This is the published version of a paper published in .

Citation for the original published paper (version of record):

Öhrner, A. (2019)
Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the future: Review of the catalogue to the exhibition Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the future at Solomon R. Guggenheim.
Woman's Art Journal, 40(1): 46-48

Access to the published version may require subscription.

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:sh:diva-38075
know many of her subjects as individuals (306). I particularly like Kim’s suggestion of adding additional labels to the sculptures. For example, alternative labels for Sudanese Woman (1930–34; Fig. 1), might read “Egyptian Woman, Malian Woman, Senegalese Woman, British Subject, and French Subject” to give “a more nuanced understanding of the rapid demographic, migratory, and political changes Africa was undergoing in the early twentieth century” and to encourage more active thinking about the construction of race and of stereotype (294). After all, Kim concludes (by citing Levi Strauss), “the great value of the sculptures is that they are good to think with” (307).

Jennifer Wingate is Associate Professor of Fine Arts at St. Francis College. She is author of Sculpting Doughboys: Memory, Gender, and Taste in America’s World War I Memorials and co-editor of Public Art Dialogue.

Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future
By Tracey Bashkoff, with many contributors
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and Hilma af Klint Foundation, 2018

Reviewed by Annika Öhrner

With her painting series The Ten Largest from 1907 (Fig. 1) placed in the gallery at the top of the spiraling Guggenheim Museum, New York, the Swedish artist Hilma af Klint (1862–1944) is finally, it appears, fully embraced within the art historical canon. Hilma af Klint was previously known to some members of the US audience through the presence of a few works in the 1986 traveling exhibition The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting, curated by Maurice Tuchman for Los Angeles County Museum of Art, or the elegant 2005 exhibition at The Drawing Center in New York, 3 x Abstraction, New Methods of Drawing by Emma Kunz, Hilma af Klint, and Agnes Martin, curated by Catherine de Zegher and Hendel Teicher. In her native Sweden and the surrounding Nordic countries, however, several extensive exhibitions have been devoted to af Klint—including at the Nordic Art Centre, Helsinki, 1988; and Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 1989 and 2013 (which traveled to Berlin, Málaga, Humlebaek and Tallinn). In the late 1970s, the Swedish art historian Åke Fant of Stockholm University was the first scholar to investigate the artist’s work, and his monograph Hilma af Klint: Ockult målarinna och abstrakt pionjär (Occult painter and abstract pioneer) (1989) remains the set piece. The discourse on her in Scandinavia has developed since then.

The Guggenheim retrospective connects to this long trajectory of presenting Hilma af Klint as a pioneer of abstraction, associating her body of spiritual work with that of artists like Malevich, Mondrian, and Kandinsky (18). After af Klint left the Royal Academy of Art in Stockholm, where she studied from 1882 to 1887, she jumped into a successful career as a portrait and landscape painter, while privately she developed her interest in theosophy and in spiritualism. In 1896, she and four friends, including the artist Anna Cassel (1860–1937), her close collaborator and patron, formed The Five (De Fem), an independent circle that undertook religious studies and séances that eventually resulted in contacts with named spiritual guides (19). In 1906, for example, the spirit “Amalīl” commissioned The Painting for the Temple, a visionary and ambitious project that was kept secret within the group (20).

When af Klint died, she left a large body of work with spiritual content of great beauty, expressed through figurative forms, abstractions, and diagrammatic structures. She had arranged for the work to be kept secret by her family until at least twenty years after her death, and the work has been supported and promoted within the Hilma af Klint Foundation. Since the 1970s, the public has responded accordingly to her “unsettled” position in the art historical canon, specifically as a pioneering woman artist, to use the term in the catalogue essay of Daniel Birnbaum, director of Moderna Museet (210). The audience now reckons with an impressive, large body of work that still manages to incite discussions and controversies over its artistic merit and spirituality, its contemporaneity and relevance, and, not least important, the

Notes

Fig. 1. Hilma af Klint, The Ten Largest, no 3, The age of the Youth (Detio största, nr 3, Ynglingsåldern, grup 4) (1907), 124” x 92 1/2”. Photo: Albin Dahlström/Moderna Museet. © Stiftelsen Hilma af Klints Verk.
family included well-respected officers in the Swedish navy, travelers, and publishers of the Swedish nautical atlas, actually was interested in the real, material world? What can be gained from triangulating her own diaries, sketchbooks, and writings with other public sources and publications? (52–62). The result is a fascinating account of an artist—far from the image of one locked up in secret rooms with a handful of female friends—one who during her studies at the Academy was already making trips in Norway, Holland, Belgium, Germany and Italy. Voss proves, through careful archival work, that af Klint and her circle were indeed interested in the world at large, and she cites a previously unknown exhibition of her spiritually based work, as early as 1928, at the World Conference of Spiritual Science and Its Practical Applications, in London (61). Voss’s exceptional archival research contradicts the often-repeated statement (including elsewhere in this catalogue) that af Klint specified in her will that her work not be made public until twenty years after her death. She did not. Rather, Voss points to a specific notebook from 1932 that suggests that all works remain concealed from public viewing until twenty years after her death (51). However, Voss underscores the extent to which af Klint “painstakingly” and over a long period prepared her archives and practically staged her own historical presentation for future generations, ordering her documents and inserting herself in her “own historiography” (51–52).

In another important essay, using her bright naturalist painting Spring Landscape-Scene from the Bay of Loma (1892) as an example, David Max Horowitz dispels the prevalent idea that af Klint, before the spiritual commissions, was a thoroughly academic painter, uninterested in alternative approaches. He is thus challenging another reoccurring element in the reception of af Klint (both within and apart from this catalogue)—that is, the divide between af Klint’s figurative and representational paintings and abstract work (130). Briony Fer explores the chromatic diagramming, which appears in the somewhat schematic but very appealing works on paper of 1919–20, saying “that, as an artist, af Klint was less a code-breaker than a code-maker—less a programmer of a spiritual path, more a diagrammer of fictional abstract structures and processes” (167). Tessel M. Bauduin writes about af Klint’s relation to scientific motifs and explorations, and modern occultism’s interaction with science. Af Klint not only worked occasionally as a scientific illustrator but also practiced her own form of ‘scientism’ in her painting (an “appropriation of scientific rhetoric and concepts”), in works from series such as Primordial Chaos (1906–07) or later The Atom (1917) (188).

Andrea Kollnitz’s essay gives an overview of the emerging avant-garde scene in Sweden directed towards Fauvism, Expressionism, and Cubism during the period following the shift toward abstraction in af Klint’s work around 1910, although the artist was not at all engaged in these artistic circles or beholden to its growing art market (72). Vivien Greene follows another path, linking af Klint’s work to the “revival” of Swedish folk art at the turn of the century, as inventive a suggestion in its proposals on the importance of Swedish folkloric and craft traditions as it is reductive in its “hermetic” connotations (98).

The characterization of af Klint as a neglected abstract pioneer has not always served her—or historical accuracy—well. That af Klint was “exhibited alongside the Russian artist’s [Kandinsky’s] abstract paintings in the Baltic exhibition in Malmö” in 1914 (27) is not only misleading but illustrative of the pitfalls of this characterization. The Baltic show was an immense, biennale-like exhibition, arranged in national sections and also by artist groups. Hilma af Klint exhibited with the Föreningen Svenska Konstnärinnor, the Association of Swedish female artists, of which af Klint was a leading member, while Kandinsky’s work hung several rooms away in the exhibition’s Russian section. To be appointed a “pioneer of abstraction” comes with a price, and if you are considered to have been a neglected abstract painter, you are doomed to a lesser place in history. It is my contention, however, that the project of Hilma af Klint...
and her female colleagues was the result of great maturity, of confidence and collective efforts, performed both in work and in life, and which still remains to be fully researched. ●

**Sophie Taeuber-Arp and the Avant-Garde**

By Roswitha Mair, translator Damion Searls
University of Chicago Press, 2018

Reviewed by Joanna Gardner-Huggett

Originally published in 2013 (in German), *Sophie Taeuber-Arp and the Avant-Garde*, unfortunately, does not benefit from the latest scholarship on the artist. Nevertheless, written in accessible prose, this text will appeal to general audiences interested in modern art and specialists in Dada and geometric abstraction. The author, Roswitha Mair, does not explicitly take a feminist stance in evaluating Sophie Taeuber-Arp’s (1889–1943) history, but offers some important insights regarding the lives of women artists.

Sophie Taeuber-Arp remains relatively understudied. A versatile artist, married to Hans Arp and affiliated with Dada, geometric abstraction, and the groups Cercle et Carré (1929–30) and Abstraction Création (1931–36), and who served as editor of the journal *Plastique* (1937–39), Taeuber-Arp drew no distinction between the fine arts, decorative arts, and interior design (115). Her work in applied arts, however, historically casts Taeuber-Arp within the realm of the decorative and feminine, keeping her on modernism’s periphery. Mair aims to counter these biases and asserts in the Preface that, “this book attempts to sketch a biography of Sophie Taeuber as a singular figure, not a secondary player in the European avant-garde” (viii), and to varying degrees the author succeeds in achieving this goal.

The text offers a chronological account of Taeuber-Arp’s life and career from birth to her death at age 54 from accidental carbon monoxide poisoning (188). It concludes with a brief epilogue explaining how Arp and his second wife, Marguerite Arp-Hagenbach, framed her artistic legacy, suggesting their efforts contributed to Taeuber-Arp being viewed as her “husband’s misunderstood muse” (192). The biography greatly benefits from Mair’s access to private diaries and letters, especially those from Taeuber-Arp’s sister, Erika Schlegel, and Schlegel’s son Leonhard, who is frequently cited as corroborating other sources of evidence.

The first chapter addressing Taeuber-Arp’s early years is especially illuminating and reveals how her mother, Sophie Taeuber-Krüsi (1854–1908), modeled how to live an autonomous and creative life. Because Taeuber-Arp’s father, Carl Emil Taeuber, died two years after her birth, her mother needed to work. First, Taeuber-Krüsi managed the large apartment building where they lived in Davos Platz, Switzerland, occupied by architects, florists, dressmakers, and paper merchants. In 1895 or 1896, the family moved to Trogen, near the city of St. Gallen, in a region known for its weaving and fine embroidery, and Taeuber-Arp’s mother taught her to knit, embroider, crochet, and make lace. Taeuber-Krüsi also recorded the young lives of Sophie, sister Erika and brother Hans with a camera, developing her own photographs, and in 1900, she designed a new house for her family on land given to her by her brother-in-law, hiring an architect to execute her plans. Taeuber-Krüsi died from cancer two decades before her daughter Sophie would follow in her footsteps, designing her own home and studio in Meudon, outside of Paris (1929) (1-15).

Mair’s biographical account effectively exposes the risks and challenges facing European women artists in the early twentieth century. For example, she examines Taeuber-Arp’s dances at the Galerie Dada, donning Cubist masks created by Marcel Janco and costumes designed by his partner, Maya Chrusecz. Already teaching in the textile department at the School for Applied Arts in Zurich, Taeuber-Arp was threatened with termination once the administration discovered she was performing at the Galerie Dada. She continued to participate in performances, which she deemed acts of political protest against the war, using a pseudonym and sneaking into the cabaret for fear of being seen (52–54). She collaborated with Hans Arp and Theo van Doesburg on the Café Aubette (1927; Fig. 1), supervising the entire project and designing the Tea Room; however, her role was rarely credited. Art historian and friend Willy Rotzler, for instance, acknowledged that Taeuber-Arp did most of the work but attributed the overall vision of the café to van Doesburg (109–14). Taeuber-Arp became all too familiar with these dismissals. When Hans Arp asked Peggy Guggenheim to visit Taeuber-Arp’s studio in Meudon, the collector bought one sculpture by Arp but described her work as dull and painful to contemplate (145).

Mair does not idealize collaborations between husband and wife, establishing that Arp’s desires and goals always took

**Annika Öhrner** is an associate professor of art history at Södertörn University, Sweden, where she writes on feminist historiography and transnational strategies. Her writings on Hilma af Klint include “A Northern avant-garde: Spaces and Cultural transfer,” in Pam Meecham, ed. *A Companion to Modern Art* (2017).