

The Esoteric Botany of Hilma af Klint

From a lecture delivered by David Adams, Ph.D., March 8, 2020, at Lightforms, Hudson, NY

We are so pleased to be able to show a number of artworks by Swedish pioneering artist Hilma af Klint for the first time in North America here at Lightforms in Hudson, New York. Hilma af Klint was – and is – a visual artist like no other. Over the last several years she has become an international artworld sensation—something difficult to do when you’ve been dead 75 years! Historically, at a previously unacknowledged early date she painted in an “abstract” or non-representational mode before almost anyone else previously recognized (such as Kandinsky, Kupka, Malevich, and Mondrian), she made large-scale paintings on the studio floor well before the Abstract Expressionists, she used automatic drawing and writing long before the Surrealists, and she demonstrated the groundbreaking original creativity of a female artist highly unusual, if not unprecedented, for her time.

Tonight I want to make some observations about some of the artwork of Hilma af Klint from the perspectives of theosophy and, especially, anthroposophy. Even though af Klint joined the Theosophical Society already in 1889 and was very interested in anthroposophy for the last 30+ years of her life and a dedicated follower

of it for the last 20+ years of her life, this is a perspective either missing from the dozen or so books and hundreds of online articles published about her in the last 6-7 years or it is treated superficially and incorrectly. So hopefully my talk tonight will be one small step toward correcting this. If you have no previous acquaintance with either of these worldviews, some of what I will say here will probably sound rather strange. But this is the world of understanding, experience, belief, and imagination in which af Klint lived and created her artwork, so it offers us the best hope of understanding her often puzzling paintings.

I will need to go over aspects of her biography to set what I have to say in a proper context. Hilma af Klint (1862-1944) was born near Stockholm, Sweden, 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, 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, where she worked until 1908, mostly painting conventional naturalistic landscapes and portraits, which she exhibited and sold, such as figure 2.



Fig. 1. Hilma af Klint in her studio, 1895

She also created many careful botanical studies of plants and flowers (figure 3) and worked as an illustrator of animal surgery techniques at a Stockholm Veterinary Institute (1900-01).



Fig. 2. Hilma af Klint Summer Landscape 1888 oil on canvas

But af Klint had another stream of interest and activity in her young life in addition to painting. Already as a child she had experiences of an invisible spiritual world (apparently a degree of natural 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 wrote that she tried to convince the soul of her ten-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.

Then in 1896 – fourteen years later – 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



Fig. 3. Hilma af Klint Thistle 1890s watercolor

consisting of a prayer, meditation, New Testament Bible study, and ending with a séance while kneeling before an altar with a triangle and cross, during which they contacted disembodied spirits and spiritual guides.

In our media-saturated world historical memory is often very short. At the time of af Klint in the late nineteenth century the popular and fashionable spiritualist movement (or, we could say, experiment) had eight million followers in the U.S. and Europe.

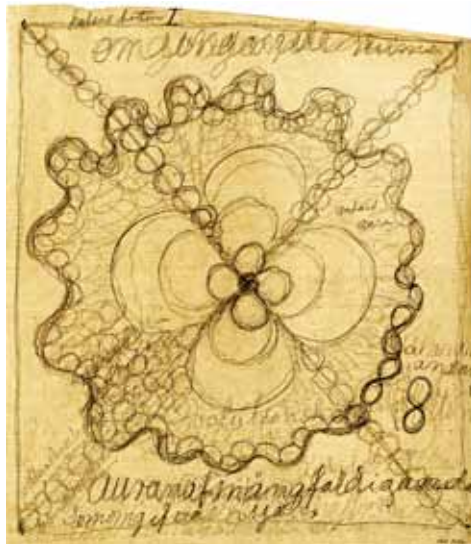


Fig. 4. *The Five* Untitled 1903

At least one of the crosses *The Five* used on the altar was a white rose-cross with a glass rose in the middle on a three-level base, and they seemed to feel the communications and guidance they received were associated with the Rosicrucian stream of esoteric spirituality. Taking turns serving as trance-mediums, they also received many messages via automatic drawing and writing. Over time, various messages, images, and symbols were recorded in a series of five notebooks and nine sketchbooks documenting their weekly séances (books that af Klint kept her whole life and used as a resource). Figure 4 shows an example of one page from these “messages.”

By 1903 the at-first somewhat skeptical af Klint had become the group’s chief medium. From age 18 onward she read widely in Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, Rosicrucian, Hermetic, and Theosophical texts, and her eventual library consisted of many theosophical and anthroposophical books as well as other occult literature.

The Five found themselves in regular, repeated contact with a number of named spirits, 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 Guides or High Masters, whom af Klint tells us in one of her notebooks, are “the Masters of Mysteries,” “an exalted and holy brotherhood, known to all mystics,” and “servants of Christ who reside in Tibet.”¹

As a short, thin, but serious, alert, grounded, and independent personality, Hilma was said to be able to

enter and leave the spiritual astral world at will. A vegetarian, she lived a simple ascetic life devoted to art and spiritual matters. She normally wore black. In 1907 she wrote, “I have been sent to work for the Rosicrucian world of ideas.”² At her death in 1944 she left well over 1,200 paintings and at least 127 handwritten and illustrated notebooks/sketchbooks (over 26,000 pages of writing, mainly in Swedish). Given the huge quantity and often enigmatic nature of her artwork, my presentation tonight should better be called just “*An Introduction to the Esoteric Botany of Hilma af Klint.*” How did these extensive artworks – a few of which are on display here – come about?



Fig. 5. *Hilma af Klint Primordial Chaos, No. 2, 1906*

A notebook entry by af Klint 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.”³ She was to depict in paintings “the immortal aspect of Man” and paint “a message to humanity.” She gave up her more realistic painting, underwent a ten-month 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. These preparatory works included the series of 26 small paintings that became the *Primordial Chaos Series*, seemingly about the creation of the world or earlier phases of human evolution, for which she received detailed



Fig. 6. *Hilma af Klint Primordial Chaos, No. 1, 1906*

instructions from her spirit guides and passively allowed her hand to be guided in a somewhat looser style by these spirits (see figs. 5-6).

A note in The Five's séance book for November 7, 1906, speaks of her interpreting "the color hearing and seeing tones," and says of her method: "Amaliel draws a sketch, which H. [Hilma] then paints."⁴ A

notebook entry from 1907 concerning another small part of the 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."⁵

In the freely painted *Primordial Chaos Series* she explored principles of polarity – light and dark, good and evil, male and female – and their possible reunification or transcendence. In these and later works the letter "W" represents matter, while the letter "U" represents spirit, with "WU" indicating a union, or transcendence, of the dualities.⁶ (see figures 7-8)

Some of the abstract symbolic language she began to employ in these and later paintings was already received by The Five between 1896 and 1906: the snail and/or spiral, serpent, rose (and rose cross), lilies, a wide array of



Fig. 7. Hilma af Klint, Primordial Chaos, No. 12, 1906-07. Words mean Middle Ages and the Present.



Fig. 8. Hilma af Klint, Primordial Chaos, No. 13, 1906-07

botanical imagery, especially winding, twisting tendrils, an elaborate system of diagrammed dualities, symbolic words and letters, and certain expressive geometrical forms. Plants for her could also serve as a model for the ideal of overcoming/reuniting sexual difference.

Hermaphroditism is the norm in plants as among snails, and plants express a kind of purity of natural life forces without contamination by human or animal passions and desires. 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."⁷ Some of her diagrammatic like pictures recall those used in theosophy. For example, see Figure 9 from Helena Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled*.⁸

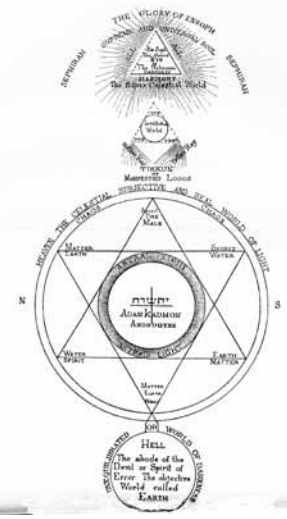


Fig. 9. H.P. Blavatsky, Fold-out diagram from *Isis Unveiled*



Fig. 10. Hilma af Klint Primordial Chaos #11 1906-1907

As Klint was told and clearly felt she had an important higher calling to create these paintings.

She was able to fulfill her original promise from May 1907 to April 1908, when she painted *The Ten Largest*,



Fig. 11. Hilma af Klint *Ten Largest*, 1906-1907, at the Guggenheim Museum, New York City 2018

taking about four days for each painting, executed in tempera on paper glued to canvas, and each about 10' 5" high by nearly 8' wide. They express The four great periods of human life (see figures 11-13).

Keeping all these paintings secret, 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."⁹ In another notebook entry she wrote, "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."¹⁰

Let's look in some detail at a couple of these early paintings with fairly clear figural esoteric spiritual representations, which can help us to understand some of her symbolism in more non-representational paintings:

In Figure 14 inside a multi-colored ellipse on a black background, a red snail (representing spiritual evolutionary development, as does the spiral in Blavatsky's writings) is projected across a human figure standing before a large white



Fig. 12. Hilma af Klint, Ten Largest #3 Youth 2007



Fig. 13. Hilma af Klint, Ten Largest #7 Adulthood 2007



Fig. 14. Hilma af Klint No. 1, Group 8, Series US 1913

cross. Starting from and centered in the lowest or "root" chakra, a spiraling red line arises and intersects the other upper chakras of the central yellow-blue figure. A half-yellow/half-blue lemniscate (which often is a sign for eternity) radiates from middle, or heart chakra. Perhaps representing the two-petal, "third-eye" chakra, small blue and yellow lines radiate out from each side of the head, with similar red rays emerging above, probably indicating the upper or "crown" chakra. Above, a blue woman and a yellow man sit on the crossbeam of the cross looking in different directions, each holding a small spiral in their left hand and connected to the white spiral/snail held up by the main figure below (which itself is encircled along with the head by an oval of pure white lines emerging from the heart chakra). Two divine white hands seem to reach down from above, connected to a red substance that either falls from them or rises up to them.

Af Klint began to use many unusual color schemes in these sometimes figural paintings, perhaps imitated from her spiritual visions, and also with certain symbolic meanings. For example, she later described a "bluish pink color" as indicating "trusting in previous incarnations."¹¹ In all her work blue stands for the female principle and yellow for the male principle – a basic color polarity according to Goethe's color theory, which she studied.



Fig. 15. Hilma af Klint Group 6, Evolution, #4, 1908

Again in Figure 15 above we see a polarity of yellow male figure and female figure with blue contours, on either side of large interpenetrated snails/spirals (large blue one and smaller yellow one in center). Above the man, who is holding a chalice, hover two combined black-white snails, reflected in chalice, which suggests an indirect, reflected awareness of the spiritual reality. The more intuitive woman touches the feelers of snail and holds a smaller snail to her ear. A counterclockwise spiral or snail seems to indicate the masculine power of

thought, while a clockwise spiral indicates the feminine power of emotion or intuition.

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 two-volume *The Secret Doctrine* as well as a number of western philosophers. 1908 was also the year of her first meeting with Rudolf Steiner, then the leader of the German Section of the Theosophical Society. In April of that year after giving some lectures in Stockholm that we suspect af Klint attended, Steiner was lecturing a few days later in Oslo, Norway, when af Klint invited and managed to convince him to come back to Stockholm to view her secret paintings in her studio and advise her, offering to pay his travel costs.¹² She 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 a few things about some of the paintings and their symbolism and confirmed that at least certain paintings "belonged to the astral world," she seems to have been generally disappointed by his visit. Steiner also told her that figure 16 was a kind of spiritual self-portrait.



Fig. 16. Hilma af Klint Group VI, Evolution #15 from the Seven-Pointed Star Series 1908, oil on canvas

Why might Steiner have not been more enthusiastic about her work? I want to briefly suggest three reasons:

1. Steiner objected to her working passively and mediumistically as guided by spirits and apparently encouraged her instead to consciously develop her own spiritual faculties through disciplined meditation 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 apparently predicted that her paintings would not be understood for

at least fifty years. This comment seemed to help her develop the attitude that these paintings only belonged to the future, when human beings might be ready to accept and understand them, and should in the meantime largely be kept secret.

2. Steiner said on Sept. 4, 1913: "in everything that a medium writes – whether it is from a trained medium or from a natural medium – and also where someone feels compelled to write something automatically," the evil tempter spirit *Ahriman* is at work. "[*Ahriman*] wants . . . to make things fixed in writings or symbols."¹³ By contrast, "manifestations of figures, heads of light, etc., produced by a medium are incited by *Lucifer* [the polar opposite tempter spirit of humanity]."¹⁴



Fig. 18. Hilma af Klint Primordial Chaos #15, 1906-1907

Af Klint's paintings up to that point, as innovative as they may have been for their time in the artworld, clearly illustrated both types of mediumistic unhealthy directions that Steiner spoke about:

A. Symbols & Writing (see fig. 17) and
B. Figures of Light (see fig. 18).

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." – and many want to try to influence human beings.¹⁵



Fig. 17. Hilma af Klint Painting in Notebook #1173, August 1907

3. This studio visit in Stockholm was only a bit over a year after Steiner's surprising introduction at the 1907 Congress of the Federation of

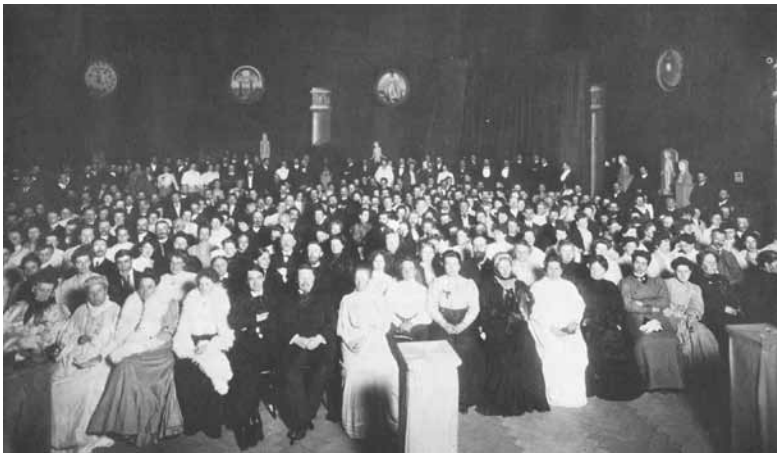


Fig. 19. Photograph of the Theosophical Society Congress, Munich, 1907

European Sections of the Theosophical Society in Munich of artistic work as essential to a modern mystery culture like the Theosophical Society (see fig. 19, showing in the background Steiner's "apocalyptic seals and painted columns mounted on walls covered with red cloth).

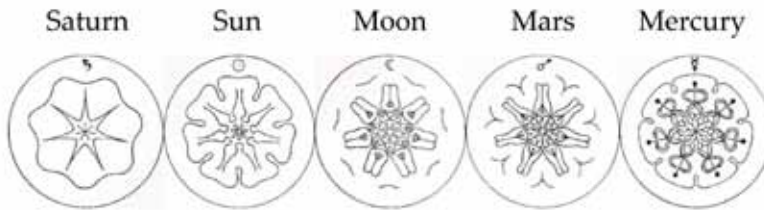


Fig. 20. Rudolf Steiner, Planetary Seals, 1907 – first five seals redrawn from Munich Congress program

Among other things, this involved introducing the "musical" principle of metamorphosis of form (recalling the inaugural exhibition at Lightforms), such as the five "planetary seals" printed on the Congress program that Steiner said were drawn from the spiritual "occult script" (see figure 20 above), the distinction between traditional esoteric symbols and a modern contemplative, qualitative

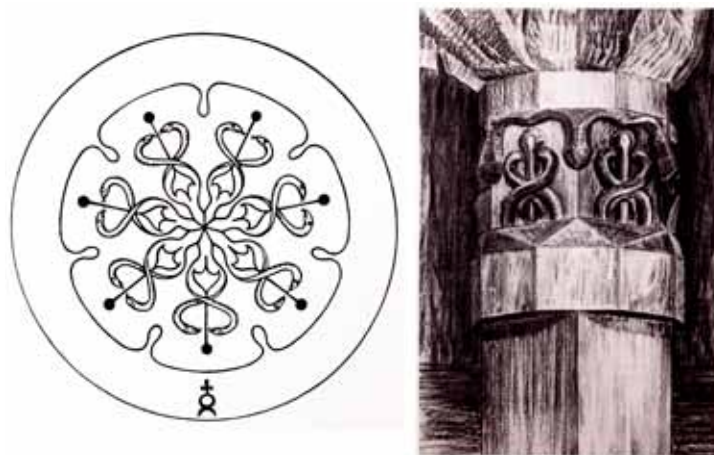


Fig. 21. Rudolf Steiner, Mercury Seal with Mercury Column Capital in First Goetheanum, Dornach, showing how a "section" of the seal was used for the capital design. Image from Rex Raab, ed., *Sieben Kapitelle aus dem grossen Kuppelraum vom ersten Goetheanum als Offenbarer von Stützkraften: Einführung und Zeichnungen* (Dornach: Verlag am Goetheanum, 1995).

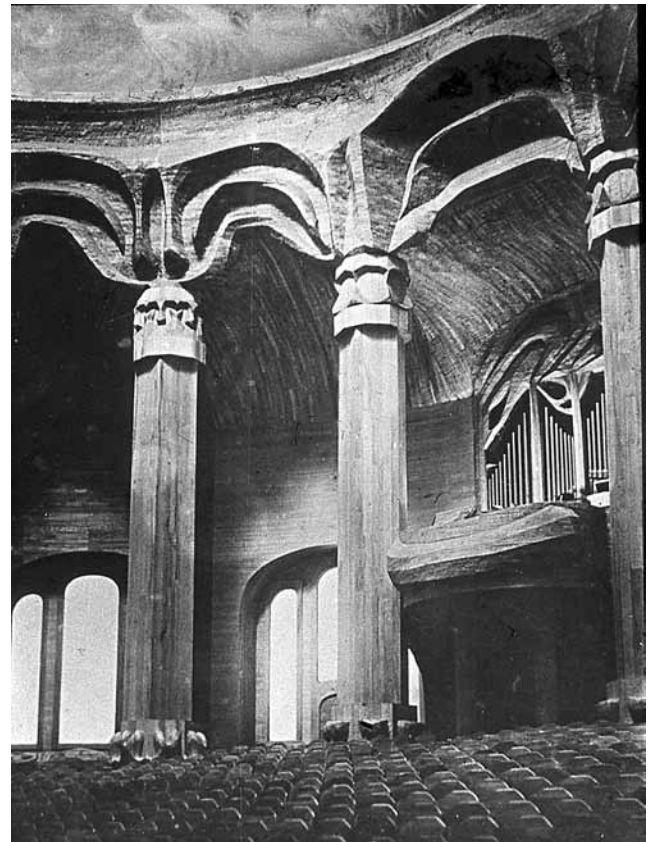


Fig. 22. Rudolf Steiner, First Goetheanum, Dornach, interior of auditorium looking to rear organ loft, 1913-1922

experiencing of esoteric art more as pure form and color; and the basic layout and features (from what he called "the true temple of the Rosicrucians") of what would eventually between 1914 and 1921 become his First Goetheanum building in Dornach, Switzerland.¹⁶ The work of Klint was channeling then must have seemed pretty far removed from the new artistic impulse Steiner was trying to introduce.

When in 1912 she resumed work on the series of *Paintings for the Temple*, Hilma af Klint steadily modified her method of working. She still would spiritually, clairvoyantly receive inner images or visions, but she then would need to herself interpret and compose these into executed paintings. Her contact with spiritual guides became more free and 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.¹⁷ She continued to work serially and systematically, creating paintings in connected series with subgroups, numbered like scientific research. These works also continued to explore a path toward a harmony between spiritual and material worlds, good and evil, female and male principles, religion and science.

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 from 1912-1919, which includes *The Tree of Knowledge* on exhibit here, had more topical identities (e.g., *The Swan*, *The Dove*, and *The Atom*) and a wide range of symbols. Rudolf Steiner again lectured in Stockholm in both 1912 and 1913, as did Annie Besant, the international leader of the Theosophical Society, and presumably af Klint attended at least some of those events.¹⁸

Now I want to attempt to consider at length some possible meanings of her 1913-15 series of seven paintings *The Tree of Knowledge* (with an eighth painting showing “details” of the seventh one in the series), which probably can be interpreted in various ways.. I will do this mostly by sharing some of the complex things that Helena Blavatsky wrote about this traditional symbol in *The Secret Doctrine*, which we know af Klint was reading around this time as well as adding a few of the rather different but equally complex things Rudolf Steiner said about the meanings of that symbol and the spiritual realities it represented. Of course, traditionally the Tree of Knowledge (of Good and Evil) is usually paired with the symbol of the Tree of Life, as a polarity, starting from the account in Genesis of the two trees in the Garden of Eden. Af Klint’s paintings seem to freely combine her clairvoyant visions of this Tree with diagrammatic depictions typical for Theosophy.

Figure 23 above, the first painting in the series, is richly colored, full of weaving life forces. Note a twelvefold (zodiacal) radiation above from a rose-colored oval (the interior of a chalice) with twelve white disks (white and pale rose being her purest, most spiritual colors, relating also to the colors of the traditional esoteric symbols rose and the lily as well as equivalent to the “w” and “u” symbols, respectively, both conveying “perfection,”¹⁹) and stylized paired-snails/spirals in red below representing a process of spiritual evolution, from which (among others) winding yellow (male principle) and blue (female principle) streams flow upward and around. The two

black and whiter birds also grow smaller and whiter (more pure) as the “tree” ascends.

In *The Secret Doctrine* sometimes Blavatsky mentions the Tree of Knowledge as just one example with similar meaning to other recurring “tree symbols” from ancient religious and mystery-center traditions. For example, she refers to oriental esoteric wisdom traditions that teach the need to raise within oneself the spiritual form of the Tree of Knowledge, the Tau or Cross, focusing on the vital Force that directs its growth within one, forming “the trunk and branches, which, in their turn, bend down on either side symmetrically like the boughs of the *Asvattha*, or the holy tree of Bodhi, sitting under which the Buddha gained enlightenment.²⁰ This Bodhi tree (or fig tree), a Tree of Life, is a real spiritual experience of deep meditation and initiation from almost all ancient Mystery traditions²¹ – such as the ancient Chinese sacred tree called *Sung-Ming Shü*, a combined Tree of Knowledge and Life, under which on the top of the “great mountain” Foh-tchou (the teacher of the Buddha’s doctrines) produced his greatest spiritual miracles; or the *Arasa-Maram*, the banyan tree, also a combined Tree of Knowledge and Tree of Life, sacred with the ancient Hindus,

since the god Vishnu, during one of his incarnations taught humanity higher and scientific knowledge there, and gurus even today are said to initiate their pupils in the mysteries of life and death underneath it.²² In antiquity, Blavatsky writes, the Tree was the universal symbol for sacred and secret knowledge, or also for a scripture or record. The Lipika were the most occult spirits of the universe (beyond even the planetary deities), who were the “scribes” of such supersensible scriptures, or Trees of Knowledge, which were usually guarded by dragons, representing wisdom.²³ The “tree” seems to grow up symmetrically out of the spinal or kundalini column or nervous system of the connected physical and spiritual aspects of human beings, linking the various higher levels of the human constitution. Thus, on a couple of her



Fig. 23. Hilma af Klint Tree of Knowledge #1, 1920s copied from 1913 original, watercolor, gouache, graphite, metallic paint, and ink on paper

original paintings of the Tree of Knowledge series Hilma af Klint later labeled the three supersensible hierarchical levels vertically up the “tree” using the Theosophical terminology of “Ethereic Plane,” “Astral Plane,” and “Mental Plane” (or Devachan) – which are also names associated with the higher “vehicles” or “bodies” of the human constitution (see figure 24 above).

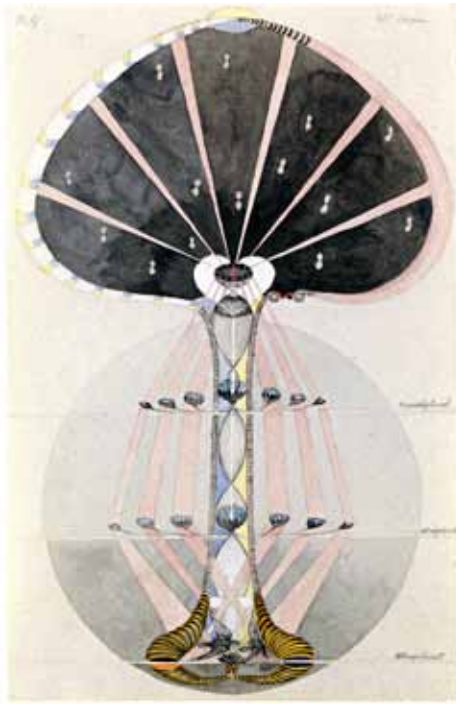


Fig. 24. Hilma af Klint Tree of Knowledge #4 1915, with handwritten texts on lower right side above).

paintings of Klint also indicated that the whole series portrays a condition and process when passion and desire has succeeded in penetrating part of the human soul.²⁴ One interpretation is that this explains the appearance of darker colors (like aura colors) and paired black-white birds active in the tree, which represent profane desire, and are gradually purified through the series in its passage upward through the “human tree.”²⁵ If we follow further through the *Tree of Knowledge* series, we notice how much darker and more brown (less pure) the colors have become in the second painting in the series (figure 25).

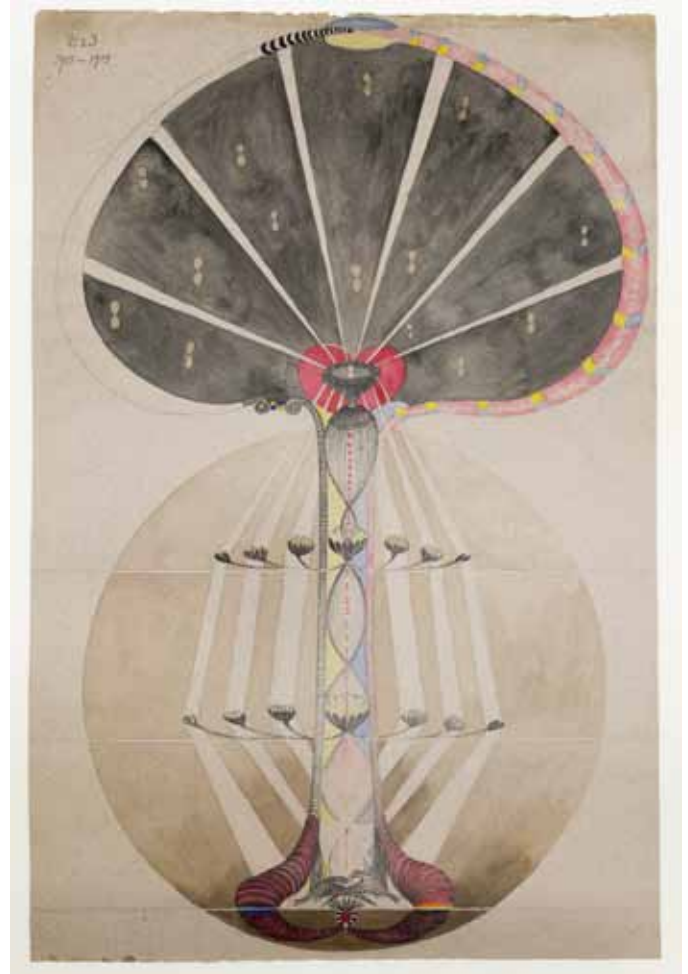


Fig. 26. Hilma af Klint Tree of Knowledge #3 1920s copy of 1915 original

In her explanatory writing on the back of some of these

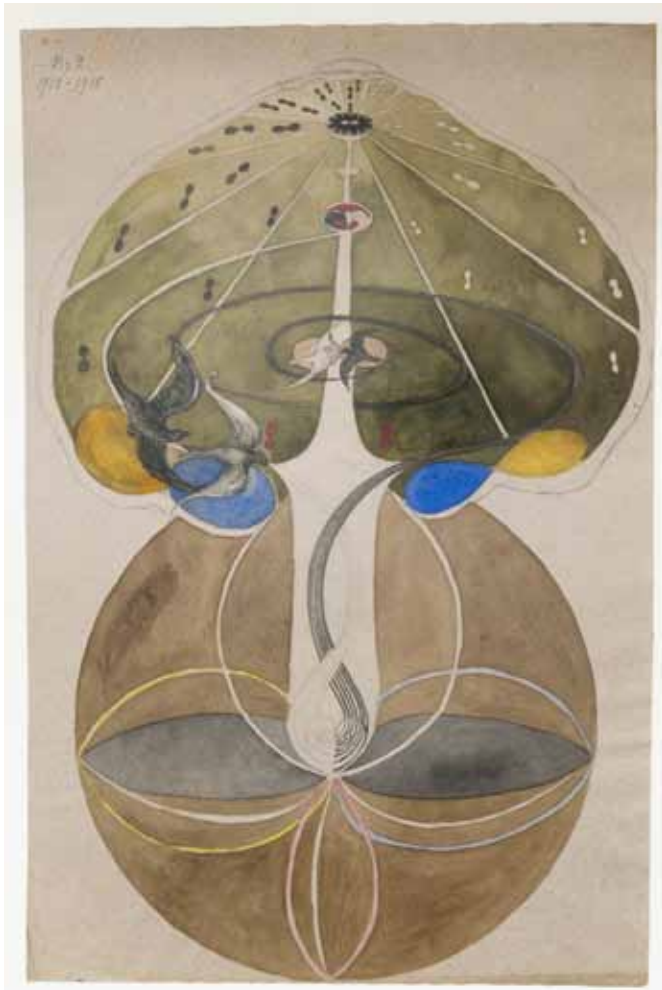


Fig. 25. Hilma af Klint, Tree of Knowledge #2 1920s copied from 1913 original

Paintings #3 and #4 of the series include horizontal rows of seven lotus flowers each (usually shown more vertically) at both the etheric and astral levels, representing the astral sensory organs of the chakras, which can be meditatively developed and activated through inner purification and also radiate through the level of the etheric body. These can also be related to the spheres of influence of the seven planets (of occult tradition) or the seven roses on the rose-cross, a basic Rosicrucian symbol and anthroposophical meditation.

inducing more orderly formations, and the upper Mental Plane area is now a sevenfold “planetary” division or radiation (connected to a lower, darker chalice within a red “oval,”) related to the working of and on the chakras, represented by the seven white radiations, but is also colored black, suggesting it remains unconscious, and seems to be encircled by a rose-white serpent biting its own tail (the uroboros, and a symbol of the

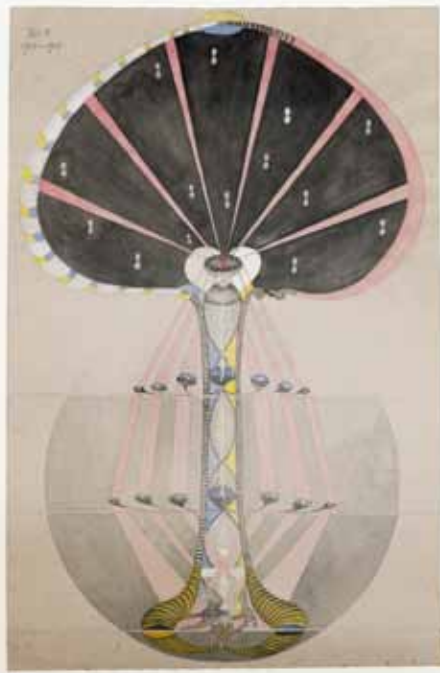


Fig. 27. Hilma af Klint, Tree of Knowledge #4 1920s copied from 1915 original



Fig. 28. Hilma af Klint, Tree of Knowledge #5 1920s copied from 1915 original

wisdom not yet conscious).

In figure 27, the fourth picture of the series, the white radiations have become pale rose-colored.

In the next painting, figure 28 to the left, notice how much cleaner and purer the colors start to become, and how areas of blue and yellow below start in part to combine or unify into green areas, while a twelvefold “Grail” chalice (re-)appears above. Also a multi-colored, lobed “cross” or X-form appears in a small box on the middle-right, perhaps suggesting the first awakening of the higher self.



Fig. 29. Hilma af Klint, Tree of Knowledge #6 1920s copied from 1915 original

In the sixth painting (figure 29 above) we observe the transformation to large green areas below and how black and white angels appear above backed by the purer colors in af Klint’s palette of white and rose. Seven spiral loops below, the multi-colored “cross” form has grown much larger.

In the seventh and final image in the progression (figure 30 next page) the purifying ascension upward continues, now with a white circular area within a large black circle above (which may indicate that this highest region is still



Fig. 30 above. Hilma af Klint, Tree of Knowledge #7. & Fig. 31 below. Tree of Knowledge, #7 Details, both 1920s copied from 1915 originals

largely unconscious). Also, the upper area has become unitary, rather than sevenfold or twelvefold.

In the curious eighth painting in the series, labeled “Details” of number 7 by af Klint (figure 31 lower left), we see a supposed enlargement of barely discernible details from the upper part of image number seven. Note the rising multi-colored ladder formation in the center, with its sixteen ascending steps (representing, I think, what af Klint was told by her spirit guides were how many more incarnations humanity had left to achieve its goal in this age).²⁶ The male and female figures (backed by pale rose and white, no longer blue and yellow ovals) have cooperated to give birth to a “spirit child”/higher self that they lift up between them, with the process being accompanied by several new cross-forms below and “shepherded” by a floating, winged angelic figure shown in a rose-colored aura to the right, so that at the apex of the upper triangle a mature androgynous figure radiates seven rainbow rays from each arm, seemingly rising up toward a cross of “Grail chalices” above.

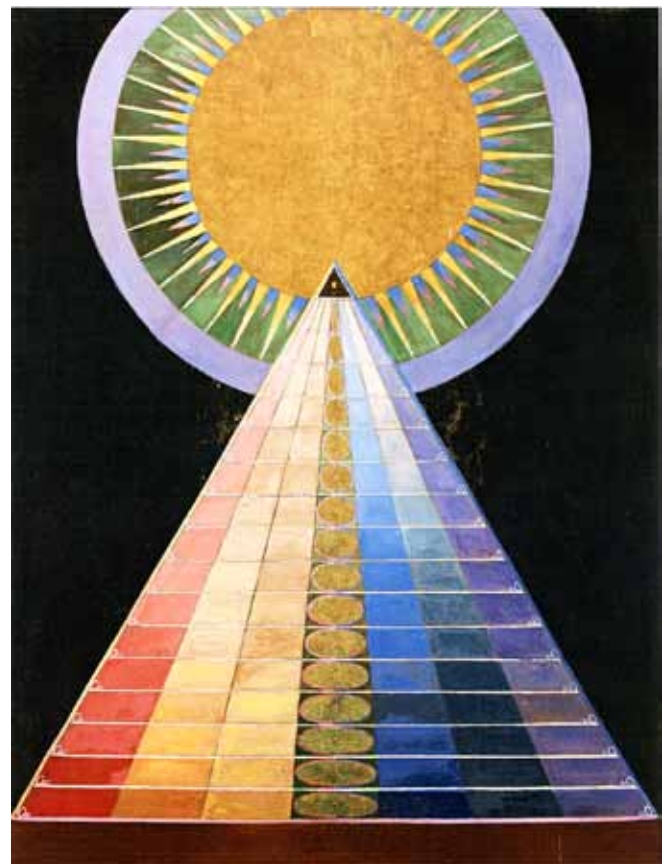


Fig. 32. Hilma af Klint Group X, No. 1 Altarpiece 1915 oil and metal leaf on canvas

Compare this detail of a “rainbow ladder” with one of her three culminating “altarpiece” paintings (figure 32 above) intended to summarize the whole *Paintings for the Temple* series, also showing sixteen multi-colored stages or steps ascending to a radiant gold-leaf spiritual “sun” or higher self above.



Af Klint's early focal point (still present in her *Tree of Knowledge* series) of reuniting or transcending the divided unity of male (yellow) and female (blue) principles and other spiritual polarities likely derives not only from her spirit guides but also from writings of Blavatsky. In several other places in her writings Blavatsky draws on the elaborate teachings of an Egyptian Gnostic sect called the Ophites as well as from the divided left-right, male-female Sephiroth Tree diagrams of the Kabala, and what she calls the "allegory" of the first chapter of the biblical book of Genesis, whose symbols, including the Tree of Knowledge, she says all derive originally from ancient India²⁷ and which she mixes together in sometimes dizzying constructions of explanation in *The Secret Doctrine*. I will describe one example of this.

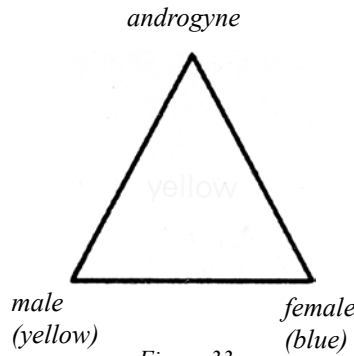


Figure 33.

here to give you a general idea. In one of his lectures on the Apocalypse of St. John in 1907 (p. 59) Steiner said that The human being became a "knower" through the inhalation of air through the lungs, where "used" carbon-filled blue blood is transformed into oxygen-rich red blood. Our individual "I" or self arose through the inflowing of the *Odem*, the breath of God, through which the human being became a knowing soul. He says you can see a kind of "tree" incorporated into the human body created by the main arteries that branch off into smaller and smaller capillaries throughout the body. To be a knowing being it is necessary to take in the oxygen from the air to make red blood so that "human beings can take into themselves the tree of knowledge through the red blood."³³

The other "tree" is made of the blue veins; the used, blue blood is a poison, is filled with death forces. By descending to earth, the tree of life in "the human being was divided into two parts, comprising the veinal and arterial, the blue and the red blood vessel systems. The blue blood system is removed from human mastery over it. It streams up to the heart and must unite with the oxygen the plants give to the air. In humans: carbon dioxide is exhaled, oxygen inhaled; in plants, the reverse: carbon dioxide inhaled, oxygen exhaled. Human breathing, "which expresses itself in our actual 'I-ness,' is an intertwining of the red and blue 'blood trees.'" But it is the plant that allows us to intertwine the blue and red "blood trees." Steiner also said this present divided red-blue state of human blood arose at the same time as the differentiation of the sexes and the development of free will in human beings.³⁴

The "apocalyptic seal" from the Munich Congress in 1907 shown in Figure 34 (next page) shows the red Jachin and blue-red Boaz columns (which also stood on either side of the entrance to the temple of Solomon), showing above and between them, as described in the Apocalypse, the sun-faced, cloud-bodied angelic figure with rainbow overhead and feet "like pillars of fire,"³⁵ indicating the higher self that we in the future can create/realize between the pillars (the "legs," which are also representing the Trees of Knowledge and Life). To progress, human beings need to maintain a balance between the one column representing the rigidifying, withering death- forces of the moon and the other column representing the over-fast, over-lively life-forces of the sun.³⁶

Steiner also related the red and blue blood streams to these symbols of the two columns of Jachin and Boaz that he pictured in 1907 on the fourth seal or sign of

She speaks of the meanings of ancient triangle symbols, which represent threefold associations of spirit, force, and matter; or active (male), passive (female – Blavatsky's words, not mine), and a dual androgynous principle that binds the two together.²⁸ (figure 33) She tells us that the original giant human spirit, Adam Kadmon, a collective name, is an androgyne being related to the Logos as a double principle of Good and Evil, who esoterically becomes the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and around which are seven creative angels who operate in the planetary spheres on our globe.²⁹ For the Ophites the unity of the Logos manifests as both *Ennoia*, or divine mind, and the serpent-like *Ophis*, the shadow of the divine light or wisdom on the earthly plane. When these two become separated, one is the meaning of the spiritual Tree of Life and the other is the Tree of Knowledge (of Good and Evil). Thus the serpent Ophis urges the first human couple, Adam and Eve, to eat the forbidden fruit (or Soma) of the Tree of Knowledge.³⁰ As in Genesis, the Creator God breathed the "breath of life" into these first humans, but not of intellect and mind. The latter was only acquired and developed once Adam had tasted of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge and had the spiritual principle of *Manas* implanted into him, which allowed a connection with the Spirit and divine Soul.³¹ Later symbols of the primal male-female, spirit-matter polarity (as well as the androgyne), writes Blavatsky, were the two columns of Solomon's temple, Jachin and Boaz.³² Believe it or not, this is a great simplification or summary of what Blavatsky writes in several scattered places.

Let me add to this something of what Rudolf Steiner said about the diverse meanings of the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life. This is even more complex and shifting than Blavatsky, so I will only indicate a few aspects

sexual division within humanity.⁴⁰

When her mother died in 1920, af Klint felt more free to travel and in September began to undertake regular journeys to Dornach, where she joined the Anthroposophical Society. Over eight or nine separate visits from 1920 to 1925 (the year of Steiner's death) she spent altogether more than a year of time in Dornach. There she could observe the style of painting inaugurated by Rudolf Steiner on the Goetheanum building cupola murals (Figure 34), learn something about his new approach of "painting out of the color," and how Steiner

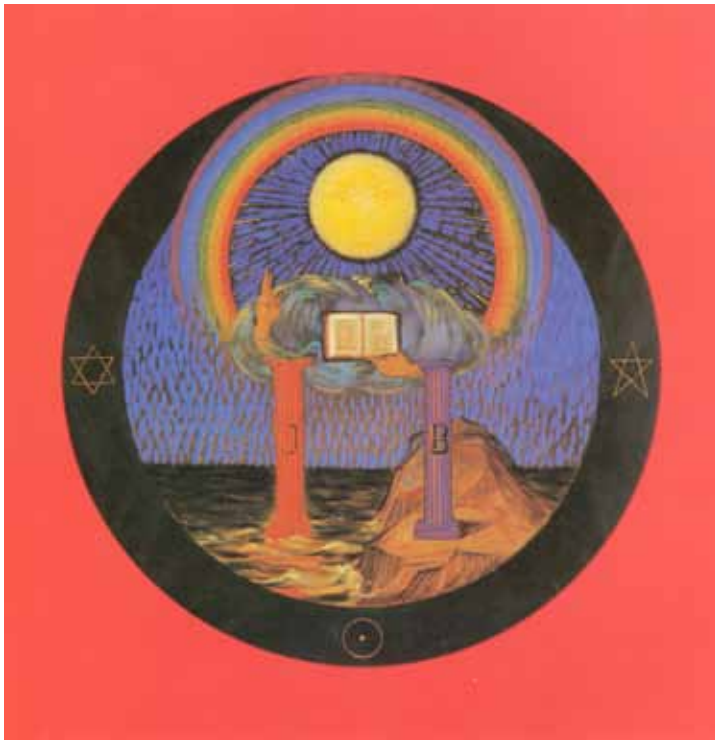


Fig. 34. Clara Rettich, after Rudolf Steiner Fourth Apocalyptic Seal 1907

the Apocalypse, an astral image representing a future higher stage of development when the two trees can be reunited.³⁷ In 2007 I gave an hour and a half lecture just on the many meanings and spiritual realties behind the Jachin and Boaz columns, so it is best we do not try to go more deeply into this aspect now.³⁸

Additionally, Steiner a few times recounted a story from the Golden Legend (and the Temple Legend) where Seth, the offspring of Adam, was allowed after the Fall to enter Paradise and had a vision there of the Tree of Life and Tree of Knowledge, grown together. Seth took a seed from this grown-together tree and planted it in the mouth of his deceased father Adam. From it grew a great tree with 3 trunks (representing Manas, Buddhi, and Atma; or, in anthroposophical terms, Spirit Self, Life Spirit, and Spirit Man), which clairvoyant people saw as shining with a fiery glow and forming the letters "J B" (Jachin and Boaz) as a kind of flaming script in the branches whose meaning was "Ejeh, Asher, Ejeh," which means "I am he who was, he who is, and he who will be." Later, among other things, wood from that tree was used to make the cross on which Jesus Christ was crucified, as a kind of new Tree of Life.³⁹

I tend to doubt that Hilma af Klint in the 1913-1915 period was very aware of the meanings that Steiner gave to the Tree of Knowledge and more likely took her cues from Blavatsky and her spirit guides, but she did own one book of 1907 lectures by Steiner, *Theosophy of the Rosicrucian*, where he talks about the mystery of the blue and red blood, as related to life and death forces and



Fig. 34. Rudolf Steiner, Egyptian and Greek Motifs, watercolor mural paintings on small cupola, First Goetheanum, Dornach, 1918-1919.

was extending Goethe's color theory through such concepts as image and luster colors. She may have attended his lectures specifically on color in Dornach, May 6-8 in 1921.⁴¹ She had conversations with Steiner and attended various lectures by him and about 36 of her later notebooks are full of extensive notes from these. All she was learning in Dornach needed to be digested and incorporated into her working methods and seemingly led her to stop painting again for a couple of years 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. She did not just externally copy a "Goetheanum style" of painting, but worked at penetrating the inner nature of colors and how form can arise from their interactions 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 plant-related meditative exercises described in Steiner's basic

book *How to Know Higher Worlds*⁴²:

Exercise 1. In one of the first and most basic exercises in the book, Steiner says to patiently and devotedly practice observing life in the natural world that is growing, flourishing, developing, and blooming and suggests we eventually will come to feel the quality of these phenomena as similar to a sunrise.

Exercise 2. By contrast, he then instructs meditants to similarly observe natural phenomena of fading, withering, and decaying and suggests these will be experienced like the slow rising of the moon.

When practiced long enough (which can vary for each person), these exercises aim to build inner, spiritual organs of clairvoyance (the chakras or lotus flowers) that will enable one to experience the invisible astral plane (“soul world”) that lies behind the world we experience with our ordinary senses. Then the meditant will become aware of certain “forms of feeling,” attached to each process, that is, astral forms, lines, and figures associated or expressive of each of the two contrasting phenomena of the living world of nature, especially in plants. Consider

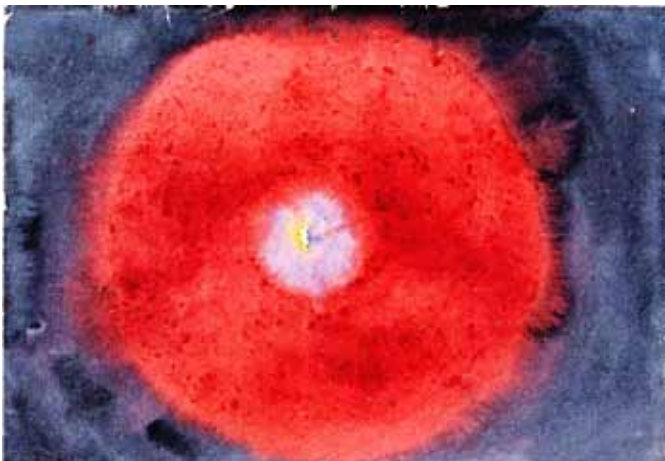


Fig. 35. Hilma af Klint Birch from *On the Viewing of Flowers and Trees* 1922 watercolor



Fig. 36. Hilma af Klint Thistle from *On the Viewing of Flowers and Trees* 1922 watercolor



Fig. 37. Hilma af Klint Wheat and Wormwood from *On the Viewing of Flowers and Trees* 1922 watercolor



Fig. 38. Hilma af Klint Untitled 1941 watercolor

some of Hilma af Klint’s paintings from this 1922 series of watercolors that seem to show these opposite “botanical” phenomena:

Figure 35 of a birch tree seems more sprouting and full of life. By contrast, figure 36 of a thistle seems more withering and contracted. Figures 37 and 38 seem to show pairings of the two different tendencies in a single picture.

Exercise 3. Steiner then directs a meditant to first comparatively observe and then call up in inner mental images the different forming forces and related feelings of stone, plant, and animal. He says this helps form spiritual organs of perception to grasp purely spiritual colors (similar to but different than colors of the ordinary sense world) expressive of each natural kingdom. For plants he describes a typically greenish color turning to an ethereal pink. The closest example I could find to this in af Klint’s paintings is figure 39 (next page_)

Exercise 4. Another plant-related meditative exercise from Steiner’s *How to Know the Higher Worlds* asks the meditant to physically observe and then inwardly imagine a plant seed, say a sunflower or squash seed, gradually building up in inner mental imagery and

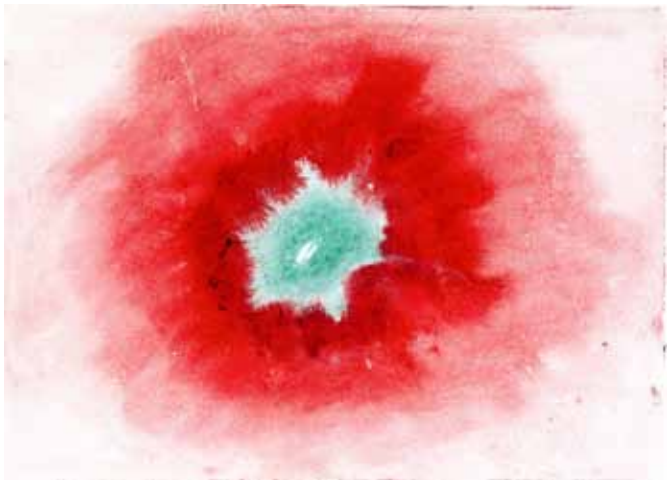


Fig. 39. Hilma af Klint Untitled from On the Viewing of Flowers and Trees 1922 watercolor

inner feeling the invisible forces in the seed as they will gradually unfold in that specific plant as it grows. If one more and more feels this with intensity, the inner image of the seed will come to appear as if enveloped in a small luminous colored flamelike cloud or aura with certain colors. (typically lilac with blue edges)



Fig. 40. Hilma af Klint Aura of a Plant Seed 1922 watercolor



Fig. 41. Hilma af Klint Green Algae from On the Viewing of Flowers and Trees 1922 watercolor

Exercise 5. Then one must practice the opposite imagination: Picture the fully developed plant that will eventually wither and die but will produce seeds. Consider that something one cannot see guards the plant from disappearing completely into nothing. There is something in the plant that we cannot see physically. Out of this feeling the meditant will gradually come to perceive a spiritual flame-form or aura, larger and differently colored than with the seed. (typically greenish-blue in the center and yellowish-red at the outer edges). In my experience with these exercises each specific species of plant generates somewhat different auric color patterns. Note a few examples from af Klint's work in figures 40-42).

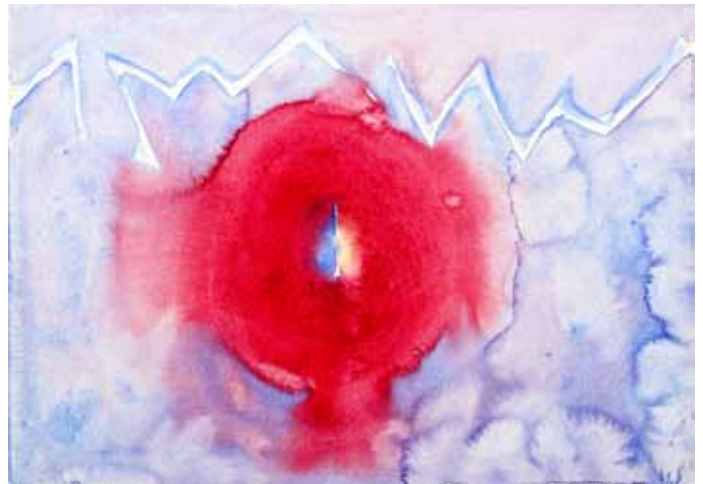


Fig. 42. Hilma af Klint The Mallow from On the Viewing of Flowers and Trees 1922 watercolor



Fig. 43. Hilma af Klint Violets with Guidelines 1919 watercolor, graphite and metallic paint

These meditative plant studies seem to have helped lead to her most extensive project from the later "anthroposophical" period: notebooks presenting extended, unique "spiritual-scientific" botanical studies. created especially during 1919-1920, annotated in German, and recording the characters and qualities of individual plants.

Completed just before these note-books, figure 43 (left) seems to be a transitional work toward them, or maybe a study for them, which includes also realistic images of the violets. Figure 44

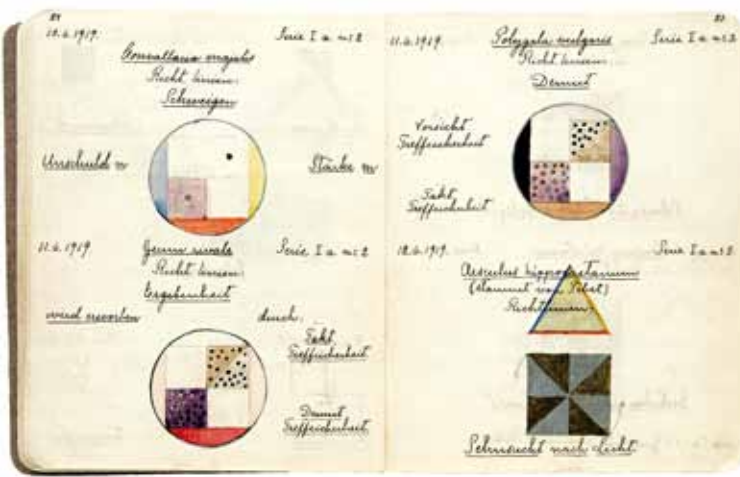


Fig. 44. Hilma af Klint Flowers, Lichens, and Mosses 1919-1920 pp. 24-25.

(above) shows a typical two-page spread from one of her notebooks as one example of the format she finally settled on.

All of these studies employed a combination of careful meditative observation, clairvoyant perception, and artistic expression – titled *Flowers, Mosses, and Lichens*. She recorded these in three sketchbooks, one of which she also made a nearly complete copy of (the one exhibited here at Lightforms⁴³). For these botanical studies she developed an unusual threefold diagrammatic language to capture the qualities of each plant, with each species given either a full or half page, reflecting a very different way of experiencing nature than that used in classical botany:

- 1) The plant's identifying scientific name (seemingly replacing the realistic depiction in the violets painting),
- 2) A small drawing/painting of spiritually perceived "directional lines" either as free-floating symbols or often a square (or oval) divided into 4 quadrants, usually with expressive colors, lines, and forms; and
- 3) A verbal description of the plant's emotional or spiritual qualities (sometimes seemingly pointing to therapeutic properties).

It is possible that this plant research was a task given to her by Steiner, but we have no evidence of that. Later in one notebook it was written: "The images are seen on the astral plane."⁴⁴

In these diagrammatic plant pictures from 1919-1920 we seem to see elemental forces, colors, structures, and tendencies that expand and contract. We don't know why she so often employed a quadrant format within the square or oval shapes depicting the plants' "directional lines." Perhaps they represent four levels of reality in which the plant exists or maybe four stages of plant growth. I will just present a few specific examples here, as visual images and/or verbal descriptions, indicating

the English name of the plant and the page number for it in af Klint's notebook:

- *Tussilago farfara* (coltsfoot): "Through the energy of the will from light to darkness, and from light to greater light." (p. 3)⁴⁵

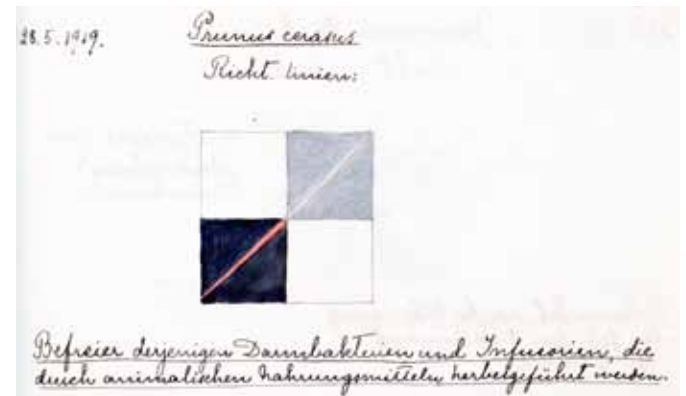


Fig. 45. H. af Klint Flowers, Lichens, and Mosses 1919-1920 pp. 17.



Fig. 46. Hilma af Klint Flowers, Lichens, and Mosses 1919-1920 p. 19.

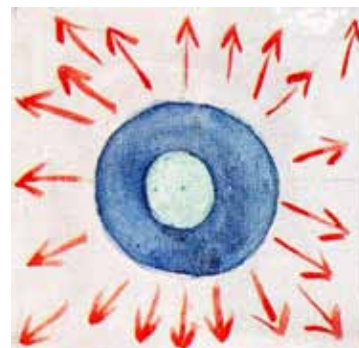


Fig. 47. H. af Klint Flowers, Lichens, and Mosses 1919-1920 pp. 21.



Fig. 48. H. af Klint Flowers, Lichens, and Mosses 1919-1920 pp. 25.

- *Prunus spinosa* (blackthorn): "The incorruptibility of the law. The inexhaustibility of the gospel." (p. 14)
- Figure 45: *Prunus cerasus* (sour cherry): "Liberator of the intestinal bacteria and infusoria that are caused by animal foodstuffs." (p. 17; remember that af Klint was a vegetarian.)
- *Pyrus communis* (European or common pear): "Give me enlightenment about my astral weakness. Help me to improve the kidneys of humanity." (p. 18)
- Figure 46: *Fragaria vesca* (wild strawberry): "Liberator. Longing: To cause balance within the blood system by driving out either the white or red blood cells." (p. 19)
- Figure 47: Juniper: "Tenacity, persistence, energy of the will, honesty, lack of ostentation, need for completion." (p. 21)
- Figure 48: *Polygala vulgaris* (milkwort): "Humility. Caution. Accuracy. Timing." (p. 25)
- Figure 49: *Viburnum opulus* (European cranberry bush): "Disobedience" (p. 28).

- *Sedum telephium* (Purple Emperor, a succulent): “Tireless. In special contact with the spirits of the air.” (p. 41)
- *Tulipa* (tulip): “Physical strength is a necessary asset. The body is dependent on the etheric body.” p. 51)
- Figure 50: *Helianthus annuus* (sunflower): “Love is the greatest of all. The strength not to forget God always comes from love.” (p. 44)
- Figure 51: *Hylocomium triquetrum* (“Bryophyte”) (p.72) One of the woodland mosses (included in the original copy of the notebook but not in the one on display here) is even represented by a four-note rising melody in a musical bar sign (lower right) labeled “The collective sound wave of the mosses.”^{46 & 47}



Fig. 49. H. af Klint Flowers, Lichens, and Mosses 1919-1920 pp. 28.

In her later years af Klint continued to feel her earlier paintings were of value and undertook to interpret and document them. In 1927 she made a copy of the *Tree of Knowledge* series exhibited here and gave it to Swiss poet, playwright, and painter, Albert Steffen, then the leader of the Anthroposophical Society after Steiner’s death in 1925. She apparently donated one or more of the plant research notebooks to the Natural Science Section of the School of Spiritual Science, a kind of alternative, spiritual-scientific university Steiner founded at the Goethanum⁴⁸ (whose “First Class” af Klint also joined⁴⁹).

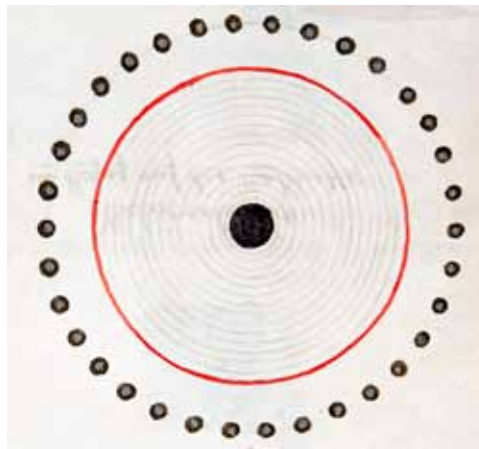


Fig. 50. H. af Klint Flowers, Lichens, and Mosses 1919-1920 pp. 44.

Recently the first public exhibition of a selection of her paintings has been rediscovered to have taken place at the World Conference of Spiritual Science and Its Practical Applications, a event held in London in 1928 from July 20 to August 1, and intended to introduce the various fields of anthroposophical work to the general public. There af Klint was given an entire room, where she exhibited “her studies of Rosicrucian symbolism” and also gave a talk about them.⁵⁰ 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

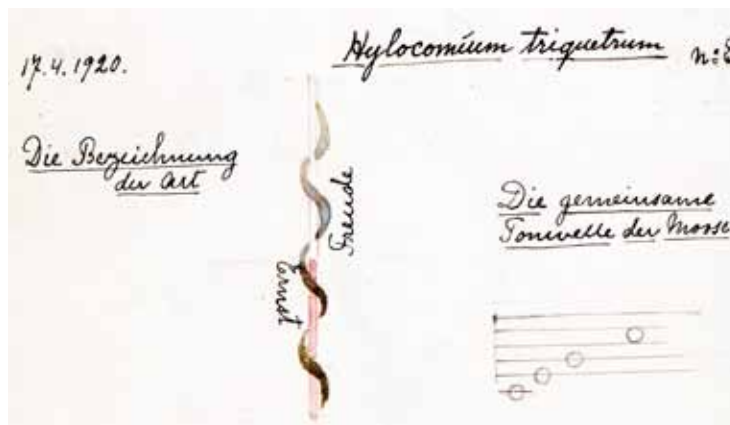


Fig. 51. Hilma af Klint Flowers, Lichens, and Mosses 1919-1920 pp. 72.

with the unhealthy relationships that had developed among Steiner’s successors in the Anthroposophical Society.⁵¹

She continued to receive guidance into old age from some of her spirit teachers and also claimed to be in touch with Steiner after his death.⁵² 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 dictated an account of her understanding of spiritual life, “Studies of the Life of the Soul,” which in 1941-1942 was typed to create a manuscript of more than 2,000 pages. 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.”⁵³ When she died very poor at nearly age 82 in 1944 a statement in a notebook from 1932 stated that all her works only “should be opened twenty years after my death, . . .” and she also specified that none of them should ever be sold.⁵⁴

Unexpectedly, her entire estate (except for a few works 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 conceptual background in art to properly steward them.”⁵⁵ Erik rolled up her paintings and built wooden crates to store her work, although not always in

the best of circumstances. Eventually, the Hilma af Klint Foundation was formed in 1972 to look after her work.

Outside of a few small shows in Sweden, her paintings were only first exhibited in public in 1986 in Los Angeles as part of the 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. Arising from a clairvoyant visionary process, her artwork is somehow *both* abstract and representational with unique ways of coding information pictorially and diagrammatically that need further investigation. Today af Klint can't easily be integrated into any existing category of modern artist. 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 theosophical/anthroposophical knowledge and contacts. The artworld is now engaged in trying to broaden its perspectives to adequately incorporate her work as an inspiring example of a life dedicated to the spiritual sources of visual art.

All illustrations of works by Hilma af Klint are in the collection of the Hilma af Klint Foundation, Stockholm, Sweden, except for the Tree of Knowledge series exhibited at Lightforms and owned by the Albert Steffen Stiftung in Dornach, Switzerland.

Endnotes

¹ From Hilma af Klint, “Letters and Words Pertaining to Works by Hilma af Klint” in Christine Burgin, ed., *Hilma af Klint: Notes and Methods* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), p. 257.

² 1907 notebook HaK 556, p. 431; as quoted in Johan af Klint and Hedvig Ersman, “The Invisible Made Visible,” September 20, 2018; The Hilma af Klint Foundation, www.hilmaafklint.se; or: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/cuu9ntag8kugoia/Article%20about%20Hilma%20af%20Klint%20%20September%202018.pdf?dl=0>. All her items left behind have been registered by the Hilma af Klint Foundation with a special “HaK number.”

³ Burgin, ed., *Notes and Methods*, p. 14.

⁴ Quoted in 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.

⁵ 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; Ostfönden, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2013), p. 38, in David Max Horowitz, “‘The World Keeps You in Fetters; Cast Them Aside’: Hilma af Klint, Spiritualism, and Agency” in Tracey Bashkoff, *Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2018), p. 130.

⁶ Burgin, *Notes and Methods*, p. 14.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 246

⁸ Fold-out diagram from H.P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled, vol.2* (Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, 1960 [1877]), p. 264ff.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ Burgin, *Notes and Methods*, p. 257.

¹² From translation of letter from Hilma af Klint to Rudolf Steiner, June 26, 1908, by Kevin Dann (as printed in an article in the

anthroposophical periodical *Die Drei*, 2016), from email from Kevin Dann to David Adams, August 23, 2019.

¹³ Rudolf Steiner, *From the Esoteric School: Esoteric Lessons 1913-1923, Vol.3* (Great Barrington: Steinerbooks, 2011; CW 166/3), pp. 141 & 145.

¹⁴ Rudolf Steiner, trans., James Hindes, *From the Esoteric School: Esoteric Lessons 1913-1923, Vol.3* (Great Barrington: Steinerbooks, 2011; CW 166/3), pp. 141.

¹⁵ Nov. 25, 1903 in *Concerning the Astral World and Devachan* (Great Barrington: SteinerBooks, 2018; GA 88), pp. 45 and 138.

¹⁶ 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. For more on Steiner’s first Goetheanum building, see Hagen Biesantz and Arne Klingborg, trans. Jean Schmid, *The Goetheanum: Rudolf Steiner’s Architectural Impulse*, (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1979); Rudolf Steiner, trans. and ed., Frederick Amrine, *Toward a New Theory of Architecture: The First Goetheanum in Pictures*, (Great Barrington: SteinerBooks, 2017); Rudolf Steiner, trans. and ed. Frederick Amrine, *Architecture, Sculpture, and Painting of the First Goetheanum*, (Great Barrington: SteinerBooks, 2017; and David Adams, “Rudolf Steiner’s First Goetheanum as an Illustration of Organic Functionalism,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 51,2 (June 1992): 182-204.

¹⁷ Fant, “The Case of Artist Hilma af Klint,” *The Spiritual in Art*, p. 158.

¹⁸ Guenther Wachsmuth, *The Life and Work of Rudolf Steiner*, 2nd ed. (New York: Whittier Books, 1955), pp. 176 and 205.

¹⁹ Burgin, *Notes and Methods*, p. 269; for a good overview of the various traditional meanings of the rose and lily – including botanical fruits and grains, sacramental wine and bread, physiological blood and nerves, forces of moon and sun, etc. – see Rudolf Hauschka, trans. Marjorie Spock and Mary T. Richards, *Nutrition* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1983), pp. 87-93.

²⁰ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy, Vol. 2* (Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, 1999 [1888]), pp 588-589.

²¹ Also see Rudolf Steiner, trans., K. Castelliz and B. Saunders-Davies, *The Gospel of St. John* (London: Temple Lodge Press, 1980: GA 94), p. 21. This is an excerpt translated from the complete German edition: *Kosmogonie. Populärer Okkultismus, Das Johannes-Evangelium*, 2nd ed. (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 2001). “When a person has reached the fifth grade of initiation he always sees a picture on the astral plane, which formerly he had not seen – the picture of a tree, a finely branched, white tree. This picture on the astral plane . . . is called the Tree of Life. He who had reached this point is said to have sat under the Tree of Life. Thus, Buddha sat under the Bodhi Tree and Nathaniel under the Fig Tree. These are terms for the picture on the astral plane. . . . The Bodhi Tree is but the astral mirror image of the human nervous system.” (p. 21)

²² Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled, vol. 2*, pp. 293-294; and *The Secret Doctrine, vol. 2*, pp. 214-15 and 589.

²³ Various from Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled vol. 2*, p. 293; and *The Secret Doctrine, vol 1*, p. 128fn; and *vol. 2*, pp. 4, 293, 354, and 588-589.

²⁴ David Lomas, “The Botanical Roots of Hilma af Klint’s Abstraction,” in Iris Müller-Westermann, ed. *A Pioneer of Abstraction*, p. 232.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Burgin, *Notes and Methods*, p. 269.

²⁷ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled, Vol. 2*, pp. 267 and 293; and *The Secret Doctrine, Vol. 2*, pp. 175 and 214-215.

²⁸ Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine, Vol. 2*, pp. 268-270.

²⁹ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled, vol. 2*, p. 264; and *The Secret Doctrine*,

vol. 2, pp. 4 and 293.

³⁰ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, Vol. 2, pp. 184 and 293; and *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 2, pp. 214-215 and 499fn.

³¹ Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. 1, p. 247; and Vol. 2, p. 175.

³² Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 2, p. 270.

³³ Rudolf Steiner, trans. James H. Hindes, *Reading the Pictures of the Apocalypse* (Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1993; GA104a), p. 59 (May 15, 1907).

³⁴ Rudolf Steiner, trans. M. Cotterell and D.S. Osmond, *Theosophy of the Rosicrucian*, 2nd ed. (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1966; GA 99), pp. 128-129 (1907); and Rudolf Steiner, trans., John M. Wood, *The Temple Legend: Freemasonry and Related Occult Movements* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1985; GA93), pp. 252-252. (October 23, 1905); and Steiner, *Reading the Pictures of the Apocalypse*, pp. 59-60.

³⁵ As in the biblical Book of Revelations 10:1.

³⁶ As in Rudolf Steiner, trans. Sabine Seiler, *Toward Imagination: Culture and the Individual* (Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1990L GA 169), pp. 56-57 (June 20, 2016); or Rudolf Steiner, *The Tree of Life and The Tree of Knowledge*, (Chestnut Ridge, NY: Mercury Press, 2006; GA 162), pp. 56-57. (August 1, 1915).

³⁷ Rudolf Steiner, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 4th ed., trans. M. Cotterell, J. Collis, et al., (London Rudolf Steiner Press, 1977; GA 104), pp. 160-161 (June 26, 1908); *The Gospel of St. John and Its Relation to the Other Gospels*, 2nd ed., trans., Samuel Lockwood, Loni Lockwood, and Maria St. Goar (Spring Valley, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1982; GA 112), pp. 264 and 269 (July 7, 1909); "The Theosophical Congress of 1907. A Report by Dr. Rudolf Steiner, published in the magazine "Lucifer-Gnosis," *Anthroposophical News Sheet* vol. 5, no. 25 (1937), p 104; and "Occult Seals and Columns: Introduction to the Portfolio. 1907": translation in John Fletcher, *Art Inspired by Rudolf Steiner* (England: Mercury Arts Publications, 1987), p.77.

³⁸ For more information on this apocalyptic seal, see Rudolf Steiner, "Occult Seals and Columns" in Fletcher, *Art Inspired by Rudolf Steiner*, pp.76-79; and David Adams, "An Overview of Rudolf Steiner's Apocalyptic Seals," *Art Section Newsletter* 30 (Spring-Summer 2008: 4-9, 11, + color insert; also in *News for Members* (The Anthroposophical Society in America) 2 (2008).

³⁹ Rudolf Steiner, trans., Lisa D. Monges, *Signs and Symbols of the Christmas Festival* (NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1969), pp. 57-58 (December 17, 1906); *The Tree of Life and The Tree of Knowledge*, pp. 5-6 (July 24, 1915); and *Concerning the History and Content of the Higher Degrees of the Esoteric School 1904-1914* (Isle of Mull, Scotland: Etheric Dimensions Press, 2005), pp. 378, 381, and 384-385.

⁴⁰ Steiner, *Theosophy of the Rosicrucian*. See note 33.

⁴¹ Rudolf Steiner, trans., John Salter, *Colour* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1971; GA 291; or see the later, expanded edition, trans. John Salter and Pauline Wehre, *Colour* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1992; GA 291).

⁴² Rudolf Steiner, trans., Cristopher Bamford, *How to Know Higher Worlds: A Modern Path of Initiation* (Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1994; GA10). Also translated as *Knowledge of Higher Worlds and Its Attainment*.

⁴³ Of the original 80-page notebook, her copy includes the first 66 pages.

⁴⁴ Burgin, *Notes and Methods*, p. 233.

⁴⁵ All descriptions of the plants are quoted from the translations in Burgin, *Notes and Methods*, pp.165-244.

⁴⁶ Burgin, *Notes and Methods*, p. 236.

⁴⁷ This sketchbook book also includes a few other, not directly botanical 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) It would be interesting if a therapist or medical researcher tried

applying some of af Klint's plant indications to determine if the bodily and psychological therapeutic effects af Klint described could be documented in practice, maybe after the manner of homeopathic herbalism, the Bach flower remedies, or the anthroposophical remedies.

⁴⁸ The original copy of the first plant notebook is part of the collection of the Hilma af Klint Foundation in Stockholm. The copy of the majority of this notebooks is part of the collection of the Albert Steffen Stiftung in Dornach. The second and third plant research notebooks are in the collection of the Rudolf Steiner Archive in Dornach, as confirmed by an email to the author from an editor there, Anne Weiss, of February 7, 2019: "The first notebook (red) is dated 21 April 1919 (144 pages), the second notebook (black) is not dated (162 pages)."

⁴⁹ I thank Anne Weise at the Rudolf Steiner Archive in Dornach for this information, in an email to me of February 12, 2019.

⁵⁰ Julia Voss, "The Traveling Hilma af Klint," in Bashkoff, ed., *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.

⁵¹ Quoted by Voss, "Traveling Hilma af Klint," p. 60; from Notebook HaK1047 (1930-1930), p.33.

⁵² Ibid., p. 59; and Ulf Wagner, Sweden, email to author of February 7, 2019.

⁵³ Quoted in Tracey Bashkoff "Temples for Paintings," *Paintings for the Future*, p. 18, 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. 17.

⁵⁴ Voss, "Traveling Hilma af Klint," *Paintings for the Future*, p. 51.

⁵⁵ Johan af Klint, "Artist's Foundation Statement" in *Paintings for the Future*, p. 9.

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Fig. 52. Hilma af Klint "Vortex" from *On the Viewing of Flowers and Trees 1922 watercolor*

