

## The Spiritual Evolution to Abstract Art

“The beautiful is a manifestation of secret laws of nature, which without its appearance would have remained forever hidden.”

*Goethe, Maximen und Reflexionen*

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Modern painting begins when a new spirituality merges into the works of art in the late nineteenth century. An aesthetic transcends the compositions through a unique range of philosophies and a variety of techniques, uniting with the context of the times and advances in scientific theories. Nature is the nexus of this philosophy, science and arts in the late 1800s and it continues into present day interpretations of the visual, literary and performing arts.

This spirituality of divine nature and theories of evolution are examined here in the suggestive and layered meanings expressed in paintings throughout the modern art era of abstract art. The artists move away from representation, organize their inner visions, then use line, form and/or color to present on the surface an indication of the sublime, the invisible and the esoteric. Like the scientific theories, the spiritual in art evolves to the essence of expression and the exploration of inner understanding of the interconnectedness of all in nature. It is a metamorphosis from the real to the abstract and a transformation of the visible to the invisible. Abstract art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century expresses pantheistic ideology and harmonizes with evolutionary theories.

Leonardo da Vinci expressed this concept of spirituality and evolution in his *Studies of Embryos*, drawn in the early 1500s. The similarities of the human fetus are compared with the fruit of a tree. The drawings connect realistic and abstract representation. Some parts are rendered in transparent layers and dotted lines to reveal the inner essence of his study, the



relationship of humankind with other natural forms. Through drawing and inscriptions, “nature is full of infinite reasons which have never been experienced,”<sup>1</sup> da Vinci shows his insight into the philosophical ideas of the interconnectedness of nature and science.

### **The Spirituality**

Pantheism is a one-spirituality of many names and its influence is prevalent throughout the art of many artists, philosophers and scientists throughout time. Nature, or the divinity in all of nature, is the main component of this philosophy. Belief that the universe as a whole is divine and that there is no divinity other than the universe and nature, is

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<sup>1</sup> Odilon Redon, *To Myself: Notes on Life, Art and Artists*, trans. Mira Jacob and Jeanne L. Wasserman (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1986).

usually an intuitive rather than learned doctrine or discipline; it belies the monotheisms of traditional Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

Pantheism is a doctrine that believes all things are connected and that all things are interdependent. Other religious sects rely on this sacred thought but embellish the ideal with further doctrines of reincarnation, rebirth, etc. Pantheism equates god with the forces of nature and the laws of the universe.

This spirituality has existed throughout the history of the world, starting with pagan beliefs. It is the thread that runs through the Hindu and Buddhist doctrines and is characteristic of Native American way of life.

The philosophical explorations of Hinduism were written in 600 BCE describing a unity, Brahman, which connects mankind with everything around him. Brahman is the same as every individual or world soul.

A favorite Hindi poem, *Bhagavad Gita*, expresses this, "Himself as in all beings and all beings as in himself sees he...who sees the same in all."<sup>2</sup>

A great teacher, Siddhartha who awakened as Buddha, wandered India in 500 BCE, and offered a path from mental and emotional conditioning, as practiced by theistic religions. In opposition to taught or revealed religions, Buddhism as a "realized from within" religion spread to many Eastern countries and grew into different observations and ways of life

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Harrison, The Elements of Pantheism: Understanding the Divinity in Nature and the Universe (Boston: Element Books Limited, 1999). P.15

over time, an evolution that is still going on today.<sup>3</sup> From the initial thoughts of nature and nirvana, Buddhism has adapted to the beliefs and customs of its respective locales. Life and world affirming pantheist versions of Buddhism are found in China and Japan, believing in a cosmic divinity that is eternal and manifesting itself in all forms everywhere. Zen Buddhism and Taoism are the major practices today. Both have strong pantheistic views of reality. The Tao te Ching describes the Tao, interpreted Way, as “All things depend on it for life, and it does not turn away from them. One may think of it as the mother of all beneath heaven. We do not know its name but we call it Tao...deep and still, it seems to have existed forever.”<sup>4</sup> Because Buddha or Tao is



Odilon Redon, *Buddha in his Youth* 1904

inherent in everything, it cannot be learned, only realized, as enlightenment.

Buddhist influences have been available in the West since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Artists readily accepted the inspiration as it embodied “values of compassion through its view of the interdependence of beings with each other and within nature, along with its ability to co-exist with

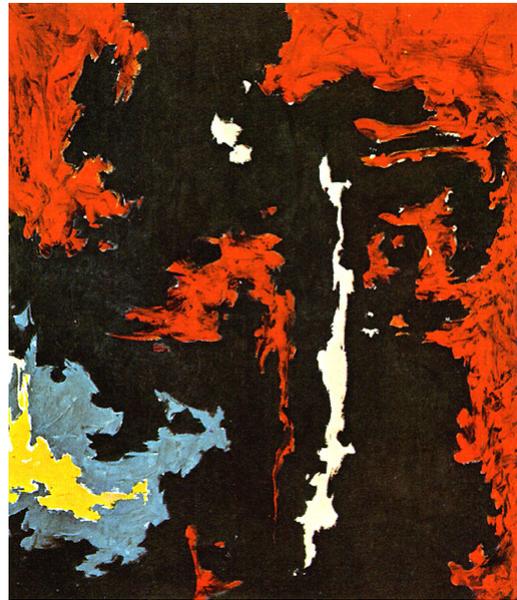
<sup>3</sup> Jacquelynn Baas and Foreward by Robert A.F.Thurman, Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art, from Monet to Today (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). P.9

<sup>4</sup> Harrison, The Elements of Pantheism: Understanding the Divinity in Nature and the Universe.p.16

other religions.”<sup>5</sup> Buddhism also influences the spiritual in art starting in the 1880s and is continuous today.

But the western world had identifiable pantheists in ancient Greece when philosophers divided into two schools of thought about the world. One school held that all nature, including humans, was alive and self-creative, ever making order from disorder. Others, Pythagoras and Plato, held that the real world could be known only through pure reason, not through direct experience, and was God’s geometric creation, perfect behind the illusion of disorder. This mechanical/religious worldview became the foundation of the whole Western worldview, opposed to the ideas of Thales, Anaximander and Heraclitus, the organic philosophers who saw all the cosmos as alive. <sup>6</sup>

The first major movement of pantheism in the western world, Stoicism, was influenced by Heraclitus and his writings, “The cosmos was not made by gods nor men, but always was, and is, and ever shall be, ever living fire, igniting in measures and extinguishing in



Clyfford Still *Untitled* 1949

<sup>5</sup> Jacquelynn Baas and Mary Jane Jacob, eds., Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). P.11

<sup>6</sup> Elisabet Sahtouris, Earthdance: Living Systems in Evolution (1999). P.16

measures.”<sup>7</sup> Stoicism was a philosophy rather than a religion and became one of the leading schools of thought in classical times despite the opposition with religious ideals and rituals.

The literary, musical and visual art worlds were influenced by the pantheistic writings of 17<sup>th</sup> century Jewish philosopher Benedict Spinoza and 18<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher G W F Hegel. In 1698, the word “pantheism” was coined by the Irish writer, John Toland, in his book, *Christianity not Mysterious*, to define a person who believes in no other eternal being but the universe.<sup>8</sup> Influenced by these beliefs, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe inspired the next generation of Romantics’ artists and writers with his poetry and scientific theories. It was difficult to put a title to this intuitive relationship of nature and spirit, a realized sensitivity rather than revealed ideology; however, many names have been coined to capture the essence of the inspiration.

In 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, this sacred spirituality was unmistakable in the music of Wagner, who called the idea correspondences,<sup>9</sup> in the literature of Baudelaire, as well as the visual and literary work of William Blake, the poetry of William Wordsworth and the imaginative prints and

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<sup>7</sup> Harrison, *The Elements of Pantheism: Understanding the Divinity in Nature and the Universe*. (Boston: Element Books Ltd., 1999) p.20

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p.35

<sup>9</sup> Maurice Tuchman, "Hidden Meanings in Abstract Art," *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*, eds. Edward Weisberger and Los Angeles County Museum of Art (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986).

paintings of Odilon Redon. From across the Atlantic Ocean came the poetry of Walt Whitman and the essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson that resonate with the intuitive ideals that the world is divine and is the only paradise to be experienced. In 1836 Emerson wrote about spirit in his collected essays, *Nature*,

Know then, that the world exists for you... Build, therefore, your own world. As fast as you conform your life to the pure idea in your mind, that will unfold its great proportions. A correspondent revolution in things will attend the influx of the spirit.



Bruno Ceccobelli, *Etrusco Ludens* 1983

Emerson called his spirituality “transcendentalism”. It is the same innate life force as pantheism, or “God in everything” that runs like a thread through Buddhism and Stoicism. The Symbolists were interested in the theory of “correspondences”, analogy and duality, “synesthesia”, having senses evoke and overlap different senses as total works of art, and “syncretism, a melding of religious beliefs”. Through symbols, artists and writers could express a personal “higher” reality. These

notions are the beginning of abstract art.<sup>10</sup> Efforts to find the underlying “Ur-form,” the biomorphic shape used to suggest the primal or original shape, and the recurrence of sacred geometry interested the artists and philosophers.<sup>11</sup> Another interesting theory that encompassed the spiritual and transformation was Eliphas Lévi’s theory of “astral light.” This primordial light was the vehicle of all ideas, and the mother of all forms. It is saturated with images, and because imagination and soul affect these reflections, artists accepted it.<sup>12</sup>

Mystical and occult thinking, as well as religious and non-religious leaders, like Emanuel Swedenborg and Helena Blavatsky, spread “theosophy,” or divine wisdom. “There was a surge of interest in Theosophy and other related philosophical and metaphysical systems because they represented attempts to make sense of all aspects of an individual’s life, projected an appealing vision of an afterlife, and stood outside established religious institutions.”<sup>13</sup> Usually these concepts include additional theories to define the values, yet the basic premise of a vital life force uniting all in harmony underlies these spiritual perceptions. Many abstract artists of the modern era were influenced by Theosophy.

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<sup>10</sup> Tuchman, "Hidden Meanings in Abstract Art.", p 21

<sup>11</sup> Ibid p.19

<sup>12</sup> Geurt Imanse, "Occult Literature in France," *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*, eds. Edward Weisbeger and Los Angeles Count Museum of Art (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986).

<sup>13</sup> Tuchman, "Hidden Meanings in Abstract Art."p.19

These preceding influences of spirituality culminated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when painters in Europe and the United States began to make



completely abstract art. Wassily Kandinsky's commitment to abstraction corresponded with his convictions about the spiritual. His book, *On the Spiritual in Art*, published in 1912, is considered one of the most influential documents by artist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>14</sup> He chose the acoustic term "Klang" to express the

soul in art. The vibrations of sound, color and form were metaphors for cosmic order and the manifestations of nature.<sup>15</sup>

The 20<sup>th</sup> century created its own terms for the depiction of the spiritual divinity in nature: ancestral, cosmic, sublime, metaphysical, and equivalents. Just as pantheism evoked some of the works of Post Impressionism, Symbolism, and Romanticism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was evidenced in the later art movements of Fauvism, Transcendentalism, Futurism, the Avant-Guard, Minimalism and, especially, Pure Abstract. The abstract creations defined impulses toward immaterialization and the invisible was transported into the real and material world.

Approaching the 21<sup>st</sup> century, these same pantheistic ideas of the interconnectedness of all life were expressed in the theory of Gaia.

<sup>14</sup> Tuchman, "Hidden Meanings in Abstract Art."p.34

<sup>15</sup> Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. M T H Sadler (New York: Dover, 1977).p.57

## **Theories of Evolution**

Pantheism does not contradict science or the theories of evolution.

However the vital life force is viewed, as electrons, water, energy, cells or even fire, the philosophy supports scientific accounts. Pantheism is not “inconsistent with what science can show to be true, and does not entail anything that science could show to be false.”<sup>16</sup> Michael Levine explained the position of the pantheist about theistic thought on creation,

Pantheists deny that the creator of persons – or what is responsible for the conditions that made the existence of persons possible – is personal. If evolution can adequately account for persons it seems both false and superfluous to claim that persons were created by something personal. Pantheists view this assumption about creation, along with the theistic concept of deity generally, as anthropocentric and anthropomorphic.<sup>17</sup>

Darwin was not the first to publish a theory about the transformation of life forms. A naturalist, Lamarck, first published his views, *Philosophie Zoologique*, in 1801. In 1780 Goethe wrote in an essay a very early theory of the metamorphosis of species,

If one observes plants and animals in their imperfect state, one sees they are hardly distinguishable. A point of life, rigid, moving or halfway between can hardly be observed through our senses. Whether these first beginnings are determinable and lead over on

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<sup>16</sup> Michael P. Levine, Pantheism: A Non-Theistic Concept of Deity (New York: Routledge, 1994).p.193

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. pg.194

one side to plants through (the effects of) light or on the other to animals through (the effects of) darkness, we ourselves do not have confidence to decide, although opinions and analogies seem to suggest this.

But we can say this much: that out of a relationship that can hardly be analyzed as to what is plant and what animal, creatures gradually emerge in two directions toward perfection, with the plant finally reaching glory in the tree, perduring and rigid, and the animal in human beings, the epitome of



Frantisek Kupka, *Soul of the Lotus*, 1886

Goethe, as a scientist and Germany's most respected poet, was able to synthesize and broadcast his beliefs, influencing many artists, writers and scientists with his theories and pantheistic principles. Important in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe and America was the ability of this idealization to fit with the scientific theories of Charles Darwin's, *Origins of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, which appeared in 1859.

Darwin made two points in his publication. First, he argued from evidence that the species of organisms inhabiting Earth today descended from ancestral species. Then, he proposed a mechanism for evolution that he termed "Natural Selection," that was based on a competitive existence. The basic premise is that a population of organisms can

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<sup>18</sup> Robert J. Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002). P. 478

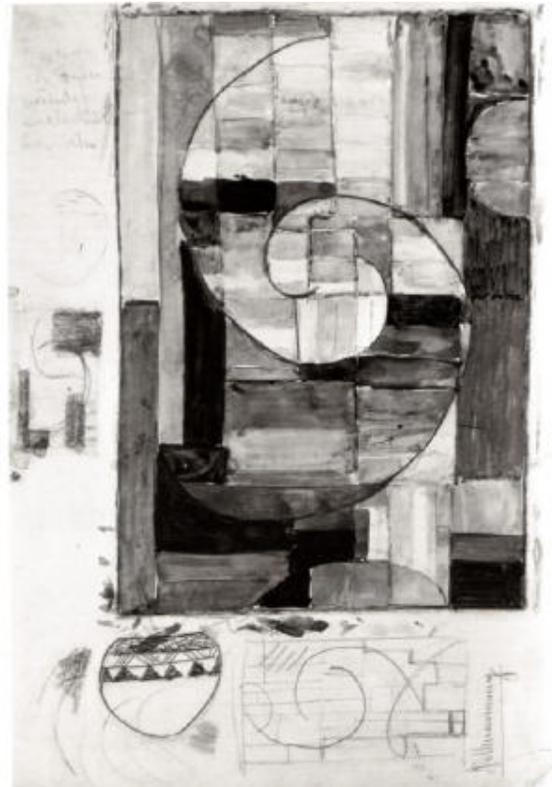
change over generations if individuals having transmissible traits leave more offspring than other individuals. The results are evolutionary adaptation, with inherited characteristics enhancing organisms' survival and reproduction. Natural selection occurs through interactions between the environment and the variability of the individual organisms in a population. For example, the forelimbs of all mammals are constructed from the same skeletal elements. The homologous structures, though diversely adapted, reveal that all mammals descend from a common ancestor.

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Theodoros Stamos *Movement of Plants*, 1945

<sup>19</sup> Stamos's *Movement of Plants* was named for Darwin's book *Power of Movement in Plants* and evokes the stirrings of life in forms held captive through long geological ages. Robert Carleton Hobbs and Gail Levin, Abstract Expressionism, the Formative Years (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981). P. 123

At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, evolutionary biologist, Elisabeth Sahtouris<sup>20</sup> published her theory that the planet and the life forms are both competitive and cooperative. Every living being is part of a larger being and negotiates its self-interest in order to sustain the larger being to which it belongs, a principle at work in all of nature. Sahtouris added, “except in the current human realm” but she hopes humanity can have a new vision of life on earth, a key to survival.<sup>21</sup> The universe is interactions among large and small moving patterns, contributing to each other’s formation; a cosmic unity of process.<sup>22</sup> To Sahtouris evolution revealed a spiraling pattern that repeats itself.



Johannes Itten, *Study for "The Meeting"* 1915-16

On the subject of how life began, Sahtouris diverged from mainstream thought that life was an accident of organic chemistry. She believed original bacterial life was a process, a product of the life-giving source that directs and underlies all of creation, a cosmic consciousness, much

<sup>20</sup> Sahtouris is an evolution biologist with a doctorate in brain science and taught at MIT

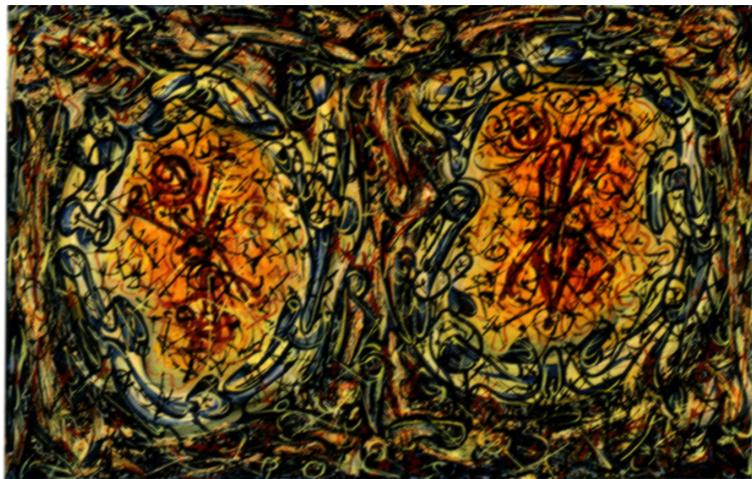
<sup>21</sup> Louise Palmer, "Cooperative Evolution: Why the Human Species Will Finally Grow Up," Spirituality & Health, December (2005).

<sup>22</sup> Elisabet Sahtouris, Earthdance: Living Systems in Evolution (Lincoln: iUniverse, 2000).

like the Gaia theory of the origin of the world. James Lovelock, the scientist responsible in the 1970s for Gaia hypothesis, explained it as a “theory in which all life and all the material parts of the Earth’s surface make up a single system, a kind of mega-organism, a living planet.”<sup>23</sup>

Sahtouris, in the late 1990s, enlarged on Gaia with her evolutionary theory. It is based on three main concepts – autopoiesis, holarchy, and the maturation cycle. In an alive, self-directed planet they operate simultaneously and can be seen, both visibly and invisibly, in every aspect of creation:<sup>24</sup>

Autopoiesis, Greek for self-creation or self-production, defines a living entity that continually creates itself and self-organizes in



Alfonso Ossorio, *Dividing Cells* 1951

relationship to other entities.<sup>25</sup> Like the cells of the human body keep their form while constantly creating and replacing parts, growing as well as dividing to offspring cells. Something is alive if it is continually recreating itself and its parts.

<sup>23</sup> James Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>24</sup> Sahtouris, *Earthdance: Living Systems in Evolution*.

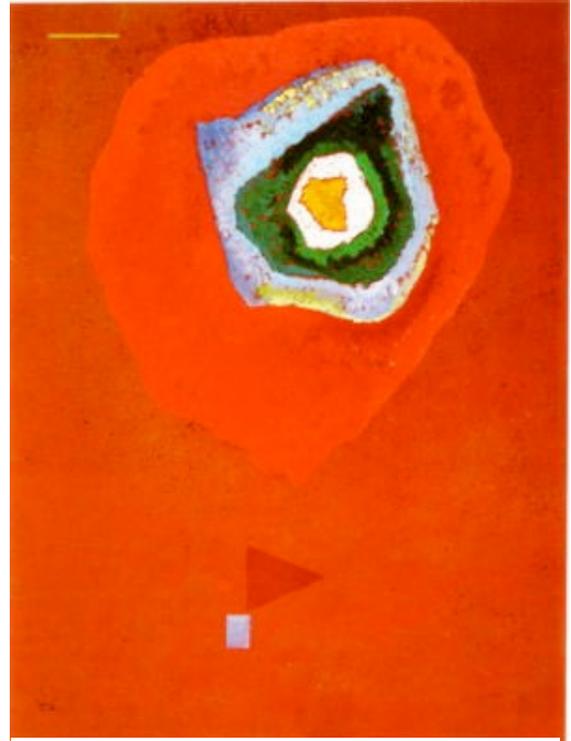
<sup>25</sup> Palmer, "Cooperative Evolution: Why the Human Species Will Finally Grow Up."

Holarchy is a term originally coined by Arthur Koester to represent a whole made of its own parts that is also part of a larger whole.

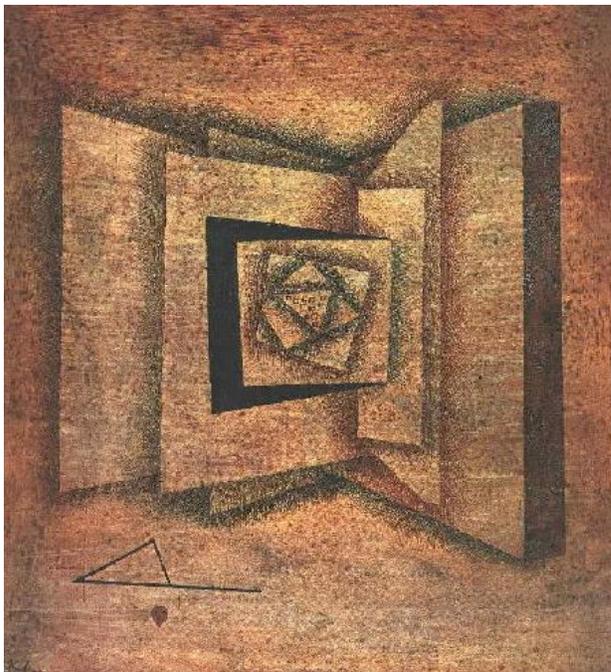
Something that is whole in itself, but is embedded in a larger whole, ie, the earth, a holon, as part of the holon solar system, which is part of the galaxy, another holon.

Maturation cycle guides the evolutionary process, repeating itself

infinitely at all levels of creation. It starts as a state of unity or oneness.



Wassily Kandinsky, *Cool Concentration* 1930



Paul Klee,, *Open Book* 1915

Separation and division occur where the vulnerability to competition and possible extinction exist. In order to survive, negotiations follow and cooperation prevails, giving rise to a higher level of unity and organization.<sup>26</sup> Then the cycle begins again.

<sup>26</sup> Palmer, "Cooperative Evolution: Why the Human Species Will Finally Grow Up."

Sahtouris tells the whole story in her book *Earthdance*. The Big Bang created swirling white forms of energy, out of which heavy and light particles formed. From this moving stardust the thickest areas created proto-galaxies, which evolved into richer patterns and



Frantisek Kupka, *Abstraction* 1930

parts, eventually forming planets. An intelligent pattern unfolds as soon as the universe whirled itself into being and has continued as such.

The first cycle of maturation begins with the first 2 billion years of Earth's life when bacteria were the only life form. Using fermentation,



Georgia O'Keefe, *Blue I* 1917

the bacteria, or microbes, broke up molecules for energy; Sahtouris called them bubblers. When they multiplied and used up the food molecules they made innovations. In crisis of extinction, bubblers found a way to trap sunlight to make food and DNA using photosynthesis and rebuilding molecules. This gave rise to a new type of bacteria, the blue-greens.

The pattern was continued by the blue-greens building large colonies into muddy masses that transformed onto rock and eventually, continental shelves. Another crisis occurred as the waste created by the blue-greens, pure oxygen, was toxic to themselves. The bacteria



Piet Mondrian, *The Sea* 1912

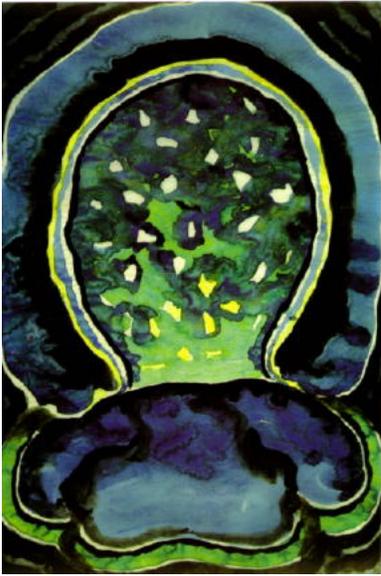
resolved it by recycling this waste. Some developed enzymes to make the oxygen harmless to themselves and others discovered a way to make food or burn oxygen, these Sahtouris called breathers. Respiration caused waste as well, but the cycle continued as the waste, carbon dioxide, was needed for photosynthesis, helping not only the blue-greens, but the bubblers and breathers as well. These bacteria united and organized until the blue-greens evolved into chloroplasts in plants and the breathers turned into mitochondria, which are found in the cells of almost everything from fungi to humans.<sup>27</sup>

Sahtouris cites the work of Lynn Margulis, who worked with Lovelock on Gaian theory, as she explains further about bacteria:

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<sup>27</sup> Sahtouris, *Earthdance: Living Systems in Evolution*.

They developed different lifestyles, competed with each other, and



Georgia O'Keeffe, *Abstraction* 1917

provoked worldwide crises such as global hunger and pollution, dramatically changing the Earth. At each stage of their evolution, they made innovations and eventually evolved from an exploitative, selfish existence to a harmonious, cooperative one. From these collaborations they eventually created a large, collective, nucleated cell from which all other life evolved. It was the biggest step – or leap – in evolution, occurring about halfway through Earth's life.<sup>28</sup>

To explain how this happened, Sahtouris compared the complex DNA information trade to the World Wide Web. Opening cellular walls, slipping DNA back and forth, which she called original sex, the bacteria became more varied and more interdependent as they assigned themselves different functions. This insured their autonomy as well as holonomy on Earth.

Challenged again by overpopulation and food, breathers invaded bubblers and fed from them.

Eventually they evolved into cooperative systems,



Wassily Kandinsky, *Capricious Forms* 1937

<sup>28</sup> Palmer, "Cooperative Evolution: Why the Human Species Will Finally Grow Up."

sharing survival strategies and creating a new life form that was thousands of times bigger than any one bacterium. Every plant, animal and human evolved as colonies from this multi-creature cell, with mitochondria as energy generators and a nucleus containing a vast library of information from DNA.



Paul Klee, *Guarded Palnt* 1937

The evolutionary theory is the art Sahtouris created, the spirituality was to paint nature as an intelligent, learning organization with abundance and balance. It illustrated the cooperation necessary for evolution to occur and the ideas of unity and interdependence's of all life forms, from



Ad Rinhardt, *Untitled*, 1946

microcosm to macrocosm. She related her personal realization while fishing one night:

...I would swirl the grappling hooks and nets in the water and see the bioluminescent plankton. Up above, the black sky was full of tiny stars just as the water seemed to be. There was no horizon, no division. As above, so below. I was halfway between macrocosm and microcosm. These images came to me while I was reading all kinds of philosophers and scientists, as well as Greek drama. It was the ancient Greeks who really understood that whatever humans

did impacted all beings and levels of the cosmos, that everything affected - and reflected – everything else. A lot came together that way. I meditated a lot, asking Nature whether what I was reading was true.<sup>29</sup>

Sahtouris pointed out that humans are one of the younger species on Earth, and mid-stage in their evolution. They can learn from the natural world that a shift from competition to cooperation is possible. She asks, “Why do we think it’s so hard to weave 6 billion people into one global family when a single human body is made up of more than 100 trillion cells?”<sup>30</sup> It is part of the maturation cycle of the species and the key to survival. She adds, “It’s thrival, not survival.”<sup>31</sup> It is here that Sahtouris was most like an artist as she uses the suitability of her knowledge to its spiritual atmosphere for social evolution.



Jackson Pollock, *Autumn Rhythm: Number 30* 1950

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid p. 60

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p. 75

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

### **Abstraction in Art**

*“In order to approach the spiritual in art, one employs reality as little as possible... This explains logically why primary forms are employed. Since these forms are abstract, an abstract art comes into being.”*

Piet Mondrian, Sketchbook II, 1914

Abstraction is not an absolute term; it may refer to art that stylizes, simplifies or distorts the subjects or objects of the real world. Pure abstraction, nonobjective or nonrepresentational art will not have recognizable form, but will have content. The movement of abstraction in art was a trend toward organic life, nature, as opposed to social life. It was often a search for wisdom or the natural order of the universe. Stripping to the essence while maintaining nature’s self-organizational patterns and laws, to serve the purpose of the work.

As artists moved away from representational art toward abstraction, preferring symbolic color and sign over reality, and ideas over direct observation, they did not move away from meaning. Efforts were made to develop deeper or more levels of meaning, and the most pervasive was the spiritual.<sup>32</sup> Art critic Donald Kuspier called art that makes use of abstraction “silent art,” generating a spiritual atmosphere. Without the diverting outer layer, it presents the inner necessity.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Tuchman, "Hidden Meanings in Abstract Art." P.17

<sup>33</sup> Philip W. Jackson, John Dewey and the Lessons of Art (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). P. 115

Not all abstract art is spiritual in nature, like color or compositional studies. Abstract art is usually misunderstood or considered meaningless by most viewers. “Only an open mind to the qualities of

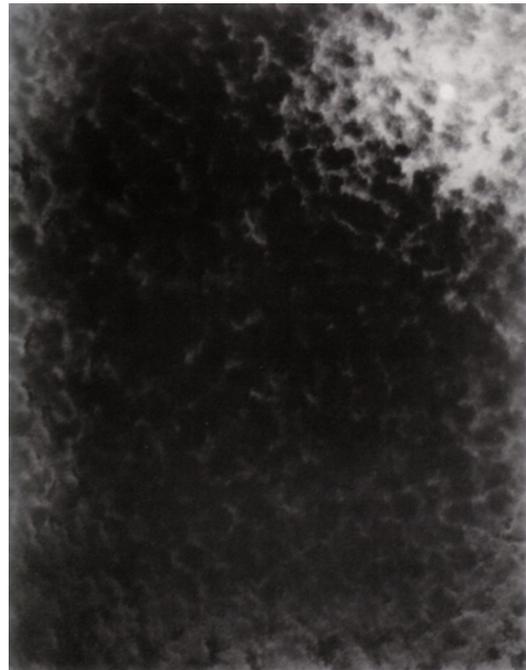


Joan Miró, *Passage de l'Égyptienne*

things, with a habit of discrimination, sensitized by experience and responsive to new forms and ideas, will be prepared for the enjoyment” of abstract art is the view of art historian Meyer Schapiro.<sup>34</sup> Some viewers draw parallels to the art of children, the insane and outsider art, or art brut, and

understandably so, these artists view the world differently. Paul Klee, Jean Dubuffet and Joan Miró used this type of vision in their work.

Like spirituality, abstraction took its place in art forms other than painting during the last century. John Cage is venerated for his abstraction of music or sound composition to its essence. The abstract and sublime, “that which transcends limits of knowledge and discourse because it is an experience of pleasure, pain, joy and anxiety unknowable and



Alfred Steiglitz, *Equivalent, Set G*. 1929

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p.117

unrepresented”<sup>35</sup> is reached in photography, the conceptual arts, sculpture, film and transitory installations. The mobiles of Alexander Calder fit the parameters and used the techniques of primary color, organic shape, line and synesthesia, with rhythm and awe. Images of metamorphosis flourish in the blown glass works of Dale Chihuly.



Gino Severini, *Spherical Expansion of Light* 1913-14

There are myriad ways to express the spiritual in abstracted art. The laws of nature can be depicted as balance and harmony, giving back for all that is taken and showing all aspects of nature in non-physical communication, interconnected and interdependent. The artist must first use imagination if interested in revealing the invisible onto the flat picture surface. Some artists insist on symbolic color, usually primaries to express the essence of color, pure, not blended. Vibration, light, cosmic energy and auras are revealed using aspects of color and its textures. Color-field paintings using only the nuances of a single color are meditative and require an extended look. In abstract art, much can be revealed with a single line.

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<sup>35</sup>Jean-Francois Lyotard, "Theory for Art History," *Theory for Art History*, ed. Jae Emerling, Theory4: Theory for Religious Studies (New York: Routledge, 2005).

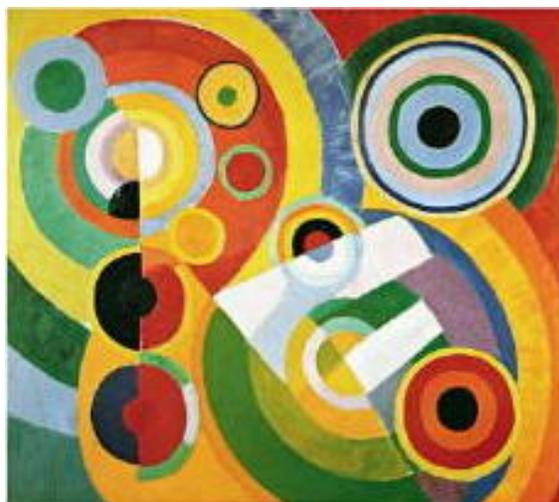


Hilma Af Klint, *No. 1*, 1906

Theosophy is based on geometric shapes as the ideal form for spiritual communication and is employed in many abstract works. Loose curvilinear forms are elemental and cellular in the biomorphic approach to envision organic processes and development. The circle is symbolic of several aspects of the cosmos and

universality. Mandalas are Hindi and Buddhist symmetrical images, usually circular, but sometimes square or floral, used to assist concentration and meditation. It is an analogy for moving inward into the spiritual self.<sup>36</sup> The circle is an evolutionary and cosmic allegory as well. In his essay *Circles*, Emerson compares the eye with the circle,

The eye is the first circle, the horizon which it forms is the second; and throughout nature this primary figure is repeated without end...Our life is an apprenticeship to the truth, that around every circle another can be drawn; that there is no end to nature, but



Robert Delaunay, *Joie de Vivre*, 1931

<sup>36</sup> Robert Galbreath, "A Glossary of Spiritual and Related Terms," *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*, eds. Edward Weisberger and Los Angeles County Museum of Art (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986). P. 375

every end is a beginning; that there is always another dawn risen on the mid-noon, and under every deep a lower deep ocean.<sup>37</sup>

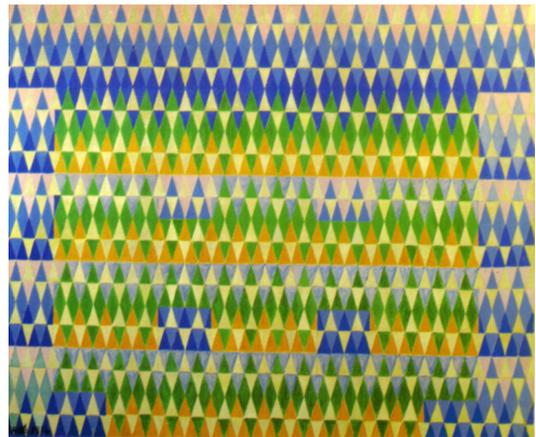


Kurt Schwitters, *Abstract Composition* 1923-25

Another form or line used to suggest vital force and divinity is the spiral and sacred geometry. The golden section is based on perfect growth and allied to mathematical equations as it relates to phi. It is a magical proportion that spirals into infinity and represents many of nature's organizational structures, in surprising ways,

including the formation of the galaxy and the arrangement of seeds in the sunflower. It is a symbol for the cosmos, continuity and organic unity and the idea of Sahtouris' autopoiesis.

Transformation and the juxtaposing of plants and animal parts symbolize the enigmas of evolution, suggesting the underlying congruencies between vegetal and animal morphologies. Duality and correspondence, the same above as it is



Giacomo Balla, *Iridescent Interpenetration* 1914

<sup>37</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Circles", *Essays: First and Second Series* (New York: Library of America, 1990). P. 184

below, reflections and mutations are all representative of the natural states of evolutionary theory. There is no end to the imagery that can be created by the abstraction of the laws and relationships of nature combined with meaningful concepts to express the sacred in growth and survival.

### **Abstract on the Spiritual Evolution**

*“What constitutes the real unity of our age is the reality of an abstraction of faith that all phenomena can submit to generalization. In other words, we are really capturing the profundity of the Greeks, who accepted the unknown as a positive element of reality.”*

Mark Rothko<sup>38</sup>

Abstract art is ready for a metamorphosis. If the aspects of spirituality in the form of Theosophy are added to the concepts of a new theory on evolution, *Earthdance*, and imagined, as an abstract artist must to make his creation, Kandinsky may be insightful. He quoted Madame Blavatsky as she ends her book in his *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, written in early 1900s in the early cycle of the maturation of abstract art,

*“...eternal truth. The new torchbearer of truth will find the minds of men prepared for his message, a language ready for him in which to clothe the new truths he brings, an organization awaiting his arrival, which will remove the merely mechanical, material obstacles and difficulties from his path. The earth will be a heaven in the twenty-first century in comparison with what it is now.”*<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Mark Rothko and Introduction by Christopher Rothko, eds., The Artist's Reality: Philosophies of Art (New Haven: Yale Press, 2004). P.27

<sup>39</sup> Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art.p.13-14

Abstraction of art and pantheism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have come together and formed a new entity of “spiritual abstract art” that is at the beginning of a new maturation cycle. It is in its self-serving stage ready to either survive, or thrive. It can come together, as an entity that continually recreates itself and organizes with other entities within the holons of art and spirituality. Maybe it is time for the newly transformed abstract spirituality that unifies all in nature to spiral out into the cosmos, a harmoniously unified network of integrally related parts, to understanding the universality of the visible and the invisible. Just imagine what could evolve in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



Oscar Fischinger, *Motion Painting No. 1* 1947

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