

Until recently very little was known about the artist Hilma af Klint and her mystical paintings. Born in Sweden in 1862, she studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Stockholm and became an accomplished landscape and portrait artist in her early years. This was her public art and how she earned her living; however there were other sources from which quite different paintings were inspired. It was sometime after the death of her sister in 1880, that Hilma af Klint became interested in spiritualism and mediumship. In 1886 she formed a group called "The Five" or "The Friday Group." This was an occult gathering of women who, John O'Rourke writes, "claimed to have 'spirit world' leaders, or 'High Masters,' Gregor, Clemens, Ameliel, Ananda and Esther among others. ... according to af Klint, in 1904, Ananda told her to begin producing paintings from the Astral Plane. This, she was informed, would follow a period of preparing to mediate a message." Many of Hilma af Klint's works were the expression of these mediumistic sessions in which she said she channelled symbolic messages from the Masters. "The pictures were painted directly through me, without any preliminary drawings and with great force. I had no idea what the paintings were supposed to depict; nevertheless, I worked swiftly and surely, without changing a single brushstroke" (*With Great Force Swiftly and Surely*).

In 1888 Hilma af Klint joined the Theosophical Society and became interested in the work of Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater, and most likely read *Thought Forms*, their ground-breaking book that discussed how thoughts could be seen as colored forms carrying the intent of the sender. She also met Rudolph Steiner and studied his Rosicrucian, Theosophical, and later Anthroposophical teachings, though Steiner questioned af Klint's involvement with mediumship. All of these encounters informed her spiritual development and influenced her esoteric practices.

Hilma af Klint's early works were direct translations of what she saw on the spiritual plane; later she took charge of interpreting her messages. This evolution in her approach could be considered as the progression of an initiate to that of an advanced pupil or adept who learned how to manage her spiritual teachings. "Mediumship is the opposite of adeptship; the medium is the passive instrument of foreign influences, the adept actively controls himself and all inferior potencies" (*Isis Unveiled*, 2:588).

Hilma af Klint considered the works she produced during her