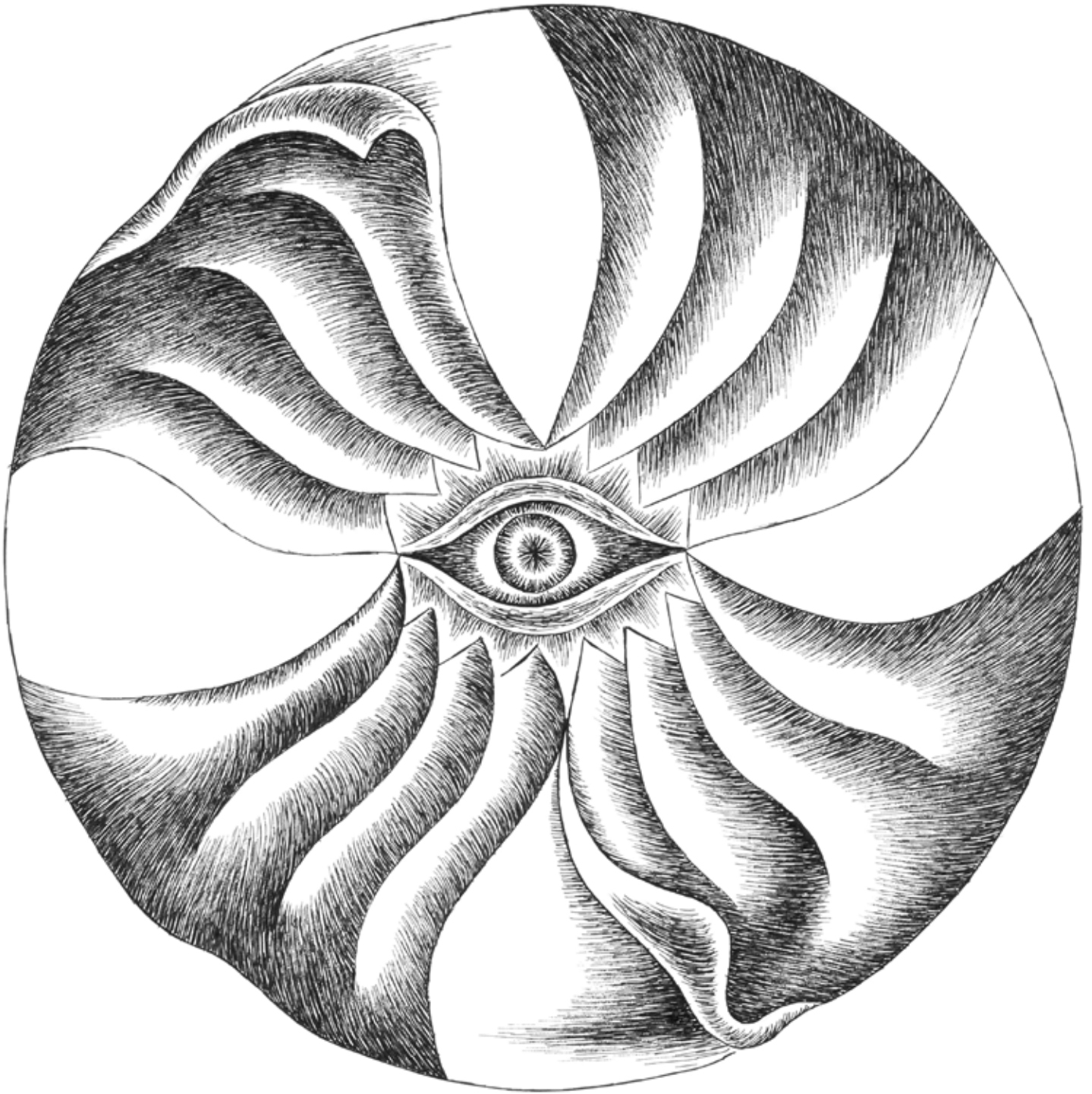




## Sacajawea

(circa 1788-1812)

Native American interpreter and guide for the Lewis and Clark expedition; though documented as an essential member of the group, she did not receive compensation for her valuable contributions.



**Caroline Herschel**  
(1750–1848)

German-born British astronomer who detected eight comets and catalogued numerous nebulae and star clusters.



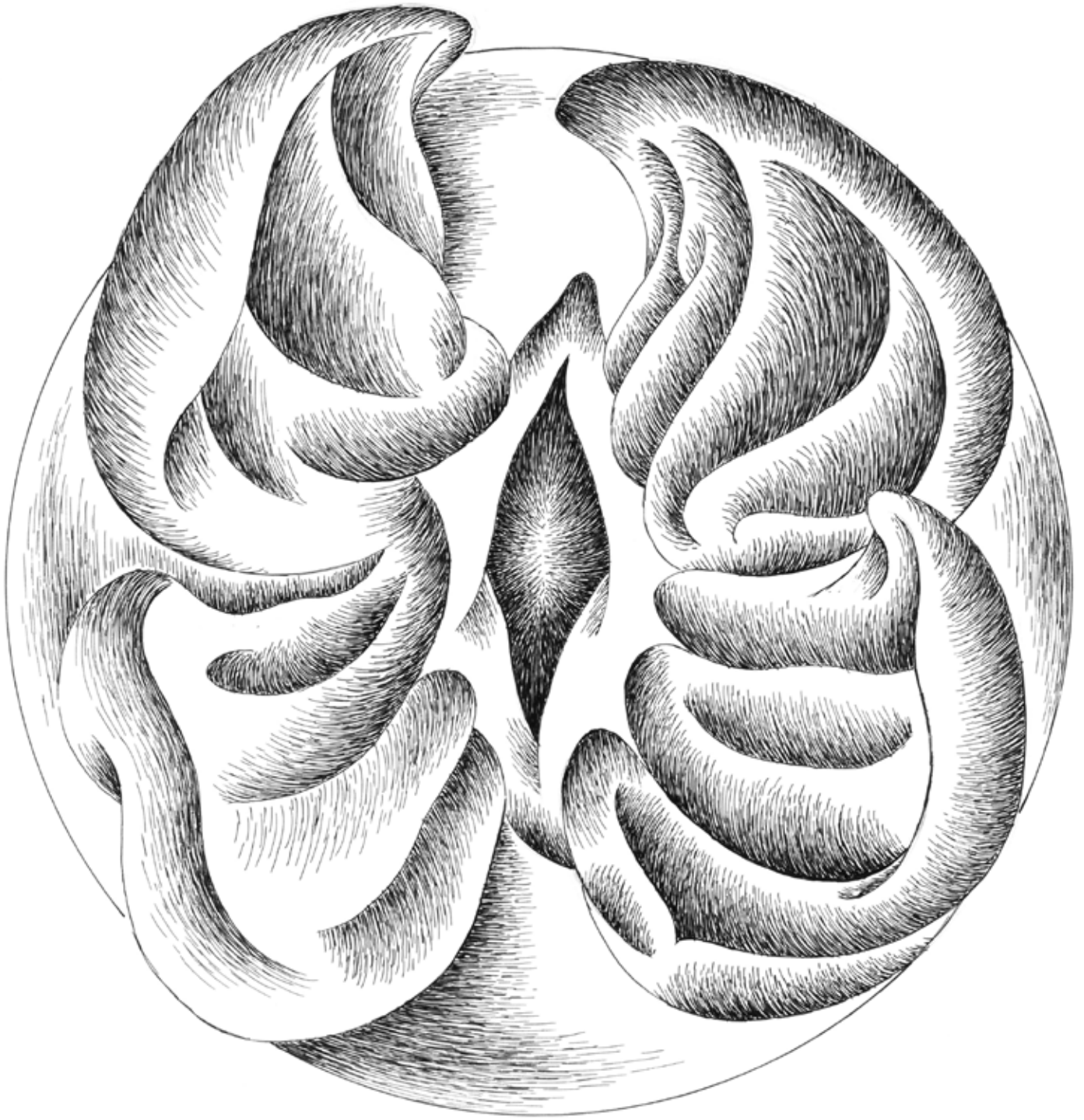
**Mary Wollstonecraft**  
(1759–1797)

English author and feminist theoretician; she was famous for her treatise arguing that human progress hinged upon equality for women.



**Sojourner Truth**  
(1797-1883)

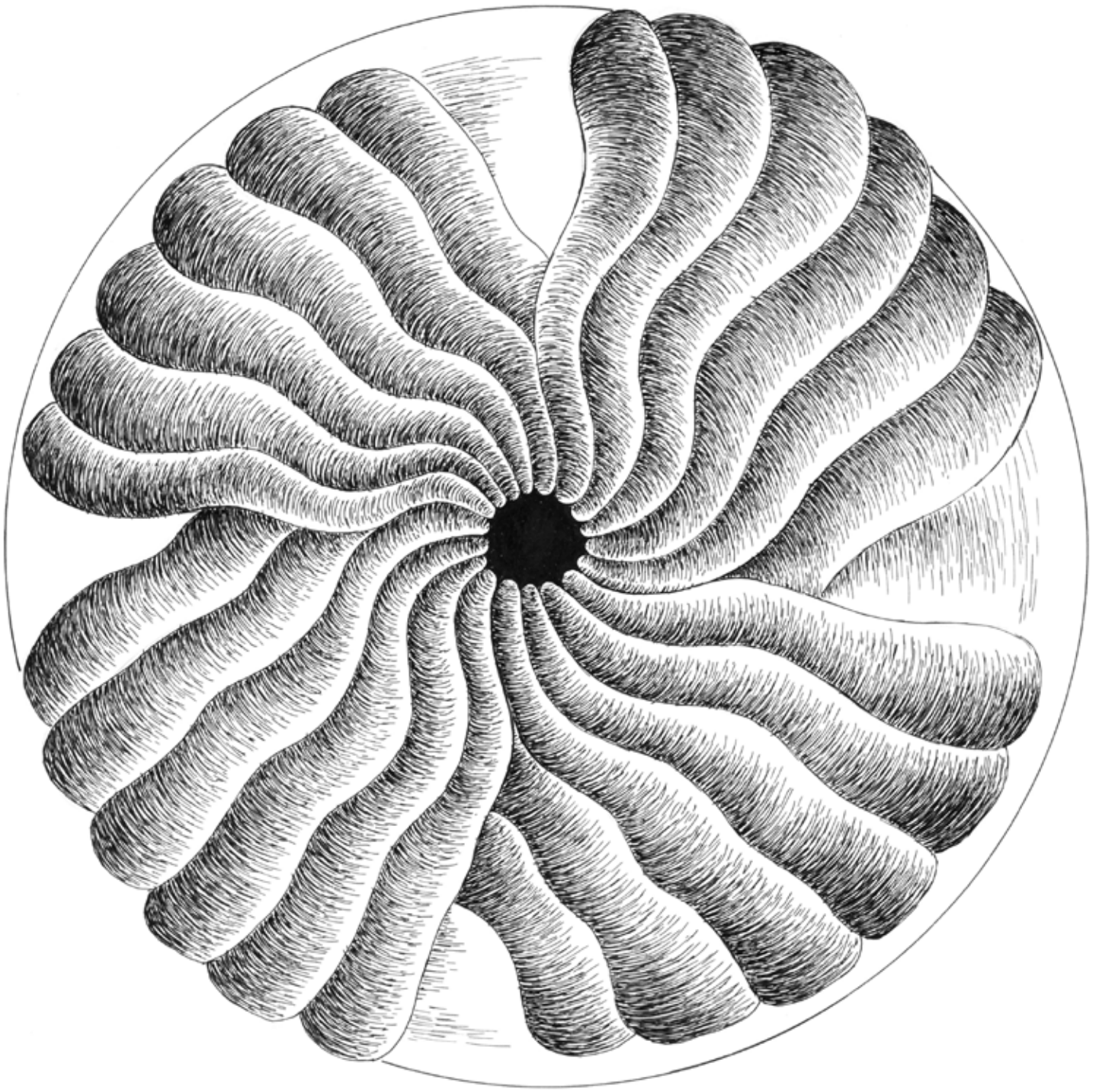
Itinerant preacher and abolitionist, she rose from slavery and became a public speaker and activist for the equality of African Americans and women in the U.S.



**Susan B. Anthony**  
(1820–1906)

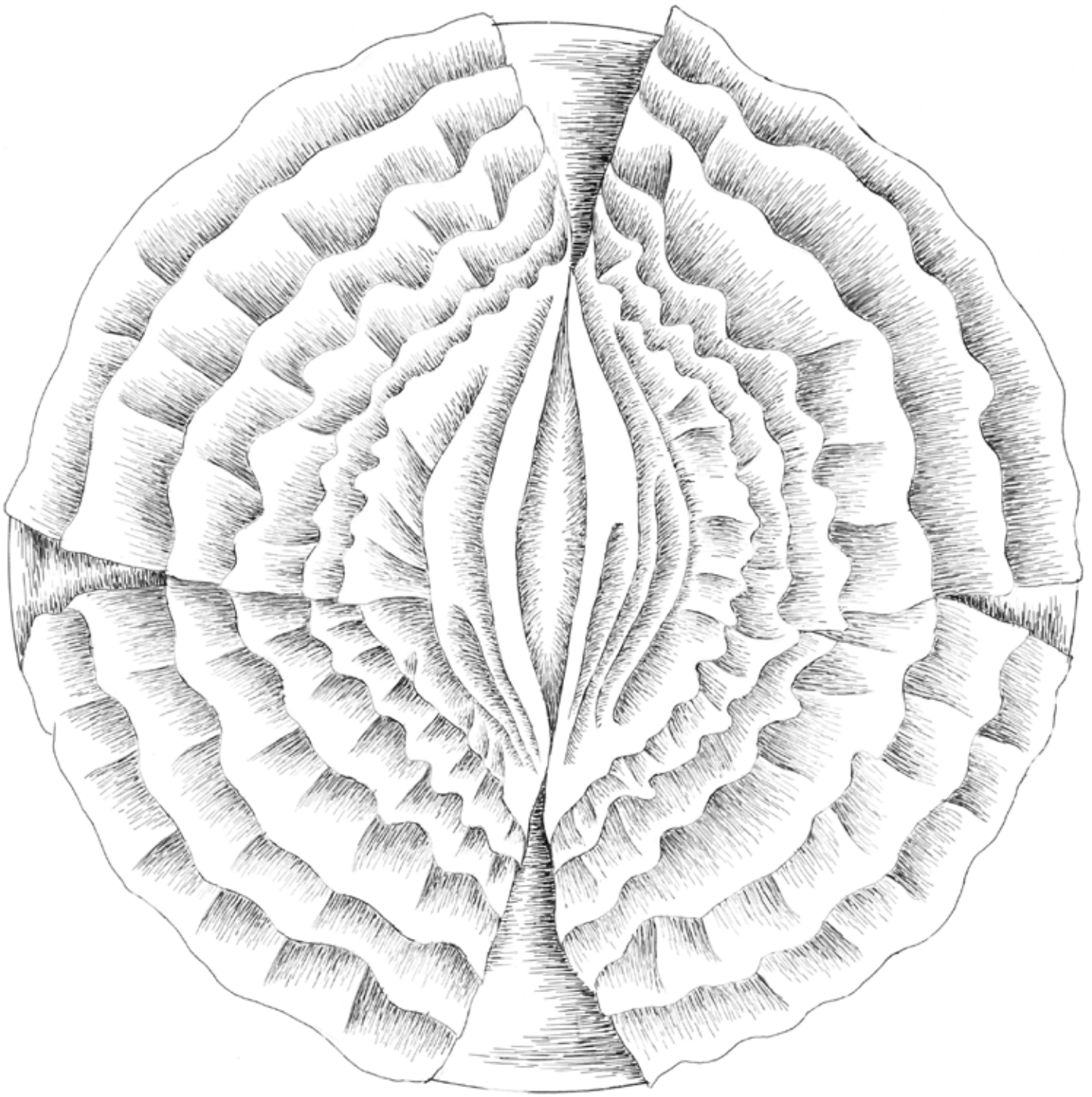
American activist; she demanded that women be able to vote, receive formal education, and have legal control over their bodies, earnings, and property.





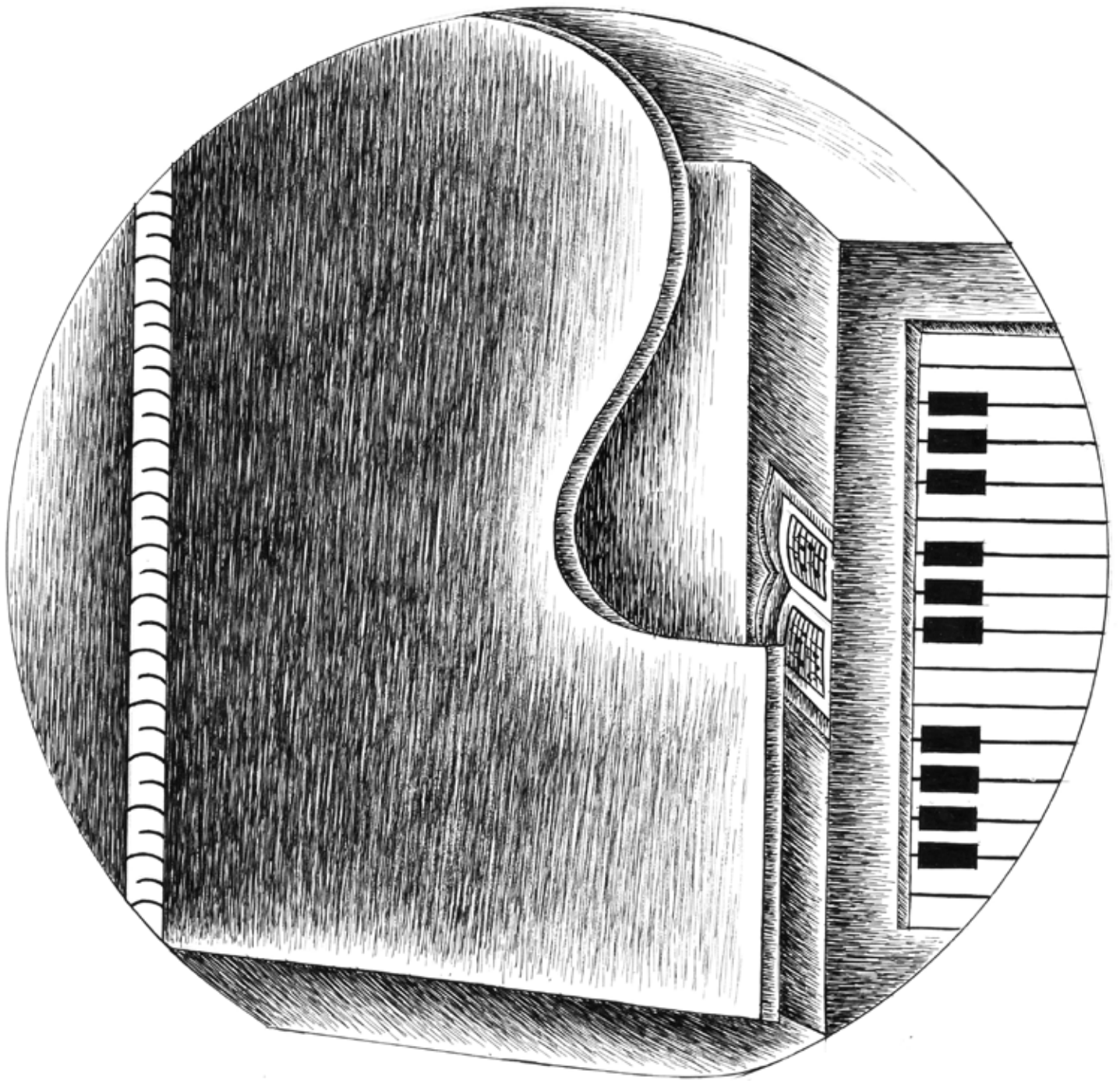
**Elizabeth Blackwell**  
(1821–1910)

First woman in America to graduate from medical school and become a licensed physician; she strove to open the profession to other women.



**Emily Dickinson**  
(1830–1886)

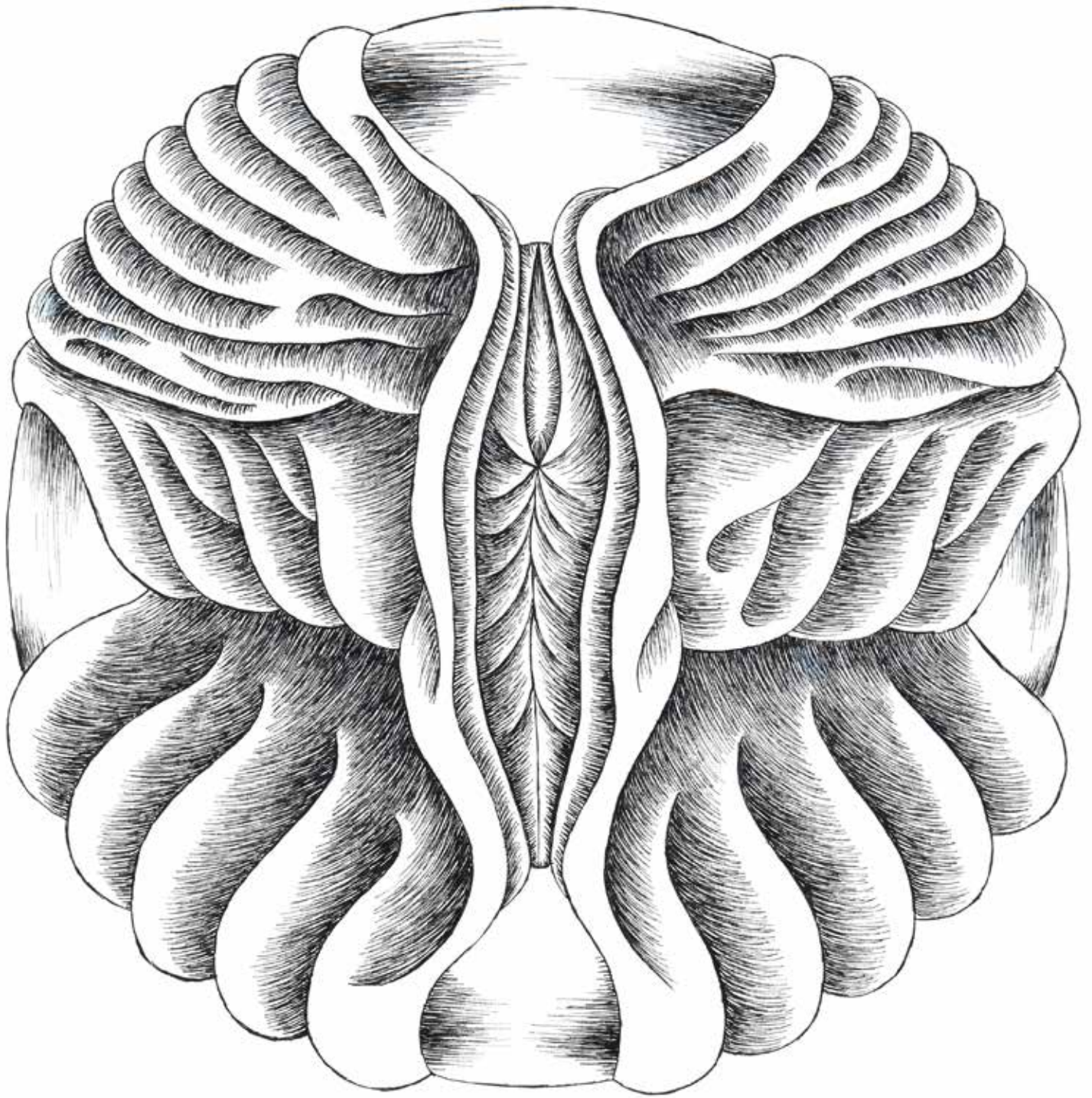
Victorian-era American lyric poet whose early feminist voice and unconventional style went largely unrecognized until thousands of her poems were discovered and published after her death.



**Ethel Smyth**  
(1858–1944)

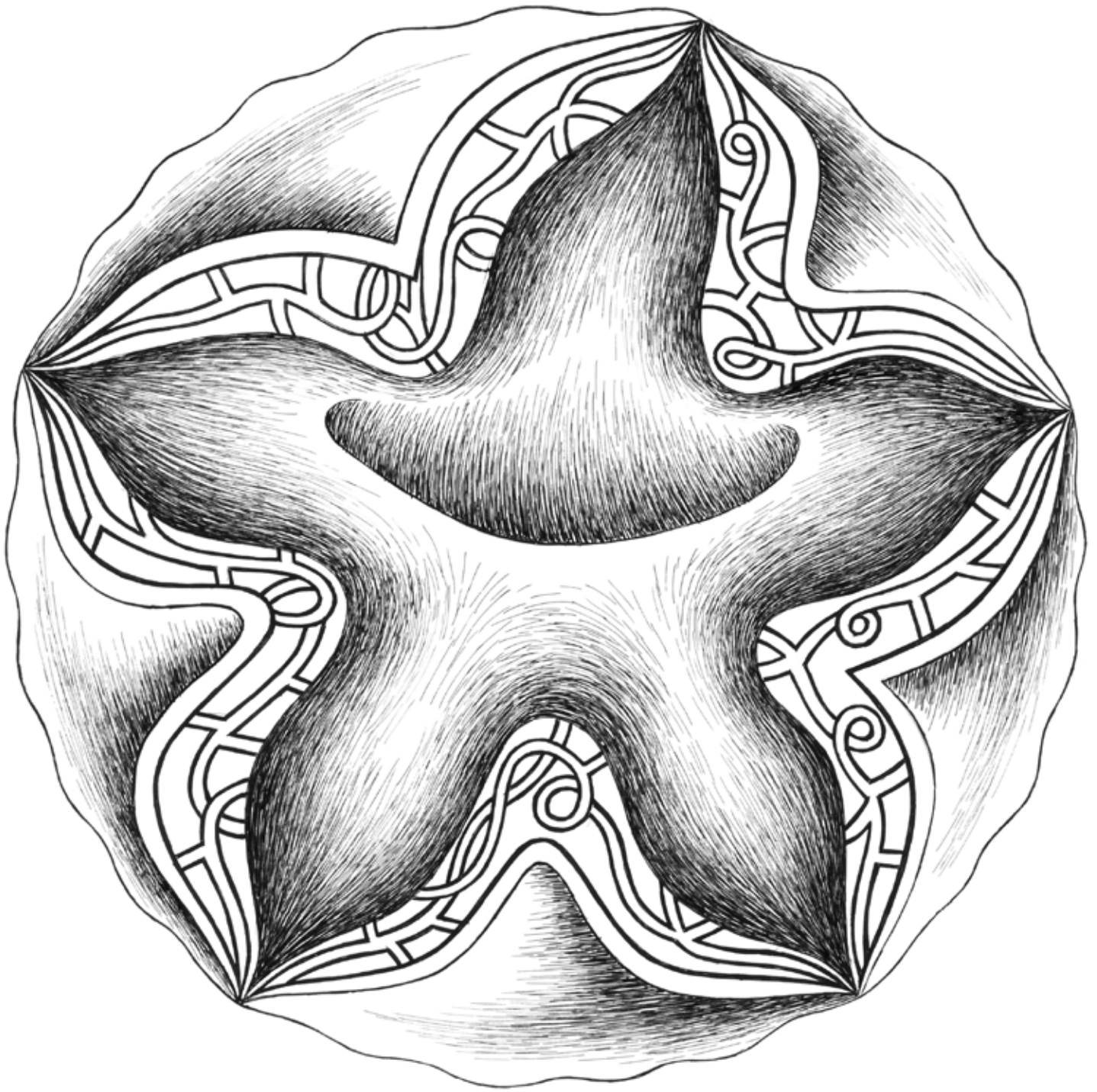
English composer of orchestral and chamber music, operas, and choral works as well as a famous anthem for women's suffrage; lived openly as a lesbian; advocated for women's rights.





**Margaret Sanger**  
(1879–1966)

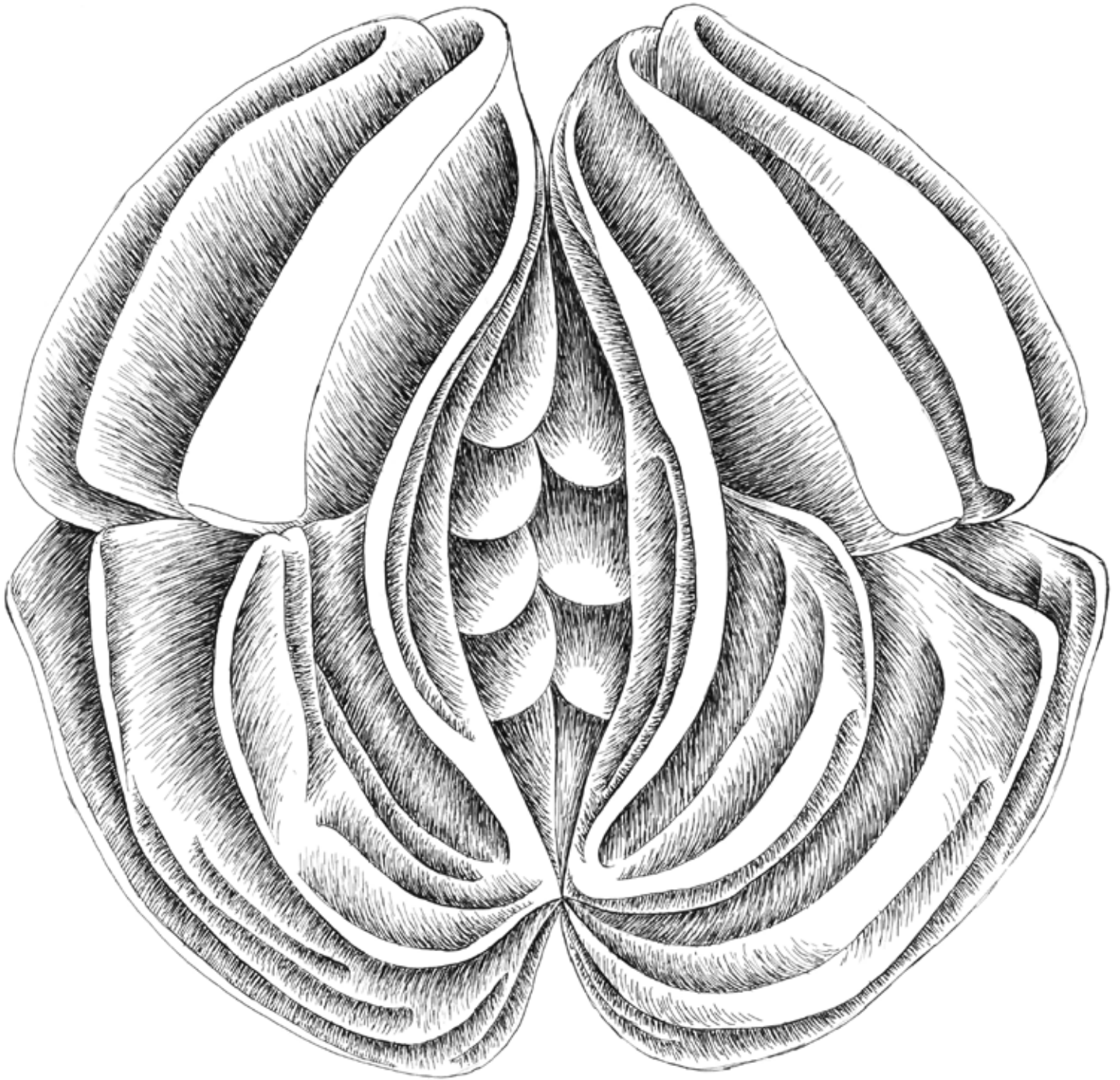
Pioneering campaigner for birth control and advocate for sexual and reproductive education; she believed that involuntary childbearing led to poverty and oppression.



**Natalie Barney**  
(1876–1972)

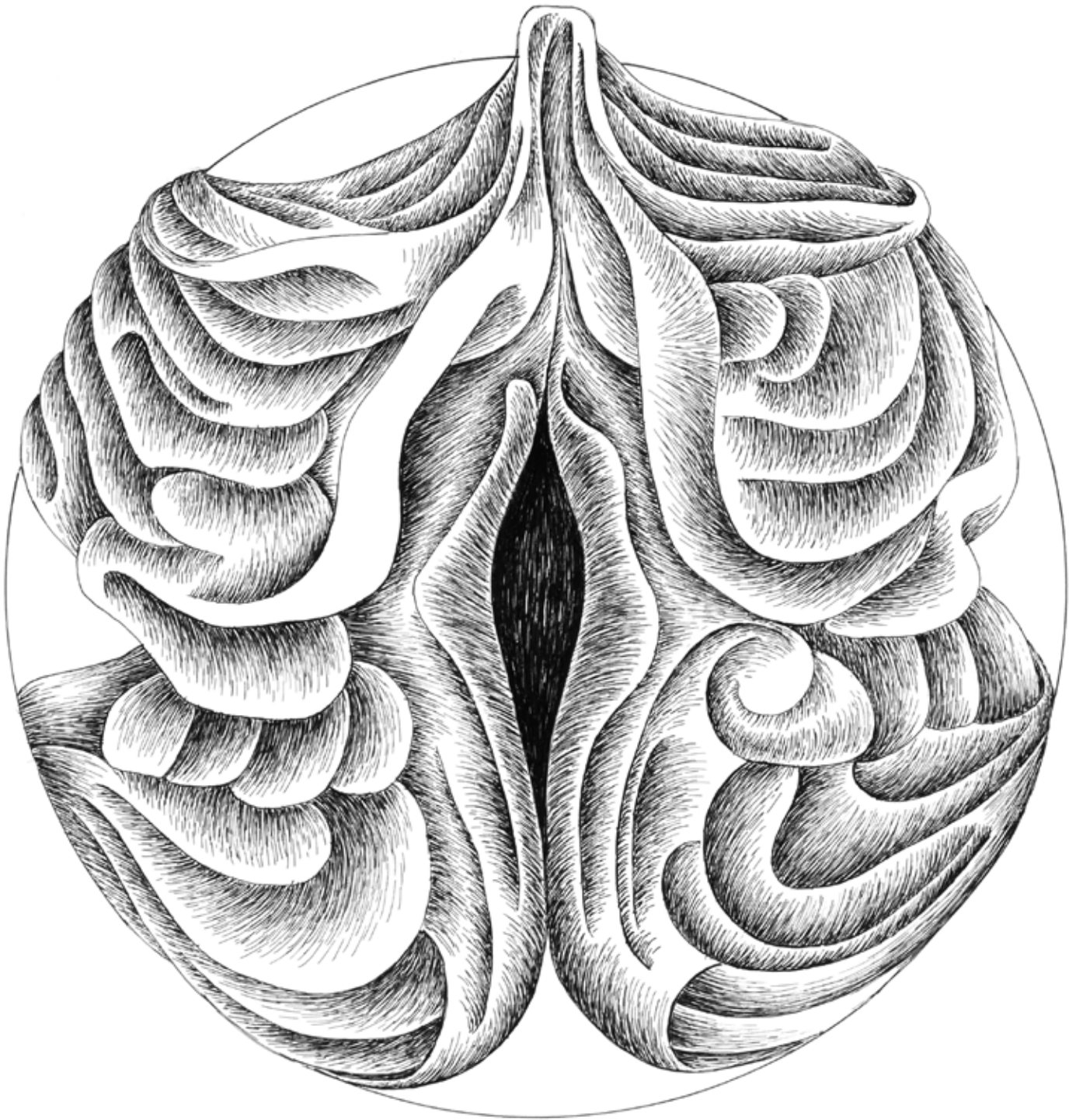
American-born poetry and prose writer who openly lived and wrote as a lesbian; she hosted a weekly cultural salon in Paris for almost sixty years.





**Virginia Woolf**  
(1882–1941)

Modernist English writer known for her literary innovations; she criticized the absence of women's voices in history and literature and strove to redress this through her work.



**Georgia O'Keeffe**  
(1887–1986)

American painter, well known for her paintings of flowers and landscapes; she pursued an independent vision of modern art divergent from the work of most of her male contemporaries.

*The Dinner Party* by Judy Chicago comprises the following:

## Entry Banners

Six woven banners hang in procession and welcome visitors to *The Dinner Party*. These tapestries repeat the red, black, and gold tones associated with the overall work and incorporate motifs found throughout the piece, such as triangular, floral, and abstract butterfly forms. Woven into the banners are a series of phrases intended to convey Chicago's vision for an equalized world, one in which women's history and perspectives are fully recognized and integrated into all aspects of human civilization.

## The Table

The principal component of *The Dinner Party* is a table in the shape of an open equilateral triangle—an emblem of equality. Each place setting forms a kind of “portrait” of a woman of great historical significance, either actual or mythical, and is rendered using weaving/embroidery styles appropriate to the time period and the individual being honored. Upon each intricately embroidered runner is placed a gold ceramic chalice and utensils, a napkin with an embroidered edge, and a fourteen-inch, hand-painted china plate with a central motif based on butterfly and vulvar forms.

Millennium runners, silk coverings inspired by altar cloths, fit over the apexes of the table. They are embroidered in white thread, each with a subtle letter “M,” as it is the thirteenth letter of the alphabet, signifying the break in each group of place settings.

The table is divided into three wings, each 48 feet long; Wing One of the table begins in prehistory with the Primordial Goddess and continues chronologically to the development of Judaism, to early Greek societies, to the Roman Empire, marking the decline in women's power, which is signified by Hypatia's place setting. Wing Two represents early Christianity through the Reformation, depicting women who signify the early expression of the fight for equal rights, from Marcella to Anna van Schurman. Wing Three begins with Anne Hutchinson and addresses the American Revolution, Suffragism, and the movement toward women's increased individual creative expression, symbolized at last by Georgia O'Keeffe.

## Heritage Floor

The Heritage Floor, beneath the table, is comprised of 2,300 hand-cast and hand-sanded porcelain tiles. Upon it appear the names of 999 mythical and historical women of achievement inscribed in gold luster. These women correlate to each of the 39 place settings above them by commonality of experience, historic contribution, time period, and/or geography.

## Heritage Panels

Seven hand-colored photo-and-text collages portray the 1,038 women represented at *The Dinner Party*. Like the Heritage Floor, the names listed on the Heritage Panels are organized beneath their corresponding place setting. Each name is accompanied by biographical information, photographs of related art and artifacts, and images of many of the women. Brief passages describe the circumstances these women struggled against for equality.

These panels are accessible on our website and preserved in our collection.

## Acknowledgment Panels

These panels acknowledge *The Dinner Party*'s primary staff as well as hundreds of volunteers who helped to realize Chicago's vision. While these three mural-sized panels are not on view in the Brooklyn Museum installation, they are preserved in our collection and accessible on our website.

## Judy Chicago

Judy Chicago is an artist, author, feminist, and educator whose career now spans more than five decades. Chicago pioneered feminist art and art education in the early 1970s, through unique programs for women at California State University, Fresno, and later at the California Institute of the Arts. Her art has been frequently exhibited in the United States as well as internationally, and her ten published books have brought her art and philosophy to readers around the world. She is the recipient of numerous grants, awards, and honorary degrees from prestigious colleges and universities. Her work is in the collections of museums worldwide.