

relevant to the development of modern art. Within the academic study of religions, these organisations are seen as part of western esotericism: an umbrella term for a group of related currents, which date back to the gnosis of antiquity, the hermetic philosophy of the Renaissance and what were considered the occult sciences (alchemy, magic, astrology).



During the nineteenth century the progress of industry and science went hand in hand with the process of secularization; people no longer found the answers to life's big questions in their traditional (Christian) faith, and turned to new religious, philosophical and ideological currents. Around 1900 especially the intellectual avant-garde found itself attracted to the organizations like freemasonry and Theosophy. Esoteric symbolism found its way to the arts through the work of these members. The membership of esoteric currents by artists and its relevance to their work was openly mentioned in Dutch newspapers at the time. Joséphin Péladans occult "Salons de la Rose + Croix" lay fresh in art critics memories; Piet Mondriaans interest in Theosophy was widely known; and architect Karel de Bazel made the headlines with his design for the temple of his masonic lodge in The Hague.



The start of World War II marked a sudden end to this openness. The Nazi regime ordered the abolishment of many esoteric organisations and confiscated their buildings and possessions. The Nazis also directed an intensive propaganda campaign against freemasonry and related organisations, insinuating they were part of a Jewish 'Zionist' conspiracy. Fear of persecution prompted many families, including artists, to destroy their membership papers and other documents between 1940 and 1945.

After the war, esoteric organisations were