

SPIRITUALITY IN MODERN ART

By

Chelsea Ann Rulofson

A Thesis Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment
of
the Requirements of the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS IN ART HISTORY

University of Wisconsin – Superior

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As members of the Thesis Committee, we certify that we have read the thesis prepared by Chelsea Ann Rulofson and that we approve it as fulfilling the thesis requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Art History.


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Abstract:

This thesis includes the interpretation of art as a religious device in early history that was essentially, exclusively used within the context of spirituality. Art from around the world reveals the deep roots between spirituality and art. Looking then to modern times, the influence of Darwinian Theory and science on artists at the time divulges a different type of spirituality that does not need any God, gods, spirits, or ancestors for creation or for art. Philosophies of humanism and cosmic humanism begin to take the spiritual stage in art. Art and its relationship with spirituality and with people in most cases no longer serves a communal purpose and has become a tool of the individual's inner expression, which excludes instead of includes people. The transition has been from artists making art that was for the pleasure of a deity to artists transforming, philosophically, into their own deity and making art to please themselves alone. Through this research into art and spirituality, the relevance of modern art is examined.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank my parents for all their support that they have given me to pursue my dreams, and their unconditional love that helped me through the times I doubted myself. I would also like to thank all my art teachers that built the foundation for my art history career. Lastly, I thank my husband-to-be for his encouragement and faith in my abilities.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this research to my Father, whose truth cannot be hidden.

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CHAPTER 1

RELIGION, SPIRITUALITY, AND ART

Religion is defined as an act which represents a belief in, duty to, and worship for a god, gods, or similar phenomenal power.¹ Similarly, spirituality is defined as: “The quality or condition of being spiritual; attachment to or regard for things of the spirit as opposed to material or worldly interests, a spiritual society.”² According to these definitions, religion and spirituality are interconnected in the belief in the supernatural and spiritual realm. Understanding the meanings of these two principles better equip one to understand the relationships between art and spirituality. Art and spirituality have always been intertwining entities. One, in so many ways, relies upon the other, but over the years, art and spirituality’s roles have changed. When looking into possible causes for these changes, one must first look into the relationship between art and spirituality in cultures prior to the late 1800’s, its relationship since, and the results of these changes in modern day art.

When looking at various religions, one can see that art and spirituality are bound together, sharing a symbiotic relationship that stretches back throughout time. Many religions, if not all, display an interconnected relationship with art and spirituality, from the Mayans in Mexico to the Elema of Papua New Guinea.³ No matter where one goes on this planet, where there are people there is a God, gods, or spirits, and where there are these God, gods, or spirits there is also an art honoring or embodying them.

¹ "Religion, n.". OED Online. March 2012. Oxford University Press. 29 March 2012
<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/161944?redirectedFrom=religion>>

² "Spirituality, n.". OED Online. March 2012. Oxford University Press. 29 March 2012
<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/186904?redirectedFrom=spirituality>>

³ Tribe of Papua New Guinea, which is an island in Melanesia.

Art is used as a translation of people's belief systems, grasping the invisible realm in a visible image. In every culture, art's foundation seems primarily and almost exclusively for religion and spirituality. Some of the most well-known and beautiful works of art were done in the names of different religions. Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and many others have contributed to the vast array of artistic treasures which this world holds dear. When examining each of these different religions, one sees across the spectrum of what is considered art, from painting, sculpture, and architecture to textiles, body scarification, and elaborate masked dancers. The vast majority of art prior to the 1860's carried with it some kind of spiritual purpose.

Christian art has such a variety of styles and canons, from the work of the Middle Ages, to the Renaissance, and onward (Fig.1). One can see paintings, sculptures, and stained glass windows all depicting Christ's life (Fig.2), crucifixion (Fig.3), resurrection, and many other scenes from the Holy Bible. Certain scenes have become iconic such as Christ on the cross, the good shepherd (Fig.4), David and Goliath (Fig.5), and many others. People were able to read these images to interpret the biblical stories that these artists were illustrating or alluding to. Architecture for the cathedrals was done predominately in the cruciform shape or the shape of a cross (Fig.6), this cross refers to Jesus' cross; so, the buildings became outward symbols of their internal spiritual purpose. These artworks were made for a deeper spiritual meaning and purpose, which aimed at giving glory to God and imparting his message to the people. The images were made so that the illiterate people could understand and the literate could contemplate their spiritual lives. Jasper Johns once said, "The Christian artist was not he who merely knew the Bible but he who created from the depth of its spirit."⁴

⁴ Hodin, J.P. *Modern Art and the Modern Mind*. The Press of Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland & London 1972. (p.12).

Mosques are decorated with care and intricacy (Fig.7). As a Muslim's place of worship, mosques are designed to face Mecca—the native land of the Prophet Muhammad—for their obligation to the Muslim tradition of prayer.⁵ The discipline of prayer requires much Muslim devotion, and the intricacies of the mosaics can be seen as a reflection of the intricacies of the human mind and spirit. Even the exquisitely elaborate carpets that the Muslims made were predominately used in mosques and for prayer (Fig.8).⁶ The towering minarets are delightfully detailed and are specifically for calling the citizens of the town and whoever can hear to a time of prayer, for one of the required five daily prayers (Fig.9).

Depending on the country, Buddhist art takes on many different forms. In Japan, Zen Buddhism gave rise to the meditative Zen garden where people would engage with the spiritual through the avenue of the visual landscape (Fig.10).⁷ When looking at these gardens, it is easy to see how one could effortlessly meld into the spiritual realm merely by the aesthetic quality around him/her. In China, some Buddhist art is seen in paintings showing patriarchs being enlightened by writing a poem or cutting down a bamboo tree (Fig.11).⁸ The sculptures of the Buddha symbolize the very god or prophet of Buddhism.

Hinduism, one of the main religions of India, has many pious deities (Fig.12).⁹ Darshan is a form of worshiping through viewing at times such as festivals, so idols that represent the gods are made to be carried around for people to look at and worship (Fig.13).¹⁰ Like many other religions, Hindus have areas built specifically for their worship. Hindu temples were

⁵ Kleiner, S. Fred & Christin J. Mamiya. *Gardener's Art through the Ages Non-Western Perspectives Twelfth Edition*. Copyright 2006. Published by Thomas Wadsworth, a part of the Thomas Corporation. (p.119).

⁶ Kleiner Non-Western Art, 132

⁷ Kleiner Non-Western Art, 100

⁸ Kleiner Non-Western Art, 59

⁹ Kleiner Non-Western Art, 12

¹⁰ Kleiner Non-Western Art, 12

sometimes carved from pre-existing mountains or boulders, and it is believed that this is where the gods would make themselves visible to humans, and the temple itself would serve as their earthly dwelling place.¹¹

Art and spirituality can be found all across the earth, and all cultures display a close relationship between spirituality, religion, and art. This position is supported by the following ideas: “Art is nostalgia for God” and “Art is the visible God”, and in many other cultures, art and spirituality fuse into an inseparable unit.¹² In Hawaii people who make royal feathered robes will recite the genealogies of the royal wearer which will increase the spiritual substance called mana.¹³ Mesoamerican temples were made to resemble mountains with ‘caves’ at the top that were a spiritual entrance for the leaders to move and return from the spiritual world.¹⁴ Skillful carvers from the northwest Pacific coast were perceived as being blessed with supernatural gifts.¹⁵ The Aztecs believed that artists had the ability to become immortal if they were spiritually enlightened by the gods.¹⁶ Aborigines in Australia believed that designs were given by ancestral beings; and the list goes on.¹⁷ An idea by Rodin, which was supported by some artists, believed that “true artists are the most religious among mortals.”¹⁸ Correspondingly, Barbara Hepworth says, “all true works of art are an act of praise.”¹⁹ Across the world, art has

¹¹ Kleiner Non-Western Art, 14-15

¹² Hodin, 159

¹³ O’Riley, Kampen Michael. *Art Beyond the West Second Edition*. Copyright 2001. Published 2002 by Harry N. Adams, Inc., New York. (p.222).

¹⁴ O’Riley, 286

¹⁵ O’Riley, 317

¹⁶ O’Riley, 306

¹⁷ O’Riley, 208

¹⁸ Hodin, 167

¹⁹ Hodin, 167

served as an interpretive function for religion.²⁰ Although this bond of spirituality and art has been around for ages, something in art has changed.

²⁰ Read, Herbert. *The Philosophy of Modern Art*. Copyright 1952. The World Publishing Company, Cleveland and New York. 1954. (p.9).

CHAPTER 2

MODERN SCIENTIFIC INFLUENCE

Alfred Manessier said that, “There is a spiritual climate which determines the style of the centuries.”²¹ Since the 1860s, after the publication of Darwinian Theory,²² the idea that life needed no aid of a deity for creation percolated into many artists’ views, and has vastly altered what was once called art and its relationship with spirituality. Art’s purpose had shifted from being sacred and spiritual and had become more secular and scientific. J.P. Hodin viewed this shift in art in a negative light, believing that art stops being art if it does not have a spiritual objective and because art that complies to scientific control becomes inhuman, which leads to the inevitable ruin of art.²³

A viewpoint of art at this time was accepting the aesthetic as an evolving part of cultural evolution.²⁴ In science, in order to research new theories more thoroughly, scientists apply them to various aspects of the world and society. This method came from the Renaissance scientist Francis Bacon who was a father of the scientific method.²⁵ Jose Ortega displays this theory perfectly, making the distinction that only an exclusively gifted few are able to grasp modern art, and that modern art separates society into two different species: those who appreciate modern art and those who do not.²⁶ In addition to Ortega’s view of the segregated and superior public who appreciate modern art he also deems it a “profound injustice of the assumption that men are

²¹ Hodin, 165

²² See glossary

²³ Hodin, 178

²⁴ Hodin, 178

²⁵ Klein, Juergen, "Francis Bacon", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = *First published Mon Dec. 29, 2003. 14 Feb. 2012.*
<<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/francis-bacon/>>

²⁶ Gasset y Ortega, Jose. *The Dehumanization of Art- and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey 1968. Copyright 1948. (p.12).

actually equal.”²⁷ It makes sense that Darwinian Theory was applied in art, but is art really an avenue of science that needs to be analyzed? Art need not be scientifically analyzed, and art’s purpose should serve a higher and more significant calling than ascribed to it during and after this point in time.

Art started taking in themes from science and rejecting old traditions. Gasset says that, “the imperative of unmitigated realism that dominated the artistic sensibility of the last century must be put down as a freak in aesthetic evolution.”²⁸ Scientific influence had begun taking the place of the spiritual in art. Darwinian theories, especially at this time, were being applied to art, pushing out the more supernatural aspects that art embodies and replacing them with scientific ideology. Some have believed that when people try to scientifically define art they dehumanize the most internal origin and meaning of art, and that art’s inner experience is missed, void of its human heart-beat.²⁹ Similar to Darwinian Theory of the survival of the fittest, art was becoming more and more exclusive and elitist. Not just in its availability to the public—art has almost always been a more affluent person’s article—understanding it or “getting it” started becoming, in and of itself, a type of exclusion toward people who did not understand or appreciate it.

Darwin’s theories were very quickly applied to art around the turn of the 19th century. One of the most prevalent themes that came from Darwinian literature was the *femme fatale*.³⁰ When looking at some of Darwin’s writings, Bram Dijkstra found that the largely believed argument was that evolution proved that women were more animal-like, less evolved, and less intelligent than men.³¹ Furthermore, because women were less advanced he believed that they

²⁷ Gasset, 7

²⁸ Gasset, 25

²⁹ Hodin, 182

³⁰ See glossary

³¹ Larson, Jean Barbara and Fae Brauer eds. *The Art of Evolution: Darwin, Darwinisms, and*

stalked and ensnared men out of their primal fish hybrid or animal instincts (Fig.14).³² This negative view of women became very popular with many male artists at this time, spreading the doctrine that women are unequal to men because they are less evolved or progressed, which created another type of elitism in art. Artists such as Edvard Munch (Fig.15), Alphonse Mucha (Fig.16), and many others contributed to this theme in art (Fig.17).

Groups of artists, like Fauvists, likewise started using themes from Darwinism. Fauvism comes directly from the French *les fauves* which means wild beasts. In all likelihood, this group's name was no coincidence in relationship to Darwinism. Henri Matisse was the oldest member of the group and acted as their mentor; he believed in stressing the importance of expression as his art's main goal.³³ The Fauve style sought to capture the emotional spirit of the subject employing spontaneity, decoration, and intuition.³⁴ This theme of relying upon one's intuition and instinct can be linked directly to Darwinian Theory and the idea of instinctual qualities inherent in humans. Fauve artists tended to internalize their work, seeking inspiration from within to create their art. "Fauves as a group hunted exotic patterns in the artifacts of museums. They were inspired by the work of the Byzantines, the Coptic Christians, and the archaic Greek artists, as well as by the tribal art of African, Oceanic, and the Native Americans."³⁵ These art forms display the religions or spiritualities of these people groups. One might be tempted to think that relying on one's instinct alone to create is not enough. Perhaps its lack of a spiritual purpose was one of the reasons this movement was so short lived. The Fauve

Visual Culture. Copyright 2009. Published by University Press of New England, N.H. (p.173).

³² Larson, 173.

³³ Buesking, R. Michael ed. History of Modern Art: Art 333 Section 1. LAD Pac Custom Publishing, Inc. Evangel University. (p.7).

³⁴ Ocvirk, G. Otto, Robert E. Stinson, Philip R. Wigg, Robert O. Bone, and David L. Cayton. *Art Fundamentals: Theory and Practice, Tenth Edition*. Published by McGraw-Hill, an imprint of The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc. Copyright 2006. (p.267).

³⁵ Ocvirk, 268

movement ended by 1912 because they were considered too sedate when related to their more “evolved” contemporaries.³⁶

Some art critics believe that the changes in style are due to an artistic evolution, which started with Cezanne’s belief of looking for the cone, cube, and the sphere in nature, then, based off this idea which artists explored further, evolved into styles of some Fauve Expressionists and Cubism itself.³⁷ Cubist artists, as well as others at that time, showed signs of similar scientific influence. Picasso and Paul Klee relied upon their senses to discover what they thought to be the way to an honest work of art.³⁸ Jasper Johns thought the works of Picasso were interesting in a peculiar way, but he believed they did not evoke an emotional response.³⁹ Perhaps the absence of an emotional reaction is due to its lack of a spiritual function. Georges Braque, another cubist artist, believed in unending progression of adaptation.⁴⁰ Braque’s belief in the idea of adaptation can also be attributed to Darwinian influence involving the idea that animals adapt to their surroundings.

In addition to science booming at the turn of the 20th century, industry furthermore influenced art and its relationship with the spiritual. The human aspect of art had been removed to be replaced with the mechanical. The Dadaists displayed this quality in their art and, when talking about their ready-mades, Hodin felt that the spiritual was being overcome by the mechanical in art.⁴¹ With the exchange of the spiritual for the mechanical, art was changing drastically. Artists like Marcel Duchamp and Max Ernst created machine-esque forms that were

³⁶ Ocvirk, 267

³⁷ Ocvirk, 274

³⁸ Read, 38-39

³⁹ Hodin, 8

⁴⁰ Hodin, 204

⁴¹ Hodin, 180-181

supposed to represent people as unthinking robots.⁴² This, as well as many other art movements, is one of the reasons why people talk of modern art and roll their eyes and say, “Oh, those artists.” To simply say “those people just ‘don’t get it’” is not really an answer. The reason for people not “getting it” maybe that people fail to see the human relevance in modern art and possibly without realizing it they see its lack of spiritual purpose.

Signs of Darwinian influence can be seen in other branches of science, which have also influenced art. Looking at just a few art movements after the publication of Darwinian Theory, signs of its influence leap from the canvas. Sigmund Freud, who was a pioneer in psychology, would influence the world of art through his studies. As an admirer of Darwin, Freud believed that only the weak needed a God and that believing in God was only a neurosis; moreover he felt that religion as a whole was not reality but instead a psychological defense.⁴³ In addition to Freud’s spiritual views, Douglas Groothuis wrote about how Freud believed that subconscious elements are raging in the mind for control and that reason is not what governs people but rather the unconscious mind.⁴⁴

The influences of ideologies such as these were very prevalent around the turn of the 20th century. Surrealists used automatism⁴⁵ in their work to unfold the creativity of the subconscious mind. Automatism itself was actually scientific and not fundamentally artistic at all, and Freudian theories of the unconscious mind were also used by the Surrealists.⁴⁶ Surrealists were very interested in the new scientific world that was now accessible through the microscope,

⁴² Ocvirk, 284

⁴³ Groothuis, R. Douglas. *Unmasking the New Age*. Published by InterVarsity Press, Illinois, 1986. (p.73).

⁴⁴ Groothuis, 73

⁴⁵ See glossary

⁴⁶ Read, 48

which revealed organic shapes that were one of their fundamental areas of study.⁴⁷ Through Freud's ideas concerning dreams and their meanings, Surrealists attempted to generate "a new pantheon of subconscious imagery."⁴⁸ To the Surrealists, actions and behaviors generated on the conscious plane were less real than those on the subconscious level; likewise they believed people could only maintain their individual freedoms through dreams which arose from beneath the conscious level of the mind.⁴⁹ Additionally, the Surrealists were drawn to the subconscious revelations from dreams as well as the supernatural origins of life.⁵⁰ Essentially, they attempted to construct a new art mythology, which was a fusion of unconscious and conscious planes of the mind.⁵¹ Their focus included creating their own mythology, establishing their own mystic origin of being, and looking inward toward the instinctual dream qualities within. All of these components fall under the umbrella of spirituality.

The new found interest in spirituality among Surrealists may have come about because of the absence of the spiritual in earlier art movements, such as cubism. Either way, artists started bringing back different elements allied with religion and spirituality. Artists Max Ernst was an example of this, he would go into a type of trance when he created his works, "The artist [Max Ernst] would search for a variety of images while in a state of feverish mental intoxication. A process bordering on self-hypnosis was embraced to arrive at this heightened state."⁵² This is a method similar to that of some Native American traditions. The crow warrior Arapoosh (Sore

⁴⁷ Ocvirk, 95

⁴⁸ Ocvirk, 287

⁴⁹ Ocvirk, 287

⁵⁰ Ocvirk, 95

⁵¹ Ocvirk, 287

⁵² Ocvirk, 287

Belly) made a shield from his revelation that he had on his vision quest, which dictated the materials and designs for the shield.⁵³

Surrealism developed at the same time as two theoretical scientific advances: Albert Einstein's theory of relativity and the development of quantum physics.⁵⁴ Surrealists had these theories at their core, and would also be influenced by Andr  Breton and Philippe Soupault's *Magnetic Fields*, which is where they got the idea of automatism.⁵⁵ Yves Tanguy did something similar when he created his work; he would let his hand wander free as he unconsciously doodled.⁵⁶ His thoughtless doodlings are a perfect example of automatism. Other artists additionally influenced by quantum physics included Wolfgang Paalen, who took inspiration from the type of quantum physics that was led by Erwin Schr dinger and Louis de Broglie, and Salvador Dal  who, in his *The Persistence of Memory* (Fig.20), employed a fusion of Einstein's relativity theory and Freudian psychoanalysis.⁵⁷

Aspects of quantum physics interestingly demonstrate a spiritual quality in art. In regards to Schr dinger, Fred Alan Wolf coined the term "solipsism" to describe Schr dinger's position on wholeness, which states that everything depends on the individual and that the self is the single thing that can be verified, and that the individual created the universe or rather the "you-universe."⁵⁸ This theory gave rise to philosophies of self-importance or individual deification, which would have a large impact on philosophy and art in the next few decades. Eastern influence was seen in some of the ideology of quantum physics. Theoretical Physicist David

⁵³ O'Riley, 323

⁵⁴ Ambrosio, Chiara. *Papers of Surrealism*, Issue 8. Spring 2010. University College London.   Chiara Ambrosio, 2010. 17 April 2012. <<http://www.surrealismcentre.ac.uk/papersofsurrealism/journal8/index.htm>> (p.1).

⁵⁵ Ambrosio, 1

⁵⁶ Ocvirk, 287

⁵⁷ Ambrosio, 3

⁵⁸ Groothuis, 98

Bohm believed that relativity and quantum theory indicated the need to view the world as a specific whole, in which everything in the universe combines into one united totality.⁵⁹

However, Fritjof Capra, author of *The Tao of Physics*, says that this idea of oneness is thousands of years old and comes from the Eastern mystic belief that “all is one.”⁶⁰ Both of the theories about self and oneness would become popular in decades to come.

⁵⁹ Groothuis, 97

⁶⁰ Groothuis, 97

CHAPTER 3

MODERN PHILOSOPHICAL INFLUENCES

Following on the foundations laid by Darwin came philosophy. Like art, philosophy had started incorporating evolutionary principals. This was viewed by some as a spiritual crisis of the age; and many thought that artists were now forced to search for new organic concepts and new internal instruction.⁶¹ Philosophy based on different avenues of science gave rise to many different styles of art based on artist's individual philosophies about spirituality and/or science. The changes in the styles of modern art were thought by Read to be the stylistic evolution of art.⁶² Many artists that stemmed from the modern art movements more strictly resembled philosophers than artists.

Although there was a scientific movement that came from the study of nature, nature itself as a subject for art was rejected because of the spiritual qualities that some believed it possessed. Modern art philosopher Herbert Read states that when *Nature* is capitalized its meaning is similar to God, and that abstract art and its varieties like constructivism⁶³ or neoplasticism⁶⁴ reject the idea that art is reliant on Nature (God) and the laws of Nature.⁶⁵ Artists were in essence rejecting God represented by Nature. Edvard Munch was said to have “renounced all painting from direct observation of Nature, turning instead to congealed memories inscribed on his own sensorium.”⁶⁶ These thought patterns were largely due to the Humanist Philosophy.⁶⁷ J.P. Hodin touches on this subject: “In the nineteenth century an attempt

⁶¹ Hodin, 3-4

⁶² Read, 4

⁶³ See glossary

⁶⁴ See glossary

⁶⁵ Read, 72, 75-76

⁶⁶ Larson, 109

⁶⁷ See glossary

was made to replace religion with art...At the same time there was a tendency to replace religion with humanism and faith with knowledge.”⁶⁸ Art and thought have developed in stages together, and they both are connected with social movements.⁶⁹ It is interesting that Nature is portrayed in this way because “Nature” represents the very things that most cultures believed were created by a god, gods, or ancestral spirits: such as humans, animals, plants, and landscapes. The Christians believe that earth is God’s creation and that it bears his image, “The heavens are yours, and yours also the earth; you founded the world and all that is in it.”⁷⁰ Based on this line of thought the connection between Nature and the Christian God was a contributing factor, if not the main cause, for artists’ aversions toward realistic representation.

In the early 1900s, many artists were using styles that explored imaginary imagery, and their styles were extremely different and individualized from each other.⁷¹ Some modern art movements coined their own spirituality and reflected it in their art; it is easy to see this in artists such as Paul Klee, Franz Marc, and Wassily Kandinsky. All three of these men were associated at one time or another with the group Der Blaue Reiter.⁷² Paul Klee “saw the creative act as a magical experience in which the artist was enabled in moments of illumination to combine an inner vision with an outer experience of the world...He believed that his inner truth, his inner vision, was revealed not only in the subject, the color, and shapes as defined entities, but even more in the process of creation.”⁷³ Klee’s year-long trip to Egypt influenced his painting *Ad Parnassum* (Fig.21); Parnassum is a mountain that was holy to the Greeks for their god Apollo

⁶⁸ Hodin, 159

⁶⁹ Read, 15

⁷⁰ *Seasons of Reflection*. The Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright 1994. Psalm 89:11 (p.632).

⁷¹ Fichner-Rathus, Lois. *Understanding Art*, Eighth Edition. Thomas and Wadsworth Inc. © 2007. (p.486).

⁷² Arnason, H.H. *History of Modern Art, Painting Sculpture Architecture Photography: Fifth Edition*. Published 2003 by Prentice Hall, Inc. Copyright 2004. (p.135).

⁷³ Arnason, 351

and the Muses, so Klee used a pyramid in his painting to elevate the viewer into a Parnassian realm.⁷⁴

Franz Marc used animals as a subject matter and saw them as a “source of spiritual harmony and purity in nature.”⁷⁵ Indeed the subjects of his work were mainly animals: horses, cows, dogs, and the like (Fig.22). In his work he never has humans in the same harmony with nature as his animals, and his religious style of art can be defined as pantheistic.⁷⁶ He believed that the colors themselves took on a spiritual, sensual, or brutal principle, and when they were mixed together to make an abstract shape, they took on a spiritual or material significance apart from the subject.⁷⁷

Wassily Kandinsky studied the relationship of art and music and had unconventional religious views, as stated by Arnason: “Advances in the physical sciences had called into question the ‘reality’ of the world of tangible objects, with the expression of the spiritual rather than the material. Despite his strong scientific and legal interests, Kandinsky was attracted to Theosophy, spiritism, and the occult.”⁷⁸ Kandinsky’s *Composition VII* displays one of his general interests in his art, which is the Deluge from Genesis; he also focused on themes from cosmic conflict, renewal, and other biblical scenes such as the Apocalypse from Revelation (Fig.23).⁷⁹ Kandinsky’s style, which focused on spiritual purity, predicts more drastic simplifications to come in art.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ Arnason, 353

⁷⁵ Arnason, 137

⁷⁶ Arnason, 137

⁷⁷ Arnason, 137

⁷⁸ Arnason, 351

⁷⁹ Arnason, 136

⁸⁰ Arnason, 135

The emphasis of self is quite prevalent in the rationale of the modern artist, which contrasts greatly with earlier artists who had to satisfy their patrons and make art specifically to their clients' tastes.⁸¹ In modern times, the artist has no need of patronage to make art, and additionally, the artist of today needs no clients to buy their paintings because they are only made to please the artist or to help the artists express themselves. A translation from the *Intimate Journals* in New York in 1936, talked about the Impressionists saying, "it is better to paint from memory, for thus your work will be your own: your sensation, your intelligence, and your soul will triumph over the eye of the amateur."⁸² The word your is repeated again and again which helps in clarifying that the idea of the self was making its way into artist's ideologies even at the time of the Impressionists.

Changing views on reality have vastly altered the traditional perception of art and the people it represents. These changing conceptions of art have stemmed from philosophy. Jasper Johns, when asked about modern art, said "today, however, artists indulge in the same mischief as some philosophers by borrowing concepts from modern science which they pass off as a world view. The case of the modern artist is this: he says modern science has done away with the notion of reality."⁸³ In the past, art represented a people's spiritual theology, now it represents the individual's spiritual theology. Along the lines of the individualized new art is the popular philosophy of Existentialism. Read believes that relativism in philosophy has deemed reality to be subjective, and that the individual has to build his/her own reality even if it is random or ridiculous, which parallels art and what is required from artists.⁸⁴ "Existentialism [is] a philosophy that emphasizes the uniqueness and isolation of the individual in a hostile or

⁸¹ Read, 16

⁸² Read, 23

⁸³ Hodin, 11

⁸⁴ Read, 8-9

indifferent universe, regards existence as unexplainable, and stresses free choice and responsibility for one's actions."⁸⁵ Beliefs similar to or derived from this philosophy are Cosmic Humanism and the New Age movement.⁸⁶ A common New Age belief holds to the theory that there is a different reality for each person because people make their own realities.⁸⁷ Philosophy like this accounts for the expansion of art taking on themes and subjects that are viewed by most people as nihilistic or pointless. This philosophy explains works by artists like Eric Fischl and Gerhard Richter. Eric Fischl's "subjects move beyond a fascination with either flesh or paint to become implicated in suggestions of alcoholism, voyeurism, onanism [masturbation], homosexuality, and incest" (Fig.24).⁸⁸ Gerhard Richter "wanted to do something that had nothing to do with art, composition, color, creation, etc." (Fig.25).⁸⁹ He did a series called *Gray* which consisted of virtually identical, entirely gray paintings.⁹⁰ Artists write off the negative perceptions and reactions of art by calling it "difficult art", which alludes to the presence of an elitist portion of people for whom this art is not difficult. "Once this sense of security is removed (that is to say, is destroyed by scientific analysis) then philosophy and art are public auctions in which the most acceptable reality commands the highest price."⁹¹

Beverly Galyean's statement represents a very common New Age belief: "Once we begin to see that we are all God, that we all have the attributes of God, then I think the whole purpose of human life is to renown the Godlikeness within us; the perfect intelligence, and when we do

⁸⁵ Costello, B. Robert (Ed.). *The American Heritage College Dictionary Third Edition*. Copyright 1997. Houghton Mifflin Company. (p.480).

⁸⁶ See glossary

⁸⁷ Groothuis, 15

⁸⁸ Arnason, 704.

⁸⁹ Taylor, Brandon. *Contemporary Art*. Copyright 2005. Laurence King Publishing Ltd. Published by Pearson Education, Inc. (p.70).

⁹⁰ Taylor, 70

⁹¹ Read, 9

that, create back to that old, that essential oneness which is consciousness.”⁹² The New Age movement is so varied and diverse that people who make statements for it do not necessarily represent the beliefs held by all New Age believers; this variation is due to its relationship with the theory of evolution and the idea of an ever changing and improving state of being.⁹³ The New Age ideology is becoming a popular spiritual theology among people and artists today.

Groothuis offers a definition of Pantheistic monism as “all is god; all is one; ‘that art thou.’ Despite variations, the basic assumption is that there is no ultimate distinction between humanity and deity.”⁹⁴ This idea has influenced the minds of many artists and can be seen as a contributing factor to artists of today feeling that they need only to please themselves with their work. Artists were being consciously and subconsciously influenced by the idea of individual deification. Baudelaire said that an artist “is a law unto himself...He is his own king, his own priest, his own god.”⁹⁵ He later goes on to talk about how art is the only dominion where a person can believe if they want to and not believe if they do not want to.⁹⁶ Rodin talks about how in this age man has replaced God and that this form of thinking was what one would find when looking at Picasso.⁹⁷ Picasso once said,

How can you expect an onlooker to live a picture of mine as I have lived it? A picture comes to me from miles away: who is to say from how far away I sensed it, saw it, painted it; and yet the next day I can’t see what I’ve done myself. How can anyone enter into my dreams, my instincts, my thoughts, which have taken a long time to mature and to come out into the daylight, and above all grasp from them what I have been about—perhaps against my own will?⁹⁸

⁹² Groothuis, 14

⁹³ Groothuis, 18

⁹⁴ Groothuis, 141

⁹⁵ Groothuis, 141

⁹⁶ Hodin, 159

⁹⁷ Hodin, 160

⁹⁸ Read, 31

Picasso's statement drips with animosity towards people who would try to interpret his work, because he feels like only he can truly know and interpret its meaning.

Humanism in modern art is believed by Read to have risen from this ideology: "Man is as good as God—as a theme for the artist."⁹⁹ This belief system is subconsciously if not consciously influencing many artists in modern times. Read expands on the idea that some modern artists claim to build new realities on ambiguous concepts like worldwide harmony or the shared unconscious, and their construction of these new realities is considered somewhat divine.¹⁰⁰ Edvard Munch said, "I will paint a series of such pictures, in which people will have to recognize the holy element and bare their heads before it, as though in church."¹⁰¹

Artists have seen spiritual elements in the works of other artists which the artists who made them might not immediately recognize themselves. Fernand Léger felt that abstract art had reached its creative conclusion and contributed all that it could, and that abstract art's want for perfection and freedom had created an elite art of a few artists and admirers that were able to make it.¹⁰² Léger went on to say that he considered this formula arrogant and irrefutably a religion.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Read, 15

¹⁰⁰ Read, 9

¹⁰¹ Read, 27

¹⁰² Selz, Peter and Kristine Stiles (Eds.). *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art- A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA. 1996. (p. 177-178).

¹⁰³ Selz, 177-178.

CHAPTER 4

ART'S RELEVANCE

Art has at times sought to omit spirituality entirely, and when that approach lost its novelty, artists turned back to religious and spiritual elements for inspiration and meaning in their art. With this there has come a change from communal religious art to individual religious art. This change, and the wave of New Age individual artists and their varied realities have caused art itself to lose much of its significance to viewers.

Art that is made in a different country of the world helps to identify the country as a whole. An example is when a person thinks of India, he/she usually thinks of things like curry, elephants, and the Taj Mahal. In so many ways, the art of a country represents its people. Yet today, with a large portion of the spiritual aspect in art omitted, or so obscure and individualized, art cannot represent the country as a whole. In the news today, when we see countries in conflict with one another, what is one of the first things done when an invading army is taking over a major city? They destroy the artwork that represents that country and its people. How would most people react if someone tore down an abstract monument? Probably not the same way as if someone destroyed the Statue of Liberty. And why is that? Because an abstract piece of art has lost its human and spiritual relevance, whereas Lady Liberty stands for the heartbeat of her people. Unlike the form of the abstract piece, the Statue of Liberty is a human being, an icon that even a young child could understand, whereas most adult people would not understand an abstract monument. Some people believed that when abstract art first came about that there must have been something wrong with the viewer if he/she did not understand it. In most abstract art, we find the absence of the spiritual element almost entirely. J.P. Hodin said it best when he was

speaking of non-objective art: “To this we can only say that there always is something unsatisfactory in ‘abstract’ art.”¹⁰⁴ Artists have realized this and have formed their own individual spiritual realities to fill this void. In times before modernism, art was for the most part self-explanatory, but today it is up to the viewer to interpret what the artist is trying to convey.¹⁰⁵

Since the beginnings of recorded history art and spirituality have been connected, and when one separates one from the other, something important and irreplaceable is lost. People have tried to fill this hole in art with philosophy, psychology, science, and many other things, but they all fall short of being relevant to the human element in art. With the inclusions of hybrid religions and spiritualities now becoming the norm in art, art’s communal function is becoming more and more exclusive.

The Tlinget tribes in the Northwest Coast of the Pacific make Chilkat blankets as a symbol of status because it was a labor-intensive and time-consuming process.¹⁰⁶ In the same way, people today use difficult art as conversation pieces to show others how cultured they are because they appreciate the piece, how wealthy they are to afford such a piece, and how educated they are to be able to interpret the piece. Although these pieces share the theme of status, many Chilkat blankets depict imagery of animals which are related to their beliefs in totemic animals and ancestral spirits (Fig. 24).¹⁰⁷ They share a commonality as a symbol of status, but Chilkat blankets represent a people and their belief system; whereas the conversation or difficult art piece only represents an individual artist and his/her interpretation of art. In modern times, religious or spiritual principles, when applied to art, are considered old-fashioned. Louise

¹⁰⁴ Hodin, 182

¹⁰⁵ Bois, Yve; Buchlon, Benjamin, H.D.; Foster Hal; Krauss, Rosalind. *Art Since 1900: Volume II*. Copyright 2004. Published by Thames and Hudson Inc. (p.142).

¹⁰⁶ Corbin, A. George. *Native Arts of North America, Africa, and the South Pacific: an Introduction*. Copyright 1988. Westview Press Boulder, Colorado. 1988. (p.50, 52-53).

¹⁰⁷ O’Riley, 320

Nevelson puts it this way: “All creative work is sacred. Religion is another form of creation. The formal religions that are inherited by mankind are like any other lovely thing—they are heirlooms.”¹⁰⁸ Although acknowledging the value of religion, she is undermining its importance in art like so many others do. Art from the Tlingit peoples, as well as almost every religion around the world, was for communal events such as ceremonies, festivals, and religious practices. Art today seems to only be focused on the individual artist’s interpretation of his/her own personal spin on philosophy, spirituality, and art. With this emphasis on the individual and the self, the communal aspect of art, especially in its spiritual context, is becoming obsolete. Read wrote about how modern art is considered to be a closed system that has no spiritual calling and is accused of having no social purpose.¹⁰⁹

In this individualized art movement, themes like creating art for art’s sake have become very prevalent, and what people or the masses want is forgotten or purposefully ignored. In most cases today, people who create art specifically based on the tastes of others are viewed as sell-outs and kitschy, merely because they created art for people and not for themselves. A philosopher of modern art Karsten Harries describes kitsch in this way: “Those paintings were called Kitsch which seemed to show a lack of integrity and which catered to the longings of the sentimental bourgeois.”¹¹⁰

Jasper Johns commented that the modern artists in general do not have a base of religious faith.¹¹¹ In fact, people of spiritual faiths are considered by some as uncreative, Johns goes on to say, “I am convinced that there are many believers in our time, people who live in sincerity and

¹⁰⁸ Hodin, 167-168

¹⁰⁹ Read, 34

¹¹⁰ Harries, Karsten. *The Meaning of Modern Art: A Philosophical Interpretation*. Copyright 1968. Northwestern University Press. 1968 Evanston. (p.75).

¹¹¹ Hodin, 13

are ethically correct. Yet it is true that their world is not creative.”¹¹² Yet, art history would disagree with that statement. Artists since the beginning of time have been closely and, most times, inseparably fused with spirituality and religion. Art based on religious principals has touched people throughout time, Joan Miró spoke of art in this light: “Painting as a means of poetic expression is not enough. Art is something more. One sees the hidden thing, the soul of things.”¹¹³ Rodin spoke of an inner life to art saying, “Art is spiritualization. It represents the highest delight of the intellect which penetrates nature and senses in it the same spirit with which art itself is imbued.”¹¹⁴ Art, when connected with the spiritual, has the ability to move the most artless of persons because it can transcend the bounds of intelligence, class, and education, and speak to their spirit.

¹¹² Hodin, 13

¹¹³ Hodin, 169

¹¹⁴ Hodin, 180

Glossary

Automatism—“An artistic approach in which the artist relinquishes conscious, rational control, enabling subconscious and impulses to direct the form of the work. Automatism is most closely associated with the Surrealists and the Abstract Expressionists.”¹¹⁵

Constructivism—“An early 20th-century Russian art movement in art formulated by Naum Gabo, who built up his sculptures piece by piece in space instead of carving or *modeling* them in the traditional way. In this way the sculptor worked with ‘volume of mass’ and ‘volume of space’ as difficult materials.”¹¹⁶

Darwinism—“A theory of biological evolution developed by Charles Darwin and others, stating that all species of organisms arise and develop through the natural selection of inherited variations that increase the individual’s ability to survive and reproduce.”¹¹⁷

Evolve—“To develop or achieve gradually: evolve a style of one’s own.”¹¹⁸

Femme Fatale—“A seductive woman who leads men into dangerous situations.”¹¹⁹

Humanism—“A system of thought that centers on humans and their values, capacities, and worth.”¹²⁰

Neo-plasticism—“A theory of art developed by Piet Mondrian to create a pure plastic art composed of the simplest, least subjective, elements, *primary colors*, primary values, and primary directions (horizontal and vertical).”¹²¹

New Age—“Of or relating to a complex of spiritual and consciousness-raising movements of the 1980’s, including belief in spiritualism and reincarnation and holistic approaches to health and ecology.”¹²²

Theosophy—“Religious philosophy or speculation about the soul based on mystical insight into the nature of God...The Theosophy Society, founded in New York City in 1875, incorporating aspects of Buddhism and Brahmanism.”¹²³

¹¹⁵ Arnason, 799

¹¹⁶ Kleiner Volume II, 1096

¹¹⁷ Costello, 353

¹¹⁸ Costello, 476

¹¹⁹ Costello, 502

¹²⁰ Costello, 661

¹²¹ Kleiner Volume II, 1097

¹²² Costello, 918

¹²³ Costello, 1406

Voyeur—“A person who derives sexual gratification from observing the naked bodies or sexual acts of others, esp. secretly.”¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Costello, 1515

Illustrations

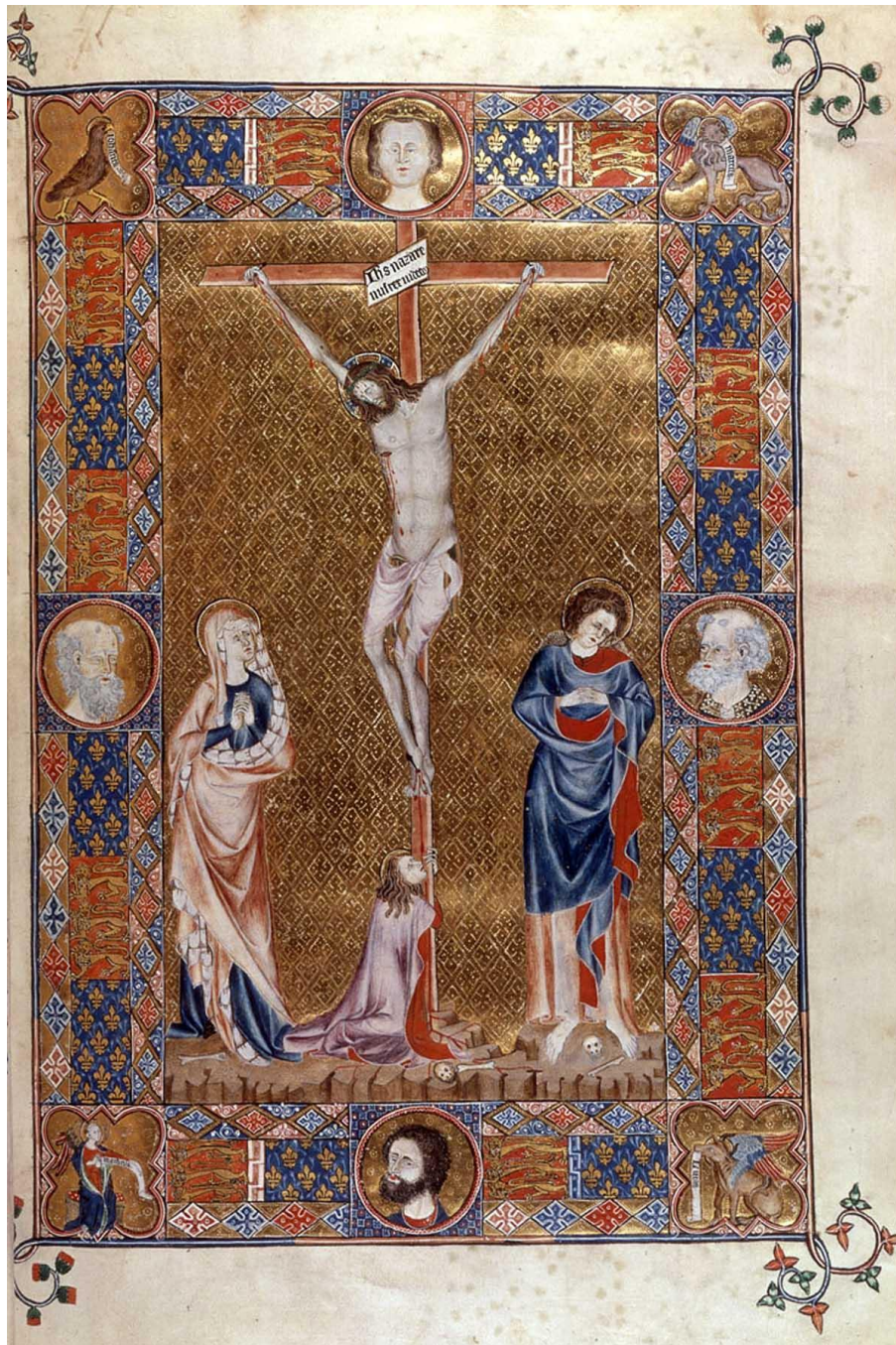


Fig.1: Gorleston Psalter. *Crucifixion*. Illumination 10 1/8 x 6 3/4." Second quarter 14th century. British Library (Ms. Add. 49622, fol. 7r), London.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Zarnecki, George. *Art of the Medieval World: Architecture Sculpture Painting the Sacred Arts*. Published by Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York, 1975. (p. 409).



Fig.2: Saint Bavo Cathedral. Ghent, Belgium. Stained glass showing Christ's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane and the Mocking.¹²⁶

¹²⁶Google. "Google Ghent Cathedral Stained Glass," Accessed May 14, 2012. Last Modified 2012. <http://www.belgium-tour-guide.com/pit-1288-stained-glass-cathedral-ghent-belgium.php>



Fig.3: Peter Paul Rubens, *The Elevation of the Cross*. 1610-11. Antwerp, Cathedral (wood; centre painting 181 3/4 x 134 1/4, wings, each 181 3/4 x 59).¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Stevenson, R.A.M. *Rubens Paintings and Drawings Phaidon Edition*. Published 1939. Oxford University Press. New York. (Portrait 218).



Fig.4: *Christ as the Good Shepherd*, Mosaic from the entrance wall of the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna, Italy, ca. 425.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Kleiner, S. Fred and Christin J. Mamiya. *Gardner's Art Through the Ages Twelfth Edition Volume I*. Copyright 2005. Wadsworth, a division of Thomas Learning, Inc. (p.316).

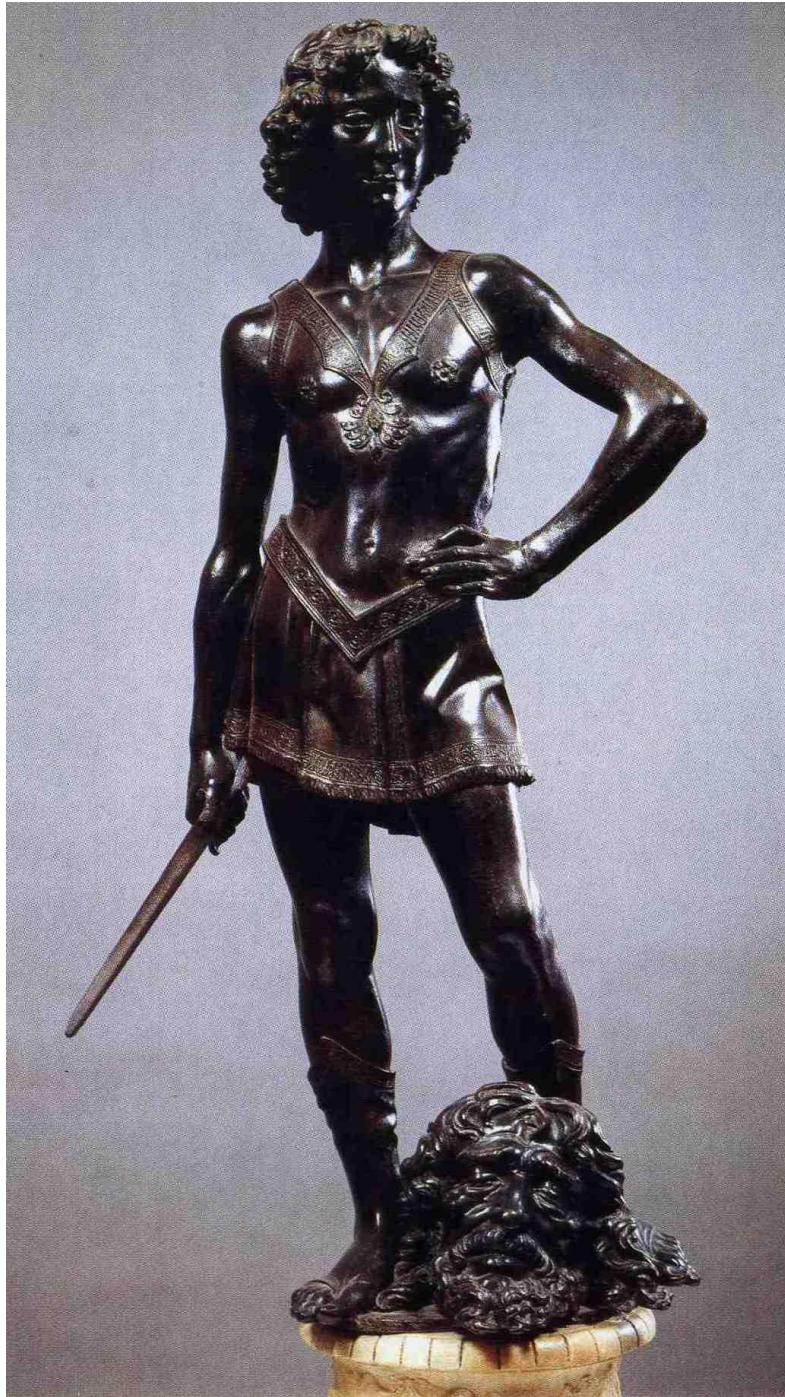


Fig.5: Andrea Del Verrocchio, *David*. (c. 1470). Bronze. H: 49 5/8." Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, Italy. ¹²⁹

¹²⁹Fichner-Rathus, 362



Fig.6: Aerial view of Chartes Cathedral (from the northwest), Chartres, France, begun 1134; rebuilt after 1194.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Kleiner Volume I, 483

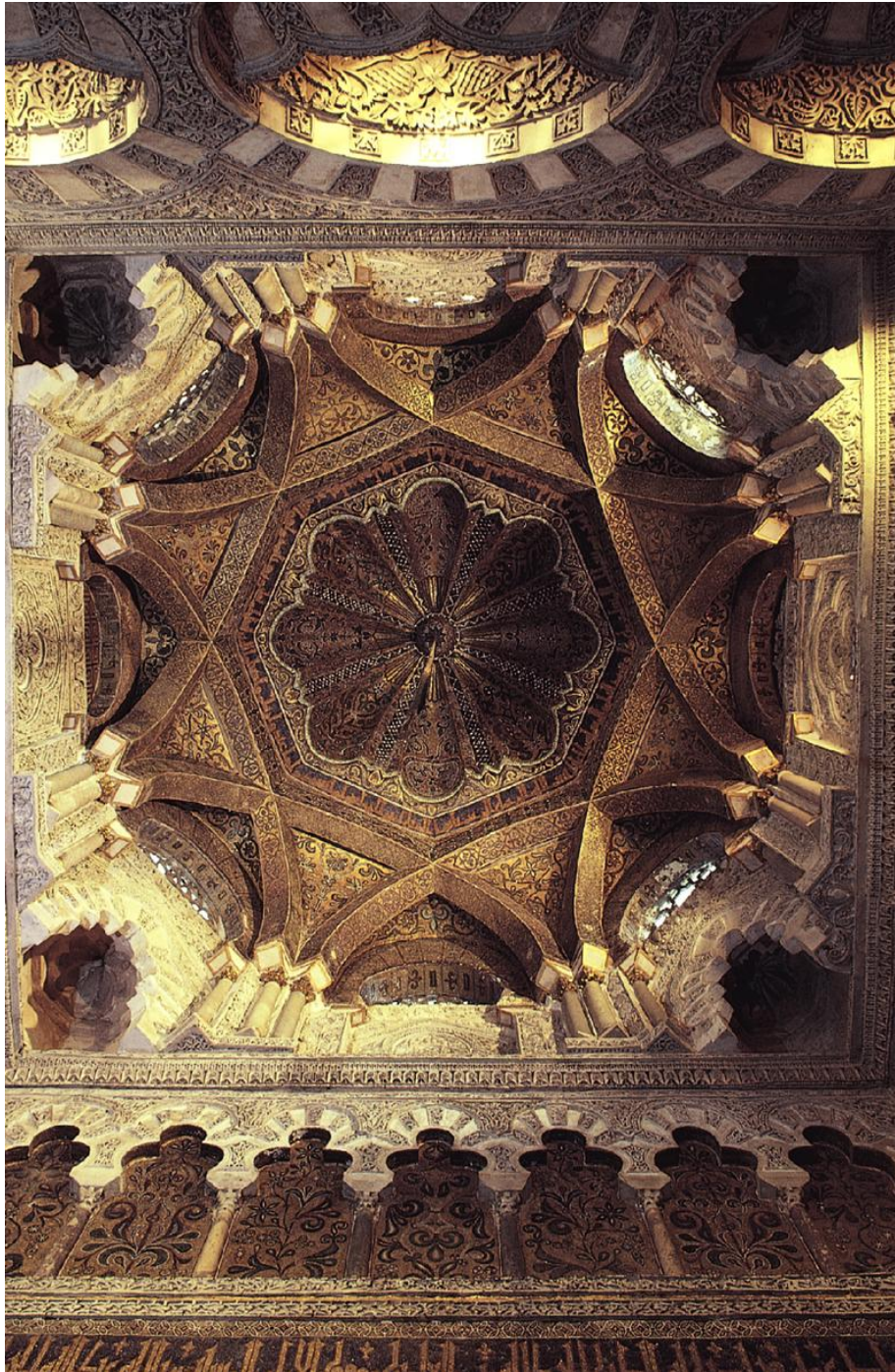


Fig.7: Dome in front of the mihrab of the Great Mosque, Córdoba, Spain, 961-965.¹³¹

¹³¹ Kleiner Volume I, 356



Fig.8: Maqsud of Kashan, carpet from the funerary mosque of Shaykh Safi al-Din, Ardabil, Iran, 1540. Knotted pile of wool and silk, 34' 6" x 17' 7." Victoria & Albert Museum, London.¹³²

¹³² Kleiner Volume I, 374

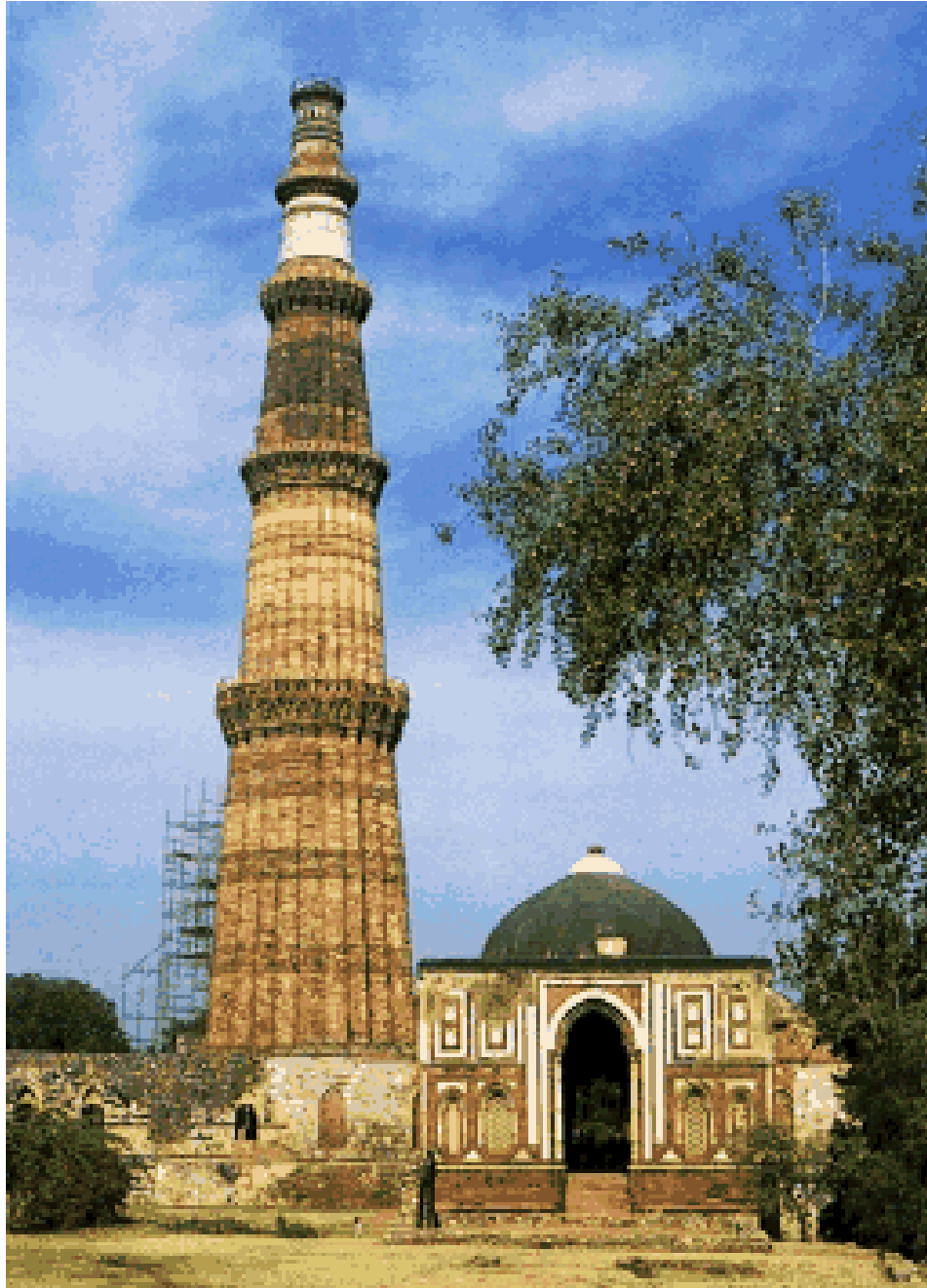


Fig.9: Qutb Minar, begun early 13th century, Alai Darvaza, 1311, Delhi, India.¹³³

¹³³ Kleiner Non-Western Art, 26



Fig.10: Dry cascade and pools, upper gardens, Saihoji Temple, Kyoto, Japan, modified in Muromachi period, 14th century.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Kleiner Non-Western Art, 99



Fig.11: Liang Kai, *The Sixth Patriarch Chopping Bamboo*, Southern Song period, early 13th century. Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 2'5 1/4" high. Tokyo National Museum, Tokyo.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ Kleiner Volume I, 211



Fig.12: Gopura, Great Temple, Madurai, India, completed 17th century.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Kleiner Non-Western Art, 31



Fig.13: Shiva as Nataraja, bronze in the Naltunai Ishvaram Temple, Punjai, India, ca. 1000.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Kleiner Volume I, 184



Fig.14: Odilon Redon, *Femme à l'aigrette* [Woman to the egret]. Lithograph, 1898. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Odilon Redon (1840-1916) *Femme à l'aigrette*, 1898. Accessed May 9, 2012. <http://patachonf.free.fr/musique/debussy/vincent/redon.htm>



Fig.15: Edvard Munch, *Vampire*, 1902. Woodcut and lithography, from an 1895 woodcut, 14 7/8 x 21 1/2" (38 x 54.6 cm). Munch-Museet, Oslo.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ Arnason, 93



Fig.16: Alphonse Mucha, *Emerald* from the *Four Precious Stones*. Panneaux d coratifs color lithograph (110 x 52 cm). Paris, 1900 (P. Grant).¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ Mucha, Jiri, Marina Henderson, and Aaron Scharf. *Alphonse Mucha Revised Enlarged Edition*. Copyright Academy Editions 1971, 1974. First published under the title *Alphonse Mucha Posters and Photographs* in 1971. Second Enlarged Edition 1974. Published in USA by St. Martin's Press Inc, New York. (p.70).



Fig.17: Adolphe-William Bouguereau, *Nymphs and Satyr*, 1873. Oil on canvas, approx. 8' 6" high. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Kleiner, S. Fred and Christin J. Mamiya. *Gardner's Art Through the Ages Twelfth Edition Volume II*. Copyright 2005 Wadsworth, a division of Thomas Learning, Inc. (p.861).

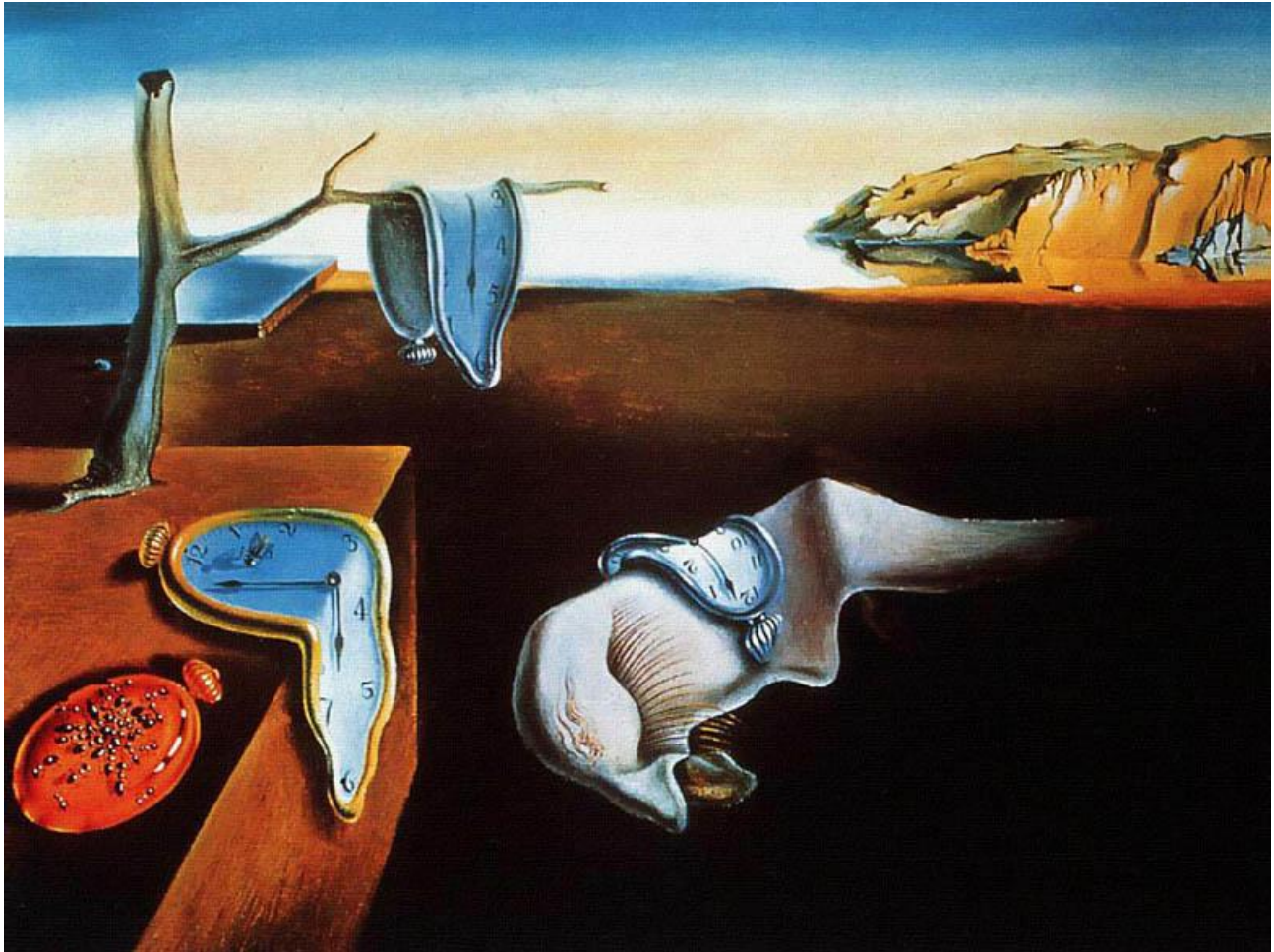


Fig.18: Salvador Dalí , *The Persistence of Memory*, 1931. Oil on canvas, 9 1/2"x 1' 11." Musuem of Modern Art, New York.¹⁴²

¹⁴² Kleiner Volume II, 999

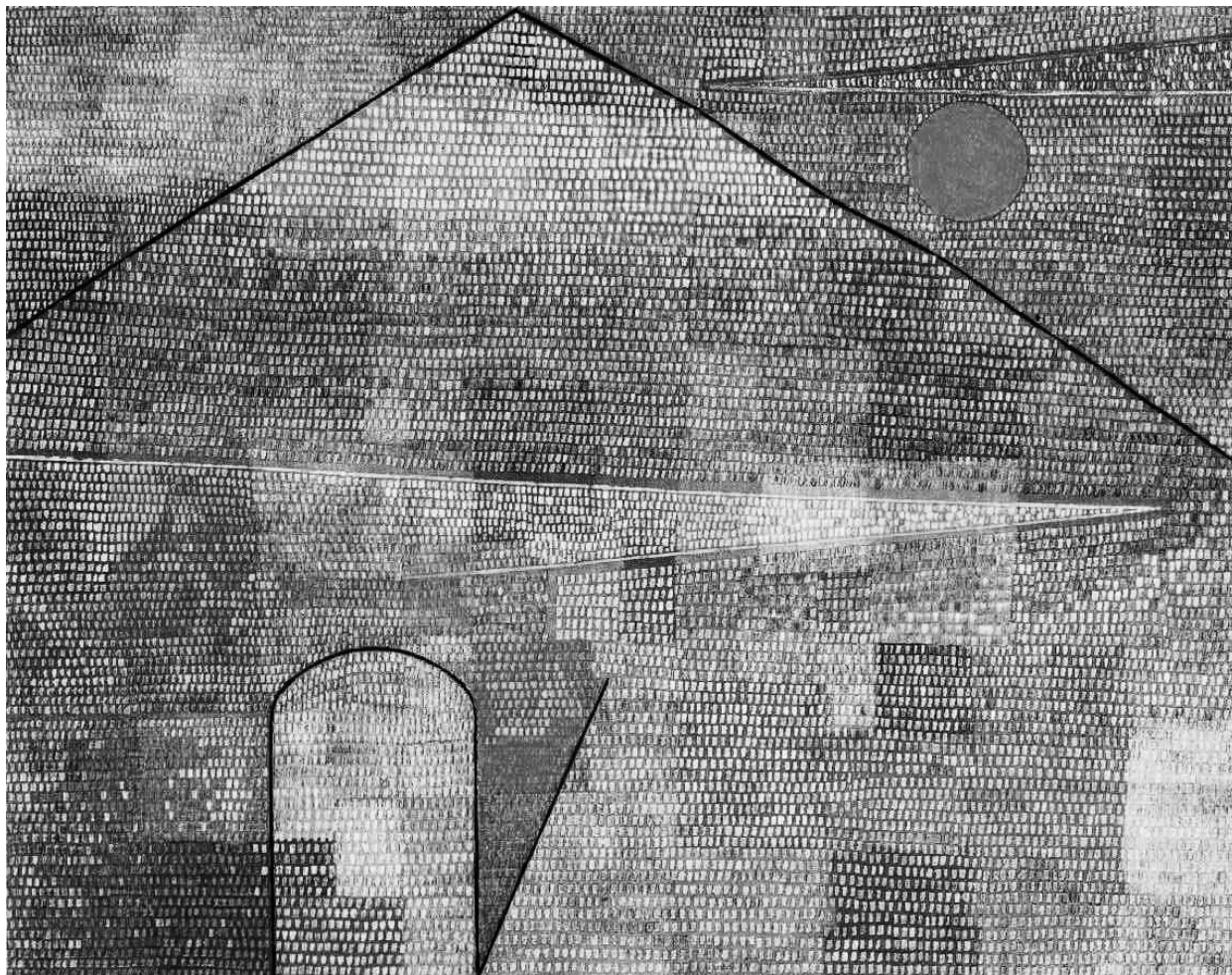


Fig.19: Paul Klee, *Ad Parnassum*, 1932. Oil and casein on canvas, 39 3/8 x 49 5/8" (100 x 126 cm). Kunstmuseum Bern, Society of Friends of Kustmuseum Bern.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Arnason, 353



Fig.20: Franz Marc, *The Large Blue Horses*, 1911. Oil on canvas, 41 5/8 x 71 5/16" (105.7 x 181.1 cm). Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Arnason, 137



Fig.21: Wassily Kandinsky, *Composition VII*, 1913. Oil on canvas, 6'6 3/4" x 9'11 1/8" (2 x 3m). Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Arnason, 136

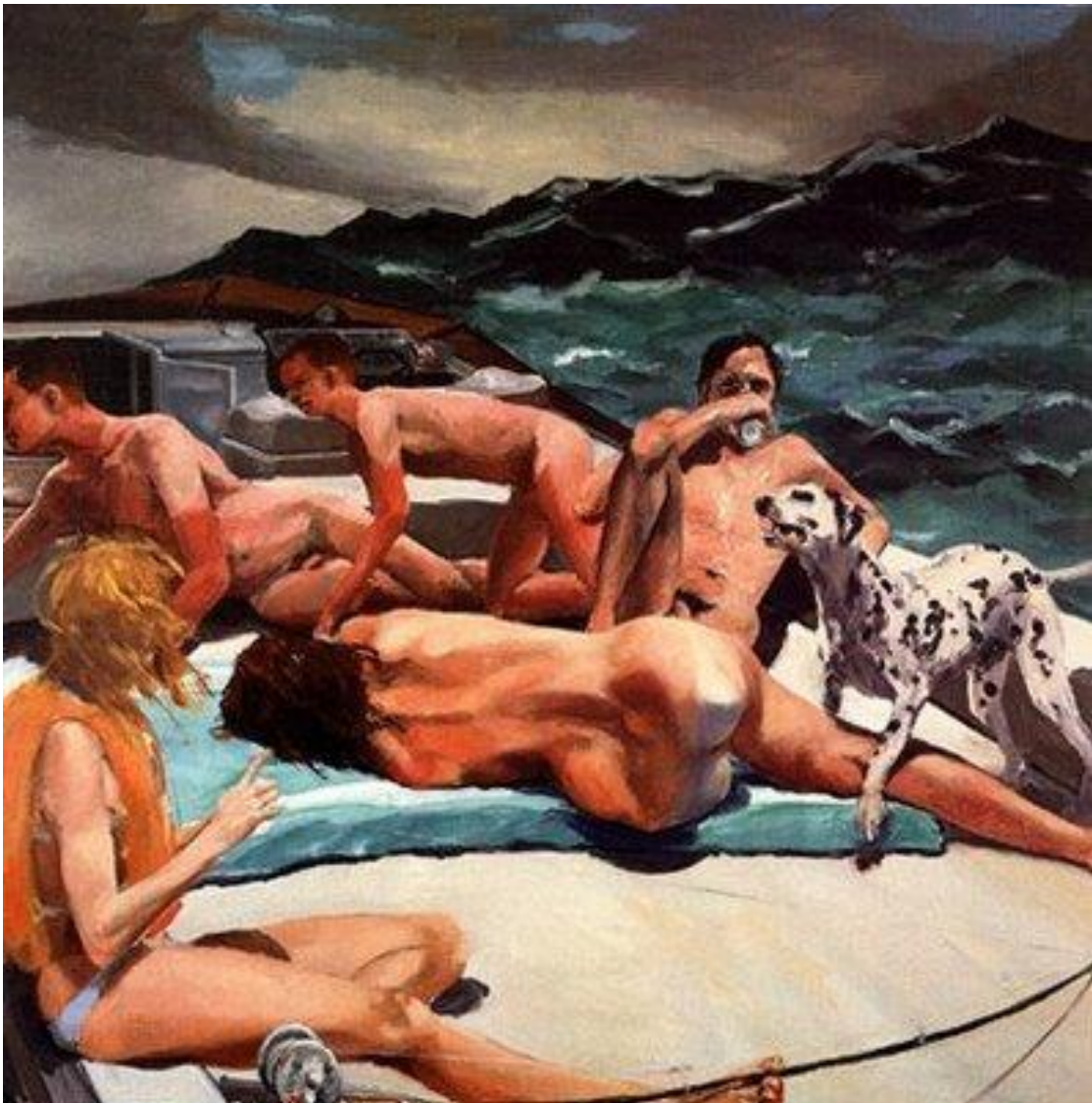


Fig.22: Eric Fischel, *The Old Man's Boat and the Old Man's Dog*, 1982. Oil on Canvas, 7 x 7' (2.1 x 2.1 m). Collections Mr. and Mrs. Robert Lehrman, Washington, D.C.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ Arnason, 704



Fig.23: Gerhard Richter, *Gray* (348-3), 1973. Oil on canvas 8' 2 1/2" x 6' 6 3/4" (2.5 x 2.0 m).¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ Taylor, 70



Fig.24: Chilkat Blanket with stylized animal motifs, Tlingit, early 20th century. Mountain goat's wool and cedar bark, 6' x 2' 11." Southwest Museum, Los Angeles.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ Kleiner Volume II, 916

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