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ABSTRACTION, SPIRITUALITY AND THEOSOPHY

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From the end of the nineteenth century, in Europe, some relevant novelties led many artists to evolve their language from Symbolism towards Abstractionism. It was particularly Konstantinas Čiurlionis, Hilma af Klint and Marianne von Werefkin, who are considered to all intents and purposes as proto-abstractionists, who, in the first decade of the 20th century, nurtured the great inner drive to develop a new way of representing their own profound dimension. There is in fact a precise thread between abstraction and spirituality, which runs through the artistic, social and economic changes in Europe, up to the first abstract experiences of the expressionist side of Kandinskij and Klee, who will affirm the existence of an authentic spiritual abstractionism, opening to the listening of colours and inner sounds, in a continuous ascent towards the liberation from matter. Inner suggestions that nourish other profound identities, oriented towards the discovery of one's own "subtle dimension" through the study of Theosophy, or "Secret Doctrine", founded in New York in 1875 by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891); "ultimate truth" accessible through the practice of an initiatory path, remembering also that, in 1922, Piet Mondrian, enrolled in the Theosophical Society since 1909, would define Neoplasticism as "theosophical art in the true sense of the word".

The study of the theosophical presence in art is a very important and topical subject, analysed also by the exhibitions *The Spiritual in Art: abstract painting 1890-1985* (held in 1986 at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles) and *Okkultismus in the Avantgarde von Munch bis Mondrian 1900-1915* (held in 1995 at the Kunsthalle in Frankfurt). The 2013 conference at the University of Amsterdam, *Enchanted Modernities: Theosophy and the Arts in the modern world*, attended by 250 scholars and another 2,000 live streamed from all over the world, was also of global significance. At its origin, however, does not suggest the existence of a direct link between the birth of Theosophy and its subsequent, significant diffusion within the Avant-gardes, but rather a fascination of artists with certain texts relating to sacred geometry and the esoteric meaning of certain geometric shapes, such as the triangle and the circle, by the founder Helena Blavatsky, which directly influenced the research of Hilma af Klint (1862-1944), the authentic forerunner of Abstractionism.

As can be expected, the wide diffusion of the theosophical message in the artists of the 19th century will also be formative for those of the following generations. Notable figures were the Belgian painter Jean Delville, who would influence the work of his disciple Fernand Khnopff and, later, the French Nabis group of Paul Sérusier, as well as Paul Gauguin, an avid reader of Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine*. Theosophy had a similar diffusion in Poland, thanks to the Lithuanian Kazimierz Stabrowsky, founder of the Polish Theosophical Society, which encouraged a following in his student Konstantinas Čiurlionis, one of the most significant proto-abstractionists. Although he died in 1911 at the age of just 35, Čiurlionis was to be one of the protagonists of the transition from Symbolism to Abstractionism and, according to some scholars, was to significantly influence Kandinsky's abstract approach. In Italy, Gaetano Previati, a reference point for many artists, including those of different generations such as Boccioni and Dorazio, was the pointillist closest to Theosophy and the only Italian artist invited to the first *Salon de la Rose+Croix* in Paris in 1892,

whose followers claimed a state of moral and spiritual perfection, in descent from the Order of the Templars and the Holy Grail.

Edouard Schurè, a member of the local Theosophical Society, was very active in Paris at the beginning of the 20th century. He was also the author of the essays *I grandi iniziati* (1889), *La Via mistica* (1893) and *L'Anima dei Tempi Nuovi* (1909), which had a great influence on the young Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, who passed on this specific sensitivity on the subject to Umberto Boccioni in particular. Boccioni, for his part, would also draw interesting ideas from the essay *Le Forme Pensiero* (1905) by the theosophist Annie Besant, whose reflections he would share with the artist Romolo Romani, the first subscriber to his first Futurist Manifesto dedicated to painting (1910) and who would play an important role in the creation of the *States of Mind* cycle (1911), as Gino Severini and Carlo Carrà confirm in their memoirs. Theosophy would also lead František Kupka from Symbolism to Abstractionism, not only a frequent visitor to theosophical thought but also a professional medium.

The spiritual-shamanic side of the Russian folk tradition exerted a great influence on Kandinsky's education, which he enriched with theosophical acquaintances, who were also present in the education of Alexej von Jawlensky and his wife Marianne von Werefkin, as well as Johannes Itten, author of the essay *The Art of Colours* and Paul Klee, all teachers at the Bauhaus, where they were able to encourage intense proselytism.

proselytism. The Russian tradition also nourished Piotr Demianovič Ouspensky, author of *Tertium Organum*, "Treatise on the nature of the universe", encouraging his entry as a disciple into the community of the esotericist Georges Ivanovič Gurdjieff and influencing Kazimir Malevič, who was a regular reader.

The Canadian abstract school of the 1930s is also important, led by the artist Lawren Harris, who was very active in the theosophical sphere and who in 1930 declared: 'Theosophical art can only be abstract', balancing and reversing the assumption of Mondrian's 1922.

Jackson Pollock's research at the end of the 1940s, with precise reference to the dynamics of Action Painting and the pictorial technique of dripping in the application of colour, has often been traced back to an unspecified shamanism, to an improvised individual ritual, even linked to his alcoholism, without, however, referring to his precise frequentation of the theosophical sphere, dating back to the high school lessons of his art teacher Frederick John de St. Louis. Vrain Schwankovsky, a member of the Theosophical Society, as well as later ones with the artist-occultist John Graham, thanks to whom he took part in the *Spiritual Awakening Retreat* (in Ojai, California) with the theosophist Jiddu Krishnamurti, theorist of the so-called quantum mysticism, developed with the physicist David Bohm.

From this point of view, Pollock's dripping can easily be traced back to the principles of automatic writing of mystical-surrealist derivation, governed by a deep interiority in a state of trance or by a theosophical contact with the unconscious elsewhere. This spirit-guide was expressly cited by Hilma af Klint as the origin of his 193 *Works for the Temple*, which are to be considered authentic, conscious and complete anticipations of the abstract novelty still attributed to Vasilij Kandinskij.

In the abstract sphere, since its origins, the role of the artist and that of the critic-visionary have often been combined and overlapped, as is unequivocally demonstrated by the Manifestos on Painting signed by Giacomo Balla (1910) and his formidable Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe (with Fortunato Depero, in 1915); Vasily Kandinsky and the Spiritual in Art (1912), followed by Point, Line, Surface; the fervent season of the Russian Suprematists and Constructivists; the writing Abstract Art concerning Julius Evola's theoretical position in 1920; Carlo Belli's questionable essay *Kn* (1935); the untiring activity of the Italian abstract artists in the 1930s, with the drafting of programmatic manifestos; the theoretical activity of the international Cercle et Carré groups (1929) that would join the Futurists Russolo, Prampolini and the Rationalist architect Alberto Sartoris with Mondrian, Kandinskij and Le Corbusier and that would organise the great exhibition dedicated to Abstractionism at the Galerie 23 in Paris, inaugurated on 18 April 1930. This was followed by *Abstraction-Création* (1931-37), which was to become an authentic fulcrum of world aggregation dedicated to Abstraction, a true international census, rewarded by the adhesion of over 400 artists from all over the world and the publication of five issues of the annual magazine; Prampolini's seminal Manifesto of Polymaterism in 1944, anticipating the modern concept of installation, up to the important and organised theoretical and didactic experience of the Bauhaus.

In Italy alone, from the end of the 1940s onwards, there was an authentic proliferation of groups: from MAC to Forma, from Origine to L'Age d'Or, where most of the artists were the authors of their own research, also from a critical point of view. Without counting that the historical vision we have today of the whole of Futurism, declined in painting, sculpture and architecture, depends directly on the intransigent and multidisciplinary theoretical stature of Umberto Boccioni, author of the four specific manifestos, relating to painting, sculpture and architecture (two in 1910, 1912, 1913), as well as the essay *Pittura e*

sculpture, published in 1914.

Theosophy deeply penetrated the thinking of many abstractionists. In particular, Kandinsky's first abstract works can also be traced back to the publication in 1905 of the essay *The Forms of Thought* by the theosopher Annie Besant and Charles W. Leadbeater, published a few years earlier and dedicated to how to recognise the states of mind referring to the subtle world in which we live, as well as how to materialise them, in colours, in space: a sort of theoretical vademecum on the spiritual side for the transposition of this inner analysis into painting.

With regard to the theosophical influences in Kupka's work, it is also worth mentioning his great sensitivity to spiritual themes as a regular contributor to the magazine *Sphinx*, as well as a reader of *Le Lotus Bleu*, where contributions regularly appear dedicated to Helena Blavatsky, whose writings on India visibly influenced the artist in the creation of the work *The First Step*, dated 1909-1913. Works that allude to universal cosmogony, where geometric figures appear doubled, overlapping their aura. As was the case with the 1912 work *Amorpha*, a two-colour fugue, an authentic abstract-abstraction, as Kupka himself succinctly declared: "In an artist there is the will to recreate the universe". Similarly, in the same period, Kandinsky, on the same wavelength, stated: "The creation of a work of art is the creation of a world".

As for the centrality of the circular or spiral representation, Giacomo Balla, who was in contact with the anthroposophist Rudolf Steiner, created *Mercury Passes in front of the Sun*, which was dated 7 November 1914, according to scientific evidence.

In 1914, Piet Mondrian hoped to create a work that would lose its meaning as such and come closer to the truth of inner consciousness. Art thus takes on a new role of universal, cosmic validity, accessible to all, like an absolute code for the achievement of a lost peace: 'I construct combinations of lines and colours on a flat surface to express a general beauty with a supreme consciousness [...] Nature inspires me [...] it puts me [...] in an emotional state that provokes in me an urgency to do something, but I want to get as close as possible to the truth and extract everything from it'.

Hans Arp was a frequent visitor to the Abbey of Monte Verità, the world's theosophical centre in Ascona, and in 1911 he published *Runes and other bizarre writings*, declaring, in his later passage from Dadaism to Surrealism, that "the law of chance, which contains within itself all laws and remains completely incomprehensible to us as the primary cause from which life originates, can only be known by a complete abandonment to the unconscious".

Mario Radice will be the artist-theorist of the Como Group, closer to the mystical interpretation of God's voice on earth, and Franco Ciliberti, founder and theorist of Primordial Futurism, also a fervent Catholic, will consider the recovery of the spiritual dimension as primordial in the very creation of the work of art, as the materialisation of a divine will. Kandinsky would define Theosophy as a "great movement that represents a vigorous agent in the spiritual atmosphere and also in this form can reach, like a sound of liberation, many desperate hearts enveloped in darkness and night"; and in his essay *The Spiritual in Art* he states: "Spiritual life is represented schematically by a large acute triangle divided into unequal horizontal sections, with the smallest and sharpest pointing upwards. The upper sections of the triangle will be occupied by those who attend to elective experiences, as opposed to the materialists, atheists and socialists, who are located in the lower sections, representing the evolution of life through experiences in successive existences. Similarly, Kandinsky's interest in the latent powers or life waves of the cosmos, as theorised by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, would play a major role in the genesis of Abstract Expressionism and have a strong influence on the large number of artists in his circle, both amicable and educational. Kandinsky was also fascinated by the poet and essayist Maurice Maeterlinck, Nobel Prize winner in 1911, who was a devotee of spiritualism and occultism. In 1908, in his final retreat to an abbey in Normandy, he wrote the fairy tale *The Bluebird*, which is clearly similar to *The Blue Rider*. Kandinskij shared with Paul Klee both the experience of *The Blue Rider* and the teaching position at the Bauhaus, which Klee held from 1920 to 1931 on behalf of Walter Gropius, considering him "the extreme moral instance of the Bauhaus", acclaimed as an authentic spiritual guide also by the students for his introspective and hieratic behaviour. On the theoretical figure of the artist from the theosophical-spiritual side Klee wrote that "the artist delights in thinking that the present creation is not to be considered finished and extends the cosmo-creative function from the past to the future, attributing a duration to creation".

In addition to the artists mentioned above, the same considerations can also be made with regard to Marcel Duchamp, who was interested in alchemy; the Delaunays, who represented cosmic symbolism in colour, and many others who, right up to the present day, paid attention to theosophical and anthroposophical principles, such as Joseph Beuys or James Lee Byars.

Just as anthroposophy was to be a point of reference in the training of the young Gillo Dorfles, co-founder, theorist and animator of the *Movimento Arte Concreta* (1948-1958), from 1934, when he was able to attend anthroposophical courses at the Goetheanum in Dornach.

2.1 Hilma af Klint

The little-known figure of Hilma af Klint (1862-1944) should be acknowledged as an essential reference point for the study of the origins of Abstractionism. Over the course of more than a century, almost all abstract artists would declare precise references to interiority, introspection or spirituality as the primary reasons for their research. In this context, in the founding years of the twentieth century, Theosophy would become the doctrine of a vast array of intellectuals, who also frequented the innovative laboratory of the Abbey of Monte Verità on Monte Monescia, active since the beginning of the twentieth century, a forge of experiences of collectivism, vegetarianism, nudism and confessional freedom, which would also cross over into esotericism.

The perfect synthesis of these components is clearly visible in the mystery work of Hilma af Klint, which to this day, despite the intense rediscovery of recent years, remains guiltily the preserve of specialists and insiders. Her pictorial research presents very particular characteristics, but the results with respect to the dating of her abstract works certainly place her as the forerunner and first protagonist of European Abstractionism, greatly dampening the categorical primogeniture referred to Kandinsky until today. Specifically, this comparison cannot be extended to Giacomo Balla, as the intentions and results of af Klint's research can be traced back to the spiritual root of man and its translation into the visible through painting: Hilma af Klint therefore anticipates Abstract Expressionism more than the rigorous Abstraction of Balla's Iridescent Compenetrations (1912) and then proceeds through Malevič and Mondrian. af Klint's most significant body of expression consists of a nucleus of 193 works, created between 1906 and 1915, which the artist christened Paintings for the Temple. As early as 1896 she formed a group, The Five, with four other artists, dedicated to the transposition into painting of "other" impulses, transferred through automatic writing, governed by the "automatisms" of her own consciousness. In Sweden, women were not allowed to vote until 1919 and, in the case of academic studies such as hers, they were relegated to different classrooms from those of men, with different programmes and limited to slavish reproduction, devoid of any creative component. The five women artists of the group, on the other hand, were already dedicated to the conception of evolved works-writing under the automatic dictation of the spirit-guide, and it would be a further progress in this direction, after 10 years of artistic-theosophical research, that would put af Klint in a position to paint the 193 works Destined for the Temple, in the realisation of which the artist declared that she was only a medium, guided by the spiritual entity Amaliel. As early as 1915, the artist imagined them to be destined for an unidentified exhibition space, with a structure of concentric circles of future construction. It is therefore surprising, to say the least, that his definitive worldwide affirmation will take place in 2018 with a major exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, designed by the architect Frank Lloyd Wright, who was dedicated to Theosophy, and characterised by an upside-down spiral structure with declared esoteric significance.

The works Destined for the Temple, produced since 1906, are rigorously abstract, matured from the spiritual side and nourished by an absolute interiority, coming from an "elsewhere" that exceeds man himself and his earthly possibilities. In af Klint's paintings, therefore, all the artistic and spiritual intentions that would later be advocated by Kandinsky are already present, but elevated to the nth power and realised at least four years earlier. As in many other cases in the history of the 20th century, af Klint was not given any critical attention and his works were only comprehensively exhibited, taken from the silent (and distracted) Moderna Museet in Stockholm, in 1986, for the exhibition The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting

1890-1985 at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. One of the justifications for this inexcusable delay, unfortunately shared by many other artists of absolute importance, even if less incensed by the market, lies in af Klint's own testamentary declarations, which foresaw their eventual exhibition only twenty years after her death, so that society would be better prepared for a message that the artist considered too far ahead of its time. With his death in 1944, the release of his will became effective in 1964, but the first exhibition was not scheduled until 1986, without raising any real debate among scholars, despite a nucleus of 193 works out of a total of 1,200, albeit in large format, with an equally relevant documentary background, consisting of notebooks, 26,000 pages of considerations, memories, messages (from the future), a hundred texts and much more.

The artist's work will only be fully presented again in 2005, albeit with two other artists (Agnes Martin and Emma Kunz) at the Drawing Museum in New York and with the authentic international consecration of af Klint and the group The Five at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013, curated by the Italian Massimiliano Gioni, in the Central Pavilion of the Giardini. The Red Book by Carl Gustav Jung, the fulcrum of the entire project, received a great deal of attention on this occasion, but less so the plates by Rudolf Steiner, exhibited in the adjoining room, and almost none of the works by the Swedish group. Pontus Hulten, director of Stockholm's Modern Museet, is perplexed by the statement that af Klint's works are unsalvageable (entirely specious), considering their mystical afflatus out of time, thus questionably juxtaposing the artistic and commercial aspects, and forgetting the importance of the outdatedness of many artists with respect to the widespread taste of their time. Giving substance to the invisible, as af Klint did, is not an everyday occurrence, and this authentic extraordinariness certainly cannot correspond to automatic acceptability, unless it is properly contextualised. The very identity between saleability and intrinsic quality noted by the director cannot but leave one utterly perplexed. What remains, however, is the sublime quality of the work, the authenticity of a spiritual power that is so disconcerting, dates - from 1906 - of absolute interest, large formats of strict contemporaneity and, above all, an idea of Absolute Abstraction, which completely disregards the rarefaction of nature, as will be evident in Mondrian.

Paradoxically, while on the one hand a museum is being built specifically for Hilma af Klint on Lidingö, an island near Stockholm, after a highly sought-after competition tailored to her research, defined as the first in the abstract sphere and awarded to Andrea Chan, the community of international art historians, after having for a long time marginalised Marianne von Werefkin as simply von Jawlensky's wife, has not yet discussed the stale classifications regarding the primogeniture of Abstraction with respect to Kandinsky. Since it is a matter of sensation painting, strongly interiorised and emotional, even with esoteric-future suggestions, the research to which af Klint's painting is to be assimilated requires a courageous as well as inevitable questioning of the hierarchies in the aniconic research of the 1910s, Completely reshuffling the one concerning the primogeniture of Abstract Expressionism, attributed today to Kandinsky, who in this case would have to renounce, after the sceptre concerning Abstraction in favour of Balla, even this one in favour of af Klint. As for Klint, once consecrated in her private museum, it is to be hoped that she will not be catalogued by official historiography - which is reluctant to admit its oversights, especially if they are gross - in a sui generis section, that of the unclassifiable, relegated to an island as an original and partly bizarre case, promoted as a phenomenon linked to the paranormal, but leaving all the historiographic-commercial counterweights linked to the artists of the Paris market unaltered. Italy is also familiar with this event, having already made two esoteric artists such as Romolo Romani and Julius Evola suffer for it.

The presence of Theosophy in the artistic sphere, especially linked to Abstraction, is also confirmed by the connection between the experiences of the forgotten Hilla Rebay with the great patron Solomon

Guggenheim and the famous Frank Lloyd Wright, consecrated as the most important American architect of the 20th century.

2.2 Hilla Rebay and Frank Lloyd Wright

The story of Hilla Rebay and Frank Lloyd Wright is illustrative of the deep connection between Theosophy and Abstraction, or in this case, Non-Objective Art.

The meeting between the two dates back to 1943: Wright was a frequent visitor to the thought of both Gurdijeff and Ouspensky, both of whom were theosophists and spiritualists, as was the forgotten Hilla Rebay (1890-1967), a close collaborator of the collector and patron Solomon Guggenheim, who used all her energy to convince him to build a museum to house and exhibit his immense collection. The figure of Rebay, in the light of different aspects, will assume great importance in the history of 20th century art, in the absolute, unshakable conviction of the affirmation of a rigorously abstract art or, as Rebay herself put it, of an even more rigorous, non-objective art: "A non-objective painting does not represent any known or unknown object on the face of the earth. It is nothing more than a harmonious organisation of colours and forms that must be appreciated in itself, in all its harmonious beauty'. Statements that go beyond Kandinsky and go beyond Mondrian himself. An arduous task, opposed above all by Peggy Guggenheim, who would be fiercely hostile to her.

A careful analysis of her incredible biography can help us understand her decisive role in certain passages that were to prove crucial in the art of the entire 20th century. Rebay, although sometimes unconsciously, played decisive games on different tables: that of artist, animator, promoter, dealer, critic, curator, theorist, so interconnected that they became a unique and unrepeatable mixture, cemented by the strength of her devotion to Theosophy.

In 1909 she was in Paris, where on 20 February Marinetti's Futurism took flight from the columns of *Le Figaro*; Rebay was already tapping into the source of Theosophy, which had been widespread in Europe for decades, but with the *Ville Lumière* as its authentic cathartic fulcrum in those years. In 1912, she gravitated towards the Bernheim-Jeune gallery, where the Futurists were exhibiting, in sharp contrast to the Cubists. Her mentor was Félix Fénéon, director of the gallery and a great supporter and friend of Marinetti, but above all a formidable critic-journalist-merchant-literate, considered (post mortem) by Jean Paulhan as the only true literary and artistic critic France had ever had. La Rebay assimilated the visionary transversality that led Fénéon to found, from 1884, the magazine *La Revue indépendante*, to direct *La Revue Blanche*, to collaborate with *La Vogue*, *Le Figaro*, *Le Chat Noir*, *Le Cravache*, *Le Matin*, *La Revue Moderniste*, *La Plume*, *Le Père Painard*, *Le Symboliste*, where he promoted authors such as Apollinaire, Jarry, Claudel and others such as Proust, Mallarmé, Joyce, Rimbaud and Verlaine.

Thanks also to her activity as a picture dealer, the young Rébay was to benefit from an invaluable lesson in the works of Van Gogh, Cézanne and Gauguin and, at the same time, from the stimuli of the most innovative avant-garde of the time, thanks to Fénéon's direction of the Bernheim-Jeune gallery. The art critic and dealer had been professing his anarchism since 1886, and was indicted (and acquitted) for an

attempted bombing in 1894. He was also at the forefront of the political and social issues of the time: from the columns of *Entretiens politiques et littéraires* he took a position in favour of Dreyfus, in the anti-Semitic scandal that divided France for twenty years, and then joined the Communist International after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. But Félix Fénéon will not only be a formidable vehicle for the innovative ideas of others, publishing from the columns of *Le Matin* over 1500 novels of 3 lines each: one for the setting, one for the chronicle, more or less black, of the event, proposed in an ironic and desecrating way, the last one dedicated to the surprise epilogue, thus creating brilliant micro-stories and anticipating the very idea of Synthetic Theatre of the Futurists (1915): "At Dunkirk a certain Scheid shot his wife three times without ever managing to hit her. At that point he turned the gun on his mother-in-law. Centre'².

After drawing avidly from this almost inexhaustible creative and social reservoir, in 1914, at the outbreak of the war, Rebay moved to neutral Zurich, where she came into contact with the Dadaist and desecrating environment of the Cabaret Voltaire, becoming affectionately linked to Jean Arp, thanks to whom her artistic research evolved towards non-objective solutions that were to determine her future. In the same period he also met the publisher-gallerist-merchant Herwarth Walden, in whose gallery, *Der Sturm*, he had the fatal meeting with the artist Rudolf Bauer, who would become the grace and damnation of his life. From 1919 he was an active part of the expressionist season in Berlin, participating with the *Novembergruppe* in the exhibition at *Der Sturm* gallery, sharing the experience with artists of the calibre of Max Ernst, Kurt Schwitters and Viking Eggeling. He founded the group *Die Krater* and devoted himself assiduously to oriental and theosophical disciplines. Up to 1927 he went through a very difficult period and spent time in a sanatorium. In the same year he left for the United States. In a short time, she resumed her pictorial research and was recognised by prominent personalities in very selective circles, managing to sell two works to Irene, Solomon Guggenheim's wife, until the decisive achievement in 1929 of a portrait to the great, powerful magnate, with whom she also managed to consolidate a very close relationship that, in the following years, would have sensational developments to say the least. Having become Guggenheim's trustee for art acquisitions, Rebay was to build up an enormous collection in just a few years, thanks to her high-level European contacts, which included works by Kandinsky, Delaunay, Léger and Moholy Nagy, all strictly abstract. The entire collection would be kept until 1939 in a large suite of the Plaza Hotel, before being transferred - due to lack of space, but above all due to increased ambitions - to the first location of the Museum of non-objective painting (so called in accordance with his 1936 paper *Definition of Non-Objective Art*) which Rebay would inaugurate, in a former car dealership, with the exhibition *Art of Tomorrow*. From different perspectives, her activity would attract great attention in New York, not least because of the heated controversy that would be fuelled against her, an immigrant, non-American, promoter of almost exclusively European art, on a direct collision course with Peggy, Solomon's ambitious niece, who had meanwhile opened an art gallery in London and who considered Rebay's work as an authentic family affront.

It was during these years that the uncertain mercantile future of the Futurists' experience was also at stake; Rebay in fact touched on their research many times: in Paris, at the beginning, gravitating around the activities of Fénéon - a great friend of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti - and the Bernheim-Jeune gallery, the venue for the legendary Futurist exhibition of 1912 and the following one of 1913, dedicated to Boccioni's sculptures. Then he would be in Berlin, meeting Walden, the owner-animator of *Der Sturm*, a few years after his exhibitions dedicated to the Futurists and after the "incident" of their renouncing participation in the New York Armory Show in 1913, where Walden would play a negatively decisive role. Walden was hated by the Futurists and it was because of the "trafficking" of their works (underpaid or not paid at all) with the Berlin banker Dr. Borchardt that Marinetti did not come to the States in 1913 for the Armory Show. It is legitimate to think that Walden carefully avoided proposing to Rebay the very people who would

have made him look bad. He therefore did not promote any Futurists for the Guggenheim collection which, over the decades, would form generations of American collectors.

The same could be said for the great Parisian dealers, with their strong ties to Cubism, who were specifically and repeatedly attacked by those very Futurists who arrived in Paris in 1912 and who, claiming an internal commercial autonomy, would not contribute in any way to their enrichment. From the very beginning of his relations with European merchants, Rebay followed the most prosperous and diversified market, that of Paris. Paris was an inexhaustible source, where the best professionals had at their disposal works from all over Europe, including those from the thriving circle of Russian exiles, who were very keen to offer favourable conditions to a new market that was set to explode.

It is also clear that the working relationship between Rebay and Walden intensified after 1936 with the opening of the museum's first branch, i.e. during the years when the United States entered the war against Fascist and Futurist Italy.

Rebay, Guggenheim's operational arm in New York, had no particular personal incentive to promote the Futurists' research, nor any outside pressure from her contacts in Berlin or Paris. In those years of dizzying acquisitions, and above all of the birth of the extremely powerful mechanism connected to the Guggenheim Museum, the first museum of non-objective art in the world, the welding between the historicized and unassailable market of Paris and the future, very rich market of the United States would take place: the Futurists would be opposed by the former, ignored by the latter and literally obscured, from 1945 onwards, by their country of origin. This was perhaps the decisive reason, almost hegemonic even if unreasonable, for the maintenance of the positions of Kandinsky, Delaunay and Léger, above all, within their primogeniture over Abstraction, confirmed by the continuity maintained by the Guggenheim, up to the present day, regarding the "cutting" of acquisitions in this field. This is evidenced by exhibitions such as Hilla Rebay and Solomon R. Guggenheim, 2005 or The Museum of Non-Objective Painting: Hilla Rebay and the Origins of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2009, in addition to those on Abstraction mentioned above.

The wartime period was not an easy one for Rebay, who was of German origin, and she was suspected of colluding with the Nazis and placed under house arrest. However, this restriction did not prevent her from having contacts with the architect Frank Lloyd Wright, a theosophical follower like herself, in order to design the museum space for her impressive collection. The two of them focused on the construction of a museum with a spiral structure intended for non-objective painting, as theorized by Hilma af Klint, whom they did not know. All this happens not by chance the year before her death. They will become the creators of the original project related to the destination of his works Destined for the Temple, more than eighty years later. The basic idea of the project will have priorities linked to a content of a spiritual nature, in which Wright will re-elaborate a project (not realised) for the construction of a planetarium with strong symbolic values, which he will call, not by chance, "Taruggiz", a palindrome of Ziggurat, a Sumerian religious structure symbolising the Cosmic Mountain, thanks to whose ascension one gains access to the Higher Regions saturated with sacred forces 3.

Wright was not approached by chance; he is in fact attuned to the general principles of The Secret Doctrine, as well as being the most suitable architect for the creation of a museum dedicated to abstract, non-objective painting, brought up with Friedrich Fröbel's pedagogical principles, linked to the use of geometric shapes and cubes, painted in pure colours, which guide children towards the creation of complex forms, combining these elements with different solutions: "The smooth cardboard triangles and the polished maple blocks remained impressed in my childhood memory and were an unforgettable experience'. This method was also to influence another young pupil, Johannes Itten, who was to lead the teaching towards the theorisation of primary colours. In 1945, construction of the museum began but, four years later, Solomon Guggenheim died, leaving Rebay unprotected, especially from the criticism she received from Peggy, who was hostile to her origins and hostile to Theosophy, animated by an inexhaustible materialistic ambition, and who made her consider her grandfather's inconvenient advisor as a formidable competitor in her activity as dealer-gallery-owner.

Rebay was soon stripped of all her functions and was forced to resign as director of the museum after a fierce press campaign in 1952. In 1959, Hilla Rebay was not among the guests at the opening of the new Guggenheim Museum in New York, a prodigious injustice that would not go unnoticed by its creator. Frank Lloyd Wright sent her a personal letter: "Dear Hilla, Mr. Guggenheim could not have found a better and more faithful curator than you. The building was created for you and around you, whether you know it or not. Or whether he knows it or not.

Notes:

1. Calvesi, M., *Il Cavaliere Azzurro e l'Orfismo*, Fabbri Editori, Milan, 1976, p. 96.
2. Fénéon, F., *Romanzi in tre righe*, Adelphi, 2009.
3. Eliade, M., *Trattato di storia delle religioni*, Editore Boringhieri, Torino, 1976, pp. 113-114.

Roberto Floreani is an artist with over 70 monographic exhibitions behind him.

He has also written important texts and articles,
with a particular focus on Futurism and its leading exponents.

It is with pleasure that I publish this lecture by Floreani at the headquarters of the Theosophical Society in Vicenza.