Mandala Influence on Twentieth Century Abstract Paintings

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Abstract

If we emphasize ‘Abstraction’ we’d find that the word is nothing less than the word ‘Meditation’ in terms of meaning and substance. One of the great sources of abstract modernism is ancient oriental art. Many great painters, for example, Jackson Pollock and Van Gogh, were influenced by oriental art. Ancient oriental art has several roots. Among them are the most ancient Eastern philosophies in the world, the Mandala philosophies. Traditional Mandala symbolisms (forms such as circle, spiral, square, rectangle and triangle) and philosophies belong to India and mostly spread in East Asian countries, while the key part of Tantra meditation practice remained confined within India.

Mandala influence on art since ancient times to Renaissance was more orthodox and ritualistic rather than abstract in terms of expression. The seeds of Mandala in modern paintings, however, can be traced back from the Renaissance to Impressionism to Post Impressionism and to Expressionism and Fauvism. Many western philosophers of twentieth century such as David Fontana and especially Carl Jung had ‘meditative experiences’ and ‘a representation of the unconscious self’ through Mandala and therefore western painters such as Kandinsky and Paul Klee got curious and inspired from Mandala philosophy. In the context of modern Abstract art it is apparent that the seeds of Mandala grow up as a plant from Cubism with painters such as Paul Cézanne, Picasso, George Braque, Kandinsky, Paul Klee in the forefront. In Suprematism the plant of Mandala became a really huge abstract tree. Kasimir Malevich, the originator of Suprematism was highly influenced by Russian philosopher and mystic-mathematician Georges Gurdjieff. Moreover, in mid twentieth
century, the Eastern painters such as Hsiao Chin from Taiwan and S. H. Raza from India made a significant contribution to the field of Mandala symbolism.

This article, therefore, presents the details of the examination carried out on “Mandala Influence on Twentieth Century Abstract Painting”. The paper gives a unique analysis with Eastern and Western philosophy viewpoints, painting methods and impact of geometrical forms in their painting.

**Keywords:** Mandala, Abstract Painting, Zen, Tanta, Supremacist, Eastern influence, Western influence.
I. Introduction

Mandala Art within Hinduism, Buddhism and Contemporary Society

Mandalas (Sanskrit: “that which encircles a center”) are geometric designs, using squares, triangles and circles, that can be two-dimensional paintings, or three-dimensional architecture. The Chortens (the Buddhist Stupas) and the architecture of Tibetan sanctuaries are basically Mandalas. In a few cases, entire monastic complexes are laid out as Mandala. The most famous example is Samye Gompa. The Mandala is a symbolic, visual representation of the abstract concept of the divine or the sacred, and as such it is universal. The ancient Greek mazes and those in Gothic cathedrals (Chartre), the cruciform Byzantine churches of Eastern orthodoxy, most Turkish and many of the Iranian mosques are in effect three-dimensional Mandalas. The Mandala may also be related to the Pythagorean quadrangle of the circle and its mystical use in Sufism, the Kabala, and the Western alchemy.

Mandalas are thought to be one of the world’s oldest art forms. The word 'Mandala' is Sanskrit and has been defined as the circumference of whole world, circle, round or wheel. They could be seen as a landscape of the mind and have been described in the Columbia Encyclopedia as “expressing a microcosm embodying the various divine powers at work in the universe.” Attempting to quantify exactly what a Mandala is a difficult task. However they have been widely used in different forms of meditation.1

The form of a Mandala on the primary level is purely visual; the meaning they possess is unique to the creator and the beholder. In their earliest forms within Hindu and Buddhist art works, they were graphic symbols of the universe. In latter manifestations they arose off the parchment and gave inspiration to western church architecture in the shape of great multicolored "Rose" windows throughout the cathedrals of Europe. Here, the new element of light came into glorious effect, literally illuminating the spiritual and religious representations of the church.

A. Mandala in Hinduism

In Hindu cosmology, the surface of the earth is represented as a square, which, after the triangle is the most fundamental of all Hindu forms. The earth is seen as having four corners which relates to the horizon's relationship with sunset and sunrise and the north and south direction. The earth is thus called 'Caturbhrsti' (four-cornered)

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and is represented in the symbolic form of the *Prithvi* Mandala. The term *Yantras* normally refers to Hindu contexts and practices, while Mandala normally refers to Buddhist contexts and practices. Yet, the terms are also used interchangeably, and *Mandala* is sometimes used as a cross-over term in Hindu contexts. A *Yantra* is a two or three dimensional geometric composition used in *Sadhanas*, or meditative rituals. It is thought to be the abode of the deity. Each *Yantra* is unique and calls the deity into the presence of the practitioner through the elaborate symbolic geometric designs. According to one scholar, *Yantras* function as revelatory symbols of cosmic truth and as instructional charts of the spiritual aspect of human experience.\(^2\) *Yantras* are not representations, but are lived, experiential realities. As Khanna describes:

*Despite its cosmic meanings a Yantra is a reality lived. Because of the relationship that exists in the Tantras between the outer world (the macrocosm) and man’s inner world (the microcosm), every symbol in a Yantra is ambivalently resonant in inner-outer synthesis, and is associated with the subtle body and aspects of human consciousness.*\(^3\) (Fig 8B)

### B. Mandala in Buddhism

*Bon* is pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet and has its own importance. In *Bon*, the five elemental processes of earth, water, fire, air and space are the essential elements of all existent phenomena or *Skandhas* (Sanskrit: aggregates) - the most subtle enumeration of which are known as the five pure lights. The symbolism related to *Bon* religion are mainly ‘Chakras’ (the *Pranic* centers of the body). The major visual forms depicting the *Bon* philosophy are geometric with no realistic form in the bon Mandala painting. Also it is the ancient Tibetan calligraphic symbol in the center.\(^4\) Mandalas are commonly used by tantric Buddhists as an aid to meditation. Some monks spend hours creating temporary sand Mandalas which are painstakingly created on the temple floors using small tubes of differently colored sands. The visualization and concretization of the Mandala concept is one of the most significant contributions of Buddhism to religious psychology. Mandalas are seen as sacred places which, by their very presence in the world, remind the viewer of the immanence of sanctity in the universe and its potential in his or her self. In early and *Theravada* Buddhism, Mandala also can be found in the form of the *Stupa* and in the *Atanatiya Sutta* in the *Digha Nikaya*, part of

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\(^3\) Khanna, Madhu. *Yantra: The Tantric Symbol of Cosmic Unity*. 12-22.

Mandalas have sometimes been used in pure land Buddhism to graphically represent the Pure Land, based on descriptions found in the *Larer Sutra* and the Contemplation *Sutra*.

(kyl khor Tibetan for Mandala) in Vajrayana Buddhism usually depicts a landscape of the "Buddha-land," or the enlightened vision of a Buddha, which inevitably represents the nature of experience and the intricacies of either the enlightened and confused mind, or ‘a microcosm representing various divine powers at work in the universe.’ Such Mandalas consist of an outer circular Mandala and an inner square (or sometimes circular) Mandala with an ornately decorated Mandala ‘palace’ placed at the center. Any part of the inner Mandala can be occupied by Buddhist glyphs and symbols, as well as by images of its associated deities, which "symbolize different stages in the process of the realization of the truth." In many Tantric Mandalas, this aspect of separation and protection from the outer samsaric world is depicted by "the four outer circles: the purifying fire of wisdom, the Vajra circle, the circle with the eight tombs, the lotus circle." The ring of Vajras forms a connected fence-like arrangement running around the perimeter of the outer Mandala circle.

The Japanese branch of Vajrayana Buddhism, Shingon Buddhism makes frequent use of Mandalas in its rituals as well, though the actual Mandalas differ. Sand Mandalas, as found in Tibetan Buddhism, are not practiced in Shingon Buddhism. Mandala in Nachiren Buddhism is called a moji-Mandala and is a hanging paper scroll or wooden tablet whose inscription consists of Chinese characters and medieval Sanskrit script representing elements of the Buddha's enlightenment, protective Buddhist deities, and certain Buddhist concepts.

C. Mandala in Western Society

In the West, Mandala is also used to refer to the ‘personal world’ in which one lives, the various elements of the Mandala or the activities and interests in which one engages the most important being at the centre of the Mandala and the least important at the periphery. Depicting one's personal Mandala in pictorial form can give one a good indication of the state of one's spiritual life. Cowen (2005), states that forms which are evocative of Mandalas are prevalent in Christianity: the Celtic cross; the rosary; the halo; the aureole; ocular; the Crown of Thorns; rose windows; the Rosy

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Cross; and the dromenon on the floor of Charters Cathedral. The dromenon represents a journey from the outer world to the inner sacred centre where the Divine is found.\textsuperscript{9} Similarly, many of the Illuminations of Hildegard von Bingen can be used as Mandalas, as well as many of the images of esoteric Christianity, as in Christian Hermeticism Christian Alchemy, and Rosicrucianism. Mandala in Bora rings, found in South-East Australia, are circles of foot-hardened earth surrounded by raised embankments. They were generally constructed in pairs (although some sites have three); with a bigger circle about 22 meters in diameter and a smaller one of about 14 meters. The rings are joined by a sacred walkway. Matthews (1897) gives an eye-witness account of a Bora ceremony, and explains the use of the two circles. \textsuperscript{10}

Interestingly the Native Americans, specifically ‘the Ojibwas’ used ‘Dreamcatchers’ that are strikingly similar to Yantras or Mandalas, to filter sweet dreams from nightmares! One element of Native American dream catcher relates to the tradition of the hoop (A circular band of willow put around a cask or barrel to bind the staves together).

*The Ojibwa believe that a dreamcatcher changes a person's dreams. According to Konrad J. Kaweczynski, "Only good dreams would be allowed to filter through . . . Bad dreams would stay in the net, disappearing with the light of day." Good dreams would pass through and slide down the feathers to the sleeper.*\textsuperscript{11}

Americans of North America held the hoop in the highest esteem, because it symbolized strength and unity. Many symbols started around the hoop, and one of these symbols is the dream catcher. Today the Dreamcatchers represents many things including a symbol of unity among the American nations.

Mandala art has been used throughout the world for self-expression, spiritual transformation, and personal growth. Mandala is the ancient Sanskrit word for the circumference of the circle and is seen by Tibetans as a diagram of the cosmos. It is used by Native Americans in healing rituals and in Christian cathedrals the labyrinth is a Mandalic pattern used as a tool for meditation. This arena of Mandala has transformed itself because of a series of incarnations in a span of several thousand years and thus, there are many impacts of Mandala on modern art.

II. The Eastern and Western Mandala

‘Mandala’ is an eastern word. Yet, the visual meaning of both Eastern and Western forms tends to depict the same thing; i.e., the ways of discovering knowledge. It would be interesting to compare how ideas evolved in these two cultures. ‘Mandala’ in fact intends to seek an understanding of life's cycles which has been at the heart of human exploration of the mind, body, world, and spirit. To gain this understanding, Western philosophers explored the world around us, seeking common patterns and processes in the things we can see, hear, smell, and touch. Early philosophers, often alchemists, were the forerunners of the modern scientists. Whereas in the East, the desire to understand life's cycles took a different approach. Eastern philosophers sought understanding by exploring their own thoughts, seeking patterns and processes that would lead to an understanding of how and why we create the world around us.

The comparative study of Eastern and Western philosophy, psychology, and metaphysics offered a fertile context for artists to encounter Asian thoughts through the filter of contemporary discourses. From at least 1827, when Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel linked Arthur Schopenhauer’s “cult of nothingness” to the Buddhist nirvana – “the principle of everything, the ultimate, final goal and ultimate end of everything” – Western thinkers from the romantics to the postmodernists have consulted Vedic and Buddhist texts especially as a method of inquiry and counterpoint. 12

The Mandala is a cosmographical diagram representing relationships. It is a graphic metaphor for interdependence in a globalizing world. Its form is circular, like the cosmos, and tian (the Chinese Heaven or 'moral universe'). Its structure is concentric, across many levels of meaning and correspondence - such as that of macro-micro. The Mandala's constant properties are a centre, symmetry and cardinal points. 13

Western painters explore the physical, objective world asking: Where did all these things come from? How did they get here? In the West, the knowledge is discovered through examination of outer phenomenon. Eastern painters explore the inner, subjective world asking: Where did all these thoughts come from? Why do we have them? In the East, the knowledge is realized through inner experience. The main difference is that formulae are defined and applied, whereas Mandalas are realized.

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and experienced. Mandalas serve two functions: To express the knowledge that has been realized, and to provide a way for others to experience that knowledge.

Others participated in post-utopian discourses of a syncretic, East-West universalism that corresponded to their avant-grade agendas. They culled new cultural identities from transcendentalism, Theosophy, Jungian aspirations of the collective unconscious, Merton’s Vatican II-inspired integration of Christian and Buddhist monastic mysticism, and New Age movements preaching the perennial vitality of Asia’s spiritual psychology in a global age. Still others simply extracted and freely enlisted what served their particular creative impulses. Some, like Franz Kline and Jackson Pollock, were surreptitious: They borrowed the visual and gestural structures of monochromatic, calligraphic painting from East Asia but rejected outright association with its marginal, effeminate source.¹⁴

Eastern views help to find relation between Mandala art and history, culture, tradition, mythology, as well as twentieth century abstract painter’s influence of Mandala. Western views help to understand the real structure, process and exact criticism of paintings. Hence if we look at the overall approach of Eastern and Western Mandalas we can find that the East goes deep and broad inside and come out with more emphatic touch of Mandalas whereas West explored its expressions of the outer and went wider to make the paintings more comprehensive in code with the modern world, its interests, colors and forms.

Ⅲ. Influence of Mandala on 20th Century Art

Art comes from and is realized in a place before language, outside of the discursive mind. It shares this place, the place of emptiness, with Buddhist meditation practice.¹⁵

Kandinsky’s watercolor In the Circle from around 1911-13 is an early example of a form that would replace his beloved horse as a symbol of power. Some fifteen years later, he told the psychologist Paul Plaut, “If…in recent years I have preferred to use the circle so often and passionately, the reason (or cause) for this was not the ‘geometric’ form of the circle, or its geometrical characteristics, but rather my strong feeling of the inner force of the circle in its countless variations.” The art historian Peg Weiss has argued that possible inspirations for Kandinsky’s circles include Lapp and Siberian shaman drums, as well as cosmological concepts. One could infer another possible source: the circle of enlightenment –the wholeness of form and

emptiness expressed in “countless variations,” from the circle of the “both vanished” stage of the Chinese Ch’an Oxherding Pictures to Zen brush drawings of the enso, Japanese for “circle (Fig.18A,B,C).” “A circle is a living wonder,” Kandinsky wrote in 1937, in an essay entitled “Empty Canvas.” According to Kandinsky’s biographer Will Grohmannt Kandinsky was essentially Eastern in his personality.16

The historian of Asian art Michael Sullivan has linked Kandinsky’s concept of resonance with that “cornerstone of Chinese aesthetic theory”- chi-yinsheng-tung (“spirit resonance”) - defined by the Chinese painter Hsieh Ho in the sixth century: “Early Chinese painters felt that this 'spirit’ was a cosmic force.17

The suggestion in The Coffee Grinder of a Mandala a “window” that opens from material to immaterial reality hints at a Tantric influence. This work was done at the end of 1911, the same year that Jacques Bacot’s Tibetan collection, which included Mandalas, was shown at the Musee Guiment. Duchamp may even have attended or discussed this exhium’s Buddhist sculpture.18

“Rotational movement is one of the most obvious characteristics of Tibetan rites,” wrote Jacques Bacot in his first published Musee Guimet lecture. Coffee Grinder depicts a machine that through rotational movement transforms individual coffee beans, whose form resembles the female exterior genitals, into a substance that can be made into a stimulating-an awakening-liquid. Perhaps the best known Tibetan examples of rotational movement are prayer wheels-rotating wheels or cylinders bearing or containing inscribed texts. Small ones are twirled on sticks; very large ones are turned using a mill powered by flowing water. Tibetan prayer wheels are modeled on the Wheel of the Dharma, the wheel the Buddha drew on the ground when he preached his first sermon, “Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dharma.” Sometime in 1913 – the year after his return from Munich Duchamp attached a bicycle wheel to a stool. He kept it by his chair in his studio so he could easily set it spinning. In Buddhism, the wheel is associated with turning the wheel of the Dharma-the liberating truth set in motion by the Buddha.19 Tosi Lee has made a convincing case for the connection between Duchamp’s choice of a wheel for his first “readymade” and the Buddhist Wheel of the Dharma (Fig.17A,17B). In the Buddha’s first sermon the wheel stands, among other things, for the newly enlightened Buddha’s

16 Jacquelynn Baas. Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art from Monet to Today. 61-62.
18 Jacquelynn Baas. Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art from Monet to Today. 85.
determination to turn the wheel of truth in this world. In early Buddhist art, the Wheel of the Dharma is represented by a wheel placed on top of a throne or pillar.\textsuperscript{20}

Duchamp began constructing The Large Glass in 1915, which titled - Grand Vehicule - the French term of ‘Mahayana’. Four elements on the right side of the lower, “bachelor” half of the glass allude to Buddhist “perspective”. At the top is a small circular form described by Duchamp in his 1965 etching as a “Mandala (a magnifying glass to focus the splashes).” It hovers above three “Oculist Witnesses,” whose wheel-like shapes were supposedly based on French oculist charts. Duchamp first developed these circular forms in 1918 in a piece he referred to as “the small ‘Glass,’” evoking the name of Buddhism’s other main branch, Theravada or Hinayana-in French, Petit Vehicule (“small vehicle”), because it focuses on individual enlightenment, as opposed to Grand Vehicule, which focuses on the enlightenment of all beings. The “Mandala” of The Small Glass is an actual magnifying lens, and Duchamp inscribed the piece: “To Be Looked At (from the Other Side of the Glass) with One Eye, Close To, for Almost an Hour.”\textsuperscript{21}

In the last decade of his life the famous American Japanese sculptor and painter Isamu Noguchi made Ojizousama or ‘Jizo’, a nineteen-inch, slightly vertical stone with a circle carved in its middle. When the former relocation camp internee represented the United States at the 1986 Venice Biennale, he showed Ojizousama in an exhibition entitled “What Is Sculpture?”

The bodhisattva Jizo is the compassionate protector of the dead, especially children, and of travelers. His Sanskrit name, Kshitigarbha, means “womb of the earth”. Jizo’s stone form, which can be as simple as a barely carved rock, appears along Japanese roads, at intersections, in mountain passes, and at the entrance to graveyards. The circle carved into Noguchi’s Jizo could be a reference to the womb or to the wish-granting jewel that is his attribute. It is also another enso, resonant with Mu, nothingness. \textsuperscript{22}

Taiwanese abstract painter Hsiao Chin is inspired from Buddhist Zen and Taoist philosophy whereas Indian abstract painter S H Raza has inspired from Hinduism and Tantra philosophy. After 1978, Hsiao Chin’s works have basic shapes of squares and circles. The square represents the early beginnings of life and the circle represents the complete realization of life. In the painting ‘Everything is Zero’, (Fig. 10) Hsiao Chin

\textsuperscript{20} Jacquelynn Baas. \textit{Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art from Monet to Today}. 86-87.
\textsuperscript{21} Jacquelynn Baas. \textit{Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art from Monet to Today}.88-89.
\textsuperscript{22} Jacquelynn Baas. \textit{Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art from Monet to Today}.122-123.
used the Chinese paintbrush to paint the squares and circles, and then to produce several colored dots of varying sizes in all four directions.\textsuperscript{23} Whereas Raza began experimenting with imagination and expression to perceive the world with closed eyes, imagine and then express. He realized the importance of the \textit{Bindu/dot/circle} as one of the most important symbols in the visual arts. The mysteries of this world emerge from the black void. When he painted one of the most important paintings of his career, the \textquote{\textit{Tama-Shunya}}, that is, \textquote{Everything is in Zero}, (Fig. 9) a new avenue of experiences and experiments opened up to him.\textsuperscript{24} The similar part is the Taoism diagram of Yen and Yang is a circle or a bindu and diagram of point, or circle of Mandala and Tantra. Hsiao Chin’s circle has reached into the universe and Raza’s circle has reached in the seed or earth, so that their work may looks similar.

Another cubist New York based painter Adolph Frederick Reinhardt ("Ad" Reinhardt)’s journey towards Mandala is also fascinating. Around 1940 he had abandoned Cubist-influenced abstraction in favor of the overall pattern of collage, and by the late 1940s he was creating black-and-white “calligraphic” paintings and luminous “brick” paintings. His shapes gradually became larger and more contingent until he achieved the brilliant variations on a single color exemplified by Red Painting of 1952. For the next four years, Reinhardt focused on two colors: red and blue. In 1955-56 he began to darken his colors dramatically, first in vertical canvases and then in five-foot-square paintings bearing nine black squares arranged in a symmetrical cross or Mandala shape. “Five feet wide,” he was quoted as saying, “just the width of a man’s reach.”\textsuperscript{25} In language that echoes his reverent descriptions of Buddhist sculptures, Tantric Mandalas, and Chinese landscape paintings, Reinhardt declared his black paintings to be “pure, abstract, non-objective, timeless and changeless.”\textsuperscript{26} His mature geometric abstractions emerge as a distinct formulation to effect as concentrated state of “sacred” awareness:

1. Symmetry – geometry – perfection – absolute
2. Centrality – frontality – black – rectilinear
3. Finished before begun?
4. Thought – contemplation – meditation
5. More is less – much in little – latent
6. Conventionality – repetition
7. Quietness – “holy” – sacred – symbolic

\textsuperscript{25} Jacquelynn Baas. \textit{Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art from Monet to Today}. 127-128.
With the work of the composer and artist John Cage, the relation of Buddhism to Western art came out of the closet. Cage freely acknowledged the significant impact of Buddhist philosophy on his life and his work. In a 1992 interview with Laurie Anderson for Tricycle: The Buddhist Review, Cage explained how he came to Buddhism:

“I had read The Gospel of Sri Ramekrishna. I became interested, in other words, in Oriental thought. And I read also a short book by Aldous Huxley called The Perennial Philosophy, and from that I got the idea that all the various religions were saying the same thing but had different flavors...So I browsed, as it were, and found a flavor I liked and it was that of Zen Buddhism. It was then that Suzuki came to New York, and I was able to go to Columbia once a week for two years to attend his classes.”

Cage seems to have begun reading about Zen Buddhism in the late 1940s, before he began attending the lectures of D. T. Suzuki around 1950. In 1960 grove press published D. T. Suzuki’s Manual of Zen Buddhism. The purpose of this book, Suzuki explained in his preface, was to share with Western students of Zen what “the Zen monk reads. Suzuki often cited the esoteric ink painting by the zenga artist Sengai Gibon (1750-1836) as the quintessential embodiment of the universe and hence a diagram of satori. (Fig 13B) He interpreted Sengai’s three fundamental forms as geometries of formlessness and infinity which underscored his own view of emptiness (Sunyata) as the essence of Zen enlightenment.

Suzuki reproduces an early Chinese woodcut version that ends with an ‘empty circle’ and a Japanese version of Kakuan Shien’s twelfth-century elaboration, in which the ‘empty circle’ is only stage eight. Kakuan, Suzuki tells us, thought the shorter version “some-what misleading because of an empty circle being made the goal of Zen discipline (18B,C). Some might take mere emptiness as all important and final.

Painter Agnes Martin, born in the same year as John Cage, was among the first, along with her friend Ad Reinhardt, to absorb and reflect the lessons of Zen Buddhism in her art. If in his paintings Reinhardt contains and conveys the rich darkness of the

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mind, Martin strives to contain and convey the elements of the natural world within the elements of two-dimensional expression. These are primarily line and color; though line and light might be a better way to describe it, for some of Martin’s most powerful paintings have no color at all.

She was apparently influenced by the sixteenth-century Chinese poet Pu-ming, whose verses are quite surrealist and deep in nature. In the early 1960s Martin gave her paintings and drawings, which were empty of anything but simple grids, titles like Flower in the Wind and Grass, evoking Pu-ming’s “lilies of the field and its fresh sweet-scented verdure.” She herself indicated that her own philosophy integrated heavy doses of both Taoism and Buddhism: “My greatest spiritual inspiration came from the Chinese spiritual teachers; especially Lao Tzu…My next strongest influence is the Sixth Patriarch Hui Neng…. I have also read and been inspired by the sutras of the other… Buddhist masters. Zen influence is readily apparent in Martin’s Cow, a painting from 1960(Fig 16 B). Its brown circle could almost represent the “Both Vanished” (Fig.18B) episode from the Zen Oxherding Pictures about the taming of the mind.31

By the late 1960s radically abstract Indian Tantric art - made to be used as perceptual aids to meditation - was increasingly available to artists like Martin and Irwin. In 1969 the Los Angeles County Museum of Art presented Fifty Tantric Mystical Diagrams in an American museum. Ajit Mookerjee’s Tantra Art, which influenced the art of Jasper Johns, came out in 1966, with new editions in 1971 and 1977.32

According to Richard Tuttle, who was influenced by wabi-sabi (the Japanese aesthetic of impermanence) and by Chinese calligraphy, but who has more recently been engaged in an effort to shift his (and our) energy from an east/west to a north/south axis:

“Such a haptic, four-dimensional conception of energy is reminiscent of the Tantric Buddhist mandala, whose visualization cultivates profoundly aesthetic as well as spiritual perceptual awareness, and which is organized in reference to the four directions. The earth turns from west to east, so east-west energy has to do with time. North-south energy, on the other hand, is related to the poles of our planet-to space”.33

31 Jacquelynn Baas. Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art from Monet to Today. 215.
32 Jacquelynn Baas. Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art from Monet to Today. 207, 209.
33 Jacquelynn Baas. Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art from Monet to Today. 211.
Irwin and Turrell collaborated on a project for the U. S. Pavilion at Expo 70, Osaka. Their collaborator was Edward Wortz, who would drop out of the space program and become a gestalt therapist at the Los Angeles Buddhist Meditation Center. The focus of their investigations, like isolated meditation periods inside a black, soundless anechoic chamber, was to devise mechanisms (art) that would “make people conscious of their consciousness…The experience is the ‘thing,’ experience is the ‘object.’” Irwin pursued the possibility of an edgeless painting with a series of convex silver-white disks whose material form, when attached to the wall and lit, dissolved in the interplay of its own shadows (Fig. 19B).

The abstract color films of California artist Jordan Belson likewise function as what Pran Nath would call “a psychic phenomenon; A song of the universe. Samadhi (1967) (Fig 16A) is a gradual metamorphosis of emerging and receding circles that evoke planetary globes and the pupil of an eye. While Bleson’s images in part from live photography, they are documentary “visions of [his] inner eye” that correlate with his phenomenological experiences of advanced yogic meditation. Several of his films are based on specific South Asian metaphysical texts and concepts. Belson acknowledges his fellow abstract filmmaker James Whitney for developing the mandalic potential of the graphic film with works such as Yantra (1957) and Lapis (1966).

By 1969, the year Carl Andre made Zinc Ribbon (Fig. 7A). He had developed his concept of “sculpture as place” and wrote: “A place is an area within an environment which has been altered in such a way as to make the general environment more conspicuous.” This approach reflected his interest in Zen gardens designed for Buddhist monastic contemplation as “ancient exemplars of field sculpture” and experiences that induce “an ecstatic change of state.” He later noted how “[he] found in Kyoto this kind of clam, fierce calm, a kind of fierce attention, a fierce equilibrium.” Increasingly, he saw mass culture as inimical to art and described his Minimalism as a process of emptying art to arrive at “blankness.”

Another artist De Maria emerged as an intermediate, proto-Minimalist artist. Her reference to a mandalic cosmogram can be seen in an earlier work, Triangle, Circle, Square (Fig 13 A), which quotes the famous Buddhist cosmogram by the eighteenth-century Japanese zenga artist Sengai. (Fig 13 B) De Maria orchestrated Minimalist means and contemporary disseminations of Asian cosmologies to

intentionally create an art of sublime immanence.\textsuperscript{37} 

Among the Seattle painters, Morris Graves was the most profoundly influenced by Tobey’s ideas about Asian art. Graves achieved such emblematic authority with his painting Black Buddha Mandala an image that occurred to him in a “waking vision.” It is one of the few works to explicitly reveal his profound understanding of Buddhist art forms. Using the predetermined dimensions of the stretched canvas, Graves duplicated the traditional Mandala “palace” format of a square enclosing a circle containing a deity represented, in this case, by diaphanous layers of “white writing.” At each of the four gates, or “cardinal directions,” of the palace is another deity; Graves chose plant forms to serve this purpose. By retaining the traditional “sacred geometry,” Mandala became his schematized map of cosmic consciousness.\textsuperscript{38} 

My main consideration is that the influence of the Mandala on the Western tradition examining the spiritual dimension of art as embodied in the works of the guiding figures of Modernism: Kandinsky, Malevich and Klee; the Mandala’s significance in the life and work of Carl Jung; and the related phenomenon of the labyrinth, which can be seen as a Christian Mandala.

A. Renaissance: Beginning of Modern Painting

The seeds of Modern painting can be traced back to the Renaissance. The revival of ancient Greek culture and new found sciences brought about a celebration of the individual. While many diverse styles evolved out of the Renaissance, the perfection of representational art superseded the flat decorative forms of medieval art. Pattern and decorative art played a smaller role on the two-dimensional as artists grew more attentive to spatial depth.\textsuperscript{39} Mandalas always have a central focal point from which elements of the image radiate. They are found in nature and in the art of all cultures - rose windows are found in Renaissance and medieval cathedrals.

B. Impressionism

In the 1870s, the Impressionists launched a revolutionary painting movement in Paris. Because of their unpolished style and informal subject matter, they were initially scorned by the French salons. Brush strokes create an abundance of beautiful patterns and textures in their paintings, but in a random, natural form. Eventually, the Impressionists were recognized and celebrated in their own day. Impressionism remains popular for its engaging portrayals of 19th century French life. Impressionist artists were attempting to depict or convey some spiritual, translational,

super-individual state, feeling, awareness, or insight. However, Impressionists such as Monet were scientific in their approach; whether painting landscapes, still life or figures, they were not so concerned with making pretty pictures or evoking emotions, as they were with rendering the effects of light. Many Mandalas are a impressionism of the subtle dimension (in contemplation, the inward eye often perceives symmetrical, billowing, luminous patterns—in other words, Mandalas; usually these are impressionistic, but in Vajrayana they are rendered in an extremely realist fashion, with minutely detailed aspects, as can be seen in most thangka paintings; these are not symbolic, they are realist, for they depict inner realities that can be directly perceived in meditation).

C. Post Impressionism

Post Impressionism included many divergent styles. Pointillism, Symbolism, Expressionism, is among the many styles assigned to Post-Impressionism. Whatever their priorities, these painters tended to use color to level shapes toward the picture plane and distort images. Since pattern also flattens space, it naturally infiltrated Post-Impressionist styles. Functioning decoratively, expressively, or as repetitious brush strokes, pattern proved a useful tool to explore the two-dimensional plane.

Vincent van Gogh is the greatest painter of the Post-Impressionism era. By using complementary colors he made each seem brighter, using yellows and oranges with blues and reds with greens. His choice of colors varied with his moods which one can see in Mandala (Fig.13). Paul Gauguin also used color expressively. He was interested in the character of the subject as it was revealed by colors; noble lines leading to eternity. Gauguin and many of his colleagues were part of the Symbolist movement. Symbolist painters stopped working from observation and painted from soul, which is the basic principle of Mandala. Eduouard Vuillard, who initially painted under Gauguin's influence, lived with his mother, a seamstress who worked with patterned fabrics. He often chose patterns from her fabrics as part of his subject matter. The flat shapes of Symbolist painting freed him to use pattern as a formal element in his work, and Vuillard was part of an artist's group called the Nabis, the Hebrew word for "prophet." The Nabis believed painting should be recognized as a great decorative art which is similar with Mandala art.

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D. Expressionism

Expressionism was a cultural movement, initially in poetry and painting, originating in Germany at the start of the 20th century. The typical trait is to present the world under an utterly subjective perspective, violently distorting it to obtain an emotional effect and vividly transmit personal moods and ideas. Expressionist artists sought to express the meaning of "being alive" and emotional experience rather than physical reality. Gauguin and Van Gogh influenced the paintings of Northern Expressionists such as Edward Munch. Munch was a Norwegian who created paintings of extreme emotion. The Expressionists manipulated color, pattern and line to convey their emotional state.\textsuperscript{44} The Expressionist painter ‘Chun Sung Woo’ has highly influenced by Mandala. Besides the title of Mandala artist, Chun has been recognized by critics for the natural description of the Oriental way of thinking by adopting abstract expressionism. (Fig. 14)

He says,

\begin{quote}
To me, the Mandala symbolizes the pose of the human mind. And, from the Mandala, I seek and find ‘absolute peace.’ To me, the world of beauty exists in the heart with pure peace, and in such a heart, artistic works that are honest are created. To me, Mandala does not necessarily denote the Buddhist Mandala. It is a state of mind.\textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}

E. Fauvism

The paintings of the Fauves were characterized by seemingly wild brush work and strident colors, while their subject matter had a high degree of simplification and abstract. Fauvism can be classified as an extreme development of Van Gogh’s Post-Impressionism fused with the pointillism of Seurat.\textsuperscript{46} The most celebrated Fauve, Matisse, flattened his shapes into the flat decorative shapes introduced by Gauguin. Yet, as he coaxed his subjects into, these ornamental shapes, their contours formed strong and vibrant shorthand of color compositions. Matisse exploited the sensuous and abstract possibilities of color and pattern more than its Romantic symbolism.\textsuperscript{47} Fauvism’s Strident colors, simplification and shapes into the flat decorative shapes can see in Mandala.

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F. Cubism

Cubism was a 20th century avant-grade art movement, pioneered by Pablo Picasso and George Braque, that revolutionized European painting and sculpture, and inspired related movements in music and literature. In cubist artworks, objects are broken up, analyzed, and re-assembled in an abstracted form instead of depicting objects from one viewpoint, the artist depicts the subject from a multitude of viewpoints to represent the subject in a greater context can see in Mandala. Often the surfaces intersect at seemingly random angles, removing a coherent sense of depth.\(^{48}\) The background and object planes interpenetrate one another to create the shallow ambiguous space, one of cubism's distinct characteristics also find out in Mandala.

G. Suprematism

Suprematism was the pure abstract art of twentieth century and, an art movement focused on fundamental geometric (in particular the square and circle) which formed in Russia in 1915-1916. It was not until later that Suprematism received conventional museum preparations. It was founded by Kasimir Malevich.\(^{49}\) In his book ‘The Non-Objective World’, which was published abroad as a Bauhaus book in 1927, Malevich described the inspiration which brought about the powerful image of the black square on a white ground that he felt only night within him and it was then that he conceived the new art, which he called Suprematism. He created a Suprematist 'grammar' based on fundamental geometric forms; in particular, the square and the circle.

As described in ‘significance and expected outcome’ that, in Mandala the circle symbol meaning is universal, sacred and divine. It represents the infinite nature of energy, and the inclusivity of the universe. In Man and his Symbols, Jung's interpretation of the symbol of the circle and its significance to human beings holds that the circle or sphere is a "symbol of the Self. Also the meaning of square in Madala represents the natural (structured) order of the universe. There is no happiness without security, and security represents square. Thus Suprematism art movement is the most supportive to this research.

So if we analyze these various disciplines of the different art movements such as Renaissance, Impressionism, Expressionism, Cubism, Fauvism to Suprematism, we can clearly find an underlying concept of Mandalas exists. This transformational stage of Mandalas with various movements transfigures further to abstract paintings of


modern era which makes it more versatile and convincing. This is purely an evolutionary process of Mandalas which gets advanced to the current format through valuable contributions by various artists and philosophers in the field of art and art forms.

**IV. Mandala: An analysis of 20th Century Abstract Paintings**

The twentieth century art was saturated with the problem of form, not merely in art, but equally in terms of economic conditions. The most significant development, however, took place in art, which became non-objective and had freed itself from all the subject-matter which hemmed it in during thousands of years. Cubism, Futurism and Suprematism have achieved direct connection with the world and display a perception of it in one way or another. The new art represents the great challenge to that aspect of the functional role of life which holds on leash.

The nineteenth century may be seen as a century of the great bonfire of art, the spark of which were quenched in the sewers of economic conditions, in various sciences, historical event, etc. The shapelessness of the age set in. A constructivism of utilitarian and profitable forms arose in place of artistic forms and totally rejected art, in particular architecture as an art form. The twentieth century was marked by the sharp onslaught of painters and poets on objectivity. The former achieved non-objective art.

Paul Cézanne was a French painter who represents the bridge from impressionism to cubism. Although his works doesn’t represents complete abstract forms he often tied the foreground and background together to create patterns. One can find geometrical composition and balance of Mandala designs in the works of Paul Cézanne who is considered the father of modern art. By using colored planes and geometric patterns, Cézanne created paintings with a sense of three-dimensions. Some early abstract paintings emerged out of the themes of Cubism, Fauvism and Expressionism. The artist Kandinsky 1906-1909 used color to express strong personal emotions. In his early work, he painted themes based on peasant life in the Bavarian hills. Kandinsky depicted their folklore with overtones of the supernatural. This emotional exploration rapidly moved him away from representational art, and he began to express his spirituality by transforming colorful shapes into purely abstract paintings.\(^50\) In modern era, when Picasso and Braque and then Kandinsky started to experiment with abstract art it was all a big enigma, shocking and strange. Now it’s accepted but hardly understood. Furthermore, foremost among the creators of the

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\(^{50}\) H. W. Janson. *History of Art*. 785.
new abstract art, which through its application in architecture was intended to be the blueprint for a transfigured world, was Kazimir Malevich.

A. Wassily Kandinsky

When Kandinsky and the German Expressionists abandoned realism to explore emotion or spirituality in complex abstract compositions, artists such as the Suprematist and Constructivist, Malevich, and the Neo-Plasticist, Mondrian integrated the planar forms of Cubism into their geometric work. Though Suprematist art is hard-edged and minimal, it is spiritually motivated too.

An interesting link Kandinsky and Mandala arises when one considers the connection between geometrical abstraction and fractal geometry. Fractal geometry creates visual patterns that bear an uncanny resemblance to some of Kandinsky's paintings. Since fractal geometry seeks to unravel some of the most fundamental mysteries of the universe, it is interesting to consider how and why similar patterns are manifest in works of art that also explore these mysteries. Carl G. Jung's psychological investigations into the human mind and Ronald Siegal's studies of hallucinations in human subjects are also directly relevant to an analysis of fractal geometry and imagery that appears in his works of art. For long time he worked on comic themes, on representing the widest sense of the sun, the moon, the stars and the comets.\(^{51}\) The connection between fractal imagery and patterns that arise in nature and culture reinforces the fact that scientific theories are often preceded by intuitive, semi-mythological, archetypal ideas.\(^{52}\) It is interesting to note that Jung felt that mathematics held the key to unlocking the mysteries of human consciousness and the cosmos. Jung was particularly interested in our primary mathematical axiomatic or primary mathematical intuitions, such as the ideas of an infinite series of numbers in arithmetic, or of a continuum in geometry, etc.\(^{53}\) In the realm of art, fractal imagery can be detected in patterns of scaling, self-similarity, and randomness, and by the overall sense of simultaneity of order and disorder in the images.\(^{54}\) All of these qualities are manifest in Wassily Kandinsky's paintings.

In Chinese symbolism yellow emerges from black as Earth emerged from primeval waters. Yellow is unmatched in its intensity of brightness and even more than red stands for light and life. Kandinsky remarked that yellow tends so strongly to brightness that there can never be such a color as dark yellow. Regarding his oil paintings, Kandinsky said "Color is the keyboard, the eyes are the harmonies, and the


soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand that plays, touching one key or another, to cause vibrations in the soul" (Fig. 3). In concern to the spiritual Kandinsky defines the colors white and black as birth and death, and his diagram of the color circle he equates the circle with entire cycle of life: The antitheses as a circle between two poles, i.e., the life of basic colors between birth and death.55

In concluding forms of Kandinsky’s connection of Mandala then, Beeke Sell Tower described that, Kandinsky introduced a wealth of different form motifs such as Mandala and the semicircle as well as many small additional color assent.56 In the painting *mild Hardness* the basic compositional order is established by two vertical red lines and four horizontal lines, but upward and downward at the right angle, so that they form a *Swastika*-like shape.57 In Buddhism *Swastika* is one of the sixty-five marks of Buddha-hood, usually located in the sole of the foot.58 It also represents the esoteric doctrine of the Buddha and commonly uses in Mandala.

**B. Paul Klee**

Discussing the term Mandala, Brauen also asserts its indication of “other structures for example the discs of the five elements that constitute the lower part of the *Kalacakra universe* or the discs of moon, sun and the two planets *Rahu* and *Kalagni* that serve as a throne for a diety.”59 Extrapolating to the cosmologically and spiritually diagrammatic nature of another Klee painting, *Actor’s Mask Schauspieler=Maske* (1924), which exerts a decidedly eastern partitioning of space; one can again feel the verity of Brauen’s words (fig. 2).

In explicating the essence of Paul Klee’s 1934 painting, *The One Who Understands*, a disarmingly understated oil and gypsum masterwork of profound reflection and metaphysical distillation, it is fitting that the Swiss artist’s eastern connectivity, inclusiveness, and visual construction comfortably share scholar Martin Brauen’s definition of a Mandala, dissected at length in his gratifyingly comprehensive volume, *The Mandala: Sacred Circle in Tibetan Buddhism*.60 In Klee’s facial strata of compressed ocular and lingual tides, expansively linear cheeks and brow, negative space captured and harvested into painful constriction, and the perpetual act of drowning in ever deepening fathoms of water while still on land, *Actor’s Mask* lifts this visage out of any titular theatricality and into more intangible

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60 This painting is in the Metropolitan Museum New York, and: http://www.metmuseum.org/Works_of_Art/recent_acquisitions/1999/co_rec_t_century_1999.363.31_l.asp.
realms. One can discover that the human being is also seen as a Mandala. For instance, each of the wind channels, which according to Tantric conception flow inside the body, is linked to a particular direction, element, aggregate (skandha), and color, thereby forming a Mandala. In the so-called inner Mandala, the human body is seen as a cosmos Mandala. Dissecting, reimagining, then reassembling the human structure, reduced to the essential elements as Mandalas, Paul Klee (1879-1940) distilled the pathos of human existence, the cyclical destruction and animation of form, intellect and emotion strongly evident in the Neue Galerie’s *Printed Sheet with Picture (Bilderbogen)*, (1937), (Fig. 4) which presents a complex diagram of an individual’s universe, or psychic life (which Tucci asserts reflects that of the universe as the body Mandala.

True Oriental from the earliest years of his artistic life, Paul Klee profoundly altered his color palette, compositional approach to space, graphic symbolism, and dexterous architectural translation of three dimensions into two; a fundamental visual iconography that would persist and metamorphose, perpetually reinventing itself throughout his prolific, but tragically abbreviated career. In discussing the complex premises from which the Mandala derives, Tucci succinctly defines a structure that perfectly describes Klee’s landscapes and cityscapes: It is a geometric projection of the world reduced to an essential pattern. While derisive observers have occasionally attempted to marginalize Paul Klee’s meticulously constructed works as overly decorative, they seem to have confused pattern with ornamentation; one is a rigorous schematic exercise of intellect, while the other is mere surface adornment.

Addressing patterns in the architecture of iconic towns as Mandalas, Brauen, in a key observation, connects the morphology of urban forms with the universe itself, positing their fundamental structure to be a reflection of the cosmos, designed as its symbolic centers: The architecture of many towns mirrors an ever-recurring shape (gestalt) of the town, and this shape of the town, mirrors an ever reappearing pattern, the Mandala. (Fig. 8) In fact, “architectural precincts with a Mandala type or cosmological structure are widespread in Asia, include the towns of Kirtipur in the Kathmandu Valley and Leh in Ladakh; the Mingtang, the Imperial Palace of pre-Buddhist China, temple-towns of South India (the shrine of the chief deity at the center of Tiruvanamalai). The ideal town plan of Bhaktapur in the Kathmandu Valley depicts a Mandala with the shrine of Tripurasundari in the middle. Paul Klee’s

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Gradation, Red-Green (Vermilion) (1921) (fig. 12), preserves the distinctive character of Egyptian architecture through surreal, but expertly controlled abstraction, a palace Mandala of allegorical structure. “A Mandala-like structure and a plan representing the world are shown, for example, states Brauen, by the cities of Jerusalem, Rome, Gur, the capital of the Sassanids, Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate, and Ecbatana, the first capital of the Indo-European Medes, in the center of which, on the testimony of Herodotus, stood the royal palace, behind seven circular walls, each of a different color.66

Thus Klee’s Mandalas, both his kaleidoscopic middle eastern cities of iconic character and timeless historical presence in the psyche of mortal thinkers and builders, and his graphically arresting portraits of interior landscapes made manifest, curl through the waking and dreaming minds of those who see rather than simply observe, uncoiling with the sinuous architectural grace of the human body and the eternal philosophical searching of the human mind.

C. Jackson Pollack

Pollock had for several years been in psychoanalytic therapy to try and cope with depression and this gave him an interest in Carl Jung’s theory of primitive archetypes that formed the basis of his works between 1938 and 1944. These works were often violent and not well received at first. His therapist made the decision to engage him through his art, leading to the appearance of many Jungian concepts in his paintings.67

The artist's experience, which often reflects to a remarkable degree the strata of consciousness with their various contents, takes on its active meaning at the very moment when the gesture of painting renders form concrete; its expressive power is heightened by a synthesis of the successive moments in which the creative experience takes place. What the painter never forgets and this cannot possibly be determined by an unconscious or instinctive impulse is the value of his action; this action is a reality deriving from experimentation and it is the only concrete datum which the artist recognizes.

Thus, it can be concluded that, we can’t see any Mandala form in Jackson’s painting but spiritual way of meditation can figure out through his working style is why Pollock needed to lay his canvas out flat on the floor, to walk around it, to get into it, and thereby identify the picture as closely as possible with the physical act of painting, as he earn from Carl Jung’s theory.

D. Hundertwasser

A Viennese post-war artist, Hundertwasser adopted automatism and Tachism into a style that exhibited strong biomorphic patterns. Hundertwasser was born in 1928 in the repressed atmosphere of pre-war Vienna. Strongly individualistic and talented, Hundertwasser left art school and went to Paris in 1949 where he was exposed to the work of Paul Klee and the Tachists. He invented his own style of painting, Transautomatism. Briefly, Transautomatism is planned automatism, or as Hundertwasser described it, the ability to identify with the process rather than the creation. Still in his youth Hundertwasser began a bohemian nomadic life and devoted himself to a philosophy based on the organics of art.

Hundertwasser gives both line and form equal emphasis. The spiral is irregular in shape, and although both helix and core are maintained, neither is given more significance. Hundertwasser's spirals also defy the categorization of spiraling inwards or outwards, leaving the viewer wondering if the relationship is centripetal or centrifugal. Spirals have been described as Hundertwasser's way of beginning a painting when no other form comes to mind a convenient receptacle into which other forms might be introduced. Hundertwasser has described spirals as "a bulwark for me against my environment." (Fig. 15) He sees himself as the core, simultaneously protected and isolated by the surrounding cell or enclosure.68

Hundertwasser opposed the Bauhaus and its square geometry. He eschewed the straight line in preference for the spiral which he regarded as a symbol of natural cycles the continuity of life and death, which could often find in Kundalini, the spiral form of Mandala. (Fig. 7) The spiral is a moral rejection of a rational mechanistic world with destructive and straight line." The organic shape of the spiral infused his work with repeating "onion slice" patterns in bright jeweled colors.

E. Kazimir Malevich

Malevich was a founder of Suprematism and an active member of the avant-garde Russian and coasted El Lisitzky, Chagall, Matiushin and Rodchenko. Malevich believed that the pure aesthetic of a square represented spiritual perfection in space; Mondrian claimed that geometric shapes freed Man from subjectivity and drew him toward a higher universal consciousness. The early work of Constructivism laid the basis for the Bauhaus School of Architecture in the 1920s, eventually establishing Mondrian's square as the dominant shape in contemporary architecture and Minimalist art. While these serious, formal artists placed little interest in ornament, their work does refer to pattern in an archetypal way. Mondrian's squares cannot help but remind us of the simplest pattern, the grid.

68 Chipp, Herschel and Brenda Richardson. *Friedensreich Hundertwasser, CA: University Art Museum. 1968.2010.* (http://hs.riverdale.k12.or.us/~dthompso/art/100h2o/).
The Suprematist artists Malevich and El Lisitzky set out to transform the visual universe by setting geometric forms in motion through bondless space. Although can be compared with the symbolic religious signs of three major religions, Christian, Islamic and Buddhist are presented on these three painting can close proximity to each other. (Fig. 6) The cross a universal as well as Christian sign appears with four points, two on each side. It can be traced to a pre-Christian sign found on Greek vases around 700 B.C. So, it is both pagan and Christian. The four points are associated with drops of water. Crescents like crosses are universal signs relating to the different phases of the moon, it's waxing and waning. It is now the primary symbol of Islam.

Malevich was highly influenced by Russian philosopher and mystic-mathematician Georges Gurdjieff. In concerning on Gurdjieff’s philosophy, there are three recognized ways of self-development generally known in esoteric circles. These are the Way of the Fakir, dealing exclusively with the physical body, the Way of the Monk, dealing with the emotions, and the Way of the Yogi, dealing with the mind. What is common about the three ways is that they demand complete seclusion from the world. According to Gurdjieff, there is a fourth way which does not demand its followers to abandon the world. The work of self-development takes place right in the midst of ordinary life. Gurdjieff called his system a school of the ‘Fourth Way’ where a person learns to work in harmony with his physical body, emotions and mind. Malevich’s first dated painting Black Square got the bulk of critics regarded Suprematist painting and became a focal point for hatred directed at the new art. The critics were unsparing in their irony about this picture. They described it as a ‘dead square’, ‘a void’, and ‘the embodiment of emptiness’. In the other hand, squares in Mandala uses in mythological tales of cosmogony as symbols of the created universe opposed to the uncreated chaos and emptiness.

Red, Yellow and Black squares, rectangles, circle and rhombuses are set out on a white background along horizontal, vertical and diagonal line, thus dividing space in definite directions and imparting to it an inner rhythmic mobility in the paintings by Malevich and El Lisitzky. (Fig.1, 5, 6) In some compositions, two or three dynamic axes are combined and the artists, in order to create the effect of multi-directional layered spatial movement, uses methods of spatial representation such as foreshortening: geometrical shapes are optically transformed, made markedly flat and elongated. Circles become elliptical, cubes and rectangles turn into slanted rhombuses, parallelograms or triangles, or even simply become straight lines.

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70 Larissa A. Zhadova. Malevich, Suprematism and Revaluation in Russian Art 1910-1930. 43.
71 Larissa A. Zhadova. Malevich, Suprematism and Revaluation in Russian Art 1910-1930. 47.
In the other hand, in Mandala black is the color of black earth, of the potentiality of germination of seeds in the spring to come. It is presented here in a positive meaning. Halo in is usually yellow or orange. Juxtapose with red or yellow, displays the sacred marriage of Heaven and Earth and red, a fundamental primary color is universally regarded as the basic symbol of the life principle. In the Asian religious symbolism it is considered to be the universal substance and of primordial formlessness. Circles stand for the turning wheel of time and symbolize the self-contained absolute which has no beginning and no end. The neo-Platonic philosophers have compared a circle to God whose center is everywhere and its periphery nowhere. The concentric circles have been used in Buddhist art as emanations of spiritual power. As a halo it has also been used in Christian symbolism. Triangles as widespread and common symbolic signs have numerous meanings. In this pictorial context they are associated with the number three and this number can stand in the Christian religious tradition for the Trinity, in the Buddhist religion for the triad ‘right thinking, right speaking and right doing’ from the Noble Eightfold Path. In the Muslim Shiite religious tradition the triad the profession of faith follows the formula: there is no deity but God; Mohammad is the messenger of God; Ali is the friend of God.’ The religious triad of Christianity, Islam and Buddhism may be also indicated by the triangle symbolism of the number three.

It would be useless to question an artist about the symbolism outlined above. Did they really assign consciously the geometrical figures to have symbolism in general and the specific one in particular? We must agree with Malevich's words:

It cannot be stressed too often that absolute, true values arise only from artistic subconscious or super conscious creation.72

As can be seen from these paintings (Fig. 1, 5, 6) the resistance to the accumulation of things, Suprematism stands for the non-representational art. In the non-representational art, the focus of the artistic creation shifts from outward to inward, from the world of things to the inner world of feelings and thoughts. This inner world of an artist should resonate to the viewer on the assumption that human beings share the same feelings and thoughts. The degree of resonance will vary among individuals as in our present society introspection is neglected and feelings are not paid much attention.

Since the non-representational art originates in the unconscious, the question of influence becomes irrelevant. Either all artists possess the same unconsciousness in which case an influence can't be perceived or they have different unconsciousness. In both cases a particular influence cannot be detected. What remains is the community

72 Larissa A. Zhadova. Malevich, Suprematism and Revaluation in Russian Art 1910-1930. 3.
of spirit. In other words, we can define it as search towards the ultimate Truth. The Ultimate truth that the spirit and the matter, the heaven and the earth or the night and day are only one and the Mandala in modern abstract paintings are the expressions of this underlying reality.

By thoroughly making an exhaustive study on Mandalas, it is crystal clear that the influence of this divine art form is well flourished from ancient times through various disciplines and movements and get into the more pure form of abstract paintings in Suprematism. This in turn has felicitated by many philosophers and artists in their works as discussed above and flown from east to west to contemporary paintings and finally reached at a more matured level in the abstract paintings of twentieth century.

V. Conclusion

The Mandala is a circular symbol that usually contains a variety of geometrical forms, simple and complicated patterns, and recognizable figures and objects within its circumference. Such symbols are shared by many different religions and belief systems and arise as patterns within myriad facets of human life, culture, nature, and the cosmos. The significance of fractal imagery, geometrical patterns, and the symbol of the circle to human beings should not be underestimated and it is no coincidence that these forms appear in many works of modern art and the avant-garde, especially abstract works.

Twentieth century’s artistic representation of the kinds of imagery found in hallucinations, fractal geometry, or transcendental mind states can be interpreted as unconscious manifestations of knowledge that is stored deep within the collective unconscious and the psychological and molecular structure of human beings. When this knowledge is unconsciously tapped and represented through cultural art, artifacts, and rituals, it would seem to be a function of our intuitive faculties rather than a deliberate intention that we arrive at by means of the intellect alone. Starting from the multifaceted versatility of Mandala as an art form, it had progressed through various dynamic fields and touches by many personalities and movements and reached in a wider spectrum of modern paintings. By explaining its evolutionary steps, basic foundations, color formats and its interaction with various ‘isms, this thesis arrives into a unique form and significantly contributes to the field of study through its multidimensionality. The Mandala influence on twentieth century abstract painting is of a unique and a very special one which gives enormous new viewpoints and inspiration to twenty first century abstract paintings.
Mandala, however, have been grossly understated and underestimated by the Western art historians and critiques as the common source of inspiration and influence for the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century artists of West as well as East. The Western historians, although were able to identify the spiritual metamorphosis of individual artists such as Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Jackson Pollack, Malevich, Hsiao Chin, S. H. Raza, etc. through the body of their works, they so far have been unable to connect the dots or pin point the common source as Mandala.

It would be quite interesting to observe the works of the disciples of these artists and further proliferation of Mandala Symbolism in twenty first century as well the recent times. A further and detailed study of the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century modern artists in terms of their psychological metamorphosis and its reflection on their works in terms of Eastern philosophies and Mandala; and a chronological categorization of their works will bring forth a more scientific and authentic account of the rise of Mandala Symbolism and its global proliferation in the modern times. I am convinced that Mandala Symbolism easily qualifies as a separate school of thought and expression amidst all the other ‘isms’.
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Fig. 5  El Lissitzky, *Proun*, ca. 1922-23. Oil on Canvas, Collection Van Abbemuseum, D.C.

Fig. 6  Kazimir Malevich. *Plane in Rotation, called Black Circle*. 1915. Oil on canvas, Private Collection, Courtesy Galerie Gmurzynska Zug.
Fig. 7  S. H Raza. *Kundalini (Coiled Female Snake).* 2001.

Fig. 7A  Carl Andre. *Zinc Ribbon,* One continuous strip. 1969.

Fig. 8A  *Hevajra Mandala,* Central Tibet, 14th century.  Collection of Rubin Museum of Art

Fig. 8B  Khanna. *Yantra.*
Fig. 9  S. H. Raza. *Tam Shunya* (Everything is Zero). Acrylic on Canvas.

Fig. 10  Hsiao Chin. *Everything is Zero*, 1978.

Fig. 11  Hsiao Chin. 太陽之三 1964, Ink on Canvas, collection of the artist.

Fig. 12  Paul Klee. *Gradation*, *Red-Green*. 1921. Water color on paper. Pierpont Morgan Library.
Fig. 13A  Walter De Maria. *Triangle, Circle, Square*. 1972. Brushed stainless steel. The Menil Collection, Houston.

Fig. 14 Chun Sung Woo. Mandala, The Joy of Ancients. 1961. Oil on Canvas.

Fig. 15 Friedrich Hundertwasser. A Raindrop that Falls into a City. 1955. Water color. Herausgeber Art, Architecture and Engineering Library.

Fig. 16A Jordan Belson. Samadhi. 1967, color film with sound, 6 minutes.

Fig. 16B Ages Martin. Cow. 1969. Oil on Canvas.
Fig. 17A  East Gate of Sanchi Stupa.  India.

Fig. 17B  Marcel Duchamp.  Bicycle Wheel. 1964.  The Vera and Arturo Schwarz Collection of Dada and Surrealist Art.

Fig. 18A  Wassily Kandinsky.  In the Circle.  1911-13.

Fig. 18B  DT Suzuki 1870-1960.  Both Vanished.  Manual of Zen Buddhism.


曼陀羅對二十世紀抽象繪畫之影響

Sagar Subhash Talekar

摘要

「抽象」不論就意義或實體而言皆與「沉思、冥想」同義。現代主義中抽象最重要的源頭之一是古代東方藝術。波洛克（Jackson Pollock）、梵谷（Van Gogh）等偉大的藝術家均受古代藝術影響。古代東方藝術有數個源頭，涵括最古老的東方哲學：曼陀羅哲學。傳統的曼陀羅象徵（形式上具有圓、螺旋、正方形、長方形、三角形等）及其哲學，源於印度盛傳於東亞，然而其中最關鍵的即是密續冥想在印度的流傳。

曼陀羅在藝術上的影響，自古代到文藝復興時期是屬於較傳統而儀式性的，而非抽象性的表現。自文藝復興時期起，曼陀羅對現代繪畫的影響開始展現並發展至印象主義、後期印象主義、表現主義到野獸派。二十世紀的許多西方哲學家如馮大拿（David Fontana）、特別是榮格（Carl Jung）等人，透過曼陀羅而有冥想體驗及潛意識自我的再現。也因此，使得康丁斯基（Kandinsky）、保羅・克利（Paul Klee）等西方畫家對此好奇並獲致啟發。從現代抽象藝術的脈絡看來，自立體派以來，透過塞尚（Paul Cézanne）、畢卡索（Picasso）、布拉克（George Braque）、康丁斯基、保羅・克利等人的努力，曼陀羅的種子逐漸長成為枝葉繁密的植物。藝術家從多元觀點來描繪此一主題，更豐富了曼陀羅的文本內涵。通常立體派藝術家讓表現形式貫穿隨機交錯的視角，消解感官上的深度。不過，藝術表現仍是具象再現。

至於絕對主義，曼陀羅茁壯為抽象藝術的大樹。它的開創者-馬列維奇（Kasimir Malevich）則深受俄羅斯哲學家及神秘主義數學家喬治・戈傑福（Georges Gurdjieff）的影響。絕對主義建構在純粹抽象和絕對幾何之上，像是圓形、螺旋形、正方形、長方形、三角形及豐富鮮明的色彩上。這些幾何的形式皆可與曼陀羅的純粹幾何形式做連結或比較。此外，至二十世紀中期，東方藝術家：如台灣的蕭勤、印度的若札（S. H. Raza）對曼陀羅藝術作出深具意義的貢獻。雖然二者接受西方藝術技法的訓練，所本的卻是東方的禪與密續，此皆明顯源自曼陀羅。就此可推論，

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許多二十世紀的抽象畫家，均直接或間接地受到曼陀羅象徵與哲學的啟發，而使其藝術極具獨特性。這些藝術家本身不僅具冥想氣質，其繪畫亦反映自身的冥想生活及深邃的價值觀。作品中可以捕捉到許多相似性的元素，而這些皆源自曼陀羅這個具神性的圓點。然而此前，未有任何相關研究特意對此提出探討。

本文詳細地檢視曼陀羅對二十世紀抽象繪畫的影響。試圖從藝術作品中，以東西方哲學觀點、繪畫方法及幾何形式的影響，提供獨特的分析，營造新思維的氛圍，提供深切理解其創作的洞察。

關鍵字：曼陀羅、抽象繪畫、禪、密續、絕對主義、東方影響、西方影響