

Foreword to *Sacred Mirrors* by Alex Grey

In the Eye of the Artist: Art and the Perennial Philosophy

According to the perennial philosophy, men and women possess at least three different modes of knowing: the eye of flesh, which discloses the material, concrete, and sensual world; the eye of mind, which discloses the symbolic, conceptual, and linguistic world; and the eye of contemplation, which discloses the spiritual, transcendental, and transpersonal world. These are not three different worlds, but three different aspects of our one world, disclosed by different modes of knowing and perceiving.

Moreover, these three modes of knowing, these three "eyes," are not simply given to a person all at once. Rather, they unfold in a developmental sequence from the lower to the higher. The baby at birth is all but blind, and it is only in the first two years of life that sensorimotor intelligence--the eye of flesh--develops and evolves to eventually disclose a material world of "object permanence," of solid surfaces and colors and objects, as well as the sensorimotor body's own feelings and emerging impulses. In the following decade or two, the eye of mind will increasingly emerge and develop, disclosing in its turn the world of ideas, symbols, concepts, images, values, meanings, and intentions. And if development continues beyond the mind--via meditative discipline--then the eye of contemplation opens and discloses the world of soul and spirit, of subtle energies and insights, of radical intuition and transcendental illumination.

The eye of flesh tends to disclose a prepersonal, preverbal, preconceptual world--a world of matter and bodies. The eye of mind tends to disclose a personal, verbal, and conceptual world--a

world of ego and minds. And the eye of contemplation tends to disclose a transpersonal, transverbal, trans-egoic world--a world of luminous soul and spirit. The first realm is composed of sensibilia, or phenomena that can be perceived by the body. The second realm is composed of intelligibilia, or objects perceived by the mind. And the third realm consists of transcendelia, or objects perceived by the soul and spirit. These three overall realms, from matter/body to ego/mind to soul/spirit, are collectively referred to as the Great Chain of Being.

(The Great Chain is often said to consist of five, seven, or even more levels of being and knowing; my own model, distilled from the various contemplative traditions, presents over two-dozen carefully defined ontological levels [Wilber, K., *The Atman Project*; Wilber, Engler, and Brown, *Transformations of Consciousness*]. For the purposes of this essay, the simple three-level division will suffice, but it should be kept in mind that a final theory of art can be much more precise than three levels).

When it comes to a critical theory of art, then, the immediate question is: What eye, or eyes, is the particular artist using? Of course, the artist's medium is usually sensibilia or various material substances (paint, clay, concrete, metal, wood, etc.). The critical question, rather, is this: Using the medium of sensibilia, is the artist trying to represent, depict, or evoke the realm of sensibilia itself, or the realm of intelligibilia, or the realm of transcendelia? In other words, to the standard question, "How competent is the artist in depicting or evoking a particular phenomenon?", we add the crucial ontological question: "Where on the Great Chain of Being is the phenomenon the artist is attempting to depict/evoke/express?" And, "Does he or she succeed?"

We have, then, two important but different scales of critical judgement for any work of art:

1) How well does it succeed on its own level? 2) How high is that level?

The first great achievement of European art--if I may for the time being confine myself to the last thousand years of central Western art--was the "perfection," if you will, of ways to convincingly depict the realm of sensibilia. After all, it's not much more than 500 years ago that the rules of perspective became widely known and utilized in painting, embodying a discovery and an understanding of the actual geometry of the material-sensible world (as in, for example, Renaissance art). Painting became increasingly realistic, or empirical, tied to the concrete sensory world, tied to the eye of flesh and its bodily perspective: still life, realistic landscapes, realistic portraiture, vignettes of daily life--all grounded in the realm of sensibilia and its accurate representation. Even religious art tended to be very concrete and literal. Depictions of the Virgin Birth, the Ascension, the parting of the Red Sea--all were portrayed as actual, concrete facts, not as symbolic or figurative or conceptual. In other words, even most "religious" art was tied to the realm of concrete sensibilia and failed to reach sufficiently into the realm of the symbolic or abstract (intelligibilia) or the contemplative and mystical (transcendelia).

All of that would begin to change with the coming of modern art. If the first great achievement of European art was to perfect the depiction of sensibilia, the second great achievement was to rise above it, to rise above sensibilia and began to depict the various realms and aspects of intelligibilia, of symbolic and abstract and conceptual and phenomenological art and its rules. The medium would still be sensibilia, but no longer would the depicted object itself be bound by the rules or perspectives of matter; it would follow the contours not of matter but of mind. No longer Nature, but Psyche. No longer realistic but abstract. Not things but thoughts. Not Euclidean but Surrealistic. Not representational, but impressionistic or expressionistic. Not literal and concrete but figurative and symbolic.

Starting with Paul Cezanne, whom Matisse called "the master of us all," we see the fixed perspectivism of the material-sensible world broken down and superseded by an emotional-psychological participation (intelligibilia), not mere representation (sensibilia). With Kandinsky, arguably the father of abstract art, we see the full emergence, if not the perfection, of intelligibilia over sensibilia, of the condensed potency of the abstract over the mere imitation of Nature's forms. As Kandinsky put it, "It must become possible to hear the whole world as it is without representational interpretation."

The same evolutionary thrust from sensibilia to intelligibilia continues with the Cubists Picasso and Braque, whose paintings, one critic said, "are more cerebral than sensual... They discard the old art of local proportion in order to express the grandeur of metaphysical forms. This is the art of painting new structures out of elements borrowed not from the reality of sight, but from the reality of insight." Not the eye of flesh, but the eye of mind. As another critic of the time put it, "This very strange and pure principle of painting things as one thinks them."

Cubism began as a type of geometry of natural form but quickly became a vehicle for essential impressionism, an act of attention not just to outer objects but also to inward mental forms and patterns. As one critic put it at the time, the impact of the Cubists "came from the fact that the essential reality was rendered with great purity, while visual accidents and anecdotes had been eliminated." As Plato knew, the elimination of sensual vagaries and "accidents" is the essence of mental abstraction, the key to its great metaphysical (meta-sensible) potency.

Perhaps no one better articulated the need to go from mere-Nature to more-than-Nature than Piet Mondrian. "As the natural becomes more and more 'automatic', we see life's interest fixed more and more on the inward. The life of truly modern man is directed neither toward the material for its own sake nor toward the predominantly emotional [matter/body]: rather, it takes the form of the

autonomous life of the human [psyche] becoming conscious.... Life is becoming more and more abstract. The truly modern artist consciously perceives the abstractness of the emotion of beauty.... In the vital reality of the abstract, the new man has transcended the feelings of nostalgia.... There is no escaping the tragic, so long as our vision of nature is naturalistic [tied to sensibilia]. That is why a deeper vision is essential." Deeper than sensibilia is intelligibilia, and deeper still, transcendelia. Kandinsky was a pioneer in both (we will return to his approach to transcendelia later).

The whole point was to free the mind from the confines of nature, and thus to free art from photographic realism, while at the same time plumbing the depths of the psyche itself and giving artistic expression to that extraordinary search. Railing against the "imitative work which today is superfluous," Frantisek Kupka stated that "There is a kind of pictorial geometry of thought, the only possible one, which forces the painter to lie less. And that is what I am trying to achieve." Nor was this "geometry of thought" dry and lifeless, as the term "geometry" unfortunately suggests. Rather, said Kupka, it is created "by the painter's poetic imagination.... Yes, painting means clothing the processes of the human soul [psyche] in plastic forms." That is, clothing intelligibilia in the forms of sensibilia, and not reducing intelligibilia to the noncreative task of merely copying sensibilia. Even Marcel Duchamp was very clear on this point: "I wanted to get away from the physical aspect of painting. I was much more interested in recreating ideas in painting. I wanted to put painting once again at the service of the mind."

Perhaps this is why Kasimir Malevich at first called his work "supranaturalism" (later changing it to the ungainly "suprematism"), which attempted to "free art from the ballast of its objectivity." As he sharply put it, "To produce favorite objects and little nooks of nature is just like a thief being enraptured by his shackled legs.... Objects [sensibilia] have vanished like smoke to

attain the new artistic culture.... [This is] the first step of pure creation in art. Before it there were naive distortions and copies of nature. Our world of art has become new, nonobjective, pure...."

"Pure" because the idea or the essence of an object captures that which is timeless or immutable about the object, and not that which is accidental or mutable--an idea at least as old as Plato. As the great Brancusi summarized his entire approach to sculpture: "At the turning point in the development of my metier, I said to myself: I must express...the idea of the subject: that which never dies. Starting with this thought, you naturally reach the conclusion that it is not detail that creates work but rather the essential [the idea; the intelligibilia]. I worked hard to discover the means of more easily finding for each subject the key form that would powerfully sum up the idea of that subject. I reached the point where I could draw out of bronze, wood, or marble that hidden diamond, the essential." The essence, the idea, the intelligibilia, which was then embodied or clothed in the chosen medium of sensibilia itself. In the creative act, the material form is in-formed by idea; things are made to follow thought, and not thought made to copy things.

This new art--the art of the mind, the art of depicting the geometries of thought, the patterns of psyche, the art of intelligibilia clothed in sensibilia--was found in an inward, not solely outward, direction. It was an act of attention to the inner subject as well as the outer object, and a conveying of the interrelationship between the two: the patterns of thought interrelated with the patterns of things. And although these patterns or essences depend in part on looking inwardly with the mind's eye, they are not merely subjective or idiosyncratic, but rather, to the extent they resonate truly in a work of art, reflect larger patterns of reality itself. As Brancusi almost screamed out: "They are imbeciles who call my work abstract; that which they call abstract is the most realist, because what is real is not the exterior form but the idea, the essence of things." As Hegel and Schelling would put it, "The ideal is real, and the real is ideal."

The fact that all of these artists, each in their own way, acted to free intelligibilia from the grip of sensibilia, does not mean that sensibilia itself should be rejected or its importance in any way denied, especially in art. Quite the contrary, by exploring the realm of intelligibilia, modern artists were able to return to the ground of sensibilia with new insights and radically novel approaches. The Cubists brought a completely new understanding to form, while Seurat, Delaunay, and Matisse brought a new revelation of color. Matisse, for example, freed color from the constraints of nature. As he forcefully put it, "The Beaux-Arts masters told their students: 'Copy nature stupidly'. Throughout my entire career I have reacted against this attitude.... Color exists in itself, possesses its own beauty.... I understood then that one could work with expressive colors which are not necessarily descriptive colors." Expressive of intelligibilia, not just descriptive of sensibilia.

The point, then, was to stay firmly rooted in sensibilia--not to deny nature or repress nature--but then to reach through or beyond sensibilia to intelligibilia, to mind and essence and idea and intention, and cloth these in the "plastic" of the material or natural realm. And further, through introspection and intuition of the patterns of mind and intelligibilia, return afresh with new and radical insights into the form and color and essence of nature itself, of sensibilia.

I have sketched, then, two broad developmental or evolutionary movements in European art: the mastery of sensibilia (realism), and the transcendence of sensibilia through a sustained exploration of intelligibilia, the former marked by a predominance of body and nature, the latter by a predominance of mind and psyche. We now reach the third and most crucial evolutionary movement: the emergence in art not just of body or of mind, but of spirit. And the correlative depiction in art not just of sensibilia and intelligibilia, but also of transcendelia.

Not that the spiritual hadn't been portrayed before in art, and portrayed well. It was just that, as I have tried to explain elsewhere (see *Up from Eden* and *Eye to Eye*), the tendency was to confuse "spiritual" with "mythological." The mythological mind, whatever its undoubted merits, has a central and grievous fault: it is almost always concrete and literal, and therefore fundamentalist. The mythically-religious mind actually believes, for example, that Moses really parted the Red Sea, that Jehovah really rained locusts on Egypt, that Christ really was born from a virgin, and so on. There is nothing symbolic here, nothing really transcendental here, nothing genuinely spiritual or contemplative in all these fundamentalistic "facts," which wish to claim the dubious status of empirical sensibilia. And the art governed by this type of mythic-religious sensibility, no matter how inspired the artist may genuinely be, remains contaminated by the flaws of mythic fundamentalism. The new spirituality in art--as well as in philosophy, psychology, and metaphysics--would have to be a Spirit approached more directly and immediately, not in mythic forms, but in direct intuition and contemplative absorption.

Indeed, many of the pioneers in modern art, the pioneers that we just discussed--men such as Kandinsky, Mondrian, Malevich, Klee, Brancusi--felt that they had in fact pushed beyond the individual mind and body and discovered, in their new art, a genuine and powerful approach to Spirit itself. They were disclosing and portraying not just sensibilia, not just intelligibilia, but also transcendelia. This, at any rate, was their oft-stated aim.

Kandinsky, for example. His literary masterpiece, *On the Spiritual in Art*, has as its theme the evolutionary emergence of Spirit from matter, with Art being the midwife of this emergence. As he put it in his autobiography:

"Today is the great day of one of the revelations of this world. The interrelationships of these individual realms were illumined as by a flash of lightning; they burst unexpected,

frightening, and joyous out of the darkness. Never were they so strongly tied together and never so sharply divided. This lightning is the child of the darkening of the spiritual heaven which hung over us, black, suffocating, and dead [realism]. Here begins the epoch of the spiritual, the revelation of the spirit."

Art, then, becomes not just technical skill, not just observation and execution, not even just creativity, but a method of spiritual growth and development on the part of artists themselves. True art, according to Kandinsky, must involve the cultivation of the soul and spirit. "Construction on a purely spiritual basis is a slow business, and at first seemingly blind and unmethodical. The artist must train not only his eye but also his soul, so that it can weigh colors in its own scale and thus become a determinant in artistic creation."

Kandinsky's point was that if artists are to "be the servants of Spirit," then artists must grow and develop their own souls to a point they are capable of directly intuiting the spiritual dimension. As I would put it, in order to see (let alone artistically convey) Spirit, the eye of contemplation must first be opened, and this opening-- Kandinsky's "revelation of Spirit illumined as if by a flash of lightning"--discloses new, higher, and wider dimensions of existence. "Only with higher development," wrote Kandinsky, "does the circle of experience of different beings and objects grow wider. Only in the highest development do they acquire an internal meaning and an inner resonance. It is the same with color...." (Kandinsky's last point is that, no matter how transcendental these illuminations and spiritual intuitions might be, they nonetheless have a direct affect on the perception and understanding of form and color in the natural world, and this new understanding would infuse spiritual art.)

In the artist's own spiritual growth and development, subtler and subtler experiences, emotions, and perceptions would come into view, and it was the artist's duty to portray these subtler

experiences (transcendelia), and thus to evoke them and encourage them in those who witness with care the finished work. "The soul is emerging, refined by struggle and suffering. Cruder emotions like fear, joy, and grief, which belonged to this time of trial, will no longer attract the artist. He will attempt to arouse more refined emotions, as yet unnamed. Just as he will live a complicated and subtle life, so his work will give to those observers capable of feeling them emotions subtle beyond words."

Kandinsky was extremely clear about this goal. Soon after his arrival at Bauhaus, he told a colleague that his aim was to "proclaim the reign of Spirit...to proclaim 'light from light, the flowing light of the Godhead.' Oppositon to a materialist world: the supraterrrestrial, the pursuit of a raison d'etre, theosophy, astrology, the search for a reality above our all-too-narrow terrestrial sphere." The ultimate goal of contemplative spirituality, of genuine mysticism, is the union of the soul with Spirit, and it was no less Kandinsky's aim: to find an art "which will ultimately extend far beyond the boundaries of art [as we know it], into the realm of 'union' of the 'human' and the 'divine'."

Piet Mondrian was no less spiritually inspired and determined. "Art," he wrote, "although an end in itself, like religion, is the means through which we can know the universal [spiritual] and contemplate it in plastic form." Mondrian thus defined genuine art as the "subjectivization of the universal," what we might call the opening of the individual to the spiritual. "The subjectivization of the universal in art brings the universal downward on the one hand, while on the other it helps raise the individual toward the universal."

We said that sensibilia is the realm of the prepersonal, intelligibilia the realm of the personal, and transcendelia the realm of the transpersonal. That is, the body and nature are preverbal, preconceptual, and therefore pre-egoic and prepersonal. The mind is verbal, conceptual,

and symbolic, and therefore forms the basis of ego and individuality. But Spirit, being universal, is beyond body and mind--it is transverbal, trans-egoic, transindividual--a point where the soul touches eternity and completely transcends the prison of its own involvement.

In short, the more consciousness grows and evolves, the more it grows beyond the narrow bounds of the personal ego, the more it touches the transpersonal and universal Divine. Thus it is no accident that Mondrian states: "All art is more or less direct aesthetic expression of the universal. This more or less implies degrees [of development or evolution].... A great heightening of subjectivity is taking place in man--in other words a growing, expanding consciousness. Subjectivity remains subjective, but it diminishes in the measure that [the spiritual] grows in the individual. Subjectivity ceases to exist only when the mutation-like leap is made from individual existence to universal existence." Thus, he concludes, "The new culture will be that of the mature individual; once matured, the individual will be open to the universal and will tend more and more to unite with it"--the common conclusion of mystics the world over.

We find similar themes echoed by many of the modern masters. Malevich's theme: "I search for God, I search within myself for myself.... I search for God, I search for my face, I have already drawn its outline and I strive to incarnate myself...." Malevich spoke openly of the realm of the absolute, contacted only in intuition; and for this realm to manifest itself in art, the artist must allow the "superconscious" to have "the privilege of directing creation." ("Superconscious" is what we also call "transpersonal.") Franz Marc called for "symbols that belong on the altars of a future spiritual religion." Paul Klee spoke of art as "Genesis eternal." "Everything passes," he wrote, "and what remains of former times, what remains of life, is the spiritual. In everything we do, the claim of the absolute is unchanging." Or Brancusi: "Look at my works until you see them. Those who are closer to God have seen them." And even the Abstract Expressionists, beginning in

the 1950s in New York, sought, according to Harold Rosenberg, "not a richer or more contemporary fiction, but the formal sign language of the inner kingdom--equivalents in paint of a flash, no matter how transitory, of what had been known throughout the centuries as spiritual enlightenment."

As I said, central to all genuine spiritual and mystical traditions is that the absolute, the universal, the very Divine itself, is contacted only when the individual's separate self or ego is transcended. The child develops from instinct to ego; the adult develops and expands the ego; the mystic goes beyond the individual ego to the universal itself--an overall movement or evolution from subconscious to selfconscious to superconscious. Many of these artists had just that higher development in mind; true art was disclosed only in the development beyond the individual ego. "Through our intuition, the universal in us can become so active that it pushes aside our individuality. Then art can reveal itself," wrote Mondrian. "If the universal is the essential, then it is the basis of all life and art. Recognizing and uniting with the universal therefore gives us the greatest aesthetic satisfaction, the greatest emotion of beauty. The more this union with the universal is felt, the more individual subjectivity declines." Or Brancusi again: "Whoever does not detach himself from the ego never attains the Absolute and never deciphers life."

And so there it was--there was the scope and the aim of the new art. According to these masters, true and genuine art, the highest art, involved: First, the development or growth of the artist's own soul, right up to the point of union with universal Spirit and transcendence of the separate self or individual ego; and second, the artistic depiction/expression of this spiritual dimension, particularly in such a way as to evoke similar spiritual insights on the part of observers. "Something sacred, that's it," said Picasso. "We ought to be able to say that such and such a

painting is as it is, with its capacity for power, because it is 'touched by God'. But people would put a wrong interpretation on it. And yet it's the nearest we can get to the truth."

There remains the difficult question: Did these great masters succeed? Did they succeed, not only in freeing intelligibilia from sensibilia, but also in freeing transcendelia itself and bringing it down into "plastic form"? Did they discover and portray not just body-nature and psyche-mind, but also Spirit?

My own conclusion is that, at best, the pioneering effort has just begun. I think the clear and definite accomplishment of these masters was to free intelligibilia from the confines of sensibilia, to save mind from engulfment in matter. I think their claims in this regard are absolutely correct and justified. But when it comes to the spiritual realm, their efforts strike me as heroic but very fledgling and even infantile. Their efforts represent, we might say, the growing tip of Western evolutionary consciousness, which, in the world of art as elsewhere, has moved from matter to body to mind, and only now stands barely poised at the realms of soul and spirit, and thus stands now only as an infant in the face of the Divine. The great thrust of modern art was to move from body to mind, and there it succeeded admirably. But when it attempted to move from mind to soul and spirit, its reach, for the time being, seems to have exceeded its grasp. Brancusi, Mondrian, Delaunay, Kandinsky, Malevich and others--I believe they truly glimpsed the Divine and directly intuited Spirit, but I do not believe they stabilized that intuition nor in any convincing way brought it to artistic fruition. A brief flash of lightning, yes; a new dawn, no. But a beginning was made, and a powerful direction for a future spiritual art was chartered. A genuine search had begun for the "symbols that belong on the altars of a future spiritual religion."

I think one of the reasons that modern (and postmodern) art has not yet fulfilled its spiritual aspirations is that it has yet to fully avail itself of the tools and techniques of contemplation, of

genuine meditative disciplines. If, as Kandinsky, Mondrian, Brancusi et al thought, true art is the manifestation of Spirit, and if Spirit is seen most clearly with the eye of contemplation, and if meditation is one of the surest ways to open the contemplative eye, it follows that truest and purest art will be contemplative art, art born in fire of spiritual epiphany and fanned by meditative awareness.

This, of course, is precisely what is behind many of the great Oriental works of art, from Tibetan thangkas to Zen landscapes to Hindu iconography. The best of these works of art stem directly from the meditative mind. The artist/master enters meditative samadhi, or contemplative union, and from the union of the subject and the object, the "subject" then "paints" the "object," although all three--painter, painting, and object--are now one indivisible act ("He who cannot become an object cannot paint that object"). And precisely because the painting is executed in this nondual state of subject/object union or transcendence, it is spiritual in the deepest sense. It springs forth from the dimension of nondual and universal Spirit, which transcends (and thus unites) both subject and object, self and other, inner and outer, a transcendental union the artist/master recreates in his or her own contemplative awareness and nondual absorption. In short, art created in this nondual awareness has direct access to nondual Spirit, at which point the quality of the art work depends first, on the clarity of the nondual awareness, and second, on the particular talent of the individual artist.

That is the secret of all genuinely spiritual works of art: they issue from nondual or unity consciousness, no matter what "objects" they portray. A painting does not have to depict crosses and Buddhas to be spiritual. This is why, for example, Zen landscapes are so profoundly sacred in their texture, even if they are "just landscapes." They issue from nondual awareness or unity consciousness, which is itself Spirit. The point is that, at the height of transcendence, Spirit is also

purely immanent and all-pervading, present equally and totally in each and every object, whether of matter, body, mind, or soul. "To see the world in a grain of sand, and Heaven in a wildflower...."

But the crucial point is that just painting a wildflower will not do (that's merely sensibilia). One must first discover Spirit; then see Spirit in the wildflower; then paint the wildflower--and Heaven will flow through it (according in measure to the talent of the artist.) The art work, of no matter what object, becomes transparent to the Divine and a direct expression of Spirit. It thus partakes of transcendelia, of "something sacred," as Picasso said, and no longer is merely an isolated patch of sensibilia or individual geometry of lonely thought.

That, of course, was the central definition of "beauty" from the time of Plato and Plotinus to the Scholastics: an object possesses beauty to the extent it is transparent to the Divine, to the extent it allows the One to shine through it. Likewise, a work of art is beautiful (and good and true) to the extent it is translucent to nondual Spirit, to the extent it allows that which is beyond itself to shine through--as Mondrian said, to the extent it aesthetically expresses the universal. And correlatively, an artist is "good" to the extent he or she can detach from the ego or transcend the separate-self sense and allow the superconscious to flow through him or her into the work of art.

Finally, these "art works," such as Buddhist icons, themselves serve one and only one main purpose: they are supports for contemplation. By gazing on the artwork, the viewer is invited to enter the same meditative and spiritual state that produced it in the first place. That is, the viewer is invited to experience nonduality, the union of the subject with all objects, the discovery of universal or transcendent awareness, in an immediate and simple and direct fashion--and this is the purest reason one views art in the first place.

This, in fact, was Schopenhauer's theory of art. All great works of art, he maintained, had one thing in common: they had the power to pull the viewer out of him- or herself and into the

work of art. In other words, to pull the viewer out of self, out of the subject/object duality, and into a nondual or unity awareness. Great art, said Schopenhauer, suspends the division between self and other, inner and outer, and ushers one, if only for a moment, into the realm of the timeless. One momentarily becomes the art and is for that moment released from the alienation that is ego.

Bad art copies; good art creates; great art transcends. Great art dissolves ego in nondual consciousness, and is to that extent experienced as an epiphany, a revelation, a release or liberation: Great art as release from the tyranny of the separate-self sense. To the extent that an art work can usher one into the nondual, then to that extent it is spiritual or universal, no matter whether it actually depicts bugs or Buddhas. I am not the only one, for example, who sees Van Gogh's landscapes as drenched in Spirit.

Thus, as I said at the beginning of this essay, a critical theory of art based on the perennial philosophy would demand at least two different scales, one horizontal and one vertical. On the horizontal scale we would include all the critical elements on a given level that influence a work of art. These elements include everything from the artist's talents and background, to socioeconomic factors (a Marxist critique, for example), to psychological factors (e.g., a Freudian critique), to literary theories (a deconstructionist critique). I wish to exclude none of those factors or theories from a well-balanced critical theory of art. I simply wish to point out that, in addition to all those horizontal factors, the perennial philosophy would insist on the addition of a vertical scale, cutting at right angles to all those earthly factors, and dealing with the ontological dimension of Being itself. This vertical scale would have several components, pertaining to the artist, the art work, and the general viewer, but they all can be summarized by the question: How high up the Great Chain of Being is the art work itself situated? My simple point is that a truly comprehensive theory of art

must include both the horizontal and the vertical scales (and yet no contemporary theory of art does so).

And, as I was saying, it is on the vertical scale that Western art receives rather mediocre marks, having made it only half way up the Great Chain, from matter to body to mind, but not quite clearly to soul and spirit. Nonetheless, it was the great artists of the modern era that kept alive the quest for the sacred, the search for Spirit, while all about them the cultural world was succumbing to scientific materialism. For this we are forever in their debt.

But their spiritual quest lacked precision and focus, and my point is that it was (and is) the general lack of a contemplative method or technique that seems to have so handicapped Western modern artists in their desire to transcend individuality, to transcend subject and object, to find instead a universal and nondual Spirit, to ascend to the uppermost reaches of the Great Chain of Being. They stand on the threshold and, quivering with excitement, strain to see into the face of the Absolute. But for the most part, all they see are their own reflections. After glimpsing the realm of transcendelia, of spiritual illumination beyond thought and form, they all-too-often fall back into the realm of intelligibilia itself, back into the realm of the mentally abstract. After pulling the mental out of the submental, they cannot quite gaze steadily and with conviction on the realm of the transmental, the superconscious, the transpersonal, the universal.

The next great movement in Western art lies waiting to be born. And it will not be of the body, or of the mind, but of the soul and spirit. We have seen Art move from the subconscious to the selfconscious; we have yet to see it move to the superconscious. Thus we await with much anticipation the great artistic symbols "that belong on the altars of some future spiritual religion."

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I write this introduction for my long-time friend Alex Grey, who is attempting to unite in art the realms of sensibilia, intelligibilia, and transcendelia. His "Sacred Mirrors" series, for example, takes the viewer from the gross-physical plane of the body, through the subtler etheric-mental-psyhic planes of one's being, to the spiritual-transcendental Clear Light Void at the core of every being. I particularly like this series because, like the best of Alex's work, it helps the self become transparent to itself, thus facilitating transcendence.

But the point I would like to emphasize about Alex's work, the crucial point it seems to me, a point that places Alex in a very small group of truly important contemporary artists, is that in his art he attempts to evoke and blend all three realms, of body, mind, and spirit. Thus, of our two criteria--how high (vertical) and how well (horizontal)--we can say that Alex passes with flying colors the first criterion: he aspires to all three realms, he reaches from matter to mind to spirit, in itself a very rare ideal.

As for the second, how well does he succeed?, that is for the viewer of this volume to decide.

(All quotes, unless otherwise specified, are from Roger Lipsey, *An Art of Our Own*, Shambhala, 1988. Although I disagree strongly with Lipsey's main conclusion, I nevertheless highly recommend this volume as the very best introduction to the spiritual in twentieth century art.)