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PS
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The Institute for
Contemporary Art,
P.S. 1 Museum
and The Clocktower Gallery
46-01 21st Street
Long Island City, NY 11101
718-784-2084

Alanna Heiss
President and Executive Director

January 9, 1989

To Staff:

Attached please find a copy of Ake Fant's lecture
in the gallery on Hilma Af Klint. I did very little
editing. The narrative is as close to Ake's words as
possible.

NOTE:

There are some parts which I could not hear on the
tape.....etc.

There may be some minor errors aside from my usual
typo's. Please inform me if you catch any. I hope
you enjoy!

Thanks,

George Yank

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Hiima at home

Lecture given by Ake Pahl at P.S. 1, January 2, 1989

Rm 2

Start with a series called the EVOLUTION SERIES. It's not the very first one. That series starts with figure painting and then it changes; figure painting, figures in a very bad mood, ...depressing, but then you have the lotus flower, and then everything changes; and then after that you have the EASTER LILY on that side; and she notes about that Easter Lily "Well, it had to be brought a bit to the right hand side, so one side is a bit predominant."

And then it was on with the Evolution Series, and they become more and more abstract to the pattern, as you can see and she works very much with the surface, the Plane Surface, like this, with red and black, it changes as you can see.

Tom: are they chronological?

Ake: Well, they're not quite chronological, because of the hanging, they had to change a bit.

Well, the second series that she painted in this specific mood, are the paintings here, the Pink ones on that wall and that Green one on the back wall there, across.

? These are matched?

A: Yes, they belong together in one series, and that's the last one in that series, that pink one to the right.

And here you can see how she's working with a Plane Surface and with Diagonals. Now you may want to look at the very first one. And here

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you will see the very first painting from 1903, when she has ceased painting portraits and landscapes - she had been a landscape and portrait painter, and was known as that in Sweden, and if you look in a Dictionary of Swedish Artists, she is known for that, and they are noted works till 1905, and then there are no noted works, and nothing is written about her work since that time. Now, the specific things are happening.

From the 1880s she was deeply involved with Spiritists, and work in the Spiritists, you know, you work with Automatic Writing, and Automatic Drawing. And after that work, she also got messages from Spiritist Leaders, and they told her in 1905 that she was to have a commission, the commission at first would last for one year. And she had to prepare herself for one year from 1905 - 1906, and then she started working like in the Spiritistic drawings, with the pen or the pencil working lightly, and after that with the forms, and this is called her "Primordial Chaos" and this is her very first one, and you can see a form like an Embryo in this painting, and she speaks about thunder and waves, and out of that cosmos begins to work out.

And we have the second painting, and it goes on. There are 26 paintings of this size in the series of which we have 4 and she works with green, yellow and blue, and as it goes on the forms become more and more evident; and some words and some sounds are written on the painting. This is not a word, just a sound.

These are preparatory works: She wrote... and upon the easel I saw the Jupiter sign rising, and then the work started, like that, then I took the pencil and my hand was led and I had no idea what would happen, and then she painted and it came to 10 figure paintings, and this is

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#4 of these figure paintings where you can see the sort of natural beings, the green ones and they are in relation to the male person and the female person, the male person is painted in the yellow color and the female is painted in blue; and these colors come through during her work; and these are the paintings for the Temple. And when she came to #4 she didn't know how to do it, how to explain the painting, and then she painted that Blue one and said, "That is the key to the works," but no other comments. It's just the key to the work. And after that she just continued with her work.

...in the early Spring of 1908 she did the 1st part of the paintings for the Temple. And then things started to happen. Various people came to Stockholm, including Rudolf Steiner the Theosophist, to lecture, and Hilma spoke to him and showed him some of her paintings. And they discussed the paintings a bit and then she ceased to paint in 1908, she had a break for 4 years. During that time her work, her way of work changed a bit. At first she was just working as a medium, not knowing what she was doing in these paintings but then, after that break, she had a message or she saw it in a picture, and that picture she painted, and then she became more responsible herself to her work.

And this is one of her earliest, from 1912, also a series, and you can see, male and female beings...you can also see that they are looking through the body and see the bones and skeleton, and the inner organs, like the liver and the heart, and they are in different colors, blue and yellow. And you can also see how the brain is handled in 4 parts. And during this time she also dictates to a

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friend messages and the study according to the life of the soul. a Big Books, typewriter, and there are lots of messages in some are interesting, others are boring in those books.

And she says, when I look upon the female skull, I realized that the right hand side is very strongly illuminated, and if I look upon the male skull, I see that the left hand side is very strongly illuminated; and then she discusses the difference between male and female, female personalities mostly work out of their feelings, and male out of intellect, and then she discusses that a bit, comparing them to each other and saying that they have to cooperate in order to make a really true creation, female and male have to cooperate. And that is an "Amazing?" thing to be saying that about the brain in 1912.

And in the meantime, between 1908 and 1912, she says "Well, during that time I became Clairvoyant. And I can also heal with my hands."

Ake has found one example of that - she cured a man who was very sick with her hands, 1908.

She never married, she took care of her mother from 1908.

Question: Why did her friend cooperate, and write down what Hilma said?

Ake: There was a group forming around her, the group of female friends who saw her as a leader, and they always noted everything she said - there are piles of books where everything is noted what she said; so we have so many books with handwritten texts about that. And that group was very close, they called themselves the Five, The Friday Group, they had their meetings on Fridays. They were 2 friends from

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the Art Academy in Stockholm, among others.

And so she changed her way of painting.

All these were Paintings for the "TEMPLE" she conceived of a temple in a spiral form, theoretically, all together, but never had enough money to build it.

The Swan Series, 1914.

As you can see there are swans in the paintings, and there is a sort of mirroring, the left side mirroring the right, the white swan the black side. And we can also follow that we have those colors, blue here, yellow here — the feet are blue...

And then they are a bit more complicated, they are coming together the two swans.

And then you see on the third picture of the series, how they somehow are mixed, the black swan and white swan, and the feet are also mixed.

And you also have her color system, if you can call it that, male yellow, female blue, and then you have the Pink or Reddish color that is more a picture of a love, a higher love; and out of a meeting between those colors, all creation can come into being.. and in the center, a heart..

And then she changes to abstraction, and it's a very great change.

Her first works, she was a Spiritist; then she came into Theosophy, with 2 and Steiner, Theosophical Ideas, and these, referring to the paintings, are representatives of Theosophy, Theosophical ideas; at

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least through books she had in her library, some by P and Steiner, who was a Theosophist, before he founded the ANTHROPOSOPHICAL movement.

THE ALTAR PAINTINGS, the final series for the Temple

And I think, in looking at these paintings that they are, so to speak, recordings sort of, MEDITATIONS: looking upon them, notice for example, how the forms change, more and more, as they change to a round form, and then turn in the other direction, and you can meditate in the space. And also the colors, they are very bright, and as they are getting darker and more forceful. And then you have the Sun out of it.

And then, reversed some how, with the triangle pointed downwards. And look how she's handling the surface, she's mixing tempera and oil colors. Notice the surfaces: and how she perhaps now works on the Floor, in #2, because we now have traces of a female person who walked on the canvas.

The triangle form and the globe above, #3 and that was what was supposed to be the CENTER of her TEMPLE, belonging to these were a little painting, one of blue background, and in the center of that painting was a little girl, kneeling, holding a heart, a golden heart within her hands.

It is a painting, more personal in appearance. We didn't bring it

Further evolution of the SWAN SERIES

Here we have another aspect, in this room, of forms mirroring each other, of a bright field over a darker field, she puts a sort of a shadow over her colors so that they are getting darker, with sort of prismatic forms pointing upwards and downwards; and you have that

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strong circle, bl., v., and pink, on one side, and wh., bl., and against
in a reddish bkg., etc.

Tom: Was there a lot of abstract painting in Sweden at this time?

Ake: None at all.

Alanna: Who was working in Europe in 1916?

Ake: She's born in 1862 and she died in 1942; Kandinsky is born in
1866 and dies in 1944; Mondrian 1872 - 1944; Munch 1862 - 1944. It's a
very progressive days for artists, I would say, if you look upon
Malevich, a bit younger, 1870s, contemporary with the Suprematists,
tho unaware.

Ake: I'm told she just read Swedish, couldn't read English, German, or
French.

Until 1908 she had a studio that she got from the Royal Academy, as a
sort of gift, because she was a fantastic painter, landscape painter.
She left that studio in 1908, there she had seen the more provocative
paintings exhibited, for example, those of Munch exhibited, important
ones like the GRY. In 1902; she had the opportunity of seeing those,
but Munch is working with the Soul, feelings, she is working with very
different feelings, a more intellectual way, with the Spirit.

According to Ake: she was a tiny little woman, black hair, deep set
eyes, very straight, very earnest, dry humor, interested in Math and
flowers, esp. the books on Flors; for one year at the turn of the
century, she worked at the Doctors Hospital in Stockholm, drawing
horses, organs, so a very direct knowledge of such.

Levitsky, Bassant, some books of theirs were translated into
Swedish but not very specific ones, such as "Thought Forms." But if
they were in the Philosophical Library at that time, she could have

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looked at the pictures and someone could have translated them.

We do know that Kandinsky was not interested in Steiner's way of working as an artist, but in his theories. Out of the theories of Bassant, Lazavsky, and Steiner, Kandinsky worked out his very specific way of abstraction, so out of theory, more than out of example, like Mondrian, they worked our coming into a more abstract, non representational pattern. They are working with very specific sources, with man meditating.

When Hilma met Bassant and Steiner, they pointed out to her that you couldn't work out of an atavistic way, like a Shaman, you had to work out your intellect on your own, and that is what I suppose, she tried to do in her painting. And the paintings are examples of that way of working.

And we can see how her work shifts...Mondrian like colors red, blue, yellow, and notice the details of the colors in the paintings. (I can't make out the rest of this section.)

This is a bit more meditating way of working.

She always starts with figures; here, St. George, not pointing the sword toward the dragon, up, like this,

And Christ, and Anti-Christ.

The very distinct rhythms, in all her paintings, you can follow the circles coming into and going out again, that sort of rhythm of the forms and the lines in all paintings are due to a very specific rhythm, perhaps, and I suppose she was right handed, was due to the rhythm of the feeling of her body I think,

The signs of the Zodiac...

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She didn't have money to erect her temple, she asked Steiner, he said
No.

She asked her nephews if they could help her; they loved her dearly,
but they thought our very beloved but very specific aunt, we simply
can't help her with that. and so, together, with her friends of the
Five, they erected a studio building on an island outside Stockholm,
and they started erecting that building in 1915, just when the works
were ready; and it consisted of a very large room where her paintings
were scrolled, hanged, none of the paintings were pressed? they hung
on hooks against the wall and they could be changed.

Like the Altar paintings, they have been scrolled for 40 years; when
we started making an exhibition out of them, and these have been laid
flat, piled on each other since her death. For when she died, in
1944, the Studio Building, and everything had to be taken away, because
it stood on a ground that was not free; it belonged to someone
else and returned to them after Hilma's death. According to Hilma's
will, all her paintings went to her nephew, an admiral in Sweden; and
in 1944, he had much to do, and he couldn't take part in storing and
cataloguing them. So a friend went to the admiral and asked to help
the admiral, and # d them, boxed them, and then stored in the
admiral's attic. Her will also stipulated that the works couldn't be
shown to the public until 20 years after her death - the mid 1960s.
It was also good for the admiral, who was then retired. He took some
out of the attic and went to the Museum in Stockholm and said: Well I
had an aunt who painted, would you like to have them for your museum;
but you don't take an admiral and an aunt who painted very seriously.

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And some looked at the paintings and said, well, they look a bit like Kandinsky, but we are not interested, so the Admiral, who was a very noble man said, well the time was not ripe yet, and he went home again with the paintings.

He got older and realized that he had to do something with them. I have to give them to a foundation. It's not good for them to be private. So, founded a Foundation consisting of artists, family members, and an art historian, Ake, and they are the Board. He takes care of the paintings. Ake wrote about them. Took him 10 years, because few remember her, they are now quite old. The admiral died 5 years ago and his son took over, he is a commander in the navy, an old tradition in the family. Hilma's father trained Cadets for the navy.

Ake wrote an article in German on the paintings. Got responses from a Harvard Art Historian, then "The Spiritual in Art" exhibition in Los Angeles, in 1986, where they were shown for the first time.

Last Room

MEDITATION paintings

started meditating the color according to theosophical ideas, and texts by Steiner, meditating different levels of experience.

The physical level: 6 paintings

studies of character of the astral level with different squares with texts on them:

the color coming forward, downward, backward;

outwards, upwards, upwards;

Meditates the colors in different squares

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Meditations on Flowers and Birds: The physical appearance as well as the spiritual appearance, she brought them together.

of looking outward and inward, the two ways of working: Kandinsky was very interested in the actual theory: Concerning the Spiritual in Art.

Also studied the Atom, the moral aspects and their evolutions.

Meditations: Different religious systems ending with christianity.

Mother died in 1920, remember, she took care of her since 1908, then she was freed and the world was open to her, she visited Switzerland to Steiner.. And ceased painting again, now 60 years old.

Last series: she changed.

George York