

space and uprightness typical of a European mind. She had clearly a more conscious participation in the work. Then came the encounter with Steiner's art, that for a while seems to have destroyed her originality. One of her 1922 works is reproduced in the catalogue, but none of her last works, which are rich and exciting. Her spiritual gifts thus seem to have undergone a transformation under the impact of Steiner not unlike those of other highly endowed people who came into his orbit. This was surely not an easy task.

Expanding on Sixten Ringbom's pioneering book, the exhibition is a gateway opening the path for new kinds of investigations and aesthetic experiences. Rudolf Steiner's own work was not included because Steiner always remained a figurative artist. Yet from now on Steiner will be a central figure in the story of the development of modern art, and we should be prepared to make his work and that of his followers better known to an ever more interested public. Books like the recent *Rudolf Steiner, Ein malerischer Schulungsweg* with wonderful color illustrations, as well as Hilde Raske's *Das Farbenwort*, are valuable contributions.

The Struggle: Expressing the Spiritual in Art The Exhibition and Its Catalogue

by FLORIN LOWNDES

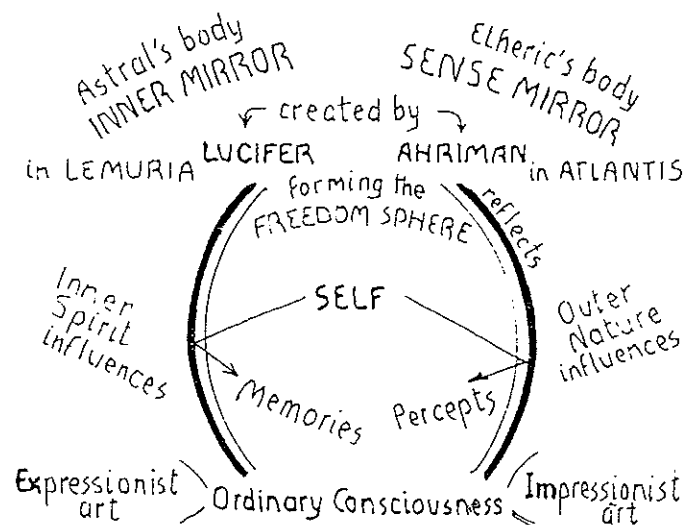
AN ANTHROPOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE ¹

In creative activity, the artist works out of the free space between the mirror of the astral body on one side and the mirror of the etheric on the other. Surrounded by the inner world of memories reflected by his astral, and the world of sense perceptions reflected by his etheric body, he encounters as an "I" the world of spirit and the world of nature.

If, through his spiritual work, he "polishes the etheric mirror" so the etheric body becomes transparent, he beholds etheric processes, the beings at work in nature.

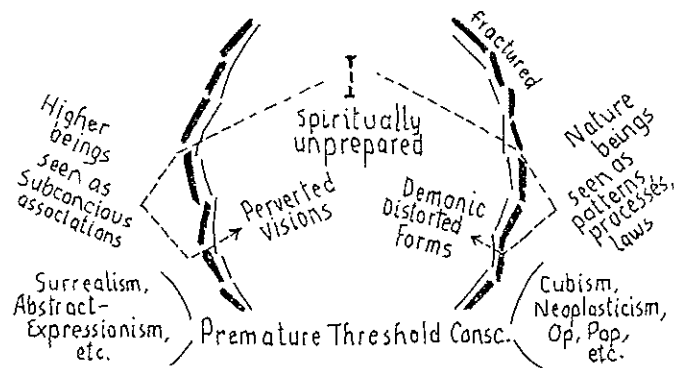
If he succeeds in making the astral mirror transparent, thus penetrating the inner barrier, the astral light and the higher beings at work in Man become visible to him.

Both paths, however, are fraught with danger. The earthbound artist, prematurely pressing to see through the etheric mirror—the outer barrier, a necessary Ahrimanic



creation—shatters it. Spiritually unprepared, he stumbles into the world of Ahrimanic "effects." The experience, seen in his art, conveys a distorted, perverted, anti-human picture of reality. Yet, because of his paintings' seductive power, the artist is rewarded with huge financial success and celebrity status. Ahriman transforms art into business. Picasso typifies this casualty. Formalist aesthetics, where effects, style, externals pose as art, championed by the Museum of Modern Art since its inception, is but the label for the shattered, spiritless images of a certain kind of modern painting. This leads, as is only too obvious in today's art world, to the desecration of the picture of nature.

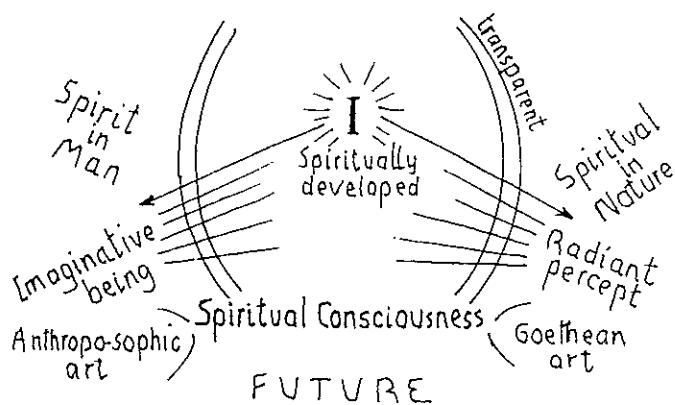
The spiritually oriented artist, when helped by "good Lucifer" forces, is rather concerned with making the astral mirror transparent. After intense spiritual preparation, he reaches the realm where color lives in free flowing activity. Unfettered by matter, it takes on the quality of light. Shape and line freed from weight and quantity express spirit reality. On this path the artist meets Rudolf Steiner as the



guide—so did Kandinsky. From this meeting "abstract art" emerged. The world of "ideas"—of spiritual forms—Kandinsky saw as real, as a consciously experienced concrete world. Although the term "abstract" has prevailed, Kandinsky called his art "concrete." His abstract paintings are actually a translating from, not an abstraction of, that world.

Steiner has shown to the seeking artist this path, the "anthroposophical path," in his basic books: *Theosophy*, *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds*, *Stages of Higher Knowledge*, and *Occult Science*.

The preliminary step to this higher stage of consciousness prepares the artist, helped by "good Ahriman" forces to see through the illusion mirrored by the etheric body. This is the "Goethean path." It is the corrective, developed by Steiner, to the traditional painting training. It is expounded most succinctly in the three *Color Lectures* of 1921. There Steiner completes Goethe's work on color by revealing the "image" and "luster" quality of colors, and the way to truthfully paint the kingdoms of nature.



THE EXHIBITION: ITS HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

From this perspective, "The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting" exhibit takes on a profound historic significance. We glimpse the artists' struggle, as Paul Klee put it: to "render visible" rather than "render *the* visible."

Michael Brenson writes in his *New York Times* review: "The Spiritual in Art" is a direct challenge to the picture of modernism painted by the Museum of Modern Art" with its committed materialistic aesthetics: "it reminds us what was at stake when a handful of artists in different parts of Europe first painted without reference to the external world," looking for a "reality that was universal and timeless rather than particular and ephemeral."

"The genesis and development of abstract art were inextricably tied to the spiritual ideas current in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" writes Maurice Tuchman in the introduction to the catalogue. Steiner's theosophy—read anthroposophy—decisively affected these artists and the culture of the pre-war period. The exhibit documents this. One section displays texts known to have been studied by those pioneering artists, including early editions of Steiner titles.

"The early twentieth century abstract art, long regarded by a suspicious public as basically meaningless and without a subject, turns out to have a very distinct one—the last mutations, in fact, of religious experience in the visual arts" concludes Robert Hughes in his *Time*

Magazine review. And Maurice Tuchman in the catalogue claims "an astonishingly high proportion of visual artists working in the past hundred years have been involved with these ideas and belief systems, and their art reflects a desire to express spiritual, utopian or metaphysical ideals that cannot be expressed in traditional pictorial terms."

That spiritual element appeared within abstract art as conceived by Kandinsky, its main theoretician. In his booklet of 1912 *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* he presents it as corresponding to a precise inner path. He credits Steiner with carving this path. On it, he writes, "the all-important spark of inner life" can overcome "the nightmare of materialism . . . which holds the awakening soul still in its grip" and the artist can take up again his proper place in culture.

Of the four acknowledged originators of abstract art, three claimed ties to Steiner or theosophy:

—Kandinsky publicly stated his indebtedness to Steiner: he attended many of the lectures Steiner gave in Berlin—where he heard some of the well-known Architektenhaus series, in Nuremberg—the great Apocalypse cycle, in Munich—where he resided.*

—Mondrian, acknowledged anthroposophy as a source for Neoplasticism, his form of abstract art, and was a member of the Theosophical Society from 1909.

—Kupka in 1910 considered publicly stating his beliefs in theosophical principles.

—Malevitch, while never claiming adherence, moved in theosophical-anthroposophical circles in Russia and was certainly familiar with Steiner's ideas and the importance Kandinsky attached to them.

Other artists directly involved or interested in Steiner or theosophy include: Theo van Doesburg, Jacoba van Heemskerck, Hilma af Klint, Jean Arp, the Americans Arthur Dove and Marsden Hartley, the Canadian Lawrence Harris, and more recently the German sculptor Joseph Beuys.

The roster of those who, via Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, drew indirectly on Steiner is quite extensive. Suffice it to mention the Americans Georgia O'Keeffe and Jackson Pollock, and the German Sigmar Polke.

Yet so far, mainstream aesthetics has authoritatively presented to the public a one-sided view of modernism, hardened in formalist critiques, ignoring the spiritual content, even in artists it promoted. To use the word "spiritual," as one of those artists, Richard Pousette-Dart, recently acknowledged, "was near-heresy and dangerous to an artist's career."

In the aftermath of this exhibit, one can only hope that something similar will be done for music, literature, etc., to show the spiritual in *all* arts. In music, for example, Schoenberg and his immense influence should be seen in a new light. His opera "Jakobsleiter," to cite one instance, was inspired by Steiner and drew on his *Mystery Plays*.

*see reproduction on page 36

KANDINSKY



Kandinsky, cover for On the Spiritual in Art, 1911. The motif originated in a painting inspired by Steiner's lectures on the Apocalypse, 1908

ANTHROPOSOPHISTS CONTRIBUTE TO THE EXHIBITION

Several anthroposophists have a share in the preparation of this endeavor. First, Konrad Oberhuber, curator of drawings, Fogg Art Museum, and professor of fine arts, Harvard University, is acknowledged as one of its initiators. In 1980 he, together with John Hallmark Neff, then director of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, was planning an exhibit of the works of artists influenced by Rudolf Steiner and anthroposophy. That led to the collaboration between the Los Angeles and Chicago Museums on the exhibit. Oberhuber also suggested to the organizers the work of Hilma af Klint. Ake Fant, Swedish art historian, co-author of books on the Goetheanum, contributes the essay on af Klint. Eleanor Hill Edwards, American architect working in Järna, Sweden, is acknowledged among many others for her scholarly contribution.

THE CATALOGUE ²

The catalogue is a superb achievement—435 pages, profusely illustrated, with outstanding color reproductions. Seventeen American and European scholars, in pertinent, lucid essays document the spiritual background.

Ake Fant's "The Case of Hilma af Klint" introduces this artist unknown outside Sweden. For the first time her paintings are exhibited in public. They show the artist's move from an unconscious, mediumistic path to a fully



Kandinsky, Sound of Trumpets (Study for Large Resurrection), 1911

conscious one following Steiner's guidance.

Also notable is Sixten Ringbom's "Transcending the Visible: The Generation of Abstract Pioneers." Ringbom, a medieval scholar in Finland, distinguished himself in this field through his 1970 study *The Sounding Cosmos* that connects Kandinsky's abstract painting and theory to Steiner's scientific spirituality.

From the other essays as well, Steiner appears to have had a wide influence in artistic circles through such figures as Édouard Schuré in France and Andrej Bely in Russia. Rudolf Steiner is one of the most often referred to in the catalogue.

A section in the catalogue is formed of 16 brief background articles on spiritual and related terms. The one on "Anthroposophy" by Robert Galbreath is surprisingly accurate and encompassing. (See reprint in this issue.)

An interesting section credited to Judi Freeman lists a chronology for each artist, highlighting events, meetings, readings, from which the "role of the spiritual in the artist's life can be identified." For example:

—"Joseph Beuys: 1951-1961 interested in the ideas of Rudolf Steiner . . . 1980: stands for election to the Parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia as a candidate for the Greens."

—"Serge Charcoune: 1920: through Bely becomes especially interested in the ideas of Rudolf Steiner."

—"Jackson Pollock: 1930: moves to New York. Writes, "I am still interested in Theosophy and am studying a book . . ."

—"Marsden Hartley: 1913: Writes that he expects to meet Rudolf Steiner and Édouard Schuré."

Following is a sampling from various essays on artists' connections to Steiner:

Kandinsky (essays by Ringbom and Rose-Carol Washton Long) credits Steiner with giving a modern precise form to theosophical teachings. Early on he

how "Steiner echoed loud and clear" in Russia at that time.

There are many more interesting, even fascinating, facts and new perspectives on the influence Rosicrucianism, Alchemy, Jacob Boehme, or Zen had on modern artists, documenting their spiritual search.

After Los Angeles the Exhibition is in Chicago, April 17-July 19, and the Hague, Sept. 1-Nov. 22, 1987. What could it mean that this significant event, revealing Rudolf Steiner and anthroposophy to be such prominent factors in modern art, instead of coming from Europe to America, is reaching eastward from our own West Coast to Europe?

¹For background see the following Dornach lectures by Rudolf Steiner:

—Nov. 21, 1914, in *Balance in the World and Man*.

—Aug. 27 & 28, 1916, in *Memory and Habit*.

—Nov. 2, 1919, in *Lucifer and Ahriman*.

—Sept. 28 & 30, 1920, in *The Boundaries of Natural Science*.

²*The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting, 1890-1985*. Catalogue of Exhibition; Maurice Tuchman, curator. Abbeville Press with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1986; 435 pages, illustrated; paper \$24.50, cloth \$55. Note: the clothbound edition is available in bookstores; the paper edition only from the Museum.

Anthroposophy An Objective View

From the Catalogue
*The Spiritual in Art:
Abstract Painting 1890-1985*

Essay by ROBERT GALBREATH
(pages 369-370.)

ANTHROPOSOLOGY

A term introduced during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, constructed from Greek roots meaning "human wisdom," or "wisdom concerning man." *Anthroposophy* is the name adopted by Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) for his system of OCCULT teachings, which he also called *Geisteswissenschaft* (spiritual science). Steiner defined Anthroposophy in 1924 as "a path of knowledge, to guide the Spiritual in the human being to the Spiritual



Rudolf Steiner, 1915

in the universe" (Rudolf Steiner, *Anthroposophical Leading Thoughts*, trans. George and Mary Adams [London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1973], 13). Anthroposophy is both a body of teachings and a path or epistemology for attaining occult knowledge.

The term *Anthroposophy* is meant to stand in pointed contrast to THEOSOPHY ("divine wisdom," or "wisdom concerning God"). Although Steiner was the dominant figure in the Theosophical Society's German lodges after 1902, his relationship with the international society's leadership, Annie Besant and Charles W. Leadbeater, was stormy. His independent Christian ROSICRUCIAN teachings were at odds with their oriental emphasis, and he strongly rejected their promotion of the Hindu youth Krishnamurti as the vehicle in whom the World Teacher, Lord Maitreya, would next incarnate. For Steiner the present age required occult knowledge that does not depend upon external revelation but upon the power of human cognition to penetrate the spiritual realms. In 1913 he left the Theosophical Society and established his own Anthroposophical Society.

Anthroposophy, or spiritual science, is presented by Steiner as the necessary means of stimulating spiritual awakening in the modern age. His teachings are derived from Goetheanism, philosophy (especially idealism), esoteric Christianity, Rosicrucianism, and various teachings of the Theosophical Society (karma and reincarnation, the stages of cosmic evolution, the inner constitution of the human being), and his own spiritual investigations. His emphasis on epistemology, the possibility of personal verification of his findings, and the role of Christ as the pivot of cosmic evolution is distinctive of anthroposophy. Steiner's occult ideas were decisively