

# Hilma af Klint – A Beginning Anthroposophical Commentary

by David Adams



*Hilma af Klint The Ten Largest 1907-1908 "Pioneer of Abstraction" Exhibition, Moderna Museet, Stockholm 2013*

The recent large exhibition of the paintings of Hilma af Klint (1862-1944) filling the Guggenheim Museum in New York City is making huge waves in the mainstream and online art-world, waves that have been flowing ever since the first and still largest solo show of her work at the Moderna Museet (Modern Art Museum) in Stockholm in 2013. The latter show, "Hilma af Klint: Pioneer of Abstraction," of 230 paintings was the most popular show the museum has ever held, deeply moving many visitors and traveling to seven further venues throughout Europe so that it was seen by more than a million people. Likewise, the Guggenheim show is the most-visited in its 60-year history (over 600,000) and included many references to Rudolf Steiner and Anthroposophy in its wall placards and sold-out catalog (not all of them accurate). Her work seems to be especially appealing today to younger persons, and many enthusiastic reviews one reads stray quite a bit from the usually more sober tone of professional art critics, art historians, and artists. I will quote a few examples.

Let's begin in 2013 with Jennifer Higgle, Co-Editor of the British art magazine *Frieze* in its 155th issue of May 18, 2013, reacting to the Stockholm show: "a suite of enormous, dazzlingly beautiful paintings, . . ."

"This is, without a doubt, one of the most extraordinary exhibitions I have ever seen."

"Purely minimal abstract works – for example, the 'Parsifal' series from 1916 – jostle with more overtly celestial and even figurative works. Swans and doves and bodies mingle in a hallucinogenic celebration of Eros and the spirit. A black room with her three enormous 'Altarpieces' from 1915, which she designed for an as-yet-unbuilt temple, give Mark Rothko's late work more than a run for its money."<sup>1</sup>

Again, reviewing the artistic highlights of 2013 in a later *Frieze* of Jan. 7, 2014, Higgle gives an even more personal recounting of her experience of this show: "I spent the next few hours in a giddy state: wandering from picture to picture. It was like traveling through the various stages of someone's mind, and seeing the strange and lovely evidence of how the things that this mind had experienced were translated into images – and what images! With more than 200 works on view, they veer from ecstatic abstraction to a woozy, ür-hippy love fest; from a hard-edged minimalism to images of swans and nudes born of what can only be described as a spirit/nature-delirium. And that's putting it mildly."

Or consider Ben Davis's recent reactions to the Guggenheim show in the online art journal *Artnet News*: "I can't help but agree with all the praise being heaped on the Guggenheim's big Hilma af Klint show. It's great, great, beyond great.

"Assembled in a chronological progression up the museum's spiral, the show feels like both a transmission from an unmapped other world and a perfectly logical correction to the history of Modern art—an alternate mode of abstraction from the dawn of the 20th century that looks as fresh as if it were painted yesterday."

"Part of that has to do with her status as a powerfully convincing and long-underappreciated voice. Now happens to be a very exciting moment in art history, with loads of new scholarship disrupting the old Paris-to-New York, Modern-to-contemporary throughline, reconsidering the stories of minorities and the colonized, "outsiders" of all kinds, and also of women." . . .

"My argument, though, is that all that occult stuff is what makes her particularly interesting in the present—probably more interesting than modernists who were outwardly more individualistic

and purely formal.

“We live today in a time of almost universal domination by the mercenary values of profit, immersed in the cheerful ideology of high-tech disruption and economic creative destruction. . . .

“So it’s very instructive to be reminded that all that proto-New Age, occult symbolism that af Klint drew upon did not simply represent a lapse back into pre-Enlightenment superstition. In fact, for thousands upon thousands of people (including many artists), this was the specific form that modernity took.”

“. . . [Her] obsessions with secret signs and improbably all-connecting codes . . . return a sense of mystery and order to a world that seems dispiriting and beyond control.”

For Davis af Klint is “a convincing heroine for today.”<sup>2</sup>

Anya Ventura in *Frieze*, Oct. 2018: “Why does af Klint speak to us in the present? Perhaps because she represents values – female, spiritual, ecological, collectivist – eroded by the rise of industrial modernity, values we desperately need to reclaim.”<sup>3</sup>

Halina Dyrschka, German film director and producer, *Beyond the Visible – Hilma af Klint*, 2018: “When first visiting the exhibition “Hilma af Klint – a pioneer of abstraction,” it made me speechless: exuberant colour compositions in over-dimensional paintings that seemed very familiar. Why have they [been] kept from me so long?”<sup>4</sup>

Kate Kellaway, 2016: “breathtaking abstract art as if she was painting in the 21st century – and, in 1906, before Kandinsky, Malevich or Mondrian.” “Between 1906-1915, there followed 193 paintings – an astonishing outpouring . . . she worked as if possessed – in the grip of what can only be described as inspiration.”<sup>5</sup>

Daniel Birnbaum, Director, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, and 2009 Venice Biennale: “. . . today her art seems to inspire innumerable young artists across the globe.”<sup>6</sup>

And let’s also consider a couple of earlier reactions to smaller af Klint exhibitions:

New York critic Roberta Smith, 1989: “Startlingly fresh, they are also eternally innocent; they seem almost to exist beyond time but they also lack the specific wisdom that only time endows. Nonetheless, this show goes a long way to reminding us how little we know about early abstract art and its sources; likewise, how unnecessarily narrow is the history constructed around it.”



*Hilma af Klint Primordial Chaos Series (part) 1906-07 Guggenheim Museum, New York*



*Hilma af Klint Ten Largest 1907-8 at the Guggenheim Museum, New York*

In her 2018 Guggenheim review she added: “If you like to hallucinate but disdain the requisite stimulants, spend some time in the Guggenheim Museum’s staggering exhibition, . . . [*The Ten Largest*] may induce disorientation, not the least for the way they blow open art history.” “These game-changing works envelop you in hues from dusty orange to pale pinks and lavenders, tumbling compositions of circles, spirals and pinwheels, and unfurling ribbonlike lines that sometimes form mysterious letters and words.

The scale of the motifs and the paintings’ sheer size (10 feet by nearly 9 feet) invite you to step in and float away to the music of the spheres.” “. . . a world of squirming spermatozoa, notational charts, decorative writing and a horseshoe crab that evokes a flying saucer, with three exhausts”<sup>7</sup>

Critic Adrian Searle, 2006: “. . . seeing af Klint’s work for the first time, in the largest gallery of the Camden Arts Centre in London, is something of a revelation. . . . One scrabbles for precedents and connections with other artists, but the references are all retroactive: It is as if af Klint anticipated moves Matisse didn’t

make until 1908. She painted watercolour square monochromes in 1916. She made automatist drawings decades before the surrealists. She seems to prefigure painters such as Alfred Jensen and Arthur Dove, as well as early 1980s neo-expressionism and abstractionists such as Beatriz Milhazes and Elizabeth Murray.”<sup>8</sup>

Iris Müller-Westermann, Senior Curator, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 2018: “Between 1906 and 1915, af Klint created 193 paintings, a body of work that, in scale and scope of imagery, was like none other of the time. Botanically inspired imagery, which after 1912 became increasingly abstract and geometric, mystical symbols, diagrams, and a vast array of words and letters make up a complex abstract vocabulary that would not become part of the language of art until years later. . . . “an artistic operation that is completely pure, raw, reinvented in all its phases by the author.”<sup>9</sup>

And we also can look at a few further attempts to describe the character of af Klint’s paintings:

Tracey Bashkoff, Director of Collections and Senior Curator, Guggenheim Museum: “The mix of floral, geometric, and biomorphic forms with letters and invented words creates a vocabulary of complex and shifting meanings, with which af Klint herself appears to have grappled.

In these works a plant tendril may become a spiral, which in turn

unfolds into a coiling line that then scribes a calligraphic letter – codes and words from an unknown language. Two pulsing orbs are, at the same time, microscopic eggs and intersecting solar systems. These forms continue to evade singular or stable inter-

pretations – evolution, continuity, growth, and progress all coexist with a return to the beginning or the oneness of the spirit. Science and spirit, mind and matter, the micro and the macro are simultaneously present.”<sup>10</sup>



*Hilma af Klint "The Keeper" Exhibition, New Museum, New York, 2016*

Hanne Loreck, Ph.D.: “. . . the linear, the typographic, and the painterly all happen on the same plane and often develop into one another.”<sup>11</sup>

Daniel Birnbaum, 2013: “In af Klint’s pictorial universe, the semiotic level is never radically separated from the world of visual forms; her cosmic figures send out mysterious linguistic messages that, as a mystic, she seemed to channel from another dimension, often referring to herself in the second or third person.”

“[Her paintings] seem to arrive from nowhere, as if flirting with the very thresholds of visibility and dimensions of perception that their forms explore.”

“Her version of abstraction is compatible with the processes of teeming nature rather than the precision of heavenly geometries.” [In her work] “we find helical patterns in bright colors reminiscent of schematic seashells or microscopic genetic structures: the forms always evolving, growing, expanding outside her own obsession with traditional dualisms, to hint at a dimension of life emerging in matter as much as in the mind. . . .

“It is as if the geometric shapes one finds next to plants and animals on the page are extracted from these life samples and become diagrammatic renderings of the vital forces governing their growth. . . . Form is never distinct from life in af Klint’s art: The spiritual forces that sometimes emerge in purity in her paintings are, as her drawings and notes indicate, also present in everything that is alive.”<sup>12</sup>

*New York Times* Critic Natalia Rachlin, 2013: “The works, featuring bubble-gum pink, burnt orange, peach, lavender, dusty blues and bright yellows, were at once enticing, playful and slightly trippy.”<sup>13</sup>

Art historian Briony Fer, 2015: “. . . being a receiver made it possible for her to not prime the raw canvas but leave parts of it bare, so the oil seeps out from a series of geometric shapes. It allowed her to leave pencil lines as well as all sorts of tiny errors, mistakes, and diaristic notes . . . . In the larger-scale works it permitted her to paint in flat, affectless color . . . without worrying about the direction or texture or facture of the strokes. . . . Her paintings show very vividly the systematic character of image-making and the relationality that drives all symbol-formation. . . . the proliferation of her various series is striking for its sheer excess. . . . it demonstrates this drive to make art, under whatever name you care to call it. . . . ecstatic diagrams rendering a visionary process and, as such, a different order of knowledge.”<sup>14</sup>



Photograph of Hilma af Klint, ca. 1910

I began writing this article to provide a kind of commentary from an anthroposophical, spiritual perspective about the “Hilma af Klint Phenomenon” during the last few years in the artworld – an aspect that so far seems missing both from mainstream art writings on her and within anthroposophy, at least in English. Although it is still often difficult to find reliable

information about her life and work and this piece has grown gradually longer, I hope it will still be of value.

I should probably begin with a kind of spiritual overview of her biography, a rather incredible story that is becoming familiar to more and more people. Hilma af Klint (1862-1944) was born near Stockholm into a bourgeois family with a long line of male naval officers, navigators, and ocean map-makers (and no interest in art). She was classically trained as a painter, taking classes in portrait painting in 1880-81 before attending the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Stockholm from 1882 to 1887, part of the first generation of women accepted by art academies. Graduating with honors, the Academy provided her with a studio in the art center of Stockholm (shared with two other women artists), where she worked until 1908, mostly painting conventional

naturalistic landscapes and portraits, which she exhibited and sold (which she continued to 1914). With money she earned she took study trips to Belgium, Norway, Holland, Italy, and Germany. She also created many careful botanical studies of plants and flowers and worked as an illustrator at a Stockholm Veterinary Institute (1900-01).

Although raised in the Lutheran church, already as a child af Klint had supersensible experiences (apparently a degree of atavistic clairvoyance or “second sight” ran in her family) and at age 17 (1879) joined the Spiritualist Literature Association and began participating in then-popular “séances” with secondary school friends. This interest was stimulated when, at age 18, she tried to convince the soul of her 10-year-old sister Hermina that she was dead (from influenza) and needed to continue on in the afterworld. But in early 1882 she abandoned the séances as not serious enough. Later she and a few friends joined the Edelweiss Society, founded in 1890 as a kind of combination of Spiritual-

ism and Theosophy. In 1896 she formed with four other women “The Friday Group” or “The Five,” a Christian spiritualist group that met weekly for the next ten years in each other’s homes and studios for meetings consisting of a prayer, meditation, reciting sermons, study of a text from the New Testament, a benediction, and ending with a séance while kneeling around an altar with a triangle and cross, during which they contacted disembodied spirits and spiritual guides. At least one of the crosses they used on the altar was a white rose cross with a glass rose in the middle

on a 3-level base, and they seemed to feel the communications and guidance they received was associated with the Rosicrucian stream. Taking turns serving as trance-mediums, they also received messages through a psychograph (an instrument to record psychic transmissions) and via automatic drawing and writing in pencil. Over time various messages, images, and symbols were recorded in a series of 5 notebooks and 9 sketchbooks documenting their weekly séances (books that af Klint kept her whole life and used as a resource). By 1903 the at-first somewhat skeptical af Klint had become the group's chief medium. On February 21, 1905, the log book of The Five recorded this advice: "Protect your drawings. They are pictures of drenching waves of ether which await you one day when your ears and eyes can apprehend a higher summons."<sup>15</sup> In 1889 she had joined the Swedish Theosophical Society (founded that same year) until 1915/16 and in 1920 the Anthroposophical Society, yet during the 1890s she also ran a Christian Sunday School on a family farm with a cousin. From age 18 onward she read Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, Rosicrucian, Hermetic, and Theosophical texts, and her eventual library consisted of many anthroposophical texts translated into Swedish, theosophical books, and other occult literature.

At the time popular and fashionable, Spiritualism, at its peak near the end of the 19th century, had about 8 million followers in the U.S. and Europe. In several places Rudolf Steiner has told us that this spiritualism phenomenon using specially prepared trance-mediums (usually women) that began in the 1840s was a "compromise" project of various secret brotherhoods to counteract the peaking materialism of the 19th century with what they hoped

would become a wide recognition of the existence of the spiritual world all around us (for example, in nature spirits) due to the physical-plane evidence manifested by the mediums. When, instead, the other-worldly phenomena from séances, etc. were generally interpreted as communications from the dead (just what some of these brotherhoods who were manipulating dead souls did not want), and false communications at that (for example, not mentioning reincarnation), the attempt was abandoned.<sup>16</sup>

But this mostly failed esoteric experiment, we are belatedly learning, did apparently yield better results for The Five and resulted in the unusual "secret" artistic career of af Klint (also the artwork of Georgiana Houghton in England that is likewise being rediscovered in recent years).<sup>17</sup> The Five found themselves in regular, repeated contact with a number of named spirits (Teohatius, Amaliel, Clemens, Georg, Gregor, Ester, Ananda), two of whom – Amaliel and Ananda – were said to belong to a group of still more advanced spirits that the others served, called the High Ones/High Guides/High Masters, whom af Klint tells us in

one of her notebooks, are "the Masters of Mysteries, synonymous with Vestal-Ascetic; servants of Christ who reside in Tibet (in the astral body?). An exalted and holy brotherhood, known to all mystics who participate in the evolution of the world. . . . The High Masters fill the entire universe."<sup>18</sup> We don't actually know what kind or rank of beings these were who communicated with af Klint and The Five. As Rudolf Steiner once said, "The astral world is the place where beings from different worlds can meet, so to speak." Such beings "often seek to influence human beings."<sup>19</sup>

Hilma af Klint has been described physically as a slender, small



*Hilma af Klint Group 1, Primordial Chaos, No. 16 1906-07 oil on canvas*

woman with a beautiful face, barely 5' 2" (1.57m) tall.<sup>20</sup> As a serious, alert, grounded, and independent personality, Hilma was said to be able to enter and leave the astral world at will. A vegetarian, she lived a simple ascetic life devoted to art. She normally wore black. She tried to serve the "Vestal-Ascetics" (a term in some of her paintings) as a virgin living a life dedicated to higher morality and asceticism.<sup>21</sup> In 1907 she wrote, "I have been sent to work for the Rosicrucian world of ideas."<sup>22</sup> She constantly wore a necklace with a plain silver cross, in the middle of which was engraved a rose within a circle.<sup>23</sup> At her death in 1944 she left well over 1,200 paintings and at least 126 handwritten and illustrated notebooks/sketchbooks (over 26,000 pages of writing, mainly in Swedish). How did these extensive artworks come about?

Already in 1904 the spirit Ananda predicted to The Five the creation of future paintings, presumed to be shaped from the astral plane, while that same year the spirit Gregor foresaw the building of a future temple that af Klint would help design and, as further predicted in

1905, construct. In 1905 af Klint also was informed she would receive a mission in the area of painting of "auspicious work" in service to the Mysteries. Gregor described this as concerning "all the knowledge that is not of the senses, not of the intellect, not of the heart, but is the property that exclusively belongs to the deepest aspect of your being [...] the knowledge of your spirit."<sup>24</sup>

Then af Klint's notebook entry from January 1, 1906, stated: "Amaliel presented me with a task and I immediately said Yes. The expectation was that I would dedicate a year to this task. In the end it became the greatest work of my life."<sup>25</sup> She was to depict "the immortal aspect of Man" and paint "a message to humanity." She gave up her more realistic painting, underwent a ten-month "alchemical" purification to prepare herself involving prayer and fasting, and began in November 1906 at age 43 by creating 34 preparatory paintings as preliminaries to the major task, *Paintings for the Temple*. These preparatory works included the series of 26 small paintings that became the *Urchaos*, or *Primordial Chaos*, series, seemingly about the Creation or earlier phases of human

evolution, for which she received detailed instructions from her spirit guides and passively allowed her hand to be spontaneously guided in a somewhat looser style by these spirits. A note in The Five's séance book for November 7, 1906, speaks of her interpreting "the color hearing and seeing tones," and says, "Amaliel draws a sketch, which H. [Hilma] then paints."<sup>26</sup> A notebook entry from 1907 concerning another small preparatory series of that time, *The Large Figure Paintings*, reads, "The pictures were painted directly through me, without any preliminary drawings and with great force. I had no idea what the paintings were supposed to depict; nevertheless, I worked swiftly and surely, without changing a single brushstroke."<sup>27</sup>

In the freely painted *Primordial Chaos Series* (part of the *WU/Rose Series*) she explored principles of polarity – light and dark, good and evil, male and female – and their possible reunification as well as the unity of all life. In these and later works the letter "W" represents matter, while the letter "U" represents spirit, with "WU" indicating a union of the dualities.<sup>28</sup> Some of the abstract language she began to employ in these and later paintings was already received by The Five between 1896 and 1906: the snail, rose (and rose cross), snake, lilies, a wide array of botanical imagery, an elaborate system of diagrammed dualities, symbolic words and letters, and a certain geometrical language. One notebook records a message received in 1907 from the High Ones: "The purpose of these letters is to prepare the way for a language of symbols that has already existed forever and that has now been given to humanity by the creative spirits."<sup>29</sup>

On November 4, 1906, af Klint noted the message, "You will commence a task that will bring great blessings on coming generations." She also wrote, "Your mission is to open their eyes to a life that lasts for eternity." She clearly felt she had an important higher calling. She was able to fulfill her promise from May 1907 to April 1908, when she painted *The Ten Largest*, taking about four days for each one, each executed in tempera on paper glued to canvas and each ca. 10' 5" high by nearly 8' wide, working with one female assistant. She noted about her process of working, "It was not the case that I was to blindly obey the High Lords of the Mysteries but that I was to imagine that they were always standing by my side."<sup>31</sup>

In her journal on September 27, 1907,

she described these significant paintings (the ones that seem to evoke the most appreciation from contemporary viewers): "Ten paradisaically beautiful paintings were to be executed; the paintings were to be in colors that would be educational and they would reveal my feelings to me in an economical way. . . . It was the meaning of the leaders to give the world a glimpse of the system of four parts in the life of Man. They are called *childhood, youth, manhood* [adulthood], and *old age*."<sup>32</sup> In another notebook entry, she further described an example of her way of working: "I read off their size within me (158cm x 114cm). Above my easel I saw a Jupiter sign which was brightly illuminated and which was visible for several seconds. I immediately began to work in such a manner that the pictures were painted through me directly without any preliminary drawings and with great force."<sup>33</sup>



Hilma af Klint Group 1, Primordial Chaos, No. 12 1906-07 oil on canvas

Let's also consider how the contemporary critic Ben Davis describes *The Ten Largest*: "They are also, to a contemporary eye at least, very feminine, in a way that stands as a pre-rebuttal of the machismo that later came to dominate abstract rhetoric as it rose to art historical preeminence. The works of 'The

Ten Largest' are not figurative, but the forms they channel—the blossoms, lacy garlands, and curlicues; the looping, cursive lines of cryptic text that surge across the surface; the palette of pinks and lavenders, peaches and baby blues—draw freshness, to a

contemporary eye, from their symbolic associations with feminine iconography."<sup>34</sup> As Rudolf Steiner once noted, the astral world is "filled with flowing colors and radiant light-beings. . . ." Although "when a painter . . . goes far beyond the reality of colors in the physical world in his choice of tones and color harmonies," these are only "shadow-images," "precipitation," or "after-effects of the astral experiences. . . ." <sup>35</sup> These astral colors are not the same as colors perceived in the sensory physical world, and it could be presumed that af Klint's often somewhat unusual color schemes tried to reproduce those astral colors. For example, she later described a "bluish pink color" as indicating "trusting in previous incarnations."<sup>36</sup>



Hilma af Klint Ten Largest, No. 3, Youth 1907 tempera on paper, mounted on canvas (Do circles maybe represent chakras?)

She continued with several additional series of *Paintings for the Temple* (111 in all), stopping in 1908 for four years to care for her blind mother, during which time she also studied H. P. Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* as well as a number of western philosophers.<sup>37</sup> By coincidence or causation 1908 was also the year of her first meeting with Rudolf

Steiner. In April of that year Steiner was lecturing in Oslo (then called Kristiania), and af Klint invited him to come to Stockholm to view her paintings and advise her. He had also lectured publicly and privately at several places in Sweden, including Stockholm, a few days before from March 30 to April 3.<sup>38</sup> He was reluctant at first to travel there (“no possibility”), especially since, as he wrote her (in English) “it must be supposed that you have full confidence in your teacher.” (Amaliel?)<sup>39</sup> However, she managed to convince him to come to her studio in Stockholm and showed him the paintings she had so far completed mediumistically, which he contemplated silently. She was hoping he would be able to analyze and interpret them in detail for her. Although, as she recorded, he did tell her which of the *Primordial Chaos* series had the best symbolism,<sup>40</sup> which abstract painting was actually a kind of spiritual self-portrait,<sup>41</sup> how to balance another more figurative painting,<sup>42</sup> clarified a subgrouping for her and the meaning of a few of the symbolic letters in the paintings, and confirmed that at least certain paintings “belonged to the astral world,”<sup>43</sup> she seems to have been generally disappointed by his visit.

Steiner also objected to her working atavistically, passively, and mediumistically as guided by spirits and apparently encouraged her instead to develop her own spiritual faculties and take a more inwardly active and independent role in her artistic creation as a more proper modern way to obtain and express spiritual knowledge. Further, he either predicted that her paintings would not be understood for about fifty years or else advised her not to show them to anyone for at least fifty years (perhaps to avoid a cultural influence appearing too early?). This has been reported both of these ways, and we need a firm translation of her notes about their meeting to be sure which is correct. In any case this helped her develop the attitude that these paintings only belonged to the future, when human beings might be ready to understand them, and should in the meantime pretty much be kept secret.

We should further keep in mind that this studio visit in Stockholm was only a bit over a year after Steiner’s revolutionary introduction at the 1907 Congress of the Federation of European Sections of the Theosophical Society in Munich of artistic work as essential to a modern mystery culture like the Theosophical Society. Among other things, this involved the introduction of the forms of the column capitals/planetary seals, the “musical” principle of metamorphosis of

form, the distinction between traditional esoteric symbols and a modern contemplative experiencing of esoteric art purely as form and color, and the basic layout and features (from “the true temple of the Rosicrucians”) of what would eventually become the first Goetheanum. Much of that work and Steiner’s related lectures concerned how the visual arts can ennoble and purify the human etheric body, in contrast to relying only on astral sources.<sup>44</sup> The work af Klint was channeling then must have seemed pretty far removed from the new artistic impulse Steiner was trying to introduce.



*Hilma af Klint Ten Largest, No. 7, Adulthood 1907 tempera on paper, mounted on canvas*

In a recent review prominent New York critic Peter Schieldahl seems to prefer what he calls the “egoless consciousness” behind af Klint’s early mediumistic works,<sup>45</sup> as apparently do all the critics, curators, and artists involved in the Guggenheim exhibition. A group of New York City area curators, art historians, and artists engaged in a transcribed discussion about af Klint in Brooklyn in Fall 2017 (which was included in the catalog book for the current Guggenheim show), where one participant called Steiner’s 1908 visit “the worst studio visit in history” – a comment immediately echoed approvingly by a couple of the other participants, primarily because they thought it was what caused af Klint to stop painting for the next four years and then to change her creative method. Like so much in their discussion and whole approach to af Klint’s life and work, they tended to project 2018 attitudes and their own inner motivations into situations of more than 100 years ago. It becomes clear that none

of them know much of anything about anthroposophy or Rudolf Steiner (who at times is speculatively accused with no evidence of ridiculous things like paternalism toward af Klint or jealousy of her superior cosmology!).

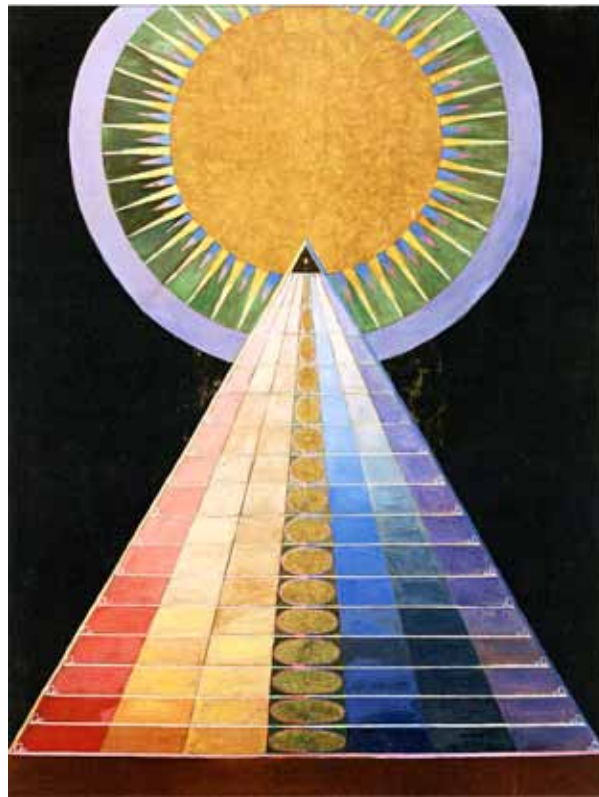


*Hilma af Klint WUS/Seven-Pointed Star Series: Group VI, Evolution, No. 15 1908 oil on canvas*

Also, the artworks af Klint created after joining the Anthroposophical Society in 1920 seem to be of far less interest to the curators and writers dealing with her work in recent years than her earlier more mediumistic work (with a couple of exceptions). It seems that, despite the evidence, they tend to continue the longtime, widespread characteristic of both the artistic academic and exhibition worlds of not being interested in or themselves believing in the existence of a spiritual world and not taking seriously those who work from spiritual knowledge and research – even when they are major modern artists. Typically, attempts are made to interpret most such phenomena, including af Klint, as somehow arising from the artist’s psychological unconscious. This attitude,

of course, is quite different than that of af Klint herself, who eventually came to regard Steiner as on the same spiritual level as her “High Masters.”<sup>46</sup>

When in 1912 she resumed work on the series of *Paintings for the Temple*, she steadily modified her method of working. She would spiritually receive artworks formed as spiritual images or visions, which she then would need to interpret and compose into physical paintings. Her contact with spiritual guides became freer and more personal. She said she had gone through an occult education to become independently clairvoyant and able to research spiritual worlds in a more conscious way.<sup>47</sup> She continued to work serially and systematically, creating paintings in series with subgroups, numbered like scientific research. These works continued to explore a path toward a possible harmony between spiritual and material worlds, good and evil, female and male, religion and science.



*Hilma af Klint Group X, No. 1, Altarpiece 1915 oil and metal leaf on canvas (note its 16 steps representing 16 incarnations)*

By 1915 af Klint had finished 82 additional paintings to complete the set of 193 *Paintings for the Temple* (organized into 16 groups or series), which she had worked on since 1906. These later series had more topical identities (e.g., *The Tree of Knowledge*, *The Swan*, and *The Dove*) and a wide range of symbols.<sup>48</sup> These paintings were intended to be displayed in a spiraling temple that af Klint made a few sketches for in the 1930s, but was never able to complete. Thus, it is very appropriate for her work to be displayed in 2018-19 in the spiraling interior of the Guggenheim Museum. At the end of 1915, as a kind of culmination and “summary” of the entire *Paintings for the Temple*, she painted 3 (or 4?) large “altarpiece” paintings, which were to be placed at the top of the interior spiral pathway.<sup>49</sup>

Especially from 1915 onward she worked in a more reflective, explorative, less spontaneous way, often with more geometric forms – especially seen in the 144 paintings of the *Parsifal Series* (in 3 groups), but also in her *Atom Series* of 1917 and several small series from 1920, including one on World Religions. In 1917 she wrote: “Hereafter I shall not receive my direct orders in the same way but must seek out guidance, which with a simultaneously visible and invisible finger will show me

what I am to examine. Thus what is required of me is rather that I should undertake my own studies than be lectured to with regard to what I am to present. During the foregoing period of develop-

ment I have been like a vessel which is filled from above while it constantly overflows, always being more than full with the exception of brief interludes. Now the situation is reversed, now it is a matter of filling the bowl by means of my own studies, though still under guidance, yet still by means of free studies.”<sup>50</sup> I could also mention that Steiner lectured in Stockholm in both 1912 and 1913, and presumably af Klint attended at least one of these times.

The 22 paintings (watercolor, graphite, and metallic paint on paper) from her 1917 *Atom Series* each consist of two images of an “atom”: the atom on the etheric plane in the upper left corner and in the lower right the atom’s state of energy on the physical plane enlarged four times. Apparently receiving direction through her own etheric body, she includes notations for each image that seem to reflect the complex connections between physical and etheric worlds at the atomic level, such as the following:<sup>51</sup>

“The midpoint of the universe consists of innocence.” “Every atom has its own midpoint, but each midpoint is directly connected to the midpoint of the universe.” “The body must be mediated by going to its center and drawing from these new forces.” “Through its longing to create ever more beautiful forms first on the etheric plane, and then in matter, the body becomes capable of being penetrated by light.” “When the atom is at rest on the etheric plane, its center absorbs the energy that is stored there. When the body is in harmony, energy radiates outward from the center of the atom.” “When the atom expands on the etheric plane, the physical part of the earthly atom begins to glow.” “On the etheric plane the atom alternates constantly between rest and activity.” “The atom’s strength increases as it senses and admits its dependence upon Divine energy, it is ‘inexhaustible and incomprehensible life itself.’” “The atom is on its way to freely and deliberately transform itself in observance with the Lord Jesus, who has paved the way for all humanity.”<sup>51</sup>



*Hilma af Klint SUW/US Series: Group IX/UW, The Dove, No. 1 1915 oil on canvas*

When her mother died in 1920, af Klint felt freer to travel and in September began to undertake regular journeys to Dornach. Over 8 or 9 separate visits from 1920 to 1925 (the year of Steiner’s death) she spent altogether more than a year in Dornach

(with the longest single visit lasting six months). There she could observe the style of painting inaugurated by Rudolf Steiner on the Goetheanum cupola murals, learn something about “painting



*Hilma af Klint Group X, No. 3, Altarpiece 1915 oil and metal leaf on canvas*

out of the color,” and how Steiner was extending Goethe’s color theory (which she also studied in 1921). She may have attended his Color lectures in Dornach May 6-8 in 1921 (GA 291). She regularly stayed in a house on Bruggweg near the Goetheanum,<sup>52</sup> often traveling with her mother’s former nurse Thomasine Andersen, who had a better knowledge of German than her. She attended lectures by Rudolf Steiner and about 36 of her later notebooks are full of extensive notes from these, some of them in German taken by Anderssen. She had conversations with Steiner, and it is even possible that she assisted with work on the first Goetheanum. At some point she apparently learned of Steiner’s February 15, 1918 lecture about the “two original sins” of visual art: 1) Copying or merely imitating an appearance of the physical senses; and 2) “the attempt to represent the supersensible.”<sup>53</sup> These were the very two kinds of painting she had been creating up to then and must have given her pause. All she learned in Dornach seemingly led her to stop painting again until 1922.

Especially from 1922 onward for the rest of her artistic life she changed her painting to working in a wet-on-wet watercolor technique, creating more than 200 watercolors from a more anthroposophical approach, some of which may have been exhibited in group shows at or near the Goetheanum. She did not just externally copy a “Goetheanum style” of painting,



*Hilma af Klint SUW/UW Series:Group IX/SUW, The Swan, No. 17 1915 oil on canvas*

## Contemplative Observations at the Guggenheim

In the exhibition we see three of the many “altar paintings” she envisioned for a temple built in the shape of a spiral. It is a perfect fit for the Guggenheim.

Standing before this rather large altar painting made me think of a description of the Son of Man in the Book of Revelation: “And his countenance shone like the sun in all its creative and dynamic power.” How could anyone possibly paint such an image? Do all the colors of the world shine forth from that golden sun disk or are all the colors of the world drawn into it?

Something profoundly essential expresses itself in this abstract composition, this abstract, geometrical configuration. It is selflessness on the part of the painter, the creator. And it calls for selflessness in the response of the beholder.

It is an image unburdened, free of the too personal or realistic limitations. It has something very pure and objective. It is expansive, inclusive in its expression, even inviting to all and everyone to grow into a Son of Man. It allows one to see the far-off potential in every human being.

It is the countenance of the future human being, still in the spirit.

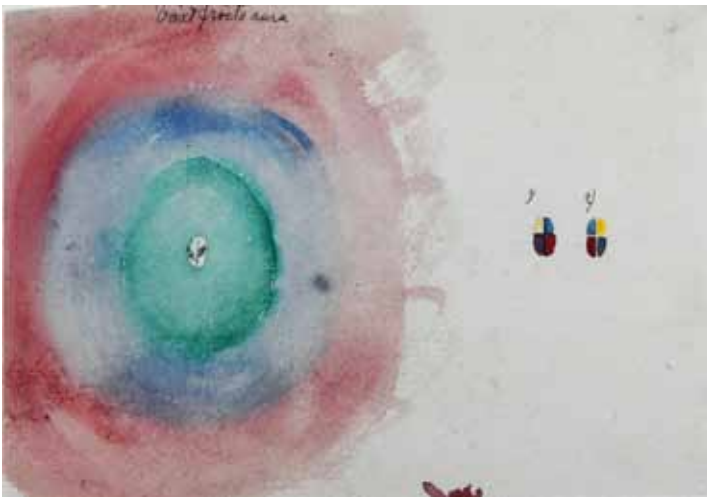
And it will have to remain in the abstract until the arrival of that new humanity. Hilma af Klint has attempted to lift the veil in her creative working.

The ten large panels on the ages of life are also fascinating, especially the last two on old age. In the second-to-last it all falls back into a seed stage, with an ever-so-slight intimation of a new beginning. And what I love most is that the last painting is again rather abstract with the four squares, and so it is in stepping across the threshold we move back into the spiritual, which has an abstract component.

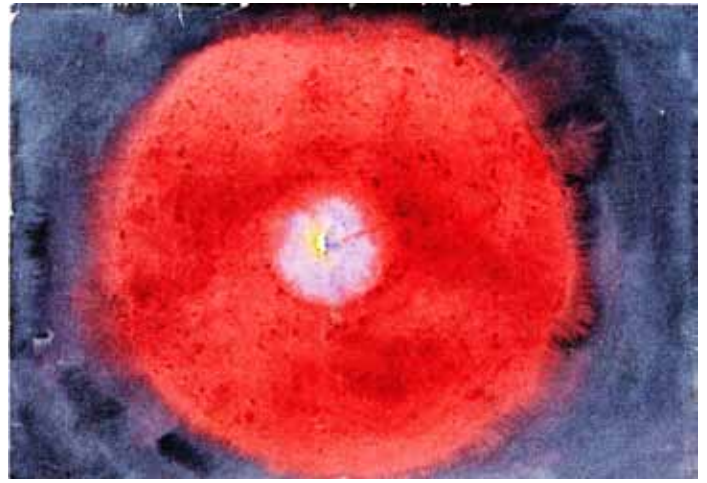
by Gisela Wielke, Christian Community Priest, NYC

but worked at penetrating the inner nature of colors and how form can arise from them as well as with a clairvoyant, spiritual-scientific research into the natural world that also used art as a means of recording or reporting the results of such investigations. Some of her later paintings – especially from the series *On the Viewing of Flowers and Trees* painted between July and October, 1922 – seem to be based on exercises from *How to Know the Higher Worlds*, such as the “seed meditation” or the observation of growing and withering plants. For example, a 1922 painting of a thistle is dry and brown, while, by contrast, a birch tree seems full of living energy (see next page).<sup>54</sup> Some of her late paintings seem to show the auras of persons experiencing moving spiritual colors, forms, and tones.





Hilma af Klint *On the Viewing of Flowers and Trees: Aura of Plant Seed* 1922 watercolor+



Hilma af Klint *On the Viewing of Flowers and Trees: Birch Tree* 1922 watercolor

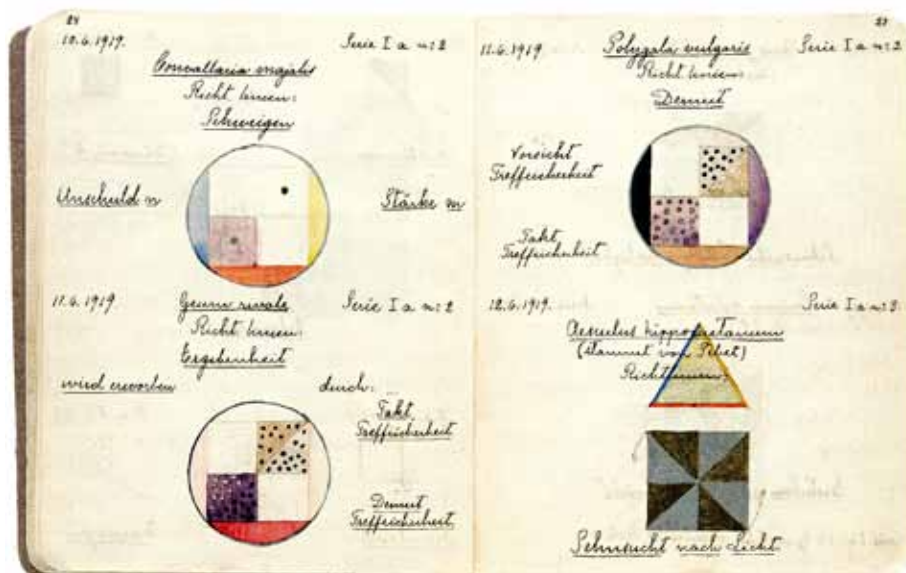


Hilma af Klint *On the Viewing of Flowers and Trees: Wheat and Wormwood* 1922 watercolor



Hilma af Klint *On the Viewing of Flowers and Trees: Thistle* 1922 watercolor

Her most extensive project from the late “anthroposophical” period were extended botanical studies, annotated in German and recording the characters and qualities of plants, all of which employed a combination of clairvoyance, meditative observation, and artistic expression – titled *Flowers, Mosses, and Lichens*. She recorded these in German in at least 3 notebooks totaling 306 pages, which she donated to the Natural Science Section at the Goethenäum (?); two presently are in the Rudolf Steiner Archiv in Dornach.<sup>55</sup> She gave another volume (approx. 80 pages) to Albert Sterffen and her copy of this was recently translated into English and reproduced in full.<sup>56</sup> She developed

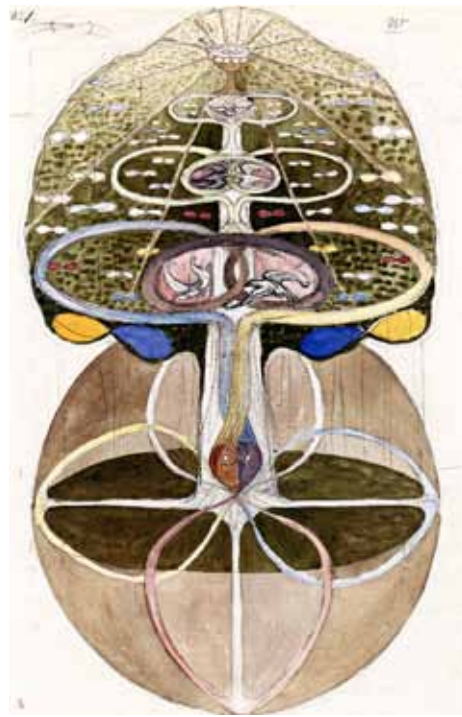


Hilma af Klint *Flowers, Mosses, and Lichens*, 1919-20 pp. 24-25 ink, watercolor, and graphite on paper, HaK 586 (copy of notebook now at the Albert Steffen Foundation in Dornach)

an unusual threefold diagrammatic language to capture the qualities of each plant, with each species given either a full or half page: its scientific name, a drawing of “directional lines” (often a square divided into 4 quadrants, sometimes with expressive colors/forms), and a description of its emotional or spiritual qualities (sometimes seemingly pointing to healing, medical properties). Later in the book it is written: “The images are seen on the astral plane.” It is possible that Rudolf Steiner gave this task to her as a research project, but no record of that has been found.

In these diagrammatic plant pictures from 1919-1920 we seem to see elemental forces, colors, and structures that ex-

pand and contract. A few sample descriptions: “Longing for light and noise; longing to hide power; longing to explain light and noise, longing to show power.” “Through the energy of the will from light to darkness, and from light to greater light.” Prunus spinosa: “The incorruptibility of the law. The inexhaustibility of the gospel.” “Liberator of the intestinal bacteria and infusoria that are caused by animal foodstuffs.” “Give me enlightenment about my astral weakness. Help me to improve the kidneys of humanity.” “Tireless. In special contact with the spirits of the air.” “Physical strength is a necessary asset. The body is dependent on the etheric body.” One of the mosses even includes a four-note melody in a musical bar sign! The first(?) book also includes a few other, seemingly unrelated topics, including one butterfly, one mosquito, one spider, a form for each Scandanavian country, a diagram of the kingdoms of nature, and one of comparative qualities of the four gospels. Professor Hanne Loreck describes her abstract modes for depicting plant characteristics and the greater meaning of her “thinking of progression and transformation” as follows: “Delicate little arrows indicate transformations, discontinuous circle lines visualize movements, tiny little starbursts cause a form to radiate or slightly blurred edges mark a flow. . . . They are about the virtual in the sense of making operations of the Other thinkable, thus establishing a way of conceiving of nature and the supernatural beyond the dichotomies characteristic of classical thought and action.”<sup>57</sup>



*Hilma af Klint W Series: Tree of Knowledge, No. 1 1913 watercolor, gouache, graphite, and metallic paint on paper*

She offered some of her paintings to decorate the second Goetheanum (which Steiner declined).<sup>58</sup> In the same vein in an April 1924 letter to Steiner asked, “Should the paintings that were executed through me from 1906 to 1920, and of which you, Herr Doctor, have seen a few, be destroyed, or could they be used somewhere?”<sup>59</sup> Her hopes for support from Steiner for the interpretation and display of her paintings apparently came to nothing. But she continued to feel her earlier paintings were of value and undertook to interpret and document them. In 1927 she made a copy of her elaborate *Tree of Knowledge* series of 5 (or 7?) paintings from 1913-1915 and gave it to Albert Steffen.<sup>60</sup> Probably sometime after 1917 she created a “catalog” of her work in which she organized *The Paintings for the Temple* into a sequence of discrete series with small black-and-white photographs along with a small watercolor version of each original painting and added titles, comments, and notes – a kind of “mobile museum” in miniature.<sup>61</sup>



*Hilma af Klint Untitled 1941 watercolor*

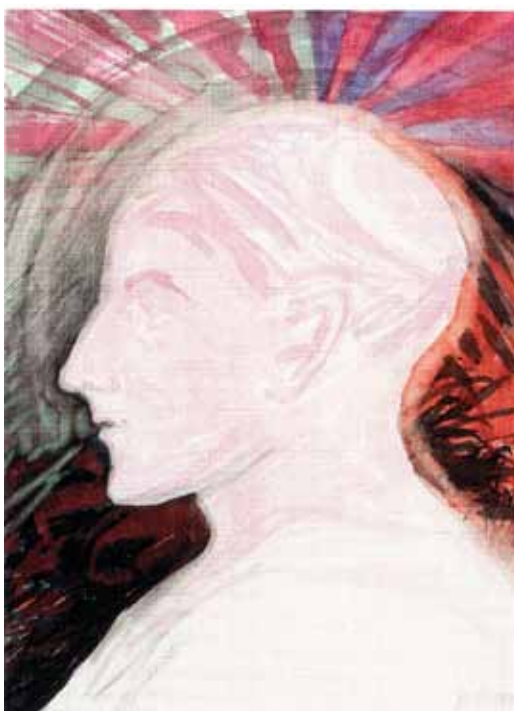
been rediscovered by art historian Julia Voss at the public World Conference of Spiritual Science and Its Practical Applications, held in London in 1928 from July 20 to August 1. Chaired by Daniel Dunlop, the conference and display event, intended to introduce the various fields of anthroposophical endeavor to the general public, took place in the Friends’ House there, where af Klint was given an entire room among the rooms placed around a cloister-like arrangement and where she exhibited “her studies of Rosicrucian symbolism” and also gave a talk about them at 4:00 on July 25. She was aided by an anthroposophist she met in Amsterdam, Peggy Kloppers-Molzer, who helped her make arrangements in English with painter Eleanor Merry and other conference organizers.<sup>62</sup> Two years later in 1930 her last, two-week visit to Dornach took place, and a notebook entry of December 27 of that year expressed her disillusionment with the conflicts and power struggles that had developed among Steiner’s successors in the Society: “Hence is the fate of the Anthroposophical Society sealed.”<sup>63</sup>

She continued to receive guidance into old age from some of her spirit teachers, including Gregor, Georg, Amaliel, and Ananda<sup>64</sup> as well as remaining in contact with Rudolf Steiner after his death in 1925.<sup>65</sup> Her last painting was completed in 1941. She continually reworked her handwritten notes and interpretive annotations about her artwork, preparing for a future humanity that she hoped would understand them, including creating indices to help decode the many linguistic symbols she had received in her mediumistic works, which are usually unique integrations of language and visual artistic elements. In 1917 she had dictated to Anna Ljungberg an account of her understanding of spiritual life, “Studies of the Life of the Soul,” which she and her late-life “secretary” Olof Sundström in 1941-1942 typed to create a manuscript of 2,075 pages.<sup>66</sup> In one of her notebooks she wrote: “The experiments I have conducted . . . that were to awaken humanity when they were cast upon the world were pioneering endeavors. Though they travel through much dirt they will yet retain their purity.”<sup>67</sup> Her final notebook entry from October 9, 1944 ended with this sentence: “You have a mystery service ahead and will soon enough realize what is expected of you.”<sup>68</sup> When she died very poor at nearly age 82 in 1944 a statement in a notebook from 1932 stated that all her works “should be opened twenty years after my death, . . .” and she also specified that none of them should ever be sold.<sup>69</sup>

Recently the first public exhibition of a selection of her *Paintings for the Temple* (including at least some of the *Ten Largest*) has

Unexpectedly, her entire estate (except for the 3 notebooks and 8 paintings in Dornach) was bequeathed in her will to the care of

her nephew Erik af Klint, “a naval officer with neither the financial means nor the theoretical background in art to properly steward them.”<sup>70</sup> Erik rolled up her paintings and built wooden crates to store her work. In a difficult-to-uncover history, the crates became variously stored after her death in Eric’s attic with a tin roof subject to extremes of hot and cold temperatures, in a building (barn? cellar?) in Järna watched over by anthroposophical artist Arne Klingborg, and, currently, in a warehouse(?) between Stockholm and Järna.<sup>71</sup> However, the exact sequence and years of these far-from-ideal storage situations are still rather unclear. A little over twenty years after Hilma’s death, Erik and his son Johan in 1966 undertook to unpack the paintings and photograph them. As one effort to find a permanent home for her work, Erik offered the paintings to the Moderna Museet in Stockholm in 1970, but the offer was rejected.<sup>72</sup> When the Hilma af Klint Foundation was formed in 1972 both Klingborg and Åke Fant were on its original board, which requires that a majority of its members belong to the Anthroposophical Society.<sup>73</sup> Klingborg and Fant exhibited some of af Klint’s monumental pieces in a large eurythmy building at Järna (early 1980s?), and there was talk for a number of years of designing and building a museum in Järna for her collection; however, the af Klint family and the Swedish Anthroposophical Society hit some kind of a snag about financing it, and it never materialized.<sup>74</sup>



*Hilma af Klint Untitled 1933 watercolor*

Outside of a few small shows mainly in Sweden, her paintings were only first exhibited in public in 1986 in Los Angeles as part of Maurice Tuchman’s large, revelatory show “The Spirit in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985” (which traveled to Chicago and The Hague) – 42 years after the death of af Klint. The “index” she wrote for word and letter symbols in her paintings often contains highly esoteric (and not always easily understandable) explanations. A couple of examples: A rose is a “sign of the astral world, will”; a red rose signifies selfishness, a white rose



*Hilma af Klint Untitled 1931 watercolor*

unselfishness, a pink rose “spiritual knowledge and devotion.” The odd word “Yssée” means “to divide oneself into two halves, one obedient under pressure, one moving freely in the light, receiving instructions through direct guidance.” Another sign indicates that “16 incarnations remain for the people of the earth to achieve all

that is set forth in this work.”<sup>75</sup> (re. the 16 “steps” in 2 of her 1915 altarpiece paintings)

In the catalog for the Guggenheim show “Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future” (a sold-out bestseller on Amazon.com!) I was pleased to see that the “Selected Exhibition History” in it references the *Aenigma – A Hundred Years of Anthroposophical Art* catalog and *Rudolf Steiner: The Alchemy of the Everyday* as well as including in the Bibliography three catalogs written by the late Swedish anthroposophical art historian Åke Fant – af Klint’s first interpreter, researcher, and promoter – who had been researching af Klint at least since the early 1980s and gave his first public lecture on her in 1984 in Helsinki.<sup>76</sup> Arising from a clairvoyant visionary process, her artwork is somehow both abstract and representational with a unique way of coding information pictorially that needs further investigation. As Daniel Birnbaum asks, “How are these chromatically intriguing and sophisticated paintings actually constructed and what

do they do to us viewers? How do they work, and how do they produce the perceptual and visceral effects that make them such appealing aesthetic objects?”<sup>77</sup>

The dramatic (re)appearance of the artwork of af Klint in recent years like a kind of opened time capsule has been completely confounding mainstream art’s rather rigidified understanding of

the existing, historical narrative of the rise of modern art as well as the whole accustomed practice of visual art today. She can’t easily be integrated into any existing category of artist. Historically, at a previously unacknowledged early date she painted in an “abstract” or “non-objective” mode, made unsigned large-scale paintings on the studio floor, used automatic drawing and writing, and demonstrated the groundbreaking original creativity of a female artist unusual, if not unprecedented, for her time. It is not only that now European abstract art has a female progenitor. Her artwork and practice is

everything almost all modern and contemporary artistic practice is not – not interested in personal expression or fame, not concerned with the art market and art as financial investment, not involved with egotistic ambition, incorporating a profuse use of symbols and diagrammatic approaches, and involved with com-

munal creation (whether working with human beings or spiritual beings). Rather, her art has a certain purity that resulted from an attitude of selfless service to humanity and the spiritual world and spiritual research (even involving fasting!). Curator Iris Müller-Westermann writes, “Af Klint’s paintings force and invite us to rethink our established categories – what art is and can be, and how it is connected to the ways we perceive the world in general. . . . how do we describe the process of inspiration and where does inspiration come from? From where do ‘geniuses’ receive their ideas?” “But what Hilma af Klint’s work demonstrates is that we need to broaden our perspectives, take a more inclusive view of how creativity works and where images might come from. We should not be shielding ourselves from unknown sources of inspiration but embracing a widened perspective.”<sup>78</sup>

What we know of her life, motivations, and creativity is still an incomplete story until her extensive diaristic notebooks in Swedish are translated and digested – and intelligently related to her occult and anthroposophical knowledge and contacts. For example, does the mainstream art world even have a clue how to evaluate that she was a member of the First Class of the School of Spiritual Science?<sup>79</sup> Or that she described in later notebooks that she was in continuing spiritual contact with Rudolf Steiner after his death?<sup>80</sup>

But for those so inclined, her work can be an inspiring example today of a life dedicated to the spiritual sources of visual art. It will be interesting to see how both the mainstream artworld and the anthroposophical world come to relate to her work and life in the coming years.<sup>81</sup>

*All photographs are of works in the collection of the Hilma af Klint Foundation, Stockholm, Sweden.*

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> <https://frieze.com/article/hilma-af-klint-0>; and <https://frieze.com/article/highlights-2013-jennifer-higgie?language=en>.

<sup>2</sup> “Why Hilma af Klint’s Occult Spirituality Makes Her the Perfect Artist for Our Technologically Disrupted Time,” *Artnet News* (October 23, 2018) <https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/hilma-af-klints-occult-spirituality-makes-perfect-artist-technologically-disrupted-time-1376587>.

<sup>3</sup> “Secret Séances and High Masters: The Making of Mystic Painter Hilma af Klint,” *Frieze* (Oct 11, 2018) <https://frieze.com/article/secret-seances-and-high-masters-making-mystic-painter-hilma-af-klint>

<sup>4</sup> <https://program.goteborgfilmfestival.se/events/beyond-the-visible-hilma-af-klint>

<sup>5</sup> “Hilma af Klint: a painter possessed,” *The Guardian*, (Feb. 21, 2016)

<sup>6</sup> “Afterword” in Kurt Almqvist and Louise Belfrage, eds., *Hilma af Klint: Seeing is Believing*, 2017, p. 126; it is interesting that Birnbaum had Åke Fant as a high school teacher at the Kristofferskolen in Stockholm in the early 1980s, when he was already researching af Klint; see “Afterword” in Kurt Almqvist and Louise Belfrage, eds., *Hilma af Klint: The Art of Seeing the Invisible* (London: Koenig Books and Stockholm: Axel

and Margaret Ax:son Johnson Foundation, 2015), pp. 270-271.

<sup>7</sup> “Hilma af Klint, Explorer in the Realm of the Abstract,” Review of Show at P.S.1 Museum, Long Island City, Queens, NY, *The New York Times*, February 3, 1989, p. 261; and “‘Hilma Who?’ No More,” *The New York Times* October 11, 2018, p. C15.

<sup>8</sup> “Out of This World,” *The Guardian*, March 14, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> “Introduction” in Christine Burgin, ed., *Hilma af Klint: Notes and Methods* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), pp. 8, 12.

<sup>10</sup> “Temples for Paintings” in *Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2018), p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> “Spiritual Alphabetisation” in *The Art of Seeing the Invisible*, p. 216.

<sup>12</sup> “Universal Pictures: The Art of Hilma af Klint,” *Artforum* 1,5 (January 2013); <https://www.artforum.com/print/201301/universal-pictures-the-art-of-hilma-af-klint-38217>.

<sup>13</sup> “Giving a Swedish Pioneer of Abstraction Her Due,” *The New York Times*, April 29, 2013.

<sup>14</sup> “Hilma af Klint and Abstraction” in Almqvist and Belfrage, *The Art of Seeing the Invisible*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>15</sup> February 21, 1905: Quoted in Tracey Bashkoff, “Temples for Paintings,” *Paintings for the Future*, p. 19; from Åke Fant, “Secret Pictures by Hilma af Klint,” *Secret Pictures by Hilma af Klint*, exh. cat. (Helsinki: Nordiskt Konstcentrum, 1988), p.24.

<sup>16</sup> See lectures of October 10, 11, and 17, 1915 in *The Occult Movement in the Nineteenth Century*, GA 254; lecture of November 27, 1916, in *The Karma of Vocation*, GA 172; lectures of November 18 and 19 in *Secret Brotherhoods and the Mystery of the Human Double*, GA 178; lecture of September 23, 1916 in *Inner Impulses of Evolution*, GA 171; and lecture of November 26, 1916 in *The*

*Karma of Untruthfulness*, Vol. 1, GA 173.

<sup>17</sup> See Karin Althaus, Matthias Mühling, and Sebastian Schneider, eds., *World Receivers - Georgiana Houghton - Hilma af Klint - Emma Kunz* (Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2019); and Simon Grant, Lars Bang Larsen, and Marco Pasi, *Georgiana Houghton: Spirit Drawings* (London: Courtauld Gallery, 2016).

<sup>18</sup> From Hilma af Klint, “Letters and Words Pertaining to Works by Hilma af Klint” in Burgin, *Notes and Methods*, p. 257.

<sup>19</sup> Nov. 25, 1903 in *Concerning the Astral World and Devachan* (Great Barrington: SteinerBooks, 2018; GA 88), pp. 45 and 138.

<sup>20</sup> Johan af Klint and Hedvig Ersman, “The Invisible Made Visible,” September 20, 2018; The Hilma af Klint Foundation, [www.hilmaafklint.se](http://www.hilmaafklint.se); or: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/cuu9ntag8kugoia/Article%20about%20Hilma%20af%20Klint%20%2020%20September%202018.pdf?dl=0>.

<sup>21</sup> Åke Fant, “The Case of the Artist Hilma af Klint,” *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985* ex. cat. (New York: Abbeville, 1986), p. 157.

<sup>22</sup> 1907 notebook HaK 556, p. 431; as quoted in af Klint and Ersman, “Invisible Made Visible.” All her items left behind have been registered by the Hilma af Klint Foundation with a special “HaK number.”

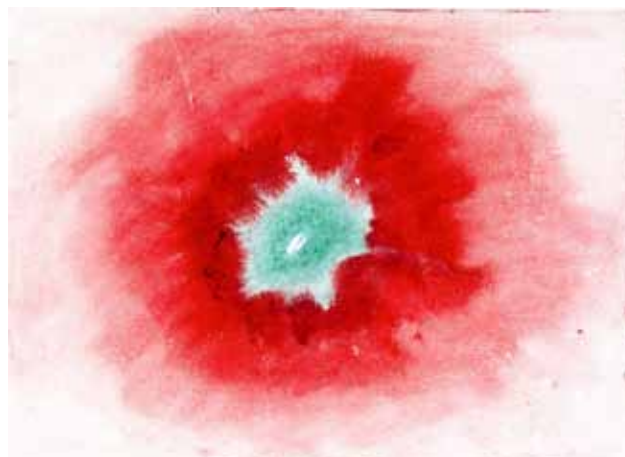
<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Sally O’Reilly, “Reviews /Hilma af Klint,” *Frieze* (April 12, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> Burgin, *Notes and Methods*, p. 14.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Fant, “The Case of the Artist Hilma af Klint,” *The Spiritual in Art*, p. 157.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted from Iris Müller-Westermann, “Paintings for the Future: Hilma af Klint – A Pioneer of Abstraction in Seclusion,” *Hilma af Klint – A Pioneer of Abstraction* ex. cat. (Stockholm: Moderna Museet; Ostfenden, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2013), p. 38, in David Max Horowitz, “‘The World Keeps You in Fetters; Cast Them Aside’: Hilma af Klint, Spiritual-



*Hilma af Klint On the Viewing of Flowers and Trees: Untitled 1922 watercolor on paper*

ism, and Agency” in Tracey Bashkoff, *Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2018), p. 130.

<sup>28</sup> Burgin, *Notes and Methods*, p. 14.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246

<sup>30</sup> Birnbaum, “Universal Pictures,” *Artforum*, p. 185.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted from Anna Maria Svensson, “The Greatness of Things: The Art of Hilma af Klint,” in John Hutchinson, ed., *Hilma af Klint* ex. cat. (Dublin: Douglas Hyde Gallery, 2005), p. 19, in Horowitz, “The World Keeps You in Fetters,” *Paintings for the Future*, p. 130.

<sup>32</sup> Fant, “The Case of the Artist Hilma af Klint,” *The Spiritual in Art*, p. 157.

<sup>33</sup> Svensson, “The Greatness,” p. 18; quoted in Tessel M. Baudin, „Að sjá og sýna hið ósýnilega. Um nútímalist og andleg verk Hilmu af Klint“ (“Seeing and Depicting the Invisible. On Hilma af Klint’s Modern Art and Spiritual Paintings”), *Ritið* 1/2017: 187-224; English translation pdf of Icelandic publication by Eva Dagbjört Óladóttir.

<sup>34</sup> Davis, *ArtNet News*.

<sup>35</sup> November 12, 1906, in *The Inner Nature of Music and the Experience of Tone* (Spring Valley: Anthroposophic Press, 1983; GA 283), pp. 14, 17-18.

<sup>36</sup> Burgin, *Notes and Methods*, p. 257.

<sup>37</sup> J. af Klint and H. Ersman, “The Invisible Made Visible.”

<sup>38</sup> Guenther Wachsmuth, *The Life and Work of Rudolf Steiner*, 2nd ed. (New York: Whittier Books, 1955), pp. 106-107.

<sup>39</sup> Letter of July 18, 1908, *Hilma af Klint On the Viewing of Flowers and Trees: Untitled 1922 watercolor* from Steiner to af Klint (in English); courtesy of Anne Weise, Rudolf Steiner Archiv, Dornach, Switzerland, email of Feb. 7, 2019.

<sup>40</sup> Burgin, *Notes and Methods*, p. 36.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted by Wolfgang Zumdick, “Finding the Inner Form: Pathways to Hilma af Klint’s Change from Outer to Inner Experience” in Almqvist and Belfrage, *The Art of Seeing the Invisible*, p. 246.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Burgin, *Notes and Methods*, pp. 66 and 74.

<sup>44</sup> For much more information on the artistic innovations of the 1907 Munich Congress, see Michael Howard, “Schooling Artistic Feeling for the New Social Art” and David Adams, “On the Artistic Impulse of the Munich Congress of 1907,” *Art Section Newsletter* 26 (Spring-Summer 2006): 1-12 and David Adams, “Reflections on the Artistic Initiatives of the 1907 Munich Congress,” *Art Section Newsletter* 28 (Spring-Summer 2007): 9-11.]

<sup>45</sup> “Hilma af Klint’s Visionary Paintings,” *The New Yorker* (October 22, 2018): <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/10/22/hilma-af-klints-visionary-paintings>.

<sup>46</sup> Ulf Wagner, Sweden, email of February 13, 2019.

<sup>47</sup> Fant, “The Case of Artist Hilma af Klint,” *The Spiritual in Art*, p. 158.

<sup>48</sup> As Helena Blavatsky described in an 1890 essay, “The Last Song of the Swan,” the swan, in alchemy, stands for the union of opposites – a key theme in af Klint’s entire artwork, as noted in Davis, “Why Hilma af Klint’s Occult Spirituality Makes Her the Perfect Artist . . .,” *ArtNet News*.

<sup>49</sup> Kathleen Hall, “Theosophy and the Society in the Public Eye: Hilma af Klint”; <https://www.theosophyforward.com/articles/theosophy-and-the-society-in-the-public-eye/1239-hilma-and-the-enigmatic-mathilde-n>

<sup>50</sup> January 17, 1917, quoted in Lindén, “Excerpts,” 650, quoted in Bauduin, “Seeing and Depicting the Invisible,” *Ritið* 1/2017: 187-224.

<sup>51</sup> All of the above from Burgin, *Notes and Methods*, pp. 150-157.

<sup>52</sup> Johannes Nilo, Dornach, email of January 14, 2019.

<sup>53</sup> “The Two Sources of Art: Impressionism and Expressionism” in Michael Howard, ed., *Art as Spiritual Activity: Rudolf Steiner’s Contribution to the Visual Arts* (Hudson: Anthroposophic Press, 1998), pp. 195-196.

<sup>54</sup> Zumdick, “Finding the Inner Form,” p. 251.

<sup>55</sup> “Chronology,” *Paintings for the Future*, p. 233; and Anne Weise, Rudolf Steiner Archiv, Dornach, email of February 7, 2019.

<sup>56</sup> Included in Burgin, *Notes and Methods*, pp 160-244.

<sup>57</sup> “Spiritual Alphabetisation,” *The Art of Seeing the Invisible*, pp. 223-224.

<sup>58</sup> “Chronology,” *Paintings for the Future*, pp.232-233.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* The catalog for the 2013 Moderna Museet exhibition *Hilma af Klint – Eine Pionierin der Abstraktion* and the catalog from the 2018-



19 Guggenheim Museum show list only 5 paintings in this series from 2013-15. However, there are 8 paintings in the *Tree of Knowledge* series af Klint gave to Albert Steffen in Dornach probably in 1927 (after Steiner’s death in 1925), currently in the collection of the Albert Steffen Stiftung in Dornach (actually a series of 7, since the 8th is labeled “details of no. 7”) along with one of her notebooks. It seems that af Klint may have painted three additional pieces for the series in the 1920s, years after the earlier five (?).

<sup>61</sup> Burgin, *Notes and Methods*, p. 14.

<sup>62</sup> Julia Voss, “The Traveling Hilma af Klint,” *Paintings for the Future*, pp. 61-62 and Anonymous, “The World Conference on Spiritual Science,” *Anthroposophy: A Quarterly Review of Spiritual Science* 3, 3 (1928): 383-399.

<sup>63</sup> Quoted by Voss, “Traveling Hilma af Klint,” p. 60; from Notebook HaK1047 (1930-1930), p.33.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>65</sup> Ulf Wagner, Sweden, email of Feb. 7, 2019.

<sup>66</sup> “Art for Another Future: Learning from Hilma af Klint,” *Paintings for the Future*, p. 34.

<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Tracey Bashkoff “Temples for Paintings,” *Paintings for the Future*, p. 18, from Svensson, “The Greatness of Things,” in Hutchinson, ed., *Hilma af Klint*, p. 17.

<sup>68</sup> “Chronology,” *Paintings for the Future*, p.233.

<sup>69</sup> Voss, “Traveling Hilma af Klint,” *Paintings for the Future*, 51.

<sup>70</sup> Johan af Klint, “Artist’s Foundation Statement” in *Paintings for the Future*, p. 9.

<sup>71</sup> Ulf Wagner, email of Feb. 11, 2019.

<sup>72</sup> Cindi di Marzo, “With Great Force, Swiftly and Surely,” *Studio International*; <https://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/with-great-force-swiftly-and-surely>.

<sup>73</sup> Ulf Wagner, Sweden, email of Feb. 11, 2019.

<sup>74</sup> John Stolfo, Hong Kong, email of December 1, 2018.

<sup>75</sup> Burgin *Notes and Methods*, pp. 263, 265, 269.

<sup>76</sup> Birnbaum, “Afterword,” *Art of Seeing the Invisible*, p. 271.

<sup>77</sup> Birnbaum, “Afterword,” *Seeing Is Believing*, p. 127.

<sup>78</sup> “Hilma af Klint in Her Time and Ours,” *The Art of Seeing the Invisible*, pp. 190 192.

<sup>79</sup> Anne Weise, Dornach, email of February 12, 2019.

<sup>80</sup> Ulf Wagner, Sweden, email of February 8, 2019.

<sup>81</sup> It may help that two biographies translated into English are slated to appear soon: Julia Voss, *Hilma af Klint: Life and Work 1862–1944*, approximately 368 pages (from German); and Luciane Pinheiro, *A Life of Hilma af Klint* (from Portuguese).