

SPECIALIZATION RESEARCH PAPER

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY: THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

Submitted by
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Abakanowicz, Magdalena. Magdalena Abakanowicz. New York:
Abbeville Press, 1982.

Magdalena Abakanowicz is a contemporary Polish artist who creates artworks in natural fibers and, more recently, bronze. This book combines excellent photographs of Abakanowicz's work interspersed with biographical details and the artist's thoughts on art and the role of the artist. She speaks in terms of an underlying unitary reality as she weaves the basic myths of humanity in "fibrous structures" that echo the materials from which "all living organisms are built." (page 94)

Campbell, Joseph with Bill Moyers. The Power of Myth.
New York: Doubleday, 1988.

With few exceptions, this book is a faithful transcript of the PBS television series of the same name. Mythologist Campbell soars beyond temporal and spatial boundaries as he explores the relationship of myth to culture, history, religion, psychology, philosophy and spirituality.

(Note: Read any of Campbell's numerous books on myth for a fascinating (and usually demanding) journey.)

Campbell, Joseph. The Inner Reaches of Outer Space. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1986.

Once again, Campbell weaves together external experiences and inner realities, picking up the mythological threads that unite seemingly disparate religions, cultures, and historical eras. In Chapter Three, "The Way of Art," Campbell examines the role of the artist as mystic and shaman. It is the potential of the artist to reveal the unitary nature of inner and outer realities, to lead to "the mountaintop that is everywhere," that so captivates Campbell.

Davis, Keith. "Modernism and the Quest for Primacy," in Marks In Place: Contemporary Responses to Rock Art. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988, pp. 121-131.

In "Modernism and the Quest for Primacy," Keith Davis explores the influence of the archaic signs and symbols associated with "rock art" on the Western modernist tradition. According to Davies, the aura of mystery surrounding these "primal marks" combined with the intense alienation felt by many individuals in Western culture, creates a dynamic whereby the artist's innermost longing for myth, magic, transcendence and unity are projected onto these ancient symbols.

This dynamic is activated by a number of perceptions and experiences of the mysterious language of the petroglyph. The geographical isolation of these rock art sites engenders an intensely private experience. The overlay of symbol on nature speaks of cultures integrated with their environment. The gestalt of this experience harks back to the ideas and notions promulgated in the Romantic movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Davis examines the ideas of the proponents of this movement vis-a-vis the current quest among some contemporary Western artists for an experience of underlying unitary reality.

Davis also looks at other historical antecedents that have influenced this quest, including the Symbolist movement,

"Modernism and the Quest for Primacy," con't

Jungian psychology, the establishment of ethnographic museums where so-called "primitive art" could be seen, twentieth century linguistic theory, and the perceived religious sacrality of rock art. Davis also includes a discussion of those thinkers who view this quest in less than utopian terms.

Eliade, Mircea. Symbolism, the Sacred and the Arts.
New York: The Crossroads Publishing Co., 1986.

Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts consists of a collection of essays by the noted historian of religions, Mircea Eliade. Among the topics discussed are the nature of symbols, the relationship between Christianity and mythical thought, images of the divine as revealed through art and iconography, the mythical and ritual origins of masks, "Brancusi and Mythology," and "Sacred Architecture and Symbolism."

(Note: Mircea Eliade (1907 - 1986) was at the time of his death the Sewall L. Avery Distinguished Service Professor in the Divinity School and professor in the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago.

I would recommend any of the over fifty scholarly books he has written on topics ranging from religion and myth to witchcraft and shamanism.)

Gimbutas, Marija. The Language of the Goddess. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989.

Gimbutas takes an extensive look at the symbols and significance of goddess imagery in Paleolithic, Neolithic, and Bronze Age Europe. The many wonderful illustrations and photographs of goddess-associated visual forms, coupled with exhaustive archeological data, serves as the basis for Gimbutas' archeomythological theories regarding the primacy of the goddess religions in the history of humankind.

Gimbutas prepares a theoretical foundation from which we can trace the migration of these symbols across time and place and examine the appropriation of these symbols by the Indo-European and Christian god-centered religions. A cursory glance at the symbology of many Western contemporary art forms would imply that these symbols are still bouyant in the creative imaginations of artists today.

(Note: Gimbutas has written extensively on the topic of the goddess. Among the many other books currently available on this topic, Eric Neumann, in The Great Mother, compares the development of the historical image of the goddess with the development of the individual human psyche.)

Jung, Carl G. and M.-L von Franz, ed. Man and His Symbols.
New York: The Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group,
Inc. 1968.

Man and His Symbols is a compilation of essays by Carl Jung and other prominent Jungian analysts. These essays are intended to provide the layperson with a coherent and accessible exegesis of Jungian theory and terms and their application to the analysis of dreams, myth and symbolism in the visual arts and in individual analysis. In his essay entitled "Approaching the Unconscious," Jung explores the nature of the conscious and unconscious mind and their interrelationship. He also looks at the function of dreams and the symbolic imagery by which dreams assist in revealing the contents of the unconscious to the conscious mind. Such concepts as the archetype, the collective unconscious, and the anima and the animus arose from Jung's unique approach to the study of dreams. This essay is particularly useful in gaining an understanding of these concepts. It is important to know that Jung's approach to these concepts was fluid and dynamic and evolved throughout his lifetime. Contemporary Jungian writers and analysts continue to interpret these terms. In addition, such concepts as the anima and animus reflect the male gender bias of the Eurocentric masculinist tradition and there are

Man and His Symbols, con't

a number of discourses throughout the book that are, from a contemporary perspective, blatantly sexist. However, such concepts as the archetype continue to fascinate as they help to explain why certain images and symbols speak to us in ways we do not fully understand.

Pertinent to the discussion of the visual arts is Aniela Jaffé's essay entitled "Symbolism in the Visual Arts." Jaffé scans the centuries and examines the symbolic meaning inherent in the recurring motifs of the stone, the animal, and the circle. She also gives a brief overview of the development of the Western artistic tradition and examines how this tradition reflected the changing belief systems and patterns of existence in society. Jaffé also notes the difference between "sensory" (realistic) and "imaginative" (abstract or dreamlike) styles of visual expression. Jaffé details the history of imaginative art in the twentieth century and explains how this art serves as a bridge between the conscious and the unconscious and between the material and the spiritual worlds.

Lippard, Lucy R. Overlay; Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory. New York: Pantheon Books, 1983.

As the title of this book suggests, Lippard juxtaposes images of prehistoric "art" with contemporary works so that each may be seen with fresh eyes and new understanding. The author combines well-chosen photographs of ancient visual forms and contemporary art works with a text that blends myth and ritual, art history and archeology. There is a tremendous amount of information contained in this very readable book.

Lipsey, Roger. An Art of Our Own: The Spiritual in Twentieth Century Art. Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1988.

In An Art of Our Own. Roger Lipsey takes his cue from Kandinsky's 1912 treatise On the Spiritual in Art. Kandinsky sought new meaning in both the form and content of visual expression. He postulated the legitimacy of the plastic elements in art to stand alone in their expression of the deepest spiritual yearnings of the artist and humankind.

Lipsey notes the influence of the Theosophical movement on late nineteenth and twentieth century art and explores the spiritual aspects of many of the creative works of the artists of this period. Also examined is the tension that exists between the "laws of the marketplace" and "the laws of the studio."

Norwood, Vera and Janice Monk, ed. The Desert Is No Lady.
New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987.

The Desert Is No Lady consists of a series of articles that eloquently and lyrically explore the relationship between art and place, specifically, the way women artists in literature and the visual arts have incorporated their personal and cultural experience of the Southwestern landscape into their art. The essayists explore the artistic visions of Anglo, Hispanic, Mexican, and Native American women, pioneers and contemporary artists. This book is not a celebration of dominance over nature but rather a look at relationship, spiritual connection, and adaptation to a specific region as expressed in art. Of particular interest is Elizabeth Duvert's essay entitled "With Stone, Star, and Earth; The Presence of the Archaic in the Landscape Visions of Georgia O'Keefe, Nancy Holt, and Michelle Stuart."

Regier, Kathleen, ed. The Spiritual Image in Modern Art.
Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1987.

The Spiritual Image in Modern Art is a collection of essays detailing the relationship between art and occultism in the late nineteenth century. Here, the emphasis is on the influence exerted by the theosophical movement on the works of such artists as Kandinsky, Mondrian, Arp, Klee, and Marc. Information on the origins of the Theosophical movement and its founders and proponents, including Mme Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, C. W. Leadbeater, Katherine Dreier, and Rudolf Steiner, is included.

Wade, Edwin L. "Neo-Primitivism and the Sacred," in The Eloquent Object. Ed. Marcia Manhart and Tom Manhart. Tulsa: The Philbrook Museum of Art, 1987, pp. 257-277.

In his article entitled "Neo -Primitivism and the Sacred," Edwin Wade takes on the challenging task of defining and exploring the relationship between the art object and the sacred. In our secular, materialistic, and highly technological Western culture, Wade believes that the "quest for union with the sacred is neither futile nor ended." One of the most potent expressions of this quest can be found in the created works of contemporary, "neo-primitive" artists. The sacrality of these objects, Wade asserts, lies in their ability to evoke the most ancient racial memories in the viewer, archetypal impressions that reverberate beyond the boundaries of our historical era and culture.

Weisberger, Edward, ed. The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985. New York: Abbeville Press, 1986.

The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985 is a collection of essays referencing the 1987 exhibition in Los Angeles of the same name. The mystical, spiritual and/or occult underpinnings of abstract art are explored. These essayists set out to show how antimaterialist philosophies, renewed interest in belief systems outside the scope of institutional religions, such as the Theosophical movement, and the fascination with tribal cultures, contributed to the shape and substance of abstract art in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Of particular interest are the essays by W. Jackson Rushing, "Ritual and Myth: Native American Culture and Abstract Expressionism," Donald Kuspit, "Concerning the Spiritual in Contemporary Art," and Sixten Ringbom, "Transcending the Visible: The Generation of the Abstract Pioneers."

Wolff, Theodore F. "On Art." Excerpts from The Christian Science Monitor

In his articles from The Christian Science Monitor, Theodore F. Wolff writes passionately and convincingly on a wide range of art topics. Wolff seems undaunted by the most controversial of topics, expressing opinions on issues ranging from the "truth-seeking" impulse of art to the subtle distinctions between art and craft. After lamenting the virtual impossibility of defining art, Wolff never-the-less forges ahead with his own definition. Wolff's writings are a great place to begin to formulate one's own views on these subjects.