



THE

WORLD

The WILLIAM ROLLAND GALLERY *of* FINE ART

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Edited by Rachel T. Schmid

Book designed by Barbara Obermeier

This book is set in Avenir, a geometric sans-serif typeface designed by Adrian Frutiger in 1987 and released in 1988 by Linotype. Avenir, French for "future" was inspired by the style of sans-serif typefaces from the 1920s that took the circle as the basis from its underlying geometry.

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Cover image: Mars-1, *Nuclear Mystics*, Acrylic on canvas, 72" x 60", 2009

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HomeLight

A century of visionary and psychedelic art

by Michael Pearce

The Otherworld is an exhibit of visionary paintings by artists who imagine the world as another place, where alternatives to everyday reality are made manifest, and landscapes and people are transformed. There are a range of paths to this other world—chemical, religious, and imaginative—all are treated with equal respect in the exhibit, which seeks the common ground that lies between the psychedelic explorations of the Californian hippy movement, visions born of the contemporary spiritual imagination, and artists' creative conceptions of how the world might be re-made.

Surprisingly, the roots of the hippy movement art are found in Germany among members of the anti-urban *Wandervogel* (Wandering Bird) youth movement which flourished in the first two decades of the 20th century. Millions of young Germans participated in loosely affiliated youth groups, which were inspired by their members' desire to get back to nature, to return to the earthy roots of "honest" German culture, and to reinvent their idealized ancient past. Wandervogel members joined together on long rambles across the countryside, sleeping in barns or camping in tents, playing revived folk music, and writing songs in folkish style. The most dedicated of them took to heart a combination of ideas inspired by utopian anarchism, by the romantic medieval revival of the spiritual awakening of itinerant monks, and by a powerful sense of traditionalism. Many of them became nudists, practiced the novel idea of sunbathing for health, and ate a vegetarian diet. Many of them were sincere nationalists, devoted to reviving the spirit of ancient Germanic culture.

In his classic study of German youth movements, writer Walter Laqueur complained that although the Wandervögel made a substantial and worthy contribution to folk music, it made none to art, but he seems to have approached the aesthetic from a conservative and reactionary position, ignoring the imagery the artists of the movement produced as illustrations to its printed materials, and perhaps regarding it with the prejudiced aesthetic expectations of the modern art establishment. Because art-making is a material activity, and intimately tied to the marketplace, there was little interest in it within the idealistic, anti-capitalist movement; nevertheless, at the turn of the century visionary illustrations by an

artist dubbed Fidus (born Hugo Reinhold Karl Johann Höppener), or "Faithful," in German, began appearing in the movement's literature, and he became a prominent figure. A follower of the robed, long-haired, proto-communist activist Karl Wilhelm Diefenbach, who was a popular symbolist artist, Fidus grew his hair long like his mentor, and was arrested for public nudity while the two of them were gardening naked. He embraced the utopian ideas of the socialists, and created a poster for international workers day, but soon realized that the spiritual reformation he hoped for was not on their agenda. He started a commune, and helped to establish a theosophist lodge in Berlin, provided inspiring poster designs for the society's events, and made many drawings of happy, naked men, women, and children in idealized landscapes, their arms opened to the heavens, intimately joined in tantric love, dancing in transcendent joy and ecstatic celebration of their unity with the sun.



Hugo Höppener (Fidus), *Zu den Menschen*, Plate 1 from the portfolio *Lebenszeichen*, 8½" x 11½", ca. 1922

Fidus had ambiguous ideas about sexuality, writing a sensual novella in 1907 for *Deutsche-Hellas* magazine about nude male and female dancers who enjoyed the aesthetic of their moving bodies and the scent of their sweat, but without eros, and contributing art to a magazine for homosexuals called *Der Eigene*. Like Diefenbach, he wore robes and was a practicing vegetarian. He seemed to live an itinerant lifestyle and was perceived as something of a prophet by his admirers, designing imaginary temples conceived from grand visions of the future of the theosophical religion. Many of the nationalistic ideals he embraced and championed were also adopted by the Nazis as they attempted to resolve the German cultural crisis in the aftermath of the nation's defeat in the first world war, and in 1932 – the year before the NSDAP won power – he joined the party. He was 64 years old. Because of his enthusiastic affiliation with the Theosophists, his bohemian mysticism, and his individualism, Fidus was banned by the Nazis and put onto their list of degenerate artists. He survived the war and renounced his membership in the Nazi Party, joining the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party (which would one day be led by Angela Merkel). He died from a stroke in 1948.

It is possible that Fidus had experimented with hashish, or even mescaline, which had become known in Germany after the chemist Arthur Heffter identified and isolated the compound from peyote in 1897. His imagery is indebted to the visionary state, but it is difficult to know if the transcendent men and women, vibrant skies, and lush vegetation in his work were inspired by meditative practice, or by vivid memories of chemically induced visions.

NATURE BOYS

The population of German immigrants who arrived in California in the 19th and early 20th centuries shared deep relationships with their families in Europe, and their young people brought with them the idealistic counter-cultural ideas the Wandervögel had advocated – communal life, esoteric spiritual searching, a return to nature, vegetarianism, but without the nationalism which had pointed him and many Wandervogel followers towards National Socialism. They also brought Jugendstil art with them, including Fidus' popular, ecstatic and visionary work, sowing the seeds for the psychedelic hippy imagery that developed in the 1960's posters of counter-cultural San Francisco concert poster artists like Wes Wilson, Stanley Mouse, Rick Griffin, and Victor Moscoso.

A new archetype took shape among these new German Americans. Like the Wandervögel, these "nature boys" were deeply committed to the alternative lifestyle which later became central to hippy life: at one with the natural environment, eating a vegetarian diet and leading the health food movement, and seeking spiritual revitalization outside of established Western doctrines. The nature boys were itinerant, lived off the land, and made hermit homes in the canyons and on the beaches of the golden state. One, named 'Gypsy Boots' established a health food store in Hollywood, where he invented the smoothie, and

promoted a natural diet and physical exercise. He appeared repeatedly on television talk shows. A bohemian network of individuals living an alternative lifestyle flourished.

The Second World War slowed this fledgling counterculture's development, but after the defeat of the Nazis it soon regained its lost momentum, and found fame, partly thanks to Nat King Cole's #1 hit recording of 'Nature Boy,' a minor key elegy by Eden Ahbez. An archetypal nature boy, long-haired, bearded Ahbez was featured in a two-page story in *Life* magazine 10th May 1948 which described and popularized his unconventional lifestyle throughout the United States. In 1948 *Life* was one of America's most influential media outlets and the story ensured that large numbers of Americans were aware of a new lifestyle. The lyric of Ahbez' song was partially published in *Life*, and heard by millions of radio listeners, sowing the seed for the hippy harvest that would come in the sixties.

**"There was a boy
A very strange, enchanted boy
They say he wandered very far, very far
Over land and sea
A little shy and sad of eye
But very wise was he
And then one day
A magic day he passed my way
And while we spoke of many things
Fools and kings
This he said to me
The greatest thing you'll ever learn
Is just to love and be loved in return"**

Hashish was well known among bohemians throughout Europe after Napoleon Bonaparte's soldiers returned from his North African adventures with a taste for it, and the visionary state it produced soon impacted aesthetics. Parisian bohemians of the 19th century produced symbolist art which was powerfully influenced by marijuana and opium. In 1860 Charles Baudelaire, a member of the *Club des Hashischins* or Hashish Club, wrote his famous essay on hashish, *Les Paradis Artificiels*, introducing it to a wide audience of his young bohemian readers. Eugene Delacroix, the celebrity champion of scruffy bohemians and great hero of romantic painting was also a member of the club, and he popularized hash-eating among a generation of his acolytes. In the United States, hemp had been grown since the first days of colonial settlement as the ideal material for making rope, although using its resin as an ecstatic and vision inducing drug was not widespread. In August of 1854, travel writer Bayard Taylor wrote an account of his powerful hallucinations after eating two teaspoons of hashish in Turkey, publishing it in the popular magazine, *Putnam's Monthly*, which introduced its use to a broad North American readership. Taylor's account was followed in 1857 by Fitz Hugh Ludlow's enthusiastic book *The Hasheesh Eater*, and soon hash candy was available in apothecaries, and hash clubs opened in every major U.S. city.

In the early twentieth century the surrealists had nurtured the relationship between visionary drugs and art. Artist Jean Cocteau experimented with mescaline and became addicted to opium. André Breton was fundamentally opposed to stimulating the imagination with artificial aids, quarreling with Antonin Artaud and Robert Desnos about them, and he ejected artists who strayed from his no-drugs policy from the group. Nevertheless, Breton compared the surrealist life to consuming hash in his *Surrealist Manifesto*, quoting Baudelaire's comment that in the surrealist approach "like hashish, there is enough there to satisfy the most delicate systems." Anticipating Timothy Leary's advice to turn on, tune in, and drop out by a half century, in 1922 Breton told his readers to, "*Lâchez Tout*," let go of everything, and lead a gypsy surrealist life:

"Drop everything...Drop your wife, drop your girl-friend...Park your children in the woods... Drop your comfortable life...Take to the road."

Salvador Dalí recommended that painters chew hashish five times in their lifetime, and he notoriously said, "I don't do drugs, I am drugs." Picasso was an opium smoker in Montmartre until 1908 when he dropped the habit after an addicted friend committed suicide. The Polish painter Witkacy acquired peyote from an obscure "International Society for Metaphysical Research" and made numerous psychedelic paintings between 1928 and 1930. The influential Frankfurt School semiotician Walter Benjamin ate hashish, smoked opium, had himself injected with mescaline, and wrote a string of essays about his experiments which he planned to publish as a book—they were posthumously published as *Walter Benjamin on Hashish*.

The mescaline Heffter had synthesized was derived from a small cactus which grows in the deserts of Northern Mexico and the U.S. border states called peyote. Peyote "buttons" contain a psychoactive proto-alkaloid compounds very similar to LSD in their effects on human consciousness. It had attracted the interest of amateur and professional anthropologists some years before becoming the subject of chemical experimentation because it caused spectacular visions when ingested. In Northern Mexico beat adventurers of the 1950s encountered the Huichol people, who had avoided the worst intrusions of Christian persecution by retreating from the conquistadors into the Sierra Nevada mountains, where they maintained the ancient tradition of using the peyote cactus, called *hí'kuli*, as a vehicle to the spiritual otherworld.

A Texan doctor, John Raleigh Briggs, experimented with peyote in 1886, followed by the Irish-American historian and Smithsonian ethnologist James Mooney, who was the first European to attend a peyote religious ceremony in 1891 and began eating it the following year. The Norwegian anthropologist Carl Lumholtz lived with the Tarahumara and Huichol, first using peyote in 1892. In Britain, Havelock Ellis published his account of eating peyote in the respected medical journal *The Lancet*, 5th June 1897, and in an extended account titled *Mescal: A New Artificial Paradise* in a progressive literary quarterly, *The Contemporary Review*, in January 1898. His account is important, because it described

his peyote experience in an entirely Western context stripped of the rites and veneration of native religion. The phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty took mescaline in 1934. Existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre took it in 1935 and later said, "I liked mescaline a lot," although for many years after his experience he complained about being followed by imaginary lobsters.

Although the narrative of psychedelic art extends back into prehistory, the earliest modern American psychedelia was made by artists holidaying with beat generation poets at art colonies in Mexico, following a peyote-pilgrim trail to Chihuahua in the footsteps of the fragile French surrealist dramaturg Antonin Artaud, architect of total theater and the integrated spectacle. Artaud traveled to Mexico in 1936 specifically to eat peyote with the Tarahumara people, shortly after finishing his classic *The Theater and its Double*. He wrote a short account about his travels, the religious rites, and his visionary adventure, titled *The Peyote Dance*. The overwhelming sensory assaults of total theatrical spectacle he prophesied in the book would become a seminal handbook for the sixties' acid tests in California, and his *The Peyote Dance* a sought-after text of the intellectual bourgeois-bohemian beat and hippy counterculture. The sensory spectacles of *Theater and its Double* would eventually be made manifest in rave events and festivals like Burning Man, Coachella, and Electric Daisy.

Already mentally ill, after Artaud returned from Mexico he tipped into madness and was committed to a mental institution. Nevertheless, he served as an early model for psychedelic tourism which continues to this day in the form of Mexican government sponsored holiday trips to the Copper Canyon homeland of the Tarahumara, of Ayahuasca package tours to South America, and of touring shamans of dubious authenticity drumming their medicine-making services for wealthy Americans. Like his anthropological descendent Carlos Castaneda, who would invent tall tales of a shamanic Don Juan at the end of the 1960s, there is some doubt about the authenticity of the Tarahumara ceremonies Artaud describes, and he may have invented and exaggerated some of what he witnessed. But inauthenticity didn't discourage readers from enjoying either Artaud or Castaneda's books and taking them as gospel guides for the new age, perhaps because the stories described sacramental peyote as they needed it to be rather than as it was, fulfilling a deeply suppressed need for a fundamental, spiritual connection with nature that was present among European Americans.

LSD

A new era in the story of modern psychedelia began on April 16th 1943, when a Swiss chemist named Albert Hoffman synthesized lysergic acid diethylamide, and accidentally absorbed a tiny amount of the chemical through his skin. The effects were dramatic. In his book about the experience, he described how he "perceived an uninterrupted stream of fantastic pictures, extraordinary shapes with intense, kaleidoscopic play of colors." Impressed with the potential of the powerful substance, a few days later, on April 19th 1943,



Mars-1 and Alex Grey, *Bicycle Day*, Acrylic on canvas, 48" x 60", 2013

he ingested 250 micrograms in his laboratory. This time, the effects were so strong that he left work and rode his bicycle home where, hallucinating, and suffering from severe anxiety, he called in his doctor, who assured him that there was nothing physically wrong with him. Now comfortable, he relished the experience. He wrote, "Little by little I could begin to enjoy the unprecedented colors and plays of shapes that persisted behind my closed eyes. Kaleidoscopic, fantastic images surged in on me, alternating, variegated, opening, and then closing themselves in circles and spirals, exploding in colored fountains, rearranging, and hybridizing themselves in constant flux..." Inevitably, word of this visual torrent soon spread among creative bohemians who wanted to feel its effects themselves.

The famed British author Aldous Huxley published his *The Doors of Perception* in 1954, enthusiastically describing his mind-expanding experience under the effects of mescaline. It had an immense impact upon intellectuals, who Huxley specifically challenged to examine the unexplored landscapes of the mind which were opened by peyote. "I was looking," he wrote, "as the pure aesthete whose concern is only with forms and their relationships within the field of vision or the picture space." Soon after its publication *The New Yorker* ran a long article about the benefits of Native American peyote rituals. In 1956 Huxley published *Heaven and Hell*, comparing LSD and mescaline experiences to the religious visions of saints, and praising the use of entheogens as a safe way to gain the spiritual benefits of them without harming the body.

The British abstract painter Bryan Wynter, a member of the St. Ives Group, was an enthusiastic fan of Huxley's *Doors of Perception* and became an avid mescaline user. Allen Ginsburg's famous 1956 poem *Howl* was partly written while on a peyote trip, which he mentions in the piece, and he wrote other poems titled *LSD*, *Mescaline*, *N20*, and *Ether*. *Life* magazine, an extraordinarily popular vehicle of American domestic propaganda with a circulation of millions, stepped into publicizing psychedelic substances in 1957, with a seminal photo essay by amateur mycologist and J.P. Morgan Vice President Robert Gordon Wasson titled, "Seeking the Magic Mushroom," simultaneously popularizing psilocybin mushrooms and giving them a new nomenclature. A week later, *This Week* magazine published an interview with Wasson titled, "I Ate the Sacred Mushroom," and hunting, eating, and enjoying psychedelic mushrooms became a popular pastime.

In 50's Mexico the beats bought LSD from Hoffman's Sandoz company in Switzerland, and experimented with peyote and mushrooms, and introduced the psychedelic aesthetic into obscure poetry publications like Charles Plymnnell's *Now* magazines and occasionally in early issues of the intellectual *Evergreen Review*. Beat poet Michael McClure had read Artaud's *The Peyote Dance* in the early fifties and responded to it in his "POINT LOBOS: ANIMISM," which he read at the Six Gallery in 1955, and in 1958 he took five buttons of peyote and described his psychedelic experience in his *Peyote Poem*. A short excerpt reads:

There is no time. I am visited by a man
who is the god of foxes
there is dirt under the nails of his paw
fresh from his den
We smile at one another in recognition
I am free from time. I accept it without triumph
— a fact
Closing my eyes there are flashes of light
My eyes won't focus but leap. I see that I have three feet
I see seven places at once!
The floor slants — the room slopes
things melt
into each other. Flashes
of light
and meldings. I wait
seeing the physical thing pass
I am on a mesa of time and space

Psychedelic alkaloids interested darker minds, too. Although LSD was first used by psychologists to treat addiction and trauma, the U.S. government soon became interested in its potential as a "truth drug," and the Central Intelligence Agency established a program in 1953 called MKULTRA, experimenting with it upon unwitting soldiers. Some of them were traumatized by the experience, and ignorant of the cause of their spectacular visions, thought they had gone mad. Others were profoundly moved by their brush with the godhead—learning what had been done they became acid evangelists, taking LSD into the wild and sharing it with millions of enthusiasts.

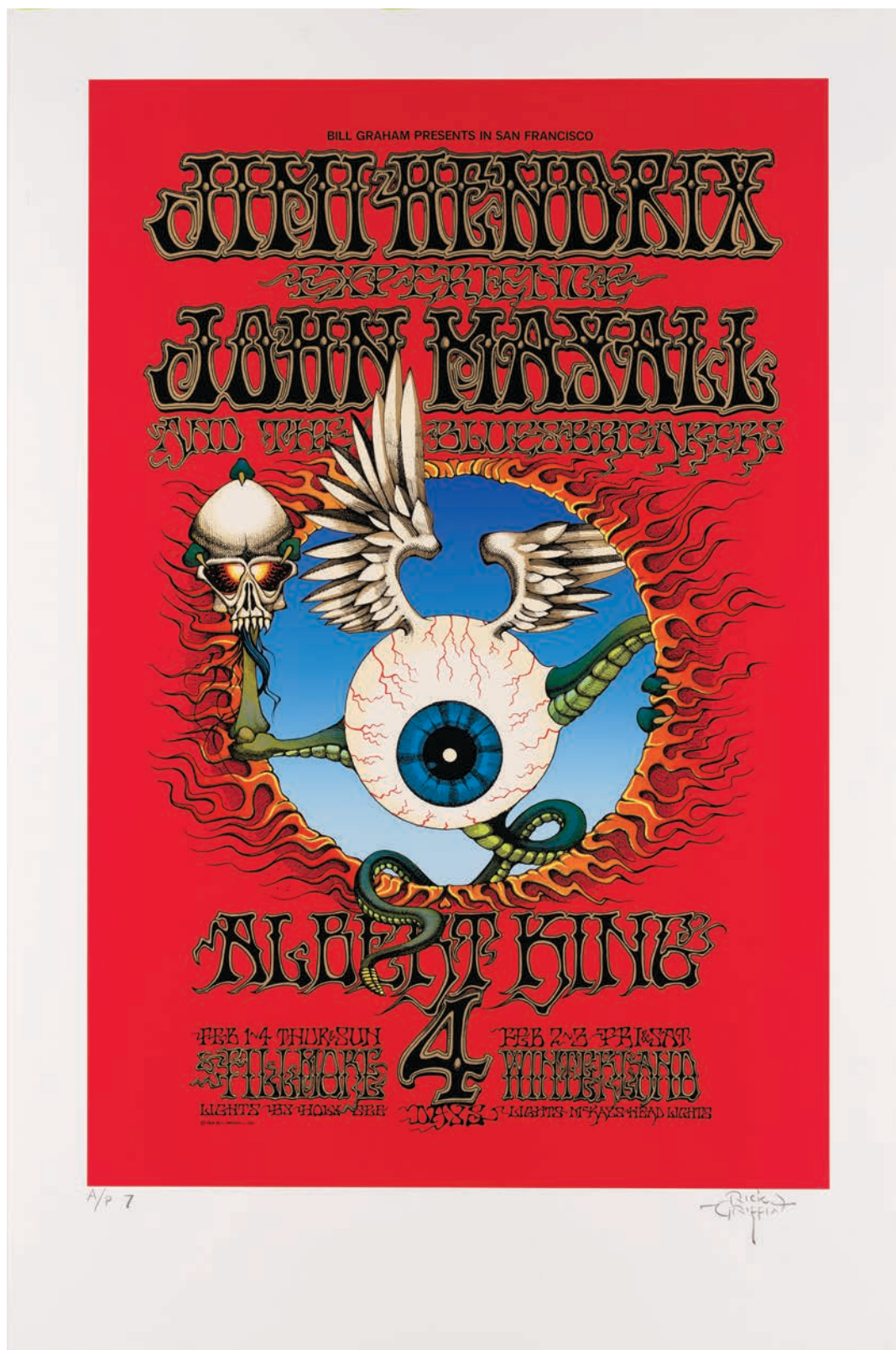
The fledgling hippy movement began emerging from a wild Californian convergence, adopting ideas from theosophy, from the beats, from the utopian "back to nature" movement which had grown out of the ideas of the nature boys, from native cultures, from interest in LSD among psychology researchers, and from the acid enthusiasm of former MKULTRA participants. In the 1960s acid enthusiasts the Grateful Dead, Owsley Stanley, Timothy Leary, Ram Dass, Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, turned on a generation to the hallucinatory extravaganza of lysergic acid diethylamide. The psychedelic experience has been part of the landscape of the West's cultural consciousness since then.

By 1966 rumors of the new mind-expanding chemical had reached the centers of power in New York, and *Life* magazine ran two cover stories about it, with the whole-hearted support of the magazine's owner Henry Luce, who was an enthusiastic user of LSD. The first, published in March, was a confusing mixture of sympathetic coverage of the LSD experience muddled with hostile and alarming warnings about the dangers of consuming mind-altering drugs. The second, in September, was focused on the immersive installation art of "be-ins" and described it as an imitation of the LSD experience, wondering at its popularity.

Despite the profound visual effects of the alkaloids, surprisingly few pictures expressing the power of the hallucinatory experience were published in the underground media of the early sixties subculture. Although references to marijuana and LSD were commonplace in *The East Village Other*, a New York paper published between 1965–1966, there were seldom any psychedelic images to be seen within its pages, and this was common to the hundreds of magazines which were members of the Underground Press Syndicate, which distributed articles to their members. Huxley had said that art could only provide a limited idea of the visions of the trip, describing his experience of looking at a painting of a chair by Vincent van Gogh: "...though incomparably more real than the chairs of ordinary perception, the chair in his picture remained no more than an unusually expressive symbol. The fact had been manifested suchness; this was only an emblem." Studies were made to test the idea that psychedelics made people more creative, but when the artists involved in these experiments were asked to draw and paint while peaking on the overwhelming effects of the alkaloids, the quality of the work they produced was inevitably impaired by the distractions of the visual spectacle they were seeing. However, memories of the colors, hallucinatory distortions, and vivid impressions of vibrant life present within all things provided artists with a new way of seeing which was unique to their period of art history. On the West Coast the exceptional *San Francisco Oracle* sensitively tuned to the art of the movement, publishing early cover art by Rick Griffin and letting fantastic imagery run riot.

Rock concert posters became vehicles of the exuberant underground aesthetic, taking their roots from art nouveau, the ecstatic imagery of Fidus, abstract art, and the colorful visuals of the hallucinogenic experiences provided by LSD and psilocybin. The brash and bright colours of pop art owe much of their fresh palette to the kaleidoscopic trip, the scrambled collages of sixties and seventies multimedia to the tumbling chaos of its hallucinatory fragmentation, the computer-generated visual effects of movies to its ethereal expansiveness and writhing, unearthly motion.

Griffin was literally the poster boy of the San Francisco wheat paste rock art scene, designing many of the iconic images that have come to define the hippy era. The "Flying Eye" poster is perhaps the most famous of them and encapsulates the new aesthetic of hippy art and psychedelia. The image has multiple roots, not least the cover art of Huxley's *The Doors of Perception*, created by John Woodcock, which was a trio of abstract blue, yellow and green eyes, with their pupils replaced by circles of connected atoms, a vaguely Aztec, jagged, and almost figurative red pattern with three blue triangles, and a crude geometric diagram resembling the strange illusions of M.C. Escher, with blue circles confined within the structure. But the flying eye had earlier antecedents in the Italian renaissance, when the famed humanist author and artist Leon Battista Alberti used it as his emblem, casting bronze coins decorated with a flying eyeball as novel tokens for friends and new acquaintances, handing them out like a business card. The eye was often deployed as a visual metaphor for God, whose omniscient vision saw and knew all things. The image was typical of a new form of literary and visual art called the emblem, which became extremely



Rick Griffin, *Jimi Hendrix, John Mayall, & Albert King at the Fillmore (Flying Eyeball)*,
Serigraph on paper, 21½" x 14"

popular between the 16th–18th centuries. Born from a new and popular interest in recently rediscovered hieroglyphics, these emblems were allegorical images accompanied by brief epigrams, usually in a spiritual vein, ranging from figurative pictures to cosmic diagrams. Religious imagery often lies behind visionary art. Like the renaissance, a strong thread of syncretic spirituality informed the hippy new age, much of it inspired by the teachings of the Theosophical Society. Fidus had admired, and esoteric thought entered the aesthetic.

Theosophy

Theosophy was central to Fidus' work. The religion began in the United States in 1875, led by Helena Blavatsky, a charismatic speaker and author who described a new path to god based on ancient universal wisdom. Theosophy propounded a neo-Platonic pantheism heavily influenced by Western occultism which Blavatsky explained in a series of books, among them *Isis Unveiled*, which described the transmission of ancient wisdom through mediums, the doctrine of reincarnation, and psychic communication. Her *The Secret Doctrine* was a record of the perennial and pan-religious "Wisdom of the Ages," the consciousness of all things in the universe, and focused on the allegorical Platonic system of correspondences. A cheerful plagiarist, a gifted writer and compiler, and a well-read occultist, Blavatsky also acted as a medium, communicating with a mystical group of transcendent adepts who had formed a spiritual network throughout the world, and were centered in the mysterious and cloud-shrouded mountaintop kingdom of Tibet. Like imaginative latter-day Pythagoreans, Theosophist initiates were encouraged to interpret the symbols of order that were present in the natural world using personal intuition and subconscious responses, finding illumination within themselves.

The Theosophical Society published hundreds of titles, including many about super-sensory practices, and these beliefs dovetailed neatly with the mind-expanding qualities of the psychotropic compounds which were becoming famous at the turn of the century. Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater's illustrated theosophical book *Occult Chemistry* is full of fantastic imagery generated through clairvoyant vision. Leadbeater's *The Astral Plane* of 1895, described seeing on other planes, including a description of how "...sight on that plane is a faculty different from and much more extended than physical vision. An object is seen, as it were, from all sides at once, the inside of a solid being as plainly open to the view as the outside."

Other texts in the Theosophist library described occult seeing too, like Leadbeater's *Clairvoyance* of 1903 and *Thought Forms* which he co-authored with Besant in 1901. In *Thought Forms*, each of the plates is accompanied by an expository text which explains its meaning, following the pattern set by emblem books. The thought forms are abstract illustrations of the imagery of the mind, made several years before abstract art entered the art historical narrative with Kandinsky's Theosophy-inspired book, *On the Spiritual in Art*, of 1914.

The abstract metaphysical art found in these Theosophical books had not appeared *ex nihilo*. It was itself preceded in books dating from the early 17th century, like those of the German mystical christian thinker and writer Jakob Böhme, whose writing was laced with esoteric illustrations, and Robert Fludd, the English metaphysician and natural magician who attempted a Rosicrucian reconciliation of the wonders of early science with esoteric christianity. Böhme's follower Dionysius Freher wrote *Paradoxical Emblems*, a collection of mystical drawings which was designed to express Pythagoras' numinous ideas and created a series of gorgeous images for *The Works of Jacob Behmen* of 1764 (Behmen is the English transliteration of Böhme) which prefigure the paintings of artists like Hilma af Klint, and later, Paul Laffoley. Simpler but similar imagery was common in emblem books, which often featured unusual creatures in imaginative landscapes.

Rudolf Steiner was another luminary among the leading figures to emerge from the cloudy mysticism of the Theosophical Society. By 1912, schismatic differences that had been simmering in the society's leadership led Steiner to split from Theosophy; Leadbeater and Besant had announced Krishnamurti as the reincarnated avatar of Jesus, and Steiner distanced himself from their messianic cult of personality to found his Anthroposophical Society, which was more closely aligned with the mysticism of Western traditions like Freemasonry, the Rosicrucians, and the esoteric wisdom of heretical proto-Protestant movements like the Brotherhood of Free Spirits and the followers of Böhme.

He conceived a world center for his new system, Anthroposophy, designing and building the first Goetheanum, a beautiful hall and center which opened in 1919 in Dornach, Switzerland. As architect of the Goetheanum he was deeply engaged in producing his own decorative work for this organic wonder of novel curving architecture, with two domes covering an auditorium and meeting rooms, held aloft by pillars capped with symbolic, abstracted capitals. The graceful ceilings were decorated with spiritual non-figurative paintings, and he carved wooden sculptures embodying his teachings; the art and architecture was replete with meaning intended to be interpreted by initiates, celebrating, and emulating the work of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who Steiner had publicly admired ever since giving his first public lecture in Vienna in November of 1888, "Goethe as Father of a New Aesthetics." The freethinking pantheist Goethe had considered his treatise on color his most important work, and it had been extremely influential upon European artists. Deeply impacted by him, in his lecture Steiner said, "...in the work of art, spirit and object, idea and reality melt into each other. The task of aesthetics is none other than to comprehend the nature of this interpenetration, and to study it in detail, in the single forms in which it asserts itself, in the various branches of Art."

Esoteric beliefs and transformative experiences provided the philosophical foundations for 20th century bohemian artists and spiritual seekers, for the art and culture of the hippy movement, and for visionary art, and renowned modern artists also took theosophy as their guide – Hilma af Klint, László Moholy-Nagy, Kasimir Malevich, František Kupka, Vasily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian were all members of the Theosophist Society, and their work

was profoundly affected by their beliefs. Their refined and intellectual approaches to esoteric art were welcomed into the mainstream via socialite gallery owners Peggy Guggenheim, Gertrude Whitney and Abby Rockefeller.

Outsider artists lacking the benefit of wealthy connections within the bourgeois world of the New York art elite were inspired by the same sources. Artist Charles Winans is an excellent example of this kind of visionary. He was a subject of MKULTRA and became an essential figure in the early 1960's counterculture. After his discharge from the U.S. Air Force, Winans became an enthusiastic consumer of peyote and LSD, drove a hearse as his car, and began producing early psychedelic art, traveling between San Antonio, Texas, and Carmel, California throughout the sixties, settling in California in 1967, where he produced album covers for Chet Helms, Wavy Gravy, the Sir Douglas Quintet, Janis Joplin, Lenny Bruce, Frank Zappa, and members of Jefferson Airplane. His art was published in underground magazines like *Open City*, *San Francisco Oracle*, and *Yellow Dog*. Winans is said to have sent drawings of a flying eye to Von Dutch and Robert Crumb, and to have introduced Jim Morrison to peyote, and to have suggested to Ken Kesey and Wavy Gray that if they wanted to evangelize LSD, they should get the iconic magic bus which would become known as Further and travel across the United States. He became notorious in the seventies when he was falsely accused of being a Navy Intelligence officer involved in the Manson murders, and his name appeared repeatedly in conspiratorial articles in underground magazines. Eventually Winans returned to Texas and opened a headshop and café called Grand-Ma's Tea House. Much of his earliest work was destroyed in a flood in San Antonio, but we have managed to borrow three of his visionary landscapes for the show.

The Winans paintings in the exhibit were derived from drawings he made in the 1970s and early 1980s. They were conceived as a dialogue with Pieter Breughel's *Tower of Babel* and Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* – Winans imagined building stone spiral ziggurats at sea, placing a double helix wind turbine at their centers, within the obelisk, generating electricity. Wave motion around the structures would also generate power, and sea creatures would create new reef homes in their foundations.

Like many hippy visionaries influenced by the syncretic philosophy of the theosophists, Winans was content to conflate his mythologies and sought parallels from multiple esoteric traditions. Although the Benben stone is the microcosmic sacred capstone at the top of the Egyptian Great Pyramid, his painting of it is set in the Huichol homeland near Copper Canyon, Mexico, and he associated it with the Hijr al-Aswad (The Black Stone) at Mecca. His concepts were imaginary and metaphysical, conflating mysticism, environmentalism, and metaphysics. In his mysterious notebooks he wrote esoteric formulae to make sense of his epiphanies, informed by his work in clandestine signals intelligence in the Air Force, and incorporating them into his art with a wink and a nudge.

By the 1970s the impact of psychedelic plants and compounds had touched technical painters of a high degree of skill who were interested in using the expansive visionary



**Charles Francis Winans, *The Ben Ben Stone*,
Spiral Island Series, Oil on canvas, 37" x 25", 2003**

**Charles Francis Winans, *The Ben Ben Stone on the
Altar of Illusion*, *The Atomic Age Series*,
Oil on canvas, 21" x 17", 1998**

**Charles Francis Winans, *Obelisk*, *Spiral Island Series*,
Oil on canvas, 40" x 30", 2000**

qualities of marijuana and hallucinogens to create a sacred and transcendent mood in their otherworldly landscapes. Artists like Thomas Akawie, Bill Martin, Cliff McReynolds, Gage Taylor, Sheila Rose, Nick Hyde, and Joseph Parker were among the original California visionary artists who first gained widespread fame in Walter Hopps' essential book, *Visions*. Akawie's work began with heavenly landscapes and evolved through abstraction into skies and seascapes in airbrushed acrylic. Taylor produced beautiful and ethereal paintings of woodlands and forests and collaborated in making early California visionary work with Uriél Danā for seventeen years, making lush, vibrant landscapes strongly inspired by the "back to nature" movement. Danā continued making her own work after Taylor passed. While their collaborative and individual work was often symbolic, using images of treasure as a metaphor for the spiritual condition, and alchemical, with the sensuality of the alchemical wedding of body and mind at its heart, an intense near-death experience gave Danā lifelong insight into the spiritual world and provided her with inspiration for a lifetime of painting.

The contemporary psychedelic art of the spiritual Californian new age overlapped with christian visionary art. Past christian religious art often had expressed the mystical union of man with their god, and the oppression of native cultures accessing direct connection with the godhead through a natural medium was a sharp irony. Colonial christians literally demonized the psychedelic experience and infected it with a poisonous legacy of righteous condemnation, and their hostility toward intoxication extended into the creative realm of visionary art that had its aesthetic foundation in substances. Now, christian visionary artists



Thomas Akawie, *Interior with Space Window*, Acrylic on canvas, 20¼" x 36½", 2010
© Estate of Thomas Akawie



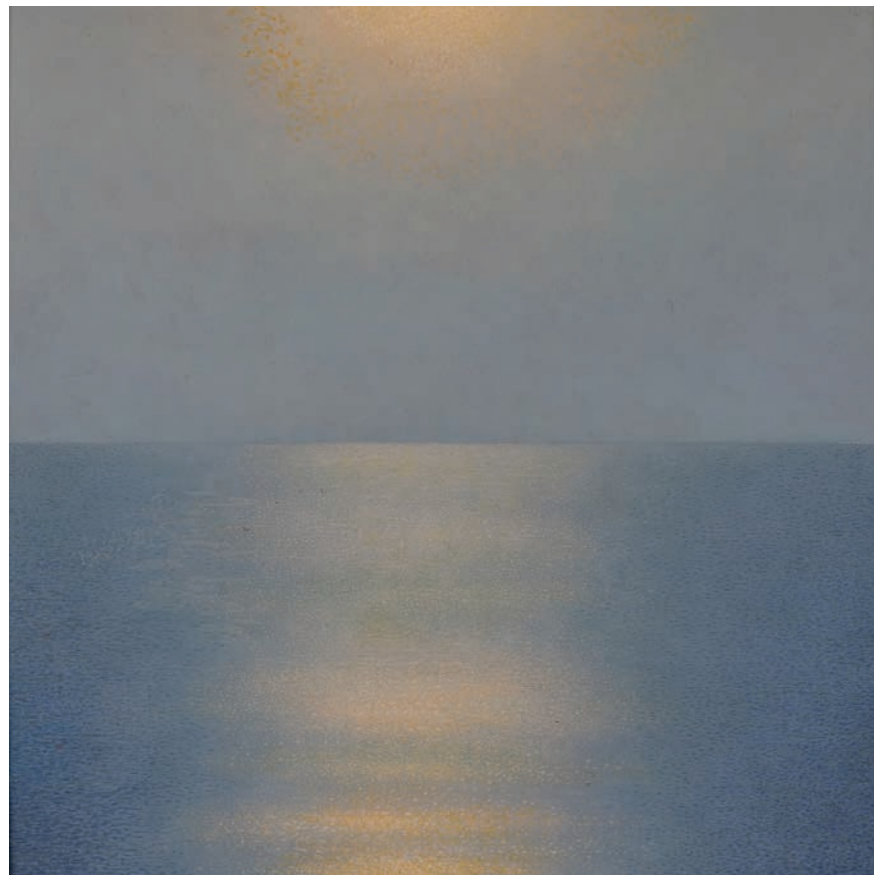
Bill Martin, *Frog*, Paint on Metal Button, 1.5" Diameter



Uriél Danā, *The In-Between*, Oil on canvas, 30" x 24", 1998



Cliff McReynolds, *Blue Rose*, Oil on panel, 28" x 34"



Cliff McReynolds, *What I See When I Walk*, Oil on Panel, 9³/₄" x 9³/₄"

found themselves at odds with conservatives, and it took some courage to continue working within the boundaries of conventional denominational churches. McReynolds' mystical christian themes wandered between the outsider art of the hippy movement, rosicrucianism, and psychedelic art in the 1970s, and used the iconography of christian symbolism with remarkable freshness. Although he was an enthusiastic consumer of marijuana in his youth, he abandoned it in 1970 and since then his art has consistently been concerned with expressing visionary utopian imagery based on his relationship with Jesus, searching for "the holy dimension in art," painting pictures of paradise.

The aesthetics of "primitive" art had been introduced into the American art narrative in the 1930s by powerful and influential collectors like patricians Abby and Nelson Rockefeller and their curator courtiers Holger Cahill and Alfred Barr, who made the dubious claim that untrained Westerners and indigenous painters and craftsmen were precedents to the artists of a uniquely American modernist tradition. As unconvincing as their rationalization was, these important gallery owners had the wealth and authority to influence millions, exhibiting primitive art in their modern gallery-temples, and soon their narrative was accepted into the mainstream of art history. During the twentieth century the primitive aesthetic gradually became affectionately adopted and now is an established genre within Western art, although it has little connection to the original intentions of native peoples. A late 20th century artist who was indebted to the *hi'kuli* (peyote) aesthetic of Huichol yarn painters, but was not personally engaged in psychedelic culture, Californian John Swanson, who told bible stories using the bright colors of the visionary experience, compressing the picture plane, and using similar iconography. The son of Mexican and Swedish immigrants, his work is an expression of a religious vision of an imagined otherworld, setting the evangelical christian message in a popular language of simplicity and colourful sensuality to attract religious consumers.

Swanson's adoption of the palette and compositions of Huichol painting raises interesting questions about authenticity. Is a style which evolves and transforms dying? Are recent Huichol yarn paintings somehow inauthentic because they are made for a commercial market rather than for religious use? Are Cliff McReynolds' paintings somehow inauthentic because they use christian imagery in an unfamiliar way, and he profits from them? Are visionary, psychedelic and fantasy art inauthentic because outsider artists rejected the narrative of the twentieth century avant-garde's dominance over art?

Huichol art has evolved commercially ever since Lumholtz, the first American anthropologist to visit the tribe, commissioned shamans to produce replicas of woven front shields and stone god discs for his collection, establishing a tradition of profane imitations of sacred objects made for sale to visitors. Before Lumholtz, Huichol ritual objects were deposited in their god-houses and left to deteriorate, but now yarn paintings made on plywood are carefully cared for and kept pristine for visiting customers. Explanations in Spanish of the imagery are often written in Sharpie markers on the back. As the tourist culture of international capitalism flourished, so did the market for Huichol art, which became



Gage Taylor, *Homecoming*, Oil on canvas, 18" diameter, 1997

brighter, more formally designed, and more cautiously cared for. Artist Gonzalo Hernández Carrillo was born in the Huichol community of San Andres, and studied yarn painting under Mariano Valadez. His work developed from his devotion to sacred teachings, ceremonies, and pilgrimages as a spiritual leader in Pochotita and Las Latas. His work features Huichol cosmology and ancestors, and has been exhibited across Mexico, the U.S., and in the U.K.

Huichol imagery has evolved in line with the multicultural character of the contemporary art world. Figures closely resembling Kokopelli, the popular commercialized Southwestern desert flute player originally derived from Hopi rock art, have begun to appear in contemporary Huichol yarn paintings, although there are no precedents for him in their pantheon before the influx of tourist package tours.

Visionary

The anti-establishment visionary art of the 1960's took root in England, where artists like Roger Dean, Rodney Matthews, and Storm Thorgerson became popular figures of the youthful British counterculture, producing iconic album cover art and selling millions of posters. Theirs were secular fantasies. The harshest spikes of the acid experience were softened in a dream-world conjured by imagination. This visionary otherworld embraced the traditions of the symbolists, and the surrealists, and entered the transcendent spiritual territory of theosophy and anthroposophy.



John August Swanson, *Fishermen—Let Down Your Nets*, Giclée, 32" x 19"
 © 2021, JohnAugustSwanson.com



Gonzalo Hernández Carrillo, *Nierakate* (yarn painting), Yarn and beeswax on board, 12"



Roger Dean, *Relayer*, Mixed-media and watercolor on board, 16" x 32", 1974



Roger Dean, *Blue Desert*, Acrylic on canvas, 72" x 108", 1989



After Chang Dai-chien, *Stepping Through Snow in Search of Plum Blossoms*, Ink on rice paper, 46" x 12"

Although overlapping with psychedelic art, imaginative visionary artists are centrally focused on creating images of other worlds from their thoughts and daydreams. Brian Chambers, the owner of A-list psychedelic gallery The Chambers Project explained, “Both psychedelic art and visionary art owe something to the psychedelic experience and seem to illuminate as the art of consciousness. The main difference between the two is that visionary art is typically more illustrative and figurative, while psychedelic art seems more abstract and sometimes ‘psy-fi’ in style.”

Dean is the brilliant designer of iconic imagery for classic rockers Yes, making fantastic paintings that are imprinted on the minds of millions of avid fans. He combines the transcendent traditions of landscape paintings by Northern European romantics like the ethereal Caspar David Friedrich with the formal serenity of the masters of Chinese Song dynasty ink paintings and the simplicity of Japanese ukiyo-e woodblock prints. His paintings capture the spirit of progressive rock with fractured worlds and flying ships, the coiled and predatory snakes and gracefully soaring rock formations of *Relayer*, and his unforgettable gravity-defying floating islands, inspiration for the movie *Avatar*. He is the creative genius behind millions of posters, prints, and books, and has painted Yes art for an extraordinary fifty years, producing his famous cracked world for the cover of their album *Fragile*, first released 26th November 1971. His most recent painting for the band is *The Quest*, released 1st October 2021. Dean is a living treasure. His *Relayer* is the epitome of his art. It is the holy grail of visionary art, the *Mona Lisa* of album covers.

Originally painted for the 1974 Yes album of the same name, Dean described the process of making the painting in an email of 17th October 2021:

“The first ideas and sketches appeared in my college sketch books like this one from 1965. You asked about *Lord of the Rings* being an influence and as I had read the book at the time (and incidentally, the Gormenghast trilogy) it would be impossible to imagine that they were not influential. However, the nearest source of influence that I was aware of was the ceilings of gothic cathedrals. I loved them—still love them—and visited as many as I could.

It would help to understand where I was coming from to explain that that the title *Relayer* never made sense to me, either for the album or the painting, frankly I thought it was a creative and conceptual misstep. *The Gates of Delirium* seemed so much more evocative. The title alone was a powerful inspiration, the music itself one of my favourite Yes tracks. To me the painting was always called *The Gates of Delirium*.

Without being this cold blooded—painting is always a very intuitive process—this was a four-part challenge.

(1) A creative challenge—what was going to be the core idea?

(2) A technical challenge—how would I execute the painting?

Then two design challenges.

(3) A design challenge for the design of the subject of the painting (*The Gates of Delirium*).

(4) A design challenge for the design of the painting, or how to view the subject matter.

Of all the gothic cathedrals I knew Canterbury the best and I imagined sitting in the congregation contemplating a gateway to another world, another state of mind, another way of being. I imagined the fan vaulting being vastly larger, and twisting and turning, and yet retaining its engineering logic, its profound rationality no matter how far removed it appeared to be. Yet in every sense of the word, it remained a gateway. At the same time, I wanted to explore the possibility of vastness.

The technique was a very natural decision for me. I decided to focus on my drawing / draughting skills as that was where I was most proficient, and it was also what I felt was most appropriate. I thought that to get into the mood for this I would want to feel more at home in a Masonic Heritage rather than a painterly one. A little of both perhaps, so it was to be a drawing with minimal watercolour washes. I joked at the time that it was really painted in dirty water.

There were a great many sketches, and I did spend a lot of time making sure, in my mind at least, that it could be built. No matter how exotic, it had to confirm to basic engineering principles.

The design of the subject lent itself to any number of acute or extreme perspectives, but I decided to see if I could make it work pretty much as a side elevation drawing, so that is what I did, no drama, no flamboyance, almost no colour, and to misquote Art of Noise: 'No shadows no Sun, November.'

For me it worked because the Magical and the Rational, the Mysteries and the Logical all came together at just the right moment."

This balance of the magical, the rational, the mysteries and the logical is surely a formula for measuring the success of all visionary art. In Poland Dawid Figielek has inherited the mysterious traditions of the artists of Northern European romanticism, and paints sublime images of monolithic pillars of light watched by diminutive figures within shrouded landscapes. Soft trees may grow among cloudy rock formations in his paintings, but there is always a sense of power at work – a mighty and forceful presence that is approached by insignificant humans. Impressively, Figielek shapes the spectacle of his fog-shrouded world in mythical proportions on small canvases.

Jacaeber Kastor, the former owner of New York's Psychedelic Solution Gallery, and an authority on the history of psychedelic art, is a crucial figure in the period between the 80s



Dawid Figielek, *Into the Light*, Oil on canvas, 19.68" x 19.68"



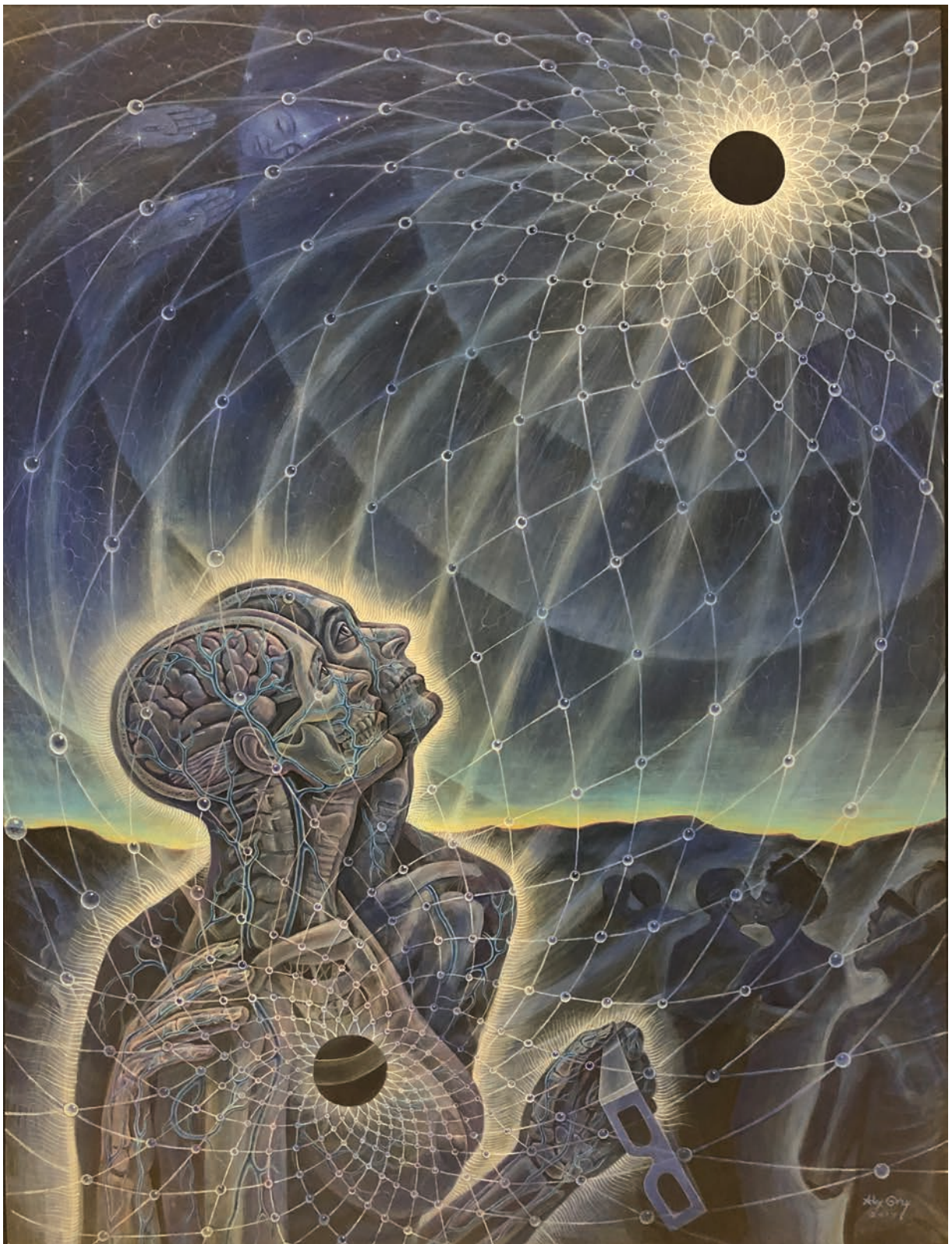
Dawid Figielek, *Quo Vadis*, Oil on canvas, 23.62" x 31.5"

and the turn of the millennium. His gallery, *Psychedelic Solution*, which he sold in 2004, was at the heart of New York's psychedelic scene, showing art by all the major painters from the hippy period, but including new painters, like H.R. Giger and Alex Grey, who became visionary superstars—Giger for his work on the Alien movies and remarkable rock album cover art, and Grey for the spectacular results of his distinctive approach to painting, in which biology textbook illustrations met with psychedelic energy.

In the 1990s Grey became a leader of a new, sophisticated kind of psychedelic art, combining a fascination with Kundalini physiology and the visionary aesthetic. Grey is the master of brilliantly controlled paintings of contemporary mind-expansion, believing in LSD as a sacred sacrament—his fellow travelers in the rock band Tool used his art as covers for their classic albums *Lateralus*, released in 2001, and *10,000 Days*, of 2006. Grey's extraordinary work rewards scrutiny, for there are inspired and twisting journeys to take among the dazzled and turning patterns, and he has a unique style which imagines a psychedelic Kundalini flowing



Jacaeber Kastor, *The Disconnect (Pink-Princess)*, Ink on paper, 14" x 11", 1975



Alex Grey, *Eclipse*, Acrylic on wood panel, 30" x 40", 2017



Daniel Sprick, *Vapor and Dusk #2*, Oil on board, 20" x 26", 2018-21

through and around human figures like bright medical illustrations. He has a devoted following and runs a "Chapel of Sacred Mirrors" in New York which shares twenty-one large pieces of his sacred art in a space designed for spiritual transformation.

Interest in new psychedelia and visionary art is partly supported by boomer nostalgia, but the art of the psychedelic sixties and stoned seventies has evolved dramatically since the fairground fantasies of Carnaby Street and the Haight were at their height, and the boomers are not the only generation with an interest in the limits of sensory perception. A 2020 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHSA) survey reported that the percentage of American marijuana users increased from 25.8 million people in 2002 to 48.2 million in 2019. Millennials and Zoomers have embraced both the psychedelic experience and its associated art in increasingly sophisticated ways. Encouraged by popular books like the bestselling *How to Change Your Mind*, and *DMT The Spirit Molecule*, they believe they are taking evolution and spirituality into their own hands, viewing pharmaceuticals as enhancements to the limitations of the human body and mind, abandoning health-harming booze for the relative safety, psychological well-being, and entertainment of

pharmaceuticals. The subject matter of new visionary art has extended, too, influenced by developments in aesthetics, technology, and neuroscience, and as the genre has matured and become increasingly valuable, its paintings have become increasingly nuanced and complex. The artists have incorporated grisaille painting and old masters' techniques, and the aesthetic of early airbrush work has evolved under the influence of the refined finishes of digital art.

In Denver, the brilliant painter Daniel Sprick has refined his observational painting skills to such a high degree that his imagined landscapes are utterly convincing, yet mystically lit and otherworldly. He has turned light inward, so that it glows from within the living land, which is made magical by his invention. Sprick has taken the visionary landscape to a new height. In his imaginary world the physics of light are inverted—he often paints mirrored



Guy Kinnear, *Great Paper Dragon*, Oil on panel, 48" x 27"



Guy Kinnear, *Matriarch*, Oil on panel, 21" x 12"

reflections, and subtly shifts our perceptions of the picture. Focused on the transcendent within the natural world, Sprick said, "I'm searching for patterns that have a key to some undiscovered harmonies. I suspect that there are some things in aesthetics that have never been discovered and I'm trying to find them. I think there are patterns and vibrations that could lead us to more beauty than we've seen."

On the central coastline of golden California, Guy Kinnear's strange paper and clay golems stride against dreaming landscapes, looming over the rising sun, and the bloody moon. They are a combination of pragmatic craftsmanship and a surreal imagination—he sculpts his curious homunculi and paints them into the rolling hills which surround his off-grid home near Paso Robles. Another Californian, Mandy Cao, pauses between painterly modernist figuration and the wistfulness of contemporary imaginative realism. Internalizing and psychoanalytical, she focuses on the rites of passage of transformation from adolescent girl to young woman within a gently alien dreamscape.

The otherworld has expanded in the burgeoning world of digital art. Tim Hengst manipulates digital images of the landscape to produce unearthly scenes, with multiple points of view and transparent layered imagery, producing a kaleidoscopic shimmer which is reminiscent of modernist collage, but unmistakably contemporary. Kirsten Zirngibl of San Diego creates extremely detailed and organic imaginary landscapes using the computer as her tool, and turns them into prints on smooth cloth, throwing a bridge between the medieval world of tapestry hangings and the modern world of shining screens.

Mars-1 is the exemplar of a new wave of psy-fi painters—his beautifully soft and gentle *Nuclear Mystics* perfectly captures the mood of the new aesthetic of the genre, sophisticated and rendered with a restrained palette which is a step back from the brash clashes of the macrodose; his is a new species of psychedelic art, and he is its champion. He worked with Grey to create a collaborative painting to commemorate Hoffman's famous hallucinatory ride home, which is now known as "bicycle day." The painting has never been exhibited before.

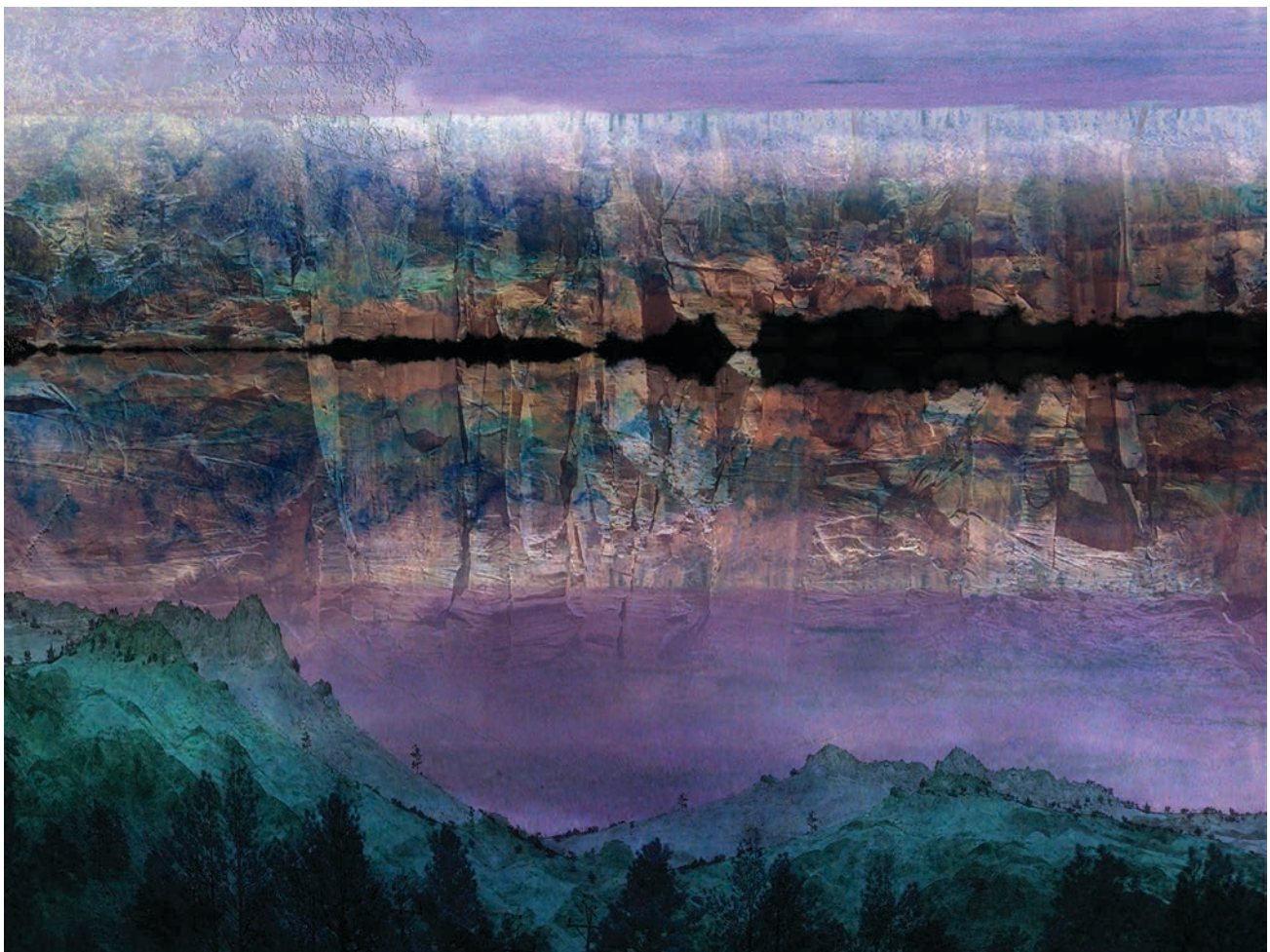
Like Mars-1 the Irish artist Graham Toms has redefined the boundaries of the aesthetic, but while Mars-1 has pushed forward the frontiers of a genial and gentle psychedelia, Toms has expanded the range of imaginative realism by creating a fantastic, but coherent world of articulated creatures built upon the ancient logic of Acadian myths to give them a deep narrative structure, and imagining a world populated by strange biomechanical creatures, where DNA has mutated and created virulent forms which morph and over-run unfamiliar landscapes. His *Isle of the Dead* emulates the great painting by Arnold Böcklin, where the island is the calm of death's refuge, but in Toms' version, the haven is paradoxically serene behind a writhing frame of insectoid and crawling creatures tumbling over each other in the foreground, a quiet center to the storm and alienation of artificial intelligence. The same alien and invasive creatures twist through the big block power of Detroit steel in his *Deity of Automobiles*, over the ancient Mesopotamian carriages of his study for *Dragon Wagon*, and within the psy-fi spectacle of Event Horizon. His is a world born of cyberpunk, of the



Mandy Cao, *Untitled (Swan)*, Oil on panel, 24" x 20"



Mandy Cao, *Wanderingly Dream*, Oil on wood panel, 16" x 20"



Tim Hengst, *Ridge Runner*, Digital collage printed on aluminium panel, 21" x 28"



Kirsten Zirngibl, *Ubuntu*, Digital image printed on cloth, 40" x 60"

intersection between digital and analogue, of dream and nightmare, and his aesthetic is new and unfamiliar, incorporating his own cartoon logic of structure, function, and motion with solid painterly craftsmanship. Toms has achieved the artistic grail. He has a unique style and knows exactly what he is doing with it.

The multi-cultural hybridity of visionary art has reached into the studios of all the artists in the exhibit. Reinventing Aztec imagery, Peruvian-American Jasmine Alexandra O has painted the god *Quetzalcóatl*. Echoing Toms' crawling interest in psy-fi nightmares, she hints at Giger's dark visions, and has begun a journey into an intense otherworld.

In his career, Oliver Vernon has moved from the intellectual austerity of his earlier modernist abstraction toward a cheerful, even optimistic non-objective psy-fi art—thanks to his psychedelic journey. He said, "Abstract expressionism was really true to my heart, and I worked through those modes quite a bit, but after I turned on to psychedelics I turned my head from art history and went inward and went in a completely different direction. After a bunch of years I got my head out of the bubble, and fused everything I had gone through and all the visionary experiences with my painting background, and it's become a fusion of a multiplicity of languages and styles. I draw on all periods of art history and all modes of experience of life." Unlike Henri Michaud, who wrote two books in the 1960s describing his painful efforts to paint and draw while under the influence of peyote, whose titles, *A Miserable Miracle* and *The Major Ordeals of the Mind*, point to his suffering, Vernon experienced a period in which he frequently painted after taking LSD, and said it was a positive, creative, and fulfilling experience.



Mars-1, *Nuclear Mystics*, Acrylic on panel, 72" x 60", 2009



Furtherrrr (Mars-1, Oliver Vernon, Damon Soule, David Choong Lee, NoMe Edonna),
Dark City - Burning Man 2010, Acrylic on canvas, 78" x 144", 2010



Graham Toms, *Diety of Automobiles (Harnessing Chaos)*, Acrylic on canvas, 60" x 40"



Graham Toms, *Isle of the Dead*, Acrylic on canvas, 24" x 30"



Oliver Vernon, *Embryo*, Acrylic on canvas, 58" x 91"

Now

Two cultural changes have created the space for the new psychedelic art to emerge. First, 21st century postmodern art is no longer governed by a New York hegemony of museums and critics. The internet has brought global communities together, and this connectivity has created marketplaces for a vast variety of emerging genres, each with their own gatekeepers, and their own critical commentary. Imaginative visionary art is among the expanding new bubbles in the extraordinary bubble-bath of art, neither limited by national borders, nor condescended to by elitists. It has an international character.

The legislative world has changed, too. Over a half-century ago, in March of 1966, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Drug Abuse Control Amendment, throwing hallucinogens together with addictive and harmful narcotics, and for decades the law has hovered over psychedelia like a raptor waiting to swoop. Possession of LSD could be punished by fifteen years in prison, despite the evidence which showed that it was dramatically less harmful than alcohol. Associating psychedelic art with squalid addiction, the fear of vigilant enforcers suppressed the genre, which was emblematic of a criminal drug subculture. Cultural change is transforming these negative perceptions, and knowledge has calmed much fear. Many American states no longer enforce laws controlling possession of marijuana; Oregon has joined the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Switzerland as states where



Jasmine Alexandra O, *Quetzalcóatl in the Underworld*, Oil on canvas, 32" x 60", 2021

small-scale drug possession is no longer criminal; Psychoactive mushrooms have been decriminalized in Denver, Oakland, Santa Cruz, Washington D.C., Cambridge (Mass.), and Somerville. Psychedelic therapy has been legalized in California, where it is considered especially effective as treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder, and as a transformative tool for ending heroin and alcohol addiction. Micro-dosing, the practice of taking small daily doses of psilocybin or LSD, is popular among Silicon Valley's smart set, who believe it enhances creativity and perception. Another best-seller, Ayelet Waldman's memoir *A Really Good Day*, has demystified the practice and helped to shed some of the shabbiest baggage of the sixties. Separated from the stigma of crime and the shame of addiction, psychedelics are becoming perceived as a socially acceptable tool for enhancing performance.

The artists of the otherworld imagine the world as another place, where alternatives to everyday reality are made manifest, and landscapes and people are transformed. Three paths lead there: psychedelic explorations inspired by the chemical path, religious visions born of the contemporary spiritual imagination, and imaginative artists' creative conceptions of how the world might be re-made. Psychedelic and visionary art haven't changed to infiltrate the boundaries of what is considered acceptable to society—the boundaries of what is considered acceptable to society have changed to include them—and this movement has stimulated increasing confidence and sophistication in the work, which is validated by capital. Enthusiastic collectors have embraced the artists in this show, whose work is highly valued, highly desirable.



Jeff Echevarria, *Loreli the Satyress of Thornewood Forest*, Graphite and charcoal powder panpastels, acetone and gouache on Somerset velvet stock, 18" x 24"

Money shouts in the world of art. While much early American psychedelic art was produced by bohemian anti-capitalist idealists with little interest in monetization, it was soon regarded by historians for its cultural significance, and as the hippy movement became increasingly popular, its art slowly became commercially viable. Art has always followed fortune, has always been the courtier of capital, has always attracted the keen senses of speculative collectors.

Visionary art has come of age.



Dr. Michael Pearce is a highly productive writer, curator, and critic.

He is an active and enthusiastic participant in the conversation about 21st century art and its roots, especially contemporary representational art and imaginative realism. He has published dozens of articles about art and artists, and wrote a book about art and neuroscience titled *Art in the Age of Emergence*. He co-founded and chaired The Representational Art Conferences (TRAC), a series of major international conferences that addressed the issues and aesthetics of contemporary representational art.

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