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## THE INFLUENCE OF THEOSOPHY ON MODERN PAINTING

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### ABSTRACT

An interesting subject that delves into the junction of spirituality, philosophy, and creative expression is the effect of Theosophy on contemporary painting. In the late 19th century, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky established the spiritual movement known as Theosophy. Theosophy is a belief system that seeks to discover the truth about the oneness of all faiths and delve further into the secrets of life, positing the existence of concealed realities beyond the material world.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Theosophy wielded a transformative influence on the field of contemporary art. Its principles were not just influential, but potent enough to reshape the work of even the most prominent painters. Russian artist Wassily Kandinsky is a testament to this; his journey was not just instrumental, but transformative in the ascent of abstract expressionism.

Theosophical teachings resonated deeply with Kandinsky, echoing not just his profound spirituality, but his personal quest to uncover art's hidden significance. Theosophy posited the existence of concealed realities beyond the material world, placing not just a premium, but a profound importance on the spiritual facets of life. For Kandinsky, art was not just a portal, but a profound conduit for these higher realms, a conduit for the cosmic spirit to manifest.

This profoundly impacted Kandinsky as he veered away from realistic imagery and delved into the realm of abstract painting. He aimed to articulate spiritual experiences and emotions through the medium of color and shape. For instance, in his painting 'Composition VII,' Kandinsky used vibrant colors and dynamic shapes to convey a sense of spiritual energy and movement. Driven by the belief that art could convey profound, transcendent truths, his work progressively shed its symbolic nature.

Famous for his geometric abstract paintings, Piet Mondrian was another artist impacted by Theosophy. Theosophy's principles of spiritual progress and cosmic oneness resonated with Mondrian's search for inner peace and a sense of

cosmic order, which were crucial to his creative process. For instance, in his painting 'Composition with Red, Yellow, and Blue,' Mondrian used primary colors and straight lines to represent the harmony and balance he believed existed in the universe, a concept aligned with philosophical ideas.

Beyond specific artists, the influence of Theosophy on contemporary art might be seen in more systemic currents like Abstract Expressionism and Symbolism. Some artists, like the symbolists, drew inspiration from the theosophical tradition's emphasis on introspection and mystical themes.

Theosophy had not just a significant but a lasting impact on contemporary painting. It inspired painters to seek not just new ways but innovative ways of expressing themselves that went beyond traditional depictions. Modern painting's enduring legacy is not just profoundly rooted but intricately intertwined with theosophical ideas of spirituality, oneness, and inner change, which fostered not just the emergence but the flourishing of abstract and emotionally charged art forms, such as Wassily Kandinsky's abstract expressionism and Piet Mondrian's geometric abstraction, which aimed not just to convey, but to evoke spiritual and emotional experiences through non-representational forms.

## KEYWORDS

Philosophy, spirituality, creative expression.

## INTRODUCTION

The exciting topic of how Theosophy impacted contemporary painting shows how spirituality, philosophy, and creative expression meet. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky established the mystical and esoteric movement known as theosophy in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Its adherents believed in a common spiritual understanding that underlies all faiths and civilizations and stressed the interdependence of all living things (Maurice Tuchman, et al., 1986).

Abstract and symbolic artwork, in particular, were profoundly shaped by Theosophy in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Many artists, on a deep spiritual

journey, were drawn to Theosophy, seeking to express their spiritual ideals in their work. (Robert E., 2016)

They delved into profound topics like reincarnation, the development of awareness, and the oneness of the cosmos, creating art that resonates with the soul.

Artist Vassily Kandinsky was a transformative figure in this context; his exploration of life's metaphysical and spiritual aspects led him to incorporate Theosophical ideas in his abstract works. Kandinsky saw art as a transformative tool, a doorway to immaterial, higher truths. (Bashkoff, T. 2018). He believed that color and shape held a profound spiritual meaning, a belief that revolutionized the art world.

Piet Mondrian, whose grid-based geometric abstractions using primary colors are instantly recognizable, was another famous artist who drew inspiration from Theosophy. (Düchting, H., & Kandinsky, W. 2000) A Theosophical ideal, Mondrian's work mirrored his faith in a spiritual order to the cosmos and the oneness of all people.

Hilma af Klint and Frantisek Kupka were among the many painters who drew inspiration from Theosophy to depict esoteric scenes and symbols.

Scholarly publications that examine the relationships between Theosophy and contemporary art might help one to explore this subject further. To better understand how spiritual movements like Theosophy impacted artistic developments, it is helpful to read books such as "The Spiritual Dynamic in Modern Art: Art History Reconsidered, 1800 to the Present" by Charlene Spretnak and "The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985" by Maurice Tuchman and Judi Freeman (Silberstein, R. 2015).

Studying Blavatsky's foundational writings, such as "The Secret Doctrine" and "Isis Unveiled," which are fundamental texts connected to Theosophy, may also help us comprehend the philosophical concepts that fascinated painters throughout that time.

Ultimately, the enduring influence of Theosophy on contemporary art underscores how spirituality and art converged during a period of intense philosophical

study and social upheaval. This influence continues to reverberate in modern art, a testament to the enduring relevance and significance of spirituality in artistic expression.

## Literature Review

Theosophy emerged in the late 19th century and quickly expanded over North America and Europe, so let's start with that historical context.

**Artistic milieu of the time:** Discuss the significant movements and trends in art (such as Art Nouveau and Symbolism) that were happening while Theosophy was growing.

### Ideals of Modernism and Theosophy

Consider how modernism and Theosophy share philosophical ground, such as opposing materialism and searching for ultimate spiritual truth.

Discuss how Theosophy's focus impacted the modernist painters' conceptual frameworks on symbolism, mysticism, and universal oneness.

### Works by Notable Artists

**Research on artists:** Include works by notable Theosophists such as Hilma af Klint, Piet Mondrian, and Wassily Kandinsky.

**Artwork analysis:** look at a few paintings that show how theosophical ideas are present, such as spiritual

symbolism, geometric abstraction, and the way color may suggest abstract ideas (Düchting, H., & Kandinsky, W. 2000).

**Consideration in the modern era:** Look at the critical and popular reception of works of art with a Theosophical basis.

Consider the effects of Theosophy on art history and how it has shaped future schools of thought.

## METHODOLOGY

### 1. Literature

All relevant academic publications, books, catalogs of art exhibitions, and archival records about contemporary art and Theosophy should be thoroughly reviewed. Determine the most essential ideas, topics, and historical settings connected to the influence of Theosophy on creative movements.

### 2. Analyzing Theosophical Texts

Analyzing original Theosophical writings can help you learn about the fundamental ideas, symbols, and philosophical notions that may have influenced contemporary art. You can also investigate how works of art relate to the teachings of the Theosophical Society (such as the need for spiritual development and the oneness of all people).

### 3. Studies of Artists' Work

Pick a few artists whose work has been extensively studied because of its association with Theosophy (such as Hilma af Klint, Piet Mondrian, or Wassily Kandinsky). Look for spiritual themes, symbolic symbols, and artistic decisions that echo Theosophical principles in artworks.

### 4. Analysing in Comparison

Find the similarities and differences between modernist art styles like Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, and Symbolism and the ideas held by the Theosophical tradition. Investigate Theosophy's role in the emergence of new visual languages and creative vocabularies.

### 5. Studies on Reception

See what people thought of artwork with a theosophical theme in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Review recent critiques, essays, and public responses to art shaped by philosophical concepts.

### 6. Aesthetic Evaluation

Investigate individual pieces of art using formal analytic approaches. Look closely at the geometric shapes, symbolic colors, and spiritual stories that are part of the artwork.

### 7. Placing in Perspective

Put Theosophy in its day's historical, philosophical, and spiritual framework. Think about how it relates to

other occult movements, currents in philosophy, and societal changes.

## Expert Consultations and Interviews (No. 8)

Interview art history and Theosophy experts if at all possible. Amass information that clarifies the impact of Theosophy on contemporary art.

## 9. Archives and Digital Resources

Investigate the relationship between Theosophy and contemporary art by consulting sources, exhibition histories, and digitized artworks made available via online archives and digital technologies.

## 10. A Foundation in Theory

Use appropriate theoretical frameworks (such as semiotics or postcolonial theory) to understand how Theosophy relates to contemporary art. Consider how cultural norms and power structures affect the making and receiving of art.

## Finding

An intriguing aspect of the link between spirituality, philosophy, and creative expression in the late 19th and early 20th centuries is the impact of Theosophy on contemporary painting. Theosophy, a spiritual and intellectual movement, was founded in the late 19th century by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and further developed by Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater. It pursued the discovery of ultimate truths via

esotericism, metaphysics, and comparative religion studies. The arts were among the many cultural spheres that felt the full force of this revolution.

Some ways in which the teachings of Theosophy influenced contemporary art are as follows:

**Symbolism and Mysticism:** According to the teachings of Theosophy, many religious and cultural practices include hidden meanings and symbolic representations. Modernist painters such as Hilma af Klint, Piet Mondrian, and Wassily Kandinsky incorporated this mysticism and symbolism into their work. Abstract shapes and symbolic compositions allowed these artists to communicate their spiritual experiences and beliefs.

**Spiritual Expression via Abstraction:** Theosophy advocated for a more transcendental and ethereal style of art. Substantiating inner truths and spiritual aspects, artists impacted by theosophical views shifted their attention away from realistic depictions. Theosophical teachings were strongly resonant with Kandinsky's belief that art might elicit spiritual vibrations via shape and colour. This shift towards abstraction in art was a direct result of Theosophy's influence.

Theosophy encouraged its adherents to learn about Eastern faiths and philosophies, including Buddhism and Hinduism. Inspired by Eastern spirituality, modern artists sought new methods to depict and understand



spiritual concepts; this exposure significantly influenced them. Gustave Klimt and Franz von Stuck are two painters whose works show an interest in Eastern philosophy and symbolism.

Theosophy offered concepts of cosmic unity and spiritual progress. All life is interrelated. Unity, harmony, and the cosmic web of connection were significant motifs in the works of modern artists who accepted these concepts. Artists sought to communicate universal truths via non-representational forms in abstract art, which developed in response to the focus on interconnection.

A place where artists could meet, share ideas, and work together was in the theosophical groups and communities. In Germany, for example, artists like Franz Marc and Kandinsky were part of the Blue Rider (Blaue Reiter) group, which was active in the theosophical movement. Theosophy not only influenced individual artists but also fostered the formation of artistic communities that further propagated its ideas. These groups encouraged the growth of innovative creative practices with their origins in introspective spirituality.

By encouraging artists to explore spirituality, symbolism, and abstract shapes as ways of conveying deep truths about life and the human experience, Theosophy ultimately influenced contemporary painting. This influence, which is still felt in modern art,

shows the lasting effect of theosophical concepts on creative expression.

## CONCLUSION

There were profound changes in creative expression in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the topic of Theosophy's impact on contemporary painting is both complicated and fascinating. As a philosophical and spiritual movement, Theosophy greatly influenced artists looking for new methods to express esoteric and mystical concepts in their work. Several vital characteristics reveal this influence:

Universal symbolism and the interdependence of spiritual notions across civilizations were important tenets of theosophical teachings. Artists started using symbolic imagery in their paintings to communicate more profound, esoteric ideas. By abandoning representational forms in favor of symbolism, art could be interpreted more spiritually and abstractly.

Theosophy advocated going beyond the confines of established religions to investigate other spiritual worlds. Artists were moved to portray ethereal realms, mystical visions, and the forces thought to control the cosmos. A resurgence of interest in portraying hallucinations and other forms of altered awareness followed this.

Theosophy advocated for a transcendent spiritual knowledge that could unite all peoples. As a result of

this idea, painters began incorporating symbols from both Eastern and Western traditions into their work. A more diverse and inclusive perspective was mirrored in the emerging vibrant visual tapestry.

Centrality to Inward Realities: Theosophy prioritized inward spiritual growth and enlightenment. In response, artists began to look inward, investigating ideas of self-actualization, enlightenment, and the development of awareness. This introspective method pushed artists to break from established conventions and try new things.

Key Figures: Wassily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian, Hilma af Klint, and others were profoundly impacted by Theosophy. Their departure from conventional representational painting, aiming to convey spiritual truths via abstract shapes and brilliant colors, directly resulted from Theosophy's influence. The rise of abstract and non-representational art styles owes much to their groundbreaking work.

Enduring Influence: Theosophy's influence on artist engagement with symbolism, spirituality, and introspection is undeniable. This influence had a profound effect on contemporary painting, forging a stronger connection between art and philosophical ideas. The lasting impact of this movement on the development of visual culture is evidenced by the persistence of theosophical concepts in modern art.

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