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A

THE POLITICS OF REDEMPTION: DYNAMIC SYMMETRY, THEOSOPHY, AND SWEDENBORGIANISM IN THE ART OF EMIL BISTTRAM (1895-1976)

by

RUTH PASQUINE

VOL. I

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2000

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Abstract

THE POLITICS OF REDEMPTION: DYNAMIC SYMMETRY, THEOSOPHY, AND SWEDENBORGIANISM IN THE ART OF EMIL BISTTRAM (1895-1976)

by

Ruth Pasquine

Adviser: Professor Marlene Park

Emil Bisttram's (1895-1976) drawings and paintings executed between 1920 and 1945 are examined in the context of his use of various aesthetic and occult systems. The two aesthetic systems primarily investigated are dynamic symmetry, a system of picture composition based on Euclidean geometry developed by Jay Hambidge, and Denman Ross's color system. The author argues that Bisttram adopted these systems as a way of effecting the redemptive process described in theosophy, Swedenborgianism, and Rosicrucianism. Bisttram took these occult philosophies, which described redemption as a resolution of opposites in geometrical terms, and applied them to his art-making. This argument is supported by examining Bisttram's teaching curricula and notes, in addition to his drawings and paintings. In Chapter 2 the author shows that many other artists were similarly interested in grid systems and the occult during the period, and proposes that Bisttram's approach was analogous to Mondrian's.

Bisttram was introduced to dynamic symmetry and the occult in the 1920s in New York; his New York occult circle included Howard Giles, Leo Katz, Nicholas Roerich, Claude Bragdon, and Manly P. Hall. After studying with Diego Rivera in Mexico City in the summer of 1931, Bisttram moved to Taos, New Mexico, where he began experimenting with cubist, futurist, and geometric styles, in addition to specifically occult subjects. The author argues that Bisttram's turn to abstraction was influenced by the

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occult milieu he found in Taos, exposure to Native American culture, the theories of Carl Jung, and his friendship with Dane Rudhyar, a theosophist who became one of the writers for the Transcendental Painting Group, which Bisttram and nine others founded in New Mexico in 1938. The ways that William Blake, Adolpho Best-Maugard, Picasso, and Kandinsky influenced Bisttram's work are also discussed. The dissertation concludes with a chapter on the founding of the Transcendental Painting Group.

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Fig. 189. Logo, Transcendental Painting Group.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Emil Bisttram's artistic career is of special interest because of the fascinating array of spiritual, philosophical, and scientific traditions he brought to bear on his painting. Profoundly spiritual and convinced that all intellectual disciplines lead to divine truth, Bisttram enriched his compositions with references to such varied subjects as electricity, rebirth, the growth of plants, the healing power of the dance, planetary forces, the fourth dimension, and the male and female principles of nature. Bisttram's essential goal in building his compositions, however, was personal redemption. For Bisttram, dividing space on a blank sheet of paper replicated such proportional divisions as were made by the Creator when He separated day from night, and earth from water. Bisttram's essential belief was that harmony was proportional, and that making harmonious, proportional divisions on a sheet of paper was a productive, life-giving, redemptive enterprise that combated negativity and disharmony. For Bisttram, every individual has a certain amount of negativity in his personal aura which has to be purified by positive, harmonious actions; likewise the larger world contains negative elements that must be purified through larger acts of harmony by groups of people. Bisttram sought to purify his own personal aura through art-making, and to purify the larger world through such activities as founding the Transcendental Painting Group and community service.

The manner that Bisttram used to proportionally divide his compositions was dynamic symmetry, a method of picture composition based on Euclidean geometry developed by Jay Hambidge (1867-1924). Bisttram used dynamic symmetry as the structure for his representational, proto-abstract, and transcendental or abstract

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compositions.[1] For Bisttram, dynamic symmetry functioned as a compass that guided him through the many stylistic experiments he undertook. Also, his sustained use of dynamic symmetry provides the essential coherency for his work as a whole.

Bisttram began using dynamic symmetry in New York in the 1920s, when he was just beginning to establish himself as an artist. At the same time he also became interested in various spiritual systems generally associated with the occult, including theosophy, Swedenborgianism, and Rosicrucianism. By correlating these spiritual approaches with dynamic symmetry, he felt that he was imbuing his work with the highest spiritual values. Bisttram began by applying dynamic symmetry to representational compositions; after his move to Taos, New Mexico, in 1931, he began working with proto-abstract styles, arriving at an aesthetic of pure geometric form by 1938, when he and nine others founded the Transcendental Painting Group. Tracing Bisttram's transition from representation to abstraction through his "mystical" use of dynamic symmetry, is the major focus of this dissertation.

The dissertation examines the works Bisttram produced during the 1920s, 1930s, and early 1940s. The decision to limit the topic to these years was made during the research phase of this project, when it became apparent that this period of his evolution was not only highly complex, but also embraced ideas from various spiritual and aesthetic movements that could be closely followed in his works. The key theoretical construct with which Bisttram worked was the theory of opposites that functioned within H. P. Blavatsky's theory of the ether, which is examined in depth in the following

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[1]The term "proto-abstract" is used to refer to Bisttram's works that employ cubist or futurist strategies, and "transcendental" or "abstract" to his works that employ pure geometric form. The use of these terms is discussed throughout the dissertation.

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chapter. As is shown, this principle of opposites also functioned within Swedenborgian theology, which Bisttram read in the 1920s, and in Jungian psychology, which he read in the 1930s. The link between Bisttram's approach to painting and these theories is that they all present similar methods for redemption.

During his lifetime, Bisttram was well-known across the Southwest and West. He had a number of solo exhibitions at museums and university galleries,[2] frequently won awards in group exhibitions, and was regularly invited to serve on juries. In 1931 he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship to study in Mexico with Diego Rivera. He was also active in the Taos art scene: in 1933 he was the moving force behind the founding of Taos Heptagon, regarded as the first art gallery in Taos, and in 1939 organized La Fonda Gallery in the La Fonda de Taos Hotel. He participated in the government mural programs, and served as supervisor for Northern New Mexico for the Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP). He was a founding member two associations of artists in Taos (1934, 1952), and served as president of the Taos Artists Association in 1939 and 1940.

As shown in the final chapter, the initial idea for the Transcendental Painting Group was his. Through his membership in the Transcendental Painting Group, his work came to the attention of Hilla Rebay, who included him in a number of group exhibitions

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[2]One-person museum and university art gallery exhibitions of Bisttram's works were mounted at: The Currier Gallery of Art (1929, 1938); The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (1933), traveling to the Witte Museum, San Antonio, and Texas State College for Women Art, Denton; The H. Sophie Newcomb Art Gallery, Tulane University (1936); Stanford University Art Gallery (1937); The Dallas Museum of Art (1940, 1943); The Philbrook Museum of Art (1945); the Pasadena Art Institute, now the Norton Simon Museum (1949); and Arizona State University Art Gallery (1955, 1966). His exhibition at the George Nix Gallery, Colorado Springs, includes a valuable essay. Henry Hunt, Emil Bisttram: Recent and Early Paintings, George Nix Gallery, 2-24 Nov. 1973, Emil Bisttram Papers, Archives of American Art [hereafter abbreviated BP, AAA] 2894:185-189.

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at the Museum of Non-Objective Art, now the Guggenheim Museum (1940, 1944, 1950). Beginning in 1932, he ran an art school during the summers in Taos, and usually had a few students during the winters. Additionally, he became known on the West Coast during the period he operated his art school in Los Angeles (1945-1951). In 1961, he was included in the only exhibition ever devoted to dynamic symmetry, which was organized by the Rhode Island School of Design.[3] In 1973, he was appointed to serve on the New Mexico Arts Commission, and on his eightieth birthday, the governor of New Mexico proclaimed "Emil Bisttram Day."

Since Bisttram's death, his work has been treated primarily in the context of large group exhibitions. The spiritual dimension of Bisttram's painting and the importance of the Transcendental Painting Group was recognized by the inclusion of paintings by Bisttram and three other members (Agnes Pelton, Raymond Jonson, and Lawren Harris) in Maurice Tuchman's The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985 (1986).[4] Spiritual painting has also been practiced by representational painters, which is shown in Cosmic Art (1975), Raymond Piper's survey of twentieth-century spiritual painting, in which Bisttram was also included.[5]

Bisttram's transcendental paintings, which were produced after 1936, are usually

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[3]David Giles Carter, Dynamic Symmetry: A Retrospective Exhibition (Providence: Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 1961).

[4]Maurice Tuchman, The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985 (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1986).

[5]Raymond Piper and Lila K. Piper, Cosmic Art, ed. Ingo Swann (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1975). This book was compiled after Piper's death by his wife and Ingo Swann and represents only a fraction of the material Piper amassed during his lifetime. His notes and correspondence with hundreds of artists are preserved in 171 boxes at Syracuse University, where he was Professor of Philosophy. Bisttram and Piper began corresponding in 1949.

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classed with the "second wave" of American abstractionists--those artists who came to maturity during the 1930s under the influence of Picasso and Kandinsky. This categorization of Bisttram is generally correct, and points to the essential interest of his work--the manner in which he made the transition from representational to abstract painting, and the relationship of his work to Kandinsky's. The "second wave" abstractionists have been examined in large exhibitions that in many cases include both the Transcendental Painting Group and the American Abstract Artists. The association between these two groups has been made primarily by collectors interested in 1930s abstraction.[6] Theme & Improvisation: Kandinsky & the American Avant-Garde 1912-1950 (1992), a broad overview of these trends, provides the most comprehensive treatment of Bisttram and the Transcendental Painting Group.[7] Bisttram has also been included in the few publications devoted to the Transcendental Painting Group.[8]

Since Bisttram also worked in a representational mode using subjects related to New Mexico, he has been included in books and exhibitions devoted to New Mexico

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[6]The following collection catalogues include Bisttram, other Transcendental Painting Group members, and members of the American Abstract Artists: Virginia M. Mecklenburg, The Phillip Frost Collection: American Abstraction 1930-1945 (Washington, DC: The Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989); Susan E. Strickler and Elaine D. Gustafson, The Second Wave: American Abstraction of the 1930s and 1940s: Selections from the Penny and Elton Yasuna Collection (Worcester: Worcester Art Museum, 1991); Robert Knott, American Abstract Art of the 1930s and 1940s: The J. Donald Nichols Collection (Winston-Salem: Wake Forest University, 1998).

[7]Gail Levin and Marianne Lorenz, Theme & Improvisation: Kandinsky & the American Avant-Garde 1912-1950 (Dayton: Dayton Art Institute, 1992).

[8]James Monte and Anne Glusker, The Transcendental Painting Group New Mexico 1938-1941 (Albuquerque: Albuquerque Museum, 1982). Robert C. Hay, "Dane Rudhyar and the Transcendental Painting Group of New Mexico, 1938-1941" (MA diss., Michigan State University, 1981). Tiska Blankenship and Ed Garman, Vision and Spirit: The Transcendental Painting Group (Albuquerque: Jonson Gallery, 1997).

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painters.[9] Jackson Rushing's inclusion of a number of Bisttram's Native American proto-abstractions in Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde (1995) is the most important recognition the artist has received to date.[10] Since his death only one solo exhibition of his works has been mounted at a museum, an exhibition of his works on paper from the Anschutz Collection at the Harwood Museum in Taos in 1983; a monograph on Bisttram was published by the dealer Walt Wiggins in 1988.[11] Although none of these texts examine Bisttram's work in any depth, the many provocative statements made about him and his work inspired this fuller investigation.

Sources on Bisttram

Bisttram's writings and notes have guided every step of this analysis. Of primary importance are his teaching materials. They reveal just how closely theosophy, Swedenborgianism, and Rosicrucianism were joined to his painting, and how teaching served as a platform for developing, sustaining, and promulgating these ideas. Consequently, his two detailed course outlines, one developed in New York, the other in

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[9]Mabel Dodge Luhan, Taos and Its Artists (New York: Duel, Sloan, & Pearce, 1947); Van Deren Coke, Taos and Santa Fe: The Artist's Environment (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1963); Kay Aiken Reeve, "The Making of An American Place: The Development of Santa Fe and Taos, New Mexico, as an American Cultural Center, 1898-1942" (Ph.D. diss., Texas A & M University, 1977); Charles C. Eldredge, Julie Schimmel, William H. Truettner, Art in New Mexico, 1900-1945: Paths to Taos and Santa Fe (Washington, DC: National Museum of American Art, 1986); Dean A. Porter, Teresa Hayes Ebie, Suzan Campbell, Taos Artists and Their Patrons, 1898-1950 (Notre Dame: The Snite Museum of Art, 1999).

[10]W. Jackson Rushing, Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde: A History of Cultural Primitivism (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 85-90.

[11]David Witt, Emil James Bisttram (Taos: The Harwood Foundation, 1983). Walt Wiggins, The Transcendental Art of Emil Bisttram (Ruidoso Downs, NM: Pintores Press, 1988).

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Taos, and his mostly unpublished writings and lectures, are critical texts for interpreting his paintings. Equally important are his two reading lists, the first compiled about 1930 for his students in New York, the second compiled about 1945 for his students in Los Angeles.[12] His manuscript, The Practical Application of Dynamic Symmetry for the Contemporary Creative Artist, begun about 1960, is a critical tool for interpreting his paintings as it provides the key to the structure of his compositions.[13]

Also of importance is the book he began about 1975, when the Denver collector Philip Anschutz acquired ten paintings and 238 works on paper. For this project, Bisttram prepared a hundred-page essay, The Creative Process in the New Age. Part one is a detailed chronology of his personal life until his move to Taos in 1931; part two is an essay on art history outlining his views on culture and style with sections on Egyptian, Chinese, and Renaissance art.[14] Also of prime importance are the one-paragraph descriptions he wrote for each work that were to appear in the book alongside reproductions of the works. Although the book was never published, Mrs. Bisttram's comments on the manuscript, made in response to a suggestion that the section on art history be deleted, provides an overview of Bisttram's philosophy of art and a sense of some of the personalities involved:

> I am afraid that Emil, as usual, saw in his mind's eye something bigger, more comprehensive. ...his intention was to approach art from the philosophical-religious point of view. He believed art was the final expression or form of a

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[12]For Bisttram's reading list of 1930, see Appendix I; for his reading list of 1945, see Appendix II.

[13]Emil Bisttram, The Practical Application of Dynamic Symmetry for the Contemporary Creative Artist, TMs, BP, AAA 2893: 220-434.

[14]Emil Bisttram, The Creative Process in the New Age, TMs, BP, AAA 2893: 435-621.

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> religion or philosophy as it developed with a civilization. He was never in sympathy with history whose basis was chronology and/or the psychosis of the period. Perhaps, one day when in the mood and have the time you will read what he has written. I expect to find something quite different from the hackneyed approach of the past. Also, I think he stopped dead at the final chapter--Contemporary Art--simply because in this period there is chaos and no sign of any "new" spiritual awareness. He knew there was a new religion coming and just before he died he said, "I know now how to write that last chapter." But it was not to be.[15]

Also of importance is a fifty-page manuscript of notes taken by Edith Carlson while she was studying with Bisttram between 1954 and 1956.[16] Carlson and her husband, the novelist Frank O'Rourke, were living in Taos when Carlson applied to Bisttram to take a few classes. Bisttram insisted that she take the entire course or nothing at all. Carlson was one of the few students from that time who completed Bisttram's entire course of study.[17]

Bisttram's correspondence, some of his writings, and a substantial collection of his drawings from the 1920s are at the Archives of American Art. Most of the correspondence, typed by Mrs. Bisttram, is related to exhibitions; personal

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[15]Mayrion Bisttram to (George Schriever), TLS, 4 June 1976, George Schriever Papers, AAA. Schriever, curator of the Anschutz Collection, brought Bisttram to Anschutz's attention.

[16]Desert Light: Paintings and Drawings by Edith Carlson (Salt Lake City: Utah Museum of Fine Arts, 1991).

[17]Edith Carlson, Notes from Conversations with Emil Bisttram, TMs, Edith Carlson Papers, Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Salt Lake City. The manuscript also recalls fellow students Bernard Stone, John de Puy, George McCheanly, and Dean Delgado. Her notes also provide a context for the "Scratch Series" that Bisttram was working on during this period. Carlson's papers also include an important letter from Mrs. Bisttram describing the thinking behind TICO (Taos Institute of Creative Orientation, Inc.), a partially successful educational initiative aimed at the business community founded by Bisttram in 1957. They also contain a number of excerpts from Bisttram's notebooks not found elsewhere. Bisttram gave Carlson the copy of Kandinsky's Concerning the Spiritual in Art that he had purchased in 1947. Edith Carlson to the author, TLS, 7 April 1997.

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correspondence and that with students was discarded.[18] Some of this correspondence has been recovered, most importantly that with Frank and Margel Hinder, who studied with Bisttram in New York and Taos. In 1934 the Hinders moved to Australia, Frank's place of birth, and became important members of the avant-garde art scene in Sydney.[19] Another group of papers, entrusted by Mrs. Bisttram after the artist's death to William Warder, a student of Bisttram's in 1937, contain handwritten drafts of some of Bisttram's unpublished writings from the 1920s and 1930s, and important documents relating to the founding of the Transcendental Painting Group.

The Harwood Museum, Taos, is also an important repository of documents. They have three paintings, four sketchbooks, and some 250 uncatalogued drawings. They also have the original set of Bisttram's teaching materials, some correspondence and clippings, a number of taped interviews, and a good photo archive. Another important source is U.S. Bank, Minneapolis, which has fifty-three works. These were acquired by Marvin Buckles, Vice-President, Midland Federal Savings Bank, Denver, from the Stables Gallery, Taos, and from Mrs. Bisttram after the artist's death. The collection passed to U.S. Bank through a succession of bank mergers. Also of interest is the appraisal of Bisttram's library that lists some of the titles he owned on Chinese, Renaissance, and modern art, the occult, and the Southwest.[20]

While Bisttram was a prolific artist, executing in excess of three thousand works,

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[18]Mrs. Bisttram to (Francis V. O'Connor), ALS, 21 Jan. 1977, courtesy Dr. O'Connor.

[19]Renée Free, Frank and Margel Hinder 1930-1980 (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1980).

[20]For the appraisal of Bisttram's library, see Appendix III.

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locating his paintings from the 1920s and 1930s has presented a number of challenges. Although there are some large collections of his works in public and private institutions, they do not contain a concentration of works from the period of interest, or are dominated by works on paper. Also, Bisttram neither kept a record of sales nor of works executed. Furthermore, all the works from his estate were sold off quickly and no one took on the task of keeping track of them.[21]

The disposition of Bisttram's estate is of interest because he kept many of his best works until his death.[22] After Bisttram's death, his widow sold seventy-seven works through the New York dealer Martin Diamond, who introduced Bisttram and other members of the Transcendental Painting Group to the New York art market. Mrs. Bisttram willed all remaining works to St. John's College, Santa Fe. After her death the College consigned the estate to Gerald Peters Gallery, Santa Fe; then, to move the works more quickly, the College turned the estate over to Munson Galleries, Santa Fe. Jim Parsons, Munson's sales agent, made some large sales, including 104 works on paper to Tom Summers, Oklahoma City, and Warren Shaull, Dodge City, Kansas, who subsequently sold them on the secondary art market. An even larger sale of paintings and works on paper was made to Walt Wiggins whose book on Bisttram includes many of the works he purchased. Most of the research for the book was done by Parsons; the

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[21]An inventory of his works was made, however, upon his death by Mrs. Bisttram, assisted by William Warder. A photo album containing snapshots of some of the works from the estate is housed in the library of St. John's College.

[22]One of his students has suggested that this was because he used them in his teaching. To explain points he was making in his teaching, he would pull out his own paintings to show what he meant. Barbara Harmon, interview with the author, 10 October 1999. Harmon studied with Bisttram in the late 1940s in Los Angeles and in Taos.

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unsigned works handled by Parsons have stamped signatures on the front.

Bisttram's signature and the spelling of his name are also not without interest, especially since they bear on his spiritual outlook. Born in Hungary with the name Bistran, he gradually changed the spelling, finally settling on Bisttram by 1931.[23] Various surviving friends of Bisttram's recall that he said that he changed the spelling of his name after consulting a numerologist while he was living in New York. At the same time his wife Mary changed her name to Mayrion. A document in the Bisttram archives at the Harwood Museum suggests that the name change was based on sound rather than on number. The name Emil Bisttram is diagramed, with Emil shown as a upward moving spiral surmounted by a five-pointed star, and Bisttram as an upward moving spiral surmounted by a triangle. The accompanying text, headed with the new spelling of his name, includes an explanation based on the occult relationship of sound to form.[24]

The revised spelling of his name also enabled him to make the sign for pi out of the double t, which embedded his dedication to geometry and the occult in his signature. Pi, or 3.1415+, the ratio of the diameter of a circle to its circumference, is variously called an incommensurable number, an irrational number, or an unending fraction. The golden section, or 1.618+, is the same type of number. Even though pi and the golden section represent fractions, they can be expressed as whole figures, pi as a circle with a

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[23]An examination of the catalogues of the Boston Society of Independent Artists, for example, where he exhibited between 1927 and 1931, shows his name spelled Bistran for all entries except 1931, when it is spelled Bisttram. In the Message of 1929, the annual report of the Roerich Museum for the year 1929, his name is spelled Bistran; in the Message of 1930, his name is spelled Bisttram. Message of 1929 (New York: Roerich Museum Press, 1930); Message of 1930 (New York: Roerich Museum Press, 1931). The New York Phone Directory, however, shows his name spelled Bistram beginning in October 1923, up to and including the final listing, the winter of 1930-31.

[24]For the text accompanying the new spelling of Bisttram's name see Appendix IV.

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diameter, and the golden section as a rectangle. One of Blavatsky's many theosophical interpretations of pi holds that the circumference of a circle represents the hidden deity, and that the diameter represents the creative power of male and female. Pi, therefore, represents the relationship between the Creator and the creative power of the individual.[25] Dynamic symmetry is primarily concerned with rectangles whose sides are in incommensurable ratios.

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[25]H. P. Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy, 2 vols. (London: The Theosophical Publishing Company, Ltd., 1886; reprint Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, 1988), II, 536.

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Chapter 2

Bisttram in Context

Bisttram's aesthetic was based on the concept that a sense of order vitalized life and should be expressed in art. For Bisttram, this order encompassed concepts of the beautiful, the spiritual, the moral, and the mathematical, a combination that can be traced back to Plato and Pythagoras. Bisttram's interests in Greek philosophy and mathematics were aroused by dynamic symmetry; they were, however, also influenced by H. P. Blavatsky's Isis Unveiled (1877), which provided a mystical interpretation of the Platonic tradition. Bisttram also sought inspiration in other systems, such as color theory, Swedenborgianism, Rosicrucianism, and psychology--many of the same sources used by other artists seeking to express rarefied spiritual experiences in painting. Furthermore, Bisttram developed personal relationships with some of the most visible theosophists in New York at the time: the Russian expatriate mystic and symbolist painter Nicholas Roerich (1874-1947), Claude Bragdon (1866-1947), and Manly P. Hall (1901-1990).

Hambidge's theory of dynamic symmetry was one of three independently-conceived systems based on archeological investigations published during the 1920s that sought to recover the lost canon of proportions used by the Greeks. The Romanian-born mathematician and aesthetician Matila Ghyka (1881-1965), the most influential scholar to embrace Hambidge's system, observed that interest in systems of this type was symptomatic of a larger "neo-Pythagorean surge" in which the relationships between mathematics, art, and science were being reconsidered.[1] Ghyka's Esthétique des

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[1]The other two systems were developed by the Norwegian scholar F. M. Lund and the Munich architect E. Moessel. Frederick M. Lund, Ad Quadratum: A Study of the

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proportions dans la nature et dans les arts (1927), which provided a complete explanation of Hambidge's system, also included discussions of the fourth dimension and of mysticism, interests typical of the trend.[2] Ghyka's promotion and elaboration of Hambidge's system insured its inclusion in a new discipline that joined geometry and art, which has come to be known as "design science."[3]

Bisttram's rigorous and well-documented use of dynamic symmetry provides an unparalleled opportunity for investigating this neo-Pythagorean approach. Bisttram's combination of geometry and mysticism, however, was also conditioned by symbolism and primitivism. In this chapter the author argues that similar interests by late nineteenth and early twentieth-century modernists provide a context for evaluating Bisttram's unique contribution.

One of the primary assertions made by H. P. Blavatsky (1831-1891), the founder of the Theosophical Society in 1875 in New York, was that science and religion could be reconciled by an examination of ancient mystical teachings.[4] Isis Unveiled (1877), in

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Geometrical Bases of Classic and Medieval Religious Architecture, with special reference to their application in the restoration of the Cathedral of Nidaros, Norway (London: B. T. Batsford, 1921); Ernst Moessel, Die Proportion in Antike und Mittelalter, 2 vol. (Munchen: C. H. Beck, 1926), cited in Matila Ghyka, The Geometry of Art and Life (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1948; reprint New York: Dover, 1977), 155.

[2]Matila Ghyka, Esthétique des proportions dans la nature et dans les arts (Paris: Gallimard, 1927).

[3]For an overview and bibliography of "design science," see Jay Kappraff, Connections: The Geometric Bridge Between Art and Science (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1990).

[4]Theosophy is a general term referring to a mystical approach to religion. Jacob Böhme (1575-1624) is usually considered the first theosophist because he used the term

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which she challenges the materialism of contemporary scientific thinking, sets the tone for the confrontation. In the preface to volume one, she supports her position with the authority of Greek geometry:

> Our work, then, is a plea for the recognition of the Hermetic philosophy, the anciently universal Wisdom-Religion, as the only possible key to the Absolute in science and theology. ... They [the sages of the Orient] showed us that by combining science with religion, the existence of God and immortality of man's spirit may be demonstrated like a problem of Euclid.[5]

In the first volume of Isis Unveiled, Blavatsky outlines a theory of the cosmos in which the architect or "magician" plays an analogous role to that of the Demiurgus, the creator of the world, by developing the will and using geometry:

> The ancient philosophy affirmed that it is in consequence of the manifestation of that Will--termed by Plato the Divine Idea--that everything visible and invisible sprung into existence. ... The plan of the structure to be erected is in the brain of the Architect, and reflects his will; abstract as yet, from the instant of the conception it becomes concrete through these atoms which follow faithfully every line, point and figure traced in the imagination of the Divine Geometer. As God creates, so man can create. ... Given a more intense and intelligent concentration of this will, and the form becomes concrete, visible, objective; the man has learned the secret of secrets; he is a magician.[6]

Bisttram's adoption of the concept of "artist as magician" is shown in the statement he prepared for Dane Rudhyar's unpublished manuscript, The Transcendental Movement in Painting (1938), which provides the theoretical framework for the

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in the titles of a number of his books. The first English group that gathered to study Swedenborg's writings in the late eighteenth century also called themselves theosophists.

[5]H. P. Blavatsky, Isis Unveiled: A Master-Kay to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology, 2 vols. (New York: J. W. Bouton, 1877; reprint Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, 1988), vii, vi.

[6]Ibid., I, 61-62. For the Creator as "mystic painter," see Ibid., I, 348.

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founding of the Transcendental Painting Group:

> His [Bisttram's] philosophy of life has developed along occult or broadly theosophical lines, and his attitude is largely that of the "teacher." By this is meant that, for him, art should be a means to transmit truths and basic principles of cosmic proportion and evolution. He considers art as the Egyptian or Hindu artist-initiate did, as fulfilling a sacramental function, an ethical-philosophical task of symbolization. Art reveals philosophy through forms and colors that are symbols--not merely individual and temporary significant symbols, but universally valid representations of eternal truths.[7]

Bisttram's adoption of dynamic symmetry, an essentially geometric system, was his way of becoming the "divine geometer" specified by Blavatsky.

In Science, the first volume of Isis Unveiled, however, Blavatsky's primary argument is for the existence of the "universal ether," the envelope of interrelated forces composing the cosmos, through which the individual can ascend and reunite with the Divine. The universal ether was fundamental to the cosmologies of the ancients:

> Pythagoras, Plato, Timaeus of Locris, and the whole Alexandrian school derived the soul from the universal World-Soul; and the latter was, according to their own teachings--ether; something of such a fine nature as to be perceived only by our inner sight. ... The ancients called it Chaos; Plato and the Pythagoreans named it the Soul of the World. According to the Hindus, the Deity in the shape of Æther pervades all things. It is the invisible, but as we have said before, too tangible Fluid. Among other names this universal Proteus--or "the nebulous Almighty," as de Mirville calls it in derision--was termed by the theurgists "the living fire," the "Spirit of Light," and Magnes. This last appellation indicates its magnetic properties and shows its magical nature. [8]

Within the ether lie all the forces of nature, "what the kabalists term 'the gross

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[7]Dane Rudhyar, The Transcendental Movement in Painting, AMsS, 6 Nov. 1938, Rudhyar Papers, George Arents Research Library for Special Collections, Syracuse University, 111.

[8]Blavatsky, I, 316, 129.

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purgations of Ether--light, heat, electricity, and motion."[9] Since the individual likewise produces currents in the ether by his thoughts and actions, the ether contains a stream of images of past, present, and future:

> The oracles assert that the impression of thoughts, characters, men, and other divine visions, appear in the æther... ...surrounding space is not an empty void, but a reservoir filled to repletion with the models of all things that ever were, that are, and that will be, and with beings of countless races, unlike our own.[10]

Within the ether, however, there are two major forces or currents, the centripetal and the centrifugal, that produce harmony by acting together geometrically:

> Pythagoras taught that the entire universe is one vast system of mathematically correct combinations. Plato shows the deity geometrizing. The world is sustained by the same law of equilibrium and harmony upon which it was built. The centripetal force could not manifest itself without the centrifugal in the harmonious revolutions of the spheres; all forms are the product of this dual force in nature.[11]

The problem for the "artist-magician" is to learn how to manipulate these forces:

> The human body is subjected as well as the earth, and planets, and stars, to a double law; it attracts and repels, for it is saturated through with double magnetism, the influx of the astral light. Everything is double in nature; magnetism is positive and negative, active and passive, male and female... When the mesmerizer will have learned the great secret of polarizing the action and endowing his fluid with a bisexual force he will have become the greatest magician living. Thus the astral light is androgyne, for equilibrium is the resultant of two opposing forces eternally reacting upon each other. The result of this is life. When the two forces are expanded and remain so long inactive, so to equal one another and so come to a complete rest, the condition is death.[12]

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[9]Ibid, I, 186.

[10]Ibid., I, 178, 116.

[11]Ibid., I, 318.

[12]Ibid., I, xxvi.

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To prepare himself for the task of creating harmony in the world through image-making, the "artist-magician" organizes and purifies his will, intuition, and imagination. The ideas he uses, however, are not his own, but already exist in the ether:

> Before an artist paints a picture every feature of it exists already in his imagination... the abstract must become concrete... Only it must not be understood that this thought creates matter. No; it creates but the design for the future form; the matter which serves to make this design having always been in existence...[13]

The imagination, which is critical to the creative process, could, however, lead the artist astray:

> What is imagination? Psychologists tell us that it is the plastic or creative power of the soul; but materialists confound it with fancy... Imagination, Pythagoras maintained to be the remembrance of precedent spiritual, mental and physical states, while fancy is the disorderly production of the material brain.[14]

The ether and the forces that act in it were the primary subjects of Bisttram's transcendental paintings in the 1930s. He was also attempting to depict the ether and its forces by using dynamic symmetry in his earlier representational works.

Blavatsky's call for a resolution between science and religion through mysticism came at a point in the nineteenth century when the debate around this heated issue favored the skeptics, the materialists, and the scientists. In many quarters her writings served to tip the balance in favor of religion and spirituality. The cultural rupture between science and religion, which in many ways had been the defining polemic since the eighteenth century, manifested in the individual as a conflict between external reality

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[13]Ibid., I, 310-311.

[14]Ibid., I, 396.

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and inner knowing.

Internalizing the conflict between science and religion, Bisttram sought an aesthetic resolution by scientifically studying the technical aspects of painting, drawing, and design, and infusing them with a rarefied spiritual content. Like other artists seeking to resolve similar contradictions, his research led to the development of a method in which the technical aspects of his pictures symbolized and reinforced the content.

Bisttram laid out his methods in two course outlines, one prepared for his classes in New York, the other for his classes in Taos. Through his curricula, he articulated a clear and deliberate approach that enabled him to confidently express his spiritual beliefs in a direct manner. Bisttram's aims were not without precedent in the period, and indeed he often worked from precedent, but his work is set apart by his essential aim for clarity in a field charged with ambiguity and veiled motives. He was always very sure about what he wanted to say in a picture, and each picture, even his most abstract, is about something very specific.

In order to develop this theme and to provide an overview of the topics that are discussed in the body of the dissertation, this chapter places Bisttram in the larger context of European and American art during the period under consideration. This is achieved by comparing the most important aspects of Bisttram's interests with those of other artists and movements of the time. Five aspects of Bisttram's interests are set into context: his use of symbolism, his use of primitivism, his use of dynamic symmetry as an occult system, his interest in the design tradition, and his role in the founding of the Transcendental Painting Group. These comparisons show that Bisttram's concerns

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paralleled and intersected with mainstream trends of the period.

During the 1920s, one of Bisttram's approaches to a spiritual aesthetic was working with landscape motifs in a symbolist style. His use of symbolism in landscape painting was influenced by his teacher at the New York School of Fine and Applied Arts, the Swedenborgian Howard Giles (1876-1955). Swedenborg's theology is essentially symbolic; its basic tenet is a theory of correspondences that posits that each thing in the seen world represents and symbolizes something in the unseen world. Swedenborg's major theological work, Arcana Coelestia (1749-1751), a phrase by phrase interpretation of Genesis and Exodus, is based on the assumption that the science of correspondences was a language, that it was known by the ancients, and that it was used by the writers of the Bible.[15] Bisttram's immersion in Swedenborg formed the basis for his use of symbolism in landscape painting, biblical subjects, and abstract works.

Giles's Swedenborgian background--he was the grandson of the esteemed nineteenth-century Swedenborgian theologian Chauncey Giles (1813-1893)[16]--predisposed him to a symbolist approach to painting and gave him entrée to the third generation circle of transcendentalists in Cambridge. Giles's circle, which also expressed spiritual values in landscape painting, was encouraged by the Russian theosophical-

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[15]Emanuel Swedenborg, Arcana Coelestia: The Heavenly Arcana Contained in the Holy Scripture or Word of the Lord Unfolded, Beginning with the Book of Genesis (1749-1751), trans. from Latin by John Clowes, London 1774-1806, revised and edited by John Faulkner Potts, 1905-1910, 12 vol. (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 1997).

[16]In Isis Unveiled Blavatsky cites from a recent lecture Giles gave in New York; since she wrote Isis in New York, the two may have been acquainted. Blavatsky, I, 317-318.

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symbolist painter Nicholas Roerich. Roerich promoted his ideals in New York in the 1920s by establishing a school, the Master Institute of United Arts, where Bisttram and Giles both taught, and a museum, which collected and showed works by these artists and others.[17] Roerich's theosophical writings and his activities as a stage designer widened the scope of his influence. The theme of his school, which taught both music and art, was idealistic and promoted the unity of the arts. Roerich's primary message, that culture had the power to heal the ills of society, was essentially redemptive. The course Bisttram developed for the Master Institute was structured on Swedenborg's theory of the regeneration of man; this theory was based on the idea of resolving opposites, and was also redemptive.

Three other members of the Transcendental Painting Group--Agnes Pelton, Raymond Jonson, and Lawren Harris--were similarly influenced by symbolism in the depiction of landscape during the 1920s.[18] Furthermore, their spiritual approach to painting was also influenced by contact with Roerich during the same period. While it is beyond the scope of this inquiry to demonstrate the stylistic influence of Roerich on any but Bisttram, the circumstances surrounding Roerich's influence on these other members is cited.

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[17]Ivan Narodny, American Artists, introduction by Nicholas Roerich (New York: Roerich Museum, 1930; reprint Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1969).

[18]Transcendental Painting Group members, were, in addition to Bisttram, Agnes Pelton (1881-1961), Lawren Harris (1885-1970), Raymond Jonson (1891-1982), Stuart Walker (1904-1940), Robert Gribbroek (1906-1971), Bill Lumpkins (b. 1909), Horace Towner Pierce (1916-1958), and Florence H. Miller (b. 1918). Ed Garman (b. 1914) joined the group shortly after its founding in 1938.

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The inspiration that the Transcendental Painting Group members took from the New England transcendentalists provides another context for their motivations and aims. By consciously borrowing the name of a well-known and well-respected literary group in the shadow of their centennial, the Transcendental Painting Group associated itself with an American tradition and with concepts that already had some meaning and acceptance in the public mind.[19] Given his connections with Giles, Bisttram may have been more closely wedded to this tie than others in the group. Clearly referring to Emerson, Bisttram titled one of his transcendental works The Oversoul.

Swedenborg was a formative influence on many writers and artists, including Balzac, Baudelaire, Blake, Emerson, and Inness. The French tradition was mixed with the occult and had a formative influence on symbolism. Balzac's novel Seraphita (1835), which Bisttram read,[20] provided the major impetus for interest in Swedenborg in France. Seraphita, an androgyne and a relative of Swedenborg's, obtained redemption by advocating a Swedenborgian theology to the three other characters in the novel. The androgyne was a primary symbol for the unification of opposites, and for the dual force operating in the universal ether. Balzac's comments on geometry, however, were more related to the occult tradition.[21] Baudelaire's theory of correspondences, his idea of the unity of the arts, and his rejection of the primacy of nature, were all based on

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[19]"A Century Ago Transcendentalism Was the 'New Thought' of Day," Kansas City Times, 11 April 1939, BP, AAA 581:283

[20]See Bisttram's reading list of ca. 1930 in Appendix I.

[21]George Frederic Parsons, introduction to Seraphita, by Honoré de Balzac, trans. Katharine Prescot Wormeley (1889; reprint New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1970).

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Swedenborg. The occultist Eliphas Levy, who published a poem titled "Correspondences" before Baudelaire, and whom Baudelaire knew, was probably the source for the mix of Swedenborgianism and the occult.[22] This mix persisted in Bisttram's circle.

Of the symbolists, Gauguin and Seurat provide the most important precedents for Bisttram: Gauguin because he considered himself an artist-initiate,[23] and Seurat because of his interest in design and color theories. The two most important theoretical influences on Seurat, Charles Blanc and Charles Henry, presented similar theories to those that Bisttram used. Additionally, Seurat worked with the golden section,[24] which was the major form used in dynamic symmetry. Seurat also used a theory of opposites, which he expressed in color by using complements, and in line by using the right angle.[25]

Symbolism has also been credited with influencing the development of proto-

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[22]Enid Starkie, Baudelaire (Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1958), 227-236. For a discussion of the relationship between mysticism, the occult, and theosophy, and a bibliography on their influence on modern art, see Linda Henderson, "Editor's Statement: Mysticism and Occultism in Modern Art," Art Journal (Spring 1987), 5-8; Okkultisumus und Avant-Garde: Von Munch bis Mondrian, 1900-1915 (Frankfurt: Schirn Kunsthalle, 2 June - 20 Aug. 1995).

[23]Vojtech Jirat-Wasiutynski, "Paul Gauguin's 'Self-Portrait with Halo and Snake': The Artist as Initiate and Magus," Art Journal (Spring 1987), 22-8.

[24]Ghyka shows Seurat's use of the golden section in three diagrams; Ghyka drew these based on conversations with André Lhote. Ghyka, The Geometry of Art and Life, 158-159.

[25]Seurat, cited in William Innes Homer, Seurat and the Science of Painting (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1964), 185-187.

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abstraction and abstraction in Europe.[26] Picasso, Kandinsky, Mondrian, and Malevich, for example, all went through symbolist phases. The critical connection between nineteenth-century symbolism and twentieth-century modernism was the rejection of realism and naturalism. Symbolism is typically characterized as a reaction against the mounting pressures of materialism, utilitarianism, positivism, and social repression in the European capitols at the turn of the century, which resulted in increased social awareness and political activism on the part of artists.[27] The attacks on the value of painting that accompanied these pressures, led the symbolists to associate realism and naturalism with materialism,[28] and to seek refuge in mysticism, which affirmed the value of painting, and provided a secret code of meaning. The critical role Blavatsky assigned to the artist was an important factor in defining the function of the artist for the symbolists and the abstractionists alike. The tendency of the twentieth-century modernists to seek solutions in occult geometry and theories such as the fourth

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[26]Daniel Robbins, "From Symbolism to Cubism: The Abbaye of Créteil," Art Journal 23 (Winter 1963-64), 111-116; Sixten Ringbom, The Sounding Cosmos: A Study in the Spiritualism of Kandinsky and the Genesis of Abstract Painting, Acta Academiae Aboensis, vol 38, no. 2, (Abo: Abo Akademi, 1970); Tuchman, 37. Rose-Carol Washton Long, Kandinsky: The Development of an Abstract Style (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

[27]For the connection between social repression, symbolism, and code languages in Paris in the 1890s, and Seurat as a symbolist, see Natasha Staller, "Babel: Hermetic Languages, Universal Languages, and Anti-Languages in Fin de Siècle Parisian Culture," Art Bulletin 76, no. 2 (June 1994), 331-354. Because of the social issues involved, symbolism represented a general approach to life in addition to specific literary and pictorial styles. For Ringbom, the pressures of positivism were stronger in Russia than in France. Ringbom, 40.

[28]Ringbom, 39-45.

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dimension[29] was an effort to prove theosophical assertions in the face of skepticism by scientific materialists.

The Stieglitz-circle early-modernists, who provide the most important American precursors for the spiritual landscapes of the Transcendental Painting Group, have also been associated with symbolism and theosophy, but not with Swedenborgianism.[30] Bisttram's influence from Giles and Roerich rather than from the Stieglitz circle charts an essentially different development from the American early-modernists. The importance of Claude Bragdon to both groups, however, provides the essential link.[31]

Mondrian's interpretation of the transition to abstraction also includes the romantic-symbolist tradition. His explanation was that abstraction emerged through the historical alternation and synthesis of styles, specifically, that between the expression of the outward in realistic painting, and the expression of the inward in idealistic painting and romanticism.[32] These alternations and syntheses, according to Mondrian, tended to

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[29]Linda Dalrymple Henderson, The Fourth Dimension and Non-Eculidean Geometry in Modern Art (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

[30]Charles Eldredge, "Nature Symbolized: American Painting from Ryder to Hartley," in Tuchman, 117-118. The connection between Hartley, Dove, and O'Keeffe and symbolism is also discussed in Roald Nasgaard, The Mystic North: Symbolist Landscape Painting in Northern Europe and North America (1890-1940 (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1984). Sherrye Cohn, "Arthur Dove and Theosophy: Visions of a Transcendental Reality," Arts 58 (Sept. 1983), 86-91.

[31]For the relationship between Stieglitz and Bragdon, see Henderson, The Fourth Dimension, 196.

[32]Piet Mondrian, "The New Plastic in Painting" (1917), in Piet Mondrian, The New Art--the New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian, ed. and trans. Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1986), 66.

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distill painting until it arrived at the essentials of pure form and color in Cézanne, after which they were disintegrated by the cubists and futurists. Finally, painting was released from the fetters of naturalism for a "new plastic of free universal rhythm."[33]

The occult influences contributing to the romantic-symbolist side of the equation were complex. The defining difference between Blavatsky and Swedenborg, for example, is that Blavatsky advocated Buddhism as the most authentic religion, while Swedenborg advocated Christianity. Blavatsky was critical of the biblical texts and asserted that they were tampered with for political-religious reasons; Swedenborg, on the other hand, considered every word in the Bible sacred. The third major occult tradition in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was Edouard Schuré, whose Les Grand Initiés (1889) promoted the Greek mystery tradition represented by Orpheus. Schuré was widely read and has even been credited with influencing Orphic cubism.[34] What unites all of these traditions is the assertion that a spiritual world of hierarchical beings exists, and that life is a series of tests in which the individual, by asserting his will in creative acts, can redeem the evil in the world and in himself.

While many artists interested in the occult tradition saw art as a redemptive act, Mondrian's theories provide the most detailed explanation of how this is to be achieved,

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[33]Mondrian, "Realist and Superrealist Art (Morphoplastic and Neo-Plastic)," (1930) in Mondrian, 231.

[34]Bisttram also read Schuré's Les Grand Initiés (1889); see Bisttram's reading list of ca. 1930 in Appendix I. For the Orphic influence in the late nineteenth century, see Dorothy M. Kosinski, "Gustave Moreau's 'La Vie de l'humanité: Orpheus in the Context of Religious Syncretism, Universal Histories, and Occultism," Art Journal (Spring 1987), 9-14. For the influence of Schuré on the Orphic cubists, see Henderson, "Editor's Statement," 6.

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and for this reason provide the most comprehensive theoretical framework for Bisttram's spiritual approach to painting.[35] For Mondrian, art and life were analogous, and what was achieved in art was also achieved in life. The artist could work abstractly with the elements that needed to be refined for personal redemption by a distillation of opposites. By working with abstract forms, the artist united these opposites as he created, and developed a new consciousness that put him in the forefront of his time:

> Yet only the continual and repeated union of the opposites can bring about the new--progress; which is possible because new form arises through the merging of opposites into each other. This plastic expression of pure (exact) relationship is possible only when the natural in man and the spiritual within him dissolve into each other; thereby his vision of the natural is transformed, that is, it becomes abstract. ... Art can realize the union of opposites abstractly; which is why art precedes real life.[36]

Mondrian felt that abstraction actually fostered human evolution:

> Superficially seen, the gradual estrangement of painting from naturalistic representation of objects appears as decadence. In fact, however, it is an evolutionary process that has been developing throughout the ages and is now progressing with great rapidity.[37]

Like Mondrian, Bisttram sought to express the universal by sublimating the individual, and worked with the unification of opposites. Bisttram also exhibited another

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[35]Welsh has associated Mondrian's ideas with Blavatsky, and James has associated Mondrian's ideas with Hegel. Robert P. Welsh, "Mondrian and Theosophy," in Piet Mondrian: Centennial Exhibition (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1971), 35-51. Martin S. James, "Piet Mondrian: Art and Theory to 1917," in Mondrian, The New Art--The New Life, 18. According to Blavatsky, Hegel's doctrine "which identifies Absolute Being or "Be-ness 'with non-Being,' and represents the Universe as an eternal becoming, is identical with the Vedanta philosophy." Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, II, 449.

[36]Mondrian, "The New Plastic in Painting," 53.

[37]Ibid., 60.

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quality that Mondrian considered essential for the abstract artist, that of clarity. For Mondrian, the ability to rationally articulate ideas about painting developed consciousness:

> Having become conscious of the newly discovered laws of growth, he [the artist] has no choice but to defend their lawfulness: consciousness so strengthens his intuitive feeling for these laws that he can define them with certainty.[38]

Another aspect of Bisttram's development in the 1920s that was also widely influential on the early modernists was an interest in primitivism. Bisttram's primitivism was aroused by the same sources that inspired his interest in symbolism, and in his work the two interests are closely linked. Blavatsky, Swedenborg, and Roerich all considered the archaic periods of primary importance because they believed that the "ancient wisdom" was embedded in the oldest cultures. The artist and art historian Leo Katz (1887-1982), who was a formative influence on Bisttram during the 1920s, likewise asserted the importance of the primitive in his theory of art cycles, which asserted that the archaic was the most vital phase of art-making. The author argues that Bisttram's interest in Oriental art and in biblical subjects in the 1920s were derived as much from his interest in the archaic as his interest in symbolism. In the 1930s when Bisttram began treating Native American themes, his interest in the primitive became more centered in artifacts, sources more similar to the early modernists. Jungian psychology, based on theories of primitive mentality and symbolism, also reinforced Bisttram's interest in archaic cultures.

The scope of meanings that the word primitivism evoked in art circles in the late

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[38]Mondrian, "The New Plastic in Painting," 41.

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nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is an indicator of the importance of the term. In the mid-nineteenth century, the primitives were fourteenth and fifteenth-century Italian and Flemish painters; by the end of the century Egyptian and Oriental artists were included in this term, as well as African and Oceanic artists.[39] As Kirk Varnedoe showed in relation to Gauguin, the interest in primitive art was entwined with larger questions about the origins of humanity, culture, and art. A new awakening to the vitality of simplified forms that was tied into the rejection of imitation in art also connected primitivism with symbolism.[40]

The theosophical position on primitivism, that the evolution of humanity was aided by "initiates," whose ideas could be found embedded in myth and artifacts, was an important impetus for studying these cultures. The theosophist Édouard Schuré claimed that man evolved through successive races, specifically the red, black, yellow, and white races. His assertion that the red race found in North America and in Polynesia were descendants of Atlantis, and that they were succeeded by the black race, guided the interests and points of view of many of the European modernist painters, most notably Gauguin and Picasso.[41] Schuré's contention, that cultures are defined by their response

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[39]William Rubin, "Modernist Primitivism, an Introduction," in "Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern, ed. William Rubin, 2 vol. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984), I, 1-3. Robert Goldwater, Primitivism in Modern Art, rev. ed. (New York: Random House, 1967).

[40]Kirk Varnedoe, "Gauguin," in "Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern, 182.

[41]Édouard Schuré, The Great Initiates: A Study of the Secret History of Religions (1889), trans. Gloria Raspberry, introduction by Paul M. Allen (West Nyack, NY: St. George Books, 1961), 36. Picasso's misguided idea that the African artifacts he saw were

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to the problem of spiritual redemption and their struggle with materialism, led artists to search for more authentic expressions of spirituality in these non-Western cultures. The most important formal design characteristic of primitive art is symmetry.

The most spiritual aspect of Bisttram's painting in the 1920s, however, was his application of dynamic symmetry to design problems. Dynamic symmetry is based on the square and its derivative, the golden section. Hambidge did not claim to have invented dynamic symmetry. He made a bolder claim, that he "rediscovered" it, and that it was known by the Greeks, who had learned it from the Egyptians.[42] The most convincing component of the system for Bisttram, however, was its scientific aspect. The golden section, the most important form in the system, contains within it the "logarithmic spiral" that Hambidge connected with anatomy and the growth patterns of animal and plant life. The association with animal and plant life has been universally accepted by scientists; the assertion that the system was used by the Greeks has not been generally accepted by art historians. While Hambidge did not propose an occult application of the system, it was so interpreted by Bisttram, Giles, and Bragdon.

The association of the mystic and occult traditions with ancient Greek mathematics, specifically geometry, permeates all of Blavatsky's texts. Her mystical interpretation of Greek philosophy in Isis Unveiled, however, was used to further her

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older than Egyptian art may have been attributable to Schuré's concept.

[42]Hambidge provides citations that show that it was known in ancient India. Jay Hambidge, The Parthenon and Other Greek Temples: Their Dynamic Symmetry, preface by L. D. Caskey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1924), xvi, 94. The derivation of the golden section from the square is explained in Chapter 4. Hambidge took an archeological, not a spiritual or mystical position.

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fundamental argument, that is, the existence of the universal ether in which cosmic forces act geometrically to produce the effects of nature. For Bisttram, the infinitely reducible and expandable proportional areas embedded in dynamic symmetry rectangles represented the geometric movements of the forces in Blavatsky's universal ether. By ordering his compositions along the force lines of the various rectangles, Bisttram believed he was infusing the highest spiritual principles of universal order and harmony into his pictures.

The logarithmic spiral embedded in the divisions of the golden section prescribed by dynamic symmetry even replicated the vibrating spiral, one of the movements in Blavatsky's universal ether:

> "The mundane God, eternal, boundless, young and old, of winding form," say the Chaldean oracles. This 'winding form' is a figure to express the vibratory motion of the Astral Light, with which the ancient priests were perfectly well acquainted, though they may have differed in views of ether, with modern scientists; for in the Æther they placed the Eternal idea pervading the Universe, or the Will which becomes Force and creates or organizes matter.[43]

Bisttram's repeated use of the square, which is also fundamental to dynamic symmetry, was undoubtedly also based on Blavatisky's occult interpretation:

> Plato, the ardent disciple of Pythagoras, realized it so fully as to maintain that the Dodecahedron was the geometrical figure employed by the Demiurgus in constructing the universe. Some of these figures had a peculiarly solemn significance. For instance four, of which the Dodecahedron is the trine, was held sacred by the Pythagoreans. It is the perfect square, and neither of the bounding lines exceeds the other in length, by a single point. It is the emblem of moral justice and divine equity geometrically expressed. All the powers and great symphonies of physical and spiritual nature lie inscribed within the perfect square; and the ineffable name of Him, which name otherwise, would remain unutterable, was replaced by this sacred number 4 the most binding and solemn

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[43]Blavatsky, Isis Unveiled, I, 56-57.

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oath with the ancient mystics--the Tetractys.[44]

The dodecahedron, composed of twelve pentagons, is one of Plato's five regular solids. In The Timaeus, he broke each of the solids down into constituent triangles, the essential geometric form for Plato. He assigned the four elements, fire, air, earth, and water to four of the solids; later commentators assigned the ether, the enveloping element, to the dodecahedron.

In conformity with her recommendation of the square, Blavatsky also recommended the grid:

> The philosophical cross, the two lines running in opposite directions, the horizontal and the perpendicular, the height and breadth, which the geometrizing Deity divides at the intersecting point, and which forms the magical as well as the scientific quaternary, when it is inscribed within the perfect square, is the basis of the occultist. Within its mystical precinct lies the master-key which opens the door of every science, physical and well as spiritual. It symbolizes our human existence, for the circle of life circumscribes the four points of the cross, which represent in succession birth, life, death, and immortality. Everything in this world is a trinity completed by the quaternary, and every element is divisible on this same principle.[45]

While the use of a grid system by artists dates back to antiquity, Blavatsky reinforced the method theoretically as well as symbolically.

Blavatsky also argued that the best way to work was deductively, that is, following Plato's geometric model that derives particulars from universals by drawing

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[44]Ibid., I, 9. William Gerdts observed that the use of the square canvas was widely used in the late nineteenth century and was a sign of modernism. William Gerdts, "The Square Format and Proto-Modernism in American Painting," Arts 50, no. 10 (June 1976), 70-75. Coincidently, many of these square paintings were done following the publication of Blavatsky's Isis Unveiled in 1877.

[45]Blavatsky, Isis Unveiled, I, 508.

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down universal ideas from the ether. While she acknowledged that higher laws could be found in nature, that is, in particulars, she denied the efficacy of the inductive scientific method that works from nature because nature often exhibits accidental and incidental manifestations of the higher laws. Likewise, she claimed that the Creator worked deductively, that is, from the top down. Blavatsky's theory of creation as a gradual and ordered descent from the highest to the lowest, from the spiritual to the material, was one phase of the vivifying force acting in the ether.[46] The evolution of the individual on the mental plane through creative acts was the complementary reverse of this phase.

Blavatsky's universal ether was also referred to as the fourth dimension. Her concept of dimensionality spawned various attempts to develop geometrical proofs for the existence of the fourth dimension; the attempt made by Claude Bragdon influenced Bisttram's concept of art.[47] Bisttram also executed a number of works specifically based on Bragdon's interpretation.

In The Fourth Dimension, Linda Henderson shows that many Section d'Or artists, the group working in the later more intellectual phase of analytical cubism, were using a mathematical aesthetic influenced by Henri Poincaré, whose theories of the fourth dimension were similar to those which Claude Bragdon used. During one phase of their development, the Section d'Or artists were even interested in depicting Platonic solids. Henderson detects, for example, forms such as the dodecahedron in works executed in

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[46]Ibid., I, 9, 154, 237, 244.

[47]For Blavatsky's comments on the fourth dimension see, Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, I, 251-252. This is discussed further in Chapters 5 and 14.

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1910 and 1911 by Le Fauconnier and Gleize.[48] She also shows that both the cubists and the neoplasticists used shadows as reflections of the Platonic universals in the fourth dimension.[49] The interest in a mathematical aesthetic based on Plato was even more widespread. Artists as diverse as Stieglitz, Picabia, Le Corbusier, Severini, and the neoplasticists used Plato's concept that the mathematical and the beautiful were linked to support their approaches to art.[50] Denman Ross (1853-1935), whose color and design theories Bisttram used, likewise rationalized his use of a mathematical aesthetic by quoting Plato, and based many of his ideas on those of Poincaré.[51] Bisttram and his circle quoted Plato as a blind for their interest in mysticism.

Blavatsky's mystical reinterpretation of the Platonic tradition in a vocabulary of geometric form couched in terms of creativity suggests that many of these interests were inspired by her texts. She even suggests the use of shadows to depict other dimensions:

> But these shadows, if we have not given ourselves up absolutely to the sensuous nature, arouse in us the reminiscence of that higher world that we once inhabited.[52]

Evidence that interests in Plato, the fourth dimension, theosophy, and a system

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[48]Henderson, The Fourth Dimension, 86.

[49]Ibid., 143-146, 308, 315.

[50]Ibid., 215, note 173; 310, note 34; 304, 317-18. Ramon Favela gives additional examples of the use of Plato to rationalize theoretical positions in Paris during this period. Ramon Favela, Diego Rivera: The Cubist Years (Phoenix: Phoenix Art Museum, 1984), 156, note 27.

[51]Marie Ann Frank, "The Theory of Pure Design and American Architectural Education in the Early Twentieth Century" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1996), 37-38.

[52]Blavatsky, Isis Unveiled, I, xiv.

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like dynamic symmetry were tied together among the Section d'Or artists is provided by Diego Rivera's involvement with these issues during his cubist period. Rivera was introduced to Platonic aesthetics and the use of the golden section in picture construction while a student in Mexico City by teachers schooled in the German Nazarene tradition. Mondrian, whom Rivera met in 1912, was an important influence on Rivera's transition to cubism. Rivera's friendship with Picasso, beginning in 1914, was based on a mutual interest in Platonic aesthetics and mathematical systems.[53] In 1917 Rivera even built a "machine" of floating gelatin planes to study the fourth dimension. According to Lhote, Rivera was attempting to depict "Platonic essences" by depicting the silhouettes and shadows of objects.[54] Rivera is important to this inquiry because Bisttram studied with Rivera during the summer of 1931. Bisttram's assertions in lectures in Taos that Rivera used dynamic symmetry even produced a letter from one of Rivera's assistants confirming his use of the system.[55]

The extent to which the golden section was used by members of the Section d'Or has not been fully established. The name Section d'Or was probably agreed upon based

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[53]Favela, 17. Favela gives numerous references to Rivera's mysticism during this period. He also characterizes Rivera's evolution towards abstraction as a combination of positivist and symbolist influences.

[54]Ibid., 130.

[55]Hastings to (Mabel Dodge Luhan), typed copy, 28 April 1932, BP, AAA 2892:172-3. For a transcript of this letter, see Appendix V. Luhan probably doubted Bisttram's assertion that Rivera used dynamic symmetry, resulting in Luhan's writing to Rivera to check on Bisttram's claim.

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on its associations with mathematics, mysticism, and the historical tradition.[56] Gris, Kupka, and Rivera, however, all brought an intense interest in the golden section with them to Paris, and both Rivera and Kupka learned of it through the Nazarene tradition.[57] Seurat's use of the golden section suggests that it was used in the late nineteenth century. DeLeftwich Dodge, who studied with Gérôme in the 1890s, told Bisttram he learned dynamic symmetry in Paris. Grid systems, some of which were associated with theosophy, were also popular in Holland in the 1890s.[58] Additionally, there were a considerable number of publications on the golden section by mathematicians in the nineteenth century.[59]

Lhote's assertion that golden section compasses were available and widely used,[60] is confirmed in an article by Hambidge. Hambidge noted that they were widely used by British artists and that they were made by a German manufacturer. Hambidge discouraged their use, however, explaining that it encouraged applying the golden section arbitrarily to any line within a composition. For Hambidge the critical element of

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[56]William A. Camfield and Daniel Robbins, Albert Gleizes and the Section D'Or (New York: Leonard Hutton Galleries, 1964).

[57]Serge Fauchereau, Kupka, trans. Richard-Lewis Rees (New York: Rizzoli, 1989).

[58]Carel Blotkamp, Mondrian: The Art of Destruction, trans. Barbara Potter Fasting (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1995), 112-113.

[59]A review of the literature on the golden section prior to about 1915 is provided in R. C. Archibald, "Notes on the Logarithmic Spiral, Golden Section and the Fibonacci Series, in Hambidge, The Greek Vase, 152-154. R. C. Archibald, Professor of Mathematics at Brown University, was a great supporter of Hambidge.

[60]Lhote, quoted in William A. Camfield, "Juan Gris and the Golden Section," Art Bulletin XLVII (March 1962), 130.

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composition was areas, and golden section areas could be applied successfully to compositions only when they related proportionately to other parts of the canvas.[61]

Interest in theosophy by artists in Paris in the teens is also not without some support. Kupka's interest in theosophy has been documented, as has Duchamp's and Rivera's. Also of interest is the combination of interests in theosophy and science found in the work of Kupka and Duchamp.[62] Léonce Rosenberg, the primary Parisian dealer for the cubists during and following World War I, and Rivera's only dealer during the war years, was also a theosophist, and strongly believed in "Cubism as a renascence of the spiritual, a road leading to Knowledge, the domain of the true initiates, les initiés."[63]

The use of the golden section to organize a composition can be seen in a painting dating from ca. 1919-1924 by Le Corbusier (fig. 1). His diagram of the painting shows that he inscribed the golden section within the borders of the of the painting, and used the lines to place compositional elements.[64] While Le Corbusier denied being a mystic, he considered mathematics to be the "door of miracles" that leads to "the realm of the

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[61]Jay Hambidge, "The Fallacy of the 'So-Called Golden Compass,'" The Diagonal 1, no. 5 (March 1920), 89-92. Additionally, Hambidge felt that the golden section, which he did not observe used frequently by the Greeks, was a derivation of the root-five rectangle. This is explained in Chapter 4.

[62]Linda Henderson, "X Rays and the Quest for Invisible Reality in the Art of Kupka, Duchamp, and the Cubists," Art Journal 47 (Winter 1988), 323-40. Linda Henderson, Duchamp in Context: Science and Technology in the Large Glass and Related Works (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

[63]Blotkamp, 182.

[64]On his diagram Le Corbusier uses ϕ, the Greek letter phi, to represent the golden section. This symbol for the golden section is widely used by mathematicians.

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gods,"[65] and dedicated his life to promulgating a mathematical approach to architecture. Bisttram used the golden section much like Le Corbusier.

The artist most clearly associated with theosophy and the grid is Mondrian. His insistent use of the square, and his use of the "perpendicular" to represent opposites, situates him within the orbit of theosophical mathematics. After experimenting with the grid, however, Mondrian ultimately rejected it, preferring pure intuition for establishing the internal rhythms of his compositions. His rejection of mathematics was based on its references to nature:

> Mathematics, the science dealing with properties of magnitude insofar as they can be calculated or measured, has nothing to do with the creation of free rhythm in art. Mathematics that uses morphoplastic means such as geometry (therefore limited form) has a natural character in spite of its abstract appearance. But because free rhythm and mathematics both use the straight line as a means of expression, and because both show the same exactness and certainty, it may still be possible to use mathematics after having created the composition, as, for example, Vantongerloo claims.[66]

Mondrian did assert, however, that by reducing his vocabulary to straight lines and color planes he was working from the universal, rather than from the particular.

> Increasingly, then, the artist of the future will be able to begin from the universal, whereas the artist of today had to start from the natural (the individual). Our time is to be seen as the great turning point: from now on humanity will no longer move from individual to universal, but from the universal to the individual through which the universal can be realized.[67]

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[65]Le Corbusier, The Modulor 1 and 2 (1949, 1955), trans. Peter De Francia and Anna Bostock (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), I, 71, 100.

[66]Mondrian, "Realist and Superrealist Art (Morphoplastic and Neo-Plastic)" (1930), in Mondrian, 231.

[67]Mondrian, "The New Plastic in Painting," in Mondrian, 62.

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The Belgian painter and sculptor, Georges Vantongerloo, on the other hand, relied on mathematics and used a grid system throughout his career.[68] Vantongerloo's studies for a painting of a nude figure (fig. 2), published in a 1918 issue of de Stijl, demonstrate his use of a system similar to dynamic symmetry. Vantongerloo's explanation, that he was attempting to express relationships between the vibrations of circles, suggests that he was trying to express forces within Blavatsky's "universal ether."[69] Blavatsky's occult interpretation of the square may have influenced his selection of that shape for the final canvas. Vantongerloo's method, starting with a free-hand sketch, and then proceeding to order it within an organizing geometric format to emphasize the dynamic relationships of the parts is similar to the methods of dynamic symmetry, and to the methods Bisttram used. Furthermore, dynamic symmetry, like the system used by Vantongerloo, tends to reject the use of perspective in favor of the flat plane of the canvas.[70]

Theosophy was also a component of Suprematism, the Russian cosmological approach, which has been connected with an impulse to depict the fourth dimension as well as with science. Malevich used the term the fourth dimension in his titles;[71] also,

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[68]Mondrian called Vantongerloo an "ordinary theosophist" because he took theosophical ideas literally. He criticized Vantongerloo's use of the grid because of its tie to nature. Mondrian (to Van Doesburg), L, 5 Sept. 1920, cited in Mondrian, 133.

[69]Sixten Ringbom, "Transcending the Visible: The Generation of the Abstract Pioneers" in Tuchman, 148-9.

[70]Some of Vantongerloo's drawings are very similar to Bisttram's. See, for example, Georges Vantongerloo (Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery, 1980), 52.

[71]Henderson, The Fourth Dimension, 282.

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his use of the square may have derived from Blavatsky. The evolution of Blavatsky, Ouspensky, and Roerich within the Russian tradition attests to the impact of its theosophical roots. Additionally, it was in Russia between 1914 and 1921 that Kandinsky made the theoretical adjustments that triggered his transition into a geometric style by exposure to constructivism.[72]

The geometrical styles of Kandinsky and his follower Rudoph Bauer were the most important stylistic and spiritual precedents for Bisttram's transcendental works. While Kandinsky didn't necessarily use the grid, the vocabulary of movement and direction that he applies to forms and colors presented in Punct und Linie zu Fläche (1926) is based on the unseen forces which move and pulsate geometrically through Blavatsky's universal ether.[73] This is supported by the sequence "point, line, plane, solid" that she uses in her theory of creation, which she credits to Pythagoras:

> In the Pythagorean Theogony the hierarchies of the heavenly Host and Gods were numbered and expressed numerically. Pythagoras had studied Esoteric Science in India; therefore we find his pupils saying "the monad (the manifested one) is the principle of all things. From the Monad and the indeterminate duad (Chaos), numbers; from numbers, Points; from points, Lines; from lines, Superficies; from superficies, Solids; from these, solid Bodies, whose elements are four--Fire, Water, Air, Earth; of all which transmuted (correlated) and totally changed, this

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[72]Rose-Carol Washton Long, "Vasily Kandinsky: Light Circle," in New York Collects: Drawings and Watercolors 1900-1950 (New York: Pierpont Morgan Library, 1999), 202. Vivian E. Barnett, Vasily Kandinsky, A Colorful Life: The Collection of the Lenbachhaus, Munich (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1996), 517-519.

[73]Wassily Kandinsky, Punkt und Linie Zu Fläche: Beitrag zur analyse der malerischen elemente, Bauhausbücher 9 (München: Verlag Albert Langen, 1926). Ringbom acknowledges Kandinsky's use of the ether, but calls it the "spiritual atmosphere." Sixten Ringbom, "Transcending the Visible: The Generation of the Abstract Pioneers," in Tuchman, 139.

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world consists." –(Diogenes Laertius in Vit. Pythag.)[74]

Bisttram was introduced to Punct und Linie zu Fläche (1926) in the late 1920s by Leo Katz. Bisttram immediately made the theosophical connections, and embedded the concept of "point, line, plane, solid" into his aesthetic approach. Bisttram associated these elements of art with fire, air, water, and earth, the primitive elements of nature, much the way Plato associated the nature elements with the regular solids. Additionally, Bisttram, following Plato and others, asserted that one could be transmuted into the other. Bisttram's attribution of mystical properties to the elements of art was based on the mystical properties attributed to the nature elements. The occult tradition holds that the nature elements, termed "elemental spirits," exist and act as formative and generative entities. In the Middle Ages they were called gnomes (earth), sylphs (air), salamanders (fire), and undines (water); there was also an artistic tradition to represent them.

While a cursory comparison between Bisttram's transcendental works and Kandinsky and Bauer's abstract works from the 1920s and 1930s makes him a "late follower," the author argues that based on Bisttram's immediate apprehension of Kandinsky and Bauer's theosophical motives, Bisttram extended their vocabulary and made some original thematic statements. Even though Kandinsky and Bisttram worked in divergent styles in their early periods, their early development can be similarly characterized by an interest in depicting primitive, biblical, and redemptive themes

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[74]Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, I, 433-4. Ouspensky also gives this sequence. These citations are discussed in Chapter 7.

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based on occult texts. Influenced by Roerich, Bisttram even used the theme of a rider wielding a sword.

Bisttram's introduction to Punct und Linie zu Fläche (1926) in the late 1920s complemented his other major interest of the period--design theory. In the 1920s Bisttram was working in advertising, executing designs in the reigning art deco style, to support his pursuit of fine art. By combining commercial work with dynamic symmetry, color theory, and Kandinsky's design principles, his approach to fine art became aligned with the design tradition. He was also stimulated in this direction by Denman Ross's design theory, which is strikingly similar to Kandinsky's. Ross also personally introduced him to his color theories, and looked and approved the palettes that Bisttram prepared.[75] The theories of Hambidge, Ross, and Kandinsky were the foundation of Bisttram's scientific approach to art.

By allying himself with the design tradition, Bisttram separated himself from those artists who were interested in individual self-expression. Bisttram always referred to his art as "impersonal." His primary preoccupation with drawing and his "problem solving" approach are other signs of his commitment to design. Bisttram's infusion of spiritual ideas into this mix is also not without precedent in this period. While Kandinsky comes immediately to mind, Claude Bragdon provided the primary model with his writings that synthesized architectural design theory and theosophy, interpreted with

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[75] Denman Ross, A Theory of Pure Design: Harmony, Balance, Rhythm (Boston: Houghton, 1907).

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drawings executed in an art nouveau style.[76]

Concern with design and the development of design theory dates to the mid-nineteenth century when controversies broke out over the quality of machine-made goods.[77] Exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art dedicated to design during the 1920s underscore the importance of this subject to the period.[78] While design has been most closely associated with the applied arts, its influence on the fine arts in the twentieth century has been profound and must be factored into any definition of modernism. Bisttram's wedding of design theory to fine art was an important trend in art during the period under examination. During the 1920s and 1930s, this approach was promoted in Europe, the Soviet Union, and America. While Moholy-Nagy in Chicago, Albers at Yale, and Gropius at Harvard are the most well-known advocates of the design approach in the United States, Bisttram's design course developed for the Master Institute in the late 1920s and a similar curriculum for his Taos School, places him within the same tradition.

Bisttram's move to Taos in 1931 situated him in an atmosphere where a conservative, regionalist approach to painting prevailed. He worked initially at applying Rivera's stylistic formula to figural compositions, religious subjects, and portraits. His

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[76]Claude Bragdon, The Beautiful Necessity: Seven Essays on Theosopohy and Architecture (New York: Knopf, 1910).

[77]E. H. Gombrich, The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art, The Wrightsman Lectures delivered under the auspices of the New York University Institute of Fine Arts (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979).

[78]R. Craig Miller, Modern Design in the Metropolitan Museum of Art 1890-1990 (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1990).

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adoption of Ouspensky's aesthetic of eternal search, however, encouraged him to experiment with other styles.[79] Stimulated by Pueblo ceremonial life, Bisttram began interpreting Native American dance using futurism and synthetic cubism.

About 1936, Bisttram began working on a series of drawings totally dedicated to occult themes that established a vocabulary of meaning for the forms he used in his transcendental works that followed. The stylistic innovations that accompanied his transition to occult subjects were also conditioned by further readings in theosophy, particularly the writings of Alice Bailey (1880-1949), and in psychology, especially the writings of C. G. Jung (1875-1961) and Otto Rank (1884-1939). Bailey's insistence that meditation involved the development of abstract thinking provided an important incentive for working abstractly in art. Additionally, Jung's Commentary on The Secret of the Golden Flower, in which he associated of art-making, meditation, and individuation, with his theory of opposites encouraged Bisttram to more explicitly express occult ideas in painting.

It is specifically in the context of Bisttram's reading of Jung, that the importance of the relationships among Transcendental Painting Group members become critical. The theosophist Dane Rudhyar (1895-1985), who became the theorist for the group, was at the same time developing his theory of transcendental painting by combining ideas from Jung and theosophy. During this period Rudhyar also started to paint under Raymond Jonson, another group member. Bisttram's involvement with the Group is discussed

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[79]P. D. Ouspensky, Tertium Organum: A Key to the Enigmas of the World, translated from the Russian by Nicholas Bessaraboff and Claude Bragdon, with an introduction by Claude Bragdon (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1920).

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primarily in terms of his relationship with Rudhyar.

The events and relationships leading to the creation of the Transcendental Painting Group are treated in the final chapter of the dissertation. The author shows that it was much more than the "serendipitous alliance of convenience" claimed by Marianne Lorenz."[80] Dane Rudhyar, writing in advance of his first trip to Taos, expressed it this way: "When the magnetic center, the Purpose, the clear vision and the will are there, one by one the individuals are drawn into the magic circle."[81] His manuscript, The Transcendental Movement in Painting (1938), inspired by the exchange of ideas among members, provides compelling testimony for the ideological cohesiveness of the Group. His manuscript further reveals that he and Bisttram had similar ideas about what transcendental painting was, and the forms that should be used to express transcendental ideas in painting.

The main thrust of Rudhyar's argument was that transcendental art is a symbolic undertaking and that the transcendental artist draws these symbols from the collective unconscious. Rudhyar defined transcendental art as a process of self-induced transformation that produces archetypal symbols of a sacred nature. His concept is based partly on Jung's theory of individuation, which holds that a symbol is generated from a process of reconciling the conscious with the collective unconscious, and partly on theosophical theory. Rudhyar's theosophical interpretation of Jung placed the

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[80]Marianne Lorenz, "Kandinsky and Regional America," in Levin and Lorenz, 90.

[81]Dane Rudhyar to (Mabel Dodge Luhan), ALS, 2 July [1925], Mabel Dodge Luhan Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

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contents of the collective unconscious in Blavatsky's "universal ether." For Rudhyar, the symbols drawn out of the collective unconscious were necessarily geometric since they alone represented universal truths. Based on Jung's distinction between the personal and collective unconscious, Rudhyar asserted, for example, that surrealist imagery derives from the personal unconscious.

Mondrian also applied his theory of opposites to the conscious and the unconscious, placing the particular and individual in the conscious, and the universal and the general in the unconscious, and postulated that unity and reality could be achieved by a union with the two:

> Art transcends particular thought as the unconscious (the universal) transcends individual consciousness. In the moment of aesthetic creation, when the universal (the unconscious) pierces the conscious, when the complete vision of things as a whole is finally achieved, the particular no longer matters. For this reason art's mission resides in the plastic suppression of particular thought.[82]

Bisttram's turn toward a geometric style as his subjects became more occult and subjective confirms Mondrian's theory that abstraction is a result of a more "inward" approach to painting.

> In Abstract-Real painting we see the transition from the naturalistic to the abstract as a transition from (outward) impure nature to pure inward nature, and from impure spirit to pure spirit (the universal).[83]

Bisttram's application of Jungian ideas and techniques to his painting is another confirmation of his essentially redemptive approach to aesthetics. Bisttram, however,

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[82]Mondrian, "Neo Plasticism: The General Principle of Plastic Equivalence," (1920), in Mondrian, 142.

[83]Mondrian, "The New Plastic in Painting" (1917), in Mondrian, 56.

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did not purify his elements as much as Mondrian. His continued use of scaled colors and forms that referred to specific ideas remained individual in comparison to Mondrian's more universal primary colors and forms that expressed "equilibrated balance." During his transcendental period, Bisttram, however, did execute a series of abstract compositions in "pure design" that approach Mondrian's aesthetic.

The Transcendental Painting Group, as an organization of artists, was an important manifestation of the spiritual aims of American artists at a time when spiritual painting was at a low ebb. Richard Pousette-Dart recalled, for example, that "To use the word spiritual in the late 1930s and 1940s... was near-heresy and dangerous to an artist's career."[84] The religious outlook of spiritual painting always remained an undercurrent because it challenged the materialism of the larger social framework. Materialism was particularly dominant in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s--the 1920s concerned with problems of surplus and extravagance, and the 1930s with shortages and thrift. Although there were many artists working with spiritual ideas during the period, they were overshadowed by more aggressive factions such as the regionalists and the leftists. The emerging formalist approach to art criticism, exemplified by Alfred Barr's Cubism and Abstract Art (1936), which discounted the value of meaning in art, further marginalized the artists concerned with the spiritual dimensions of art.[85]

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[84]Tuchman, 18.

[85]Alfred Barr, Cubism and Modern Art (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936). For the hostility of politicized critics to mysticism in expressionist art in Germany in the early 1920s, see Rose-Carol Washton Long, "Expressionism, Abstraction, and the Search for Utopia in Germany," in Tuchman, 207-8.

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There was some support for the spiritual dimensions of abstract painting, however, in New York. The most important encouragement came from the Museum of Non-Objective Art, directed by Hilla Rebay.[86] Although she primarily promoted European painters, she also exhibited and collected works by the more spiritually-oriented members of the American Abstract Artists, and exhibited some works by members of the Transcendental Painting Group. Spiritual painting had been supported by earlier forerunners such as 291, Alfred Steiglitz's gallery founded in 1905, and The Société Anonyme, founded in 1920 by Katherine Dreier and Marcel Duchamp. None of the Transcendental Painting Group members were involved with either of these two groups, except the Canadian painter Lawren Harris, an avowed theosophist, who joined the latter in 1927.

In this environment of hostility to the expression of the spiritual in art, it is remarkable that an association dedicated to the promotion of non-objective art and spiritual ideas in painting was founded in 1938. The impulse to form an organization of

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[86]In 1936 Hilla Rebay began using the term "non-objective" to refer to Kandinsky and Bauer's abstract works from the 1920s and 1930s. Kandinsky and Mondrian, however, took exception to her use of this term, which she had translated from the German word gegenstandslos, a term that Kandinsky did use. A better translation for this word, which retains the original meaning, is "without objects." The term "non-objective" gives the idea of subjectivity, which is contrary to the intended meaning. Rose-Carol Washton Long, "Non-Objective," in Guggenheim Museum: A to Z, ed. Nancy Spector (New York: The Guggenheim Foundation, 1992), 200.

Following Rebay, Bisttram used the term "non-objective" to describe his geometrical abstractions. His use of this term is discussed in Chapter 13, which is devoted to the curriculum he developed for his Taos School of Art. In this curriculum, he distinguished between "abstract" and "non-objective" approaches to painting. The author, however, uses the more generally accepted terms "proto-abstract" and "abstract" to distinguish these two types of painting. When Rebay's terms are used, they are placed within quotation marks.

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artists, however, was typical of the period and follows in a long line of European and American precursors. Three of the members had even previously been formative agent in founding groups themselves--Harris was a founding member of the Group of Seven in 1920; Jonson was a founding member of Cor Ardens in 1921, and Six Men in 1927; and Bisttram was a founding member of Taos Heptagon in 1933.[87] The most immediate precedent for the Transcendental Painting Group, however, was the American Abstract Artists, who first exhibited together in New York in 1937. With aims similar to the Transcendental Painting Group, they sought recognition for a movement of American artists working in abstract idioms. By exhibiting together as a group, they challenged the prevailing association of American art with regionalism and social realism. The much larger American Abstract Artists, with fifty-three members in 1939, however, was not able to focus its aims as clearly as the Transcendental Painting Group, and did not have a spiritual platform.

Precursors for the American Abstract Artists include Art Concret, Cercle et Carré, and Abstraction-Création, Non-Figuratif in Paris, and Unit One, Axis, and Circle in London; they were dedicated, for the most part, to promoting a hard-edged abstraction. While most were short-lived, their inter-relationships show the strength of the trend. Art Concret was founded by Theo Van Doesburg and others in 1929. Van Doesburg brought Mondrian's neo-plastic theory, based on theosophy, and de Stijl concerns, to the group.

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[87]Bisttram and Jonson also founded art schools; Bisttram founded the Taos School of Art in 1932, which operated primarily during the summers, and the Bisttram School of Art in Los Angeles, which operated during the winters between 1945 and 1951. Jonson founded the Atalayla School in Santa Fe in 1926.

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Cercle et Carré (Sun and Earth) was founded in 1930 by Torres-Garcia and Michel Seuphor as a reaction against surrealism. The group included Léger, Mondrian, Kandinsky, and others. Abstraction-Création was founded in 1931, drawing many of its members from Art Concret and Cercle et Carré. Abstraction-Création boasted 415 members by 1935, with many Americans joining. The Abstract American Artists and the English groups were all spawned by Abstraction-Création; Jean Hélion, for example, who had been a member of Art Concret and Abstraction-Création, was involved in founding both the American Abstract Artists and Axis.[88]

As is shown in the final chapter, although Raymond Jonson did most of the organizational work for The Transcendental Painting Group, the initial idea was Bisttram's. While it is uncertain which of these groups Bisttram knew about, he may have been inspired by these to found the Transcendental Painting Group. This is all to suggest that the Transcendental Painting Group was the last in a long series of artists's groups dedicated to promoting abstract art founded before World War II.

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[88]Marie Solway Schipper, "Jean Hélion: The Abstract Years, 1929-1939" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1974), 45-47, 54, 99-100.

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Chapter 3

Early Life

Emil James Bisttram was born Emilian Bistran in 1895 in the small town of Nadlak, Hungary, near the Romanian border. He was baptized in the Romanian Greek Orthodox Church in Nadlak, where his parents, Stefan (Istvan) and Emila Olariu (b. 1876) Bistran were members. Bisttram's baptismal certificate gives his birth and baptismal dates according to both the Gregorian and Julian calendars, and is written in both Romanian and Hungarian.[1] According to the Gregorian calendar he was born on 27 March and baptized on 28 March. According to the Julian calendar he was born on 8 April and baptized on 9 April. While Hungary adopted the Julian Calendar reforms in 1587, shortly after they were recommended by the Roman Catholic Church in 1582, the Romanian Greek Orthodox Church did not adopt the Julian calendar until after 1912.[2] Bisttram, however, always celebrated his birthday on 7 April. He probably felt that the time difference between Hungary and New York warranted celebrating his birthday a day earlier. Additionally, as will be shown, the number seven had a tremendous importance to Bisttram. He may have changed the celebration of his birthday for similarly occult reasons as he changed the spelling of his name.

Bisttram's maternal grandfather was the chief judge of the town of Nadlak and owned a successful sheepskin tailoring house.[3] Stefan Bistran was working as an

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[1]"Baptismal Record," BP, AAA 2787:207. Since Bisttram was baptized in the Romanian Greek Orthodox Church, his mother was probably Romanian; Bisttram's father was Hungarian.

[2]C. A. R., "Calendar," in Encyclopedia Britannica, 15th ed.

[3]Bisttram, The Creative Process, BP, AAA 2893: 435.

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apprentice in this company when he met and married Emilia Olariu, the eldest daughter of the owner. Bistran's duties at work included designing the elaborate embroidery designs that were an important element of sheepskin coats. Later he also designed and cut the coats. A few years after Emil was born, the young family relocated to Budapest, where Stefan Bistran took a job at Revillon Frères, an international fur house. Three more children were born to the family, Stephen (1898-1977) in Nadlak. and Margaret (later Mrs. Alfred Lindeman) and Julius (1904-1979) in Budapest. The move to Budapest may have been in 1902 since Bisttram's parents may have obtained his baptismal record, dated 4 September/22 August 1902, in preparation for the move.

Once the family was settled in Budapest, Emil's father, busy with travel related to work, came home less and less often. Sending financial support infrequently, the family slowly drifted into poverty. Bisttram recalled his mother reading him Hungarian fairy tales and the poetry of John Milton. Soon the young Bisttram, however, was wandering further and further from home each day, sometimes not returning at night. When he was about seven years old, his mother, not able to control him, sent him back to Nadlak to live with his maternal grandparents.

Since in the interim his grandmother had died and his grandfather had remarried, Bisttram was not welcomed into their home as family. He was sent out to do chores with the servants, and was later hired out to work for a farming family. After continued dissatisfactory performances, Bisttram was returned to his mother in Budapest. While Emil had been away, his father had been transferred to New York. His mother was waiting for him to send the money that would enable the family to join him. The family departed from Trieste in steerage class on the ship Carpathia and arrived in New York on 6 June 1906. Bisttram never returned to Europe.

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The family settled into a Manhattan apartment on Avenue B at the corner of Seventeenth Street, a neighborhood populated by Irish, Polish, and Hungarian immigrants.[4] Bisttram soon encountered the local gangs on his nightly errand down to a saloon on Twelfth Street for a bottle of Schlivowitz for his father. Going below Fourteenth Street meant crossing over the front line between two gang territories. Bisttram had his first fight when his father made him stand up to one of the young boys who was harassing him. Bisttram's father watched while the two boys fought, and then split them up when it became obvious that neither was going to win.

In September, Bisttram entered school for the first time. Although he recalled that he did not attend school in Hungary, he stated that he spoke, read, and wrote Hungarian, and spoke and read some Rumanian on his Guggenheim application.[5] He attended P.S. 40 on East Nineteenth Street, then an all boys junior high school,[6] probably entering in the fifth or sixth grade. Here he gained his first introduction to the English language. Bisttram began making drawings at this time, mostly of ships, presumably having been much impressed with the long ocean crossing from Trieste. Bisttram attributed much of his later involvement with gangs to rebelliousness against his father's annoyance and displeasure at seeing him draw and his desire to be an artist.[7]

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[4]The address Bisttram provided on his registration card for a class at the National Academy of Design in October 1913 was 299 Avenue B, corner 17th Street. Archives of the National Academy of Design.

[5]Bisttram, "Fellowship Application Form," 1930, Bisttram File, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, New York.

[6]The school was then called Wingate Junior High. Secretary, P.S. 40, telephone interview with the author.

[7]Carlson, 1.

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A short time later Bisttram's father was sent off to Paris on business, and as before, left the family with little in the way of financial resources. Bisttram's mother earned some money doing piece work at home making paper flowers, and Bisttram collected scrap pieces of wood and coal which he sold on the street.

After his father returned from abroad, family life resumed as before, except that Bisttram was becoming more and more involved with the local gang on Eighteenth Street, of which he had become the leader. They started a boxing club in the basement of his apartment house and led attacks against the other gangs--particularly the Jewish gang which ruled below Fourteenth Street. Bisttram's gang was protected by the Irish policemen and the Irish-Catholic priests who allowed them to hide in the church basement when they got in trouble.

After a particularly bad fight with the school bully, the school principal sent a note home asking Bisttram's father to come to school the next day. Bisttram recalled the event vividly:

> The following day he [my father] came with me and we sat together in the front row of the classroom waiting to see what punishment I would receive. Finally my teacher came in after conferring with the principal and asked my father to give me a good beating in front of the class. After quite a tussle he succeeded and I became angry with him for humiliating me before my classmates. In my great anger I hit him once or twice and he went down, out cold. The teacher came to help him and he was also knocked out. As a result I was expelled from school and, as I later found out, was barred from all schools in Manhattan. I never did go to school again after the seventh grade.[8]

Although corporal punishment by school officials had been banned for some time in the New York City public schools, in reality it was being inflicted almost constantly. The practice of having a parent come in and punish a child in the presence of the Principal

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[8]Bisttram, The Creative Process, BP, AAA 2893: 450.

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seems to have been common, and was even proposed for adoption by the School Board.[9] This idea, however, was summarily quashed at the request of the Board of Aldermen,[10] and obviously backfired in Bisttram's case.

No longer in school, Bisttram earned money selling newspapers, scraps of wood, and coal. The situation with his father was deteriorating rapidly:

> My father would come home loaded--not only with groceries but pretty well 'liquored up'--bringing his old Hungarian cronies to the house on Saturday nights. There would be one or two violins, much singing and drinking until all hours of the following morning, and usually ending up with a quarrel with my mother who would try to get them out of the house.
>
> Having witnessed many of these Hungarian drinking parties--singing the same old sentimental songs of the past about the heroism of the Hungarians and Austrians in their war with Russia and the famous double-cross by the Russians, I swore I would never have anything to do with Hungarians, or for that matter, with any Europeans. I was now an American and no longer cared to speak my own mother tongue; I would only speak in English and answer in English.[11]

The reference to the double cross by the Russians undoubtedly refers to the Russian intervention in the Hungarian Revolution of 1848. The Hungarian Revolution followed in the wake of the revolution in Vienna that ousted Austria's Prime Minister Metternich. Hungary declared independence from Austria, and was successful in holding off Austrian troops until Austria called on the Russian Czar Nicholas I, whose troops defeated the insurgent Hungarians. In 1867 a compromise was reached whereby Hungary received some status as a Dual Monarchy in equal partnership with Austria, and Hungary was granted some autonomy in the form of a parliament. Hungarian politics up until 1914 were split between the 67ers who were satisfied with the compromise, and the 48ers

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[9]"Urges Whipping in the Schools," New York Times, 14 Feb. 1908, p. 6.

[10]"...Voted by the Aldermen, Who also Declare Against Corporal Punishment," New York Times, 19 Feb. 1908, p. 3.

[11]Bisttram, The Creative Process, BP, AAA 2893: 451.

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who were not. Bisttram's father was presumably one of the 48ers, the more intransigent of the two groups.[12] Bisttram's aversion to his father's sentimentality became a personality trait and carried over into his taste in art and approach to painting.

With the situation at home worsening, Bisttram continued to associate with local gangs until he got into real trouble. He related the story as follows:

> I was also the leader of a well-known gang, winning boxing matches at boys' clubs and with the boys in their various groups who were still having gang wars. The last of these occurred when we got word by 'moccasin telegraph' that on a certain day the Twelfth Street gang was preparing to come up to Eighteenth Street to attack our group and generally create trouble. We immediately began readying our ammunition on the roofs of the buildings (they had done this to us one time and we had never forgotten it). We piled bricks and bottles on the roofs and even large ashcans filled with garbage and then hid in the hallways or on the roofs waiting for the gang to come marching up the street. When they were close enough, down came the ammunition from above. Many were hurt and one boy who was struck by an ashcan died within a few days.[13]

Bisttram, his best friend Stephen Gunther, and Sam Lerner, the leader of the Twelfth Street gang, were arrested and brought into juvenile court. After a few days in jail, the boys were given three years probation and assigned guardians who would assist the boys in straightening out their lives.

The New York City Children's Court, established about 1902, was a humane institution[14] and Bisttram was treated fairly, and in fact, his whole life was changed for the better because of it. The guardians assigned to Bisttram and the other two boys were volunteers who served as probation officers since the Children's Court was sorely understaffed. The three guardians were all members of the Big Brothers Organization,

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[12]Emil Lengyel, The Land and People of Hungary (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1965), 81.

[13]Bisttram, The Creative Process, BP, AAA 2893:451.

[14]"Children's Court Making Citizens," New York Times, 31 Jan. 1910, p. 16.

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one of a number of such organizations that served the Court, as well as members of St. George's Protestant Episcopal Church on Stuyvesant Square, in Bisttram's general neighborhood.

The most prominent member of St. George's was J. Pierpont Morgan, who supported the church generously. Dr. Rainsford, Rector of St. George's from 1883 to 1906, gained Morgan's confidence, and broadened the mission of the church to include social improvement and service to the neighborhood. The Church reached out to the community by expanding its facilities to include a social center, clubhouse, and gymnasium, as well as classes for women in millinery, dressmaking, embroidery, and cooking; and for boys a trade school.[15]

Bisttram's guardian, St. John Duval, a prominent member of society who lived on Park Avenue and worked on Wall Street, considered Bisttram's desire to study art impractical and arranged for him to enroll in a trade school. Trade schools were much talked about in educational circles at the time, and Bisttram was fortunate to be placed in a new experimental program at PS 100 at Fifth Avenue and 138th Street. The program included general education subjects such as English, mathematics, physics, and chemistry, in addition to courses in woodworking, sheet metal, plumbing, printing, and mechanical drawing.[16]

Bisttram did well in this setting and received his diploma. He also gained his first training in art from the drawing teacher, a German émigré typographer. After Bisttram

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[15]"St. George's Celebrates 100th Anniversary," New York Times, 12 Nov. 1911, sec. 5, p. 11.

[16]"Vocational School at Work, Institution Long Advocated, a Branch of Public School 100," New York Times, 5 June 1910, sec. 3, p. 7.

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made it known that he wanted to be an artist, Mr. Kotch, gave him a series of assignments based on the methods by which he was trained. Wadding up three pieces of newspaper into a ball, he assigned Bisttram the task of drawing them, including all the lettering and pictures, in pencil on a sheet of bristol board. Bisttram spent three months of class time completing this project. The next assignment was to draw the same wadded up newspaper balls in pen and ink; the third assignment was to execute it in black and white watercolor washes. Next, he assigned Bisttram to draw the branch of a tree, again, first in pencil, then in pen and ink, and finally in black and white washes.[17] The patience Bisttram developed executing these projects and the pleasure he found in this work provided a tremendous impetus for him to continue his artistic studies and characterized his future artistic undertakings.

St. John Duval also invited Bisttram to join St. George's, and encouraged him to become active in the sports activities at the church gym. Bisttram went to the gym almost every evening after school and joined the boxing, wrestling, and basketball teams. He also ran in the Mail Marathon, a twelve-mile run sponsored by the Evening Mail, a New York newspaper, and in various cross-country races. The highlight of his activities at the gym was sparring with the lightweight champion Freddy Welsh, who was preparing for a match with Benny Leonard.

As Bisttram matured, he began to find pleasure in reading:

> But in spite of my success in sports and gym work, I was beginning to feel as though something were missing. My interests in these activities was lessening and I began spending time at the libraries, reading the English classics, Western philosophers, the American Transcendentalist Emerson, Walt Whitman, Thoreau and others, all of which made me more and more anxious to be done with carpentry school and get on with other things. I realized how much I had to

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[17]Bisttram, The Creative Process, BP, AAA 2893: 456-460.

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learn and to do, for the urge to be an artist had become one of my principal concerns.[18]

After graduating from trade school, Bisttram was placed in a carpentry shop. He still wanted to be an artist, and so went out looking for a job in commercial art. He changed jobs every month for about a year without any luck. He then sought advice from the Rector of St. George's, Dr. Karl Reiland,[19] who suggested that he take a night course in commercial art at Stuyvesant High School, and recommended him for an office job at the American Lithography Company.

After a short time at American Lithography Bisttram realized that he would never get a job in their art department. So, "borrowing" some illustrations from the art room, he went on an interview for a job as a letterer and designer at the Rosenbaum Studios. Setting Bisttram to work, Maury Rosenbaum immediately figured out that Bisttram had not done the samples that he had brought in. But he also recognized Bisttram from boxing matches, and so hired him to run errands, do paste ups, and in general learn the business. Thus Bisttram got his first break in commercial art.

Full of confidence, and needing to learn to draw the figure, Bisttram applied to the evening class at the National Academy of Design to study the figure with Ivan Olinsky in 1913.[20] He was shocked that he had to begin by drawing from plaster casts for three years before entering the figure class, but began anyway. After three months

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[18]Ibid., 2893: 465.

[19]Dr. Karl Reiland (1871-1964) was appointed Rector of St. George's in 1912. "Accepts St. George's Call, The Rev. Karl Reiland to Become Rector on Oct. 1," New York Times, 7 May 1912, p. 9.

[20]Bisttram registered for the night preparatory antique course in October 1913, with a home address of 299 Avenue B, corner 17th Street. Archives of the National Academy of Design, New York.

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he dropped out of the class to take a life class at the Mechanics Institute. He may have then enrolled in DeLeftwich Dodge's night course in mural painting at Cooper Union.[21] He recalled the class as follows:

> The use of cloth dipped in thin plaster was the accepted practice of most artists of the Renaissance; after the cloth dried and was hard, they would paint it with the color they desired and use it as a model, avoiding the problem of living models who would completely change the draped folds and the character of the pose whenever they moved. I had an opportunity to observe this procedure when I studied many years ago with the well-known muralist, DeLeftwich Dodge, at Cooper Union Institute in New York City.[22]

In the mid-1920s, after having begun his studied in dynamic symmetry under Jay Hambidge and Howard Giles, Bisttram returned to Cooper Union, again to study under Dodge. He recalled that Dodge was familiar with dynamic symmetry:

> I recall when I was studying dynamic symmetry with Mr. Hambidge I was taking a class in mural decoration at Cooper Union under Mr. Dodge. When I showed him my drawings and studies with dynamic symmetry. He said it is nothing new. We knew of it in France where I studied in 1890. He said his teacher kept it a secret and taught it to only a few favorite students claiming to have gotten it from an Egyptian mystic or occultist, then proceeded to show me the whole system as he learned it and used it, which of course convinced me more than ever of its value and have used it ever since.[23]

Restless, Bisttram reentered the National Academy in October 1915 for the evening Life Class where he was accepted on probation.[24] This course may have been with Leon Kroll. On his registration card for this class, Bisttram lists his home address as 239 East 28th Street, and so he may have had an apartment of his own by this time.

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[21]Bisttram always listed taking evening classes at Cooper Union with DeLeftwitch Dodge on his resume, but Cooper Union has no records of his attending.

[22]Bisttram, The Creative Process, BP, AAA 2893: 615.

[23]Bisttram, Dynamic Symmetry, BP, AAA 2893:427.

[24]Archives of the National Academy of Design.

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From the Rosenbaum Studios, Bisttram moved on to a lucrative job with N. L. Schless, owner of a large printing house, where he did design work for a few special clients. This may have been in 1918 as that is when Bisttram first appears in the phone book--with Adv Art after his name. As he gained more clients and his workload increased at the Schless Printing Company he was able to hire assistants and open a firm of his own.

Bistran, Caldwell, and Hill is listed in the New York telephone directory in 1920. Bisttram did lay out, Caldwell was the sales representative, and Hill was the art director. While the company had some of its own clients, it primarily served the larger advertising agencies. At its height there were twenty-eight employees. Not satisfied with this achievement, however, Bisttram soon decided to redirect his energies towards painting, and to do only as much free-lance advertising work as was necessary to support his ambitions to become an artist. Agencies Bisttram worked for were L. L. Carroll, Redfield, and Wallerstein.[25]

In 1920 he met and married Mary Huth (1898-1984), who became his life-long companion and assisted him in all of his artistic undertakings.[26] The couple met when Huth came in to apply for a job at Bistran, Caldwell, and Hill, as fashion designer. Her father, Gustav Huth, was born in Badkomburg, Austria, in 1872, and was a musician.[27] Her parents had a restaurant in Hoboken that was frequented by artists and musicians.

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[25]Bisttram, "Application for Fellowship."

[26]Bisttram always reported that he married in 1919, but the New York City marriage bureau records show that he applied for the license on 18 Nov. 1920 and married on 19 Nov. 1920; certificate #1909.

[27]Dolores Montoya, interview by author, Taos, NM, 15 May 1998.

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Her father presumably died some time after she married Bistran since Mrs. Huth was living with the couple by 1930 and remained with them until her death sometime in the 1960s. Before her marriage Miss Huth attended Cooper Union where she studied fashion design,[28] and so was sympathetic to Bisttram's artistic ambitions. She was also an excellent typist and took shorthand. She handled all of Bisttram's correspondence as well as all the details of packing and shipping paintings for exhibitions.

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[28]Ibid. The registrar at Cooper Union was unable to locate Huth's school records.

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Chapter 4

Mysticism and the Archaic: Forging a Theory of Art

One of the most important ideas presented by H. P. Blavatsky was that all religions derived from a common source in the archaic past. This idea was critical to Bisttram and other artists because it gave priority to the primitive and archaic as a valid source of knowledge. Her argument, presented in The Secret Doctrine (1886), asserted that the early Christians attempted to obscure their origins by systematically destroying all vestiges of prior religions. Blatatsky's attempt at reconstructing the history of Christianity sought to prove that it was based on the religion of the ancient Chaldeans (Babylonians), and that the Chaldeans borrowed their religion from the Brahmans and Buddhists.[1] Furthermore, she argued that the ultimate source was an ancient wisdom religion that was spread throughout the world in ages long past and that vestiges of it were embedded in all the surviving primitive cultures.

The most important aspect of theosophy for Bisttram, however, was its cosmology, which Blavatsky maintained was embedded in the essentially symbolic and archaic texts of all religions. Her cosmology posits an infinite number of solar systems in the universe with an evolving Solar Logos as the supreme deity for our solar system. The radiating power of the Solar Logos is modified geometrically into a hierarchy of sounds, colors, and forms as it descends to earth manifesting as seven planes of increasingly dense matter, finally crystallizing into three-dimensional reality as we know it. This concept, plus the possibility for direct revelation and active participation in the evolution of the system by alignment with these forces through art-making, provided Bisttram with

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[1]Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, viii.

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a basis for his mathematical approach to art. Additionally, Blavatsky's theory of creation that "higher beings" assisted man's evolution on earth implied that archaic art provided traces of man's relationship with higher forces.

The quote from Dane Rudhyar's [2] manuscript, The Transcendental Movement in Painting (1938), that was given in the Chapter 2 is repeated here to provide a context for the rest of the statement that follows.

> His [Bisttram's] philosophy of life has developed along occult or broadly theosophical lines, and his attitude is largely that of the "teacher." By this is meant that, for him, art should be a means to transmit truths and basic principles of cosmic proportion and evolution. He considers art as the Egyptian or Hindu artist-initiate did, as fulfilling a sacramental function, an ethical-philosophical task of symbolization. Art reveals philosophy through forms and colors that are symbols--not merely individual and temporary significant symbols, but universally valid representations of eternal truths.

Bisttram goes on to describe some of the influences on his painting style and the work he was engaged in at the time, mentioning Nicholas Roerich, French and Mexican modernism, and Pythagoras:

> This approach to art has been firmly held by Bisttram for many years, but it was only about a year or two ago that he left behind all vestiges of dependence upon such influences as [Nicholas] Roerich's or the modern French and Mexican schools and sailed upon the great adventure which undoubtedly will establish definitely his reputation, already of a national scope. We speak here of two series of technically wonderful drawings which depicts in geometrical symbolism rooted in ancient Pythagorean and modern occult Wisdom the evolution of the cosmos in an archetypal sense. He is also bringing out the same series in oil, so as to develop the color aspect of the symbolism.

Commenting on his style, Bisttram called himself a classic modern:

> Bisttram's mind runs to definiteness and systematic procedures--in philosophical thought as well as in the practice of composition and painting. This is his strength--as well as his limitation. He is shy of emotionalism in his art, and romanticism of any kind has no appeal for him. He has called himself a "classic

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[2]Robert Charles Hay, "Dane Rudhyar and the Transcendental Painting Group of New Mexico 1938-1941" (M.A. diss., Michigan State University, 1981).

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> modern"--a rather ambiguous phrase, which really means however that he is for soberness and simplicity in design--and against all types of emotional "vibrato" and personal self-indulgence; for geometrical design and conceptual motives--and against looseness of form and instinctive (or even impressionistically intuitive) types of inspiration.

Bisttram concludes with some of his favorite quotes, citing Plato, Aristotle, Da Vinci, and Swedenborg:

> Art is a great Teacher. The artist is the interpreter of the totality of life experience; he is a seeker after truth, and strives to live that truth, creating and molding life anew. He is not temperamental or moonstruck, nor does he wait for the creative mood. He is a priest, a magician. He is an artist by virtue of the power within him and that power is bestowed through scrupulous morality, the strictest discipline and deep meditation and contemplation, through becoming the chosen mediator between God and man.
>
> All arts are ways of experimenting with experiences of life to find the eternal law.
>
> It is the destiny of man to overcome matter by form, matter and form by color, and now matter, form and color by spirit. The future art cannot be one of objects or scenes and people of this or that place--but rather a synthesis, an essence and spirit of people, places and things.
>
> Plato said "God eternally geometrizes"; Aristotle--"We must not imitate nature in her effects; we must follow her principles and laws"; and two thousand years later Da Vinci taught much the same: "There is no result in nature without a cause. Understand the cause and you will have no need for experiment." Lastly, Swedenborg wrote: "In the most perfect form, the part is similar to the whole and the whole to the part. The only difference being a difference of magnitude." All great souls in all times and places have said the same thing: that by the use and beauty of mathematics, with the understanding of the laws of symmetry, proportion and growth, the artist is furnished as it were with a handle for his compass with which to begin his re-creation. For no artist can really create anything. All he can hope to do is to reveal the hidden beauty and the transcendent mystery which is the core of Nature.[3]

These ideas, absorbed from his mentors in New York in the 1920s, reflect a profound idealism about what art and the practicing artist can achieve. His move to Taos, New Mexico, in 1931, was fortuitous for probably nowhere else besides this remote art colony

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[3]Ibid., 112-3.

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would it have been possible to maintain these ideals through the hardships of the Depression and emerge with a transcendental concept of art in the late 1930s.

The complexity and interrelatedness of Bisttram's painting, teaching, and spiritual position, and how fundamentally they are grounded in theory, are revealed in his teaching materials. These documents, neatly marked in six numbered notebooks, three numbered folders, and one unnumbered folder at The Harwood Museum, Taos, assembled for the most part during his New York period, provide an essential introduction to his point of view and reveal the people who shaped it.

Notebook 1 contains the Three-Year Course in Fine Art that Bisttram developed in the late 1920s for his classes at the Master Institute of United Arts. Founded in November 1921 in New York by the Russian expatriate painter and mystic Nicholas Roerich (1874-1947), the Master Institute was based on the idealistic concept of uniting all the arts in one institution. The idea that art can heal the ills of modern civilization is expressed in the school's credo:

> Art will unify all humanity. Art is one--indivisible. Art has its many branches, yet all are one. Art is the manifestation of the coming synthesis. Art is for all. Everyone will enjoy true art. The gates of the "sacred source" must be wide open for everybody, and the light of art will influence numerous hearts with a new love. At first this feeling will be unconscious, but after all it will purify human consciousness, and how many young hearts are searching for something real and beautiful! So, give it to them! Bring art to the people--where it belongs. We should have not only museums, theatres, universities, public libraries, railway stations and hospitals but even prisons decorated and beautified. Then we shall have no more prisons.--Paths of blessings."[4]

Roerich's philosophy of art was developed in the context of Russian turn-of-the-century symbolism that was strongly influenced by theosophy. The painters, poets, musicians,

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[4]Brochure, Master Institute of United Arts, in The World of Roerich by Nina Selivanova (New York: Corona Mundi International Art Center, 1922), n.p.

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and theorists in this circle looked back to the arts of prehistoric Russia for "their original sacred function as an integral part of ritual."[5] Adapting the Neo-Kantian idea that "the absolute might be knowable through other non-rational modes of human discourse," and the Neo-Platonic idea that "reality is arranged along a vertical axis from the material at one end to the spiritual at the other,"[6] art was understood as a way of knowing and revealing spiritual truth and took on the qualities of a messianic religion. Artists became priests who could draw down these truths through their ecstatic visions, transform the material world, and heal the soul of modern life.

Roerich's ideas about art education were formulated during his tenure as director of the School of the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts in St. Petersburg between 1906 until the overthrow of the Romanov dynasty, which precipitated his departure from Russia in 1917.[7] His concept that an art school should teach all the arts derived from the idea of the unity of the arts, the power of synthesis, and "horizontal correspondences." These principles were part of the prevailing Russian ideology that derived ultimately from Richard Wagner's concept of total art or Gesamtkunstwerk, which was applied mainly to theater and opera.[8] Roerich's involvement with these art forms was prodigious, designing sets and costumes for over fifty theatrical works between 1907 and 1914, including Wagner's Die Walküre (1907), the Paris production of Rimsky-

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[5]Marilyn Meyer Hoogen, "Igor Stravinsky, Nikolai Roerich, and the Healing Power of Paganism: The Rite of Spring as Ecstatic Ritual of Renewal for the Twentieth Century" (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1997), 3.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Jacqueline Decter, Nicholas Roerich, The Life and Art of a Russian Master (Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 1989), 69.

[8]Hoogen, 147.

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Korsakov's The Snow Maiden (1908), and, most notably, Diaghilev's Paris production of Stravinsky's Rite of Spring (1913).[9] The Master Institute curriculum reflected these interests with courses in theater decoration, drama, ballet, and Dalcroze Eurythmics.

Roerich's paintings also exhibit the fanciful atmosphere and mythic content of the productions for which he designed sets. Most of his paintings are set in the Stone Age, an interest fostered in his youthful archeological investigations of ancient burial mounds on his family estate. He was particularly interested in archaic ornament as an expression of the ancient harmony of man with his surroundings that he felt modern man needed to recapture.[10] This interest was part of a larger national trend to recover and restore peasant traditions as a representation of Russia's Oriental heritage, and to heal the growing rupture between the peasant and westernized upper classes.

Roerich's arrival in New York in 1920 was heralded by a large exhibition of his paintings that opened at the Kingore Galleries in New York and then traveled to the Art Institute of Chicago and twenty-eight other American cities.[11] The strength of Roerich's New York school was music; his collaborators, Maurice Lichtmann, vice-president of the school, and his wife Sina Lichtmann, were both pianists. After Roerich's departure for India in 1923, the New York school was left in the main to be carried out by Louis Horch, Roerich's financial backer, and the Lichtmanns.[12] Roerich's efforts in New York

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[9]For specific ways Roerich applied his principles to theater design, see Nicholas Roerich, "The Unity of Art," Theatre Arts Magazine 5, no. 4 (Oct. 1921), 297-299.

[10]Hoogen, 66.

[11]The Nicholas Roerich Exhibition, intro. Christian Brinton (New York: Kingore Galleries, 1920-21).

[12]Roerich returned to the United States briefly in 1924, and again in 1929 for about a year. His final visit was in 1933.

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culminated in 1929 with the opening of a twenty-four story art deco "skyscraper" at 310 Riverside Drive which housed the school, museum, library, auditorium, and restaurant, with apartments on the upper floors. Bisttram designed the restaurant (fig. 3) and elevator lobby.

Bisttram's involvement with Roerich and the school had a lasting influence on his thinking and painting. Roerich took on the persona of mystic and guru, even dressing in long robes, and became Bisttram's primary model for the artist-as-priest, "fulfilling a sacramental function, an ethical-philosophical task of symbolization."[13] Roerich and his wife Helena consolidated their spiritual ideas into a new movement called Agni [Fire] Yoga, that they taught to a select inner circle. They also instituted a broad publication program to disseminate their ideas. While Bisttram was not privy to this "closed teaching" in the 1920s, he was introduced to it in 1960 by Ralph Harris Houston and founded a study group in Taos. Bisttram's contact with Russian theosophy was sustained in Taos in his friendships with the Russian expatriate artists Nikolai Fechin (1881-1955) and Leon Gaspard (1882-1964).[14]

The Master Institute also had an extensive program of lectures and musical events. Bisttram undoubtedly met Dane Rudhyar when he gave the lecture series, "Four Essential Types of Forms: their characteristic historical representations and their significance for artists today (Forms of Power, of Beauty, of Knowledge, of Mysticism)"

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[13]Bisttram, statement for Rudhyar's book, see above.

[14]George Schriever, "Nicolai Fechin, Russian Artist in the American West," American West (May/June 1982), 34-42, 62-3. Frank Waters, Leon Gaspard (Flagstaff: Northland Press and Santa Fe: Fenn Galleries, Ltd., 1981, rev. ed).

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at the Roerich Museum in March and April 1930.[15] Born in Paris, Rudhyar studied law at the Sorbonne, then turned to music; in 1915 he served as secretary to Rodin, which fostered his interest in art. After arriving in New York in 1917, Rudhyar traveled frequently between New York, California, Chicago, and Boston pursuing his composing, performing, lecturing, and publishing activities primarily for occult and music organizations. In 1933 he began making regular stops in New Mexico.

Rudhyar also established another seminal relationship for the Transcendental Painting Group at this time. In March 1930 Rudhyar visited Agnes Pelton (1881-1961) in her studio on Long Island after having seen her Montross Gallery exhibition in November 1929. He subsequently wrote the introduction to the catalogue for her February 1931 Argent Galleries exhibition. Pelton was also a reader of Roerich's books, first mentioning Agni Yoga in a notebook entry of 23 January 1930.[16] Furthermore, after meeting Raymond Jonson in Santa Fe, Rudhyar recommended that he get to know Pelton's work, which ultimately resulted in her membership in the Transcendental Painting Group. While Pelton did not reside in New Mexico during the life of the Group, she was the first of the Group to make the pilgrimage to New Mexico, visiting Mabel Dodge Luhan in 1918 and 1922. Bisttram's comment, in a letter to Raymond Jonson, that he knew Pelton's work (but not Cady Wells's) indicates that he saw Pelton's New

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[15]Dane Rudhyar, "Chronological List of Rudhyar's Writings, Compositions, Lectures, and Paintings," TMs, 12, courtesy Patana Usuni. This lecture series is not mentioned in The Message of 1930.

[16]Michael Zakian, Agnes Pelton: Poet of Nature (Palm Springs: Palm Springs Desert Museum, 1995), 78, 111-2, footnotes 18, 64.

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York exhibitions.[17]

The first Transcendental Painting Group member to meet Roerich, however, was Raymond Jonson. Jonson saw Roerich's April 1921 exhibition in Chicago and probably also saw the Chicago production of The Snow Maiden for which Roerich designed the sets.[18] Jonson's strong response to Roerich's paintings was based on a similar use of symbolism in his own painting at that time, which was also derived in large part from the work he executed as a stage designer. Roerich was also involved in the founding of Cor Ardens (the burning heart), a brotherhood of artists based on principles similar to Roerich's. Cor Ardens was founded in Chicago in July 1921 with Jonson as President; Roerich was appointed Honorary President for Russia when the organization became international.[19]

Roerich also exerted a wide influence in New Mexico. His 1921 visit to study Pueblo artifacts resulted in a long-lasting friendship with Dr. Edgar Hewett, Director of the Museum of Anthropology and the Museum of Fine Arts in Santa Fe, based on their mutual interest in anthropology. Hewett was one of Roerich's most devoted advocates, and served as an honorary advisor to Corona Mundi. In 1925 Louis and Nettie Horch

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[17]Bisttram to (Raymond Jonson), LS, 27 Sept. 1933, Bisttram File, Jonson Gallery, Albuquerque.

[18]Ed Garman, The Art of Raymond Jonson Painter (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1976), 55, 176. The Jonson Gallery is planning an exhibition to explore the influence of Roerich on Jonson to open in June 2001; Sharyn Udall is writing the catalogue essay.

[19]"New Art Club Would Bar all Prizes," Chicago Evening American, 20 July 1921, Raymond Jonson Papers, AAA RJ9: 6415. Other foreign honorary presidents were Maruice Maeterlinck for Belgium, Gerhart Hauptmann for Germany, Ignacio Zuloago for Spain, Augustus John for England, Axel Galen for Finland, Ivan Mestrovic for Serbia, and Rabindranath Tagore for India, brochure, Cor Ardens [1922], Raymond Jonson Papers, AAA, RJ9: 6458.

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made a follow-up trip to Santa Fe, where they made arrangements to acquire Jonson's Earth Rhythms I, 1923, for the Roerich Museum.[20] Bisttram undoubtedly knew Jonson's painting as Bisttram and Jonson were included in at least one Roerich Museum exhibition together.

Furthermore, Jonson first became acquainted with the paintings of the future Transcendental Painting Group member Lawren Harris when they were included in the "Exhibition of Paintings by Contemporary Canadian Artists" at the Roerich Museum in March 1932.[21] Also, Harris and Rudhyar would have been familiar with each others writings in the 1920s since both published articles in The Canadian Theosophist.[22]

Another important aspect of Roerich's influence in New Mexico was the establishment in Santa Fe in 1938 of Arsuna, a school and gallery based on Roerich's teaching principles. This school and gallery, which featured a permanent installation of Roerich's paintings, served as a center for the activities of the Transcendental Painting

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[20]The preliminary drawing for Earth Rhythms I (1923) shows that Johnson composed this painting using Jay Hambidge's theory of dynamic symmetry. Garman, 58-9, fig. 14. Hambidge gave the Scammon Lectures at the Art Institute in April 1921; there is no indication, however, that Jonson attended these lectures. The Roerich Museum acquired two additional works by Jonson in the 1950s.

[21]Worts suggests, but does not demonstrate, that Harris was stylistically influenced by Roerich in the 1920s. Douglas Worts, "Lawren S. Harris: Transition to Abstraction, 1934-1945" (M.A. diss., University of Toronto, 1982), 7-9. Harris could have known Roerich's works through articles published in the 1920s on Roerich in The American Theosophist. The author is convinced that the similarity between Jonson and Harris's works from the 1920s and 1930s is due to a common source in Roerich.

[22]Dane Rudhyar, "The Work and Aims of a Theosophical Lodge," Canadian Theosophist, March 1923. Lawren Harris, "Revelation of Art in Canada," Canadian Theosophist 7 (15 July 1926): 85-88. Between 1931 and 1933 Harris published four other articles in the same publication. Joan Murray and Robert Fulford, The Beginning of Vision: The Drawings of Lawren S. Harris (Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre, 1982), 224.

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Group. Bisttram also taught a course at Arsuna.

The curriculum that Bisttram prepared for the Master Institute works out his idealistic concept of the role of the teacher "to transmit truths and basic principles of cosmic proportion and evolution."[23] The first semester of the First-Year Course in Pure Design teaches dynamic symmetry, a compositional system developed by Jay Hambidge (1867-1924), and the color theories of Denman Ross (1853-1935), techniques that Bisttram also used in his painting. Bisttram presents these theories in a series of seven sets of seven problems structured as a step-by-step cosmological formula for the creation of a work of art. Partially based on a reading of Kandinsky's Punct und Linie zu Fläche (1926), the course begins with a study of dots and proceeds to lines, planes, and solids; it also reveals Bisttram's symbolic thinking and provides the theoretical framework for his later transcendental works.[24]

Notebook 2 contains problems in dynamic symmetry and color exercises executed by students.

Notebook 3 is a typescript of an unpublished book, Design and Color, by Theodore Bolton (1889-1973). Part Two: Problems, is written by Bisttram; the two sections that were to be written by Howard Giles (1876-1955), the Introduction and Part Five: Comments on the Illustrations, are not included, and presumably were never written. Bisttram's Problems chapter is similar to the seven sets of seven problems in his First-Year Course in Pure Design. Design and Color also presents, in common with Bisttram's course for the Master Institute, Denman Ross's color system and Hambidge's

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[23]Bisttram, statement for Rudhyar's book, see above.

[24]The contents of Bisttram's course in analyzed in Chapter 8; the stylistic influence of Roerich on Bisttram is discussed in Chapter 7.

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theory of dynamic symmetry. The book is, in general, theoretical and historical, and provides the background for the development of Bisttram's more practical Three-Year Course.[25]

Bolton was both an artist and an art historian. He exhibited at the 1917 Society of Independent Artists exhibition, and later turned to book illustration;[26] his art historical writings focused on eighteenth-century American art. Giles, who was supervising the development of Bisttram's Three-Year Course for the Master Institute, probably sought Bolton's advice on the project, which then led to the book as a collaborative project. Giles and Bolton surely met at the Century Club where Giles had been a member since 1921 and where Bolton was appointed librarian in 1926. Evidence of Bolton's interest in the development of the Three-Year Course is provided by Bolton's enrollment in the course at the Master Institute under Giles, who was teaching it there after Bisttram's departure from New York.[27]

Bolton was a key supporter of the mathematical and geometrical approach to art. Bolton's book review defending Robert Waterman Gardner's Primer of Proportion in the Arts of Form and Music (1945) against an attack by Rudolph Wittkower[28] provided Bolton with an opportunity to defend the geometric approach and reveals the artists and writers with similar thinking. Bolton takes exception to Wittkower's ideas that art is

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[25]For the bibliography of Design and Color see Appendix VI.

[26]Bolton, for example, translated and illustrated The Wonderful History of Peter Schlemihl by Adelbert von Chamisso (1791-1838) (New York: B. W. Huebsch, Inc., 1923).

[27]"Museum Shows Student Work, Pupils of Roerich Master Institute Exhibit," New York Times, 20 May 1932, Howard Giles Papers.

[28]Rudolph Wittkower, "Review," Architectural Review 100 (August 1946): 53.

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inspirational, that a sense of proportion is "a gift from heaven," and that systems of proportion are no longer used by artists.[29] Bolton cites the artists Howard Giles, George Bellows, Helen Hokinson, and Wiliford Conrow; the theorists Jay Hambidge and K. H. De Haas; and the writings of L. D. Caskey, Edward B. Edwards, and Rutherford Boyd[30] as examples of individuals strongly committed to a geometric approach to art. These are, in effect, the artists and writers who form the context for Bisttram's interest in Hambidge's theory of dynamic symmetry.

Gardner's book, the subject of Bolton's review, provides a geometric proof of the relationship between the intervals of the musical scale and increments of form used in Greek and European architecture. The scales of form that Gardner derives are essentially the same as those used by Hambidge, but he uses the writings of the French Beaux-Arts architect Julien Guadet (1834-1908) as his source to suggest that these theories were taught at the French Academy.[31] Gardner's earlier book, The Parthenon (1925), presents these same theories, but does not mention Hambidge. Gardner's

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[29]Theodore Bolton, "A letter relating to R. W. Gardner's Primer of Proportion in the Arts of Form and Music, and a Recent Review," TMs, Howard Giles papers, George Arents Research Library for Special Collections.

[30]For references for Caskey, Edwards, Boyd, and De Haas, see Bolton bibliography, Appendix VI. Also, Doug Dreishpoon, Science into Art: The Abstract Sculpture and Drawings of Rutherford Boyd (New York: Hirschl & Adler Galleries, 1983), 14. De Haas attended one of Hambidge's lectures in New York. De Haas, New York, to (Jay Hambidge), ALS, 12 Dec. 1918, Hambidge Papers, AAA 3176:883. Albert Southwick, a Tiffany's designer who used dynamic symmetry, was also in correspondence with De Haas. Jay Hambidge (to Howard Giles), ALS, 22 Sept. 1922, Howard Giles Papers. Denman Ross also knew De Haas's publications. Frank, 100. De Haas included Hambidge's root rectangles in Over Aantoonbaar Meetkundig Verband Tusschen Formaat en Compositie Van Schilderijen (Rotterdam: T. De Vries, 1920), Plate 2, figs. 20-23; 15.

[31]Robert W. Gardner, A Primer of Proportion in the Arts of Form and Music (New York: William Helburn, Inc., 1945), 28.

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exclusion of Hambidge may have been a way of independently supporting his highly controversial theories.[32] While it is certain that Bisttram and his circle were interested in the relationship between music and form, since Gardner's book was published after Bisttram was already well into his transcendental period, it would not have directly influenced his thinking or painting. Writings by Claude Bragdon, Dane Rudhyar, Irma Richter, George Birkhoff, and Robert Morris Ogden, which Bisttram studied carefully during his formative years, deal with similar ideas, but not in as much depth as Gardner.[33]

Notebook 4 is a typescript of the book A Theory of Pure Design (1907) by Denman Ross.[34] Dr. Ross, a lecturer on the theory of design at Harvard, was a specialist in Oriental art, and served as a trustee of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts where he influenced the expansion of its Oriental collections.[35] He drew and painted because he

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[32]Robert W. Gardner, The Parthenon: Its Science of Forms (New York: New York University Press, 1925). Even though Hambidge was supported at Harvard and Yale, his critics, Rhys Carpenter at Bryn Mawr and W. B. Dinsmoor at Columbia, were highly outspoken.

[33]Claude Bragdon, The Beautiful Necessity (New York: Knopf, 1910); Dane Rudhyar, Art as Release of Power (Carmel: Hamsa Publications, 1930); Irma Richter, Rhythmic Form in Art: An Investigation of the Principles of Composition in the Works of the Great Masters (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head Ltd, 1932); George Birkhoff, Aesthetic Measure (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933); Robert Morris Ogden, The Psychology of Art (New York: Scribner's, 1938).

[34]Denman Ross, A Theory of Pure Design: Harmony, Balance, Rhythm (Boston: Houghton, 1907).

[35]Although born in Cincinnati, Ross's roots were in Boston. His maternal grandfather, Henry Waldo, was in the textile business with the Boston merchant Amos Lawrence; Ross's first interest in design was stimulated by his contact with designs produced in their mill. Of the 11,000 objects Ross donated to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, 4,000 were examples of textiles. His first trip to Europe in 1865, accompanied by his parents, lasted a year. Mary Ann Stankiewicz, "A Generation of Art Educators," A paper presented at the History of Art Education Conference, Pennsylvania State

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felt that direct experience with procedures and techniques was necessary to critically judge a work of art. On Giles's suggestion Bisttram visited Ross in Cambridge to learn his color theory for use in the Three-Year Course. Probably as a thank you to Ross for explaining his color theories, Bisttram sent Ross a T-square with the triangles set into a single instrument, presumably of his own invention.[36] Bisttram probably had Ross's book typed out to be in a larger format.

In his preface to A Theory of Pure Design, Ross states that his book was written as a "contribution to Science made by a painter" to elucidate that scientific part of art of which genius, inspiration, and the personality form the other part. As a rationale for his approach, he quotes Plato's Philebus: "If arithmetic, mensuration, and weighing be taken out of any art, that which remains will not be much." Ross's theory of pure design holds that order is harmony and that harmony is made up of balance and rhythm, concepts clearly derived from Plato. More than half of the book is devoted to positions, measures, shapes, and attitudes of dots, lines, and shapes. Bisttram uses this material in his teaching as a base onto which he adds Kandinsky's more extended concept that provides meanings and interpretations for these forms. Ross discusses only the visual sensations of forms.

Following his analysis of points, lines, and shapes, Ross introduces color, using the same vocabulary and ideas. For Ross, color is a factor only after the disposition of forms has been made in a composition. Bisttram follows this sequence in his own painting, working out the design before the choice of colors is made. Ross's color theory

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University, 1985.

[36]Denman Ross (to Emil Bistran), TLS, 25 April 1929, BP, AAA 2893:147.

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is completely laid out in A Theory of Pure Design; inasmuch as Bisttram adopted it in his teaching methods, it is discussed in the chapter on his Three-Year Course. It is worth noting here, however, that Ross's color theory utilizes terms and ideas derived from musical scales and intervals. For example, in his twelve-tone color system, Ross calls the relationships between red, yellow, and blue, fifths or triads, and complementary colors, sevenths. Ross's On Drawing and Painting (1912) [37] was one of the textbooks for Bisttram's Three-Year Course.

Ross's theories were introduced into the discourse on modernism by Roger Fry in his "Essay on Aesthetics" (1909).[38] Fry, placing the function of art in man's imaginative life, considered Ross's analysis of form to bear on the emotional content of form. Most art historians, however, emphasize the influence of Ross's color theories, which were used by Robert Henri, George Bellows, and Leon Kroll, artists whom both Giles and Bisttram knew and admired. Ross's systematic approach, which probably derived from nineteenth-century precedents,[39] was widely used by artists who experimented with these types of systems. Henri, for example, began experimenting with the Maratta color and composition systems in 1909, Ross's color theory by 1915, and dynamic symmetry in

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[37]Denman Ross, On Drawing and Painting (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1912).

[38]Roger Fry, "An Essay in Aesthetics," New Quarterly (1909); reprinted in Vision and Design (London: Chatto and Windus, Ltd., 1920). Marianne W. Martin, "Some American Contributions to Early Twentieth-Century Abstraction," Arts 54 (June 1980), 158-165.

[39]Ross made frequent trips to Europe; in 1887 he was in Paris, and at one point he studied with Bougereau. Ross worked for a period in the impressionist style, purchased a number of works by the impressionists, and had at least one conversation with Monet. Mary Ann Stankiewicz, "Form, Truth and Emotion: Transatlantic Influences on Formalist Aesthetics," Journal of Art and Design Education 7, no. 1 (1988), 87. Some possible sources for Ross's theories are explored in Chapter 7.

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1917. Bellows was using Maratta's color system by 1911, his compositional system by 1912, Ross's set palettes by 1914, and dynamic symmetry after about 1917.[40]

Ross also used dynamic symmetry in his own work. Ross became acquainted with Hambidge in 1919, while the latter was working at Harvard courtesy of the Samuel Sachs Research Fellowship. This fellowship enabled Hambidge to research Greek vases at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, to measure skeletons at the Harvard Medical School, and to lecture to the student body. Hambidge's research was first published in 1919 in his magazine The Diagonal, and was followed by The Greek Vase (1920). The subsequent publication of Dynamic Symmetry in Composition (1923),[41] showed the application of his principles by contemporary artists including Ross, Henri, Bellows, Kroll, Giles, and Christine Herter. These books were published by Yale University, which also provided him with a grant to continue his research in Greece that formed the basis of his book The Parthenon, published posthumously in 1924.

Hambidge's contacts at Harvard are important to document because it was probably Hambidge who suggested to Giles that he make Ross's acquaintance.[42] Giles's

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[40]Michael Quick, "Robert Henri: Theory and Practice," in My People, The Portraits of Robert Henri by Valerie Ann Leeds (Orlando, FL: Orlando Museum of Art, 1994), 50-55. Michael Quick, "Technique and Theory: The Evolution of George Bellows's Painting Style," in The Paintings of George Bellows, by Michael Quick, Jane Myers, Marianne Doezema, Franklin Kelly (Fort Worth, TX: Amon Carter Museum, 1992), 9.

[41]Jay Hambidge, Dynamic Symmetry in Composition as Used by the Artists (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923).

[42]Jay Hambidge (to Howard Giles), ALS, 1 July 1920, Howard Giles papers. Hambidge first lectured in Cambridge at the home of Edward Forbes, Director of the Fogg. Kingsley Porter, Professor of Medievial Art at Harvard, brought Hambidge to Forbes's attention. Ross first heard Hambidge lecture at Forbes's home. Edward Forbes (to Theodore Sizer) 17 April 1942, cited in Frank, 100.

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trip to Cambridge to meet Ross in 1923 resulted in Giles arranging an exhibition of Ross's work at the Century Club in 1923, and Ross arranging an exhibition of Giles's charcoals in the Print Room at the Fogg Museum in 1925. Ross's Century Club exhibition undoubtedly exerted a strong influence on Giles and his circle, especially since by 1924 Giles was working with set-palettes.[43] Ross laid out his color theory and the principles of dynamic symmetry in a didactic manner; and in the catalogue even quoted the French mathematician Henri Poincaré, whose theory of the fourth dimension was so influential on the cubists.[44] Ross followed Giles's teaching, and acquired drawings by his students, purchasing four drawings by Bisttram[45] and an equal number by Temima Nimtzowitz (b. 1905), who succeeded Bisttram as Giles's teaching assistant.[46]

Notebook 5 contains off-prints of Ralph M. Pearson's (1883-1958) lessons for his Correspondence Course in Critical Appreciation. Pearson's book The Modern Renaissance in American Art (1954), an extrapolation from these lessons, includes an entry on Bisttram.[47] Pearson's interpretation of art history is based on the idea that art is "a balanced blending of subject and form." He traces this ideal in Western art from the

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[43]Howard Giles to (Robert Henri), ALS, 6 May 1924, Robert Henri Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

[44]Ross's portrait of Hambidge was included in the exhibition. Denman Ross, Experiments in Drawing and Painting (New York: The Century Association of New York, 1923).

[45]Denman Ross, "Confidential Report on Candidate for Fellowship," Bisttram File, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, New York.

[46]Temima Nimtzowitz Gezari, telephone interview with the author, 26 Jan. 1999. Daniel Y. Gezari, The Art of Temima Gezari (Rocky Point, NY: Studio Workshop Press, 1985).

[47]Ralph Pearson, The Modern Renaissance in American Art, Presenting the Work and Philosophy of 54 Distinguished Artists (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 81-6.

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twelfth to the sixteenth centuries, after which he posits that a decline set in characterized by technique taking precedence over form, resulting in a literal copying of nature. Pearson credits the modern European masters, beginning with Cézanne, with recovering the foundations of classical art; he attributes to these new methods the power of evoking beauty through a process that replicates divine creation:

> Abstraction displaced the genteel subject in a burst of, not glory, but vituperation. Expressionism, creation, the harmonics of relationships, transgressed academic traditions by transferring "beauty" from a source in nature outside the picture frame to one within the artist to be created (not reflected) as an entity inside the frame. This radical shifting of the source of the aesthetic experience was undoubtedly the greatest single contribution of the international modern rebirth to the art of our time. "Beauty" was not discarded, it should be well noted; its fabrication was merely transferred from God to man.[48]

Pearson's How to See Modern Pictures (1925) presents other ideas that are also compatible with Bisttram's. He identifies design as the most important quality in art, and acknowledges Arthur Dow's Composition (1899) as the first to demonstrate it. Pearson's concept of design clearly included dynamic symmetry since it is presented in both editions, and the introduction to the second edition (1930) includes a defense of the system.[49]

Pearson's correspondence course was developed from his classes at The Design Workshop, Nyack, New York, a school he founded in 1938, after resigning his post at the New School for Social Research where he inaugurated the art program in 1928. Pearson, whose primary medium was etching, was first of all an artist. He credits his

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[48]Ibid., 14.

[49]Ralph Pearson, How to See Modern Pictures: An Extension of the Design Principle into Three Dimensions and an Explanation of the Basic Application in the Work of the Moderns, the Primitives, and the Classics of both Europe and the Orient, Together with an Appendix Containing Practical Suggestions for Bridging the Gap between Artist and Public (New York: Lincoln MacVeagh, The Dial Press, 1925; 2nd ed., 1930), 14.

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understanding of form to Hugo Robus, with whom he studied in New York in 1914. Bisttram and Pearson were close friends; since Pearson had a ranch near Taos, their relationship probably didn't begin until after Bisttram's move to Taos even though both were in New York at the same time. Bisttram, however, probably knew Pearson's books during the 1920s since they appear in Bolton's bibliography. Bisttram's inclusion of them on his 1945 reading list shows his admiration for Pearson and his ideas.[50]

Folder 1 contains typescripts of studio talks given by Shri Vishwanath Keskar (b. 1880) to Bisttram's classes at the Master Institute in February and March 1930.[51] The talks examine the relationship between art and music, the split between religion and science, and the religious origin of art. A symbolic interpretation of colors and numbers is given, as well as a theory of beauty and harmony based on ideal spiritual forms. His comments on crystals, giving priority to inorganic forms over organic forms, are relevant to the geometric approach to art:

> Crystallization was accomplished under the Laws of Harmony. Inorganic crystals are more beautiful than organic crystals, because organic form gradually had some kind of life, therefore freedom, and freedom has some form of eccentricity. Inorganic beings naturally are more regular in form and from that standpoint more beautiful. The organic has consciousness perhaps, of a very low order. It has beauty, life being given out gradually.[52]

Keskar, a Hindu mystic and art theorist who lived in the United States off and on

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[50]Pearson purchased a ranch south of Taos in 1915; he may have been the first to bring an etching press to New Mexico. Clinton Adams, Printmaking in New Mexico, 1880-1990 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991), 4, 8. For the bibliography of Bolton's Design and Color, see Appendix VI; for Bisttram's reading list of 1945, see Appendix II.

[51]Four of the eight studio talks are published in Walt Wiggins, The Transcendental Art of Emil Bisttram (Ruidoso Downs, NM: Pintores Press, 1988), 85-91. Wiggins runs the four talks together as if they had been one lecture.

[52]Keskar, Studio Talk, 13 Mar. 1930.

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between 1927 and 1931, occupied the top floor apartment of the Master Institute when Bisttram knew him. Keskar was Bisttram's primary source for a practical application of Eastern ideas in his thought and work during his New York period and introduced Bisttram to meditation.[53] Keskar self-published two books, Pillars of Life (1931) and The Universal Gospel (1936).[54]

Folders 2 and 3 are oversize fold-out publications that present two of the many color systems Bisttram experimented with--Wilhelm Ostwald's, which Bisttram knew in the 1920s, and Hilaire Hiler's.[55] Hilaire Hiler (1898-1966) was an artist and colleague of Bisttram's; they probably met in Los Angeles in the late 1940s when both ran art schools at the same time.[56] Hiler later worked in Santa Fe where they continued their relationship. Two copies of the highly technical article "Color: it is the response of vision to wave lengths of light," Life, July 3, 1944, are tucked into the Hiler folder.

An unmarked folder contains a course outline typed on thirteen legal sheets. This is Bisttram's revision and condensation of his Three-Year Course prepared in the 1930s for his school in Taos. In addition to problems in abstraction, there are also non-objective problems. Bisttram's solutions to these problems are at the Harwood Museum;

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[53]Carlson, 19.

[54]Indian Who's Who 1937-38, ed. Waman P. Kabadi (Bombay: Yeshanand & Co., 1937), 367. Shri Vishwanath Keskar, Pillars of Life, with a foreword by J. G. Phelps Stokes (New York: privately printed, 1931); The Universal Gospel, A Book of Science & Philosophy of Life (Bombay, India: privately printed, 1936).

[55]Color Matching System by Application of the Colour-Theory after Prof. W. Ostwald, classified by Franz Illgner (Berlin, n.d.); Hiler Color System, (Chicago & New York: Favor, Ruhl & Co, n.d.).

[56]Students could receive college credit through Fremont College for courses taken at both Hiler's and Bisttram's schools. Fremont College, no longer in existence, was founded in Santa Fe and then relocated to Los Angeles.

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several of these are reproduced in Chapter 13, which is devoted to The Taos School of Art.

Notebook 6 is Bisttram's Book of Notes, a compendium of extracts on art and philosophy derived from his mentors, arranged in a sequence that demonstrates the development of his ideas, as well as the order in which he undoubtedly presented them in his classes. The signatures on the title page–[Leon] Gaspard, M. P. Hall, S. M. Wright, [Lorser] Feitelson,[57] and one other that is illegible--show that this notebook was at the same time very personal and also somewhat of a showpiece.[58] The very few signatures indicate that Bisttram didn't show it to many people and when he did, it was a very special event to warrant the ritual of a signature. Since all of the material contained in the book dates from Bisttram's New York period, and the signatures are by people he knew later, it is clear that the ideas he developed in New York remained important for him throughout his painting and teaching career.

The signature of Manly P. Hall on the title page is of special importance. Hall's Masonic, Hermetic, Qabbalistic and Rosicrucian Symbol Philosophy (1928) was highly influential in occult circles. Bisttram attended his lectures in New York and later in Los Angeles. In New York, Hall took classes with Bisttram as "he wished to learn how to

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[57]Will South, "Stanton Macdonald-Wright (1890-1973): From Synchromism to the Federal Art Projects" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1994). Susan E. Ehrlich, "Five Los Angeles Pioneer Modernists: A Study of the 1940's Paintings of Peter Krasnow, Knud Merrild, Oskar Fischinger, Lorser Feitelson, and Helen Lundeberg" (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1985).

[58]Bisttram met the Russian ex-patriot artist Leon Gaspard in Taos ca. 1931, the artists Stanton Macdonald-Wright and Lorser Feitelsen in Los Angeles ca. 1945, and knew the occultist Manly P. Hall in both New York and Los Angeles. Barbara Sayre Harmon, a student at Bisttram's Los Angeles school, recalls both Macdonald-Wright and Manly Hall lecturing at Bisttram's school. Barbara Sayre Harmon, telephone interview with the author, 12 Sept. 1998.

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cartoon from memory some of his front-row listeners or sleepers!"[59] And, Hall lectured to Bisttram's classes in Los Angles. Hall's Philosophic Research Society, established in Los Angeles in 1934, served to disseminate his ideas and writings to a wide audience. Bisttram also knew the occultist Paul Foster Case (1884-1954), who wrote widely on the tarot, in New York and later in Los Angeles.

The Book of Notes opens with a two-page reading list containing forty-one titles, headed by Adolf Roeder's Symbol Psychology (1903), based on the ideas of Swedenborg, and concludes with H.P. Blatavsky's Isis Unveiled (1877) and The Secret Doctrine (1886).[60] Since all of the books were published before 1931, the list provides an overview of Bisttram's interests during his New York period. Noteworthy is the predominance of books on religion and theosophy and the inclusion of only two books on art, Foster Damon's William Blake (1924) and Walter Sargeant's The Enjoyment and Use of Color (1923).

The author appearing most frequently on the list is Claude Bragdon with four titles plus Ouspensky's Tertium Organum (1911), which he translated (with another author). Bragdon, a theosophist and architect, moved from Rochester to New York City in the early 1920s to take a position as theater designer for Walter Hampden, enabling him to focus more on his experiments with light and color. His interest in the relationships between color, light, music, and form resulted in the design of a color organ about the same time as Thomas Wilfred and Van Deering Perrine; later he

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[59]Bisttram, The Creative Process, 53-4.

[60]For Bisttram's reading list of 1930, see Appendix I.

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designed Wilfred's laboratory on Long Island.[61]

Bragdon's interests in design, geometry, the fourth-dimension, and the occult followed the model set out in Blavatsky's concept of the divine geometer. Bragdon was also a devoted supporter of dynamic symmetry[62] and understood it as an occult system. Bragdon's influence on Bisttram was considerable; Bragdon's lectures, for example, contain substantial references to three other authors on Bisttram's reading list--Ralph Waldo Emerson, Balzac, and Dhan Gopal Mukerji.[63] Bragdon and Mukerji both lectured frequently at the Master Institute, and in 1930 Bragdon lectured to Bisttram's class.[64] Bragdon was also a keen supporter of Roerich's aesthetic ideals, and edited and wrote the introduction to Roerich's travel diary, Altai Himalaya (1929).[65] Additionally, Bragdon's The Beautiful Necessity (1910) was an important component of Bisttram's teaching in Taos. It is worth noting that Bragdon knew and was in sympathy with Ross's mathematical approach to art as early as 1901.[66]

In New York Bragdon lived at the Shelton Hotel where he met and became close friends with Alfred Stieglitz and Georgia O'Keeffe. Through them he met Dorothy Brett

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[61]Claude Bragdon, More Lives Than One (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1938), 120. The Russian composer Alexander Scriabin (1871-1915) developed a color organ.

[62]Claude Bragdon, "A Dissertation on Dynamic Symmetry," Architectural Record 56, no. 4 (Oct. 1924), 305-315.

[63]Claude Bragdon, The Arch Lectures: Eighteen discourses on a great variety of subjects delivered in New York, during the winter of 1940 (New York: Creative Age Press), 1942.

[64]The Message of 1930, 68.

[65]Claude Bragdon, ed., Altai-Himalaya, by Nicholas Roerich (New York: Stokes, 1929).

[66]Frank, 107, 148.

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with whom he carried on an extensive correspondence, in which, among other things, he gave her lessons on dynamic symmetry.[67] Bisttram and Brett were close friends in Taos; Brett was one of the original members of Bisttram's Taos Heptagon, which he founded in 1933. Another member of the Stieglitz circle, Oscar Bluemner, was a reader of Bragdon's books.[68]

Following Bisttram's reading list is a similar list submitted by Shri Vishwanath Keskar, including titles on mysticism, meditation, yoga, India, and Hindu life and philosophy. Some of the books on Keskar's list also appear on Bisttram's.

The next page, titled "Cycles of Taste," outlines Leo Katz's (1887-1982) theory of art history that presents style as successive and cyclical.[69] Style, according to the theory, progresses through four periods: geometric, classic, impressionist, and self-expressionist, then cycles back to the geometric. An important component of the theory is that each of the periods has embedded in it a smaller cycle made up of the same parts. This theory, which Katz also presents in Understanding Modern Art (1936),[70] was critical to Bisttram's concept of art history as well as to how he saw his own work in the overall scheme of the history of aesthetics.

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[67]Bragdon's letters to Dorothy Brett are preserved in the Brett Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University. The correspondence begins 12 Aug. 1930 and continues until his death. Bragdon did not save the letters he received from Brett.

[68]Jeffrey R. Hayes, Oscar Bluemner (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 63.

[69]For "Cycles of Taste," see Appendix VII.

[70]Leo Katz, Understanding Modern Art, an interpretation of the historical, psychological, philosophical, and scientific backgrounds of modern art, prepared under the direction of The Delphian Society for the use of its Chapter members in connection with the programs provided for the meetings of their chapters, 3 vols. (n.p.: The Delphian Society, 1936). This book was issued first as a serial, one chapter per week.

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Bisttram first heard Katz speak at the Art Directors Club, of which Bisttram was a member, and where Bisttram gave a lecture on dynamic symmetry in 1926. Bisttram was so stimulated by Katz's talk that he, his wife, and Howard Giles signed up for Katz's 36-session course "The History of the Arts of the Ages" at the Metropolitan Museum.[71] In addition to broadening Bisttram's grasp of art history, Katz engendered in him an interest in mural painting, wrote the introduction to the catalogue for his 1933 exhibition at the Delphic Studios, Dancing God Series: Water Colors of the Indians of the Southwest, and reproduced one of the works from this exhibition in Understanding Modern Art.

Katz was born in Austria and studied at the Fine Arts Academies in Vienna and Munich, and in other parts of Europe. Before immigrating to the United States in 1921, he executed a number of murals and exhibited widely. During the 1920s Katz was engaged in a series of "symbolic" society portraits, commissions obtained for him by the New York banker, Frank Vanderlip, who sponsored Katz's immigration to the United States.[72] In 1928 he spent the summer at Glacier National Park in Canada where he painted landscapes and a series of portraits of Indians; in 1932 he assisted Orozco with the Dartmouth murals. Bisttram mentions that Katz was most interested in Durer.

In Understanding Modern Art Katz acknowledges that he derived his theory of cycles of taste from Spengler's (1880-1936) theory of the morphology of history developed in Decline of the West (1918, 1922).[73] Katz's sequence "geometric, classic, impressionist, expressionist" implies a decline, a break-up of a civilization, following

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[71]Bisttram, The Creative Process, 53-4.

[72]V. B. Metta, "The Art of Symbolic Portraiture: The Work of Leo Katz," The Graphic (16 Feb. 1924), Leo Katz papers, Archives of American Art.

[73]Katz, I, 33-4.

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Spengler's assertions that classicism was a sign of an age's decline and impressionism and expressionism were degenerate styles. Both Spengler and Katz gave precedence to the geometric period because of its universal qualities, and because the great religions developed in the earliest periods.[74] For Katz, classicism was a sign of decay because by giving priority to an object, the inner vision was relinquished. Katz, however, rejected Spengler's pessimistic view that a decline signaled an end by turning to the ideas of Paul Ligeti who proposed that the substance of a culture's achievement carried over and seeded succeeding cultures.[75] The implication of Katz's theory is that a revival of interest in the geometric was a sign of a new period; for Katz it was manifesting most clearly in the new architecture that used clean lines and pure forms to express the ideals of the machine age. The final section on Bisttram's outline of Katz's theory, "A return to Geometry," is followed by the statement, "Pure Design is an end in itself, done for its own sake, has no external use, aesthetic only--universal arrangement of space." By assigning Ross's concept of pure design to the geometric phase, Bisttram places himself, by using Ross's system, on the leading edge of a new period.[76]

Much later Bisttram explained that reading Spengler gave him the insights

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[74]Oswald Spengler, The Decline of the West (1918, 1922), trans. Charles Atkinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, vol. 1, 1926, vol. 2, 1928), I, 399. Gombrich, who was not in sympathy with Spengler's views, asserted that both Spengler and Worringer drew primarily from Wölfflin, who drew his ideas from Hegel. Gombrich, 202. Hegel took a religious and moral approach to history; for Hegel history was organic, that is, all its parts are related.

[75]Paul Ligeti, Der Weg aus dem Chaos, cited in Katz, I, 37.

[76]It is worth noting that Katz was not completely convinced by dynamic symmetry; he believed, however, that at least some similar system was used by the Greeks; he mentioned Bisttram in his explanation of the system in an appendix to Understanding Modern Art, III, 791-796.

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necessary to appreciate modern art:

> For some years I, too, was disturbed by the modern trend. My early training was in the academic tradition. It was difficult for me to accept the obvious disregard for good drawing, the rejection of object or subject, the distortion, the break-up of all natural forms, the brilliant pure color; the use of geometric shapes, the flat areas with just a few spots and lines on a pure white background, which in spite of extreme simplicity and stark rigidity, are aesthetically satisfying.
>
> Not until I read Oswald Spengler's Decline of the West, which clearly explains the decay of some of the great nations and the rise of others, did I get an inkling as to the possible explanation of the causes underlying the changes we are witnessing today in art, science, and psychology. Spengler's theory of cycles of growth from youth to maturity, old age, and finally death, appears to be the answer to many historical enigmas.[77]

Following the outline of Katz's theory are selections from Bisttram's Three-Year Course and notes on dynamic symmetry and color. The scientific color systems of Ross and Munsell are presented followed by some occult interpretations of color.[78] Next is a lecture Bisttram prepared on modern art, followed by excerpts from Ross's book The Art of Pure Design (1907). Ross's definitions of harmony, rhythm, alternation, interval, balance, continuation, and others, are included. Ross's statement that provides a use for pure design--the development of morality in the artist--is also given:

> The problems of design are problems of righteousness. The practice of design is the practice of righteousness, for the question is constantly "am I doing it right, are the repetitions exact, the sequences faultless, the balances perfect? The student constantly trying to do the right thing gets into the habit of doing it as a matter of course--he will get into the habit of thinking in terms of Law and Order.

Following Ross's definitions, with no interruption, are six pages of notes from Kandinsky's Punct und Linie zu Fläche (1926). Three of the pages, under the title

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[77]Emil Bisttram, "On Understanding Contemporary Art," El Palacio (July-August 1957), 201.

[78]The article by Isabella J. Rhodes, "Special Properties of Color," The Mystic Light (Aug. 1929), is transcribed, then handwritten notes from an article by Lord Clifford of Chudleigh, which the author has been unable to identify, describe the colors that predominate at different hours and seasons.

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"Tensions," reproduce fourteen of Kandinsky's diagrams with labels showing that Bisttram studied the text carefully. Bisttram was most interested in the diagrams relating to lines in their vertical, horizontal, and diagonal positions. He noted, for example, Kandinsky's observation that extreme contrast could be represented by vertical lines moving in opposite directions, or by diagonal lines moving between the lower right and upper left. The diagrams showing that a mild contrast could be represented by horizontal lines moving in opposite directions, or by diagonal lines moving between the lower left and upper right is also given. He also noted Kandinsky's association of rest with the vertical and the horizontal, and warm rest with the vertical and cold rest with the horizontal.[79] He also reproduced the compositions used to distinguish between lyrical and dramatic arrangements, noting the association of lyrical with static, balanced lines, and dramatic with unbalanced lines.[80] He also took note of Kandinsky's associations between upward moving lines, high tonality, cold, freedom, light, will, and reason, in contrast to associations between downward moving lines, low tonality, warmth, denseness, weight, limitation, and emotion.

It was assuredly Katz who introduced Punct und Linie zu Fläche (1926) to Bisttram as Katz includes three illustrations from it in Understanding Modern Art (1936), and recommends it highly to his readers.[81] Since Punct und Linie zu Fläche (1926) was not published in English until 1947,[82] Katz must have translated it for Bisttram.

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[79]Kandinsky, figs. 85-88.

[80]Ibid., figs. 95-98.

[81]Katz, 114, and figs. 170, 171, 172.

[82]Wassily Kandinsky, Point and Line to Plane, trans. Howard Dearstyne and Hilla Rebay (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1947). Katherine Dreier made

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Bisttram's wife, who knew some German from her upbringing in a German-speaking household, may also have helped with the translation. None of Kandinsky's writings are cited by Bolton.

Katz's sheet of diagrams "Two, Three and Four Dimensional Art," which directly follows, demonstrate conclusively that it was indeed Katz who brought Kandinsky to Bisttram's attention. Katz's diagrams recapitulate Kandinsky's with a few variations, mostly, however, in the interpretations. Katz's chapter "Two, Three, and Four Dimensions in Art" in Understanding Modern Art, which does not include these diagrams, reveals that by the fourth dimension he meant time. In his diagrams Katz gives priority to compositions that show bilateral symmetry. For example, he gives the label "man in the temple" to a triangle enclosed within a square. Another diagram labeled "magic art, sacramental" shows two zig-zags facing each other along the vertical axis. By contrast, the diagrams with diagonals are given labels such as "exhilaration, lyrical dramatic" (to the diagonal moving from lower left to upper right) and "unnatural movement or brute dramatic" (to diagonals from lower right to upper left). Perspective, which is based on diagonal thrusts, according to Katz, shows an inner conflict; a more spiritual attitude is evoked by organizing a composition along the central vertical axis, which respects the two-dimensionality of the picture plane. Katz did not deny the dramatic appeal of the diagonal, or that the diagonal showed movement and time, he just felt that these aggressive qualities were antithetical to spirituality, which he defined as static and balanced. Katz's preference for compositions organized along the central vertical axis diverges from Kandinsky's preference for the diagonal and the expressive.

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a rough translation earlier, but it was never published.

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Bragdon also held that axial symmetry was primary and supported its use in art. He speculated that it might be due to actions operating in the fourth dimension:

> May it not be that the 3-dimensional symmetry which is so universally characteristic of animal organisms is the result of bi-rotation, or revolution about a plane: the 4-dimensional movement analogous to the turning about a line in 3-space?[83]

It is worth insisting on this point because Bisttram used axial symmetry frequently in his work. Hambidge expanded the definition of symmetry to include proportional areas; he called axial symmetry static, and symmetry using proportional areas dynamic. Furthermore, he asserted that the Euclidean definition of symmetry included both the static and dynamic types.

Katz's preference for the geometric style may have been influenced by reading Alois Riegl's Stilfragen (1893). Riegl (1858-1905) traces the origins of Western and Eastern ornament to the geometric style originated by the Egyptians, characterizes it by symmetry and rhythm, and identifies bilateral symmetry as its primary attribute.[84] Riegl's arguments for a historical and developmental history of ornament across cultures and time-periods challenged the materialistic view that ornament was derived from technological processes indigenous to a culture.

Another source for Katz's interest in Egyptian art may have been William Goodyear's The Grammar of the Lotus (1891), which was one of the sources Riegl cited. Not only did Goodyear show that the use of the lotus by the Greeks was derived from the

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[83]Bragdon, Primer of Higher Space, plate 8.

[84]Alois Riegl, Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament (1893), trans Evelyn Kain (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

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Egyptians, but he also posited that the lotus was a universal sun symbol.[85] While the latter aspect of his theory has not been as well accepted, architects used his book as a source for motifs in the development of the art deco Egyptian revival style. Goodyear was also a good friend of Hambidge's and may have encouraged and confirmed his theory that the Greeks learned dynamic symmetry from the Egyptians. Katz may also have been influenced by Blavatsky's emphasis on the role of the Egyptians in promulgating mystical ideas. In his lectures Katz used Egyptian art as his primary example of the geometric period.

Katz's use of motifs from Egyptian art in his own work confirms the importance of this idea for him. One of his symbolic society portraits, Portrait of Mrs. Harrison Smith, ca. 1923 (fig. 4), shows the subject dressed in an elaborate Egyptian costume. While using Egyptian motifs in art dates from antiquity, and never completely went out of fashion, the rage for things Egyptian reached a new frenzy with the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb in November 1922. By 1923, the craze engulfed the fashion world with elaborate dress designs, fabrics, and accessories available in the most elegant shops.[86] Fashion trends undoubtedly account for the costume in this portrait.

Katz, however, followed it up by interpreting another portrait, Portrait of Mrs. Walter Sachs, 1923 (fig. 5), in the Egyptian format of the head in profile and the torso full-front. Bisttram also experimented with this format in two drawings, Portrait of Mrs. Bisttram, 1930 (fig. 6) and Figure in Half-Length (fig. 7), both from Bisttram's New York

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[85]W. H. Goodyear, The Grammar of the Lotus: A New History of Classic Ornament (London: Sampson Low, 1891). Gombrich, 182, 195.

[86]Michael Pantazzi, "Tutankhamun and Art Deco," in Egyptomania: Egypt in Western Art 1730-1930, by Jean-Marcel Humbert, Michael Pantazzi, and Christiane Ziegler (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1994), 509.

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period. Both drawings are executed within a golden section rectangle, with the latter showing the construction lines. These drawings demonstrate that Bisttram took stylistic as well as intellectual concepts from Katz.

Next in Bisttram's Book of Notes are transcriptions of lectures Katz gave to Bisttram's class between October 1929 and January 1930. The placement of Katz's diagrams and lectures directly succeeding Kandinsky's diagrams shows that Bisttram felt that Katz's ideas were a refinement of Kandinsky's.

Katz's first lecture opens with a story that confirms Katz's spiritual point of view and provides another source for Bisttram's idea that the mission of the artist is divine:

> Here follows a bed-time story told to children in India--why artists are: Shiva, the Hindu God of Creation, creates a group to carry on the work of creation in order to withstand the ravages of karma, God of destruction, who threatens to completely destroy everything. So long as there is Art there is Life, for Art is Life --creation, becoming.[87]

Another statement from these lectures, "Art cannot be divorced from the mystical elements of all time." further confirms Katz's mystical approach to art.[88]

Katz also presents Spengler's definitions of Apollinian, Magian, and Faustian cultures. Spengler categorizes world cultures into three types based primarily on their concepts of time: the Apollinian (Greek) is characterized by a concept of the present; the Magian (Byzantine and Arabic) by a religious transcendent concept of time; and the Faustian (European and American) by concepts of both past and future. For Spengler, concepts of the future and the infinite are, however, most typical of Western culture. He cites perspective in art, the fugue in music, and the infinitesimal calculus in mathematics

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[87]Leo Katz, "Modern Conception of Development of Art," lecture to Bisttram's class, 9 Oct. 1929, in Bisttram, Book of Notes.

[88]Leo Katz, lecture to Bisttram's class, 11 Dec. 1929.

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as examples of the Western fascination with the infinite. His connection between religion and mathematics--tracing the infinitesimal calculus to Cusanus's idea (ca. 1450) of the unendingness of God [89]--would have been appealing to Bisttram. For Spengler, the Egyptian culture is the most historic because of its use of permanent materials and its emphasis on portraiture; and maintains that the Greek and Indian cultures are the least historic.[90] Taking a less developed aspect of Spengler's explanation, Katz emphasizes the differences between the concepts of space in the three cultures:

> 1-Apollinian attitude in style. In this style there is no desire to conquer space. Ex. Greek Temple for the purpose of sheltering the Deity. No extension or projection into space.
> 2-Magian attitude or style. This is Semitic or Arabic. Use of the high cupola–showing a desire to raise oneself.
> 3-The Faustian attitude or style. Our style--a desire to conquer space. Therefore, skyscrapers, zeppelins, aeroplanes, etc.[91]

Another topic that Katz develops is the distinction between personal and impersonal art. Although these terms are widely used, Katz uses them as Spengler did. Spengler associates the impersonal with the universal, with destiny, and with Greek culture; and the personal with the will, with the incidental, and with Western culture.[92] Katz's theory of art cycles follow's Spengler's distinctions since it is essentially a sequence from the impersonal (geometric) to the personal (expressionist). Katz's elaborations such as, "Anything connected with motion will not be impersonal because it already

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[89]Spengler, I, 70.

[90]Ibid., I, 10, 11.

[91]Leo Katz, lecture to Bisttram's class, 8 Jan. 1930.

[92]For example, Spengler contrasts Greek drama's unity of place with Shakespeare's ceaseless change of scene. Spengler, I, 220.

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depends upon an individual expression,"[93] and his identification of Leonardo, Michelangelo, and the Japanese artist Seshu as the great exponents of personal expression, indicate how his concepts of impersonal and personal functioned in his theory of cycles of taste. While Spengler provided many insights into art history, it should be emphasized that the concepts of impersonality and cycles were fundamental to Blavatsky. Blavatsky, for example, held that the Deity was impersonal, that there was no such thing as a personal God.

In Understanding Modern Art (1936) Katz provides examples from the various periods of Egyptian art to show the development from impersonal to personal. For the different phases of contemporary art he showed Sheeler's Flower Forms, 1917 (fig. 8), and Jonson's Time Cycle, Noon, 1930 (fig. 9) to illustrate what he meant by "expressing cosmic phenomena in impersonal symbols." Two expressionist works by Kandinsky were used for personal art. These distinctions were highly influential on Bisttram in the 1930s as he attempted to make his art both impersonal and geometric. In a later chapter Katz did include, however, Kandinsky's Circles within Circles, 1923 (fig. 10), a painting from Kandinsky's mature style that typified the aspect of his work that Bisttram most admired.

Katz's lectures also discuss optical effects, relativity, geometric symbolism, line, rhythm, color, intuition, and form and speed; his final lecture presents Franz Roh's distinction between expressionism and post-expressionism.[94]

Bisttram places his course outline for his summer school class in Moriah, New

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[93]Leo Katz, "Line," lecture to Bisttram's class, 30 Oct. 1929.

[94]Katz was presumably citing Franz Roh, Nach-expressionismus; magischer Realismus: Probleme der neuesten Europaischen Malerei (Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1925).

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York, which he taught for the Master Institute in 1928 and 1929, after the Katz lectures.[95] This outline demonstrates how completely Bisttram's thinking was dominated by Katz and Spengler. Katz's theory of art cycles is included in the lecture for the first week; impersonal and personal art (perfect expression, not individual expression) is presented in week two; and "Two, three and four dimensional art" and the Apollinian, Magian and Faustian cultures in week three. The topic for week four, "Modern Art breaking down forms to their elements in place of using elements to build Ideals from," shows his understanding of cubism as a sign of the death of one culture and the birth of another following Katz's reinterpretation of Spengler.

The discussion of Plato that opens the course also relates to Katz's theories since the pure forms that he prefers are also preferred by Plato. Katz's use of a quote from Plato to defend pure geometric abstraction shows that this was a topic he probably emphasized in his lectures:

> Plato has spoken of this beauty in his Philebus as follows: 'I do not intend by beauty of shapes what most people would expect, such as that of living creatures or pictures, but, for the purpose of my argument, I mean straight lines and curves and the surfaces of solid forms produced out of these by lathes and rulers and squares, if you understand me. For I mean that these things are not beautiful relatively, like other things, but always and naturally and absolutely; and they have their proper pleasures, no way depending on the itch of desire.'[96]

Furthermore, Katz's book opens with a story very much like the allegory of the cave that Plato gives in the seventh book of The Republic. Katz advises his readers to consider how changed their point of view would be if after living in a room alone for years they

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[95]For Bisttram's course outline for the Moriah, NY summer school class, see Appendix VIII. Since Katz's lectures were given to Bisttram's class during the winter of 1929-1930 and Bisttram spent the summer of 1930 in New Mexico, Bisttram may never have taught this class.

[96]Katz, Understanding Modern Art, II, 489.

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went outside and experienced the world.

Another confirmation of these influences on Bisttram is his inclusion of Spengler's Decline of the West and Plato's Republic on his 1930 reading list. Furthermore, Goethe, whom Spengler cites as his primary inspiration, is represented on Bisttram's list by Faust and Hermann Türck's The Man of Genius (1896).

Katz's ideas are similar to those of the English critic Clive Bell (1881-1964), whose writings were highly influential on the direction of modern art.[97] Bell analyzed Western culture in terms of rises and falls, and interpreted modern art as redeeming a cultural materialism that had reigned since the Romanesque period. Bell found the salient redeeming quality in Cézanne's evocation of "significant form." Like Katz, Bell asserted that it was the religious impulse that gave primitive art its aesthetic qualities, that primitive art was the basic standard for good art, and that its understanding and reformulation signaled a new period of artistic creativity. By "significant form" Bell meant an evocation of the "essential reality" that animates all forms, throws off extraneous detail, and produces an "esthetic emotion" in the viewer. For Bell, Western art peaked in the year 1000 with the Romanesque, and then declined. While both Bell and Spengler agreed that the Italian Renaissance was a period of spiritual bankruptcy, Bell, unlike Spengler, thought similarly of the Gothic period. Underlying Bell's theories is the essential belief that art is an index of the spirituality of an era and of an individual artist, and that the spiritual content of a work is its distinguishing quality.

Katz's idea that a new cultural period is signaled by a return to the geometric, the archaic, and the primitive, had a tremendous impact on Bisttram's aims for his own

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[97]Clive Bell, Art (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., [1913]).

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painting. For Katz, primitive art was originally created for a specific symbolic use related to belief:

> Most great art has been created not as a result of a desire to create art but rather as a by product of the expression of a great idea. First comes use, Idea. The art element than enters unconsciously. The African primitives had no intention of creating beautiful designs when they made their masks. They wished to drive away evil spirits and ward off wild animals. The purpose was very definitely use. Now, however, the original purpose is forgotten--but the design remains and is admired.[98]

In this lecture Katz contrasts the circular eyes of offensive animals (eagle, snake) with the oval eyes of domestic animals (cows, oxen) and suggests that the concentric circle as an art motif represents this primitive, impersonal force of nature.[99]

Katz's association of mysticism with primitive art was most likely derived from Lévy-Brühl's How Natives Think (1910), which synthesized anthropological research into a theory of primitive mentality. Lévy-Brühl's (1857-1939) theory of participation mystique, a refinement of the theory of animism, held that the beliefs and behaviors of primitive people were based on a collective identity with a mystical force that permeated and bound together people, nature, and objects. As man differentiated himself from this mysticism through the development of logic based on experience, intermediaries such as shamans and priests enacted the rituals for the masses, with a consequent development of symbolism and mythology.[100] Lévy-Brühl classed all non-Western cultures as

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[98]Leo Katz, "Optical Elements," lecture to Bisttram's class, 16 Oct. 1929.

[99]Bisttram's use of this motif in his Native American works is discussed in Chapter 12; the possibility that it was Bisttram's suggestion to include this motif in the logo for the Transcendental Painting Group is discussed in Chapter 16.

[100]Lucien Lévy-Brühl, How Natives Think (1910), trans. Lilian A. Clare (New York: Knopf, 1926; reprint Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 366. Katz's allusion to this text in his essay on Bisttram's Indian Abstractions is discussed in Chapter 12.

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primitive, including China and India, and characterized Western culture as a thin veneer overlaying this primitive mentality.

Lévy-Brühl's theory of participation mystique also provides an explanation for the persistence of motifs and tendency to imitation in ornamental design, which was noted by Riegl and Gombrich. While they attributed it to the ease of copying over innovation, Lévy-Brühl explained that forms were sacred for the primitive and that it was taboo to change them.

Lévy-Brühl's theory also held that in the beginning individuals acted as one with the community and then slowly separated themselves from it. This idea formed the basis for Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious and individuation. In his Jungian analysis of the psyche, Rudhyar also uses Lévy-Brühl's theory of participation in Astrology of Personality (1936) to characterize the primitive mentality.[101] Rudhyar departs from Jung, however, by asserting that the goal of the individual was not separation from the archetypes, but rather to achieve reunion or "participation" with them. Additionally, referring to Lévy-Brühl's comments about the sacred nature of decorative motifs for primitive cultures, Rudhyar, in The Transcendental Movement in Painting (1938), made the evocative statement :

> that decorative art is historically speaking, the inevitable sequence to sacred or magical art. What in the latter is significant and a power-releasing symbol becomes in the former a theme for decorative variations.

This discussion is important because in abstract art the differences between decorative

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[101]Dane Rudhyar, The Astrology of Personality (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1936), 7. Since Lévy-Brühl was appointed to the faculty at the Sorbonne in 1893, and since Rudhyar cites the French edition of his book, Rudhyar may have been familiar with his ideas before he read Jung. Jung and Rudhyar's sources in Lévy-Brühl are discussed in Chapter 12.

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and fine art become blurred, and becomes relevant for Bisttram when his exercises in pure design are examined in Chapter 13.

Lévy-Brühl's theories could also be interpreted as an anthropological confirmation of Blavatsky's theory that mysticism originated with primitive man. This relationship may also have been behind the associations between archaic art and mysticism made by Katz, Roerich, and Bell. Lévy-Brühl's theory also provides a critical background for Bisttram's interest in Chinese painting, taking subjects from biblical sources, and later from Native American themes.

What all this meant for Bisttram was that even though his mentors were not working with a modernist vocabulary themselves, they were nurturing him with the same theories that were influencing the modernists. Katz's letter of recommendation for Bisttram shows the closeness of their relationship:

> I have known Mr. Bistran for several years and have been able to observe the following abilities: a passionate desire to accumulate knowledge and information from every available source; striving for high perfection of the technical and spiritual side of painting--ability for tireless work, unusual gift to pass on acquired knowledge, due to his dynamic personality and contagious enthusiasm. His interest in tempera and fresco painting is genuine, since his temperament needs strong and monumental expression. Early handicaps in education and life have prevented him from realizing many of his ideals and the opportunity for the studies as outlined in his application seemed to be very well planned and justified.[102]

Bisttram's Book of Notes concludes with some lecture notes, a handwritten transcription of Coomaraswamy's Introduction to the Art of Eastern Asia[103] and transcriptions of some of Keskar's studio talks.

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[102]Leo Katz, "Confidential Report on Candidate for Fellowship," Bisttram File, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, New York.

[103]Amanda K. Coomaraswamy, Introduction to the Art of Eastern Asia ([Boston]: Open Court Pub., 1932).

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Chapter 5

Dynamic Symmetry, Swedenborgianism, and Life Drawing

Study with Howard Giles

About 1918 Bisttram applied to Howard Giles (1876-1955) for further study in art. Bisttram began in Giles's evening life class at the New York School of Fine and Applied Arts (later Parson's School of Design). It was in this class that Bisttram and Giles began their experiments with dynamic symmetry. Bisttram stayed with this class until the end of 1928, first being promoted to teaching assistant and then to associate instructor.[1] Their shared enthusiasm for figure drawing and dynamic symmetry was the foundation of their relationship that lasted until Bisttram's departure from New York in 1931.

Giles studied at the Art Students League in the late 1890s. His primary influence was H. Siddons Mowbray, who, working in a Pre-Raphaelite style, undoubtedly interested him in symbolism.[2] Like many other artists of the period, Giles then turned to magazine illustration. In 1913 he was appointed director of the department of illustration and painting at the New York School of Fine and Applied Arts. Winning a number of awards in juried competitions, he was elected associate member of the National Academy of Design in 1918, and full member in 1929; he was most likely

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[1]Student records for Bisttram at the NYSFAA are incomplete; they consist of four registration cards, all undated, but all for Giles's life class. Bisttram's teaching is equally undocumented; he is listed as instructor, dynamic symmetry and life drawing, in the 1925-6 and 1926-7 catalogues. His letter of resignation, effective 1 Jan. 1929, states that he assisted in the "night classes in dynamic symmetry," presumably the life class. Bisttram (to Giles), TLS, 15 Dec. 1928, BP, AAA 2892:144. Bisttram was also one of the instructors in the Saturday morning children's class.

[2]Hambidge studied at the League between 1894 and 1897; Giles between 1896 and 1898. Mowbray taught at the League between 1886 and 1902. Stephanie Cassidy, Archivist, The Arts Students League (to the author), TLS, 16 Aug. 1999.

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nominated by Leon Kroll who painted his diploma portrait.[3] Inasmuch as Kroll is usually credited with introducing Henri and Bellows to Hambidge and dynamic symmetry, Kroll may have introduced Giles to Henri and Bellows.

Giles in turn introduced Bisttram to the individuals and theories that would be the basis for all of his future work. He introduced him to Jay Hambidge and his theory of dynamic symmetry[4] and to Denman Ross and his color system. He also introduced him to Nicholas Roerich, and recommended him for a teaching position at the Master Institute of United Arts, where Giles was appointed dean of the art department in 1929. Giles, whose grandfather was the esteemed nineteenth-century Swedenborgian theologian Chauncy Giles (1813-1893), also undoubtedly introduced Bisttram to Swedenborgianism. Bisttram's 1930 reading list, with eight Swedenborgian titles, including one by Chauncy Giles, shows the depth of his involvement.[5] He in turn may have inspired his brother Stephen to study at the New-Church Theological School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which he did between 1926 and 1929.[6] Returning to New York in 1930 Stephen became involved in the Master Institute, giving several lectures

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[3]Giles's most important magazine commission, illustrating Vernon Lee's "An English Writer's Notes on England" for Scribner's, provided him with a trip to England. Vernon Lee, "An English Writer's Notes on England," 54, no. 2 Scribner's (Aug. 1913), 177-194; 54, no. 5 (Nov. 1913), 609-619; 54, no. 6 (Dec. 1913), 712-724, Howard Giles papers. Giles won awards at the Salmagundi Club (1915), Philadelphia Water Color Club (1917), National Academy of Design (1918), The Art Institute of Chicago (1921), and Carnegie Museum (1921).

[4]Louise Lutz, "Dynamic Symmetry as an Archetype: A Reunification of Mathematics and Art" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1973).

[5]The eight authors are Roeder, Balzac, Damon, Giles, Worcester, Swedenborg, Trobridge, and Emerson. For Bisttram's 1930 reading list see Appendix I. The appraisal of Bisttram's library shows that he owned a broken set of Swedenborg; see Appendix III.

[6]Archivist, Swedenborg School of Religion, to (the author), TLS, 12 Jan. 1998.

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including one titled "Mind as a Creative Power."[7]

Giles probably also introduced Bisttram to Claude Bragdon. In December 1921, Giles sent a copy of Ouspensky's Tertium Organum (1911) to Robert Henri, and in a letter mentioned that Bragdon had stopped by his studio to discuss it with him. The book had been sent to Giles by Walter Hampden, the Shakespearean actor for whose company Bragdon worked.[8] Hampden, a good friend of Giles's, undoubtedly knowing of Giles's Swedenborgian background and his interest in dynamic symmetry, may have recommended Giles to Bragdon based on these interests. Bragdon's interest in Swedenborg was based on reading Emerson;[9] he may have discovered dynamic symmetry in 1921 when it received wide publicity following the publication of Hambidge's The Greek Vase in 1920. Bragdon's first mention of the subject is in his April 1922 preface to the second edition of The Beautiful Necessity (1910); Hampton may also have known Hambidge through his work as a stage designer.[10]

On 10 May 1921, Hambidge spoke at a widely publicized event held in the auditorium of the Washington Irving High School in New York announcing the formation of the League of American Artists and its platform. Under the chairmanship of Howard

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[7]The Message of 1930, 68.

[8]Howard Giles to (Robert Henri), ALS, Dec. 1921, Robert Henri Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University. The influence of this book on Bisttram is discussed in Chapter 10.

[9]Claude Bragdon, Four Dimensional Vistas (New York: Knopf, 1916), 105-116. Giles could also have come to Bragdon's attention by the biography of Chauncey Giles that was published in 1920. Carrie Giles Carter, The Life of Chauncey Giles as Told in his Diary and Correspondence (Boston: New Church Union, 1920).

[10]"To Discuss Art Drama Movement: Jay Hambidge, Century Illustrator and Stage Designer and Herbert Miller, Art Expert, Speak at Unitarian Church Tomorrow," Passaic [NJ] Daily Herald [1914], Jay Hambidge Papers, AAA 3176:497.

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Giles, the League advocated the construction of a building in New York for art exhibitions and the appointment of a cabinet-level Secretary of Art. A review of the event accompanied by a cartoon of the speakers on the dias (fig. 11) provided additional momentum.[11] Hambidge's most controversial remark--that the Hermes of Praxiteles was weak and inconsequential--was noted by all of the critics.[12] Bisttram was certainly in the audience for this lecture.

The most interesting person on the dais was W. H. Goodyear, whose book The Grammar of the Lotus (1891) was mentioned earlier. His theory that the origin of Greek ornamental motifs lay in Egyptian precedents, suggests, as mentioned earlier, that he may have advised Hambidge on the aspect of his theory that claimed that the Greeks learned dynamic symmetry from the Egyptians.[13] To support his argument Hambidge

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[11]Karl K. Kitchen, "Illustrating one of the Three Easiest Ways of Acquiring Fame and Honors in New York City," n.d., Hambidge papers, AAA 3818:1063. The personalities in the cartoon include John G. Agar (1856-1935), president of the National Arts Club, who presided and made the preliminary remarks; Professor William H. Goodyear (1846-1923), Brooklyn Museum; Howard Giles, chairman of the League; George Bellows, chairman of the Technical Bureau of the League; Charles Dana Gibson (1867-1944), Society of Illustrators; Charles B. Falls (b. 1874), president of the Guild of Free Lance Artists; Robert Mackay, representing the Poet's "House of Song;" Leo Mielziner (1869-1935), and Robert Vonnoh (1858-1933).

[12]For example, "Hardings Become Artists, President and Wife Thank League Here for Membership Honor," n.d., Hambidge Papers, AAA 3177:69.

[13]Hambidge, born in Simcoe, Ontario, Canada, probably developed his theory in collaboration with his friend, the Canadian writer Peter McArthur, while they were doing research for a humorous article on higher mathematics, McArthur to do the writing and Hambidge the illustrations. Earlier Hambidge and McArthur collaborated on a series of articles on poker playing for the magazine The Truth. In 1902 Hambidge and McArthur made a trip to London where Hambidge presented his ideas to the Royal Hellenic Society. Harold J. McWhinnie, Dynamic Symmetry: The Power of Limits and Order: the Jay Hambidge Story, TM, 1999, unpaginated. Courtesy Harold McWhinnie. Hambidge asserted that he discovered dynamic symmetry while studying Euclid, and that he applied it to design much later. Hambidge, The Parthenon, 58-59. Goodyear, who was a good friend of Kingsley Porter's, probably provided Hambidge with his introductions to

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analyzed an archaic Greek sculpture from ca. 600 B.C. that was clearly based on an Egyptian prototype.[14]

Hambidge's major presentation of dynamic symmetry in 1921, however, was at the Art Institute of Chicago where he gave the Scammon Lectures. Writing to his future wife Mary Crovatt (1885-1973) from Chicago the week before the New York lecture, Hambidge related the phenomenal interest being shown in dynamic symmetry:

> Art conditions here are better probably than they have ever been in the world excepting Florence and Athens in days past. Things have been moving for me while I was away better probably than they would have been if I had remained [in Greece]. You'd be surprised. Every day I hear of artists talking up DS who'd never be suspected–the latest is C. D. Gibson. The Damroches, the musicians, are up in the air about it. Giles has just won second prize, silver medal and $1,000 with the first scheme picture he painted. This is the International Exhibition at Pittsburgh. Eugene Speicher, another DS convert, took 3rd. Bellows and Kroll pulled off the big plums in New York and Philadelphia. I saw an exhibition of Arthur B. Davis' work at the Century Club the other day. He not only uses D.S. in his pictures but D.S. frames. I couldn't begin to give you a description of the excitement in Chicago.[15]

Giles's award at the Carnegie International increased his reputation as well as that of dynamic symmetry, resulting in three engagements to speak on dynamic symmetry in 1921--in Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh.[16] Giles used the system in

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scholars at Harvard.

[14]Jay Hambidge, "Dynamic Symmetry of the Human Figure for Advanced Students," The Diagonal 1, no. 10 (August 1920), 200-5.

[15]Jay Hambidge to (Mary Crovatt, Athens, Greece), ALS, 4 May 1921, Jay Hambidge Papers, AAA 3177:60. The Chicago lectures are relevant to Bisttram because when he went to New Mexico, many of the people he met there who were interested in dynamic symmetry had learned it from the Chicago lectures or from someone who had attended them.

[16]The first classes in dynamic symmetry in New York were held at the office of George Whittle in 1917. Edwards, vii. Hambidge, Giles, and Whittle probably met in the offices of the Century Magazine where all three worked. Giles also lectured in Detroit in 1924, in Montreal in 1932, and gave the Cook-Daniels Lectures in Denver. His

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his own work, taught it in his classes, and published and lectured on it frequently. Mary Crovatt, who learned to weave while she was in Greece with Hambidge, used it in all her weaving designs and continued to promote Hambidge's ideas after his death in 1924.[17] Crovatt first came to New York to make a career on the stage as a "whistler" and may have met Hambidge in that connection since Hambidge also did scenic design for the "art drama movement."[18] Dane Rudhyar's use of dynamic symmetry in his theory of music, published in his pamphlet "A New Sense of Space" (1929) shows its influence in the field of music, an influence suggested by Hambidge in his letter to Crovatt. Rudhyar also knew Bragdon and Hampden, having composed the incidental music for Light of Asia [1928] when it was produced in Hollywood with Walter Hampden in the leading role.[19]

Bisttram's recollection of how he first came to call on Giles reveals that he had been doing some sophisticated reading and was already interested in Oriental art.

> Mayrion and I looked through the artist listings in the New York telephone book and came across the name of Howard Giles, which somehow seemed familiar to me. I had just recently begun studying two volumes on the history of Chinese and Japanese art by Ernest Francisco Fenollosa and I thought I remembered a

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publications are discussed below.

[17]Her projects included weaving the cloth used for the costumes for Ted Shawn's dance company in the revival of the Delphic festivals, Delphi, Greece and the costumes for the production of the Little Theater Opera Company's performance of Phoebus and Pan. Also dynamic symmetry was used for the set designs for The Emperor Jones staged at the Hedgerow Theatre, Rose Valley, PA. "Dynamic Symmetry on the Stage: Drawings by Elenore Abbott," Theatre Arts Monthly (June 1924), 377-380.

[18]"Art Drama Movement," Passaic Daily News, 19 Nov. 1914, Jay Hambidge Papers, AAA, 3176:492.

[19]Claude Bragdon, "Letter of recommendation for Dane Rudhyar," 1928, Rudhyar File, John S. Guggenheim Foundation, New York.

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> book on Chinese art written by Giles.[20] Even though I wasn't sure if he were the same man, I called him and asked if I could study with him.[21]

Bisttram's memory of their first meeting at Giles's Fourteenth Street studio indicates that their relationship was based on a mutual interest in philosophy:

> We sat and talked for almost an hour as he drew me out to find the direction of my thinking. We discussed Plato, Herbert Spenser, Emerson, Walt Whitman, Schopenhauer and even some Oriental teachings. Then he asked to see my work. "Yes, I'll accept you," he said. "I'm teaching a night class at Parsons School of Art [sic] on 79th Street and Broadway and you may come to it.[22]

Mayrion Bisttram's comments on their relationship provide additional insight into their respective personalities and the strength of their friendship:

> It was an ideal combination--Giles the inspirer, kindly and paternal, kindling enthusiasm in the faint-hearted, Bisttram aggressive, ruthless but constructive, keeping both feet firmly planted on Mother earth and giving weak structures a good foundation.[23]

One of Giles's first suggestions was that Bisttram study anatomy at the morgue.

> As time went on he [Giles] recommended the study of anatomy and told me that the best place to go would be the city morgue. I did not care much for that idea but after a great deal of hesitation, I finally made it... While I learned a great deal about anatomy, I soon gave it up as I was more interested in basic structural principles than in the study of muscles and bone. It was my feeling that the nude body and, for the matter, even the clothed body, was no longer the subject for painting--the new age demanded another means of expression.[24]

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[20]Bisttram is referring here to Ernest F. Fenollosa, Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art: An Outline History of East Asiatic Design, 2 vol. (London: William Heinemann, 1912) and Herbert A. Giles, An Introduction to the History of Chinese Pictorial Art (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, Ld., 1905; 2nd ed., 1918).

[21]Bisttram, The Creative Process, 45.

[22]Ibid.

[23]Mayrion Bisttram to Frank and Margel Hinder, TLS, 13 Feb. 1939, 4, Frank and Margel Hinder Papers, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia.

[24]Bisttram, The Creative Process, 45-46.

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They also attended a series of lectures on dynamic symmetry by Jay Hambidge. Bisttram recalled that it was a series of ten lectures. These were probably the series of ten lectures held at the Architectural League in early 1919.[25] Bisttram was fascinated, and he and Giles often met with Hambidge afterwards. Since the lectures were mainly theoretical, he and Giles had to work out their own methods for applying dynamic symmetry. When they asked Hambidge for his advice, he replied, "Teach it, you will find the secret in the human figure."[26] Hambidge's interest in applying dynamic symmetry to the human figure is not as well-known because the articles he wrote on this subject appeared exclusively in The Diagonal. This, however, was a primary aspect of his theory, and was one that he undoubtedly emphasized in his lectures.

Hambidge also followed Giles's class experiments closely and judged the success of their experiments a confirmation of his method. His article on Giles's teaching, which included eleven student drawings, mentioned that the students were also taking a course in logic.[27] Giles's article on the progress of his students, which appeared the following month, included four examples of Bisttram's work.[28] Bisttram and Giles were very enthusiastic about their class experiments:

> We became so involved ourselves that several evenings after class we took the Negro model with us to Giles' studio and worked until the early hours of the

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[25]Edwards, xi.

[26]Hambidge, quoted in Bisttram, Dynamic Symmetry, 6.

[27]Jay Hambidge, "Dynamic Symmetry and Life Class Work," The Diagonal 1, no. 7 (May 1920), 134-138.

[28]Howard Giles, "Dynamic Symmetry in the Class Room," The Diagonal 1, no. 8 (June 1920), 155-161. This article was reprinted, with some additions, in The National Art Student 3, no. 1 (April 1921), 6-12. The illustrations are not credited; however, Bisttram claimed that he drew 4 of the 11. Bisttram, Dynamic Symmetry, 7.

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> morning trying to determine how we could use Dynamic Symmetry as a system of design for drawing and composition. We continued the program with our students and all of us learned a great deal; I myself have taught it in all my classes and used its principles in all of my work ever since.[29]

Dynamic symmetry was first announced in the 1918 school catalogue; the catalogue description, undoubtedly written by Giles, explains dynamic symmetry as an approach that replaces the emotional method with an intellectual method:

> Pursuing its uninterrupted policy of expansion for increase in public service, the school considers that the comparatively new admission by the present art world that the intellect as well as the emotions is concerned in art and that man's natural process of investigation is from cause to effect, makes the following announcement of very particular interest.
>
> Nothing, so far done, has contributed so directly to this end as the "Jay Hambidge Discovery," or the re-discovery and statement of the Greek Laws of Symmetry. So far as we know this is the first art school to incorporate these principles into its school teachings, which it has done during the past year through Howard Giles, one of the first Hambidge students in New York. An opportunity will be given students of all grades of proficiency to study the subject in connection with life drawing, painting or illustration.[30]

Giles's enthusiasm for dynamic symmetry was based on its relation to nature and Greek art:

> His [Hambidge's] investigations would seem to prove that the law of proportion in growth, as known to the modern botanist, that law which the contemporary artist senses subjectively in all natural forms, organic or inorganic, was known by the ancient Greeks and used as a base or plan of proportion for constructing their temples, their sculptured works, vases and the painted decorations on them and other creative works. This suggests a concept so grand, so sublimated that the mind reels. [31]

Giles was undoubtedly so impressed with dynamic symmetry because of its relationships

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[29]Bisttram, The Creative Process, 47.

[30]Winter Session of the New York School of Fine and Applied Art, 1918-1919, 6, The Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Archives of Parsons School of Design.

[31]Howard Giles, "The Golden Age and Contemporary Art, Jay Hambidge's Rediscovery of the Lost Laws of Harmony and Counterpoint as Related to the Graphic Arts," Evening Sun, 27 Dec. 1921, Howard Giles papers.

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to Swedenborgianism. Hambidge's assertion that art should be approached rationally is similar to Swedenborg's assertion that man should understand creation rationally and not by faith alone. Hambidge's assertion that there is a structural relationship between human, vegetable and animal forms relates to Swedenborg's theory of correspondences. Swedenborg posits two analogous worlds--a spiritual world (heaven and hell) and a natural world (earth)--structurally and mathematically linked in a cause and effect relationship that produces the earth's mineral, vegetable, animal, and human kingdoms by derivation.

> First, what correspondence is. The whole natural world corresponds to the spiritual world, and not merely the natural world in general, but also every particular of it; and as a consequence everything in the natural world that springs from the spiritual world is called a correspondent. It must be understood that the natural world springs from and has permanent existence from the spiritual world, precisely like an effect from its effecting cause. All that is spread out under the sun and that receives heat and light from the sun is what is called the natural world; and all things that derive their subsistence therefrom belong to that world. But the spiritual world is heaven; and all things in the heavens belong to that world.[32]

Hambidge's theory that these relationships between human, vegetable and animal kingdoms are related by proportion and ratio is similar to Swedenborg's theory of degrees. Man, who is part spiritual and part natural, according to Swedenborg, either ascends into the spiritual and celestial by putting off the natural or descends into the sensual and corporeal by putting on more things of the world. This is effected by degrees that are not continuous, but are discrete and distinct like steps, related by proportion in a three-fold ratio.

There are three degrees of wisdom, the natural, the spiritual and the celestial.

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[32]Emanuel Swedenborg, Heaven and Hell (1758), trans. John C. Ager (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1900; reprint West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 1995), para. 89.

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> Man is in the natural degree of wisdom while he lives in this world. This degree may then be perfected in him to its highest point, but yet it cannot enter upon the spiritual degree, because the spiritual degree is not an extension of the natural degree by continuity, but is conjoined to it by correspondences. After death man is in the spiritual degree of wisdom; and this degree is also such that it may be perfected to its highest point, but yet it cannot enter upon the celestial degree of wisdom, because the celestial degree is not an extension of the spiritual degree by continuity, but is conjoined to it by correspondences. From this it may be evident that wisdom can be elevated in a triplicate ratio, and in each degree can be perfected in a simple ratio to its highest point.[33]

Swedenborg's theory of degrees, which defines creation as a descent from the Creator, is similar to the neo-Kantian theory discussed in the previous chapter; it is also similar to Blavatsky's, discussed in Chapter 2. Swedenborg's concept also included his theory of opposites:

> I heard that a certain Divine truth flowed down out of heaven into hell, and that in its descent by degrees it was converted on the way into what is false, until at the lowest hell, it became the exact opposite of that truth; from which it was manifest that the hells according to degrees are in opposition to the heavens in regard to all goods and truths, these becoming evils and falsities by influx into forms turned the reverse way; for all inflowing, as is well known, is perceived and felt according to recipient forms and their states.[34]

Hambidge's explanation and use of the golden section rectangle as a form which contains within it a like form but smaller also accords with Swedenborg's concept of form. "For in the most perfect form, such as the form of heaven is, there is a likeness of the whole in the part and of the part in the whole."[35] This may be the passage Bisttram was referring to when (in his statement for Rudhyar's book cited in Chapter 4) he quoted Swedenborg

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[33] Emanuel Swedenborg, Angelic Wisdom Concerning the Divine Providence (1764), trans. William C. Dick and E. J. Fulsford (London: Swedenborg Society, 1949), par. 34. This book is on Bisttram's reading list of 1930, see Appendix I.

[34]Emanuel Swedenborg, Angelic Widsom Concerning Divine Love and Wisdom (1763), trans. John C. Ager (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1885; reprint West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 1995), para. 275

[35]Swedenborg, Heaven and Hell, para. 73.

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as saying, "In the most perfect form, the part is similar to the whole and the whole to the part. The only difference being a difference of magnitude." Swedenborg also uses the term "reciprocal" conjunction, a term which Hambidge also uses, to indicate a change in degree. Hambidge's system, by providing a system of structures that expands and contracts according to ratios, replicates the macrocosmic-microcosmic theory of the universe held by Swedenborg.

Furthermore, Hambidge's assertion that dynamic symmetry was known by the Egyptians and Greeks accords with Swedenborg and Blavatsky's assertion that the science of correspondences was known by the ancients, and again points to the priority of the archaic past for ultimate truths. Also, Swedenborg, like Blavatsky, held that angels lived on earth among men in the Golden Age.[36] Hambidge, however, was not religious, and in a number of letters to Mary Crovatt, expresses impatience with Giles's philosophical ideas.

The Whirling Square Rectangle

Dynamic symmetry is a system of picture composition based on Greek mathematics and an analysis of Greek design. The system aims for harmony of parts by the use of a series of rectangles that are integrally related by proportion and internal rhythms. Each rectangle breaks down into set divisions that provide guidelines for the designer. The rectangles are all derived from the square in increments based on a diagonal, following the relationships set out in the Pythagorean Theorem.

The whirling square or golden section rectangle is one of the most important

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[36]Ibid., 115.

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formulas and is one that Bisttram used frequently. Photographs of Metropolis (The House of God), 1929 (fig. 12), and Silence, 1929 (fig. 13), with the dynamic symmetry lines drawn in by Bisttram, demonstrate his use of this rectangle.[37] For reference, Figure 14 shows the proportional divisions of a whirling square rectangle vertically oriented like the two drawings. The two major diagonals are drawn from the corners of the whole rectangle. The minor diagonals, which establish the three registers of the rectangle--upper, middle, and lower--are drawn from the corners at 90 degree angles to the major diagonals. Horizontal and vertical lines are drawn at the intersections.

The upper and lower registers of the whirling square rectangle are smaller whirling square rectangles, turned on their sides. This is so because the operation just described--drawing the diagonal of the whole rectangle, then deriving the minor diagonal from it--is an operation known as finding the reciprocal. This is, in fact, the mathematical definition of a reciprocal, a section cut from a rectangle that is proportional to the whole rectangle. Hambidge calls this a whirling square rectangle because a square is left over when the reciprocal is cut off from it; and because the reciprocal turns around or "whirls" at 90 degrees to the main rectangle. The middle register, or the part left over from taking reciprocals off the two ends, divides into two squares and a whirling square rectangle.

Likewise, the whirling square rectangle can be built from a square. Using a compass, the point is placed at the midpoint of any side of the square; the pencil end is placed at an opposite corner and an arc is dropped to the base line. This is diagramed in Figure 15a. Beginning with the square abcd, the point-end of a compass is placed at the

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[37]The author obtained these photographs from John Fisher, Tesuque, NM, a dealer who was involved in the disposition of Bisttram's estate.

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midpoint of the base at e. The pencil end is placed at the diagonal corner b. An arc is dropped to the base line of the square at f, from which the whirling square rectangle aecf is constructed.[38] A 2 inch square produces a whirling square rectangle 2 inches by approximately 3-1/4 inches.

The three-part massing of Metropolis, ca. 1929 (fig. 12), follows the three registers of the whirling square rectangle. While there is a fair amount of detail in the composition, the structure is simple and follows the dynamic symmetry lines closely. For example, the crossing diagonals of the upper register form the roof lines of the main building, and the diagonals of the lower register provide the roof lines that form the horizon at the bottom of the composition. The most important structural element, however, is the central vertical axis. By giving dominance to the central line, the diagonals are overpowered so that they do not thrust forward or backward, but remain rhythmic elements on the picture plane. This is one of Bisttram's typical strategies for picture construction, and is also used in Silence.

Silence, 1929 (fig. 13), depicts a disciple meditating. While the three registers of the whirling square rectangle are clearly reflected in the drawing, the central vertical axis dominates and actually becomes the theme of the drawing. It traces the route for the descent of light flowing down from heaven, through the disciple's head and nose, finally illuminating the silencing finger raised to the lips. The upper register contains the heavenly realm described as concentric circles with a lotus blossom in the center and figures entering from the right and left. This picture may depict the oath to silence taken

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[38]Hambidge describes this operation in many places, for example, The Elements of Dynamic Symmetry (Brentano's, Inc, 1926; reprint New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946), 25. This book is a compilation of Hambidge's articles from The Diagonal, published in 1919 and 1920.

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by occultists. Blavatsky suggests that this may be a type:

> From the Egyptians down to the Jews it was held as the highest sin to divulge anything pertaining to the correct measure of time. It was for divulging the secrets of the Gods, that Tantalus was plunged into the infernal regions; the keepers of the sacred Sibylline Books were threatened with the death penalty for revealing a word from them. Sigalions (images of Harpocrates) were in every temple--especially in those of Isis and Serapis--each pressing a finger to the lips...[39]

Even though the golden section rectangle is "irrational," that is, the sides are not in whole number units, embedded within the golden section are an infinite number of similarly proportioned rectangles that form an integral unity. The reason for the persistent interest in the golden section is that it represents what mathematicians call the extreme and mean ratio, that is, the ratio of the longer part to the whole is equal to the ratio of the shorter part to the longer part. This relationship is given in Euclid.

The Logarithmic Curve

The connection Hambidge makes between art, nature, and mathematics is based on his discovery that the logarithmic curve is embedded in the golden section rectangle. The logarithmic spiral, also called the constant angle spiral, the Fibonacci series, or the summation series, is found in nature in the flow of water draining out of a sink, a coin rolling on the floor, and the curves of the nautilus shell and the ram's horn.[40] It is also found in the arrangement of florets in the sunflower, the curve of a lock of hair, the coil

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[39]Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, II, 396. The author has assigned the title Silence for convenience. There is, however, a drawing titled Silence on the checklist of Bisttram's 1929 exhibition at the Currier Gallery of Art, Manchester, NH. For this checklist, see BP, AAA 2893:940.

[40]Bragdon, "A Dissertation on Dynamic Symmetry," 308-9.

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of an elephant's trunk, and in the curves of a beaver's tooth and a cat's claw.[41] Hambidge described his discovery of the relationship between art, nature, and mathematics in the logarithmic curve as follows:

> Many years ago the writer became convinced that the spiral curve found in plant growth, which Professor Church describes in his work on the law of leaf distribution, and that of the curve of the shell, were identical, and must be the equiangular or logarithmic spiral curve of mathematics... Being convinced that the spiral was indeed the mathematical curve mentioned, the writer saw that, because of a certain property which it possessed, this spiral could be reduced from a curve form to one composed of straight lines and thereby be used by the artist to solve certain problems of composition and connect design closely with nature.[42]

Hambidge is referring here to A. H. Church's On the Relation of Phyllotaxis to Mechanical Laws (1901). Theodore Cook's The Curves of Life (1914), Samuel Colman's Nature's Harmonic Unity (1912), and D'Arcy Thompson's On Growth and Form (1917) are the other books that provide the context for Hambidge's theory.[43] They were the first to apply mathematical principles to the study of biological form; they also encouraged artists to re-examine nature and form in new and more abstract ways. Bisttram, in his manuscript on dynamic symmetry, specifically recommends the books by Church, Cook, and Thompson, and undoubtedly studied them carefully.[44] Thompson, in turn, was influenced by Hambidge: the second revised edition of his book (1942) contains a chapter on the equiangular spiral that runs over a hundred pages, and in subsequent

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[41]D'Arcy W. Thompson, On Growth and Form (Cambridge, England: The University Press, 2nd rev. ed., 1942), 748-753.

[42]Hambidge, The Elements of Dynamic Symmetry, 5.

[43]Edwards, 9.

[44]Bisttram, Dynamic Symmetry, 11.

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chapters, citing Hambidge, relates it to animal and plant forms.[45] It is worth noting that Spengler's theory of history as a living organism that is born, grows, and dies, is essentially biological and has much in common with these texts.

The whirling square rectangle, as discussed above and diagramed in Figure 15a, divides into a square and its reciprocal--another whirling square rectangle, except reduced and on its side. By repeating this operation--taking sections off each successively smaller whirling square rectangle--the whirling square rectangle can be proportionally reduced infinitely into its square and reciprocal. Since the reciprocal is perpendicular to the rectangle from which it is derived, taking successive reciprocals forms a spiral motion. Figure 15b shows a whirling square rectangle proportionally reduced into its square and reciprocal three times. Beginning with the whirling square rectangle abcd, the rectangle is cut at ef, giving the square aecf and the whirling square rectangle ebfd. The whirling square rectangle ebfd is reduced again at gh which gives the square ghfd and the whirling square rectangle ebgh. The whirling square ebgh is reduced again by the line ji dividing it into the square jbih and the whirling square rectangle ejgi.

It should be noted that the point at which the two diagonals cross in Figure 15b is called the "nodal point" or the "eye" of the rectangle. This is the point around which the successive motions of the whirling square revolve. The nodal points are other significant points through which other divisions of the whirling square can be made.

While all rectangles can be reduced to a characteristic curve, only the whirling

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[45] Thompson's acknowledgment of Hambidge in this edition was pointed out by Elizabeth Mitchel Walter, "Jay Hambidge and the Development of the Theory of Dynamic Symmetry, 1902-1920" (Ph.D. diss., University of Georgia, 1976), 35.

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square rectangle replicates the growth curve found in nature. This is the essential connection that Hambidge makes between art, mathematics, and nature, and is the core attraction of the system for Bisttram. Bisttram expressed his conviction as follows:

> Perhaps one of the most startling of his [Hambidge's] demonstrations was the measurements of plants such as the sunflower seed spiral formation, the conch shell, and as a final emphasis the human figure and various parts of the human skeleton. The mathematical ratios were emphatic and convincing.[46]

By using Hambidge's methods in his designs Bisttram felt that he was following nature's processes, and Aristotle admonishment, "We must not imitate Nature in her effects; we must follow her principles and laws."[47]

The Root Rectangles

The other forms used in dynamic symmetry are the root rectangles. These are derived from the diagonal of a square, in contrast to the whirling square rectangle that is derived from the diagonal of half a square. The construction of the root rectangles is shown in Figure 16a. Beginning with the square abcd, the compass point is placed at the corner of the square at c, the pencil point at the opposite diagonal corner b, and an arc is dropped to the base line at f. This produces the root-two rectangle aecf.

This operation is repeated again starting with the root-two rectangle aecf to

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[46]Bisttram, Dynamic Symmetry, 4.

[47]The construction of the golden section is given in Euclid; the discovery of the logarithmic curve is credited to Descartes in 1638. R. C. Archibald, "Note on the Logarithmic Spiral, Golden Section and the Fibonacci Series," in The Greek Vase by Jay Hambidge, 152, 146. R. C. Archibald, was a professor of mathematics at Brown University. Edward Huntington, president of the American Mathematical Association, and professor of mathematics at Harvard, attended Hambidge's lectures in Cambridge, and was an enthusiastic supporter. E. V. Huntington to (Jay Hambidge), TLS, 21 April 1918, Hambidge Papers, AAA 3176:840. The support of these mathematicians undoubtedly contributed to Hambidge's prestige at Harvard.

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produce the root-three rectangle agch. The compass point is placed at the lower left corner of the root-two rectangle at c; the pencil end is placed at the upper right corner of the root-two rectangle at e; finally, an arc is dropped to the base line at h. This produces the root-three rectangle agch. This can be carried out infinitely, but Hambidge suggests stopping with the root-five rectangle that has special properties relating it to the whirling square rectangle.

The root rectangles, progressing from root-one to root-two and so on, form a proportionate series based on the organizing ratios of the diagonals, and function as a way of multiplying squares. When a square is built on the base line of the root-two rectangle, it is twice as big as the original square. When a square is built on the base line of the root-three rectangle, it is three times as big as the original square. A square built on the base of the root-four rectangle is four times as big as the original square; this is particularly clear since the root-four rectangle is made up of two squares next to each other.

The square and the root-four rectangle are rational, that is, they are expressed as whole numbers; the root-two, root-three, and root-five rectangles, like the whirling square rectangle, are irrational, that is, they are expressed by unending fractions.[48] Since the lengths and sides of most dynamic symmetry rectangles are not in whole number ratios, Bisttram adopted standard sizes for them.[49]

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[48]The square is represented as 1; the root-two rectangle as 1.4142+; the root-three rectangle as 1.732+; the root-four rectangle as 2; the root-five rectangle as 2.236+; the whirling square rectangle as 1.618+.

[49]For the sizes Bisttram used, see Appendix IX. Bisttram, however, also used compound rectangles not on this list. For compound rectangles, see Hambidge, The Elements of Dynamic Symmetry, 71-100.

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Figure 16b shows another way of constructing the root-five rectangle, which is Hambidge's proof that the root-five rectangle is related to the whirling square rectangle. In this operation, again beginning with a square bcfh, the point end of a compass is placed at the midpoint of the base at g, as in the construction of the whirling square rectangle, but now an arc is dropped to both sides of the square; these operations produce the root-five rectangle. This shows that the root-five rectangle is composed of two whirling square rectangles, one oriented horizontally and the other on its end vertically. The root-five rectangle can also be analyzed as two overlapping whirling square rectangles.

Because of these relationships, Hambidge concluded that the root-five was more important that the whirling square, and that the whirling square was derived from the root-five. Frank Higgins' Ancient Freemasonry: An Introduction to Masonic Archeology (1928), which is based on a reading of Blavatsky, provides an occult reading for the root five-rectangle, which is given in Chapter 10.

Hambidge asserted that the knowledge and use of root rectangles is shown in Plato's Theaetetus, and that in the Timaeus Plato expressed a preference for the root-three rectangle. Hambidge hypothesized that beauty was "a matter of functional coordination," a definition which applies to Bisttram's concept.[50]

The Diagonal

The relationships among the dynamic symmetry shapes show that the square and its related rectangles form a proportional series of design modules that "nest" inside each other. When they are used alone or in combination, they "exhaust" or fill up, or account

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[50]Hambidge, The Greek Vase, 160-161, 59.

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for all areas in a given composition so that there is no leftover space. Furthermore, each of the rectangles has a certain character based on its shape, the inclination of the internal diagonals, and the rhythms produced by its proportional divisions. The diagonals are the dynamic elements that vitalize and provide rhythm to the essentially static rectangles.

Bisttram explains that the first thing that he discovered when he first started experimenting with dynamic symmetry was the importance of the diagonal:

> When we first began to teach the elements and the use of Dynamic Symmetry we did not realize the importance of the diagonal; hence when the students were sketching from a model they would invariably construct a root rectangle and try to squeeze the drawing of the model in to that root rectangle. However we soon discovered that the pose the model had taken suggested a diagonal and that diagonal suggested a particular root rectangle to be used in drawing that figure.[51]

Bisttram begins, first, by finding the major diagonal, then, second, he constructs the rectangle around it. Bisttram calls this structure the "masculine" part of the drawing, and the filling in of the flesh the "feminine" part of the drawing.[52]

Study of a Hand, 1927 (fig. 17), which retains the original dynamic symmetry lines, exemplifies this approach. The shape of the composition is not a specific root rectangle; the diagonals are the guiding structure of the drawing around which the rectangle was constructed. The diagonal from lower left to upper right governs the direction of the palm, while the diagonal from lower right to upper left forms the diagonal of the fourth finger. The central vertical axis provides the structure for the pinky finger; it is, however, subservient to the diagonals that provide the main interest. The rectangle is generally in the shape of the root-four--two squares, one above the other.

Bisttram's interest in hands is also shown in his Portrait of Mrs. Bisttram, 1930

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[51]Bisttram, Dynamic Symmetry, 27.

[52]Ibid., 28.

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(fig. 6). In this fairly complex arrangement of hands, one hand is shown wearing a glove, while the other hand is shown holding the other glove.[53] The proportional relationships of the hand were of the greatest interest to those who studied dynamic symmetry. On the cover of one of the issues of The Diagonal, the bones of the hand are illustrated, giving the ratios between the lengths of the bones.[54] Bragdon noted that the fingertips of a closed hand trace a logarithmic spiral.[55]

Study for Cubist Nudes, ca. 1932 (fig. 18) is also based on controlling diagonals; it is, however, constructed within a specific root rectangle--the root-four, two side-by-side squares. Bisttram divided the rectangle into fifths, both vertically and horizontally, producing a grid of twenty-five rectangles in the same proportions as the enclosing rectangle. The division of the root-four rectangle into fifths has been accomplished by dividing the rectangle at the "nodal points." Likewise, by using nodal points, the root-two rectangle can be divided into three divisions, the root-three into four divisions, and the root-five into six divisions.

The drawing depicts two figures--one male, the other female, each in a reclining position opposing and overlapping the other, and each governed by one of the major diagonals. The male figure built on the lower right to upper left diagonal, and the female

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[53]The characterization of Mrs. Bisttram in this picture as "prim and proper" is confirmed by recollections of her friends. Bisttram also painted a full-length portrait of her; later this portrait was cut down. The head from it is in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe.

[54]This drawing of the hand is accompanied by an explanatory article. Jay Hambidge, "Dynamic Symmetry of Man for Advanced Students," The Diagonal 1, no. 5 (March 1920), 96. The ratios for the hand are also given in Jay Hambidge, "The Dynamic Symmetry of the Human Figure for Advanced Students. Lesson V," The Diagonal 1, no. 6 (April 1920), 120;

[55]Bragdon, "A Dissertation on Dynamic Symmetry," 308-9.

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built on the lower left to upper right diagonal, become personifications of their respective diagonals. The overlapping of the figures also echos the overlaps that typify the internal structure of the root rectangles. The image may also represent the male and female vivifying forces in the universal ether, and even the concept of the androgyne. Symbolism was encouraged by Hambidge. His lecture "Practical Methods for Using Symmetry in Modern Design" included two topics encouraging the use of symbolism: "Symbolism as a Design Aid" and "The Richness of Classic Symbolism and the Poverty of Modern Symbolism."[56]

Drawing from the Model

Bisttram and Giles worked with a Negro model in their life class. Many of their drawings focus on the head. A sheet of three heads Bisttram drew for his book on dynamic symmetry about 1960, based on drawings done in the 1920s, provides a key to his approach. These drawings and the comments he made about them show that Bisttram's construction of the head, like Study of a Hand, 1927 (fig. 17), was based on finding the controlling diagonals, and then constructing the rectangle around them.[57]

Head in Profile Facing Left (fig. 19) is the model for the first of the heads in figure 19. A comparison of the two drawings, with the assistance of Bisttram's explanation for the 1960s drawing, shows that the central vertical axis of a root-two rectangle was used

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[56]This was his sixth and final lecture in Chicago. Jay Hambidge, "Scammon Lectures: Outline," 1921, Hambidge Papers, AAA 3176: 1194.

[57]A comparison between a sheet of studies of the lips executed by Bisttram for this same book and drawings of the lips by Hambidge, shows that Bisttram did not copy Hambidge, but rather conducted his own very detailed investigations. For Bisttram's drawings of the lips, see BP, AAA 2893:375; for Hambidge's drawings of the lips, see The Diagonal 1, no. 7 (May 1920), 144-45.

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for the drop from forehead to chin.[58] The decision to use the root-two rectangle was based, however, on finding the diagonals of the two directions of the nose in two of the diagonals in the left half of the rectangle. The later drawing also shows that the curve of the eyelid was projected from the corner of the rectangle at the top of the ear. The profile in the 1920s drawing is executed with relative confidence; the experimental part is the searching quality of the zig-zag line dropping down from the bottom of the cheekbone to the jaw bone.

Head in Profile Facing Left and Up (fig. 21), is the reverse of the second drawing for the book (fig. 20). The 1960s drawing shows that Bisttram used the most dramatic aspect of the pose--the diagonals of the raised lips--as the organizing structure for the drawing. The zig-zag line developed in the previous drawing (fig. 19) is more successfully applied here as it complements the more dramatic gesture of looking up. The headdress adds to the drama and spirituality of the pose. Head in Profile Facing Right (fig. 22) is an alternate, more monumental source for the second drawing for the book. The shapes are purified, but less geometric. Without the headdress the relationship of the features of the face to the strength of the neck becomes a subject unto itself. Bisttram also seems to be searching for zig-zag relationships in this drawing.

The upraised forehead recalls a description by Swedenborg:

> For all angels turn the face toward the Lord, and the Lord looks upon their forehead, because the forehead corresponds to love and its affections; while angels direct their eyes toward the Lord, because the eyes correspond to wisdom and its perceptions.[59]

The second sheet of three heads that Bisttram made for his book on dynamic

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[58]Bisttram, Dynamic Symmetry, 35-6.

[59]Swedenborg, Divine Providence, para. 29.

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symmetry are all Caucasian males in variations of the three quarter view. By using the Negro model for the first three drawings, and the profile in the first two, he gives priority to these two forms.

Another drawing using the same model and the profile but in half-length (fig. 7), in the Egyptian format discussed earlier, is inscribed in a whirling square rectangle. The center of the chest is aligned along the central vertical axis and the crossing diagonals of the middle register meet at the base of his throat in the exact center of the rectangle. This attempt to humanize the Egyptian format could also have been aroused by readings in Swedenborg.[60] Swedenborg attributed knowledge of "correspondences" to the Egyptians:

> Moreover, among the Ancients there was the science of correspondences, which is also the science of representatives, the science of the wise. This was especially cultivated in Egypt, and is the source of the Egyptian hieroglyphics. From this science they knew the signification of animals of every kind...[61]

The question is not whether Bistttram was influenced by Egyptian art, but how much and in what ways. One of his students recalled, for example, that one assignment was to find reproductions of Egyptian art in books, and then to analyze them in terms of dynamic symmetry relationships by making tracings and diagrams.[62]

Head in Three-Quarter View Looking Up, 1925 (fig. 23) is a more finished drawing in which the lines of dynamic symmetry have been transformed into dramatic

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[60]"Exponent of Egyptian Art to Speak at Heard Museum," n.p. (28 Jan. 1942) [clipping, Phoenix, AZ newspaper] BP, Harwood Museum. This is an announcement of an upcoming lecture by Bisttram.

[61]Swedenborg, The Divine Providence, para. 255.

[62]Barbara Harmon, interview with the author, 10 October 1999. Harmon studied with Bisttram in the late 1940s in Los Angeles and in Taos.

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shadow areas. The theme of the drawing is the diagonal of the nose that produced a rectangle slightly longer and narrower than a whirling square rectangle. When the horizontal line under the bottom lip is projected to the edge of the sheet, it meets the diagonal line of the nose and completes the upper register of the rectangle. The major vertical runs from the chin down to the thumb of the supplicating hand through the "eye" or nodal point of the rectangle, the point around which the "whirl" of the rectangle rotates. The diagonal of the nose, dramatic shadows, headdress, and hand raised in supplication combine to offer up a more narrative image of spirituality.

Giles's drawings have a lighter touch and are not as schematic as Bisttram's. Giles's Medicine Man, South Africa, 1925 (fig. 24), a profile facing left, bears comparison to Bisttram's Head in Profile Facing Left (fig. 19). While Giles's approach is softer, both artists clearly had the same aim--to portray and capture states of spirituality. Giles's Nubian, 121st Psalm (fig. 25) is posed similarly to Bisttram's Head in Three-Quarter View Looking Up, 1925 (fig. 23). Giles's interpretation of spirituality is more delicate and less dramatic. The features of the face, especially the nose and lips, are more individualized, supplying the viewer with a more personal relationship. Also the greater emphasis on light is more ethereal than Bisttram's strong shadows.

The choice of a Negro model for these exercises has psychological implications that a Caucasian model would not, and may have been chosen for that reason. The model for these drawings, Luther Wiggins, recalled with fondness by both Frank Hinder and Fanny Nimtzowitz, was a favorite of Giles and Bisttram's and posed regularly for Giles's class. The headdress enhances the African association and is reinforced by Giles's titles that refer to ancient civilizations, slavery, and religion. A Negro model may have been appealing to Giles because of the heightened religious feeling that Swedenborg attributed

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to Africans. Swedenborg's revelation includes a prediction that a new spirituality would emerge out of African slavery:

> The Africans are more receptive of the Heavenly Doctrine than others on the earth, because they freely receive the doctrine concerning the Lord, and have it as if implanted in themselves that God will altogether appear as a man... In Abyssinia, in Africa, they have some psalms written in a style similar to that of our Word, and they sing them in their temples, and spirits are sensible of communication therefrom.[63]

Giles may also have been influenced by Schuré's Great Initiates (1889) that describes the black race, the second to dominate the globe after the sinking of Atlantis, as a theocracy whose priests possessed a profound knowledge; the Abyssinians and Nubians, according to Schuré, exemplified the race at its height.[64]

Following the symbolism of representing spirituality by looking up, Bisttram's most materialistic depiction is shown in a three-quarter view looking down with a Caucasian model (fig. 26). The interpretation is rugged, almost ruthless. The length of the model's left eye is made into a modular unit, forming one side of a triangle within a square and a larger rectangle.

That looking down symbolizes evil is also suggested by Swedenborg:

> That it is love from which angels have their life is further evident from the fact that in the other life everyone turns himself in accordance with his love--those who are in love to the Lord and in love toward the neighbor turning themselves always to the Lord, while those who are in love of self turn themselves away from the Lord. This is so, however their bodies may turn, since with those in the other life spaces conform to the states of their interiors, likewise quarters, which are not constant as they are in this world, but are determined in accordance with the

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[63]Swedenborg, Last Judgment, para. 118, para. 122.

[64]Schuré, 37-8. This book is on Bisttram's reading list of ca. 1930, (see Appendix I). The same quotes from books on Bisttram's reading list are found among Giles and Bisttram's papers.

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direction of their faces.[65]

Giles also uses the pose of three-quarters looking down in The King, ca. 1923 (fig. 27), his depiction of a most materialistic figure, Hamlet's step-father, Claudius, King of Denmark. Giles made this drawing after seeing a performance of Hamlet.[66] He called this a "memory sketch," demonstrating what he could do from imagination and memory.[67] Giles's teaching depended as much on working without the model as with the model; he felt that a good picture could be constructed by working from the general to the particular, that is, beginning with the rules of dynamic symmetry and the memory of the figure. The very small thumbnail sketch for this drawing (fig. 28), included in a letter to Hambidge,[68] showing the dynamic symmetry relationships, may have been a model for Bisttram's drawing of the Caucasian model (fig. 26): the nose and eyes are oriented along the vertical and horizontal, and cheek and jaw lines are drawn along diagonals. Giles's drawing also demonstrates how he followed one of the great rules of dynamic symmetry, that "movement can never be greater than the diagonal of the containing shape."[69]

Bisttram's Self Portrait, 1927 (fig. 29), also clearly part of this same series, is much more controlled and less experimental that his other drawings. Even though the

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[65]Swedenborg, Heaven and Hell, para. 17. The concept of directions and quarters is found throughout Swedenborg's writings, and is always symbolic.

[66]It was undoubtedly Walter Hampton's production of Hamlet, designed by Bragdon, which had a very long run in New York, that inspired Giles's drawing.

[67]Howard Giles to (Jay Hambidge), quoted in Hambidge, Dynamic Symmetry in Composition, 47, 48.

[68]Howard Giles to (Jay Hambidge), ALS, n.d., Hambidge papers, AAA 3176: 565. Excerpts from this letter are quoted in the reference cited in the previous footnote, but the drawing is not included.

[69]Giles, "Dynamic Symmetry in the Classroom," 7.

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dynamic symmetry lines are gone, the drawing is still geometric in conception. Bisttram presents himself full face, emphasizing the central vertical axis, with no mediation between him and the viewer. His notoriously aggressive personality is evident in the directness of the gaze, determined expression, and thick neck.

Considered as a group, these drawings show Giles and Bisttram working symbolically--attempting to find and infuse meaning and content into their studies of the model. The drawings also show a method of working from two directions, sometimes looking for geometric relationships in the human figure, other times looking for human characteristics in geometric divisions of space. This back and forth, from the general to the specific, and from the specific to the general--or as Bisttram would phrase it, from the masculine to the feminine and from the feminine to the masculine--became a characteristic working method for Bisttram.

Further, it should be noted that Bisttram's tendency to fit the human form into regular geometric shapes is most noticeable in his treatment of the figure rather than of the head. Figure in Half-Length (fig. 7), Silence, 1929 (fig. 13), and Portrait of Mrs. Bisttram, 1930 (fig. 6), are all inscribed within the golden section rectangle.

Stylistically, the drawings show that Bisttram and Giles were interested in clarity of form and precise outline. This approach to drawing may also have been influenced by Swedenborg, who also considered clarity of prime importance.

> ...for whatever exists derives from its form what is called quality... Nevertheless it is a truth, they [the angels] declared, that the form is more perfect in proportion as those things which constitute it are distinct from one another but yet are united in a particular manner. ...and they explained that what is indistinct is confused, whence results all imperfection of form. Moreover, they confirmed by many examples how things perfectly distinct are united, and so constitute one.[70]

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[70]Swedenborg, Divine Providence, para. 4.

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William Blake, following the precedent of the old masters and possibly also influenced by Swedenborg, took a similar approach:

> The great and golden rule of art, as well as of life, is this: That the more distinct, sharp, and wiry the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art; and the less keen and sharp, the greater is the evidence of weak imitation, plagiarism and bungling.[71]

Although the figure drawings of Bisttram and Giles do not seem to be based on Blake's concept of the figure, Blake's combination of idealism, symbolism, Swedenborgianism, mysticism, and preference for line over color, may have been their primary theoretical model during the 1920s.

The problem of whether or not to work from nature was one that plagued all artists during this period. As is shown in the chapter on landscape painting, Bisttram always denied that he worked from nature; yet these life drawings clearly show that he was very interested in close observation of nature. Part of the problem can be attributed to terminology and interpretation, and can be explained to some extent by a reading of Hermann Türck's The Man of Genius, a book on Bisttram's 1930 reading list.

Türck provides a definition of genius and a clarification of what Platonic ideas are by interpolating Goethe's definition that genius is love of truth, and Schopenhauer's definition that genius is complete objectivity. For Türck, Goethe and Schopenhauer's definitions are based on a concept of sense perception that is impersonal and unconditioned by feeling and emotion. On his descent into the "Realm of the Mothers," the world of Platonic ideas, Faust found that they were the ideal patterns or plans of things, but that their physical manifestations were imperfect. The ideal provided the

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[71]William Blake, Descriptive Catalogue, cited in Damon, 138. Foster Damon's William Blake (1924) was on Bisttram's 1930 reading list (see Appendix I).

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inner life for the form and urged the form to perfect itself. For Türck, this experience taught that the role of the artist is not to imitate nature in its imperfect state, but to perceive and depict the underlying perfection of the idea.[72] Bisttram undoubtedly felt that he was implanting the plan or pattern of perfection into his compositions when he used dynamic symmetry.

For Türck, knowledge of these ideas was achieved by disinterested observation of nature. Modernists who rationalized abstraction based on a rejection of sensory impressions in favor of pure intuitional knowledge were working with methods that were in many ways not opposed to (Türck's interpretation of) Goethe's idea of heightened sense perceptions, and explains to a large extent how an artist can work from Platonic theory and yet work either in a representational or abstract mode. The sign of an interest in Platonic ideas is not abstraction or representation, but an interest in the ideal. The association of the ideal and the mathematical is basic to Plato's concept. Bisttram's specific interest in Plato is shown in the following chapter.

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[72]Hermann Türck, The Man of Genius (1896), trans. George J. Tamson (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1914), 19-45, 138-145.

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Chapter 6

Dynamic Symmetry, Religious Subjects, and Theosophy

Religious Subjects and the Square Format

Bisttram executed a number of watercolor studies based on biblical subjects. These studies, of which there are about fifteen, are related thematically but were not conceived as a series, that is, they are all executed in different styles, color schemes, and dimensions, thereby avoiding the monotony that often accompanies works in a series. Two of these, The Last Supper (fig. 30) and The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden (fig. 31), were executed in a square format; The Last Supper is the larger and more important of the two. Bisttram turned to the square format, a primary shape for dynamic symmetry, repeatedly beginning in the early 1930s.

According to the rules of dynamic symmetry, a square is analyzed in two primary ways. In the first, the square is divided into four overlapping whirling square rectangles (fig. 32). The upper diagram shows the four whirling square rectangles at adel, cdgh, kfgj, and abji. The lower diagram shows how the lines are connected. This method is fairly straightforward because each whirling square rectangle is divided into only three spaces. The second method, dividing the square into overlapping root-five rectangles, is shown in Figure 33. The upper diagram shows the four overlapping root-five rectangles at adel, cdgh, kfgj, and abji. The lower diagram shows how the lines are connected. The second method, using root-five rectangles, is more complicated because each root-five rectangle is divided into five equal spaces. Bisttram used the first system in The Last Supper and the second system in Expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

The Last Supper (fig. 30) takes on the problem of how to place Christ and the twelve disciples around a table. Dividing the square into whirling square rectangles

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provides two vertical axes (bi and ch in fig. 32); Bisttram aligned the figure of Christ along the right axis (ch). Christ's forehead is emphasized by its placement at the point where the diagonal from the top of the axis at the left (bg) intersects the axis at the right. Both of these lines are visible in the original work. Bisttram then placed seven disciples on the left, and five disciples on the right, all clustered near Christ, but set lower. The spiritual light emanating from Christ is used as the source of illumination and for the organization of shadow areas. Bisttram's use of chiaroscuro and dramatic highlights shows his familiarity with old master precedents.

Comments that Bisttram made later indicate that when he composed his picture he derived the idea of emphasizing the point on Christ's forehead from Leonardo's Last Supper:

> The beauty of color and composition of this most admired of Leonardo's works [The Last Supper] is beyond the simple expression of words as one looks at the figures grouped in twos and threes and wonders at the exquisite execution of human expression and gesture, the perfect delineation of every form and cloth which never before nor after have been equaled. One of the important elements in his composition is the use of perspective, which science Leonardo understood beyond all other artists. Every detail follows the lines radiating from a point at the center of the forehead of the Christ, integrating each part of the composition into one complete whole--a perfect example of Leonardo's genius.[1]

Bisttram undoubtedly took this idea from Bragdon, who pointed it out in connection with his discussion of radiation as an organizing principle of composition.[2]

Bisttram's admiring view of Leonardo's Last Supper is relevant because, according to one student who studied with Bisttram in the mid-1950s, Bisttram felt that Leonardo's Last Supper was the downfall of art, and that the gestures and facial expressions were

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[1]Bisttram, The Creative Process, 99-100.

[2]Bragdon, The Beautiful Necessity, 56, 58, fig. 32.

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superficial.[3] This statement may reflect the thinking of Leo Katz, although Katz does not say as much in Understanding Modern Art (1936). The likelihood of this idea originating with Katz is provided in Bisttram's Cycles of Taste,[4] which lists Leonardo and Michelangelo under the self-expressionistic phase, which was the furthest from Katz's ideal of the archaic. Bisttram's Last Supper is much more humble than Leonardo's grand composition. Where Leonardo individualizes each of the disciples to depict a specific moment in time, Bisttram obscures their identities and generalizes the scene. Both, however, have strong geometric underpinnings.

It is worth noting that an antipathy to Leonardo, and art of the high Renaissance in general, was part of the modernist credo. Clive Bell, for example, asserted that the Italian Renaissance was a low-point in human spirituality, and that individual Renaissance artists were isolated geniuses whose art was marred by the materialism of patrons who required artificial emotions and gestures."[5]

Dane Rudhyar concurred with this view, and felt that the Renaissance was the first turning away from the "magical" approach to painting, which he defined as identification with the subject or participation.

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[3]Bernard Stone, telephone interview with the author, 10 Feb. 1998. Stone studied with Bisttram between 1953 and 1955, contemporaneously with Edith Carlson. Stone became an art therapist.

[4]For Cycles of Taste, see Appendix VII.

[5]Bell, 164. Sheldon Cheney, following Bell, also considered Leonardo decadent. "Giotto, of all the 'well-known' painters, is first claimed by the modernists as kin, and with him a considerable group of his immediate predecessors. After him, the decline, the true Classical Renaissance painters, Botticelli, Titian, Leonardo, the sweet Raphael, and all the also-rans of the schoolbooks." Sheldon Cheney, A Primer of Modern Art (New York: Horace Liveright, 1924), 27. The influence of this book on Bisttram is discussed in Chapter 12.

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> The art of the Renaissance was an attempt to negate the magical basis of creative activity. It stressed two main factors: a preoccupation with a technique of intellectual analysis, and the necessity to fit in with a society based on show and superficial pleasure-seeking. The first factor led to the classical technique of painting, based on perspective--an intellectual analysis of sensation which has no special integrative value from the psychological standpoint--the second, to a purely hedonistic conception of art away from all great life-problems and from true spirituality.
>
> Renaissance art ties in with the birth of modern science and Cartesian intellectualism. Empiricism, experimentalism, materialism have dominated a European culture overpowered by the intellect. It is time for American artists to free themselves from this Renaissance-fetish, from this lure of European classicism--the product of the spiritual failure of 15th century Europe to develop along the lines of the great impulse given to its thought by contact with the Orient during the Crusades.[6]

Bisttram's statement for Rudhyar's book, cited in Chapter 4, in which he called himself a "classic modern" shows that there were elements of Renaissance art that he never abandoned, even at the height of his transcendental period and in the face of Rudhyar's criticism. His inclusion of the Renaissance as one of the great design periods in his Moriah summer school course outline, and as one of the precursors of modernism in his manuscript The Creative Process, shows that his interest in and admiration for Renaissance artists was of long standing. In The Creative Process he reveals that what he admired about Renaissance artists was their sense of form:

> Before I close this chapter on the Renaissance, I would like to point out that just as all art periods have a distinct characteristic, so did the Renaissance artists deal with a particular problem--the effort to overcome matter by form. This they accomplished to a high degree. From the earliest period they were preoccupied with form--the detailed representation of materials, velvet and silk, the varieties of human gesture and facial expression. In spite of the supposed religious environment, painting became more and more representational, and even in dealing with the many religious subjects the artists were unable to overcome their preoccupation with the external world. This characteristic attitude continued to the end of the nineteenth century.[7]

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[6]Rudhyar, The Transcendental Movement in Painting.

[7]Bisttram, The Creative Process, 102.

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In his drawing, Head of Christ, 1929 (fig. 34), Bisttram further develops the theme of radiating points emanating from the head of Christ by drawing in the third eye. In Blavatsky's theory of the evolution of humanity in seven rounds and seven root-races, which is explained in Chapter 8, the humanity of the third root-race was hermaphroditic and had a third eye. This third eye atrophied in the fourth root-race when humanity was divided into sexes. (Blavatsky says we are the fifth root-race.) As humanity becomes more spiritualized in later races, according to Blavatsky, the lost eye will become active again.[8] Bisttram's use of the third eye could also allude to the occult belief that Christ spent his "lost years" being initiated into eastern religions. Although the lines used to construct the head cannot be seen in this photograph, Bisttram used a circle inscribed in a square. The outline of lower edge of Christ's hair is formed by the lines of one of the inner circles.

Another image involving Christ and the square is Man Crucified on a Three-Limbed Tree, 1931 (fig. 35), which was probably executed upon his return from his study with Rivera. This work relates to the square format because the scheme is a circle set over a square (fig. 36). The lower edge of the square is formed by the lower edge of the drawing; the top edge of the square is a line that cuts the figure at the bottom of the rib cage. The exact center of the composition marks Christ's navel. The center of the circle is at the center of the man's neck. The circumference of the circle cuts the man at his groin and at the points where the nails enter his hands. This configuration also follows a framework set out by Blavatsky when she described the head on the ansated cross, ♀, as a representation of man. It also refers to the rising of the sun each day,

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[8]Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, II, 288-306.

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which, according to Blavatsky, is a symbol of resurrection.[9] The circle emerging from the square has also been given as a sign for the old mystic problem of squaring the circle.[10]

Blavatsky also associates the crucifixion with the tree, but cites a Hindu source:

> The figure of Wittoba [a form of Vishnu], even to the nail-marks on the feet, is that of Jesus crucified, in all its details save the Cross; and that man was meant is proved to us further by the fact of the Initiate being reborn after his crucifixion on the tree of life. This "tree" has now become exoterically, through its use by the Romans as an instrument of torture, and the ignorance of the early Christian schemers, the tree of death![11]

Blavatsky asserts that a form of crucifixion was part of the initiation ceremonies in the ancient mystery cults, but that it was a symbolic, not a physical death. She also asserts that initiates were called trees. For Blavatsky, the symbolic crucifixion was the sacrifice of the lower self to the higher self and resulted in redemption, and rebirth as an immortal. Swedenborg's interpretation of trees is given in the following chapter, in relation to Bisttram's landscape paintings.

Bisttram's application of geometrical forms to the construction of the human figure in Man Crucified on a Three-Limbed Tree (fig. 35) specifically relates to the occult tradition of the macrocosm and microcosm in which man is seen as constructed in accordance with the same structure as the universe. Claude Bragdon's interpretation of this tradition is shown in his drawing The Geometrical Basis of the Human Figure, 1910

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[9]Ibid., II, 600. Technically, the construction of Man Crucified is a square surmounted by two side-by-side vertical root-three rectangles. Other examples of this type of construction are given in later chapters.

[10]For a diagram of the squaring of the circle as a circle emerging from a square, see Frank Higgins, Ancient Freemasonry, 426.

[11]Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, II, 560.

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(fig. 37). Bragdon's drawing is an adaption of Leonardo's well-known image of a man inscribed in a square and a circle. Bragdon adds a downward pointing equilateral triangle to show the proportional relationship between the man's arms and his feet.

Bragdon explained that this drawing shows how the equilateral triangle, square, and circle relate art, man, and the universe.[12] For Bragdon, these three forms were the principal determinants of architectural proportion, and correlated with the tetrahedron, the cube, and the sphere, "the determining forms in molecular structure." He further explained that "the circle is the symbol of the universe; the equilateral triangle, of the higher trinity (atma, buddhi, manas); and the square, of the lower quaternary of man's sevenfold nature."[13] This concept is based on Blavatsky's division of man into seven parts, the lower earthly quadrant and the upper trinity. Manly Hall's An Encyclopedic Outline... (1928) gives other geometric divisions of man's anatomy, mostly based on occult sources. In 1932 Hall published an entire book on the subject of occult anatomy.[14]

Bisttram undoubtedly selected the square for these images because of its theosophical associations. While a number of citations were given in Chapter 2 showing that theosophy encouraged the use of a square format, Bragdon expanded this metaphor by building his theory of the fourth dimension on the problem of transforming the square into the cube, and the redemption of man. His essay "Man the Square," which develops this idea, is headed with two quotations, one from Blavatsky and one from Revelation.

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[12]Bragdon, The Beautiful Necessity, 73-4.

[13]Ibid., 85-6.

[14]Manly P. Hall, Man: Grand Symbol of the Mysteries, Thoughts in Occult Anatomy (1932; reprint Los Angeles: The Philosophical Research Society, Inc., 1972).

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> The phenomenal world receives its culmination and reflex in all in Man. Therefore he is the mystic square--in his metaphysical aspect--the Tetraktys; and becomes the cube on the creative plane. The Secret Doctrine. Vol II, p. 30, Third Edition. H. P. Blavatsky.
>
> And the city [the New Jerusalem] lieth four square, and the length is as large as the breadth. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. The Revelation of St. John the Divine, xxi:16.[15]

Bragdon interprets man, Christ, and the square as identities. For Bragdon, both the mind of the Creator and the universe are contained in a cube. Dividing the cube in half, the upper portion is heaven, and the lower portion is the world as we know it. Man the microcosm is the cube in his ideal form; as man descends into incarnation from the upper part of the cube to the lower part, he becomes a square in the descent. When descending into incarnation, however, the square is distorted by the angle by which it enters, producing the distortions of the individual personality. Bragdon's illustration of this process is shown in Figure 38. The goal of the individual is to square up his life and to eventually become the cube.

For Bragdon, the perfect life, which is embodied in Christ, is expressed in the regular unfolding of the six sides of the cube into the form of the cross on which Christ was crucified (see third diagram in fig. 39). Bragdon has borrowed this diagram from Blavatsky, who gives it twice.[16] For Bragdon, the ultimate four-dimensional cube that man aspires to and Christ achieved, is the cross in its form of eight cubes (see lower right

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[15]Bragdon's essay "Man the Square" was first published as a pamphlet in 1912 by his own publishing company, Manas Press in Rochester; the following year it was included in his book Primer of Higher Space: The Fourth Dimension, to which is added "Man the Square, A Higher Space Parable (Rochester: The Manas Press, 1913; reprint London: Andrew Dakers, 1939; reprint: Kessinger Publishing, n.d.).

[16] She credits the source of the diagram of the unfolded cube to the book, Hebrew Egyptian Mystery, the Source of Measures. Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, II, 36, 600.

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portion of fig. 39). Having arrived at an eight-sided four-dimensional hypercube or tesseract, Bragdon also diagrams it as a cube within a cube (see lower left portion of fig. 38).

Bragdon also diagrams this hypercube, or tesseract, of eight interlocked cubes, in an octagon in a plane figure (fig. 40). The similarity of Bragdon's diagram of the tesseract to the way whirling square rectangles divide a square (fig. 32) is striking, and shows the similarity of approach. Bragdon's diagram is actually eight interlocked root-two rectangles, essentially another way of dividing the square according to dynamic symmetry. Although Bragdon made this diagram before he was introduced to dynamic symmetry, Bisttram would have recognized the construction immediately, as would have Bragdon later.

Hambidge also gives the diagram of the unfolded cube. Hambidge first identifies it as the root-two shape, and classes it as one of the shapes that was used as the ground plan for temples in ancient Greece. He also asserted that the root-two was the first shape adopted by the Greeks when they changed from a linear to an area system of measurement for design purposes, later changing to the root-five module. He also identifies the opening of the cube as the basic operation of Freemasonry when they constructed a building during the Gothic period.[17]

Bragdon's diagram of a four-dimensional cube as a cube within a cube (fig. 39, lower left) also points to a reference Hambidge makes to the problem of doubling the cube, the so-called "Delian Problem," that was posed by the oracles to the Greeks. When

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[17]Jay Hambidge, "Dynamic Symmetry Rectangles as Pattern Bases," The Diagonal 1, no. 9 (July 1920), 178, 179, 182. Rivera's reference to the root-two rectangle as the "Puerta Harmonia" suggests that he learned of the root-two rectangle independently of Hambidge. For Rivera's reference to the "Puerta Harmonia," see Appendix V.

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the Greeks asked how to suppress a pestilence, the oracle suggested that they double the size of their altar, which was in the form of a cube. For Hambidge, the use of dynamic symmetry operations involved solving both problems--doubling the cube and doubling the square.[18] In Chapter 5 it was shown that constructing the root-two rectangle provides a method for doubling the square.

Dynamic symmetry was primarily concerned with the square since the golden section and the root rectangles were all derived from it. In his discussion of the importance of the square for the Greeks, Hambidge even mentions that the Greeks considered the square to be the unit form, or the "monad."[19] This relates to Blavatsky's theory of creation that the fall into generation was the fall of the monads, which is essentially what Bragdon is depicting in Figure 38.

In contrast to Bragdon, who used the diagram of the unfolded cube to arrive at the number eight, Blavatsky used the diagram of the unfolded cube to arrive at the number seven by adding four (the vertical squares) and three (the horizontal squares). She does, however, assert that a change of dimension is involved from the transformation in which three (spirituality, represented by the triangle) is added to four (chaotic matter, represented by the square):

> Esoteric philosophy explains that four is the symbol of the Universe in its potential state, or chaotic matter, and that it requires Spirit to permeate it actively, i.e., the primordial abstract triangle has to quit its one dimensional quality and spread across that matter, thus forming a manifested basis on the three dimensional space in order that the Universe should manifest intelligibly.

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[18]Hambidge, The Greek Vase, 160-161. The "Delian" problem was probably brought to Hambidge's attention by Professor Archibald, who published on the mathematical aspects of this problem, and who prepared one of the notes for The Greek Vase.

[19]Ibid., 22.

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This is achieved by the cube unfolded.[20]

Blavatsky suggests that the unfolded cube is a crucifixion by placing a face in the upper square of the vertical, and explains that this represents the ansated cross or ♀. Bisttram essentially follows this diagram in his Man Crucified on a Three-Limed Tree, 1931 (fig. 36) by organizing his composition as a circle on a square, and in Head of Christ, 1929 (fig. 34) as a circle within a square.

This is all to show that Bisttram's various associations between the tree, the cross, the crucifixion, and the square were attempts to reconcile the various interpretations of redemption offered by Blavatsky, Hambidge, and Bragdon, and that Bisttram felt that he was working with "fourth dimensional" concepts when he was working with dynamic symmetry rectangles. Swedenborg's association of the tree with redemption is shown in Chapter 7.

Bisttram was exposed to another occult interpretation of dynamic symmetry during this period. In Isis Unveiled (1877), Blavatsky mentions that George Felt, one of the co-founders with Blavatsky of the Theosophical Society in New York, had derived a system of geometry based on ancient Egyptian principles. Some of these drawings were recovered by Viola deGruchy, who studied with Giles at the Master Institute in 1930. Giles later sent deGruchy to Claude Bragdon. Bragdon, who was giving Dorothy Brett lessons in dynamic symmetry by mail, wrote to her about de Gruchy's discovery of the Felt diagrams. These diagrams derived the golden section and other root rectangles from the circle, and were an effort to recover the Egyptian system. Bisttram was

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[20]Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, II, 600.

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undoubtedly privy to these diagrams through Giles.[21]

The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden (fig. 31), also executed in a square format, but smaller, is constructed using the square divided into overlapping root-five rectangles. The angel, who dominates the composition, is aligned within the vertical root-five rectangle at the left, and the outstretched sword is aligned along the center of the upper horizontal root-five rectangle (see fig. 33). The cowering Adam and Eve flee along the horizontals of the composition, following the lead of the snake that zig-zags along the ground.

The forms are expressed abstractly and decoratively, with some reference to art deco, especially in the flat patterning of the angel's wings. The color scheme, consisting of oranges and pinks for the figures set against a blue background, is an example of the use of split complements. The deep blue in the background is the key color; but the opposing colors are not pure oranges, but rather are the colors to either side of it--yellow-oranges and red-oranges. The color scheme is not strictly successful since the strong complements give a sense of foreground and background that conflicts with the flat decorative patterning of the composition. Bisttram teaches split complements in his Three-Year Course. Split complements are described in Walter Sargent's The Enjoyment and Use of Color (1923) and also play a large part in Denman Ross's color system.

Swedenborg and Blavatsky give different interpretations of the events in the Garden of Eden. Swedenborg gives a fairly traditional interpretation. For Swedenborg Adam and Even were cast out of the Garden of Eden because of their loss of faith in the

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[21]For Blavatsky's discussion of Felt's discovery, see Isis Unveiled, I, 22. Viola deGruchy is listed as a student of Giles's in Message of 1930, 73. DeGruchy's visits to Bragdon are described in his letters to Dorothy Brett, 15 Sept 1936; 27 Sept. 1936; 3 Oct. 1936, and others, Dorothy Brett Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

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Lord. The serpent represents the senses, and man's desire to know for himself rather than from the Lord.[22] Blavatsky, on the other hand, interprets the serpent as knowledge, endowing humankind with the necessary facilities to further develop within the larger scheme of creative development. Blavatsky goes so far as to characterize the events in the Garden of Eden as an initiation rite.[23] Given the humbled poses of Adam and Eve, Bisttram seems to be depicting the Swedenborgian interpretation.

Bisttram, however, could have intended a theosophical-psychological interpretation. The angel would represent the higher self, and Adam and Eve the lower self or dependence on sensory impressions. The higher self, wielding the sword, achieves a victory in heaven by banishing the desires of the lower self.

Peace (fig. 41) is another picture from this period with a religious theme inscribed in a square. It, however, is couched in secular terms.[24] The two mourners, one kneeling facing toward the deceased, the other standing behind the bed and facing away from the deceased, make a triangular relationship with the deceased that suggests that this work is about reincarnation and regeneration. The triangular relationship between the two mourners and the deceased is obtained by the divisions of the square into four interlocking whirling square rectangles that break down into an equilateral triangle whose apex is over the head of the standing mourner (fig. 32). The other element that

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[22]Swedenborg, Arcana Coelestia, para. 192.

[23]Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, II, 215, 388.

[24]Peace is a lithograph. In the fall of 1930, Bisttram took a printmaking class at the Art Students League. He was registered in Eugene Fitsch's evening Etching, Lithography, and Composition class. Two works done in that class are now in the collection of the Tyler Art Gallery, SUNY, Oswego, donated by Grant Arnold who was the printer for that class.

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supports the interpretation of reincarnation or regeneration is the large open door or window through which a young woman holding a child can be seen.

One of the pencil studies for this image[25] shows that Bisttram changed his mind about a number of elements in this composition. In the drawing, the mourner kneeling at the bed still turns towards the deceased but she is nude. The woman standing behind the bed now looks toward the deceased. She is also much younger and is not dressed in black mourning clothes. This version of the image may have been an attempt to suggest more explicitly that all three figures are the same person at different stages of life or in different incarnations.

Bisttram's preference for using the square for his more spiritual subjects continues throughout his career. Bisttram's interest in biblical subjects in the early 1920s is indicated in two lists of subjects to paint noted in his 1925 Daily Reminder.[26] Given Blavtasky's tendency to reinterpret biblical subjects, it is difficult to determine whether

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[25]This pencil study is at Owens-Dewey Fine Arts, Santa Fe.

[26]The first list, titled "Subjects," includes: The Creation of Adam; The Creation of Eve; The Foolish Virgins; The Crucifixion [crossed out]; The Agony in the Garden (Christ's) [crossed out]; The Woman Taken in Adultery [crossed out]; The Six Days of Creation or Book of Job, 21 illus; The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse; The Resurrection of Man; Christ on the Mount of Olives or Gesthemene [crossed out]; Seven States of Man's Regeneration; The Pattern of Life.

The second list, titled "Ideas to Paint," includes: A Little Child shall lead them, leading the blind [crossed out]; The Last Supper; The Sermon on the Mount; Suzanna and the Elders; Adam and Eve; The Three Wise Men; Lazarus; America; Past, Present and Future; The St. Johns Apocalypse; The Bhagavagad-Gita; The Pattern of Life; The Coming of Maitreya with white horse, as the new era or three wise men; The Six Wise and Foolish Virgins; The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse; Book of Job; Labors of Madona [?]; Fiat Rex, figure with Flame Wings; Jeanne de Arc [sic]; the Master's Order. Bisttram's 1925 Daily Reminder is in the William Warder Papers.

The crossed-out titles may indicate those he completed. The Last Supper, however, which he did complete, is not crossed out. Note the inclusion of "The Book of Job" and the "Seven States of Man's Regeneration," which are discussed in Chapter 7.

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Bisttram was more influenced by Swedenborg or theosophy at this time. All of these subjects obviously require the delineation of the human figure; the author, however, has not located any oil paintings from the 1920s in which the human figure is featured.

Art Deco and Dynamic Symmetry

Bisttram also used dynamic symmetry in his advertising work. The geometric effects that could be obtained were particularly compatible with the reigning art deco style. Edward B. Edwards, Rutherford Boyd, and the designers at Tiffany's were among the first to apply Hambidge's system to commercial work. By 1920 Southwick was using dynamic symmetry to design silver bowls for Tiffany's. Illustrations of some of these bowls appeared in advertisements in Hambidge's magazine The Diagonal. The ad in the Feb. 1920 issue, for example, shows a cup designed using the golden section. Southwick was particularly interested in the dynamic symmetry analysis of the logarithmic spiral in nature. In a response to Hambidge's analysis of the logarithmic spiral in the florets of the sunflower, Southwick observed and diagramed the rows of florets he observed in daisies.[27] In the early 1930s Southwick designed the new Tiffany's store in Paris using dynamic symmetry, and published an essay on the methods he used.[28]

Dynamic symmetry was so well-received among designers and architects because of the way the root rectangles break down into proportional areas with no leftover

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[27]Albert A. Southwick to (Jay Hambidge), L, 17 April 1920, in The Diagonal 1, no. 6 (April 1920), 122.

[28]Albert A. Southwick, La Coordination: Une Application a l'Architecture de la Symétrie Dynamique, intro. Matila Ghyka (Paris: Librarie Gallimard, 1939). Ghyka included a diagram of Southwick's Tiffany's facade in The Geometry of Art and Life (plate LXXX).

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spaces. This was ideal for pattern making, ornament, and repeating designs. This element of the system linked the fine and applied arts in a unified concept of form that represented an important facet of the development of the early twentieth-century design movement. Bisttram did a considerable amount of work in the art deco style during the 1920s, primarily for the free-lance advertizing commissions that he undertook in order to support his other artistic pursuits.

Pearls and Things and Palm Beach, ca. 1926 (fig. 42) is a watercolor based on a design Bisttram executed for Greenleaf & Crosby Co., a jewelry store in the Breakers Hotel, Palm Beach, Florida.[29] The picture depicts a woman and man in evening dress, with the woman holding a fan. The woman is wearing earrings, a necklace, and a ring, accessories appropriate to the client. The source for this work is Jean Metzinger's La Fumeuse (The Smoker), ca. 1913-14 (fig. 43), which was reproduced in the John Quinn collection catalogue.[30] Bisttram borrowed themes from a number of works in this catalogue in the 1930s, and could have seen the exhibition when it was shown in New York in January 1926.

Bisttram was clearly fascinated with La Fumeuse and studied it carefully. He borrowed the long narrow transparent plane running along the central vertical axis, the figure of the woman, and the fan. Bisttram added the male figure, made the figures more elegant, and reduced all of the forms to geometric shapes. Metzinger breaks up his image into geometric units; to unify his composition he uses shading in the woman's

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[29]Bruce Weber, Drawn from Tradition: American Drawings and Watercolors from the Susan and Herbert Adler Collection (West Palm Beach, FL: Norton Gallery of Art, 1989), 40-1.

[30]John Quinn, Collection of Paintings, Water Colors, Drawings & Sculpture (Huntington, NY: Pidgeon Hill Press, 1926), fig. 75.

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forms and in the planes. He also describes one of the planes at the upper right as a cube; furthermore, the woman is shown in three-quarter view. Bisttram reduces all the planes to flat shapes, banishes all shading, and contrasts the woman's full face with the man's profile.

Metzinger's La Fumeuse is organized within the root-two rectangle, the equivalent of Rivera's "Puerta Harmonia."[31] Beyond this, however, there doesn't seem to be a mathematical basis for this work. The study that is in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art reveals that Metzinger did not transfer the relationships established in the drawing to the painting.[32] There could, of course, be other intermediate studies for this painting that might show closer relationships. A comparison between the study and the painting, however, shows that Metzinger was abstracting from the figure, in contrast to Bisttram's method, which was to adjust the design to the grid.

Pearls and Things and Palm Beach is a complex design clearly executed using dynamic symmetry; the enclosing rectangle, however, is not one of the regular dynamic symmetry forms. The key to Bisttram's method is found in the square at the lower right that is partially covered by the woman's hand. This square is a modular unit to which all of the other shapes are keyed: the fan that the woman is holding, for example, is projected from the lower left corner of the square. It is also worth noting that the theme of a male and female figure, with one figure overlapping the other, is similar in concept

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[31]See Rivera's letter to Mabel Dodge Luhan in Appendix V; in this letter he mentions using the "Puerta Harmonia."

[32]Metzinger's Study for "La Fumeuse," 1913-14, in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, is reproduced in Joann Moser and Daniel Robbins, Jean Metzinger in Retrospect (Iowa City: The University of Iowa Museum of Art, 1985), fig. 41. For another scholar who has found golden sections in Metzinger's work, see The Cubist Circle (Riverside: Art Gallery, University of California, 1971).

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to Cubist Nudes, ca. 1932 (fig. 18). Bisttram develops this theme in many different ways in the 1930s.

The adherence of the design elements to the front plane of the sheet and the absence of perspective in Pearls and Things and Palm Beach are characteristic of Hambidge's approach:

> Perspective does introduce proportion and to a certain extent makes a picture hang together, but the more it is used the more it increases the depth in a composition and thus introduced a quality of the photograph and leads away from design. The power and expressiveness of an artist, say like Giotto, lie in the fact that the perspective element is almost absent. The Greek vase painters were also free from the evil effects of too much perspective. What such pictures lack in realism they more than make up in design force. In fact it is just this that marks the parting of the ways for the modern artist. Photography in picture making and its inseparable companion the subject picture have had their day. Design in form and color is about to come back to its heritage where, let us hope, it will remain in possession forever.[33]

In this connection, it is interesting to look at another of Bisttram's advertising designs, an ink drawing executed for John Ward Men's Shoes, 1929 (fig. 44).[34] Going against Hambidge's recommendations, Bisttram uses perspective dramatically–the two figures, a man and a woman, are relegated to the top left quarter of the composition and pressed into the background, while the boat they are navigating is brought forward and dominates the composition. The drawing is clearly constructed with dynamic symmetry; the rectangle used for the composition, however, is not one of the regular dynamic symmetry forms. There doesn't seem to be any connection with men's shoes; instead, the emphasis is on yachting, a most art deco sport. Bisttram's long-standing fascination

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[33]Hambidge, Dynamic Symmetry in Composition, 31.

[34]This design was commissioned by the advertising agency J. Walter Thompson Co. and won first honorable mention in the pen and ink division of the 1929 annual exhibition of the Art Directors Club.

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with boats argues for a considerable degree of accuracy in its details.

Interior design was another aspect of Bisttram's art deco work. In 1929 Mr. and Mrs. Louis Horch commissioned Bisttram to redesign the living room of their apartment (fig. 45). The Horchs were Roerich's financial backers; Louis Horch served as president of Corona Mundi. The Horchs attended a party at the Bisttram apartment and were very impressed with the furniture and design. When they inquired and found out that Bisttram had designed and built all of the furniture himself, they asked him to do something similar for their living room.[35] The Horchs subsequently had the furniture designed by Bisttram made up by a cabinet-maker. Two of the pieces that were made up--a barrel chair and a coffee table--are inlaid with geometrical designs drawn using dynamic symmetry.

Bisttram also used an art deco style in the two public spaces he designed for the Master Institute building, an idealistic scheme consisting of museum, library, theater, and restaurant on the first three floors with apartments above. The rent from the apartments was supposed to cover the expenses of the operations on the main floors. The building, which opened with much publicity on 17 October 1929, was designed by Harvey Wiley Corbett of the architectural firm of Helmie, Corbett & Harrison. Bisttram was commissioned to design the dining room (fig. 3) and the elevator lobby. The color scheme for the dining room was black, white, silver, and salmon, and included a large abstract mural. The elevator lobby is the foyer that provides access to the apartments

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[35]Oriole Feshback, daughter of Louis and Nettie Horch, served as director of the Riverside Museum until its close in 1971. She has some of the furniture designed by Bisttram both for her parents's apartment and for the Master Institute dining room. The invoices for the furniture for the Horch apartment are dated August 1929. Oriole Feshback, telephone interview with the author, 26 Oct. 1997.

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and opens on 103rd Street. There is a separate entrance for the theater on 103rd Street and another for the dining room, museum, and the library on Riverside Drive. [36]

Dynamic Symmetry and Classical Idealism

Frank Hinder (1906-1992), who studied with Bisttram and Giles at the New York School of Fine and Applied Art, the Master Institute, and the Moriah summer school between 1929 and 1931, recalled that the teaching atmosphere was suffused with an interest in the classics, particularly ancient Greek culture and ideas. Hinder responded positively to Bisttram and Giles's enthusiasm for dynamic symmetry and the concepts of Greek mathematics that lay behind it. Hinder explained the interest in Greek art and ideas in their circle as follows:

> In an environment hostile to modern art, classically-minded Americans looked back to the Greek philosophers for answers, so that they could understand and teach principles on which a new art for the present could be based.[37]

Bisttram indeed felt that he and Giles and others in his group were taking art in a different direction. Bisttram expressed this idea as follows:

> ...fifty years prior to the turn of the 20th century the "Impressionist" movement was already demonstrating the theories of light and color that Science was to reveal in the first quarter of the century. Out of this developed many color systems, color palettes, experiments in techniques, styles and mediums. Most notable of the creative artists of this period were Braque, Picasso, Delaunay and many others, their style became known as cubism.... There was, however, another searching and experimentation that developed from a dissatisfaction with the results achieved by the "new" freedom. The realization began to grow that the great art of past civilizations had an intrinsic quality, a compelling

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[36] In a tape recorded interview in which he discussed his relationship with Roerich, he said he was asked to do the designs, but was not sure who recommended him. This tape recording is at the Harwood Museum.

[37] Free, 9.

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arrangement of masses, line and dimension, of space, division and proportion.[38]

Hambidge's lectures and books on dynamic symmetry added significantly to the general interest in Greek art and culture of the time;[39] his assertion that dynamic symmetry was known and used by the Greeks in all their designs beginning in the sixth or seventh centuries B.C., and his use of illustrations of Greek antiquities to illustrate his books were highly influential. Hambidge's contribution, however, can also be viewed as part of a broader cultural movement. Scholars have often characterized the period following World War I as a generally conservative one--tending toward classicism in reaction to the traumas of the Great War.[40] In art it has been most often discussed in relation to Picasso's classic nudes of the 1920s. In Chapter 2 it was suggested that it was a continuation of the occult movement based in the late nineteenth century. Giles, who was devoted to the study of Greek culture and philosophy,[41] cited numerous sources for this trend, including the World War:

> The great war has done much to revive an interest in the classics. Fundamental truths are now rushing to the forefront and eagerly sought by the people who, awakened in the struggle of nations, now desire knowledge. We need but witness the public interest displayed in the Einstein Theory, the advance of Science, and the Psychic research, to know that we are living in an age when reconstruction is basing itself on elementals and forging ahead in the great march

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[38]Bisttram, Dynamic Symmetry, 3.

[39]"The World of Art: Greek and Oriental Influences in the Schools," New York Times Magazine, 10 June 1923, p. 12-13, cited in Hambidge, Dynamic Symmetry in Composition.

[40]For a discussion of this phenomenon in Picasso and in France in general, see Kenneth E. Silver, Esprit de Corps, The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914-1925 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

[41]Walter Gutman, "Howard Giles," Art In America and Elsewhere 17 (1929), 143-159.

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of civilization.[42]

Giles's liberal use of quotations from Plato and Aristotle in his writings and lectures shows that many of his ideas derived from Greek philosophy. He even painted a coastal seascape titled Plato's Edge.[43]

One of the quotations from Plato that Giles uses, "The imitative art is an inferior that weds an inferior and has inferior offspring--thrice removed from truth,"[44] points to an essential aspect of Plato's concept of art. This quotation, from Book X of Plato's Republic, follows the distinction Plato makes between three types of artists, "which are concerned with all things: one which uses, another which makes, a third which imitates them?"[45] To make his point--that the imitator, the painter, is the least useful--Plato compares the man who plays the flute with the man who makes the flute, and with the painter who paints a picture of the flute. The user, knowing how to play the flute and what makes a flute good or bad, is of the highest order.[46] With his higher knowledge he instructs the flute-maker, who is less knowledgeable. The imitator, the painter, is lower than the other two, "without knowing what makes a thing good or bad, and may be

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[42]Howard Giles, "Greek Philosophy and Modern Art," MsTS, Howard Giles papers.

[43]Howard Giles, Plato's Edge, oil on canvas, 25 x 30 inches, Sotheby Parke Bernet Inc, New York, NY, Sale Catalog No. 709, 1945, lot 102, cited in Smithsonian Institution Art Inventories Catalog.

[44]Giles placed this quotation at the head of his article "The Golden Age and Contemporary Art." He also included it in his letter to Hambidge, who quotes it in Dynamic Symmetry in Composition, 48.

[45]The Republic, in The Works of Plato, trans. B. Jowett (New York: Tudor Publishing Co., [before 1877]), 387.

[46]Use is also a determining quality for good for Swedenborg. "...a use is a good. Unless a use is determined to something with which it may be one, it is not a use, and thus it has no reality." Swedenborg, Divine Providence, para. 11.

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expected therefore to imitate only that which appears to be good to the ignorant multitude?"[47] Plato bases this criticism on the painter's reliance on vision that is deceived by point of view and other illusions, consequently producing confusion in the mind of the viewer. Plato also criticizes the painter's art for its power of mesmerization that leads the viewer to admire the skill of the imitator rather than leading the viewer to eternal realities. Plato held out only one solution for the artist--the use of mathematics:

> And the arts of measuring and numbering and weighing come to the rescue of the human understanding--there is the beauty of them--and the apparent greater or less, or more or heavier, no longer have the mastery over us, but give way before calculation and measure and weight?[48]

Plato hints at how a mathematical approach could be utilized by the artist in the following quotation that Giles used to introduce another of his articles,

> "Will they disbelieve us when we tell them that the state can only be happy which is planned by artists who make use of the heavenly pattern?"--Plato, Republic VI (Jowett III, p. 386).[49]

But it was the quotation from Aristotle, "We must not imitate nature in her effects; we must follow her principles and laws" which most clearly pointed to dynamic symmetry as an aesthetic solution, particularly since the proportions utilized in dynamic symmetry operations replicate growth patterns in nature. The importance of this quotation for Giles is demonstrated by his inclusion of it in a catalogue devoted entirely to his courses in dynamic symmetry offered in the 1925-26 school year.[50] The

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[47]The Republic, 389.

[48]Ibid, 389-90.

[49]Howard Giles, "Religion in Contemporary Art," The New Church Messenger 142, no. 5 (3 Feb. 1932), 98.

[50]Dynamic Symmetry and Its Practical Application, Day, Evening and Saturday, New York School of Fine and Applied Art, 1925-6, n.p. This catalogue was published

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importance of this quotation for Bisttram is shown by his inclusion of it in his statement for Rudhyar's book, and by placing it on the cover of the brochure for Taos Heptagon, the gallery he founded in Taos in 1933.

Another manuscript of interest among Giles's papers, in which he includes the following quotation from Aristotle,

> Those people are mistaken who affirm that the mathematical sciences teach nothing of beauty and goodness... The main elements of beauty are order, symmetry and definition, and these are the very properties to which the mathematical sciences draw attention.[51]

presents a history of Greek art in terms of Leo Katz's theory of cycles of taste.[52] Giles argues that classicism had its ideal period, but then degenerated into a personal and erratic art; he presents art styles as evolutionary and successive, and categorizes all the styles generated from the classic as personal and romantic. Giles implies that this is a decline, and attributes it to the increased recognition accorded to artists after the fifth century B.C. This is another Platonic concept that holds that for a man to produce good work he should be neither too rich nor too poor. In support of this idea, Giles cites the eccentricities in both personality and style of such artists as Zeuxis, Lysippus, and Apelles. Giles concludes with the Platonic idea that the subordination of the individual to the divine idea is far superior to the licentiousness that results from the freedoms of democracy. Plato's concept of the decline of governments from the ideal (aristocracy), to timocracy, oligarchy, democracy, and finally tyranny, seems to be the model for

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under the name of Howard Giles, Director of Department, with 'Emil J. Bistram' listed as one of the faculty members.

[51]Howard Giles, "Untitled," MsT, 2, Howard Giles papers.

[52]For "Cycles of Taste," see Appendix VII.

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decline that Spengler adopted in Decline of the West and which Katz, and here Giles, appropriates for an analysis of the historical sequence of art styles.

The idea of cycles and decline was probably appealing to Giles because Swedenborg's interpretation of the history of the Church provided a similar outlook:

> 1. Every religion in process of time declines and is consummated.
> 2. Every religion declines and is consummated by the inversion of the image of God in man.
> 3. This takes place from the continual increase of hereditary evil in successive generations
> 4. Nevertheless it is provided by the Lord that everyone may be saved.
> 5. It is also provided that a new Church should succeed in place of the former devastated Church.[53]

Giles and Bisttram also undoubtedly saw the impersonal quality that Plato described as the ideal in the general severity of the designs produced by dynamic symmetry. Bisttram's interest in Plato, confirmed by the inclusion of The Republic on his reading list, also provides an explanation for his characterization of himself for Rudhyar's book as a "classic modern." Another element of Bisttram's statement for Rudhyar--that he is "shy of emotionalism" in his work--can also be traced to Plato who considered any disturbance of mental, emotional, or physical equanimity to be dangerous to the soul. Bisttram's spiritual beliefs can also be traced to Plato who believed in the divinity of the individual soul, its immortality, and its reincarnation. For Plato, beauty and good were the highest ideals, and harmony of parts an ideal to be obtained by the soul. Another element in Plato that is reflected in Giles's and Bisttram's artistic approach is the importance of memory. Plato believed that the Socratic method worked because the soul had memories from previous incarnations that should be tapped by philosophic

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[53]Swedenborg, Divine Providence, para. 327.

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inquiry.[54]

The relevance of Plato for Bisttram as late at 1941 is shown in a quotation he used from Plato's Philebus in a draft for his article, "The New Vision in Art." Bisttram cites the following passage to demonstrate that the abstract painter's appreciation of pure lines and colors removed from the context of an imitative painting, was not new:

> I do not now intend by beauty of shape what most people would expect, such as that of living creatures or pictures, but for the purpose of my argument, I mean straight lines, and curves, and the surfaces of solid forms produced out of these by lathes and rulers and squares...[55]

This is the same citation Katz used in Understanding Modern Art; Bisttram cites much more of the dialogue than Katz does, indicating that Bisttram at least went back and re-read it.

Three works executed during the 1920s--a cover design for National Music Week, 1926 (fig. 46), and two drawings, Youth, 1929 (fig. 47) and Circe (fig. 48)--confirm Bisttram's interest in Greek forms and ideas. For the National Music Week cover (fig. 46) he utilized a Greek motif--a figure dressed in classical garb holding a lyre. The figure is clearly Orpheus, the Greek mythological figure most associated with the lyre. Schuré's identification of Orpheus as one of the great initiates and as the founder of the Greek mysteries,[56] suggests that Bisttram intended the action of the pose to represent a powerful creative force. Both the line quality and the black on white style of the design that emulate Greek vase painting are appropriate to the subject.

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[54]Meno, in The Works of Plato, 27.

[55]Plato, cited in Bisttram, draft for "The New Vision in Art," AMs, William Warder Papers.

[56]Schuré, The Great Initiates (1889). This book is on Bisttram's 1930 reading list.

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Youth, 1929 (fig. 47), which may refer to one of the "ages of man," recalls classic Greece since the two figures play lyres. The lyres in this work are seven-stringed instruments much more precisely drawn than the five-stringed instrument in the National Music Week cover. The use of the lyre could also reflect a close reading of Plato's Republic. Even though Plato recommended the study of music in his ideal state to balance the rigors of gymnastics, he was very particular about what kinds of music and instruments should be played, and specifically approved of the lyre and harp.[57] Bisttram was undoubtedly depicting the angels sounding the "music of the spheres," which Blavatsky specifically associates with the lyre:

> Whenever you are able to attune your consciousness to any of the seven chords of 'Universal Consciousness,' those chords that run along the sounding-board of Kosmos, vibrating from one Eternity to another; when you have studied thoroughly 'the music of the Spheres,' then only will you become quite free to share your knowledge... Do not attempt to unveil the secret of being and non-being to those unable to see the hidden meaning of Apollo's heptachord--the lyre of the radiant god, in each of the seven strings of which dwelleth the Spirit, Soul and Astral body of the Kosmos...[58]

What Blavatsky meant by this is suggested by Matila Ghyka's assertion that the lengths of the strings of the lyre are a demonstration of Pythagorean musical intervals from which the concepts of Greek proportion were derived.[59] Bisttram's depictions of the lyre, however, ignoring Plato's admonition, are fanciful and based on "pictorial cliché," rather

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[57]Ibid., 105.

[58]Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, I, 167.

[59]Ghyka, The Geometry and Art of Life, ix. Bisttram recommended Ghyka's book to one of his students. Bisttram to (Margaret Sanger Slee), LT, 16 Dec. 1946, BP, AAA. Ghyka also provides a quotation from Leonardo, similar to Bisttram's reference in his manifesto for Rudhyar's book: "Oh marvelous Necessity, who with supreme reason constrainest all effects to be the direct result of their causes, and by a supreme and irrevocable law every natural action obeys thee by the straightest possible process." Ghyka, The Geometry and Art of Life, 173, footnote 1.

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than on any actual instrument or replica, or even an ancient depiction.[60]

The source for the two figures in Youth is the Zephyr winds in Botticelli's Platonic composition, The Birth of Venus, ca. 1482. Bisttram reverses Botticelli's arrangement by making the figures enter from the right rather than from the left. Botticelli's Zephyr winds are portrayed as lovers; their individualized, flowing forms embody the capriciousness of their effects on the earthly plane. Bisttram's figures sing and play lyres rather than blow wind and flowers, but the concept is essentially the same, especially the forward thrust of the bodies that suggests they are flying through the air. Bisttram's figures, however, by sounding "the music of the spheres," regularize and harmonize the rhythms of the earth rather than mischievously intrude.

Circe (fig. 48) shows Bisttram's interest in and knowledge of Greek literature. Circe, a character from Homer's Odyssey, is an enchantress who changes Odysseus's companions into swine by a magic drink. But Odysseus, who is wiser than his companions, is able to overcome Circe and bring her under his power, ultimately transforming her from evil into good for his own use. The drawing, a profile facing left, is classical in inspiration. Bisttram captures the rapture of her magical powers in the forms and lines of her closed eyes, forward thrusting chin, extended neck, and flowing hair. An untitled drawing dated 1924 (fig. 49), perhaps Bisttram's most ecstatic, may be a study for Circe. The open eyes and mouth combined with a more expressive handling give it more energy and life than the fairly controlled Circe.

In this group of drawings depicting ethereal, otherworldly beings, Bisttram uses the profile. The drawings work because the sense of the horizontal has been respected

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[60]Laurence Libin, Curator of Musical Instruments, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, to (the author), TLS, 17 Aug. 1998.

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throughout. While some of these drawings were undoubtedly executed before he met Katz, Katz's characterization of the horizontal as an expression of speed is particularly appropriate to these drawings. Katz maintained that speed is achieved with the horizontal, never the right angle, and identified the "flying horizontal with very subtle curves" as the ultimate in speed.[61] In another lecture Katz focused on the symbolic values of the full-face, three-quarter, and profile views, emphasizing that the profile is the most impersonal phase and respects the two-dimensionality of the sheet of paper, while the three-quarter view that creates deep perspective space is the most personal. [62] Bisttram's combination of the profile and horizontal lines achieves the effect of figures speeding through space, the most salient quality of the gods. Bisttram's later explanation of directions, influenced by his reading of Kandinsky, suggests that in facing his profiles to the left, he was trying to depict movement "against the current:"

> When the horizontal line is moving from the left to the right it is warm, lyrical and light and gives the feeling of moving with ease, while the horizontal line moving from right to left is dramatic and cold and gives the impression of moving against the current.[63]

Bisttram was exposed to the use of symbolic directions by Swedenborg, Blake, Katz, and Kandinsky, and later by his exposure to Native American art; Bisttram used directional symbolism in all of his work.

Bisttram's obvious dedication to drawing is also relevant. The last three works

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[61]Leo Katz, "Form and Speed," lecture to Bisttram's class, 18 Dec. 1929, in Bisttram, Book of Notes.

[62]Leo Katz, "Form Problems," lecture to Bisttram's class, 2 Nov. 1929, William Warder Papers.

[63]Bisttram, draft of book to accompany his art course, ca. 1933, AMs, William Warder Papers.

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discussed go beyond figure studies, although they are clearly derived from them. This may very well be a reflection of Bisttram and Giles's interest in the Renaissance premium on disegno. While clearly dependent on Renaissance precedents, Bisttram does not adopt any of their characteristic materials, such as tinted papers, colored chalks, heightening areas with white, or washes. He depends almost completely on the linear qualities of pencil and charcoal. The precision of his line indicates that he was probably looking at Greek and Egyptian sculpture as much as at Renaissance drawing.

His depiction of figures in states of ecstasy and rapture, however, seems to go beyond classical idealism into the realm of symbolism and the concept of the spirituality of the exalted aesthetic experience. His use of angels to express religious states of mind in Silence, 1929 (fig. 13) and Youth, 1929 (fig. 47) indicates that he may truly have believed in their existence, especially since this belief is fundamental to Swedenborgiansim. The lotus blossom in the center of the celestial realm in Silence, which depicts the bliss of Buddhist meditation, shows the wide net he cast in his search for spiritual experience.

In this context the title The House of God, written in pencil on the photograph of his drawing Metropolis, 1929 (fig. 12), is relevant.[64] In the 1920s skyscrapers represented the optimism of business and faith in capitalism, and even took on religious connotations. The Woolworth Building, one of the first skyscrapers in New York, for example, was dubbed the "Cathedral of Commerce" in 1917 by the radio preacher S.

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[64]Metropolis was listed on the checklist for Bisttram's 1929 exhibition at the Currier Gallery, Manchester, NH.

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Parkes Cadman in an effort to provide a symbol of hope to a country at war.[65] Bisttram's depiction, however, does not reflect the stately or stable qualities of architecture, nor its decorative elements. On the contrary, it emphasizes the disorder and chaos of the city by compressing a large number of buildings into a small space, and then elaborating on their differences in great detail, giving each an individual character.

The only religious form is the white pyramid surmounted by a cross located at the bottom of the central vertical axis. This form is ambiguous as it appears at first like a doorway, as if the center line were receding into space. But when the lower left corner of the form is examined, the overlap of the bottom plane indicates that it is to be read as a projecting solid--the cupola of a church, in fact.

The depiction of light, critical to any religious scene, reinforces a negative reading. The setting sun creates an aura around the buildings, providing cohesion and mystery. But an ascending moon in combination with a setting sun can, and often does, represent an eclipse of light that does not bode well for the future. A Swedenborgian interpretation seems valid here because Swedenborg refers to religious buildings as "Houses of God" rather than as churches.[66] Given the relative size of the church, and its placement at the intersection of the minor diagonals of the lowest register of the whirling square, combined with Swedenborg's theory of the decline of the Church, the best interpretation seems to be that human accretions, represented by the disorganized growth patterns of the city, have obscured the divine idea, symbolized by the Church.

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[65]Donald Martin Reynolds, The Architecture of New York: Histories and Views of Important Structures, Sites, and Symbols (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1984), 179.

[66]"In that kingdom [the celestial] the sacred edifices are not called churches but houses of God." Swedenborg, Heaven and Hell, para. 223.

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The idea of accretion is confirmed in the construction that is in progress on the tops and sides of the buildings.

The sources for House of God may lie in Bauhaus publications that Leo Katz could have loaned to Bisttram. Feininger's woodcut used on the cover of the 1919 Bauhaus proclamation (fig. 50), could have provided the crystalline form for the steeple. Paul Citroën's collage Großstadt, ca. 1923 (fig. 51), which presents an assemblage of city forms similar to Bisttram's concept, completes the idea.[67] Citroën's work provides the flat patterning of form and the interlocking geometrical shapes. Bisttram also imitates the precision and detail of Citroën's collage, which was obtained presumably with cut-outs from magazines. The dark "h" form in the center of Citroën's work is also repeated a number of times in Bisttram's drawing, most notably in the central area of his composition. Also of interest is the "international style" building at the lower left of Bisttram's picture; its horizontal strip of windows with narrow mullions is a most uncharacteristic building form for New York in the late 1920s.

The House of God, 1929, exhibits some characteristics of cubism. The relationship of cubism to dynamic symmetry--the use of straight lines and the reduction of 3-dimensional forms into planes--was not lost on Bisttram and his circle. While House of God is not a strictly analytic cubist work because the facets of the buildings are not completely dissolved into the background, Bisttram has approximated it by utilizing numerous planes oriented in different, sometimes irrational positions. He has also used the subdued palette and the shaded planes associated with analytic cubism.

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[67]Bisttram could have worked from the reproduction of Citroën's Großstadt reproduced in Staatliches Bauhaus, Weimar 1919-1923 (Weimar-München: Bauhausverlag, 1923), fig. 143.

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In a talk given in 1921, Giles expressed approval of cubism, but felt that it needed to be tamed by reason.[68] Hambidge, who began with an admiration for cubism after seeing the Armory Show in 1913, later recanted his position.[69] Some comments from Hambidge clarify his later position:

> They have indeed substituted nothing universally constructive for that which they would destroy... And the forms that result from the curious union are applied not according to profound principles of organization, but according to the fitful guidance of what is apparently an unaccountable personal caprice... The pictures of Picasso and his followers aim to express facts and emotions by pure symbolism, pure design: yet the design they use is uncomfortably capricious and personal.[70]

This attitude is reflected in Bisttram's lecture topic "Modern Art breaking down forms to their elements in place of using elements to build ideals from."[71] This definition of modern art is antithetical to Bisttram's design ideal as a great organizing principle, with chaos as the great challenge to overcome. However, the use of cubism is appropriate to express the main idea of House of God--that the chaos of the modern city is a misappropriation by man of the original divine idea, which still glows in the crystalline structure at its core.

In an autobiographical essay prepared in 1941, Bisttram stated that he was interested in the modern movements during the 1920s, but received no encouragement

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[68]"Artist Giles Paints Cubism with Words" [review of a talk by Giles at the National Arts Club], New York Times, 17 Mar. 1921, Howard Giles papers.

[69]Walter, 126.

[70]Hambidge, quoted in Walter, 223. This quotation is from an untitled, unpublished essay by Hambidge on cubism. Hambidge includes some remarks admiring modern German designers, specifically singling out for praise Ludwig Hohlwein, Hanns Pellar, and Emanuel Margold.

[71]See lecture topic for week four in Bisttram's " Outline of a Course Over a period of Six Weeks at Moriah, New York Summer School," Appendix VIII.

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from any of his teachers:

> I began the serious study of art about twenty years ago at the National Academy in New York. There I received the usual accepted method of art instruction of copying statues, copying nudes, copying nature to the best of one's ability. The better one is able to reproduce what is before one the better he is considered until finally one is considered an artist. Dissatisfaction with this dry as a bone approach, I went from one school to another, The Mechanics Institute, Cooper Union, and individual artists well-known at the time, all of them steeped in European classical tradition, [who] did everything to discourage any attempt on my part to understand the new movements that stirred the art world. Though I made every effort to understand Cézanne and Cubism, Futurism and the many other new movements that showed new paths for the creative artist I could not break the grip of my former instruction and environment.[72]

The House of God and Pearls and Things and Palm Beach were undoubtedly experiments based on this nascent interest.

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[72]This excerpt is from an early draft of Bisttram's article, "The New Vision in Art," AMs, William Warder Papers.

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Chapter 7

Watercolor and Landscape Painting

Bisttram became a devoted watercolorist during the 1920s. This was a period when watercolor was at the height of its popularity. The large annual watercolor exhibitions held in all the major cities were crammed with works by professionals and amateurs alike. In addition, watercolor was being used as the vehicle for stylistic innovation by many of the most significant American modernists including John Marin, Charles Demuth, Georgia O'Keeffe, Charles Burchfield, Arthur Dove, and others.

The emergence of watercolor as the primary medium for the most avant-garde American artists was inspired by exposure to exhibitions of works by European artists, most notably an exhibition of watercolors by Cézanne held in Paris in 1907, followed by showings of European artists in Alfred Stieglitz's gallery, 291, in New York. Stieglitz's enthusiasm for the medium was shared by other dealers and soon manifested in serious interest by museums and collectors. At the same time, a reexamination of the achievements of Homer and Sargent by way of exhibitions, museum acquisitions, and higher prices provided an important precedent and contributed to the prestige and visibility of the medium.[1]

In the 1920s Bisttram's interest in watercolor was focused primarily on landscape. For inspiration he abandoned New York City for short and long intervals, working for two weeks at a time at Greenwood Lake in New Jersey, and on Monhegan Island off the

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[1]Carol Troyen, "A War Waged on Paper: Watercolor and Modern Art in America," in Awash in Color: Homer, Sargent, and the Great American Watercolor, by Sue Welsh Reed and Carol Troyen (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1993), xxxv-lxiv.

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coast of Maine for months at a time between about 1920 and 1927.[2] Bisttram also produced a large body of watercolors in the Adirondacks, at Moriah, New York, where he taught the summer course for the Master Institute in 1928 and 1929. Watercolors based on his first trip to the Southwest during the summer of 1930 form another distinct group. While Bisttram was also working in oils, it was his watercolors that first brought him to the attention of the art world.

Bisttram's first official notice came in 1925 with the exhibition of a group of works in the Twenty-Third Annual Philadelphia Water Color Exhibition. A reviewer remarked:

> A sensation was created by the two groups of watercolors by Emil J. Bistran, who has never exhibited here before. This year he was invited and the water color of a storm, entitled Maine Coast, was probably the most admirable thing in the entire exhibition. North Light, The White House and the yellow-lit harbor at evening were all exceptionally fine works.[3]

This favorable notice was followed by the Philadelphia Water Color Prize and election to the Philadelphia Water Color Society (1926); the Charlotte A. Warren Prize and election to the New York Water Color Club (1927); the American Water Color Purchase Prize (1927); and election to the American Water Color Society (1929). In 1930 he was awarded the Philadelphia Water Color Club's Dana Water Color Medal and the Delano Prize at the combined New York and American Water Color Exhibition, both for works treating Southwest themes. In addition, Bisttram served on the jury for the 1928 Philadelphia Water Color Exhibition.

Bisttram's champion in Philadelphia was George W. Dawson (1870-1938),

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[2]There is no documentary evidence to indicate when Bisttram first went to Monhegan. The dates on Bisttram's paintings are unreliable since many are back-dated.

[3]"Philadelphia," newspaper clipping, 14 Nov. 1925, BP, Harwood Museum.

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Professor of Drawing at the University of Pennsylvania. His letter supporting Bisttram's application for a Guggenheim Fellowship describes how strongly he felt about Bisttram's achievements in watercolor:

> Mr. Bistran is a young man of unquestionable ability, doing thoughtful, vital, intellectual creative painting of great beauty, with a profound scientific knowledge of color and design, and executed with superb craftsmanship and understanding of limits imposed through the various media that he uses.
>
> I am particularly interested in the art of Water Color painting, and have for forty years been endeavoring by every means in my power to see Water Color painting advanced to the highest plane of Art, where I believe it should be placed. Some few years ago in my searchings for possible artists to further that movement, I had my attention called by Mr. Howard Giles to one of his most promising pupils, namely, Mr. Bistran. Since then I have annually visited his Studio to study his year's production, particularly in Water Color, and I have watched his work grow in power and beauty.
>
> It may be interesting to you to know that the jury that awarded our Gold Medal in Water Color this year at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, awarded it to Mr. Bistran on the first ballot, and unanimously, while our second award resulted, in its first ballot, for as many names as there were members of the jury.[4]

Other exhibition opportunities were provided by artists Bisttram met on Monhegan. William M. Hekking (1885-1970), watercolorist and long-time resident of Monhegan, invited Bisttram to exhibit in both the 1927 and 1928 annual exhibitions of American paintings at the Albright Art Gallery, Buffalo, where he was director between 1924 and 1931.[5] From the 1927 exhibition Hekking purchased Bisttram's painting The Beginning for the collection.[6] The Beginning is a desolate landscape depicting a cluster

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[4]George W. Dawson, "Confidential Report on Candidate for Fellowship," 30 Dec. 1930, Bisttram File, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, New York.

[5]In 1927 Bisttram exhibited Reflections, The Beginning (36 x 48"); in 1928, Hillside, Search Light Shadows, and The White House.

[6]Hekking requested a discount on the price explaining, "We have been given a small sun of money with the understanding that it was to be used for encouraging young modern painters who are not especially recognized, to build up a collection to be known as a Modern American Room. Your picture was one of those which was selected. None

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of three buildings.

Maud Briggs Knowlton (1870-1956), a watercolorist and one of the first women to work on Monhegan, invited Bisttram to show a group of watercolors at the Currier Gallery, Manchester, New Hampshire, shortly after her appointment there as Director in 1929.[7] In a letter from Moriah, New York, where Bisttram was teaching that summer, he responded by saying that it would be a black and white show as that was the problem he was devoting himself to that summer: "This year particularly I have limited myself entirely to black and white and my summer's work will bring forth nothing like what I have done before."[8] Bisttram was invited back for another exhibition of his watercolors at the Currier in 1938.

A third Monhegan contact was the artist Theophile Schneider (1872-1955) who hosted an exhibition of Bisttram's Monhegan, Adirondack, and Southwestern watercolors in February 1931 at his Boston gallery, Lamson & Hubbard.[9] This was presumably the same group of works that were shown in Bisttram's first New York solo exhibition at

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of the pictures are to cost over five hundred dollars. We have a number of men on this list whose pictures sell for much more money who have been given an opportunity to express themselves on a definite offer of this kind. Such men as Rockwell Kent, Niles Spencer, Preston Dickinson, Charles Burchfield, were among those up for consideration. You will appreciate that this group will make an interesting collection, and considerable publicity will be given to this new move which we believe is the first of any of its kind in this country to recognize the more modern tendencies." William M. Hekking to (Emil Bisttram), TLS, 12 May 1927, AAA 2892: 135. Bisttram's painting was deaccessioned in 1943.

[7]Maud Briggs Knowlton to (Emil Bisttram), TLS, 9 Aug. 1929, BP, AAA 2892:154. Knowlton was director of the Currier between 1929 and 1946.

[8]Bisttram to (Mrs. Knowlton), TLS. 13 Aug. 1929, BP, AAA 2892:155.

[9]As Schneider was also represented in the Master Institute Collection and also lived for periods in Brooklyn, Bisttram may have also known him in New York.

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Ferargil Gallery in April of the same year. Other Monhegan artists whom Schneider showed at his Boston gallery were Abraham Bogdanove (1886-1946) in November 1930[10] and the photographer Bertrand Wentworth (1868-1955) in December 1930. Bisttram probably knew Wentworth as three of Wentworth's photographs were in Bisttram's estate.

One of Bisttram's good friends from Monhegan was the artist Henry Mayer (b. 1908), a student of Maud Knowlton.[11] They must have had a mutual interest in dynamic symmetry as Mayer's mural, Down to the Ferry, 1938, for the Aurora, Illinois, Post Office, was constructed using a root-five rectangle.[12]

Two works by Bisttram are still on Monhegan. A painting hangs at the Trailing Yew Lodge, built in 1926, where Bisttram may have stayed, and a watercolor is in a private home.[13] The senior artist on Monhegan during the 1920s was the Boston artist Eric Hudson (1864-1932) in whose studio artists congregated in the evenings.[14]

Bisttram also exhibited watercolors at the first five annual exhibitions of the Boston Society of Independent Artists; Paul Sachs (1878-1965), Associate Director of the Fogg Art Museum, purchased Bisttram's watercolor North Light for his personal

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[10]Jessica Nicoll, Abraham J. Bogdanove (1886-1946) Painter of Maine (New York: Spanierman Gallery, 1997), 16.

[11]Henry Mayer to (Emil Bisttram), ALS, 27 May 1931, William Warder Papers.

[12]See Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz, Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), fig. 132.

[13]Ed Deci, Director, Monhegan Museum, to (the author), e-mail, 2 June 1998.

[14]Nicoll, 15.

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collection from the first annual exhibition in 1927.[15] Bisttram's watercolors (and paintings) were also exhibited in the annual exhibitions at the Art Institute of Chicago on and off between 1926 and 1957. Bisttram never submitted to any of the exhibitions at the Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh.

Bisttram continued working in watercolor beyond the 1920s, executing major works in this medium in all periods of his artistic life. Interestingly, his major stylistic breakthrough to abstraction, similarly to the early modernists, was made in watercolor. His "Dancing Gods Series," which was shown at the Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe, in July 1933, and at the Delphic Studios in New York, in November 1933, included experiments in futurism and synthetic cubism based on ritual dances he witnessed at Native American pueblos in New Mexico.

Oriental Influences

Bisttram's interest in Oriental art during the 1920s and later is evident in his teaching materials and writings, which all show that he derived his concept of landscape during the 1920s from Oriental art. Establishing Bisttram's interest in Oriental art in the 1920s is important because a number of writers have argued that the Oriental approach to painting, that is, "identification with the subject," was the means used in abstraction. If true, the experiences that Bisttram gained by studying and applying the principles of Oriental art during the 1920s provide a direct link to his abstractions and non-objective works of the 1930s. The connection between abstraction and Oriental methods was made by Arthur Jerome Eddy in Cubists and Post-Impressionism (1914) specifically in

[15]Bisttram to (Martha Crocker, Secretary, Boston Society of Independent Artists), TLS, 14 Feb. 1927, BP, AAA 2892:127.

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relation to Kandinsky. To support his contention he presented parallel readings of Kandinsky's articles and letters and Henry Bowie's On the Laws of Japanese Painting (1911).[16] Eddy was most interested in Kandinsky's aim of translating inner feelings into "pure" compositional painting and Bowie's concept of "esgoragoto," the expression of feelings in art. Bisttram undoubtedly knew Bowie's book inasmuch as it is in the bibliography of Design and Color, Theodore Bolton's unpublished book to which Bisttram contributed.[17]

Bowie, who studied painting in Japan for nine years, describes the Oriental approach as follows:

> One of the most important principles in the art of Japanese painting--indeed a fundamental and entirely distinctive characteristic--is that called living movement, sei do, or kokoro mochi, it being, so to say, the transfusion into the work of the felt nature of the thing to be painted by the artist. Whatever the subject to be translated–whether river or tree, rock or mountain, bird or flower, fish or animal--the artist at the moment of painting it must feel its very nature, which, by the magic of his art, he transfers into his work to remain forever, affecting all who see it with the same sensations he experienced when executing it.
>
> This is not an imaginary principle but a strictly enforced law of Japanese painting. The student is incessantly admonished to observe it. Should his subject be a tree, he is urged when painting it to feel the strength which shoots through the branches and sustains the limbs.[18]

Additionally, Dane Rudhyar, in his unpublished manuscript The Transcendental Movement in Painting (1938), makes the assertion that "identification with nature," the Oriental method, was used by members of The Transcendental Painting Group and was

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[16]Arthur Jerome Eddy, Cubists and Post-Impressionism (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1914), 112-139, 147-153.

[17]For the bibliography of Design and Color, see Appendix VI.

[18]Henry P. Bowie, On the Laws of Japanese Painting: An Introduction to the Study of the Art of Japan, with prefatory remarks by Iwaya Sazanami and Hirai Kinza (San Francisco: Paul Elder, 1911; reprint, New York: Dover, 1951), 77-8.

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critical to all transcendental art. Dane Rudhyar equates it with the magical technique used by primitive peoples, and contrasts it with the analytic approach developed in the Renaissance.

> It [the magical technique] is based essentially on a process of identification with that part of nature--be it outer physical nature or inner psychological nature--which is to be controlled or organized for efficient use.[19]

In The Beautiful Necessity (1910) Claude Bragdon also utilizes Oriental concepts in his theory of aesthetics by distinguishing between In and Yo, the Japanese terms that Bowie used, to analyze the negative and positive aspects of form. While he didn't utilize Oriental methods to formulate ideas about modern art, it was a substantial element in his concept of the beautiful. He similarly characterized the Oriental approach as subjective, as an "identification with the object through meditation...uniting your consciousness with the object instead of merely painting what the eye thinks it sees."[20]

The similarity of this approach to that proposed by theosophy is made clear in the following suggestion for a meditation topic:

> During meditation one may try to think of the Supreme Self in everything and everything in it. Try to understand how the Self is endeavouring to express itself through the form. One method of practice for this is to try to identify your consciousness with that of various creatures, such as a fly, an ant, or a tree. Try to see and feel things as they see and feel them, until as you pass inwards all consciousness of the tree or the insect falls away, and the life of the Logos appears.[21]

The earliest reference Bisttram makes to Oriental art is in the outline for his

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[19]Dane Rudhyar, The Transcendental Movement in Painting.

[20]Claude Bragdon to (Dorothy Brett), ALS, 4 Sept. 1936; ALS, 26 June 1934, Dorothy Brett Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

[21]C. W. Leadbeater, The Inner Life (Los Angeles: Theosophical Publishing House, 1910; reprint Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1967), I, 209-10. This book is on Bisttram's reading list of ca. 1930.

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Moriah, New York, summer school class. His lecture topic for week two shows that he considered Chinese art one of the great design periods; that the impersonal approach was superior to the individual approach; and that spirituality could best be expressed in the mediums of watercolor and tempera:

> Technique of Art, for perfect expression, not individual expression
> The great periods in Greece, Egypt, China, Renaissance
> Water color and Tempera the Spiritual mediums[22]

Bisttram also made it clear that his watercolor subjects were symbolic rather than literal and were related to landscape:

> That's the beauty of watercolor. It isn't meant to be used heavy, realistically, literally. The very nature of the medium lends itself to a symbolic treatment of a landscape or what have you, rather than an exact, literal one.[23]

Furthermore, Bisttram denied that he was a plein air artist, emphasizing his dependence on memory and imagination:

> One of the things that I want to say is that I have never painted outdoors, or even using a model very much on any composition that I have done. I may use a model and use it for three hours, or perhaps two sessions of six hours at the most. Most of it is done from memory or imagination or a few notes that I make from a little pad and that's about all. I do that purposefully so that I can remember only the essential qualities of a place and eliminate any non-essentials that appear (rocks and sticks and stones...around, and clouds and so on).[24]

While at first glance it would be easy to assume that Bisttram's landscapes were done outdoors in front of the scene depicted, Bisttram's statement calls this supposition into

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[22]For the Course Outline for the Moriah summer school, see Appendix VIII. The idea that watercolor and tempera were spiritual mediums were presented in one of Katz's lectures to Bisttram's class.

[23]Carlson, 69.

[24]Emil Bisttram, note on Ranchos Church in Morning Light, typescript of a taped interview commenting on the works in the Anschutz Collection, ca. 1975, Anschutz Collection, Denver, 11.

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question. Even though this remark was made at the end of his career, this rejection of working from observed phenomena was clearly established at the very beginning of his studies.

All of the ideas Bisttram expresses about painting--taking an impersonal approach, working from memory, and painting symbolically--are elements of Oriental art. He cites the fundamental text he used for this approach in the lecture topic for week six of the first semester of his Three-Year Course: "Personal and Impersonal Art; Flight of the Dragon and Problem of Form." The Flight of the Dragon is Laurence Binyon's book on Chinese art. Many of the ideas contained in this book were an important part of Bisttram's aesthetic, including Aristotle's dictum that "art imitates not the aspect of nature, but the workings of nature," and that "art is essentially a conquest of matter by the spirit."[25] Bisttram's adherence to the former concept has been mentioned; his belief in the latter was expressed in his first published statement about art, which connects Oriental and modern art:

> A premise for the modern movement was stated by a Hindu philosopher in answer to the question, "What direction will art take in America?" He said, "The problem of the artist of the past was to over come matter by form, while the problem of the artist of the present and the future will be to overcome form by spirit."[26]

In The Flight of the Dragon (1911) Binyon asserts that for the Orientals "landscape is the highest sphere of art," and emphasizes that working from memory is an important part of their method:

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[25]Laurence Binyon, The Flight of the Dragon: An Essay on the Theory and Practice of Art in China and Japan Based on Original Sources (London: John Murray, 1911), 9, 10. Binyon (1869-1943) was a curator at the British Museum.

[26]Bisttram, "Art's Revolt in the Desert," Contemporary Arts of the South and Southwest 1, no. 2 (Jan./Feb. 1933).

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> Memory naturally rejects what has not interested and impressed it, and these artists were not tempted, as are those who work direct from nature, to transcribe superfluous detail because it happens to be before their eyes.[27]

Furthermore, Binyon's description of the Chinese landscape as a reflection of the internal disposition of the artist, rather than the external look of nature, leads directly to a symbolic and spiritual concept of painting.

> But the winds of the air have become his desires, and the clouds his wandering thoughts; the mountain-peaks are his lonely aspirations, and the torrents his liberated energies.[28]

Binyon's discussion of the Six Canons of Chinese Painting is also relevant. In his discussion of the first canon, "Rhythmic Vitality, or Spiritual Rhythm expressed in the movement of life," he defines spirituality as a "fusion of spirit and matter;" his description of this canon aptly describes qualities that Bisttram was trying to achieve in his drawings and watercolors of the 1920s:

> A study of the most rudimentary abstract design will show that the units of line or mass are in reality energies capable of acting on each other; and if we discover a way to put these energies into rhythmical relations, the design at once becomes animated, our imagination enters into it; our minds also are brought into rhythmical relation with the design, which has become charged with the capability of movement and of life.[29]

Binyon interprets the sixth canon, "The transmission of classic models," to mean that "a masterpiece, once created, was conceived of as capable itself of engendering other works of vital art."[30] This idea of the vitality and essential aliveness of a work of art encouraged Bisttram to take other works as models, and provided him with an evocative

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[27]Binyon, 48.

[28]Ibid., 19.

[29]Ibid., 15.

[30]Ibid., 17.

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idea of what he could achieve in his own painting.

A clue that Binyon was applying theosophical ideas to Chinese painting is provided by the fact that he does not include anything about dragons in his book, even though it is titled The Flight of the Dragon. Blavatsky interprets "flying dragons" as initiates, which would indicate to readers of Blavatsky that Binyon was suggesting that the Chinese painters he was describing were all initiates. Blavatsky goes to great lengths to prove that Christian theologians, in an effort to discount other cultural traditions, desecrated the sacred symbols of dragons and serpents in order to prove the independent existence of the devil or Satan.[31]

The most important source for Bisttram's views on Chinese art is his unpublished manuscript The Creative Process in the New Age, which he wrote during the last year of his life. The second half of the manuscript was intended to provide a background for an analysis of modern art; unfortunately, he only completed the parts on Chinese, Egyptian, and Renaissance art.

Bisttram's description of the methods of Chinese landscape painting, particularly the aspects relating to memory painting, undoubtedly reflect his own approach:

> It is said that those great artists wishing to portray their life and environment would meditate for days at a time and even years, sitting before a large silk wall hanging, visualizing the object or subject they intended to paint, considering the type and character of brush stroke required to express the spirit and character of a tree or the kind of painting technique to use in producing those exquisitely subtle yet powerful mountains in rain or fog or a portrait to be executed with a few strokes. After such a period of meditation, when they felt they were ready to proceed, they would begin to paint everything from memory without notes of any kind. They worked with black ink or tusche made from soot mixed in trays, and

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[31]Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, II, 94. Blavatsky interprets the Christian fall into evil, as the descent of the monads from heaven to earth. Binyon was clearly a favorite of Bisttram's because two other books by him are cited in the appraisal of Bisttram's library. For the appraisal of Bisttram's library, see Appendix III.

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> from the deft and subtle but powerful strokes would emerge the completed painting, spontaneous, fresh, vibrating with energy.[32]

When Bisttram limited his work to black and white during the summer of 1929, it may have been an experiment modeled on this method of Chinese painting. The idea of meditating before beginning to work was one that he was practicing by 1929 when he came under the influence of Shri Vishwaneth Keskar at the Master Institute. Manuals on Oriental painting, with their emphasis on frame of mind, concentration, and purpose, presuppose a meditative approach to painting, so that he was probably practicing these methods at least in relation to his painting even earlier.

In The Creative Process Bisttram also reveals that his study of Oriental art provided a solution for the problem of perspective that helped free him from copying nature.

> But Chinese philosophy taught its people that the appearance of things receding to a vanishing point is not reality. The railroad tracks do not vanish to a point; they only seem to.
>
> Having experienced the order, rhythm and harmony of nature, its grandeur and power in relation to man's insignificance, Chinese artists created a new approach to the depiction of all natural forms in space. As man stands and looks out at the landscape surrounding him, the perspective point or vanishing point begins with man himself and expands wider and wider into space. The Western concept is exactly in reverse; the artist is himself the most important element and everything he portrays grows smaller and smaller in relation to him. The Chinese concept liberated the artist from the necessity of copying nature as it seemed to be and permitted him to express the power and grandeur of nature as it really is.[33]

The study of Chinese painting also helped Bisttram with problems of composition.

> The Chinese artists also invented a new and original method of constructing a composition. When we examine those exquisite and subtle scrolls and paintings, we discover that the small elements are in the foreground and as the larger

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[32]Bisttram, The Creative Process, 74.

[33]Ibid., 65.

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> elements get larger and larger, one area of forms overlaps another, moving higher and higher. Mountains appear one behind the other, creating the impression of a mysterious as well as a monumental landscape. The mountains disappear, then rise again majestically out of the mist or fog and yet all is created on a two-dimensional plane in obedience to laws governing painting everywhere.[34]

This concept provides the solution for the landscape as layered horizontals rather than movement into a deep perspective space, a strategy that Bisttram developed into a system by the end of the 1920s.

Bisttram also explains how "impersonal art," an important part of his concept for his own art, relates to Chinese art, and how the impersonal approach is connected to morality:

> Confucian teaching begins with the impersonal cosmic principles of energy producing the negative and positive forces of Ying and Yang, which in turn produce all other forms as well as being the social order evolved from the universal order. Morals existed in the universal order as ideas and symbols; the sages interpreted them to meet the needs of the people. The moral system accepted the concept that all men by nature are good and that the proper attitude towards man and nature would result in the attainment of happiness on earth.[35]

Bisttram also discusses Lao Tzu, who "preached the necessity of retreat from civilization to nature to attain harmony with Tao, the 'Eternal Way' or supreme governing force behind the universe."[36] This is essentially what Bisttram did when he retreated to the country during the summers and finally settled permanently in Taos. Bisttram also characterizes Buddha as one who "established communities where through practical experience his disciples learned the discipline of thought and daily acts of cooperation

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[34]Ibid., 65-6.

[35]Ibid., 67.

[36]Ibid.

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and service."[37] This also characterizes Bisttram's later activities in Taos where he organized a school, a cooperative art gallery, and an art association, and actively supported other community-based organizations.[38]

Watercolor was Bisttram's primary medium for landscape during the 1920s; his watercolors also served as studies for paintings he did later. The sequence from watercolor to oils is documented in two letters in which he expressed a hesitation to sell a watercolor because it provided the essential notes for a painting he was working on.[39] Drawing, which was always fundamental to Bisttram's methods, was also critical to the development of his concept of landscape. The differences between the mediums makes drawing appropriate for working out complex compositional problems that are later applied in a simplified form in watercolor.

Mystic Mountain, ca. 1922 (fig. 52), is an early example in watercolor that uses Oriental motifs.[40] His reduction of the subject to mountain and water, the two terms of the Chinese designation for landscape (san sui); the vertical orientation of the paper that

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[37]Ibid.

[38]Another indication of Bisttram's interest in Oriental art is the Appraisal of Bisttram's library, which lists of a number of important books on the subject. Also, Bisttram purchased four Japanese prints during the 1920s; Mrs. Bisttram, after the death of her husband, gave these prints to Bert Wilson. Bert Wilson, telephone conversation with the author, Feb. 1998.

[39]"It happens that I am at present working on a large canvas for which North Light supplies a good many notes–hence the 'not for sale' tag..." Bisttram to (Mrs. Kilham), SLT, 19 Jan. 1927, BP, AAA 2892:126. "I would appreciate being permitted to retain this water-color [Maine Coast] for about a month. It happens that I am working on a large canvas and the water-color in question is my most significant collection of notes." Bisttram to (George Pearse Ennis), LT, 14 Jan. 1927, BP, AAA 2892:121.

[40]This title was assigned by the dealer, Jim Parsons; another watercolor landscape. Maine Coast Series #1, 1920, Dallas Museum of Art, shows obvious Oriental motifs.

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emphasizes the height of the mountains; and the limited palette of blue and white, follows a typical formula for an Oriental landscape.[41] Bisttram's separation of the mountains by clouds and dense fog shows his interest in a specific style of Chinese painting popularized by Mi Fei (1051-1107), one of the most renowned of the Sung painters. Mi Fei's most widely reproduced landscape (fig. 53), which could have provided Bisttram with his concept, shows the bottom to top layering of forms so typical of Oriental landscape painting. Mystic Mountain, however, with its diagonal striations in the sky and the diagonal strip of land at the lower right, precedes Bisttram's adoption of a rigid horizontal format, showing that what first appealed to him about the Oriental landscape was the cloud and fog effects.

Bisttram followed Mystic Mountain with a three-panel landscape based on the same limited theme of mountains and water, using a horizontal format. This triptych, of which Storm Clouds, Maine, ca. 1922 (fig. 54), is one of the sections, is Bisttram's loosest, most expressionistic work from the 1920s.[42] The blues, which dominate the color scheme, are deep and rich, and the forms are mysterious and evocative. Somewhat contradictorily, the water is calm and limpid, reflecting the mountain and island forms quite clearly, while a storm rages in the sky. These two aspects are successfully unified by the consistency of the color scheme throughout--deep blue and white--the latter used sparingly only to set off the forms. Structurally, a strict horizontality has been achieved by layering the elements one above the other.

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[41]Bowie, 51.

[42]This title, too, was assigned by a dealer. Unfortunately the triptych has been broken up. The use of three panels is an Oriental format, and is specifically recommended by Bowie. Bowie, 47.

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Hilltop Village, precisely dated 13 July 1928 (fig. 55), addresses the same theme, a mountain form reflected in the water; however, here the setting is domestic and calm as the subject is a village tucked into a hillside overlooking a river on a clear day, rather than an inhospitable stormy coast at night. The river, dividing the scene from the viewer, runs horizontally across the page and continues the use of the layered solution to the problem of perspective.

The composition could very well be based on the Oriental concept of landscape as ten chi jin, having three parts identified as "heaven, earth, and man" corresponding to "a principal subject, its complimentary adjunct and auxiliary details."[43] Following Bowie's analysis, the mountain would be the primary element or heaven, the water would be the compliment or earth, and the houses would be man or the auxiliary details.

The element of Bisttram's composition, however, most probably inspired by a close study of Bowie, is his use of line. Bowie's text, in its technical parts, provides descriptions and illustrations of numerous types of lines and, for landscape forms alone, specifies twelve types for leaves, shrubs, and grass; eight for rocks and ledges; and five for water. Oriental artists made great use of "types," and most practical books on Oriental painting provide illustrations of them. Bowie explains:

> These eight laws [for rocks and ledges] are not only available guides to desired effects; they also abbreviate labor and save the artist's attempting the impossible task of exactly reproducing physical conditions of the earth in a landscape painting. They are symbols or substitutes for the truth felt. Nothing is more interesting than such art resources whereby the sentiment of a landscape is reproduced by thus suggesting or symbolizing many of its essential features.[44]

This idea that symbolism made up of types is further illustrated by Bowie's suggestion of

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[43]Ibid., 52.

[44]Ibid., 55.

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constructing trees in "aggregations of half circles, called fish scales." This is essentially the system that Bisttram used for the trees. He then clustered them into rhythmic units that provide the essential movement from left to right that culminate in the village forms to the right of center, thus following the first canon of Chinese painting, "Rhythmic Vitality," discussed earlier. The short vertical strokes that fill in the trees are particularly harmonious in their contrast to the dominant horizontal theme of the composition.

Studies of a single tree in a landscape also show Bisttram's ability to infuse individuality into Oriental types. For the Oriental artist, the tree, according to Bowie, represents the strength and power of growth, and this idea must be held in mind when depicting it:

> ...the moment the brush is applied the sentiment of strength must be invoked and felt throughout the artists's system and imparted through his arm and hand to the brush, and so transmitted into the object painted; and this nervous current must be continuous and of equal intensity while the work proceeds. If the tree's limbs or branches in a painting by a Kano artist be examined, it will astonish any one to perceive the vital force that has been infused into them. Even the smallest twigs appear filled with the power of growth...[45]

The tree depicted in Figure 56 is typically Oriental in the way that it leans over to one side causing the roots to be exposed. A whole symbolic history of the tree is constructed with its placement on a ledge overlooking a river: its backward tilt the result of battering by swift winds coming off the water; its large roots representing its age and strength; and its leaves and delicately turned branches a sign of life and vitality in the face of adversity. Study for Resurrection, 1928 (fig. 57) emulates another Oriental type of ancient tree, almost dead, with a large knot, gnarled trunk, and leafless, twisted branches. As shown in the thumbnail sketch at the left, this tree becomes the focal point for a symbolic

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[45]Bowie, 35.

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landscape of renewal and hope, as indicated in the title.[46]

Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, 1930 (fig. 58), executed in Taos during his first trip to the Southwest, achieves a geometric balance between buildings and landscape with the aid of dynamic symmetry. Laying out a whirling square rectangle oriented horizontally and dividing it into its sections before starting, provides the organizing idea. The nave of the gothic-style church[47] at the left and the pueblo-style buildings that balance it at the right, provide the dominant horizontals for the composition. The trees at the right and left form parentheses around the major horizontals. The play of light and dark, enhanced by subtle shading in all areas of the composition, is accented by various negative spaces that have been left white. These white spaces have been turned into geometric shapes for the sake of pattern, but at the expense of natural light. Bisttram's reduction of some of the windows to dots indicates he was thinking about point, line, plane, and solid when composing the design. The bare, bulbous mountains at the top combined with the sharp diagonals at the bottom make the landscape a throbbing unit, especially when the composition is imagined without the defining lines of the root rectangle. This idea of cutting the composition off at odd angles to give it autonomy and independence may be due to the influence of John Marin, who was also painting in Taos during the summer of 1930. Bisttram undoubtedly saw his work that summer as Marin regularly showed his work to artists working in the area.[48]

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[46]See Bowie, Plate XXIX for a type for this tree.

[47]The gothic-style Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Taos burned in 1961, and was replaced by a pueblo-style building.

[48]Sharyn Rohlfsen Udall, Modernist Painting in New Mexico 1913-1935 (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 131. Bisttram's first trip to the Southwest during the summer of 1930 was tremendously stimulating. Bisttram

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The most important element in Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, however, is the balance achieved between curved and straight lines. This may very well be a conscious attempt to follows Claude Bragdon's concept of harmonious composition–the balancing of the In and Yo forces inherent in any unity. For Bragdon, the Japanese terms In and Yo represent masculine and feminine, vertical and horizontal, and straight and curved, that is, the second law of beauty, duality or polarity; the first being the law of unity. In The Beautiful Necessity (1910) Bragdon analyzes both natural and artistic form--plants, painting, music, and architecture--in terms of In and Yo. "The secret of their undying charm lies in the fact that in them In and Yo stand symbolized and contrasted."[49] His book The Eternal Poles (1931) develops this idea further.

In effect, Bisttram's absorption of Oriental philosophy and painting techniques confirmed and reinforced, especially by its reliance on memory and imagination, the indirect methods and suppression of perspective proposed by dynamic symmetry. The Oriental approach also confirmed the importance of watercolor and the idea of painting

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immediately focused on Taos and made it his home base, later striking out into northern Arizona to observe the Indian dances. In Taos Bisttram met an art student named Funk, who accompanied him in an old Model T Ford on their trip into northern Arizona. Carlson, 40. This was presumably the Lee Funk, a teacher from Perilo, Texas, who spent the summers of 1929 and 1930 painting in Taos. Taos Valley News, 5 June 1930. In Taos, Bisttram rented a studio at the "Martin compound" where the Taos Inn now stands. Bisttram, "Why have you come to Taos and Why have you stayed?" The letterhead, "Hotel Martin in Picturesque Taos Where Artists from Everywhere Gather to Paint," suggests that the environment was conducive to meeting both resident and visiting artists. Helen Martin to Mrs. Bisttram, SL, 4 Sept. 1936, BP, AAA 2892:547. This letter not only provides the letterhead advertisement but also indicates that the Bisttrams purchased a tract of land from Helen Martin on the Santa Fe Road, and that the Bisttrams were past due on the payments. Bisttram was most likely impressed with the artists he met in Taos as much as by the landscape.

[49]Bragdon, The Beautiful Necessity, 35. Blavatsky also uses the terms Yo and In. Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, I, 216-217.

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as a spiritual and symbolic undertaking. It also provided a philosophy of life. In the 1950s, Bisttram renewed his interest in Chinese art and produced a fairly large body of works based on Chinese calligraphy.

While Bisttram's interest in Oriental landscape painting may have pre-dated his study with Howard Giles, the two men certainly pursued this study together. This is confirmed by a former student of Giles's who recalled that Giles's teaching was dominated by a concern with Oriental art and watercolor. For Giles, watercolor was the master medium; he even maintained that his watercolors were his most important works, and that his oil paintings only served as studies for them.[50]

The reviewer of Bisttram's 1931 exhibition of watercolors at the Lamson & Hubbard Gallery maintained that Bisttram learned everything he knew about watercolor from Giles:

> By his [Bisttram's] peculiar simplicity of planes and wash, and by his amazing heightening of the luminosity of color through the happy juxtaposition of hue of intensive gradation of tone, Mr. Giles has established a well-defined school whose every devotee exalts by repetition his own achievements.[51]

A watercolor by Howard Giles, Sunlit Inlet, 1927 (fig. 59), shows some comparable features to Bisttram's watercolors, especially the transcendent interpretation of the sky. Giles's treatment of the coastal areas is less ethereal than Bisttram's, but similar aims for a spiritualized landscape are evident.

Theodore Bolton's Design and Color suggests that John Ruskin may have been a

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[50]Ted Egri, interview with the author, October 1998. Egri studied at the Master Institute under Giles for a couple of years, probably beginning in the fall of 1931; in 1950, after serving in World War II, he moved to Taos. Interestingly, Giles gave Egri and his sister Ruth, who was also a Giles student, a letter of introduction to Denman Ross, whom they visited in Cambridge to look at his collection of Oriental works.

[51]Boston Evening Transcript, 7 Feb. 1931, BP, Harwood Museum.

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source for both Giles and Bisttram's watercolor technique. Bolton's bibliography cites The Flight of the Dragon and other works on Chinese painting; but Bolton's thinking is dominated by Ruskin, whose Seven Lamps he quotes on the title page:

> I believe that failure is less frequently attributable to either insufficiency of means or impatience of labour, than to a confused understanding of the thing actually to be done.

And indeed it is Ruskin's book Elements of Drawing that Bolton refers to for watercolor painting and relies on for his description of the technique. The following is typical of Bolton's use of Ruskin:

> Lay in the color very pale and liquid; so pale, indeed, that you can only just see where it is on the paper. Lead it up to all the outlines, and make it precise in form, keeping it thoroughly wet everywhere. Then, when it is all in shape, take the darker color, and lay some of it into the middle of the liquid color. It will spread gradually in a branchy kind of way, and you may now lead it up to the outlines already determined, and play it with the brush till it fills its place well; then let it dry, and it will be as flat and pure as a single dash, yet defining all the complicated forms accurately.[52]

Bragdon also cites Ruskin; however, for the relationships he draws between nature and architecture rather than for his technical methods.[53] Bowie also considers Ruskin's concept of nature and its relation to medieval art compatible with Oriental thinking.[54]

One technical note is worth making. In contrast to Bolton's recommendation that artists use Whatman's paper, 72 pound rough for watercolor, Bisttram always used Whatman's 300 pound, obviously much rougher and more highly textured:

> The paper used by me for all my watercolors from the moment I began to work in this medium is Whatman 300#. This is a heavy paper, almost a board that permits of much manhandling and, holds up marvelously under atmospheric

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[52]Bolton, Design and Color, 29.

[53]Bragdon, The Beautiful Necessity, 41.

[54]Bowie, 74.

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> changes. The only drawback has been the cost but fortunately I had the wisdom to acquire a lot during my N.Y. money-making days.[55]

Influence of Nicholas Roerich

The influence of Nicholas Roerich is also evident in Bisttram's landscapes. While Roerich was exclusively a painter of religious subjects, his landscape settings are most often the dominant feature of his compositions. Furthermore, his paintings abound with Oriental motifs. The influence of Roerich can be dated to 1928 when Bisttram painted the watercolor Knight of the Evening (fig. 60), and the oil based on it, Rider in the Midnight Sky, now at the Metropolitan Museum, New York. These two works, in which the clouds take on the form of a charging knight, are homages to Roerich. Both the motif and the title for the watercolor were taken from Roerich's painting Knight of the Evening, 1918 (fig. 61).[56] While Bisttram only uses this theme in these two works, it appears in many of Roerich's.[57] Nina Selivanova comments on Roerich's use of this motif as follows:

> The Knight of the Morning and The Knight of the Evening, also painted in 1918, hint of a vision of higher planes. The Knight is a messenger, a worker going out into the world to overcome evil, and returning victorious. The first picture portrays a peaceful northern landscape of hills and lakes. Its soft tones of greenish yellow slightly tinted with rose are those of an early dawn. The sky is clear except for one rose-colored cloud in the form of a horseman. The Knight of the Evening is also embodied in a cloud, dark blue and grey, with strongly

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[55]Bisttram to (Gouverneur Morris, Coolidge, NM), TL, 16 Aug. 1942, BP, AAA.

[56]Roerich's Knight of the Evening was reproduced in the catalogue of his 1920 exhibition at the Kingore Galleries, New York, which Bisttram would have been familiar with. The Nicholas Roerich Exhibition, no. 29.

[57]For example, Roerich's Battle in the Heavens, 1912; and Knight of the Morning, 1918, reproduced in Roerich, 1924. Interestingly, Roerich's depiction of a knight in a cloud in his painting Warrior of the Light, 1932 (see Decter, 195), is more like Bisttram's Knight of the Evening, than Bisttram's is like Roerich's earlier depiction.

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outlined wings--the horseman returning from a battle with a dragon.[58] Roerich's paintings, especially those executed before his departure from Russia, have been interpreted as reflecting a belief in a coming apocalypse of anarchy that would overtake civilization.[59] Roerich's paintings, writings, and archaeological investigations were all contributions towards meeting that challenge in a positive way. Kandinsky's depictions of St. George and the Dragon undoubtedly derived from similar concepts in his Russian background.

Blavatsky, on the other hand, provides another interpretation of "slaying the dragon." In her explanation of the dragon as a symbol of wisdom, Blavatsky interprets the slaying of the dragon by St. Michael as a symbol for mastering and assimilating the wisdom of the dragon and of divine self-sacrifice.[60] She goes even further in her denial of the Christian concept of evil by asserting that God has two armies, one lead by St. Michael in heaven, the other lead by the dragons and serpents (Satan) on earth, the one unmanifest and free, the other manifest and bound in matter, both emissaries of the divine.[61]

She also provides an image of etheric electricity as a horse and rider:

> Fohat is the steed and the thought is the rider. He passes like lightening through the fiery clouds; takes three, and five, and seven strides through the seven regions above, and the seven below. He lifts his voice, and calls the innumerable

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[58]Selivanova, 106. A further interpretation of this charging knight is provided by Roerich's "belief that the Messiah shall come in a cloud and the sword shall be as a comet in his hand." Roerich (New York: Corona Mundi International Art Center, 1924), viii.

[59]Hoogen, 62.

[60]Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, II, 94.

[61]A. Kingsford, Perfect Way, in Blavatsky, the Secret Doctrine, II, 235.

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sparks, and joins them.[62]

Blavatsky's interpretations show that she denied the independent existence of evil. For Blavatsky, evil was "psychological," that is, it was created by the individual. The solution to this problem, personal redemption, is the interpretation Bisttram took, as is shown below.

Bisttram utilizes the cloud formations, so important in Knight of the Evening, 1928 (fig. 60), for the centerpiece of another watercolor from the same year, Landscape, 1928 (fig. 62). However, the overt symbolism of the clouds in Knight of the Evening has been suppressed and transmuted into a natural form that still retains the sense of victory over evil intended in the former work. Landscape, 1928, one of Bisttram's most successful watercolors from the 1920s, was acquired for the Roerich Museum collection soon after it was executed.[63]

The landscapes Bisttram executed in watercolor in 1928 can be distinguished as a group by their insistent horizontality--in the orientation of the page, the layering of forms, and the application and arrangement of color. This corresponds to the use of the profile and the emphasis on the horizontal in the figure studies discussed in the previous chapter as well as to the "Oriental" solution to the problem of perspective. These meanings, moreover, should be seen in the context of the universal meaning of the

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[62]Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, I, 31.

[63]Landscape passed to the Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, when the Master Institute/Riverside Museum closed in 1971. The currently operating Roerich Museum in New York is a different institution, founded about 1935 when an irrevocable division occurred in the hierarchy of the original organization, which changed its name to the Riverside Museum at the time of the split. See Robert C. Williams, Russian Art and American Money (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).

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horizontal as a symbol for the earth, nature, and the feminine. [64]

This group can also be distinguished by the use of a monogram. Above the date and signature--E. J. Bistran--is a symbol consisting of a circle with a dot in it (the astrological sign for the sun) set over the glyph for his birth sign, Aries. Knight of the Evening and Landscape are both signed and dated with this monogram.[65] This is similar to the monogram Roerich used, which is made up of Roerich's initials written in the Cyrillic script, a "P," the first letter of his last name, placed over an "H," the first letter of his first name. Bisttram's use of a symbol with signature and date sets these works apart since many of Bisttram's works are unsigned and/or undated. Bisttram begins to use a monogram again in about 1954.

Bisttram's painting Communion, 1929 (fig. 63) also shows a strong influence from Roerich. Communion is similar to the 1928 landscapes, except that the distant mountains are now a great rocky wall that provides the background for a religious apparition. Two figures in a small open boat, with their backs to the viewer, gaze at the

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[64]Blavatsky's gloss on the meaning of the dot within the circle provides an occult, but universal interpretation for the horizontal. For Blavatsky the circle is the primary symbol of origination, the circle with a dot in it is the next symbol of the sequence, the circle with a horizontal line the next, followed by the addition of the vertical. In this progression, the horizontal within the circle "symbolizes a divine immaculate Mother-Nature within the all-embracing absolute Infinitude." Blavatsky, I, 4-5.

[65] Other 1928 landscapes with the monogram include Blue Hills, Pastoral, Arcadia, The Promise, Vermont Hills, Lake Champlain, Storm Lake Champlain, The Far Hills, The Young Moon, Resurrection, Afterglow, The Graveyard, Adirondacks, and Blue and Gold. Photographs of these works are at the Harwood Museum, Taos. Of this group, The Young Moon also relates to a work of the same title by Nicholas Roerich now at the Roerich Museum, New York. In The Young Moon Bisttram experiments with the higher value color palette for which Roerich is noted.

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miracle. This work is similar Roerich's Saint Boris and Saint Gleb, 1919 (fig. 64),[66] which depicts a similar scene of two figures in a boat. Roerich's interpretation is more Oriental, especially in the shape of the boat and the mist that makes the mountains seem like they are floating in the air. The horizontality of the rocky mountains in the background may also have influenced Bisttram to utilize a strict horizontality in his 1928 landscapes. Roerich's Himself Came (fig. 65)[67] provides the model for the apparition in Communion and also includes two figures in a boat.

In 1928, at the height of Roerich's influence on Bisttram, Roerich was traveling abroad. Consequently, Bisttram's interest in Roerich must have come from seeing his paintings at the Roerich Museum where Bisttram was teaching at the time. Upon Roerich's return to New York in 1929, the influence became more personal. Bisttram recalled that Roerich never gave him a criticism, but did try to influence him subtly. One day Roerich came into Bisttram's studio with a gift of brushes that were much larger than those Bisttram ordinarily used.[68] Roerich was clearly attempting to broaden Bisttram's style, which was less aggressive than Roerich's, utilized much smaller brushstrokes, and was not as colorful. The affection that Roerich felt toward Bisttram was shown by another gift, a ring, which can be seen quite prominently on Bisttram's hand in his 1935 self-portrait (fig. 66).

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[66]Roerich's St. Boris and St. Gleb is reproduced in the Roerich Kingore catalogue of 1920.

[67]Roerich's Himself Came is illustrated in Roerich, 1924.

[68]Bisttram recalls this story in a taped interview, Harwood Museum. Bisttram saved these brushes. They were given by Mrs. Bisttram, after Bisttram's death, to Matthew Breuer, Amherst, MA. Matthew Breuer, telephone interview with the author, 1998.

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The kind of personal and spiritual influence that Roerich exerted over Bisttram is indicated by a talk Roerich gave to Giles and Bisttram's class. In this address Roerich explained his "theory of the beautiful:"

> I have precisely in mind unlimited creative thought which impels human wings to spread in beautiful forms and colors. This creative thought adorned by essential laws, beautiful in their constructiveness, uplifts humanity toward its approaching evolution, and from the smallest hearth up to the state and continents, establishes the same sense of the Beautiful, which holds essential kinship with all ages and peoples.
>
> From this sense of the Beautiful is born nobility of spirit, constant creativeness, heroism and attainment. From the same source also springs forth optimism, because every negation is non-creative.[69]

For Roerich the beautiful thought was the source and beginning of the creative act, and was the way to connect with the eternal:

> Thus again cognizant that in touching these constructive laws, you come close to the eternal laws. You express the highest form of thought, and cooperate with the supreme consciousness. Is it not wonderful to hear in your creative mind this beautiful thought that you are in cooperation with the Beautiful, with the Supreme? Therein is your strength, because during this moment of direct cooperation with the Supreme, you create something for the next evolution–for the next life. The aspiration to that life constitutes the eternal goal; it is a beautiful law! No one can limit you as to what way your art can be applied. You cannot create anything without inner sense, form or purpose. Everything has a purpose. But remember that this purpose should be beautiful.[70]

Roerich also advised the students to cultivate and train their memories because he felt that it was important "to pay attention to every detail of life." He recommended exercising the memory every day by taking one object, examining it very closely, and

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[69]Nicholas Roerich, "Creative Thought, Address to the Students of Mr. Howard Giles, 1930," in Realm of Light (New York: Roerich Museum Press, 1931), 192. This was one of a series that Roerich gave to Giles's and Bisttram's class. The Message of 1930, 66.

[70]Roerich, 194-5.

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then closing the eyes and imagining it with all its details.[71]

Howard Giles came under the influence of Roerich as much as Bisttram--if not more. Giles was more officially connected to Roerich as his name appears on the Corona Mundi[72] letterhead as one of fifty-seven Honorary Advisers, while Bisttram's name does not, and when Giles was hired to teach at the Master Institute in 1929, he was given the title of Dean of the Art Department, whereas Bisttram remained only one of many faculty members.[73] Giles's publication of an article on the Roerich Museum in the Swedenborgian magazine The New Church Messenger clearly showed his enthusiasm for Roerich's undertakings as well as his feeling that they were compatible with Swedenborgian teachings.[74]

An exhibition of contemporary religious paintings that Giles organized for the Roerich Museum in 1931 shows how much Giles had come under Roerich's influence. The exhibition featured fifty-four works and included Bisttram's On the Road to Galilee.[75] The five works included by Giles--139th Psalm, Alpha, Invocation, 23rd Psalm,

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[71]Ibid, 196.

[72]The Master Institute was founded in Nov. 1921, Corona Mundi in July 1922, and The Roerich Museum in Nov. 1923.

[73]Bisttram purchased shares in the corporation formed at the time of the new building in 1929.

[74]Howard Giles, "The Roerich Museum," The New Church Messenger 138, no. 1 (1 Jan. 1930), 26-8.

[75]Exhibition of American Contemporary Religious Art, International Art Center of Roerich Museum, 6 Dec. 1931-4 Jan. 1932. The artists included in the exhibition were Walter Beck, Emil J. Bisttram, Eliot Clark, Emil Carlsen, Charles J. Connick, Leon Dabo, Maurice Fromkes, Howard Giles, Charles W. Hawthorne, Eugene Higgins, Arnold Hoffman, Leo Katz, John La Farge, Ella Condie Lamb, Katharine S. Lamb, Joseph Lauber, F. Luis Mora, Umberto Romano, Rubin, Carl Schmitt, Maruice Sterne, Henry O. Tanner. Brochure courtesy Oriole Feshback.

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131st Psalm, and Messenger--are clearly influenced by Roerich. Even though Giles was strongly religious, prior to his contact with Roerich he was not known as a painter of religious subjects.

Giles's 139th Psalm (fig. 67)[76] features a figure with outstretched arms dressed in religious garb, his back to the viewer, moved by religious passion. The stylistic influences from Roerich include the rugged mountain landscape setting, the generality of the major figure, and the uninhibited religious feeling. Similar aims can be seen in Roerich's Ecstacy, 1918 (fig. 68).[77] Roerich's depiction, however, is more overt and personal as his enraptured figure faces front and is very individually depicted as a wizened old man with a long beard. The very rocky landscape background is typical of Roerich's "chiseled" interpretation of nature that reflected his love of archeology, his researches into the Stone Age, and his belief that stones were "sacred objects in themselves."[78] Giles's 139th Psalm was used as the frontispiece of an issue of the New Church Messenger during the run of the exhibition, with the following comment probably prepared by Giles:

> The thought back of Mr. Giles painting, The 139th Psalm, is that omniscience and omnipresence might be conveyed not only through color, but through magnitude

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Leon Dabo was also a Swedenborgian. "Art and the Infinite, Reflections by Leon Dabo," The New Church Messenger, n.d., 317-8, William Warder Papers.

[76]The 139th Psalm was included in the 1930 Venice Biennial; the selection of works to be included was made by Walter Clarke of the Grand Central Art Galleries. "American Art at Venice Avoids Modernism–and California," The Art Digest (Mid-April 1930), 32.

[77]Ecstasy is illustrated in The Nicholas Roerich Exhibition.

[78]Hoogen, 83-4.

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of form and the relatively insignificant human element.[79]

The link between Giles and Roerich is another confirmation of the interconnectedness between art, life, and spirituality in Bisttram's circle during the 1920s.

Art, Nature, and Swedenborgianism

Bisttram's landscape painting became more associated with religious ideas as he drew closer to Roerich. Bisttram's readings in Swedenborg, experiments with landscape, his attitude towards nature, and the indirect methods he was using made him receptive to this influence. Bisttram's preference for symbolic light over natural light is also related to these issues. The indirect method of dynamic symmetry, which does not rely on working in front of the scene at a particular moment, discourages the depiction of the subtleties of natural light. Swedenborg also distinguished between natural light and spiritual light, and considered spiritual light to be alive, and natural light to be dead.[80] This was due to his theory, also held by Blavatsky, that the cosmos was double, and that behind the physical sun there was a spiritual sun that was the true source of light and energy.

Also, Leo Katz's "Theory of Art Cycles" denounced impressionism and its concern

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[79]The New Church Messenger, (2 Dec. 1931), 468.

[80]"...the understanding, which is man's internal sight, is enlightened by spiritual light just as the eye or man's external sight is enlightened by natural light. Moreover, both are similarly taught; but the internal sight, which is that of the understanding is taught by spiritual objects; and the external sight, which is that of the eye, is taught by natural objects. There is spiritual light and there is natural light; and both are alike in external but unlike in internal appearance; for natural light is from the sun of the natural world, and consequently in itself is dead, while spiritual light is from the Sun of the spiritual world, and consequently in itself is living. It is this spiritual light and not natural light that enlightens the human understanding." Swedenborg, Divine Providence, para. 166. (This book is on Bisttram's 1930 reading list; see Appendix I.)

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with fleeting sensations. Interestingly, in an essay from 1931 Bisttram assigned Katz's impressionist phase to the larger incoming Aquarian Age. In his discussion of the Impressionist cycle, both in its larger and smaller manifestations, he associated the effects of light and shadow with externals and the loss of true knowledge, and personal experience with illusion and error:

> From the classical we naturally pass on to the Impressionistic period corresponding to the flower, the manhood cycle, the period of self-consciousness, the Romantic, the recognition of personal power when man dares to forget or lay aside those basic principles laid down and taught to him while young and tries to find the why and the wherefore of life through his own experience because he sees only impressions of things, the surface or externals, and not as things truly are or as the laws have been laid down by those who really understood. And again as always if moved by a great and higher emotion or inner teaching, man uses his powers for the betterment of his fellow man. Or, when he sees only the external side of things he is bent on conquest, material- or self-glory. It is the period in life when man discovers his love nature either for self or for his fellow man; and in Art when the Artist discovers light upon objects. Either he sees the surface or light and shadow. The world of color, color corresponding to the emotions, hence the impressionistic period stands for light and color upon objects as with Leonardo da Vinci and again Monet of our day.[81]

The depiction of natural light is one of the most important aspects of traditional watercolor painting and is what makes the watercolors of John Singer Sargent and Winslow Homer, for example, so admired and sought after. The absence of people in Bisttram's watercolors also distinguishes his work from Sargent and Homer's. While the leisure class that Sargent depicted may not have appealed to Bisttram, Homer develops intense characters who in many cases are shown in a life and death struggle with the forces of nature. Bisttram, who must have been aware of this aspect of Maine life, and had equally dramatic personal struggles, was not interested in representing either of these types of personal situations. All of this is a part of Bisttram's "impersonal"

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[81]Emil Bisttram, "The New Era of Art and Life," AMs, William Warder Papers.

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approach. While he might see great meaning or drama in a storm or in a cloud, he is not interested in depicting personal, individual suffering or joy except in the form of a symbolized or transmuted religious experience.

Bisttram essentially used the terms "impersonal" and "symbolic" interchangeably. The impersonal and symbolic attitude toward nature can be found in Swedenborg. William Worcester, an interpreter of Swedenborg, puts it as follows:

> The common perception of a relation between natural objects in the world about us and spiritual things within ourselves, the perception that they are indeed the same things on different planes of life, leads us every day to call natural and spiritual things by the same names, and to describe their qualities by the same terms. We speak for example, of a lofty mountain, or a lofty ambition; a low place, or a low motive...It is to be noted in all such cases that the word is used first of natural things and natural qualities; that it gets its clear, definite meaning from what we see and hear and feel, and that it is afterwards borrowed to describe spiritual things and qualities which we perceive to be analogous to the natural... The idea of a spiritual quality is derived from nature, and the term used to describe it is borrowed from nature.[82]

Moreover, Swedenborg believed that the three kingdoms of nature, the mineral, vegetable, and animal were subservient and created by God for man's use.

> ...that all things which are external to man and which are serviceable for his use are secondary ends of creation; and these in short have relation to all things that exist in the three kingdoms, the animal, the vegetable and the mineral.[83]

Swedenborg was particularly adamant about this because he felt that atheism was based on a belief in the priority of nature.[84] In his view, atheists credit nature with having

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[82]William L. Worcester, The Language of Parable: A Key to the Bible (New York: Swedenborg Press, 1892; reprint New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1984), 12-13. This book is on Bisttram's 1930 reading list, see Appendix I.

[83]Swedenborg, Divine Providence, para. 332.

[84]"Therefore, if he attributes all things to himself and to nature, the love of self becomes the soul; but if he attributes all things to the Lord, love to the Lord becomes the soul; and this love is heavenly, but the other is infernal." Ibid., para. 199. "Those who have acknowledged nature alone and human prudence alone constitute hell; while those

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created itself and man. While Swedenborg acknowledges the evolution of forms through nature, he believed that nature was under the governance of God. [85] Swedenborg, therefore, doesn't see any intrinsic, independent good in nature itself, rather, it is the use man makes of nature that is important; nature is a means that man can use either for good or for evil, and determines his ultimate end in heaven or hell. Nature was likewise useful for Bisttram as a means for symbolizing his own spiritual ideas.

For Swedenborg, the three kingdoms of nature were each spheres unto themselves as were the spheres of man, heaven, and hell. Swedenborg maintained that there were correspondences between each of these spheres; this concept of independent but corresponding spheres fostered a concept of symbolism in which one element of one sphere represented a corresponding element in another sphere. One of the correspondences that Swedenborg made was that between man and a tree:

> As there is a correspondence between the life of man and the growth of a tree, draw a parallel or comparison between them. In the language of comparison man's infancy is like the tender shoot of a tree springing out of the earth from the seed...[86]

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who have acknowledged God and His Divine Providence constitute heaven." Ibid., para. 205. "...and if they confirm themselves in favour of nature against God, they close the interiors of their mind and interpose as it were a veil..." Ibid., para. 310.

[85]"Neither can liberty itself and rationality itself be given to those who attribute all things to nature and nothing to the Divine, and who have made this part of their faith by reasoning from visible things; for these are atheists." Ibid., par. 98. "The acknowledgment of nature alone also lies concealed in it because self-love has closed the window on its roof by which heaven lies open and also its side windows, lest it should see and hear that the Lord alone governs all things, that nature in herself is dead, and that man's proprium is hell, and consequently that the love of the proprium is the devil. Then, with its windows closed, it is in darkness and there makes a fire on the hearth for itself at which it sits with its consort; and they reason together in a friendly way in favour of nature as against God, and in favour of man's own prudence as against the Divine Providence." Ibid., par 206.

[86]Ibid., para. 332.

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Bisttram's use of the tree as a metaphor for man is shown in his pencil sketch Study for "Resurrection," 1928 (fig. 57). The tree is the primary motif; its setting on a strip of land in front of a body of water with mountains behind is shown in a thumbnail sketch at the left.[87] The idea of associating a tree with man's regeneration is also suggested by Swedenborg:

> Man, indeed is a corrupt tree from the seed; but, nevertheless there is possible a grafting or budding with shoots taken from the Tree of Life, by which the sap drawn up from the old root is turned into sap forming good fruit. This comparison is made in order that it may be known that when there is so constant a progression of the Divine Providence in the development and regeneration of trees there must be a constant progression in the reformation and regeneration of men, who are of so much more value than trees...[88]

Bisttram's interest in the idea of man's regeneration is one of his most important themes during this period and is a major part of the structure of his Three-Year Course, which is discussed in the following chapter. For Swedenborg, the regeneration or perfection of man is the purpose of life; the ultimate purpose is the creation of heaven from regenerated men. This heaven, then, takes the form of a man.

One of the topics for fourth week of Bisttram's Moriah summer school class is "Grand Man." This refers to the idea that God is in the form of a man, and that just as man is a microcosm of God (the universe), so God (the universe) is in the form of a man:

> A few words shall be said about the correspondence of the external man to the internal. Every regenerated man is a kind of little heaven, that is, he is an effigy or image of the universal heaven, and therefore in the Word his internal man is called "heaven." There is such order in heaven that the Lord rules spiritual things through celestial things, and natural things through spiritual things, and in this way he rules the universal heaven as one man, for which reason heaven is called

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[87]The watercolor, documented in a photograph in the Bisttram Papers at the Harwood Museum, is labeled with the title Resurrection. It is also signed with Bisttram's 1928 monogram.

[88]Swedenborg, Divine Providence, para. 332.

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> the grand man; and there is the like order in everyone who is in heaven. Man too, when like this, is a little heaven, or, what is the same, he is a kingdom of the Lord, because the kingdom of the Lord is in him; and then in him external things correspond to internal, that is, they obey them, just as they do in heaven; for in the heavens (which are three, and all of which together stand related as one man) spirits constitute the external man, angelic spirits the interior man, and angels the internal man.[89]

Bisttram alluded obliquely to this idea in conversation as follows:

> There were two--Blake and Swedenborg--who believed that the most perfect creation was the human form. And if you followed its rhythm in art--that is, in the shape of a nose, line of a hip, etc.,--it would be the best you could use. Blake always did. We all do instinctively, because it's what we're most familiar with. Mine nearly always end up with a face, or some part of the human body in it. I see that it needs a line here and there. I put it in and before I know it it's followed the shape of a nose or mouth, most often the face.[90]

Bisttram's connection of Blake and Swedenborg points to another source for Bisttram's interest in the regeneration of man--his outline for a series interpreting The Book of Job, that he titles The Occultism of Job or the Regenerate Man. This outline follows that developed by William Blake--a series of twenty-one images keyed to specific passages. Bisttram's outline follows the interpretation found in S. Foster Damon's William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols (1924), which provides the keys to Blake's symbolism of Job.[91] Blake's interpretation is based on Swedenborgian ideas about the regeneration of man; Blake takes biblical figures to represent the seven states of regeneration: Lucifer, Molech, Elohim, Shaddai, Pahad, Jehovah, and Jesus. Bisttram notes this sequence on his outline and utilizes is later in one of his lectures. Bisttram also follows Damon's interpretation by correlating the twenty-one plates with the twenty-one cards of the

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[89]Swedenborg, Arcana Coelestia, para. 911

[90]Bisttram, quoted in Carlson, ca. Feb. 1955, 23.

[91]S. Foster Damon, William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols (New York: P. Smith, 1924). This book is on Bisttram's 1930 reading list. See Appendix I.

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Tarot deck. While the author has not located any works based on this series, Frank Hinder's remark that Bisttram was working on a series relating to Blake during the 1929 Moriah, New York, summer session, suggests that he at least began working on it.[92]

Bisttram's notes for the Job series include some examples of the symbolism that Blake used including "the owl of disbelief" and angels representing innocent joys. Bisttram also noted the equivalencies between right and good, left and evil, front and external, and back and internal; and that a figure with his left foot forward symbolizes evil. The title for Bisttram's series and his immersion in Damon's interpretation of Blake's reading of Job indicates that he believed that the story of Job was an archetype for God's regeneration of a man.

Also of interest is that the symbolism for the old tree as the hope for regeneration is found in Job:

> For there is hope for a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its shoots will not cease. Though its root grows old in the earth, and its stump die in the ground, yet at the scent of water it will bud and put forth branches like a young plant. Job, 14:7-9.

Bisttram makes the association between resurrection and a tree even more forcefully in Man Crucified on a Three-Limbed Tree, 1931 (fig. 35), discussed in the previous chapter. This drawing also correlates with Swedenborg's concept of the Grand Man. In many ways this drawing consolidates all of the ideas Bisttram was working with during the 1920s.

Influence of Denman Ross

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[92]Frank Hinder, "Untitled Autobiographical Statement," Hinder Papers, Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia. The outline of Bisttram's planned series on Job is in the Bisttram Papers at the Harwood Museum, Taos.

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Bisttram's painting A Great Western Sky, 1930 (fig. 69), a dramatic sunset observed in Arizona, is the major landscape Bisttram executed upon returning to New York after his first summer in the Southwest. Bisttram's Landscape, 1928 (fig. 62), provides the precedent in that both works depict billowing clouds set over a mountain range. The differences between these two works demonstrate the extent to which Bisttram had come under Ross's influence in terms of both form and color by 1930.

Rhythm, one of the most important concepts for Ross, was an important part of Bisttram's concept of the landscape. This is shown in comments he made late in life about three of his 1952 landscape sketches, Mountain Rhythms, Earth Rhythms, and The Cliff:

> I have observed often the movement of the inner rhythms within one mountain crossing another one and the earth movements below them, and the clouds above. It creates a composition of earth's rhythms or mountain rhythms. The color is very similar to nature itself without exaggeration. It is low key, heavy and dramatic.[93]
>
> This is an interesting example of observing the sky and the clouds and the hillside and the foreground, and experimenting with the possibility of creating a composition that would be interesting and intriguing when one is able to look beyond what one sees. I saw the beauty of rhythms, of flow of energy, moving from one side to another and this is the reason for this type of composition that begins to tie us to nature.[94]
>
> If one looks at a cliff of rocks it appears to be a jumble of jagged shapes without any rhyme or reason, except that they have been thrown by nature into a pile. I thought of redesigning it in order to create a harmonious, rhythmic pattern, approximating rock forms on a cliff.[95] Using nature as a spring board I attempted

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[93]Bisttram, comment on Mountain Rhythms, 1952, pastel on paper, Anschutz Collection, B-217.

[94]Bisttram, comment on Earth Rhythms, 1952, pastel on paper, Anschutz Collection, B-194.

[95]"...passers-by see the scattered heaps and collections of materials from which a house is to be built; while the Lord sees it as a magnificent palace with its work of

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> to create new images to help your imagination move in any direction.[96]

This attitude towards nature--looking for order and rhythm rather than incidents, passions, or qualities of light--can also found in Denman Ross's theories of composition and color. In Ross's Theory of the Beautiful, rhythm is an essential component of order:

> The Beautiful is revealed, always, so far as I know, in the forms of Order, in the modes of Harmony, of Balance, or of Rhythm. While there are many instances of Harmony, Balance, and Rhythm which are not particularly beautiful, there is, I believe, nothing really beautiful which is not orderly in one or the other, in two, or in all three of these modes. In seeking the Beautiful, therefore, we look for it in instances of Order, in instances of Harmony, Balance, and Rhythm. We shall find it in what may be called supreme instances. This is perhaps our nearest approach to a definition of Beauty: that it is a supreme instance of Order, intuitively felt, instinctively appreciated.[97]

According to Ross, harmony, which is made up of balance and rhythm, is achieved with recurrence, repetition, alternation, correspondence, and likeness. Balance and rhythm are two contrasting ideas; balance means stability, while rhythm means movement in a direction. However, for Ross,

> Rhythm is not inconsistent with Balance. It is only necessary to get movements which have the same or nearly the same direction and which are rhythmical in character to balance on the same axis and we have a reconciliation of the two principles. [98]

Also, according to Ross, balance cannot be achieved along a diagonal.

Study for "A Great Western Sky," 1930 (fig. 70), shows that Bisttram used the diagonals of the root-two rectangle for the placement, height, and angles of the

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construction and enlargement continually going on." Swedenborg, Divine Providence, par. 203.

[96]Bisttram, comment on The Cliff, 1952, pastel on paper, Anschutz Collection, B-216.

[97]Ross, A Theory of Pure Design, 4.

[98]Ibid., 86.

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mountains. These diagonals, however, create rhythmic intervals along the horizontal, not deep space or vertical movement. Bisttram also used this approach to the mountains in Landscape, 1928, where the short rises of the mountains offset the tendency of triangular shapes to move vertically or into the background. But the flowing mountain forms of the 1928 work have been changed into two highly individualized mountains in the 1930 work. The larger mountain at the left and the smaller one set slightly lower at the right create rhythmic movement from left to right according to Ross's definition of movement as a directional flow along a line of diminishing intervals:

> The feeling of Rhythm may be induced by a regular diminution of measure or scale in the repetitions of the motive and in the intervals in which the repetitions take place. [99]

The mountains thus become the primary forms in the landscape, and they are echoed and repeated above and below, following Ross's prescription, "The value of any composition lies in the number of orderly connections which it shows."[100]

The rhythm of Bisttram's mountain forms continue to flow back and forth in the interlocking horizontal bands of land below, replacing the horizontal band of water at the bottom of the 1928 landscape. Repetitions also occur in the cloud forms. The 1930 work is thus structurally unified by a zig-zag motion running back and forth across the canvas that emphasizes up and down and right and left in a more interesting way than the layered horizontals of the 1928 work. Furthermore, the clouds, which in the 1928 landscape run over the top edge of the frame, are in the 1930 work contained well within the margins, and provide the essential spiritual content of the picture by

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[99]Ibid., 59.

[100]Ibid., 77.

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dominating more than half of the composition. Bringing the clouds within the frame of the painting reflects an idea insisted upon by Ross. Ross considered the centering of the elements of the composition within the frame to be an essential strategy for creating harmony and balance.

A Great Western Sky is also executed with a more brilliant color palette than the 1928 work, which is dominated by blues. The paint in the 1930 work is applied relatively smoothly, with little sign of brushstrokes, in a graded color scheme beginning with light orange in the largest cloud, descending to various shades of pink in the sky, to reds in the far mountains, and finally to rusts and browns in the foreground. The color palette also counteracts any idea of depth as it ranges in a vertical scale from lights at the top to darks at the bottom.

This approach shows that Bisttram was using Ross's color theories. Ross uses the same concepts and terms in his color theory as in his design theory. For Ross color is a means for bringing a composition into a state of harmony; and tone harmony, like form harmony, involves repetitions and similarities. For value harmony, colors are diminished by the addition of black or white; for color harmony, one color is mixed into all the tones to diminish color contrasts. In addition to color harmony, Bisttram used what Ross called "tone rhythm," which is produced by using a gradation of colors that moves in a particular direction.

The dominant color in A Great Western Sky is dark red, which is used in the mountain at the left, the primary form in the painting. This dark red is further darkened as it moves to the next most important form, the mountain set slightly down and to the right. The color continues to diminish in the direction of darkness, back and forth across the canvas until it reaches brown at the lower right. Conversely, the dark red of the

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mountain at the left is diminished in the direction of light into pinks and oranges as it moves into the upper sky and cloud forms. The palette is limited. There is no blue or green in the painting, and the only yellow is that which is in the orange. Bisttram thus achieves a similar zig-zag rhythm in both form and color.

Both the concept of form and the color system in A Great Western Sky are thus indebted more to Ross's theories than to Hambidge's. While Hambidge provided the organizing system--the divisions of the root-two rectangle that determined the placement of the mountains--it was Ross who defined the terms of the elements within the composition, and provided concrete examples of how to use them. The two systems are compatible in that they both aim for organization, order, and clarity in a picture. Hambidge's system is structural, while Ross's deals with the motifs within the picture. Bisttram's incorporation of Ross's system into Hambidge's system in A Great Western Sky makes it a kind of manifesto painting, an idea that is also expressed by its comparatively large size, 35 x 50 inches.

The rhyming of landscape and sky in form and color achieved in A Great Western Sky also expresses the spiritual ideas that Bisttram aimed for in his landscapes. This treatment symbolically connects earth and sky, and by extension, the material and the spiritual, while still retaining the idea of a victory in heaven.[101] Most importantly though, it sacrifices literal symbolism, and thereby achieves a style that is compatible with a modernist aesthetic.[102]

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[101]A painting Bisttram executed in 1968, Evening Drama, using the same forms but with a different color scheme demonstrates the importance of these forms for Bisttram. See Wiggins, Emil Bisttram, 75, for an illustration of this work.

[102]Bisttram's intention to depict a religious subject, and his actual sacrifice of literal symbolism in this painting is shown by a close examination of the study (fig. 70).

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The relationship between Ross's emphasis on rhythm to the first of the Six Canons of Chinese Painting, "Rhythmic Vitality, or Spiritual Rhythm expressed in the movement of life," is important given his devotion to Oriental art, which included collecting, travel to the East, and a close relationship with the Oriental department at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Discussions with his close friends Ernest Fenollosa and Arthur Dow also undoubtedly contributed to the development of his ideas.[103]

Ross's theories, however, were more scientifically and mathematically derived. A more likely source is in nineteenth century French design theory, specifically the theories of Charles Blanc and Charles Henry (b. 1859). Charles Blanc's classification system, published in 1877, uses terminology very similar to Ross's. Blanc's system, summarized in a chart, divides order into five categories: repetition, alternation, symmetry, progression, and confusion; these five are further associated with terms related to music: consonance, contrast, radiation, gradation, and complication.[104]

Charles Henry's system, published in 1885 and 1888, dealt with the meaning and directions of lines, shapes, and colors. While Ross was not interested in the meanings of lines, he was very interested in directions of lines and colors, the one of major aspects of Henry's theories. Additionally, Ross's directions, like Henry's, are expressed as angles

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At the lower right a religious figure holding a staff stands on one of the lower mountaintops; the top of his head and the top of his staff can clearly be seen rising above the higher mountain. The concept of a lone religious figure standing on a mountaintop was clearly inspired by precedents in the works of Nicholas Roerich.

[103] Joseph Masheck goes so far as to accuse Ross of stealing their ideas. Joseph Masheck, introduction to Composition: A Series of Exercises in Art Structure for the Use of Students and Teachers (1899) by Arthur Wesley Dow, 13th edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 29-31.

[104]Charles Blanc, Art in Ornament and Dress, 1877, cited in Gombrich, 73, fig. 79.

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and measured in degrees.[105] Furthermore, Ross's frequent trips to France, his interest in impressionism, and his reading of Poincaré, point to French aesthetic theory. The striking similarities between Ross's system and Kandinsky's may be attributable to similar sources.

It is also worth suggesting that Clive Bell's concept of "significant form" was derived in part from reading Ross's Theory of Pure Design. This is suggested by Fry's use of Ross's analysis of design in his "Essay in Aesthetics" (1909);[106] Bell's citation of Fry's essay in his introduction to Art (1914), presents his concept of "significant form;" and the following statement that Bell makes in his first chapter:

> On the other hand, with those who judge it more exact to call these combinations and arrangements of form that provoke our aesthetic emotions, not "significant form," but "significant relations of form," and then try to make the best of two worlds, the aesthetic and the metaphysical, by calling these relations "rhythm," I have no quarrel whatever.[107]

Furthermore, one of Bell's principle arguments, that Cézanne's significance is based on his use of structural principles, discussed in his chapter "Simplification and Design" suggests that a reading of Ross's Theory of Design contributed to his ideas.[108]

This is all to show that Bisttram was working with ideas that were seminal to modernism. As is shown in the next section, however, when he first began to study

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[105]Homer, 183-4, 188-98. For Henry's "Esthetic Protractor," see, Homer, fig. 51.

[106]Roger Fry, "Essay in Aesthetics" (1909; reprint Roger Fry, Vision and Design New York: Meridian Books, 1957).

[107]Clive Bell, Art (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company [1914]), 16.

[108]Martin's discussion of Fry's enthusiasm for Ross's ideas and their meeting in Cambridge in 1905, provided the basis for this idea. Marianne W. Martin, "Some American Contributions to Early Twentieth-Century Abstraction," Arts 54 (June 1980), 158-165.

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Picasso, he did not understand him.

Influence of Picasso

Bisttram's drawing, Ranchos de Taos, 1930 (fig. 71), shows that he discovered this village, located four miles south of Taos, on his first trip to the Southwest. The town's distinguishing feature is the eighteenth-century San Francisco de Asis Church, which both Georgia O'Keeffe and John Marin painted during the summer of 1930. Bisttram includes the church at the middle left; his view of it from a distance perhaps reflects his first hesitant appreciation of it. Later this church would become one of his favorite subjects.

For Ranchos de Taos Bisttram probably worked from Picasso's Houses at Horta, 1909 (fig. 72).[109] Bisttram has abandoned his attempt at balancing curved and straight lines as in Our Lady of Guadalupe Church (fig. 58) and established a vocabulary of rigid geometric form by borrowing Picasso's simplified house forms and placing them in the foreground of his picture. Bisttram then launches into an illusionistic style in the middle and far distances by introducing the diagonal road moving from lower right to mid-left. Picasso diminishes the size of his forms from foreground to background; he avoids deep perspective space by building the forms upward until they meet the mountains by consistently working his rhythms off of the central vertical axis.

By contrast, in Ranchos de Taos, Bisttram establishes a rhythmic movement with the road, the major diagonal, that begins at the lower right and meets the mountains two thirds of the way across the composition, at the point where the Ranchos church begins.

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[109]Houses at Horta is reproduced in Maurice Raynal, Picasso (Paris: Les Editions G. Cres & C., 1922), 36.

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The road is interrupted, furthermore, by a rhythm of tree-house-tree, which introduces a complexity unwarranted by the pure forms in the foreground. By establishing and reinforcing this diagonal movement from right to left, Bisttram misunderstood Picasso's intentions. Bisttram, however, worked more successfully from Picasso after he settled in Taos.

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Chapter 8

The Three-Year Course in Fine Arts

There is some discrepancy about when Bisttram began teaching at the Master Institute. He usually stated on his resume that he began at the Master Institute in 1925; a review of Master Institute catalogues, however, suggests that his first association was as director of the art program at the Moriah, New York, summer school in 1928. According to Bisttram's biographical statement prepared for Anschutz, it was Howard Giles who was first called in to consult on the art curriculum for the Master Institute, and Bisttram accompanied him to the first meeting, which had been convened by Maurice and Sina Lichtmann, directors of the school, who also taught piano.

The Master Institute had a policy of hiring mainstream teachers for the school; this policy was developed during a series of meetings Roerich held during the summer of 1922 on Monhegan Island with his disciples outlining his plans for the development of the school.[1] Since Giles joined the Master Institute faculty as Dean of the Art Department in 1929, he may have been offered a similar position at this first meeting, but declined because of his teaching commitments at the New York School of Fine and Applied Art. He may have at that time agreed to serve in an advisory capacity as his name appears on the Corona Mundi letterhead as one of fifty-seven advisors. Corona Mundi, founded in July 1922, one of the organizations associated with Roerich's New York enterprises, was presumably conceived at the Monhegan retreat.

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[1]Ruth Dreyer, telephone conversation with the author, June 1998. Dreyer, author of a forthcoming book on Roerich, interviewed Frances Grant, who was present at the Monhegan meeting. There is no evidence that Bisttram met Roerich on Monhegan. Bisttram discusses his early involvement with the Master Institute in The Creative Process in the New Age, 47-53.

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In subsequent meetings it was decided that Bisttram, under Giles's supervision, would design an art curriculum for the school; in its final form it was called The Three-Year Course in Fine Arts.[2] The course was reviewed by Denman Ross and Edward Waldo Forbes (1873-1969), Director of the Fogg Art Museum,[3] and was also submitted to the art faculty at the University of Wisconsin.[4]

Bisttram's course was featured prominently in the Master Institute catalogue of 1930-31,[5] the last year Bisttram was to spend in New York. The Three-Year Course became the basis for all of Bisttram's subsequent teaching and reflects the systematic approach he used in his painting.

Bisttram's success as a teacher was based on a love of teaching, rather than the necessity for earning a living. In fact, he worked as a commercial artist in order to be

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[2]Bisttram's name does not appear on the list of faculty until 1929.

[3]It was undoubtedly Giles who discussed Bisttram's curriculum with Ross and Forbes. Since a regular correspondence between Giles and Forbes began in 1924, Giles probably met Forbes on his trip to Cambridge to meet Ross in 1923. Forbes, a grandson of Ralph Waldo Emerson, was most likely very receptive to Giles's Swedenborgian background. A fairly close relationship developed between the two men: Forbes commissioned Giles to paint a portrait of his sister in 1925, and invited him to speak informally to a group of students in his home in 1927 "with the idea of spreading the gospel as widely as possible." Forbes to (Giles), LT, 9 Mar. 1927, Forbes Papers, Fogg Museum. The topic was presumably dynamic symmetry. Furthermore, Forbes was interested in Giles's teaching, purchasing a number of drawings by Giles's students in 1929.Forbes to (Giles), LT, 14 June 1929, Forbes Papers, Fogg Art Museum.

[4]Bisttram, "Pure Design Course," Book of Notes. Theodore Bolton, whose manuscript Design and Color includes a version of Bisttram's "Problems," probably also contributed to the concept for Bisttram's course. Bisttram's "Problems" included in Design and Color lack all references to spiritual matters.

[5]The Message of 1930, 67.

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able to afford to teach. Giles praised Bisttram's teaching:

> It is so rare than an artist of creative ability has a genuine flare for instruction that I feel most desirous that such a spirit should have all available support.[8]

Louis Horch, President, Roerich Museum, also praised Bisttram's teaching:

> Mr. E. J. Bistran, Artist and Teacher, has been known to me for a number of years. I have found him not only an artist of outstanding merit, but have found him to be a deep student of the art of all nations. From a modest beginning, he has built up classes until now he is a teacher of a large student body.[9]

Before departing on his Guggenheim Fellowship, Bisttram's students presented him with a portfolio that contained a letter of good wishes.[10] The first to sign the letter was Evelyn Carter (1881-1965), Howard Giles's first cousin, whom Giles married in 1933. Giles probably encouraged Carter to begin collecting; she loaned a number of canvases by the Dutch symbolist painter Willem van Konijnenburg (1868-1943) to the Roerich Museum for an exhibition in 1930.[11] Giles's enthusiasm was spurred by seeing van Konijenburg's first solo exhibition in New York in February 1930 at Montross

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[8]Howard Giles, "Confidential Report on Candidate for Fellowship," 2 Dec. 1930, Bisttram File, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation.

[9]Louis L. Horch, "Confidential Report on Candidate for Fellowship," 2 Dec. 1930, Bisttram File, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation.

[10]The letter is signed by the following students: Evelyn Carter, Edith R. Spaulding, Virginia K. Clark, Isabel Kuhlman, Brenda Lipier, Jeanne L. Nurick, Elizabeth Cook, Gladys Gough, Richard Sharpe, Jr., Frances J. Olden, Gladys Bergh Bates, Paul Gandal, Elsa Loheke, Ethel Burton, Helen Hokinson, T. Fanny Nimtzowitz. The letter was also signed by Howard Giles. The portfolio and letter are at the Harwood Museum, Taos. It is unclear what was in the portfolio; it may have been examples of student work since a similar portfolio, containing work by his students, was given to Giles when he resigned from at the Master Institute. Robert Sprague, another Bisttram student at the Master Institute, settled in Taos in 1936, was active in the Taos Artists Association, and later took the position of director of the Roswell Museum, Roswell, NM.

[11]The Message of 1930, 88.

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Gallery,[12] from which Carter may have made her purchases. Giles's interest in van Konijnenburg shows his continued interest in symbolism: Giles had translations of some of his mystical writings, and even made a trip to Holland in 1936. He probably met with van Konijnenburg and K. H. de Haas on this trip since the following year all three contributed to a book on the American artist Alexander Shilling (1859-1937), whom all three had known for many years.[13]

Evelyn Carter also purchased a number of works by Bisttram. She donated the works that she acquired by Konijnenburg and Bisttram to the Hood Museum, Dartmouth College. She was also included in the dynamic symmetry exhibition at the Rhode Island School of Design in 1961.[14] Leo Katz undoubtedly shared Giles's enthusiasm for Van Konijnenburg since he discussed him in Understanding Modern Art (1936) in the section on contemporary religious painters, and rated him higher than Roerich.

The Three-Year Course

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[12]Forbes (to Giles), LT, 28 Feb. 1930, Forbes Papers. Van Konijnenburg used a geometrical grid system. Blotkamp, 113. Ross was also familiar with Van Konijenburg. Frank, 100.

[13]Royal Cortissoz, Horatio Walker, Howard Giles, Willem A. van Konijnenburg, Ernest D. Roth, Karel H. de Haas, Leontine Luykx, Alec J. Hammerslough, The Book of Alexander Shilling (New York: The Paisley Press, Inc., 1937). Van Konijenburg's portrait drawing of Shilling, dated 1914, is reproduced as the frontispiece. A number of works reproduced in the book were owned by de Haas.

[14]Bisttram was also included in this exhibition as was Howard Giles, Leon Kroll, Denman Ross, Mary Crovatt Hambidge, and others. David Giles Carter, Dynamic Symmetry: A Retrospective Exhibition, Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 5 Feb.-12 Mar.; the Currier Gallery of Art, 22 Mar.-19 April; the Carpenter Art Galleries, Dartmouth College, 3-31 May 1961. David Giles Carter, director of the Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design between 1959 and 1964, is the nephew of Evelyn Carter Giles.

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The Three-Year Course is a document that runs fifty-three pages inserted into Notebook I at the Harwood Museum; with additional notes the document runs to seventy-five pages. Some of the sections are titled, for example, Outline of a Course in Pure Design, First-Year Problems, Materials Needed for First-Year Work, First Problems in Dynamic Symmetry, General Program for Friday Outdoor and Indoor Study.

In the two-page outline, "Pure Design Course," which was probably his introductory lecture, Bisttram defined art as a problem in pure design by contrasting pure and impure design, as follows:

Pure Design	Impure Design
Theoretical	Practical
Abstract	Concrete
Symbolical	Literal[15]

This concept, that pure design is theoretical, abstract, and symbolic, is critical to Bisttram's concept of art. In this lecture Bisttram also describes the course in terms of "law and order" (an idea taken from Denman Ross) and opposes it to the idea that art expression should be ruled by the personality and emotions of the artist. In the final section of this lecture Bisttram plainly states the spiritual nature of the study of pure design:

> The above sketchy introduction gives some idea of the necessity for such a course as planned, and if the student will have the patience to study the varied angles of this problem, he will be rewarded with knowledge and understanding of the practical use of this instrument for the release of greater power in the creative

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[15]Bisttram, "Pure Design Course." This document breaks down the subject into nine sections. This coordinates with "The ten points in any lecture," which Bisttram gives in his red bound notebook, The Daily Reminder, 1925.

This list, which runs as follows: 1. Invention, 2. Preparation, 3. Exordium, 4. Argumentation, 5. Preposition; 6. Division, 7. Proofs, 8. Refutation, 9. Peroration, 10. Invention, shows that Bisttram consulted a book on rhetoric for the presentation of his ideas. The outline for Bisttram's lecture "Modern Art," in his Book of Notes, is also divided into 10 sections according to this rhetorical format.

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> field. One thing must be remembered that these studies are only instruments in the masters' hands with which spiritual ideas may be brought into life.[16]

The first semester of the First-Year Course is the most developed part of the curriculum and is a rigorous introduction to color theory and composition. The fifteen-week semester is divided into seven sections; each section revolves around a problem that includes seven assignments or sub-problems--hence the seven sets of seven problems often referred to by his students.

Bisttram's introduction to the problems section shows that he considered color and composition the fundamentals. By allowing his students the choice of working in symbolic, abstract, or concrete (literal) styles for each assignment, he shows that he considered style a question of point of view, or more precisely, a choice made each time a work of art is begun, a decision that played equally with form and color:

> The following problems are designed to meet a long felt need for a course embodying the fundamental principles of Space relations - elements of Form, the scientific and emotional aspect of Color and the Symbolic, Abstract and Concrete modes of Expression. ... The problems are arranged in seven groups of seven in each group; each group embodies the four Basic Principles and Elements necessary for the construction and completion of a composition. That is: Space Relationship, 2 - Form, 3 - Color, and Symbolic or Concrete (literal) Expression.[17]

Bisttram further explains that the course is methodical and based on the growth patterns of nature. He admonishes his students to work slowly and persistently, and not to try for brilliance while they are learning; he suggests that they dig deep into their subject.

Two assignments precede the Problems: the construction of root rectangles of dynamic symmetry and the construction of the twelve-tone color wheel to learn

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[16]The phrase "release of greater power in the creative field" may indicate a familiarity with Dane Rudhyar's Art as Release of Power (1930).

[17]Bisttram, "First Year Problems," Notebook I, 2.

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complements, split complements, and fifths (triads).

Course Structure: The Number Seven

The most interesting aspect of the course is the insistent division into sevens. The fifteen week semester is divided into seven sections as follows:

(1) The first two weeks to spirit, point, and space
(2) the third and fourth weeks to form, line, and light
(3) the fifth and sixth weeks to mind, plane, and solid
(4) the seventh and eighth weeks to soul, solids, and emotion
(5) the ninth and tenth weeks to body
(6) the eleventh and twelfth to mind
(7) and the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth to spirit[18]

Each of these seven sections has seven problems associated with it, so that there are a total of forty-nine assignments.

Number symbolism is an important part of the course structure, and essentially identifies it with a Blavatsky-influenced neo-Pythagorean aesthetic. The meanings Bisttram associates with the seven numbers become clear in the seven sub-problems associated with the first problem in which students are assigned to work with spots (points). The first exercise is to express Creation by placing one spot in a square; the second is to express Duality by placing two spots in a root-two rectangle; the third is to express Motion by placing three spots in a root-three rectangle; the fourth is to express Stability by placing four spots in a root-four rectangle; the fifth is to express Force by placing five spots in a root-five rectangle; the sixth is to express Construction by placing six spots in a Whirling Square rectangle; and the seventh is to express Control by placing seven spots in a rectangle of the student's choice. Similar sequences are given in the

[18] Bisttram, "Outline of Course in Pure Design," Notebook 1.

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other problems.

Bisttram uses sevens in the third set of problems, devoted to planes, to introduce seven forms: circle, equilateral triangle, square, right triangle, an "L" shape, a half circle, and a rectangle. Likewise in Problem Four, devoted to solids, students are introduced to seven forms: sphere, pyramid, cube, cube on one end, cylinder, rectangular solid, and a short cylinder.

In his outline "Pure Design Course" he actually states that it is based on sevens, but then divides that cycle into fours:

> The course is based on the Seven Cycles of Man, cycles based on distinct periods in life, thru evolution from the mineral to the human state, or the growth of a plant.
>
Ex. -	Seed	Stem	Leaf	Fruit
	Point	Line	Plane	Solid
	Space	Light	Form	Emotion

This insistent breakdown into elements of seven is taken directly from Blavatsky and her teaching that the number seven is the critical number in creation. Seven times seven refers specifically to the seven root-races in each of the seven rounds of her theory of creation. The Secret Doctrine is essentially an argument that this seven-fold creation is reflected in all of nature:

> According to esoteric teaching there are seven primary, and seven secondary "creations;" the former being the Forces self-evolving from the one causeless force; the latter, showing the manifested Universe emanating from the already differentiated divine elements.[19] The immense importance of the number seven will thus become evident, as the root number of nature.[20] The phrase 'through the seven Worlds of Maya' refers here to the seven globes of the planetary chain and the seven rounds, or the 49 stations of active existence that are before the 'Spark'

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[19]Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, I, 446.

[20]Ibid., I, 460.

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or Monad, at the beginning of every 'Great Life-Cycle' or Manvantara.[21] Additionally, Blavatsky divides the individual into seven parts, a lower quaternary of four earthly elements and an upper trinity of three spiritual elements. She represented these by the square and the circle.

Bisttram's dependence on Blavatsky's concepts is shown explicitly in the drafts of the problems.[22] In draft form there are actually eight problems, with the first given the number zero. Each of the problems is keyed to an evolutionary period as follows: 0. Saturn, 1. Sun, 2. Moon, 3. Earth, Polarian, 4. Hyperborean, 5. Lemurian, 6. Atlantean, 7. Aryan. These ideas refer to Blavatsky's septenary theory of the evolution of man's development on Earth, and the seven root races of man. For Blavatsky, Hyperborea was the second continent where the second root race flourished; Lemuria was the third continent and home of the third root race; Atlantis was the fourth continent and home of the fourth root race; and the current configuration of the globe, the fifth continent, the home of the Aryan or fifth root race. Blavatsky's theory that the emergence of each root race was signaled by a flood that is caused by a shifting of the earth's poles is reflected in Bisttram's assignments for the seventh and final group of seven sub-problems: 1. Light, 2. Heat, 3. Thunder, 4. Lightening, 5. Flight, 6. Explosion, 7. Deluge.

While discussion of these evolutionary periods is scattered throughout Blavatsky's writings, they are developed into a detailed system by Max Heindel (1865-1919) in his Rosicrucian theory of the cosmos. Bisttram became a member of the Rosicrucian Order

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[21]Ibid., I, 238.

[22]Draft versions of the problems are in the William Warder Papers.

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about 1928.[23] Heindel's major book, The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception follows Blavatsky's ideas but presents them in a more orderly way. In fact, Heindel apologizes when he in any way departs from any of Blavatsky's statements.

Heindel names the seven evolutionary periods as follows: 1. Saturn, 2. Sun, 3. Moon, 4. Earth. 5. Jupiter, 6: Venus, 7. Vulcan. These correlate with the first four of Bisttram's problems. This theory of the evolution of the solar system, in which the "life wave" travels around the seven globes seven times, provides the "seven times seven" structure of Bisttram's problems with cosmological significance. For Heindel the seven revolutions of the "life wave" is a cosmic day; the rest period before the resumption of the next cycle of seven revolutions is a cosmic night. According to his theory our solar system is a manifestation of the fourth revolution of the "life wave" around the earth, the lowest point in density and materiality. Henceforth the life force becomes more rarefied.[24] Heindel further identifies seven epochs during the earth period, naming the first five as 1. Polarian, 2. Hyperborean, 3. Lemurian, 4. Atlantean, and 5. Aryan. These correlate to the final five of Bisttram's problems. Heindel places the separation of the sexes, the creation of Adam and Eve, and the "fall of man" in the Lemurian epoch.[25]

In The Secret Doctrine Blavatsky explains creation in terms of seven stages of the evolutionary process by providing glosses on seven stanzas from the hitherto

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[23]"Yes, Rosicrucianism was one of our first sources of influence. We were with the Heindel group for several years, never definitely tied up with them but contacting them." Mayrion Bisttram to Yvonne Housser, TLS, 20 Jan. 1940, Yvonne McKague Housser Papers, National Archives of Canada, Ottawa.

[24]Max Heindel, The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception or Mystic Christianity: An Elementary Treatise upon Man's Past Evolution, Present Constitution and Future Development (Reprint: London: L. N. Fowler, 1923), 199.

[25]Ibid., 283.

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unpublished Book of Dyzan. Blavatsky also suggests that these seven stages correlate to the Seven Creations in the Puranas and the biblical "Days of Creation."[26] Heindel follows Blavatsky by providing a Seven Days Creation chart[27] based on his seven evolutionary periods discussed above. These correlations to the Bible point to the relevance of Bisttram's Seven Days Creation chart in the development of his course.

Bisttram's Seven Days Creation chart (which is completely different from Heindel's) cites and correlates the verses of the creation story from the first chapter of Genesis with the seven days of the week, colors, the ages of man, and other ideas.[28] Correlations for the first two days, made in eight columns across the page, are as follows:

> (1) Gen. 1-1-5; (2) Fire, 1st day, greens; (3) 1-7 yrs; (4) Inanimate, innocence, guidance; (5) Dark waste, inception & formation; (6) Infancy to regeneration; internal of spirit separated from external man; temptation, misfortune, sorrow; (7) Physical world; world of form; (8) Region of passions; low desires.
>
> (1) Gen. 1-6-8; (2) Air, 2nd day, green and grey; (3) 8-14 yrs; (4) Growth, worship, obedience; (5) Light and distinction between light & darkness; (6) Repentance; good works under compulsion; charitable works dead because of self. (7) Desire world; world of color. (8) Region of impressionability.

In the drafts for the problems, biblical correlations are also noted on each sheet. Problem "O" is keyed to "Infancy to regeneration; dark-waste, inception+formation;" and to Saturn; Problem One is keyed to "Internal of spirit, separated from external of man, temptation, misfortune, sorrow; light–distinction between light and dark;" to the Sun, and to Genesis 1:3-5.

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[26]Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, I, 21.

[27]Heindel, 366.

[28]Bisttram's "Seven Days Creation" chart is included in his teaching notes, Notebook I, placed within the curriculum for the Second Year Course. For Bisttram's "Seven Days Creation" chart, see Appendix X.

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The drafts of the problems show a relationship between the Problems and the Seven Days Creation chart in that each of the seven sub-problems is keyed to an idea as follows: 1. Inanimate, 2. Growth, 3. Motion, 4. Mind, 5. Activity, 6. Imagination, 7. Will. Each of these words is similarly keyed to one of the days in column four of the Seven Days of Creation chart.

The phrases in column five of the Seven Days Creation chart refer to Swedenborgian ideas. In Swedenborg's exegesis on the first chapter of Genesis, he proposes that the days of creation represent "successive states of the regeneration of man."[29] All of the phrases in this column are borrowed from Swedenborg's descriptions of these successive states. Bisttram's citation of "the things which belong to the external man are separated from those which belong to the internal man" accompanied by "temptation, misfortune, or sorrow" refers to one of Swedenborg's most important distinctions, that is, between the internals and externals of man.

For Swedenborg, the external man loves the world and riches and believes that all things originate with himself. The Lord regenerates man by leading him to union with his "internal good," through repentance, faith, and acts of charity from love. Bisttram's statement for day two, "good works under compulsion, charitable works dead because of self" refers to an intermediary stage where acts of charity performed for selfish reasons still reflect an unregenerate state. While Bisttram borrows these ideas from Swedenborg, he does not copy them verbatim; for example, Swedenborg assigns "repentance" to the third state while Bisttram assigns it to day two.

Columns seven and eight of Bisttram's Seven Days Creation chart are taken from

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[29]Swedenborg, Arcana Coelestia, I, para. 6.

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the Rosicrucian chart, Man's Evolutionary Cycle (fig. 73)[30] that is pasted into Bisttram's black looseleaf notebook which contains notes from the 1920s. This chart divides our solar system into seven planes, each containing seven sub-planes. Bisttram places some of the names of the sub-planes in columns seven and eight. For example, the four qualities in column eight that Bisttram associates with the first four days are: 1. Passions, 2. Impressionability, 3. Wishes, and 4. Feeling. These are the first four sub-planes of the "desire world," which on the Rosicrucian chart are on the second plane, between the "material world" and the "mental world."

These correlations clearly show that Bisttram's insistent use of sevens for the structure of his course is an attempt to arrive at a method for the creation of a work of art based on the creative principles at work in the universe by synthesizing and applying the ideas of Blavatsky, Swedenborg, and Rosicrucianism. Swedenborg's theory of "the regeneration of man" was, in fact, specifically approved by Blavatsky:

> ...Swedenborg has virtually given the same interpretation of the first chapter of Genesis as the Hermetic philosophers. The seer [Swedenborg], as well as the initiates, notwithstanding their veiled phraseology, clearly show that the first chapters of Genesis related to the regeneration, or a new birth of man, not to the creation of our universe and its crown work--man.[31]

Swedenborg's theory of the regeneration of man is essentially his theory of redemption and is part of his theory of opposites. For Swedenborg truths are turned into their opposites by degrees as they proceed from heaven to hell:

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[30]This chart is dated 1927 and is identified as James Janney Lippencott's extrapolation from Max Heindel's The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception. The inclusion of the chart "The Rosicrucian Fellowship Healing Dates for 1928" in this notebook indicates that Bisttram probably joined this organization in 1928. This notebook is in the William Warder Papers.

[31]Blavatsky, Isis Unveiled, I, 306.

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> How the goods and truths of heaven are turned, in the hells, into evil and falsities, thus into what is opposite... ...a certain Divine truth flowed down out of heaven into hell, and that in its descent by degrees it was converted on the way into what is false, until at the lowest hell, it became the exact opposite of that truth...[32]

Man is redeemed by removing these opposites:

> And yet scarcely anyone knows what there is of heaven and the Lord in sincerity, rectitude, justice, love towards the neighbor, chastity and other affections of heavenly love, until he has removed their opposites. When he has removed the opposites, then he is in those affections, and therefrom recognizes and sees them. Previously there is a kind of veil interposed...[33]

For Swedenborg, the sequential relationship between good and evil serves for "equilibrium, relation and purification"[34] and to regenerate man. These opposites are even the source of perception and feeling:

> In this equilibrium every man is kept as long as he lives in the world, and is thereby kept in that liberty of thinking, willing, speaking and doing, in which he can be reformed... The union of good and truth is provided for by the Lord by means of related sequence; for the quality of a good is known only by its relation to what is less good, and by the opposition it meets from evil. From this relation comes the power to perceive and to feel, since from this comes the quality of these powers; for thus everything that is pleasant is perceived and felt from what is less pleasant and by means of what is unpleasant... The union of good and truth in others is provided for by the Lord by means of purification; and this is effected in two ways, one by temptations, and the other by fermentation. Spiritual temptations are nothing else than combats against evils and falsities which emanate from hell and make their influence felt.[35]

Bisttram's correlations in his Seven Days Creation Chart clearly relate to his course structure, and indicate that the structure was intended microcosmically, as a purification process for the individual, as well as macrocosmically, to replicate the creation of the

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[32]Swedenborg, Divine Love and Wisdom, para. 275 (3).

[33]Ibid., para. 419.

[34]Swedenborg, Divine Providence, para. 21.

[35]Ibid., para. 24-5.

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universe. Bisttram's use of pictorial metaphors relating to the Swedenborgian concept of regeneration of man is discussed in Chapter 10.

Seven Forms

Bisttram's introduction of seven plane forms in Problem Three and seven solid forms in Problem Four could also have been influenced by a similar concept put forward by the Mexican artist and art historian Adolpho Best-Maugard (1892-1964). In his innovative teaching method, Best-Maugard used seven motifs--spiral, circle, half circle, "s" shape, wave, zig-zag, and straight line. He identified these motifs from primitive art while studying ethnographic artifacts under the anthropologist Franz Boaz in 1910, and later by studying objects in museum collections. Best-Maugard also associated his seven motifs with the logarithmic spiral, and in his book cited both Hambidge and Bragdon.[36]

In his review of Best-Maugard's book, Claude Bragdon linked Hambidge's system with Best Maugard's by calling the former masculine and the latter feminine.

> The first [Hambidge's system] provides the "frame" or invisible mathematical network of relations, the warp of the tapestry; the second [Best Maugard's] provides the "field," or woof--whatever rich embroidery of forms the artist's feeling and imagination may determine. If this is obscure to the reader, let him conceive of the frame of a human life as its time-cycle--an invisible mathematical pattern of days, months, seasons, years; and the persons, things and events which fill this frame as the field, the character made concrete and visible.[37]

Bragdon revealed to the initiated reader that Best-Maugard was a theosophist by quoting

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[36]Adolfo Best-Maugard, A Method for Creative Design (New York: Knopf, 1927; reprint New York, Knopf, 1937). This book is included in Bolton's bibliography (see Appendix VI).

[37]Claude Bragdon, "An Alphabet of Form," Architectural Record 61, no. 2 (Feb. 1927), 103. Later Bragdon compares Best-Maugard's achievements in art education in Mexico with Fenollosa's in Japan. Bragdon, The Arch Lectures (1942), 95.

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his statement that the purpose of the course is to develop "intuition" or the "fourth form of consciousness," and that it involves a resolution of opposites:

> Summing up we may say that the development of the intuitive faculty to its utmost degree will make each being able to interpret and afterward to unify his dual nature. He will then know the part in the evolutional plan which he must perform and which corresponds to his achievement, being in its essence to help the unfoldment of all life. Art is one of the ways to fulfill such aspiration, for those who have a preference for that way. He will approach the goal, using of the strength of his will power, discriminating wisely and acting under the law of order, selecting, destroying and building anew, each time that he knows or conceives something better. With this continued effort we shall unfold until we attain the unified action of our duality and reach consciousness, the perfect self-consciousness, through intuition. And so, we shall achieve the goal of all life, Metamorphosis and the Superman.[38]

Best-Maugard's concept of the "whirling spiral" links his system to Hambidge's. For Best-Maugard, the vortical motion of the whirling spiral is the "mother archetype" of all natural forces; additionally, he asserts that his seven motifs are types or manifestations of that one "mother archetype." To prove this concept he explains that when projecting the shadow of a coil on a screen, placing the light source in different positions will produce shadows in the form of the seven motifs. For Best-Maugard, the seven motifs of primitive art were then reflections of the dynamic forces of the universe acting on the subconscious mind of primitive man.[39]

By beginning his course with the introduction of the forms used in primitive art, Best-Maugard sought to rehearse the evolution of art itself.

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[38]The identification of Best-Maugard as a theosophist might enhance an understanding of Rivera's Portrait of Best-Maugard, 1913, and Rivera's theosophical circle in Paris.

[39]Best-Maugard, 160. Best-Maugard's use of the term "mother archetype" shows his dependence on Goethe. His idea that genius develops from a knowledge of archetypes may be derived from Tüerck's The Man of Genius (1896), discussed in Chapter 5.

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> This new method recognizes that the development of individual artistic perception is the recapitulation of the evolving artistic perception of the race and that, therefore, graphic art is not something to be learned but something to be lived...[40]

His essential concept of art-making was that the artist's productions are types or symbols, developed by a fusion of personal experience and knowledge of archetypes, and that the quality of the objects produced is dependent on the extent to which the artist has developed an intuition for archetypes. For Best-Maugard, these archetypes work geometrically and are the essential laws of the universe.

> Intuition gives us the right solution for what we feel is the best. When the student gets beyond attaining-by-conscious-reasoning he is able to feel by his instinctive sense of beauty or truth (his growing intuition) and in proportion to the degree of evolution, the action of the laws of the universe and to sense their mathematical relations and unity far beyond his powers to prove.[41]

He also believed that art-making is cumulative, and that each artist makes a contribution to the larger aesthetic consciousness. Additionally, by working through aesthetic problems, that is, by fusing polarity, he felt that a new race of mankind would be born.

The importance of this book for Bisttram cannot be underestimated. Best-Maugard's concept of the interrelationship between the seven motifs, the primitive, and the whirling square serves to illuminate many aspects of the structure of Bisttram's course. Also, Best-Maugard's concept of the artwork as a symbol of the archetype brings Bisttram's interest in symbolism into more focus. Furthermore, Best-Maugard's concept of art-making as developing consciousness by resolving opposites would have further reinforced Bisttram's theosophical approach to art-making and teaching. A confirmation of Best-Maugard's influence is shown by comparing his statement, "All the arts are ways

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[40]Best-Maugard, 155.

[41]Ibid., 166.

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of experimenting to find the key to universal law." with one of the quotes Bisttram used in his statement for Rudhyar's book: "All arts are ways of experimenting with experiences of life to find the eternal law."[42]

Problem of Form

Bisttram takes for his lecture topic for week six: "Personal and Impersonal Art, Flight of the Dragon, and Problem of Form." For Problem of Form, Bisttram probably presented the ideas in the book by Adolf Hildebrand, The Problem of Form in Painting and Sculpture (1893), which Bisttram specifically recommends in the second year course. Furthermore, two statements Bisttram makes in the "First Year Problems" are taken directly from Hildebrand:

> Further, realizing that most theories of Art exhibit a useless quantity of reasoning, and a dearth of practical experience, we have attempted to avoid this by giving prominence not to theoretical considerations, but to the actual process of creating a work of art.... The artist must get his result, however modest, by natural orderly means - rather than strive to achieve something more brilliant, the outcome of a greater ability than he possesses; for such a work, being of false pretense, must inevitably be condemned to the fate of all shams.[43]

The main idea that Hildebrand presents is that a work of art must have unity of form, and that unity is obtained through a coherent concept of architectonically conceived space. Hildebrand is for the depiction of universal ideas and against imitation of nature and nature's particular forms. He emphasizes the use of the horizontal and the vertical and the repetition of forms for the resolution of the essential problem, the conversion of

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[42]Ibid., 150. For Bisttram's statement for Rudhyar's book, see Chapter 4.

[43]Adolf Hildebrand, The Problem of Form in Painting and Sculpture (1893), trans. by Max Meyer and Robert Morris Ogden, (1907; Reprint New York: G. E. Stechert & Co., 1945).

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three-dimensional reality into two-dimensional art. This book was probably recommended to Bisttram by Giles. Robert Ogden, one of the translators, was a friend of Giles's; in his book The Psychology of Art (1938), Ogden presents dynamic symmetry and acknowledges that Giles taught it to him. Katz also presents many of Hildebrand's ideas in his lectures to Bisttram's class and in Understanding Modern Art (1936).

Point, Line, Plane, and Solid

Bisttram's introduction of points in Problem One, lines in Problem Two, planes in Problem Three, and solids in Problem Four are conceived as tools for the artist to work with constructively as well as analytically. The importance of this sequence for Bisttram is shown in a chart in his Book of Notes in which he correlates these with Katz's sequence of art cycles, the four directions, the four seasons, the four ages of man, the four elements (air, fire, water, earth), and others. Bisttram's correlation of "point, line, plane solid" with the four elements recalls Plato's correlation of the elements with the regular solids in the Timeaus, and indicates how fundamental these elements were for Bisttram. Bisttram's correlation of "point, line, plane, solid" with "God, Father, Son, Holy Ghost," indicates that he also saw them religiously and mystically.[44]

While it is clear that Bisttram's ideas about "point, line, plane, solid" are derived from Kandinsky's Punct und Linie zu Fläche, this sequence of four elements appears frequently in the literature that Bisttram was reading during this period. For example, Blavatsky utilizes this sequence of forms in her theory of creation and credits it to Pythogaras:

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[44]For Bisttram's correlations for point, line, plane, solid, see Appendix XI.

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> In the Pythagorean Theogony the hierarchies of the heavenly Host and Gods were numbered and expressed numerically. Pythagoras had studied Esoteric Science in India; therefore we find his pupils saying "the monad (the manifested one) is the principle of all things. From the Monad and the indeterminate duad (Chaos), numbers; from numbers, Points; from points, Lines; from lines, Superficies; from superficies, Solids; from these, solid Bodies, whose elements are four--Fire, Water, Air, Earth; of all which transmuted (correlated) and totally changed, this world consists." --(Diogenes Laertius in Vit. Pythag.)[45]

Blavatsky also cites Swedenborg's use of this same sequence in his theory of creation:

> As in Geometry a point generates a line, a line a surface and a surface a solid, so here the connatus of a point tends towards lines, surfaces and solids. In other words, the Universe is contained in ovo in the first natural point... the Motion toward which the connatus tends, is circular, since the circle is the most perfect of all figures. (Swedenborg, Principia Rerum Naturalia)[46]

Blavatsky also bases her cosmology on an idea of geometrical progression and provides numerous interpretations of all types of geometrical figures. Also, many of Kandinsky's ideas, for example, that the vertical line is masculine and hot, and the horizontal is feminine and cold can be found in Blavatsky.[47] Kandinsky, however, it should be noted, does not discuss solids.

Another aspect of Kandinsky's Punct und Linie zu Fläche that would have appealed to Bisttram was the distinction he makes (in the first paragraph of the introduction, and then weaves throughout the remainder of the book) between external and internal. This distinction, discussed above, is fundamental to Swedenborg, and is one of his central ideas.[48] Another fundamental idea Kandinsky puts forth in the

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[45]Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, I, 433-4.

[46]Swedenborg, cited in Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, I, 118.

[47]"The spiritual male line is vertical; the differentiated matter-line is horizontal; the two forming the cross." Ibid., II, 592.

[48]Another parallel between Kandinsky and Swedenborg is Kandinsky's repeated contrast between dead and living forms, states, and experiences in Punct und Linie zu

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introduction, that was shared by Bisttram, is his stated aim to take a scientific approach to art. Kandinsky's concept of science, like Bisttram's, was strongly influenced by his interest in the occult, and involved research into areas outside the purview of contemporary science.[49] Additionally, Kandinsky's idea, also put forward in his introduction, that a scientific approach would include an investigation of all of art history parallels Bisttram's interests. Blavatsky's aims provide the precedent since her research into archaic periods was for the purpose of reconciling science and theology. While many of Kandinsky's ideas can be found in their germinal state in Blavatsky, the importance of his explanation in aesthetic terms can not be underestimated for Bisttram.

Another source for Bisttram's interest in the sequence from point to line to plane to solid is found in Ouspensky's Tertium Organum. Ouspensky uses this sequence of forms as an analogy for arriving at a description of the fourth dimension.

> But studying the mutual relations between the point, the line, the surface, the solid, we begin to learn something about the fourth dimension, i.e., of four-dimensional space. We begin to learn what it can be in comparison with our three-dimensional space, and what it cannot be... In analogy with this it is possible to consider that it is necessary to regard a four-dimensional body as an infinite number of three-dimensional bodies, and four dimensional space as an infinite number of three-dimensional spaces.[50]

Claude Bragdon, who also published on the fourth dimension and assisted with the translation of Tertium Organum into English, also used the sequence of point to line to plane to solid as a way of visualizing the fourth dimension:

Fläche.

[49]For a good overview of the mixture of science and the occult in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, see Linda Henderson, "Editor's Statement: Mysticism and Occultism in Modern Art," Art Journal (Spring 1987), 6.

[50]Ouspensky, 28-29.

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"The point, the line, the surface and the sphere,
In seed, stem, leaf and fruit appear."[51]

It should be noted, however, that the source for both Bragdon's and Ouspensky's concept of the fourth dimension was Charles H. Hinton's The Fourth Dimension (1904). Bragdon also found intimations of a "higher space theory" in Swedenborg's theology, which was reinforced by his readings in Emerson, who identified Swedenborg as the representative mystic in Representative Men.[52]

Some of Bisttram's ideas about the spiritual meanings of points, lines, planes, and solids can be found in his explanations of the problems. For example, in Problem Two, which introduces lines, Bisttram notes that the three directions, vertical, horizontal, and diagonal are the three fundamental aspects of nature. He also states that the vertical corresponds to the father, the positive aspect, or the vertical rays of the sun; the horizontal to the mother, the negative aspect, or the earth; and the diagonal to the son, all growing things, and the combination of both positive and negative elements. An additional note indicates that this symbolism also follows the cosmogony of the Egyptian gods, Osiris, Isis, and Horus, a correlation made by Frank Higgins in his book Ancient Freemasonry (1928).[53]

Problem Three introduces the use of planes. Here Bisttram explains that the circle is unity, the sun, or spirit; the triangle is soul or the triune aspect of creation; and the square is the body of man. Also, the circle is the sun, the triangle is the roof of the

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[51]Bragdon, Four-Dimensional Vistas, 19.

[52]Ibid., 105-6.

[53]The influence of Higgins's book, which was also on Bisttram's 1930 reading list, is discussed in Chapter 10.

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house, and the square is the walls of the house or the body. Blavatsky also specifically indicates the sequence from triangle to square by a diagram, and defines it as a symbol of septenary man because of the three plus four symbolism of the shapes.[54]

In terms of color, Bisttram states that the circle is blue, the triangle is yellow, and the square is red. This color symbolism follows the spectrum: of the primaries blue is the highest color and has the shortest and most rapid wavelengths; yellow has an intermediate vibration and length; and red has the longest waves which vibrate the least rapidly. While Bisttram does not specifically say how he derived these colors, his interest in the spectrum ordering of colors argues for this reasoning. Kandinsky also uses these same color correlations, but derives them differently. Kandinsky assigns blue to the circle because of its association with the coolness and passivity of the obtuse angle; yellow to the triangle because of the warmth of the acute angle; and red because of the coldness of the right angle.[55] This assignment of color is also followed in Rosicrucian circles, where the spiritual world is assigned to blue, the mental world to yellow, and the physical world to red.[56]

In Problem Four, devoted to solids, Bisttram notes that solids correspond to completion, and that they contain all previous elements such as spirit, soul, and body,

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[54]Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, II, 591.

[55]Kandinsky, Point and Line to Plane, in Kandinsky, Complete Writings on Art, ed. Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo. New York: Da Capo Press, 1994, 589.

[56]Rhodes. Bisttram's extracts from Rhodes's article, "Special Properties of Color," published in the Rosicrucian Magazine The Mystic Light, in his Book of Notes further states: "They [the primary colors] also represent the three aspects of God; Blue symbolizes the first aspect, which is the Power of Will; Yellow represents the second, which is the Word or Wisdom; and Red corresponds to the third, which is Activity or Motion."

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which are symbolically point, line, and plane. The assigned themes for the seven sub-problems related to solids are as follows: 1. Beginning, 2. Forms, 3. Life, 4. Reflection, 5. Organization, 6. Patterns, and 7. Purpose. Bisttram does not, however, introduce Plato's five regular solids.

Bisttram introduces Denman Ross's concept of harmony and his ideas of sequences of continuation, repetition, alternation, rhythm, progression, and balance in two additional sets of sub-problems for Problems One (devoted to spots) and Two (devoted to lines). Thus, for example, the first sub-problem related to spots is to create a pattern expressing sequences of continuation or repetition with any number of spots within a square. The second problem is to create a pattern to express sequences of alternation and rhythm with the use of spots within a root-two rectangle. The third problem introduces sequences of progression; the fourth, balance; the fifth, unsymmetrical balance; the sixth, rhythms; and the seventh, the choice of the student. Bisttram states that these sequences are "the principal modes in which order is revealed in nature and achieved in works of art."

Beginning with the fifth problem, the elements are brought together for compositional subjects. Bisttram explains:

> The fifth series of seven problems change completely. The previous problem[s] dealt with the simplest primary elements in nature. That is, the element[s] out of which Nature builds her variety of forms. Heretofore we dealt with them singly. In these problems, however, we deal with them all as part of an organization, that is, if the point or spot corresponds to the mineral world, and the line to the plant world, the plane to the animal kingdom, we have finally the cube or solid corresponding to the human, containing within it all previous elements.

The issue of form is addressed in Problem Five by the introduction of more complex dynamic symmetry rectangles. In the first sub-problem, students use a root rectangle within a square; in the second, two side-by-side root-two rectangles are used; in the

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third, two side-by-side root-three rectangles; in the fourth, two side-by-side root-four rectangles; in the fifth, two side-by-side root-five rectangles; in the sixth, two side-by-side whirling square rectangles; and in the seventh, a square with two root-five rectangles within it. Problems Six and Seven do not specify any particular forms to be used, only themes.

Color

Color is introduced simultaneously with form. The first four problems work with pure colors: single spectrum colors in the first problem, complements in the second problem, split complements in the third problem, and fifths (triads) in the fourth problem.

The colors are presented in a symbolic manner, keyed to the spectrum. In the first set of seven problems, the first sub-problem (one spot to express Creation in a square) is to be done with violet against the white paper. Violet is the color at the top of the spectrum that vibrates the fastest with the shortest wavelengths. The final problem (even spots to express Control) is executed in red against the white paper. Red is the color with the longest wavelengths that vibrates the slowest. The colors are thus introduced in each of the sub-problems according to the spectrum, as follows: 1. Violet, 2. Blue-violet, 3. Blue, 4. Green, 5. Yellow, 6. Orange, 7. Red. The other set of sub-problems for Problem One (that introduce Denman Ross's concepts) are also executed in the same color progression.

In the second problem, devoted to lines, complementary colors are utilized in the assignments. Again they are introduced in the order they appear in the spectrum. Violet and yellow is used as the color scheme for the first sub-problem; blue-violet and orange-yellow in the second; blue and orange in the third; green and red in the fourth; yellow-

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green and red-violet in the fifth; green-blue and red-orange in the sixth; and the choice of the student in the seventh.

In the third problem, devoted to planes, split complements are introduced. The split complements utilize three colors--one color plus the colors to either side of the complement. There are twelve groups of split complements, one for each color. The split complements for violet are yellow-orange and yellow-green.

In the fourth problem, devoted to solids, triads (fifths) are introduced. Triads are made up of the primary (red, yellow, and blue), secondary (green, orange, and violet), and tertiary colors. There are two triads of tertiaries: yellow-green, blue-violet, and red-orange; and blue-green, red-violet, and yellow-orange.

The fifth and sixth problems introduce the more complex scales of tones and color harmonies. Bisttram explains the important change in approach to color that occurs in the fifth problem as follows:

> In the four previous series the color combinations are simple pure colors. Such as red and green, or in the split complements, orange-yellow, violet, yellow-green, or in the fifths, such as red, yellow, blue. The reason for keeping these colors pure and in complements was to show that when dealing with pure colors, any color whatever is harmonious. When the areas of one color to another is properly related; in other words, when dealing with pure and brilliant color, it is a matter of areas. While hereafter we shall be dealing with tone relations and values.

Before beginning Problem Five, students are required to make thirteen color charts. The first chart is a grey scale, with white at the top and black and the bottom. White is reduced to black in seven intermediate half-tones called values. The names and ordering are taken from Denman Ross's system as follows:

White
Highlight

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Light
Lowlight
Middle
Highdark
Dark
Lowdark
Black

The next twelve charts are individual charts of each color scaled with white and/or black. Each color is assigned to one of the values according to its intensity as follows:

warm colors		cool colors
White		White
Yellow	Highlight	
Yellow-Orange	Light	Yellow-Green
Orange	Lowlight	Green
Red-Orange	Medium	Blue-Green
Red	Highdark	Blue
Red-Violet	Dark	Blue-Violet
	Lowdark	Violet
Black		Black

This chart, also developed by Ross, assigns a value to each of the twelve colors correlated to the scale of values between white and black. This scale of values shows a balance of values between warm and cool colors, except for yellow, which only exists in highlight, and violet, which only exists in lowdark. The pairs at the left and right are only complements in the medium value, that is, in red-orange and green-blue.

To make the scale for yellow, the only "highlight" color, pure yellow is placed at the top of the scale, and is then reduced with black for the remaining six tones. To make the scales for the "light" colors orange-yellow and yellow-green, the first tone of the scale is the pure color brought up once with white, the second is the pure color, and the rest of the tones are reduced with black. For orange and green, the "lowlight" colors, the scale begins with the color reduced twice with white, then goes to the color reduced once with white, then the pure color, then the rest reduced with black.

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The sub-problems for Problem Five are quite complex because the assigned topics, in most cases, have to be done in more than one color scheme. The second sub-problem, with the theme Air, is to be done in four color schemes that work with the complements, but add the subtlety of value. The first color scheme is yellow-light against violet-highlight, violet-middle, and violet-highdark. Then, the same design is done in another color scheme, in red-orange-light against blue-green-dark, blue-green-medium, and blue-green-lowlight. Then again it is done in blue-green-dark against yellow-lowlight, yellow-medium, and yellow-highdark. Finally, it is done in red-orange-dark against yellow-highdark, yellow-medium, and yellow-lowlight.

Preliminary to Problem Six, students must first construct ten new color scales by "mellowdizing" (Bisttram's term) a group of colors. The assigned topics for these sub-problems are consequently musical, as follows: 1. Music, 2. Dance, 3. Jazz, 4. "Meditation from Thais," 5. Wagner's "Fire Music-Valkyrie," 6. Debussy's "Afternoon of a Faun," 7. Modern Music and Dance.

"Mellowdized" colors work with the two triads of tertiary colors in terms of their complementary relationship to each other. The basic scale is as follows:

Yellow-Green	Light	Red-Violet
Orange-Yellow	Light	Blue-Violet
Red-Orange	Medium	Blue-Green
Red-Violet	Dark	Yellow-Green
Blue-Violet	Dark	Orange-Yellow

The idea here is that since yellow-green is a "light" color (see previous chart), and red-violet is a "dark" color, that the true complement of yellow-green is red-violet-light. Conversely, since red-violet is a "dark" color, its true complement is yellow-green-dark. Since the complements red-orange and blue-green both are "medium" colors, they do not have to be modified when used together.

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Each chart has ten colors. The first chart is made by mixing the five colors on the left; then the student mixes a little bit of red-violet-light, the first color on the right, with each of the colors on the left. The second chart is made the same way except by adding a little bit of blue-violet-light, the second color on the right, with each color on the left. The third chart is made in the same way except by mixing a little bit of blue-green-medium, the third color on the right to each color on the left. This is repeated down the chart.

The next five charts are made by reversing the process. Chart six is made by mixing all the colors on the right, then adding yellow-green-light, the first color on the left, to each of the colors on the right.

The assigned sub-problems are more complex. In the first sub-problem the student has a choice of using one of the mellowdized charts. The second and third problems use two of the charts in one composition, and the later problems specify other combinations.

The main idea is that mixing two complementary colors produces gray, but that each pair of complementaries produces a subtle gradation of gray with its own special overtones. By adding one color to a group of different colors, where that one color is the complement of one of the group, the colors are unified by the added color as well as toned up or down, and thus brought into harmony.

This strong emphasis on color was typical of Bisttram's interests. While Bisttram used Ross's system in his own painting, he did not record which scales he used for any particular work of art as did, for example, Henri and Bellows. Edith Carlson, who studied with Bisttram in the 1950s, recalls that Bisttram did not rely on color charts for his own work, but worked intuitively. Bisttram did, however, mix all of his colors before

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beginning a painting. He also used a piece of glass for his palette with a white piece of paper underneath it, as recommended by Ross. Another student, Bernard Stone, recalls that Bisttram kept drawings tacked to the studio wall, and commented, "When I see it in color, I paint it." Bisttram's use of color in his own painting was based on the Ross system; he didn't have to work from color charts because he was completely familiar with the system.

Bisttram's recollection of his two meetings with Denman Ross are worth quoting in full since they show that his enthusiasm for the system lasted throughout his career:

> The excitement about color was on every artist's mind and I decided to write to Dr. Ross to ask if I might study with him. He agreed and the following week end I boarded a train for Cambridge and was at his door at 11 A.M. I was met by his Japanese valet, who helped Dr. Ross with many of his color experiments. Dr. Ross came into his studio, shook hands, and immediately escorted me into a large exhibition of color charts, explaining each of them one by one. I was thrilled with the whole system--it was exactly what I had been looking for. As Dr. Ross explained, I made many notes and some color charts of simple complements, triads and double complements, and when he had gone through the lot, I thanked him for his kindness and help and returned to New York.
>
> I worked all week, making charts and laying out the whole system, and then showed it to Mr. Giles who agreed that it should be used at the school [The Master Institute]. The next Sunday I went back to Harvard to show Dr. Ross my charts, which he okayed, and he then showed me some twenty-eight new color palettes which were not in the original system, demonstrating the variations possible with the use of two yellows, two reds and one complementary color. I thanked Dr. Ross again for the permission he had given us to use his system and departed, happy in the knowledge that it would be part of all future teachings.[57]

Lecture Topics

Bisttram specified lecture topics for the first eleven weeks of the first semester of the first-year course as follows:

1. Pure Design; Dynamic Symmetry
2. Color

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[57]Bisttram, The Creative Process, 51.

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3. The Psychology of Direction of Line; the Personal and Impersonal Viewpoint; All-over Pattern or Symbolism
4. Modern Art Cycles
5. Perspective; Mediums
6. Personal and Impersonal Art; Flight of the Dragon; Problem of Form
7. Color Symbolism
8. Great Design Ages
9. Psychology of Symbols
10. Great Design Ages
11. Pure Design[58]

While most of these topics have been touched on in previous discussions of Bisttram's approach to painting, the above list provides a concise index and summary of the direction of Bisttram's thought at the end of the 1920s.

Art History

The Friday assignments for the second year class shows the depth of knowledge of world art that Bisttram expected of his students, presumably reflecting his own knowledge. Each week the second-year students were expected to draw, analyze, and write on an object seen in a museum or found in a book. The assignments begin with Egyptian works, move to Chinese, and then so on up to the present as follows:

> October: Draw and analyze and write upon some well-known Egyptian Fresco Painting; Egyptian sculptured figure; [Egyptian] animal sculpture; Egyptian frieze or bas-relief;
> November: Chinese fresco; Chinese painting, either portrait or landscape; Chinese Sculpture; Chinese Sculpture;
> December: early 6th century [Greek] sculpture; 5th century [Greek] sculpture; 5th century Greek sculpture; Greek Parthenon Frieze;
> January: Persian drawing; early Persian painting; late Persian Painting; Persian Tile;
> February: Byzantine Painting; Italian Primitive; Italian Renaissance; Italian Renaissance;
> March: early German school, Durer; Holbein; Early Flemish School: Memling, Van Eyck or Van der Weyden; Rembrandt or Vermeer;

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[58]Bisttram, "Outline of Course in Pure Design."

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April: English School; early French School; Modern French, Cézanne or Van Gogh; Modern French School, Gauguin, Lautrec, or Daumier;
May: American School, Albert Ryder or George Inness; Modern, Braque or Feininger; Matisse or Picasso; student"s choice.

Also of interest are the five assignments for the second semester of the second year class to illustrate Dante's Divine Comedy (weeks 15, 17, 19, 21, 23). The first assignment (week 15) is to make an illustration in black and white within two side-by-side root-five rectangles; the final two assignments (weeks 21 and 23) require the compositions to be done in color. These illustrations, obviously from imagination after reading the text, are alternated with assignments to be done from the model.

The Problem Approach

Of further interest is Bisttram's concept of using problems as the means of teaching. Majorie Jones notes that the "problem method" or the "problem system of progression" was instituted at the New York School of Fine and Applied Arts in the 1919-20 school year. Jones credits Wiliam Kilpatrick, a member of the Columbia University Teachers College faculty between 1909 and 1938, with originating this approach. Kilpatrick advocated the problem approach based on the idea that "simultaneous learning" occurs when a student is presented with a specific problem to solve.[59] Bisttram's use of the "problem" approach should be viewed within this context.

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[59]Marjorie F. Jones, "A History of the Parsons School of Design, 1896-1966," (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1968), 355. Jones identified another trend at the school: between 1913 and 1923 most of the courses in fine arts were dropped. She attributes this to the adoption of the problem method, which she surmised allowed students to work at their own rate in almost any class. This was also due to the influence of the director Frank Parsons, who emphasized the applied over the fine arts. Ibid., 344.

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Chapter 9

Guggenheim Fellowship and Taos Politics

Following the 1929 stock market crash, Bisttram's lucrative income from his advertising business dried up. Giles suggested that he apply for a Guggenheim Fellowship. His application specified the study of mural painting in Italy, but with the rise of the Fascist regime and warnings from friends that travel in Italy was dangerous, Bisttram changed his idea and decided to study mural painting with Diego Rivera (1886-1957) in Mexico City. After purchasing a new car, Bisttram set out with his wife and mother-in-law, installed them in Taos, and then proceeded to Mexico City on his own. After three months in Mexico City, Bisttram rejoined his family in Taos, and abandoned the idea of returning to New York.

Bisttram's application to the Guggenheim Foundation, dated 11 November 1930, requested a fellowship for studying tempera and fresco painting in Europe. His plan was to go first to Italy where he would visit the major artistic centers for six months, then travel to Austria, England, France, Germany, and Holland, and finally return to Florence where he would begin painting.[1] In preparation for the trip Bisttram was studying Italian. To support his application Bisttram submitted a selection of paintings, watercolors, and drawings; two of the drawings were studies for murals.[2] Howard Giles, Nicholas Roerich, Louis L. Horch, Leo Katz, George W. Dawson, and Denman Ross wrote

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[1]Letter of application, BP, AAA 2893:161-2.

[2]In support of his application Bisttram submitted oil paintings titled Vermont Hills, Green Hills, Götterdämerung, Autumn, and Monhegan; watercolors titled Mirage, Dawn in the Mountains, Continental Divide, NM, and Arizona; and drawings titled Theresa, Study for Mural #2, Study in Symmetry #2, Othello, and Study for Mural #3. Checklist, 27 Jan. 1931, Bisttram File, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, New York.

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letters of recommendation.[3]

Bisttram's interest in fresco painting was probably aroused by Leo Katz. Even though Katz had painted a number of murals in Europe before immigrating to New York in 1921, he did not become excited about mural painting until he became aware of the activities of the Mexican muralists. It was probably Orozco's (1883-1949) murals at the New School for Social Research (1930-31) that first attracted his attention. Orozco's use of dynamic symmetry[4] in these murals would have been of great interest to both Katz and Bisttram. Katz undoubtedly developed a personal relationship with Orozco during this period since soon afterwards he assisted Orozco on the Dartmouth murals (1932-33). Katz probably also developed his relationship with Alma Reed (1889-1961) at the same time; Reed opened her gallery, the Delphic Studios, in 1929, ostensibly to represent Orozco.

Katz probably met Orozco and Reed at the Ashram, the New York headquarters for the Delphic Society, an organization founded to promote Greek culture by the American heiress Eva Palmer Sikelianos with the support of her husband, the Greek mystic poet and revolutionary Angelos Sikelianos (1884-1951). The Ashram, probably Mrs. Sikelianos's family townhouse in Greenwich Village, was frequented by Indians, Greeks, and other foreigners, including Kahlil Gibran. Mrs. Sikelianos established the Ashram ostensibly to raise funds for her projects, which included the reintroduction of ancient Greek designs into native weaving practices in Greece, reviving ancient Greek

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[3]Nicholas Roerich's letter of recommendation, dated 27 Feb. 1931, India, is not in the Guggenheim file, but rather among Bisttram's papers at the Archives of American Art. The letter probably did not reach the committee in time for its deliberations.

[4]Alejandro Anreus, "Orozco in Gringoland: The Years in New York" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1997).

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music, and mounting a production of Prometheus Bound at Delphi.[5] She was also a dancer.[6] Claude Bragdon was certainly in attendance at their events as he knew Gibran and mentions reading Reed's translations of Angelos Sikelianos's poetry.[7] Mary Crovatt Hambidge also had a studio at the Ashram. She and Eva Sikelianos were close friends; they met in 1920 when Mrs. Hambidge was in Greece with Hambidge doing research on dynamic symmetry. Mrs. Sikeleanos inspired Mrs. Hambidge's interest in weaving, resulting in Mrs. Hambidge founding the Hambidge Center in Rabun's Gap, Georgia, devoted to weaving using the principles of dynamic symmetry.[8] Reed met Mrs. Sikeleanos in Greece, and assisted her with her projects. Orozco, who also had a studio at the Ashram, was undoubtedly inspired to use dynamic symmetry in his New School murals by discussions there.

Reed also commissioned and published Katz's book Understanding Modern Art (1936), which was first issued in serial form as lessons for use in Delphic Society meetings. A further connection is Bisttram's 1933 exhibition at the Delphic Studios for which Katz wrote the introduction to the catalogue; also Bisttram owned a signed copy

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[5]Antoinette May, Passionate Pilgrim: The Extraordinary Life of Alma Reed (New York: Marlowe & Co., 1993), 199-201. Aeschylus's Prometheus Bound is interpreted throughout volume 2 of Blavatsky's Secret Doctrine.

[6]Biographical details for Eva Palmer Sikelianos (b. 1874) are given in Harold McWhinnie, Mary Crovatt Hambidge, TMsA, 1999, courtesy Harold McWhinnie. There are indications that dynamic symmetry was extensively applied to the dance.

[7]Claude Bragdon, Merely Players (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1929), 135-147.

[8]Correspondence between Mrs. Hambidge and Mrs. Sikelianos is among the Hambidge papers at the Archives of American Art.

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of Reed's book on Orozco.[9] Katz also promoted mural painting in New York through lectures at the Architectural League, where he was a member, and organized a symposium at the Metropolitan Museum of Art around 1930 to bring architects and artists together. Katz later boasted that he had predicted a mural movement in America based on the Mexican precedent.[10]

Bisttram's Guggenheim Fellowship was approved on 13 March 1931, for $2,500 beginning 1 June 1931. Bisttram must have changed his mind about going to Europe shortly after the notification, since it was on 4 April that Bisttram wrote to the Guggenheim Foundation office in Mexico City asking how to contact Diego Rivera.[11] A reply dated 11 April, outlining living conditions in Mexico City, provided Bisttram with Rivera's current address in San Francisco where he was working on murals for the San Francisco Stock Exchange.[12] A response from Rivera dated 5 May shows that he was planning to depart for Mexico City within a few days to complete his work in the National Palace. He was planning on remaining in Mexico City until September when he would return to California.[13]

Bisttram, his wife, and mother-in-law left New York on 30 May, and arrived 6

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[9]Alma Reed, José Clemente Orozco (New York: Delphic Studios, 1932). See the appraisal of Bisttram's library in Appendix III.

[10]Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz, "Interview with Leo Katz," TM, 16 April 1975, 2, courtesy Marlene Park.

[11]Bisttram to (Eyler N. Simpson, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, Mexico), TLS, 4 April 1931, Bisttram File, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, New York.

[12]Eylar N. Simpson to (Bisttram), TLS, 11 April 1931, BP, AAA.

[13]Diego Rivera to (Emil J. Bistran), TLS, 5 May 1931, BP, AAA 2892: 88.

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June in Taos, where Maryion and her mother stayed while Bisttram went on to Mexico.[14] Bisttram departed for Mexico City on 27 June and arrived by 7 July; he was back in Taos by late September.[15]

Rivera began painting murals in the National Palace in 1929. The History of Mexico, painted on the three walls of the main staircase, was the first of several commissions for the building. The largest wall, at the top of the first landing of the stair, Mexico from the Conquest to 1930, can be seen from the ground floor in its entirety, and is the section Rivera was working on while Bisttram was assisting him. At the first landing the stair turns to both the right and the left. Pre-Hispanic Mexico, on wall to the right, was completed by 1930; The Future of Mexico, on the wall to the left, was not begun until 1933. Rivera interrupted his painting of Mexico from the Conquest to 1930 between November 1930 and June 1931 to execute commissions in San Francisco.

By 14 June 1931, Rivera had returned from San Francisco and was working on the central stairway mural. In his absence his assistants Ione Robinson[16] and Victor Arnautoff had been carrying on the work. Dissatisfied with what they had accomplished, Rivera repainted their work. Working sometimes twenty-four hours at a time, Rivera completed the 65 x 40 foot central stairway wall by October.[17] In early November, having secured a solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art to open in December,

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[14]Bisttram, "Why have you come to Taos," Taos News, 10 May and 17 May 1962.

[15]Bisttram to (Henry Allen Moe), postcard, 7 June 1931; Bisttram to (Henry Allen Moe), telegram, 23 June 1931; Bisttram to (Henry Allen Moe), TLS, 9 Nov. 1931, Bisttram File, Guggenheim Foundation.

[16]Ione Robinson was also a Guggenheim Fellow in 1931.

[17]Diego Rivera, My Art, My Life: An Autobiography with Gladys March (New York: The Citadel Press, 1960), 179-180.

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Rivera departed for New York.

The main wall, on which Bisttram assisted, is a highly complex historic and symbolic interpretation of events clustered under five lunettes formed by the ceiling vaults. The scheme is more general at the bottom and becomes more particular towards the top, with numerous portraits associated with specific events in the lunettes. One source indicates that it was the last lunette on the left, "The Execution of Maximillian" that was executed during the summer of 1931.[18] Given that Rivera was working from right to left, and that he did a tremendous amount of work that summer, he may also have worked on the fourth lunette, "The Madero Revolution, 1910;" the third, or central lunette, "The Mexican War of Independence, 1810;" and perhaps the lower portions of the mural.

Bisttram recalled that he mixed paint and scaled up Rivera's drawings:

> He [Rivera] immediately put me to work grinding powder colors into a paste which he used as a watercolor on large areas of wet plaster for the murals he was painting.
>
> Diego was a large expansive individual with a revolver on each hip–always ready for any emergency since those were revolutionary days in Mexico. I worked with him every day, scaling up from his small studies into large drawings which would be perforated and traced onto the wall with charcoal powder, using a piece of cotton to force the powder through the perforations onto the wet plaster. Once that was accomplished, he would start working on an area perhaps six feet by ten, depending on how much he could do in a day. Occasionally we would go to his home for dinner which somehow was never served before eight-thirty. The Hollywood "Gals" wouldn't leave him alone, insisting on sitting on his lap, but I soon got used to the idea and would simply wait until he was free.
>
> He spoke little English but we managed to communicate; he told of his fourteen years in France where he studied abstract art.[19]

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[18]Diego Rivera: Sus Frescos en El Palacio Nacional de Mexico (Mexico City: Edicion Jubileo en honor de la Olimpiada de Mexico, 1968), unpaginated.

[19]Bisttram, The Creative Process in the New Age, 57.

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Rivera's National Palace murals are usually discussed in the context of the political nature of the commission. Anthony Lee's research on Rivera's San Francisco murals suggests that the National Palace murals may have been one of a number of commissions engineered by conservative political factions to woo Rivera away from his involvement with the Mexican Communist Party.[20] Leonard Folgararait, in a semiotic reading of the National Palace murals, concludes that even though there are some Marxist elements present, the murals served the agenda of the conservative ruling party by disguising their capitalist motivations under a nationalistic program that embraced and then diluted revolutionary elements. He supports this conclusion by showing that the hierarchical distribution of the figures, with portraits at the top and peasants at the bottom, generally affirmed social stratification and the political and economic status quo.[21]

The politics of Mexico were complex at this time, and Rivera's involvement with them perhaps even more complex. Bisttram's comments in his letter to Henry Allen Moe, secretary of the Guggenheim Foundation, indicate that he neither comprehended the political situation nor wished to.

> The trip to Mexico was a real inspiration in many ways; I was tremendously impressed with the work of the artists particularly that of Orozco and Siqueiros, also Rivera whose capacity for work is a revelation. The country and its people, tho interesting, did not hold my attention... As to painting Mexico and its people I think it hardly possible without having lived with them a life time--otherwise they become merely picture-postcards of churches, beggars and Indians nicely posed with trick lighting. I pondered a great deal over staying in Mexico during the period of the scholarship. I talked with the artists, studied their work and came to the conclusion that the really big fellows, the great artists who were giving us the very essence of Mexico, were not doing their country and their people as it

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[20]Anthony W. Lee, Painting on the Left: Diego Rivera, Radical Politics, and San Francisco Public Murals (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

[21]Leonard Folgarait, "Revolution as Ritual: Diego Rivera's National Palace Mural," Oxford Art Journal 14, no.1 (1991) 18-33.

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> was customary for the average American and European artist to do them, that is--easel pictures and nice landscapes. The general trend among the more significant Mexican artists is to portray the history of the country in a symbolic way and their many revolutions naturally offer fertile ground.[22]

What most impressed Bisttram about Rivera, in addition to his legendary capacity for work, was his use of dynamic symmetry.

> He [Rivera] was also well-versed in the use of Dynamic Symmetry which I was pleased to see in all his plans for murals, and said he had learned it from an early French artist who claimed to have received it from someone who was taught in Egypt by someone who had gotten it from Greece. At any rate, he used it as I have learned it, employing diagonals and right angles without any thought of the exact rectangles that Mr. Hambidge taught.[23]

In another context Bisttram asserted that André Lhote (1885-1962) taught dynamic symmetry in Paris.[24] Since Lhote was such a good friend of Rivera's, Rivera may have been the source for this bit of information.

Upon his return from Mexico City, Bisttram gave a series of lectures in Taos and Santa Fe on dynamic symmetry. Mable Dodge Luhan must have either attended one of these lectures or heard of Bisttram's assertion that Rivera used dynamic symmetry, because she wrote to Rivera in Detroit inquiring about it. A reply from John Viscount Hastings, one of Rivera's assistants, confirmed Rivera's use of geometry in the layout of his murals and paintings, and his knowledge of Hambidge's system.[25] His statement that it was used by the Aztecs as well as the Egyptians and Greeks shows that he probably did some research on his own in Mexico, especially since Aztec themes play such a large part

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[22]Bisttram to (Henry Allen Moe), TLS, 9 Nov. 1931, Bisttram File, Guggenheim Foundation, New York.

[23]Ibid, 57-8.

[24]Bisttram, Dynamic Symmetry, MsA, 10, BP, AAA 2893:427.

[25]For the full text of Hastings' letter to Mable Dodge Luhan, see Appendix V.

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in the iconography of his paintings. Rivera's collecting activities, focused on pre-Columbian artifacts, supports this concept. His comment that "...it would almost seem they [golden proportions] are the basis of the structure of the world we live in." indicates that he used geometry both scientifically and metaphorically. Given his interest in mysticism, he may even have considered himself a "divine geometer" as Bisttram and others.

Rivera's interest in mathematics, discussed in Chapter 2, derived from his training at the Art Academy in Mexico City when he was a young student. His rigorous training enabled him to appreciate and comprehend the intricate mathematics being promulgated in Paris by the cubists. In Paris Rivera came under the influence of the mathematician Henri Poincaré (d. 1912) whose theories provided much of the basis for the rejection of linear perspective and the investigation of non-Euclidean geometry and the fourth dimension by many of the cubists. Rivera, however, abandoned cubism about 1918, and through an exploration of the stylistic innovations of Cézanne, returned to representational painting. Bertram Wolfe, Rivera's biographer, attributes Rivera's change of style to a trip he took through Italy just before returning to Mexico.

> In the frescoes of the Italian painters, from the Byzantines to Michelangelo, he saw the answer to the needs of a popular art capable of nourishing the masses esthetically, reforming their taste, telling them a story as moving as that of the medieval church, giving birth to a social and monumental painting.[26]

Rivera's adoption of classicism was based on his admiration for Ingres that dated from his early study in Mexico City. His early training, which had included analyzing the geometric underpinnings of Ingres's drawings in terms of golden section relationships,

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[26]Bertram D. Wolfe, The Fabulous Life of Diego Rivera (New York: Stein and Day, 1963), 115.

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and an appreciation of Ingres's elliptical contours as signs of Platonic essences,[27] enabled him to retain his interest in geometry while at the same time rejecting cubism. While study with Rivera prevented Bisttram from experimenting with abstraction at this time, it reinforced Bisttram's belief in dynamic symmetry and provided him with a new sense of clarity in form and pictorial organization.

Bisttram's decision to avoid the tourists and to live in a poor area of Mexico City--to learn to get to know the locals--turned out to be a rather depressing experience and contributed to his decision to return to Taos before the end of the fellowship period. Additionally, Rivera's work on the National Palace murals had come to stopping point.

> Although I was expected to work with Diego for about a year, I felt after three months that I had received from him all he could give or cared to give. I had certainly learned much about fresco painting which I was able to put to good advantage several years later; but during my stay I had seen so much of poverty (I could not sleep at night because of the mosquitos and bedbugs so I usually walked the streets from 3 A.M. until dawn) that I had given away most of my money and found myself broke. I thanked Diego for his generosity and kindness, said goodbye, and returned to Taos where I began to paint from the many studies I had done in Mexico.[28]

Bisttram had to explain to the Guggenheim Foundation why he left Mexico after only three months. In his letter to Henry Allen Moe, he said that he felt much more of an affinity with Taos and the Southwest, and felt he could interpret this land, which was more familiar to him, than Mexico. He also outlined his idea for continuing his aim of "Mural and Symbolic painting" in the Southwest, by planning "to start a Fresco movement in the West." He wrote that he had interested two artists, Kenneth Adams (1897-1966) and Andrew Dasburg (1887-1979), in mural painting. He went on to say

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[27]Favela, 18.

[28]Ibid., 58.

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that he had two projects in mind, the first being a mural at the El Chamiso Lodge (The Sagebrush Inn),[29] Taos, to be executed in partnership with Kenneth Adams. Adams was to do the life of the Mexican natives (if Adams was awarded a fellowship for the following year); Bisttram's own part was to take on "the life of the Indians expressed in a symbolic and literal way."[30]

The second project Bisttram had in mind was developed in consultation with Dr. Edgar Hewett (1865-1946), founding director of the School of American Archaeology (1907) and the Museum of New Mexico (1909), whom Bisttram had met in Mexico. The idea was to fresco the walls of the patio of the Museum, which offered four walls of fifty feet each. It is important to document Bisttram's relationship with Hewett as he was the most powerful political force in the effort to revive and publicize Pueblo culture.[31] As discussed in Chapter 4, Hewett was also a good friend of Nicholas Roerich's. In preparation for these projects, Bisttram reported that he was working on "portrait studies of Indians" as well as "symbolic compositions and drawings." Hewett may have loaned Bisttram books on Indian ceremonial life for this project inasmuch as Hewett loaned similar books to the artist Alexandre Hogue, a good friend of Bisttram's.[32]

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[29]The Sagebrush Inn, built in 1931 by Helen and Frank Hall Kentnor, is located just south of Taos. It was an elegant hotel where many of the wealthy visitors to Taos stayed. Reily, 258.

[30]Bisttram to (Henry Allen Moe), TLS, 9 Nov. 1931, Bisttram File, Guggenheim Foundation.

[31]For an assessment of Hewett's contribution, see Rushing, 18-22; J. J. Brody, Pueblo Indian Painting: Tradition and Modernism in New Mexico, 1990-1930 (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1997).

[32]Lea Rosson DeLong, Nature's Forms, Nature's Forces: The Art of Alexandre Hogue (Tulsa: Philbrook Museum of Art, 1984).

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These projects formed the basis for Bisttram's application for a renewal of his Guggenheim Fellowship in January 1932. In his letter of application he reported that he had completed twenty-five paintings and had another twenty-five sketches ready to be painted; of these, he sent seven paintings and ten drawings in support of his Fellowship renewal.[33] It is worth noting that one of the drawings, Dante Passing through Purgatory with Angels is specified as a study in abstractions. Bisttram did not get the renewal on his Fellowship--the Foundation decided not to renew any fellowships that year, and Bisttram did not undertake either of his mural ideas.

Andrew Dasburg

Bisttram's meeting with Dasburg and Adams in November 1931 to promote his idea of starting "a fresco movement in the west" is important because it marks the starting point of relationships that would strongly affect Bisttram's position in Taos. Dasburg was the senior modernist in Taos and joined Taos Heptagon in 1934, a year after Bisttram had founded it. Dasburg was also probably responsible for forcing Bisttram out of Heptagon during the winter of 1936-1937.

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[33]Paintings: Indian woman in brown dress, white drapery against blue background, 36 x 48"; Interior of Mexican home, three women mixing Mexican pancakes, 36 x 48"; Mexican funeral, blue casket, black-robed figures, silvery white background, 36 x 48"; Three Mexican market women arguing, 36 x 48"; Indian man in brown and red blanket, pale blue background, 27 x 36"; Fat Indian woman in black shawl, silver grey background interior, on gesso ground, 24 x 36"; Full front Indian man, low gold background, deep red blanket, 18 x 24"; drawings: Man crucified on three limbed tree; Mexican women washing in the outdoors; Peasant woman and child; Three Mexican women arguing; Winter scene of adobe huts and mountains with a woman's figure in foreground; Three Mexican women, two seated and one standing in the market place; Reclining nude man's figure with background of hills; Dante passing thru purgatory with angels, study in abstractions; Mexican family group in patio, scene of poverty; Peasant lovers embracing. Checklist, Bisttram File, John Simon Guggenheim Foundation.

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Bisttram's enthusiasm for mural painting clearly had an effect. Dasburg decided to learn fresco and applied to the Guggenheim for a fellowship, which he received in 1932. His stated aim was:

> ...to study both the method and artistic manner of early Italian and contemporary Mexican Fresco painting, to make a technical research of the fresco medium with the view to its adaptation for exterior decoration relative to Pueblo architecture of the southwest and elsewhere. Also to experiment with various modern materials for the purpose of finding a reliable and convenient surface for the adaptation of fresco painting to the portable picture.[34]

Kenneth Adams also applied for a Guggenheim in 1932. His plan was "The study of the modern frescoes of Mexico for the purpose of executing decorations in that medium on the walls of public buildings in the United States."[35] Adams, however, was not awarded a fellowship. Howard Cook (1901-1980), who joined Heptagon in 1937, was also probably listening to Bisttram's ideas about fresco painting since he applied for and received a Guggenheim to study fresco painting in Mexico in 1932; he, however, had unsuccessfully applied once before.

The first fresco project to materialize from this enthusiasm was undertaken in the Taos County Court House in 1934 by Bisttram, Ward Lockwood (1894-1963), Victor Higgins, and Bert Phillips.[36] In 1936 Dasburg, Adams, Lockwood, and Boardman Robinson executed fresco murals for the lobby of the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center. Lockwood was particularly stimulated by the medium and used it for his murals for the Post Office in Washington, D.C. (1937). Howard Cook also used fresco in his Pittsburgh

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[34]Andrew Dasburg, "Statement for Application," Jan. 1932, Dasburg File, J. S. Guggenheim Foundation.

[35]Kenneth Adams, "Application," 1932, Adams File, J. S. Guggenheim Foundation.

[36]This project is discussed in Chapter 11.

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(1936) and San Antonio Post Office (1939) murals.[37]

Dasburg's status as senior modernist in Taos was based on his having known Leo Stein and Picasso in Paris before World War I, and having exhibited in the 1913 Armory Show. Dasburg's friendships with Alfred Stieglitz, Marsden Hartley, John Marin, and Stuart Davis, further bolstered his preeminent position among Taos artists. Dasburg, who had been spending his winters in New York City and summers in Woodstock, New York, became won over to the Southwest when he first visited Taos in 1918, at the invitation of Mable Dodge Luhan, whom he had known since 1913.

Dasburg immediately became interested in Hispanic and Pueblo artifacts, and began to collect and sell, primarily to friends back East. In 1923, he was, with Mabel Dodge Luhan, the Santa Fe writers Alice Corbin Henderson and Mary Austin, and others, a founding member of the Indian Arts Fund. In 1926, he became a partner in the Spanish and Indian Trading Company, with the painters B. J. O. Nordfeldt (1878-1955) and Walter Mruk (1883-1942), the poet Witter Bynner, and John Evans, the son of Mabel Dodge Luhan. Vera Johnson, Raymond Jonson's wife, worked at the Santa Fe store, and also began collecting.

Walter Mruck was a member of Los Cinco Pintores, a group of five painters who built houses next to each other on Camino del Monte Sol, where Dasburg also lived. Los Cincos--Jozef Bakos (1891-1977), Fremont Ellis, Willard Nash (1898-1943), Will Schuster, and Mruk--had published a manifesto in El Palacio in 1921, but disbanded in 1926. In 1927 Dasburg joined the Six Men exhibiting group organized by Raymond

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[37]Bisttram submitted sketches for the San Antonio commission, and perhaps thought he had a chance since Ward Lockwood was on the jury.

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Jonson, which also included Bakos, Nash, Nordfeldt, and John E. Thompson.[38] Witter Bynner brought the writer Spud Johnson out to Santa Fe in the early 1920s. In 1927 Jonson moved to Taos to become Mabel Dodge Luhan's secretary. Johnson dominated the literary scene in Taos as editor of the Taos Valley News, and publisher of Laughing Horse, to which Dasburg's circle of New Mexico artists contributed.[39]

Upon his marriage to Marina Wister in 1933, Dasburg made the move to Taos. Before this move he spent a fair amount of time in Taos since a number of his former Woodstock students had settled there, most notably Kenneth Adams in 1924, and Howard Cook in 1925. Additionally, in 1926, Ward Lockwood, at the suggestion of Kenneth Adams, settled in Taos; Lockwood and Adams were both from Kansas, and had spent the winter of 1921-22 painting together in the south of France.

This group became consolidated in 1929 when they began exhibiting together at the Taos branch of the Spanish & Indian Trading Company. In 1929, after having spent a season in France painting, Kenneth Adams returned to Taos and married Hilda Brann

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[38]Ed Garman, The Art of Raymond Jonson, 178.

[39]Bynner satirized Mabel Dodge Luhan in his drama Cake (ca. 1927) in revenge for stealing his lover, Spud Johnson, away to Taos. Mabel had stolen Spud from Bynner in revenge for Bynner's theft of the Lawrences in the summer of 1923, when Bynner, Johnson, and the Lawrences made a trip to Mexico. Sharyn Udall, Spud Johnson & Laughing Horse (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 38.

Johnson was editor of the Taos Valley News between Oct. 1933 and Dec. 1935. Unfortunately, many issues of the newspaper from the early 1930s have not survived. For 1931, issues after mid-Feb. are missing; 1932 is entirely missing; for 1933, all issues except the final two are missing; for 1934, the issues between July 26 and Sept. 6 are missing. The most complete run of the Taos Valley News is at the New Mexico State Library, Santa Fe, and is available on microfilm. Taos Valley News was a weekly, came out on Thursdays, and had four unnumbered pages; many of the articles were treated as items with no headlines. Johnson resigned from the paper in late December 1935 in order to become director of the Villagra Bookshop, the primary meeting place for writers in Santa Fe. By 1941, Johnson was back in Taos operating his Laughing Horse Book Stall.

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Boulton, a poetess, originally from California, who was the manager of the Taos branch of the Spanish & Indian Trading Company.[40] Shortly after their marriage, Boulton opened the gallery with the following artists: Kenneth Adams, E. L. Blumenschein, Dorothy Brett, Howard Cook, Richard Crisler, Andrew Dasburg, Victor Higgins, Eleanora Kissel, Ward Lockwood, Loren Mozley, and Walter Ufer.[41] Except for Crisler and Ufer, all of these artists were at one time or another members of Heptagon. In fact, all of the charter members of Heptagon (except Bisttram of course) were part of this exhibiting group: Blumenschein, Brett, Higgins, Kissel, and Lockwood. In many ways the group exhibiting at the Trading Company was the precursor to Heptagon. It was, however, probably the length and depth of the relationships developed among this group that ultimately worked against Bisttram the newcomer.

This group became more consolidated as they began to move out to Talpa, a few miles southwest of Taos. Kenneth Adams and his wife made the move in June 1930. The Dasburgs followed in 1935, and later the Howard Cooks. Then in 1938, when Lockwood was appointed chair of the art department at the University of Texas, Austin, he built a home in Talpa, returning for the summers. Furthermore, Lockwood hired Loren Mozley (b. 1905) to the University of Texas art faculty.

This group of artists essentially comprised the Taos artists who were interested in modernism, and Andrew Dasburg was their avowed leader. John Marin's visits to Taos at the invitation of Mabel Dodge Luhan in the summers of 1929 and 1930 gave further impetus to modernist painting in New Mexico. Andrew Dasburg, Ward Lockwood, and

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[40]"Married in Raton," Taos Valley News, 1 Aug. 1929.

[41]"A New Art Gallery," Taos Valley News, 15 Aug. 1929.

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Loren Mozley accompanied Marin on painting and fishing trips, and were influenced by his painting style. Marin's presence in Taos was also reflected in the painting styles of Victor Higgins and Gina Knee. Bisttram's geometric approach to the landscape, however, was completely opposite from Marin's. Marin's statement, that "the object of science is to make easy for the many, the object of art to make hard for the many. Science is vulgar, art is exalted."[42] opposed everything that Bisttram believed in; Marin's expressionist style would also not have been appealing to Bisttram.

Bisttram, however, was interested in Dasburg's style. A comparison between Bisttram's watercolor Taos, 1933 (fig. 74) and Dasburg's painting El Rito, ca. 1924 (fig. 75)[43] shows this quite clearly. Frank Waters's description of Dasburg's approach to the landscape could easily be applied to Bisttram's:

> He [Dasburg] was not concerned with the cosmetic beauty of the earth's surface, the yellow aspen groves and the flowering chamisa, the dark green pine slopes. But, like a surgeon, he probed the skeletal structure of bone, ligament, and integument that integrated mountain and mesa in a living whole.[44]

Dasburg's El Rito, with its geometric forms and ordered rhythms that move in slanted horizontals and zig-zags back and forth along the front plane of the canvas, provided solutions to landscape problems Bisttram had been probing. The forms along the bottom edge of the canvas, for example, are the broadest and establish the back and

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[42]John Marin, "Letter of 22 July 1913," Letters of John Marin, ed. H. J. Seligmann (New York: privately printed for An American Place, 1931) cited in Udall, Modernist Painting, xviii.

[43]Dasburg's El Rito was reproduced in a 1924 issue of Arts that Bisttram could have worked from. Alexander Brook, "Andrew Dasburg," The Arts 6 (1924), 24, cited in Udall, 60.

[44]Frank Waters, Of Time and Change, A Memoir (Denver: MacMurray & Beck, 1998), 220.

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forth movement in a series of tilted planes.. Dasburg even utilized the rule of diminishing intervals in the ordering of the mountains.

In Taos (fig. 74) Bisttram essentially simplified Dasburg's composition by directing all of the rhythmic movement from left to right. The most obvious motif that Bisttram borrowed from Dasburg is the curving road, which in Bisttram's interpretation becomes a stream by painting it light blue. The stream becomes the theme of the composition as it insistently curves from lower left to upper right; the serpentine curve also provides the major contrast to the otherwise geometric shapes. Bisttram also interrupts the curve, as does Dasburg, but with trees, rather than with buildings. Bisttram also presses the mountains close to the top edge of the composition to give more play to the building forms.[45]

Analyzing Bisttram's composition according to the rules of dynamic symmetry, that is, dividing the composition so that all of the compartments are in proportion to the shape of the composition (fig. 76), shows how carefully Bisttram organized this picture.[46] The elements--land, trees, stream, road, buildings, mountains, and sky--are more clearly separated, defined, and subordinated to the whole in Bisttram's composition than in Dasburg's. Additionally, the coordinating rhythm from left to right is much more refined and distinctly musical in Bisttram's arrangement. The major rhythm is the serpentine

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[45]While Bisttram did not follow up on this theme in the 1930s, he did a number of works on this theme in the 1960s; see for example Taos Pueblo, ca. 1969, in Wiggins, 75.

[46]Taos measures 17 x 23 inches; this is not a regular dynamic symmetry shape. These dimensions are, however, very close to 18 x 24, the regular dynamic symmetry shape of three side-by-side root-five rectangles. Three side-by-side root-five rectangles also form a Pythagorean rectangle, that is, a rectangle in the ratio of 3 to 4. Bisttram executed many works in the 3 to 4 ratio, a number of which are reproduced and discussed in the following chapter.

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curve of the stream; the trees divide the line just to the right of the vertical axis in the same way the string of a musical instrument is stopped to sound the octave. The minor curving rhythm, the line where the mountains approach the sky, sounds a complementary rhythm as it ascends towards the vertical axis of the picture and then descends to approach the stream at the upper left.

This rhythm is repeated in similar modulations of straight-line planes of roads and houses from lower left to upper right. It begins with the house at the left whose top edge is aligned with the horizontal axis. Window and door locate this form firmly in the first quarter of the picture. The next movement is the house whose bottom edge sits on the major horizontal axis. It is divided by the vertical axis so that one third is to the left and two thirds to the right, setting up a 2:3 ratio, the musical fifth. The window in the left portion and the door in the right portion further underscore the movement from left to right. The more complex massing of buildings behind these two major buildings fills in and carries the rhythm in diminishing intervals to the right.

This analogy between intervals of form and music is spelled out in Bragdon's chapter "Frozen Music" in The Beautiful Necessity, and seems most applicable to this picture. Bragdon specifies, for example, that the ratio of 1:2 corresponds to the octave, a ratio of 2:3 to the musical fifth (which is universally considered the most harmonious of all musical relationships), 3:4 to the fourth, 4:5 to the major third, 5:6 to the minor third, and 4:7 to the sub-minor seventh. [47] Taking the musical analogy one step further, the curving road can be read as the bass line of the composition. This is suggested by Birkhoff, who remarks that the leap of an octave rarely occurs in the melody, but is often

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[47]Bragdon, The Beautiful Necessity, 104-5.

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found in the bass voice. Birkhoff also comments that the higher and lower voices never cross each other,[48] an idea that Bisttram follows by keeping his serpentine line below and separate from the rhythms of the buildings. Birkhoff makes other interesting comments that are obviously applicable to pictorial problems, for example: "No leap of more than a twelfth (octave plus fifth) is allowed in the bass. If the leap in the bass is as much as a sixth, no leap in the upper parts exceeds a third."[49] Both Bragdon and Birkhoff take Helmholtz as their source for music theory.

Heptagon Gallery

Mrs. Bisttram recalled that their first friends in Taos were Dorothy Brett, the Blumenscheins, and Eleanor Kissel.[50] Bisttram organized his new friends into a cooperative gallery that opened as Taos Heptagon in May 1933. The gallery was located on the plaza, in the Don Fernando Hotel. The group took over the former barber shop, which connected to the hotel dining room.[51] The Don Fernando was a meeting place where artists socialized and played chess. In the evenings Indians often danced in front of the huge fireplace. Since bathrooms were at a premium in Taos, groups of people would often pool their money to rent a room for a few hours and take turns taking

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[48]Birkhoff, Aesthetic Measure, 130-1. Bisttram recommended Birkhoff's book in a draft of a book on his teaching methods.

[49]Ibid., 131.

[50]Witt, "Interview with Mrs. Bisttram," TM, Bisttram Papers, Harwood Museum, 3.

[51]"Taos Heptagon to Open New Gallery," clipping, Gallup New Mexico, 11 May 1933, BP, AAA 581: 338. Information about Taos Heptagon is scant, and is here reconstructed from very brief notices in the weekly paper.

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baths.[52]

The artists in Heptagon were Bisttram, E. L. Blumenschein, Dorothy Brett, Victor Higgins, Eleonora Kissel, and Ward Lockwood. The logo for the group was a seven-pointed star inscribed in a heptagon inscribed in a circle, undoubtedly designed by Bisttram, with Bisttram's favorite quotation on the cover of the brochure:

> The Taos Heptagon is an affiliation of painters who unite in a conviction that the following quotation best expresses their ideals in art: "We must not imitate Nature in her effects, but rather follow her in her laws and principles. Only in so doing, may we hope to create works comparable to hers." —Aristotle

The design for the logo, which divides the circle into sevenths, is an unusual form since the circumference of a circle cannot be evenly divided into sevens (fig. 77). The interest in the number seven evidently took precedence over the fact that there were only six members. The term heptagon is specifically used by Blavatsky, and her use of it, in the title of one of the subsections of The Secret Doctrine, "The Tetraktis in Relation to the Heptagon," includes her interpretation of the individual as the unfolded cube. The use of this term indicates that the members were all interested in theosophy, and that they considered their art-making within Blavatsky's theory of artistic creativity presented in Chapter 2. The gallery was organized as a cooperative with members paying dues to a treasurer to cover expenses, in addition to a commission to the gallery from all sales.[53]

In a letter to Mabel Dodge Luhan, Dorothy Brett reveals that the formation of the group was based on idealistic ideas connected specifically with the spirituality of the Pueblo Indians. The centrality of Native American spirituality to the ideals of Heptagon is confirmed by the membership of Eleanora Kissel. Native Americans were the main

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[52]Fechin, 35.

[53]For the Articles of Agreement of the Taos Heptagon, see Appendix XII.

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subjects of her paintings; also it was in her studio that occult subjects were regularly discussed among Taos artists. [54]

In this same letter, Brett also reveals that she considered the group to be similar to the Slade School group she was involved with in London, Steiglitz's circle, and Diego Rivera's. Brett also disclosed that Mabel was against the group, and suggested that it may very well have been because of Bisttram.

> As for myself, I feel that here in Taos there is a movement linking us (finally a very few of us) with the group in the Room [Steiglitz's group] and Rivera's group. Bisttram's endeavour is a human one too. It is the human side that he has been trying to draw together, for himself he gives freely to one and all, what he knows, what more can he do, for his own work, he is experimenting, seeking, going through varying stages, knowing what he is about... But the thing is, that you lack of sympathy, your antagonism will inevitably make me hide my painting away from you, there will be none of the fun, the joyousness of cooperation, because the whole artistic emotion is so sensitive so quick to fold up and withdraw from antagonism. When you first came back it was different, one felt you with the movement, now I feel you against it, against me and my painting, and that means out of sheer self preservation, that I will hide all the most vital, the most intense part of my life. To stand against the movement begun this winter here, is to stand against the movement in Mexico, against the Indians here.[55]

After the Don Fernando Hotel burned down in December 1933, the gallery moved to the Saavedra building on the north side of the plaza, in the former Radio Room of the Saavedra Drug Store, reopening on 2 June 1934. The reopening was reviewed undoubtedly by Spud Johnson, who complained of the "slightly too large floor space in the room which is tiring to the visitor," suggesting that the gallery add a sculptor who

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[54]Bisttram's interest in Native American subjects during this period is discussed in Chapter 12.

[55]Dorothy Brett to (Mabel Dodge Luhan), AL, 1932, Mabel Dodge Luhan Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University. See Appendix XIII for the full text of this letter. This letter was brought to my attention by Pam Evans, who is preparing a book on Dorothy Brett. [The ... are in the letter.]

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could supply the space with "a few restful nudes or fountain pieces." [56] This opening included all of the original members except Blumenschein, who had dropped out. He was replaced by Andrew Dasburg. Two paintings by Cady Wells (1904-1954), a guest artist who was studying with Dasburg, were also shown in the opening exhibition for the season. The show was assembled by Bisttram and Higgins, the only two members who were in town.

In February 1935 the Heptagon group showed in Santa Fe's Rio Grande Gallery,[57] which was run by the Rio Grande painters, of which Gina Knee served as president, and where Cady Wells was also a member.[58] The 1935 Heptagon season opened in March with Mayrion Bisttram in charge, since the former custodian of the gallery, Jimmy Valentine, had resigned. The gallery now included a book department specializing in publications on the Southwest. The opening exhibition included a selection of lithographs in addition to paintings.[59] In April, Cady Wells and Kenneth Adams were guest artists; their works were accompanied by a group of portraits by Dasburg and Bisttram.[60] In July Dasburg resigned from Heptagon. That same month the Santa Fe artist B. J. O. Nordfeldt was a guest artist.[61] In August, Loren Mozley was appointed

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[56][Spud Johnson], "Heptagon Gallery opened in Saavedra Hall Saturday," Taos Valley News, 7 June 1934.

[57][Spud Johnson], Taos Valley News, 14 Feb. 1935.

[58]Sharyn Udall, Inside Looking Out: The Life and Art of Gina Knee (Lubbock: Texas Tech Press, 1994), 33.

[59][Spud Johnson], Taos Valley News, 28 Mar. 1935.

[60][Spud Johnson], Taos Valley News, 11 Apr. 1935.

[61][Spud Johnson], Taos Valley News, 18 Jul. 1935.

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attendant at Heptagon, succeeding Mrs. Bisttram.[62] Mozley, however, resigned the following month when he was invited to drive Dorothy Brett and Georgia O'Keeffe to New York. In September, Doris Fish succeeded Mozley as gallery attendant.[63] Dasburg, who was rumored to be contemplating rejoining Heptagon in September,[64] presumably did so by the following month since he was included in the October exhibition.

The 1936 season opened 1 May with Arch Kepner as attendant. A lithograph of Ranchos Church by Bisttram was sold to Mrs. Leopold Stokowski, who was in town visiting Mabel Dodge Luhan.[65] In June Arch Kepner resigned his position,[66] and was succeeded by Harold Jackson. Jackson had worked at the Denver Art Museum, and was touted as the first professional to be employed by Heptagon.[67] In June, Dorothy Brett showed works that she had painted in collaboration with D. H. Lawrence.[68] Also in June Loren Mozley and Cady Wells became members of Heptagon, and their works were hung later that month.[69] In July Bisttram made a big sale, his Taos Pueblo by Moonlight to Mr. and Mrs. Dan Taichert of Santa Fe. In July, five new works by Dasburg were added to the Heptagon Gallery exhibit, and works were sold by Brett, Bisttram, Higgins,

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[62][Spud Johnson], Taos Valley News, 22 Aug. 1935.

[63][Spud Johnson], Taos Valley News, 31 Oct. 1935.

[64][Spud Johnson], Taos Valley News, 19 Sept. 1935.

[65]Taos Valley News, 7 May 1936.

[66]Taos Valley News, 4 June 1936.

[67]Taos Valley News, 11 June 1936.

[68]Taos Valley News, 18 June 1936.

[69]Taos Valley News, 25 June 1936.

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Lockwood, and Wells.[70] In August works by Bisttram, Kissel, and Lockwood were sold.[71]

The 1937 Heptagon season opened in June without Bisttram. The opening exhibition included works by Brett, Higgins, Dasburg, and Wells, followed by a guest exhibition of works by Eleanor Bender.[72] In July Heptagon was hung with works by Dasburg, Higgins, Brett, Lockwood, and Wells. Howard Cook was a guest artist taking the place of Eleanora Kissel who was in Europe.[73] In September, a new Heptagon exhibition featured works by the current members: Brett, Dasburg, Cook, Higgins, Lockwood, Mozley, and Wells.[74]

The 1938 Heptagon season opened with the following members: Howard Cook, Barbara Latham (Cook's wife), Gina Knee, Dorothy Brett, Andrew Dasburg, Victor Higgins, Eleonora Kissel, Ward Lockwood, Loren Mozley, and Cady Wells.[75] A Heptagon sign, formerly in the Anschutz Collection, reading "James and Brett/Mozley, Dasburg/Wells, Kissel/others, entrance through drug store," without Bisttram's logo, probably dates from this period.

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[70]Taos Valley News, 30 July 1936.

[71]Taos Valley News, 20 Aug. 1936. Soon afterwards, Bob Meltzer succeeded Harold Jackson as Heptagon gallery attendant. Taos Valley News, 27 Aug. 1936. In October, Ruth Fish took over Bob Meltzer's duties at Heptagon. Taos Valley News, 29 Oct. 1936.

[72]The 1937 season opened with Mrs. Ruth Fish as gallery attendant. Taos Review, 3 June 1937. The Taos Valley News was purchased in 1936 and renamed the Taos Review.

[73]Taos Review, 22 July 1937.

[74]Taos Review, 30 Sept. 1937.

[75]Taos Review, 2 June 1938. In 1940 Bruce Eakin became the new gallery attendant. Taos Review, 10 Oct. 1940.

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In 1941 Heptagon moved to a new location just south of Taos Plaza in the old Scherick house, where Spud Johnson also operated his Laughing Horse Book Stall. Members were now Dorothy Brett, Howard Cook, Andrew Dasburg, Victor Higgins, Vernon Hunter, Rebecca James, Eleanora Kissel, Gina Knee, Barbara Latham, Ward Lockwood, and Loren Mozley.[76]

Just why Bisttram dropped out of Heptagon prior to the 1937 season is unclear, although it can be assumed that he was forced out. Taos artists regularly argued during the winters and made up during the summers in time for the arrival of the tourists. The fact that Dasburg dropped out and then rejoined during the 1935 season indicates that he was dissatisfied with the arrangements. The new members in 1936, Cady Wells and Loren Mosley, were both friends of Dasburg. A later remark by Loren Mosley, made in reference to Bisttram, that at Heptagon "they shared rented space, not ideas"[77] indicates that relationships among members were strained.

Cady Wells, a man of independent means, began painting in 1933 under Dasburg. After only four months painting, he sent his work to Stieglitz at Lake George, on the recommendation of Marie Garland.[78] Subsequently Wells made a number of visits to Steiglitz in the hopes of exhibiting at An American Place, but with no results. Georgia O'Keeffe became interested in Wells's work--mostly watercolors--and spent a fair amount

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[76]Taos Review, 29 May 1941.

[77]Mozley, cited in Udall, Modernist Painting, 69.

[78]Cady Wells, Chamita, NM, to (Alfred Steiglitz), ALS, 14 Sept. 1933, Alfred Stieglitz Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

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of time advising him.[79] Wells's efforts to cultivate Steiglitz reflected the general tenor of the more modernist artists who considered Stieglitz's approval indispensable.

Bisttram's relationship with Dorothy Brett was also strained, and it may have been in large part due to Stieglitz and Luhan's disapproval of Bisttram. Brett's 1932 letter to Mabel Dodge Luhan indicated that she admired Bisttram's approach to art even though Mabel did not. By the following year, however, when Steiglitz also expressed disapproval for Bisttram's work, probably after having seen his exhibition at the Delphic Studios, Brett pulled away from Bisttram.

> I write here in the mornings.... letters and so on..... then in the afternoons I go and sit and talk to Stieglitz.... see Dodo (Mrs. Norman)..... Bisttrams seem to have faded out lately..... I know what you mean.... but what can one do about it? you will be pleased to hear that Stieglitz hates Bisttram.... hates his painting too.... so there you are again.... I..of course.... feel under a certain obligation and therefore hold out the hand of friendship.....but not of intimacy...wherein lies a huge difference.....[80]

Like Cady Wells and many others, Brett's unrealized dream was to have her work hung in Stieglitz's gallery; her hesitancy to disagree with Stieglitz's aesthetic judgements was typical. With both Stieglitz and Luhan against Bisttram, it was inevitable that his position in Taos would decline.

Another sign of Bisttram's weakened position in Taos is provided by a 1934 letter to the Guggenheim Foundation from Gustave Baumann:

> It is probably entirely needless but something troubles me regarding Emil Bisttram. I do not know for certain that he has made another application or that he is eligible but there is considerable boasting on the part of other Taos artists

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[79]Alfred Stieglitz to (Cady Wells), ALS, 5 Nov. 1937, Alfred Stieglitz Papers. Wells was also good friends with Raymond Jonson and Dane Rudhyar.

[80]Dorothy Brett, Shelton Hotel, New York, to (Mabel Dodge Luhan), TLS, 14 Nov. 1933, Dorothy Brett File, Mabel Dodge Luhan Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University. [The ... are in the letter.]

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> that they had destroyed all of Bisttram's chances... If such a report based on these hatreds has been sent I am sure your experience will enable you to read between the lines and discount it accordingly.[81]

In March 1936, another incident occurred that signaled Bisttram's decline in prestige in Taos. While Bisttram was serving as regional supervisor for the Treasury Relief Art Project, some unnamed "gossips" succeeded in getting him temporarily removed from the project on the grounds that his extravagant lifestyle disqualified him for relief. Bisttram wrote a four page letter to Olin Dows at the Treasury Department defending his position and was immediately reinstated.[82]

Another indication of Bisttram's difficulties with his colleagues in Taos is provided by comments Bisttram made in an August 1936 letter to his landlord that his relationship with Victor Higgins, a founding member of Heptagon, had taken a definitely negative turn. Higgins, who was serving as president of the Harwood Foundation, located just next door to where Bisttram lived, was challenging the title to the property Bisttram was renting and wanted to purchase, by claiming it was part of the original Harwood tract.[83]

Bisttram's difficulties with Mabel Dodge Luhan undoubtedly contributed to the problem. Bisttram attributed her dislike for him to his refusal of her sexual advances. After settling in Taos, Bisttram rented one of Mabel's cottages for use as a studio.

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[81]Gustave Baumann to Henry Allen Moe, ALS, 7 Dec. 1934, Bisttram File, John Simon Guggenheim Foundation. Mr. Moe responded that Bisttram had not applied for a fellowship, and that no gossip had reached him. Henry Allen Moe to Gustave Baumann, TL, 11 Dec. 1934, Bisttram File, John Simon Guggenheim Foundation.

[82]Bisttram to (Olin Dows, Chief, TRAP), 26 Mar. 1936, BP, AAA 2892:413-6.

[83]Bisttram to (Louis B. Merwin), TLS, 8 Aug 1936, BP, AAA 2892:526. For a discussion of Bisttram's financial problems during this period, and his efforts to purchase his house on Ledoux Street, located next door to the Harwood (and his involvement with the Taos Dramatic Club and forming the Taos Ski Club), see Appendix XIV.

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Bisttram told Edith Carlson that Mabel sought him out and offered him a house on her property. Mayrion refused to move out there so Bisttram went out during the day to use the studio.

> I'd go out each morning and work there. That was fine, except that every morning Mabel was there. In one corner of the room was a bed, with curtains over it. Well, I'd come in and she might be sitting there on the bed, the curtains pulled back a little, sitting there like a Buddha, flimsy dress, nothing on underneath. Sometimes she'd be there when I got there, sometimes she'd come in later. And then she'd talk--about philosophy--her life--and on and on. All the time wiggling around. Nothing said, you understand. It was all innuendo, all suggestive. Well, I didn't want any of it. I didn't have any time for that kind of stuff. Jesus, I was full of ideas and painting, wanting to get them all out. I didn't want it anyway. Not that I wasn't interested. But not her! So she kept it up and kept it up. Oh, she didn't give up easily. Finally, when she saw she wasn't getting anyplace, it was every other day, then two days, once a week. She began finding fault with where I parked my car. It was in the way. I left eventually. But that's the way she worked it. All these guys, every one of them. But not me.[84]

Mrs. Bisttram contradicted this version by recalling that when the Guggenheim money was running short, and they were still in temporary quarters, it was Dorothy Brett who suggested they call on Mabel Dodge for studio space.[85] Both Bisttram and Mayrion agreed, however, that the arrangement was short-lived; less than a month.[86]

While Luhan's aversion to Bisttram was undoubtedly based on personal issues, it is likely that Luhan's primary objection to Bisttram was his use of dynamic symmetry. Luhan's letter to Diego Rivera to see if he really used dynamic symmetry was rooted in her disbelief, but also perhaps by her aversion to its mathematical basis. A letter from

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[84]Carlson, 17-18.

[85]Carlson, 42. After hearing Bisttram's account of renting the studio from Mabel, Carlson went to Mayrion to get her side of the story.

[86]Bisttram's aversion to Luhan was shared by many others. Udall, Modernist Painting, 66. In a lecture in his home town, Ernest Blumenschein, a founding member of Heptagon, spewed invectives against her. [Spud Johnson], "Blumenschein Indiscreet in Home Town," Taos Valley News, 2 May 1935.

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Dorothy Brett to Luhan defending the system suggests that Luhan was also critical of her using it. In her letter, Brett defends the system but deplores some people who use it, alluding, more than likely, to Bisttram.

> In regard to painting I think the mistake you all make is...that you blame the implement rather than the wielder of it...my theory is that no methods matter...whether you measure...or not...or use a brush...or a pencil...or chalk...you can be equally stupid with all of them...a stupid painter is STUPID and that is all there is to it!! Dynamic Symmetry is all right in itself..... to construct is all right...and absolutely necessary....but stupid people will be stupid....it's the same with all arts....put a pen into the hands of one man and he writes a brilliant beautiful book...put the same pen into the hands of another and he writes a stupid worthless book... is it the pen's fault...would the stupid man have done better with a pencil? tell a man the rules that govern poetry and one man will write magnificent poetry and the other rotten stuff.... and believe me that all there is to that.... Dynamic Symmetry is based on the laws that govern space and direction...therefore why not take advantage of the fact and follow those laws...so that the same laws govern your painting... if I were to paint a figure and put the arms where the ears are...what would you say? the law that governs our bodies puts our arms in a certain place... I make no improvement by changing that law.....[87]

While Dorothy Brett was introduced to dynamic symmetry by Bisttram, her commitment to it was reinforced when she found out that Bragdon used it:

> My dear Brett: My only answer to your undeserved reproaches in re Dynamic Symmetry is: "You never asked me!" As for "The Beautiful Necessity" I never push my own wares. But now that you have discovered D.S.--and a great discovery it is--I'm sending you an article of mine on "Regulating Lines," which will form one of the chapters--with much added--of my new book, "The Frozen Fountain" proofs of which I am reading now."[88]

Bisttram's vociferous support of dynamic symmetry was probably a lightning point for many disagreements in Taos. One of his first undertakings after returning from Mexico City was the organization of two series of lectures on dynamic symmetry and

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[87]Dorothy Brett, Philadephia, to (Mabel Dodge Luhan), TLS, 24 Jan. 1934, Mabel Dodge Luhan Papers, Beinecke Rare Book Library, Yale University.

[88]Claude Bragdon to (Dorothy Brett), ALS, 26 Jan. 1932, Dorothy Brett Papers, Beinecke Rare Book Library, Yale University.

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Denman Ross's color theory, one in Taos, and one in Santa Fe. Ernest Knee recalls that Bisttram descended on Taos and Santa Fe "like a hailstorm."[89] Others have hypothesized that Bisttram's promulgation of dynamic symmetry had a profound influence in New Mexico:

> Jim [Ballinger, Director of the Phoenix Art Museum] has a thesis that the work of practically all of the artists in the Taos, Santa Fe Gebiet took an upswing after Emil's arrival and his dissemination of the rules and practice of dynamic symmetry.[90]

All of the Taos artists undoubtedly attended these lectures; Victor Higgins, who was already using dynamic symmetry, was probably also very interested in Bisttram's point of view. Eya Fechin recalls that the lectures were held in the studio of Bert Phillips and that she attended with her father, the Russian émigré painter Nicolai Fechin. Eya Fechin recalls that her father was sympathetic to the system but felt that the good artist used it intuitively.[91] Sharyn Udall suggests that Maynard Dixon (1875-1946) attended Bisttram's Taos lectures and subsequently began experimenting with dynamic symmetry.[92] Dixon's most widely reproduced work from his Taos period, Earth Knower, 1931, was constructed with three vertical side-by-side Whirling Square rectangles.[93]

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[89]Udall, Modernist Painting, 196.

[90]George Schriever to (Mayrion Bisttram), TLS, 13 Jan. 1977, Schriever Papers, AAA.

[91]Eya Fechin, "Teenage Memories of Taos: Artist's Daughter Recollects the 'Real' America," American West 21, no. 6 (Nov.-Dec. 1984), 34. Eya Fechin also recalls frequent visits by Bisttram to her father's studio, and much talk of painting, metaphysics, and the occult. Eya Fechin, interview with the author, Sept. 1997.

[92]Sharyn Udall, Modernist Painting, 168. Dixon and his wife, the photographer Dorothea Lange, were in Taos off and on between 1930 and early 1932.

[93]For a reproduction of Dixon's Earth Knower, 1931, see Lois Rudnick, Utopian Vistas: The Mabael Dodge Luhan House and the American Counterculture (Albuquerque:

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Bisttram may have lectured fairly often, as the artist Gene Kloss, in another context, recalled Bisttram lecturing in Taos some time in the early 1930s to a large crowd that included Thornton Wilder in the audience.[94]

In Santa Fe the primary supporters of dynamic symmetry were the artist William Penhallow Henderson (1877-1943) and his wife, the writer Alice Corbin Henderson. While there is no record of where the Santa Fe lectures were held, they may have been held in the Henderson home, which was the center of artistic and literary activity in Santa Fe. William Henderson's complete devotion to dynamic symmetry was noted by Gustave Baumann.[95] Alice Corbin's dynamic symmetry proof of the old mystical challenge of "squaring the circle," located at the back of Bisttram's teaching notebook, indicates that her interest was sophisticated, and suggests that there was a close relationship between the Bisttrams and the Hendersons.[96] If Bisttram hadn't met Raymon Jonson earlier, they would have met at Bisttram's Santa Fe lectures. Jonson experimented with dynamic symmetry in the mid-1920s, but did not adopt it in his own painting. The Hendersons and Victor Higgins, the most active supporters of dynamic

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University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 149.

[94]Nancy Hopkins Reily with Lucille Enix, Joseph Imhof: Artist of the Pueblos (Santa Fe: Sunstone Press, 1998), 287. Wilder was a frequent guest of Luhan's in the 1930s. He spoke at a Taos Open Forum meeting during the winter of 1933, and visited for two weeks in Sept. 1934. [Spud Johnson], "Famous Novelist Here for Two Weeks," Taos Valley News, 13 Sept. 1934.

[95]Gustave Bauman, PWAP Reports, AAA, D155.

[96]The Hendersons were frequent visitors to Taos, especially after Dec. 1922 when their daughter married John Evans, the son of Mabel Dodge Luhan. Also, in 1923 John Evans, Edwin Brooks, and Bill Henderson began The Pueblo-Spanish Building Company, for which Bill Henderson designed furniture and buildings; the company was disbanded following the 1929 stock market crash.

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symmetry, were both from Chicago, and may have heard Hambidge's 1921 Scammon lectures at the Art Institute.

Another aspect of Bisttram's behavior that would have irritated Mabel Dodge was the friendships he developed with the local businessmen with whom he had coffee every day. The meeting places changed as well as the membership and the time, sometimes meeting in the mornings, other times in the afternoons, but this was a daily ritual with Bisttram up until his death. The businessmen he met with included, first of all, the cousins Jack and Howard Brandenburg. Jack Brandenburg was president of the local bank and was married to the daughter of the artist Oscar Berninghaus. He may have been Bisttram's closest friend. Howard Brandenberg was a lawyer in town. This was the group of people with whom he went fishing and hunting.[97] This group of friends contrasts sharply with the friends of Mabel Dodge Luhan. Mabel, who was a noted hostess, would have anyone over for dinner except members of the business and government community.[98] It was just this community that Bisttram cultivated. Bisttram felt that the business people in town needed to support the arts, and he appointed himself to be the one to continually put the interests of the artistic community before the businessmen, arguing that art was the business of Taos. For this purpose Bisttram even joined the Lion's Club, in which he remained active throughout his years in Taos. Bisttram's efforts were acknowledged in 1970 when he was named to the New Mexico Art Commission, and in 1975 when the Governor of New Mexico proclaimed Emil

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[97]Bisttram's skill at fishing is noted in an item in the local newspaper which credits him and one other person as being the best fishermen in town. Taos Review, 26 October 1939.

[98]Waters, Of Time and Change, 76.

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Bisttram Day on his eightieth birthday.

Another aspect of Bisttram's community activism was his involvement with the founding of the Taos Fire Department. The fire at the Don Fernando, which occurred on Sunday morning, 17 December 1933, between 2:00 and 5:00 am, in combination with the earlier fire of 10 May 1932, that devastated the north side of Taos Plaza, consuming the Country Court House with its newspaper collection, and a quarter of the central business district,[99] made it almost impossible to get fire insurance in Taos. A group of citizens, led by the artist and writer Blanche Grant, called a meeting on 28 December 1933, less than two weeks after the Don Fernando Fire, and organized the Taos Volunteer Fire Department. Bisttram was the only other artist active in this effort, serving as trustee in the first year, and as president in 1934.[100] During the late 1930s, the local newspaper was full of reports of fund-raising efforts to purchase a fire truck for the department. Complicating the constant threat of fire was the problem that there was no town water or sewer system, individuals being dependent on their own wells.[101] Further complicating matters was that the town was not incorporated.

Bisttram did, however, collaborate on one of Luhan's pet projects for town

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[99]David L. Witt, "The Courthouse Frescos," Taos Magazine (Winter 1987), 24.

[100]Pete Barela (no relation to the Taos sculptor Patrocinio Barela), who served as inspector of equipment during Bisttram's tenure as president, modeled for at least two of Bisttram's paintings from the 1930s, Cowboy and Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread. Archives of the Taos Volunteer Fire Department, Taos. In December 1954, Jack Boyer, president of the Volunteer Fire Department, added a meeting hall onto the Fire Department building, and started an art collection, in which Bisttram is represented by two paintings.

[101]Andrew Dasburg weighed in on the problem of a water system for Taos. Andrew Dasburg, "Nineteen Reasons for a Government Built Mountain Water Supply," Taos Valley News, 31 Jan. 1935.

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improvement in the early 1930s. He prepared the plans and drawings for Luhan's idea for a market with booths for use by farmers and craftspersons, to be erected on a plot of privately-owned land just off the main plaza. This collaboration shows that Bisttram and Luhan had similar concerns for the welfare and development of Taos, and suggests that it was a question of personalities which ultimately made them incompatible.[102]

By the late 1930s, however, Bisttram made up with many of his Taos colleagues. For example, in June 1939 Howard Cook brought Carl Zigrosser over to Bisttram's studio. In October, Mabel Dodge invited the Bisttrams to the going away party for Frank Waters, and in November Mrs. Bisttram served on a committee with Luhan.[103] In December, the Bisttrams were invited to one of the Dasburgs's musical events--a lunch after which guests listened to a broadcast of Wagner's Tannhauser.[104] In 1942, Bisttram executed a pencil portrait of the writer Spud Johnson.[105] Furthermore, probably some time in the 1940s Dorothy Brett began to study with Bisttram. Finally, Luhan included him in her seventh and final book, Taos and its Artists (1947). This turnabout in Bisttram's status resulted from his success with the La Fonda Gallery, and was reflected in his election to president of the Taos Artists Association in 1939 and 1940.

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[102][Spud Johnson], "Permanent Market Project O.K. Say Mayor and Village Council: Luhan, Farmer, Sandoval, Bisttram Sell Idea to Taos Officials," Taos Valley News, 7 June 1934.

[103]Taos Review, 26 Oct. 1939; 16 Nov. 1939.

[104]Taos Review, 21 Dec. 1939. For a description of these musical events and a personal view of Dasburg, see Frank Waters, Of Time and Change, 200-221.

[105]For a reproduction of Bisttram's portrait of Spud, see Udall, Spud Johnson, 88.

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La Fonda Gallery

Bisttram's success with the La Fonda Gallery was more enduring than that with Heptagon. After the Don Fernando Hotel burned, the owners decided not to rebuild. This encouraged the Karavas brothers, John and Jim, to expand and modernize their Columbian Hotel, also located on Taos Plaza. The Karavas brothers were special friends of the Taos artists, and showed their gratitude for their business by hosting an annual dinner for members of the Taos Artists Association, usually in the winter. Bisttram may have instigated this tradition, since he served as toastmaster for what may have been the first such dinner in 1934.[106] Bisttram was particularly good friends with the Karavas brothers, as well as with Jim's son Saki, who inherited the hotel. Saki acquired a number of important paintings by Bisttram; these works hung in the hotel lobby along with works by other artists. Most were acquired by trade in exchange for meals.

In 1939, the Karavas brothers invited Bisttram to organize an art gallery in their hotel, which had changed its name back to the original name, the Taos La Fonda Hotel. The officers for the La Fonda group were Bisttram, chairman; Regina Cooke, secretary and treasurer; and Alexandra Fechin, gallery attendant. The organizing committee also included Ila McAfee, Joseph Fleck, and Robert Gribbroeck. Other exhibiting members included E. L. Blumenschein, Bert Phillips, O. E. Berninghhaus, Charles Berninghaus, Blanche Grant and Dorothy Brett.[107] Only Brett and Bisttram had been members of Heptagon, and in effect the group represented a challenge to Heptagon. Most of the La Fonda members were more conservative than the Heptagon members, except that in the

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[106][Spud Johnson], "Jim & John Karavas Entertain 50 Artists at Elk Dinner Saturday," Taos Valley News, 29 Nov. 1934.

[107]Taos Review, 4 May 1939.

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meantime Bisttram, fully committed to a non-objective approach by now, had organized the Transcendental Painting Group. He and Gribbroeck, Bisttram's student and fellow member of the Transcendental Painting Group, were the most stylistically "advanced" of all the artists working in Taos at that time.

In January 1940 Holger Harthern took charge of the La Fonda Gallery, which was open year-round, compared to Heptagon, which had only operated during the tourist season.[108] In May of that year La Fonda Gallery was re-installed by Bisttram, Harthern, and a new member, E. Martin Hennings.[109] In August, Mrs. Ada Gribbroek (Robert Gribbroek's mother) was put in charge of the La Fonda Gallery.[110]

La Fonda Gallery, because of its prime location in the main hotel on Taos Plaza, and because of Bisttram's leadership, endured well into the 1970s.

Taos Artists Association

Bisttram's rise within the Taos Artists Association in the late 1930s also redeemed his political position in Taos. The Taos Society of Artists, established in 1915 by the founders of the Taos Art Colony, disbanded in 1927. In the 1930s another organization, the Taos Artists Association, was founded. The earlier organization had foundered because of the difficulties of achieving its main purpose: to organize traveling exhibitions of paintings by its members.

The 1930s organization was less ambitious, and seems to have been mostly

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[108]Taos Review, 11 Jan. 1940.

[109]Taos Review, 23 May 1940.

[110]Taos Review, 1 Aug. 1940.

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social. Information about this organization is scarce and can only be traced through the local newspaper. An item of 10 May 1934 notes that the previous evening the second meeting of the Taos Artists Association was held at Bert Phillips studio.[111] This may very well have been the start of this new organization. Bisttram was presumably active in organizing it since in 1935 he served as secretary.[112] For two terms, 1936 and 1937, the officers were E. L. Blumenschein, president; Bert Phllips, treasurer; and Blanche Grant, secretary. The executive board was composed of Andrew Dasburg, Ward Lockwood, O. E. Berninghaus, and Victor Higgins.[113]

One of the issues that galvanized members during this period revolved around the granting of fees to artists for exhibiting works of art in invited and juried museum exhibitions. This policy, which had been endorsed by the American Society of Painters, Sculptors, and Gravers, was quickly supported by the Taos Artists Association.[114] They may have been encouraged to do so by a letter addressed to Bisttram, from Stanley Lothrop, general director of the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, officially adopting the rental policy at their museum.[115] Andrew Dasburg was an outspoken supporter of this plan, and published an articles on the subject in the local paper.[116] Enthusiasm for

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[111][Spud Johnson], Taos Valley News, 10 May 1934.

[112]Bisttram is addressed as Secretary, Taos Artists Association, in two letters from Washington, D.C. related to TRAP. Olin Dows, Chief, TRAP, to (Bisttram, Secretary, Taos Artists Association), SLT, 27 Sept. 1935, BP, AAA 2892:276.

[113]"Artists Ass'n Has Business Meeting," Taos Review, 24 Dec. 1936.

[114][Spud Johnson], "Rental Charge," Taos Valley News, 15 Aug. 1935.

[115]"Art Center Approves Loan Rental Policy," Taos Valley News, 9 July 1936.

[116]Andrew Dasburg, "The Need for Rental Policy in the Development of Art," Taos Valley News, 9 July 1936.

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this concept was so great that a new constitution was drafted for the Taos Artists Association,[117] and was adopted in February 1937.[118]

Because of all this activity, the artists in Santa Fe also decided to form an artists association. In December 1936 Dasburg went down to Santa Fe to talk to the Santa Fe artists about forming an Association similar to the Taos organization.[119] In February 1937, the artists in Albuquerque also decided to form an artists association. To assist them Bisttram, Blumenschein, and Robert Sprague went to Albuquerque in an advisory capacity. The Albuquerque group was chaired by Loren Mozley, who had recently been appointed to the faculty of the University of New Mexico. The group included artists, writers, and musicians and numbered forty members.[120] In the meantime the Painters, Sculptors, and Gravers Association withdrew their idea that art works should be accorded a rental fee in museum exhibitions.[121]

In February 1938, another political issue presented itself to the Taos Artists Association. Bill Lumpkins came up from Santa Fe and urged the members to support the Coffee Bill (Fine Arts Bill).[122] The officers of the Taos Artists Association for 1938 were O. E. Berninghaus, President; Ila McAfee and Manville Chapman, secretary; and Martin Hennings, Treasurer.

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[117]Taos Review, 19 Nov. 1936.

[118]Taos Review, 4 Feb. 1937.

[119]Taos Review, 3 Dec. 1936.

[120]Taos Review, 25 Mar. 1937.

[121]Taos Review, 25 Feb. 1937.

[122]Taos Review, 2 Feb. 1938.

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In 1939 Bisttram was elected president; Regina Cooke, secretary; and Martin Hennings, treasurer; the slate was reelected in 1940.[123] Art Association activities for 1939 and 1940 proved to be more social--an annual Artists Costume Ball was instituted as the culminating event of the annual Fiesta Day celebrations. In 1940 organizational appointments included: Spud Johnson, chair, Publicity Committee; Ila McAfee Turner, Membership; Barbara Latham, entertainment; and Mayrion Bisttram and Martin Hennings in charge of the Costume Ball.[124] This collaboration may have been engineered by Bisttram as he had been a founding member of the Taos Fiesta Corporation and was appointed as a two-term director (with nine others) for 1940 and 1941.[125]

In both 1939 and 1940 decorations for the Artists Ball included caricature self-portraits by the artists.[126] Figure 78 is a photo of what was undoubtedly one of Bisttram's contributions. This self portrait is very revealing. It shows Bisttram dressed in monk's clothing and praying, smoking a cigar, and sporting both horns and a tail. Additionally, a female nude is perched on the tip of the tail. This dual representation reveals Bisttram's humorous side, his often biting sarcasm, and his enjoyment of practical jokes. More importantly, however, it shows Bisttram's complete assimilation of

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[123]Taos Review, 10 Nov. 1938; 7 Dec. 1939. In 1941 Bisttram was succeeded as president by Eleanora Kissel. Bob Gribbroeck was elected secretary, Mary Valentine treasurer, Blanche C. Grant chairman of publicity, and Mayrion Bisttram chairman of entertainment.

[124]Taos Review, 23 May 1940.

[125]Taos Review, 19 Oct. 1939.

[126]"Costume Ball on July 26 Will Be Baile of Beauty and Imagination," Taos Review, 11 July 1940.

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Blavatsky's concept of duality. For Blavatsky, the serpent was not evil, but rather the symbol of earthly wisdom that complemented heavenly wisdom.

What is most interesting about the process in which Bisttram redeemed his position in Taos is that it was essentially regressive, that is, Bisttram rallied the more conservative elements of the Taos art scene, the representational painters, rather than the modernists.

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Chapter 10

First Taos Works

An examination of the works that Bisttram executed in the year following his study in Mexico reveals a new, more developed sense of form and composition, particularly in the treatment of the human figure. Not surprisingly these works are strongly colored by his experiences in Mexico and are stylistically influenced by Rivera and Picasso. Bisttram's themes, however, also relate to the religious and mystical concerns of his New York period. The most persistent of these themes is the psychological dimensions of the various stages involved in the "regeneration of man," which he developed most elaborately in his Three-Year Course in Fine Arts. In these works he takes this theme further, asserting that this problem is universal must be addressed as part of the unfolding of the Aquarian Age. Also, not unexpectedly, he finds order and rhythm in the lives of native Mexican women as they carry on their daily tasks.

An early example of Bisttram's interest in psychological states of mind is found in his drawing Adoration, 1931 (fig. 79), which is based on Picasso's Mother and Child, 1921 (fig. 80).[1] The pose of the mother, who is seated on the ground, the position of her crossed feet, and the high horizon line, are obvious similarities between the two works. Picasso's interpretation of this familiar subject probably appealed to Bisttram because of the clarity of its underlying structure and the intimacy between the figures. Bisttram altered the composition by arranging it in a square format and bringing the child into closer contact with the mother. The influence of Rivera is apparent in the more rounded and condensed form of the woman and in her peasant costume, elements

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[1]Bisttram undoubtedly worked from the reproduction of Picasso's Mother and Child in The John Quinn Collection of Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture, 101.

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that provide a strong religious association, in contrast to Picasso's more secular and classical combination.

The dynamic symmetry lines Bisttram used in this composition are visible on the original drawing and reveal that he divided the square into interlocking root-five rectangles (fig. 81). The upper left to lower right diagonal of the upper root-five rectangle provides the angle for the nose and head of the woman as well as the line of contact between her and the child. Also the horizon line that cuts the upper root-five3 rectangle in half lengthwise crosses her face at the bridge of her nose. The intersection of lines in her forehead, like those in the head of Christ in Bisttram's The Last Supper (fig. 59) indicate Bisttram's religious, mystical intentions for this work.

Heindel provides a text that takes the meaning of this work beyond the traditionally Christian "Virgin and Child" theme by identifying "Adoration" as the highest spiritual level attainable. For Heindel, Adoration is the culmination of a series beginning with Concentration, proceeding to Meditation, Observation, Discrimination, Contemplation, and finally Adoration.

> When this height has been reached by Contemplation, and the aspirant has realized that he is in truth beholding God in the Life that permeates all things, there remains still to be taken the highest step, Adoration, whereby he unites himself with the Source of all things, reaching by that act the highest goal possible of attainment by man until the time when the permanent union takes place at the end of the great Day of Manifestation.[2]

Adoration, then, is a state of mind.

Consolation (fig. 82)[3] is a related work strongly influenced by both Picasso and

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[2]Heindel, The Rosicrucian Cosmo Conception, 495.

[3]Consolation was exhibited at the 45th Annual Exhibition of American Paintings and Sculpture, The Art Institute of Chicago, 27 Oct. 1932-2 Jan. 1933, no. 20.

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Rivera, and, like Adoration, is executed in a square format. Bisttram's image depicts two lovers embracing. Their dress indicates that they are Mexican peasants. The characterizations of the man and woman are poignant and simple--the man described by beard, dark skin, and larger limbs and hands; and the woman by lighter skin, long hair, and skirt. The figures are convincingly seated and scaled despite the lack of setting or even a ground line. Their hidden faces heighten the highly-charged emotional atmosphere by allowing freer reign to the viewer's imagination. The symbolism of the scene is enhanced by the soft diffusion of light that surrounds the couple.

The source for Consolation is most likely Picasso's Sleeping Peasants, 1919 (fig. 83).[4] Bisttram again seems to have been challenged by Picasso's treatment of subject and strong sense of geometry. Like in Adoration, Bisttram arranges the design into a square format and transforms Picasso's European setting into a Mexican setting.

Bisttram again divides the square into four interlocking root-five rectangles, with the diagonals of the upper horizontal root-five rectangle converging in the forehead of the male figure (fig. 84). The diagonal from upper left to lower right forms the inclination of his head, and the diagonal from upper right to lower left forms the upper line of the woman's arm.

In many ways Adoration and Consolation can be considered a pair, one sacred love, the other profane love. The pairing of these two works is confirmed by their similar treatment within the square format, the same method of analyzing the square into interlocking root-five rectangles, and the similar placement of the forehead of the main figure along the central vertical axis at the intersection of the diagonals of the

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[4]Bisttram could have worked from the reproduction of Sleeping Peasants (Moissoneurs) in Raynal, Plate XXIX.

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upper root-five rectangle. This placement suggests that Bisttram was emphasizing the spiritual nature of these individuals by referring to "the third eye," discussed in relation to The Head of Christ (fig. 34). This source for this dual interpretation of love is discussed below.

Another work related to Picasso's Sleeping Peasants, is Bisttram's Sleeping Adam, 1931 (fig. 85), a full-length, reclining male nude, set against a mountainous landscape.[5] While Sleeping Adam is very different from Sleeping Peasants, the subject of sleep ties the works closely together, especially since the drawings for both Consolation and Sleeping Adam were done in 1931, probably within a month or so of each other.[6]

This fairly unusual biblical subject depicts the sleep that the Lord brought over Adam when one of his ribs was removed to create woman.[7] Adolph Roeder's book Symbol Psychology (1903), a Swedenborgian interpretation of mythological and biblical stories, which is the first book on Bisttram's reading list of 1930, provides an interpretation for this work in the chapter devoted to stories that involve sleep. Roeder's analysis of "sleeping men" stories explains that the association with mountains is a critical element of the symbolism. For Roeder, the sleeping man represents "the dormant faculties of mankind," which are man's higher faculties. These higher faculties

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[5]Jim Parsons sold the painting done after this drawing to Saki Karavas. It is now in a private collection in Albuquerque, NM. Jim Parsons, conversation with the author, October, 1998.

[6]Drawings for both works were among those sent to the Guggenheim as part of his application for the renewal of his Fellowship in Jan. 1932.

[7]"And Jehovah God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in the place thereof. And the rib which Jehovah God had taken from the man, he built into a woman, and brought her to the man." Genesis 2:21-22.

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are associated by correspondence with mountains because mountains are geographically the highest points on the earth, and therefore represent the struggle that is necessary for man to achieve perfection. Consequently, the two motifs, the sleeping man and the mountains, represent two different states of being, one lower and the other higher. The sleeping man, the real, inner man, will soon be awakened by Divine Compassion.[8]

Sleeping Adam can then be interpreted as symbolizing the essential duality of man: the outer, external man that sleeps, and the internal man with god-like qualities that will soon awake.[9] This story relates to the theme of the regeneration of man that Bisttram used in his Seven Days Creation chart, his Three Year Course, Study for "Resurrection" (fig. 57), and Blake's reading of The Book of Job. This interpretation makes it possible to identify Sleeping Adam with Man Unawakened on the checklist for Bisttram's April 1933 exhibition at the Witte Museum.[10]

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[8]Adolph Roeder, Symbol Psychology: A New Interpretation of Race-Traditions (Philadelphia: The Nunc Licet Press, 1903), 128-142. Adolph Roeder (1859-1931), editor of a number of Swedenborgian journals, was ordained by the Rev. Chauncy Giles in 1880 and was an active minister in the General Convention. Roeder's book seems to be informed by a reading of Blavatsky. This confluence is confirmed in the reading of Bisttram's picture, given below, as the beginning of a new era. For Blavatsky, the birth of Eve, or the separation of the sexes, inaugurated a new root-race.

[9]Sleep representing a state of consciousness is also found in Hindu philosophy's four states of consciousness, "sleep, dream, waking, and the state of absolute consciousness–turiya." Annie Besant, The Ancient Wisdom, quoted in Ouspensky, 215.

[10]This exhibition traveled from the Houston Museum of Fine Arts to the University Museum, Denton, to the Witte Museum, San Antonio, between Feb. and April 1933. The Witte Museum has complete documentation of the tour of this exhibition, including the checklist. The exhibition included 7 paintings: The Argument, The Tortilla Makers, Eve of the Pueblo, Sun Lightening, Rosita, The Builders, Bing Abbot; 13 watercolors: Grand Canyon at Night, Ranchos Church, Pueblo Fiesta, Taos Mountain, Autumn, Mass– Ranchos Church, Reflections, Sand Hills and Mountains, Arcadia, Soliloquy, Sand Dunes at Sunset, Arizona Red and Gold, Gotterdammerung and 15 drawings: Market Woman, Tosita and Doll, Study of Pueblo Indian Girl, Study of Pueblo Indian Girl, Bullfight, The Family, Mexican Poor, Mexican Funeral, The Revelation,

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Another interpretation for Sleeping Adam is provided in the essay "The New Era of Life and Art," which Bisttram wrote shortly after returning to Taos from Mexico. This essay correlates Leo Katz's four art cycles--archaic, classical, impressionist, and expressionist with cycles of nature including birth, growth, maturity, and death; seed, stem, flower, and fruit; childhood, youth, manhood, and old age; and the four seasons. Bisttram then associates the dawning Aquarian Age with the beginning of the impressionist cycle. Bisttram's association of manhood with the impressionist cycle and the Aquarian Age suggests that Sleeping Adam represents the latency of the new era.

Furthermore, Bisttram describes this new era in terms of awakening manhood, when man, gaining self-consciousness, is faced with the choice between developing personal power at the expense of others, or dedicating himself to the improvement of others:

> Today we are on the threshold of a new cycle in man's evolution called the Aquarian Era. (We are just passing out of the Piscean Era.) The focal point of man's destiny, the Impressionistic or the Manhood cycle of man's evolution, the flowering forth of his conscious egoic nature, when nations as well as individuals are becoming conscious of their Divine state of Manhood. The era when the great struggle in man as well as nations and races, between the higher and lower nature is most operant... The new incoming vibrations insist on man coming into harmony with his higher self, or he must go down and suffer bitterly.[11]

Bisttram also specifies that each cycle includes four sub-cycles of the same order. Writing of the sub-cycles within the larger Impressionist phase, he identifies the cubists, working in a geometric style, with the archaic phase of the larger Impressionist cycle,

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Adoration, Man Crucified, Man Unawakened, Eternal Search, Winter, Consolation.

[11]Bisttram, "The New Era in Art and Life," AMs, 1931, William Warder Papers. This essay is precisely dated. It was begun on 21 Sept. 1931 and was completed a week later, on 27 Sept. 1931. This essay was the basis of Bisttram's article " "Art's Revolt in the Desert," Contemporary Arts of the South and Southwest (Dallas) 1, no. 2 (Jan.-Feb. 1933): 4-5.

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and implies that he is already working in the next phase, the classicist.

> The many schools experimenting with cubism or the geometry of space, and two-dimensional planes also symbolize all subjective expressions. While the race and nations may not be even conscious of the first or Archaic movement and the smaller cycle amongst artists, the classical period is already born and functioning. Within individuals and groups the form cycles may be gone through in a lifetime or within a few years, while others have not even begun to be conscious of their possibilities or even the existence of a new Era of art.[12]

Bisttram's positioning of himself within the classical tradition accurately describes the works he was executing during this period. His vision of himself as a classicist persists, even mentioning it in his 1938 statement for Rudhyar's book, cited in Chapter 4. His views may also reflect his observation of Rivera's development, and even of Rivera's view of himself. The date he began his essay, 21 September 1931, was presumably just after returning from Mexico. In this context, his recourse to Picasso makes sense. Later he acknowledged Picasso's influence as follows:

> That's the way ideas come, from impressions. You don't know where most of the time. But there's nothing new, the ideas are always the same, it's the way they're shown that's new. There's very little that's new and original. Picasso wasn't original. He always took his ideas from something else. I've always called him the great destroyer. He had the courage to break down all the past and start from scratch. He was the one who made it possible for all this that came after. No one would have known where to start otherwise. Myself for instance. Jesus, I wouldn't have known what to do, where to begin. Especially with my background of academic training. He did it by accident, too. He was copying a Cézanne. An artist came in, as they did then, working and talking. He quickly took it off the easel and put [it] aside and upside down. The artist friend said, "My God, what have you got there? It's good." And for the first time he realized shapes were the important thing and their relation to space.[13]

Since Rivera and Picasso had been such close friends in Paris, and Rivera was essentially working in a style very similar to Picasso's neo-classic phase, Rivera may have directed

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[12]Bisttram, "The New Era in Art and Life."

[13]Bisttram, quoted by Carlson, 23-24.

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Bisttram's attention to Picasso's style. Rivera may have even remarked to Bisttram, as he did to Edward Weston, that Picasso never worked from nature, but always worked from other schools of art,[14] which may have encouraged Bisttram to rely on precedent.

Bisttram concludes his essay, "The New Era in Life and Art" with a manifesto:

> Then man will realize that one cannot afford to express his lower nature without being judged according to his own standard. Hence the artist realizes that in order to be recognized as a great artist, they must realize that they are instruments of a higher purpose, an interpreter of the totality of life as experience. He is a seeker after the truth creating and molding life anew, he is a synthesizer of the reality of religion and the truth of science. The artist is a recreator, creating order, harmony and beauty out of chaos--he is teacher, a guide that leads mankind to the portals of self knowledge. He places before men the divine ideal. He is a priest, a magician by virtue of the power within him bestowed upon him through self-discipline, meditation, and contemplation and the structure of morality, tolerance, and humility, and, above all, love--love of God, love of mankind, and finally love of his work, which because and through the manifestation of Divine spirit within him and others, he becomes the genius.[15]

Seen in the light of this essay, Sleeping Adam becomes an archetypal image of an era, of the Aquarian Age, of its possibilities and pitfalls. The theory of cycles provides Bisttram with a way of approaching the chaos that he sees in the world--1931 is the depths of the depression--and in the wide array of current art styles. Furthermore, this last paragraph of his essay is very similar to the statement he prepared for Rudhyar's book on Transcendental Painting cited in Chapter 4. His conclusion, that the current period is impressionistic, via Katz's theory of cycles, is a reorientation after a new awakening to the possibilities of art experienced in Mexico. His statement that the artist is a "recreator, creating order, harmony and beauty out of chaos" reaffirms his aesthetic credo.

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[14]Edward Weston, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, ed., Nancy Newhall, 2 vol. (Millerton, NY: Aperture, 1961), I, 57.

[15]Ibid.

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Bisttram's opening paragraph for this essay provides a link to one of the sources for his essay as well as a key to the meaning of another work:

> Ouspensky said the meaning of life is eternal search and only in that search will he find something truly new. Therefore let us search in the bosom of nature and within life itself for the causes, the results, and effects of which we are about us daily.[16]

Bisttram is quoting from the last two sentences in Ouspensky's Tertium Organum (1911), "The meaning of life is in eternal search. And only in that search can we find something truly new." Ouspensky's aesthetic of "eternal search" was so important to Bisttram that he executed a drawing based on this theme. It was described as follows:

> One of his drawings is of an abstract and symbolic nature called Eternal Search--a figure forging ahead and shafts of light in overlapping triangles with suggestions of other forms into which one may read what he likes, but which, aside from the meaning, is interesting as pure abstraction.[17]

Ouspensky's theory of eternal search maintained that when an artist settled into one theme or style, he became stale:

> Art serves beauty, i.e., emotional knowledge of its own kind. Art discovers beauty in everything, and compels man to feel it and therefore to know. Art is a powerful instrument of knowledge of the noumenal world: mysterious depths, each one more amazing than the last, open to the vision of man when he holds in his hands this magical key. But let him only think that this mystery is not for knowledge but for pleasure in it, and all the charm disappears at once. Just as soon as art begins to take delight in that beauty which is already found, instead of the search for new beauty an arrestment occurs and art becomes a superfluous estheticism, encompassing man's vision like a wall. The aim of art is the search for beauty, just as the aim of religion is the search for God and truth. And exactly as art stops, so religion stops also as soon as it ceases to search for God and truth, thinking it has found them. This idea is expressed in the precept: Seek... the kingdom of God and his righteousness... It does not say, find; but merely, seek![18]

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[16]Ibid.

[17]Press Release, Bisttram Exhibition, Witte Museum, Bisttram File, Witte Museum. The author has not located this drawing.

[18]Ouspensky, 207.

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Bisttram essentially followed this prescription during the entire course of his artistic life: as a result he never stayed with any one style, nor can any one style be described as his mature or signature style. A reviewer, in an article published in 1934, quoted Bisttram articulating this very idea:

> "Of course, and when you come again perhaps there will be another difference, for I'm always experimenting. As I paint today may not be the way I'll paint next month. I'm always studying and I hope always growing." Which I think is true. Bisttram is essentially an explorer and is never satisfied with the commonplace.[19]

Bisttram also maintained that art, philosophy, and science were fundamentally interrelated, an idea also expressed by Ouspensky:

> Science, philosophy, religion and art are forms of knowledge. The method of science is experiment; the method of philosophy is speculation; the method of religion and art is moral or esthetic emotional inspiration. But both science and philosophy, religion and art, begin to serve the knowledge only when in them commence to manifest the sensing and finding of some inner property in things. In general it is quite possible to say--and perhaps it will be most true to fact--that the aim of even purely intellectual systems of philosophy and science consists not at all in the giving to man of certain data of knowledge, but in the raising of man to such a height of thinking and feeling as to enable him to pass to those new and higher forms of knowledge to which art and religion approach more nearly. It is necessary however to remember that these very divisions into science, philosophy, religion and art betray the poetry and incompleteness of each. A complete religion unites in itself religion, art, philosophy and science; a complete art equally unites them, while a complete science or a complete philosophy comprehends religion and art. A religion which contradicts science, and a science which contradicts religion are both equally false.[20]

Tertium Organum is, first of all, a repudiation of positivism (materialism), a philosophical system that regards phenomena as the basis of reality and limits itself to finding causes in other phenomena. The principal idea that Ouspensky develops is the concept of the fourth dimension, in which he places causes, in contrast to the positivists

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[19]Ina Sizer Cassidy, "Emil Bisttram," New Mexico Magazine 12, no. 9 (Sept. 1934), 17.

[20]Ouspensky, 208.

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who place causes in other three-dimensional physical phenomena. Finally, Ouspensky associates the mystic state of consciousness with the fourth dimension. Ouspensky concludes with a chart of four stages or forms of consciousness, keyed to the analogy that he used in the development of his description of the fourth dimension. The first stage of consciousness is analogous to a sense of one-dimensional space related to the line; the second stage of consciousness is analogous to a sense of two-dimensional space related to the plane; the third stage of consciousness is analogous to a sense of three-dimensional space related to the sphere; and the fourth stage of consciousness, the most developed, is four-dimensional and cosmic. Ouspensky posits that man's consciousness is evolving, and that those who are most evolved are approaching a fourth-dimensional consciousness. Ouspensky's characterization of the third form of consciousness by the sense of three-dimensional space probably contributed to Bisttram's identification of Katz's third cycle, the impressionist cycle, with the incoming Aquarian Age.

Ouspensky's interpretation of love also sheds light on Bisttram's two pictures, Adoration (fig. 79) and Consolation (fig. 82) provides further confirmation that they should be interpreted as a pair, as sacred and profane love. For Ouspensky, love is the primary creative energy produced by man. While the positivists only see children as the product of love, Ouspensky sees love--of whatever order--as an infinitely creative energy,

> a tempest of emotions, feelings, effervescences, desires, thoughts, dreams, fantasies, inner creations [that are] transformed into other forms of energy... the energy of love transforms itself into instincts, ideas, creative forces on different planes of life; into symbols of art, song, music, poetry; so can we easily imagine how the same energy may transform itself into a higher order of intuition, into a higher consciousness... love is the motive force which drives the creative activity in the most diverse directions.[21]

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[21]Ouspensky, 152.

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The infinite creative energy of emotion, once purified and disciplined, then becomes the key to higher consciousness and the stimulation for creative activity:

> The content of emotional feelings, even the simplest–to say nothing of the complex--can never be wholly confined to concepts or ideas, and therefore can never be correctly or exactly expressed in words. Words can only allude to it, point to it. The interpretation of emotional feelings and emotional understanding is the problem of art. ... The combination of feeling and thought of high tension leads to a higher form of psychic life. Thus in art we have already the first experiments in a language of the future. Art anticipates a psychic evolution and divines its future forms.[22]

For Ouspensky, this purification of the emotions involves a liberation "from the personal elements, and their sublimation of the higher planes."[23] This necessity for achieving the impersonal is one of the primary elements in Katz's theory of art and one of Bisttram's objectives for his own art.

Ouspensky further distinguishes between materialistic emotions and harmonizing emotions, and between pure and impure emotions. He links the purity of emotions to morality and aesthetics: "That which is not moral is first of all not beautiful, because not concordant, not harmonious."[24] For Ouspensky, one of the highest emotions is "the pleasure of activity. This emotion is a powerful motive force in culture, and of service in the perfection of life in the evolution of all higher faculties of man."[25] He goes on to advise that for perfect attainment, daily activity, morality, and aesthetics must be combined:

> Morality should be the co-ordination and the necessity for the co-ordination of all

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[22]Ibid., 73.

[23]Ibid., 199.

[24]Ibid., 203.

[25]Ibid., 203.

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> sides of life... Esthetics--the sense of beauty--is the sensation of the relation of part to a whole, and the perception of the necessity for a certain harmonious relation. And morality is the same. Those actions, thoughts and feelings are not moral which are not co-ordinated, which are not harmonious with the higher understanding and the higher sensations accessible to man.[26]

Bisttram's concept of the artist as magician and translator of the truth for the layman is also found in Ouspensky:

> All art, in essence, consists of the understanding and representation of these elusive differences [e.g, the difference between a stone in the wall of a church and a stone in the wall of a prison]. The phenomenal world is merely a means for the artist--just as colors are for the painter, and sounds for the musician--a means for the understanding of the noumenal world and for the expression of that understanding. At the present stage of our development we possess nothing so powerful, as an instrument of knowledge of the world of causes, as art. The mystery of life dwells in the fact that the noumenon, i.e., the hidden meaning and the hidden function of a thing is reflected in its phenomenon. A phenomenon is merely the reflection of a noumenon in our sphere. The phenomenon is the image of the noumenon. It is possible to know the noumenon by the phenomenon. But in this field the chemical reagents and spectroscopes can accomplish nothing. Only that fine apparatus which is called the soul of an artist can understand and feel the reflection of the noumenon in the phenomenon. In art it is necessary to study "occultism"--the hidden side of life. The artist must be a clairvoyant: he must see that which others do not see; he must be a magician: must possess the power to make others see that which they do not themselves see, but which he does see.
>
> Art sees more and farther than we do. As was said before, we usually see nothing, we merely feel our way; therefore we do not notice those differences between things which cannot be expressed in terms of chemistry or physics. But art is the beginning of vision; it sees vastly more than the most perfect apparatus can discover; and it senses the infinite invisible facets of that crystal, one facet of which we call man.[27]

The title of Bisttram's essay "The New Era of Life and Art" probably derives from Charles Hinton's A New Era of Thought (1888), one of the most frequently cited sources in Tertium Organum. A New Era of Thought describes a procedure for gaining a sense of

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[26]Ibid, 204.

[27]Ibid, 144-5.

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the fourth dimension by examining cubes. Bisttram may well have read this book.[28]

Bisttram also interpreted two other subjects from Genesis during this period, The Temptation of Adam and Eve (fig. 86) and Adam and Eve and the First Born (fig. 87). Another work, Combat (fig. 88), is closely related. The Temptation of Adam and Eve (fig. 86) portrays Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Here Eve is depicted with the fullness of figure characteristic of this period of Bisttram's development, in contrast to the diminutive figures of Adam and Eve in The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden (fig. 31) executed in the 1920s. Here the serpent is large and corpulent, encircles the seated Eve, and tempts her with the forbidden fruit from above. The fleshiness of Eve and the serpent convincingly expresses the sensuality of Swedenborg's interpretation of the temptation.

The Temptation of Adams and Eve (fig. 86) is closely related to a series of four female nudes, Continence, Knowledge (fig. 89), Strength, and Purity that Rivera executed in fresco in the Conference Room of the Ministry of Health and Sanitation in Mexico City in 1929. In both Continence and Knowledge a serpent is used to carry the symbolism. In Continence, a reclining nude crushes a serpent, grasping it by both head and tail, indicating that good has overcome evil. In Knowledge (fig. 89), the work that most influenced Bisttram's concept, a seated woman holds a flower in her hand "symbolizing germination" while a massive serpent whispers "the secrets of life" in her ear. The serpent entwined around the tree takes on the form of the cadeuceus, the

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[28]Charles Howard Hinton, A New Era of Thought (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., Ltd., 1888).

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symbol of medicine, and combined with its title, unequivocally symbolizes good.[29] In Mexico the serpent is a potent symbol: an eagle perched on a cactus with a serpent in its mouth appears on the national flag. This image symbolizes the founding of Mexico. The Aztecs founded Mexico by following the prophecy to settle where they first saw an eagle with a serpent in its mouth perched on a cactus.[30] Since Rivera was familiar with theosophy,[31] his interpretation of the snake as a bringer of knowledge may be a nod to Blavatsky.

In Bisttram's Temptation (fig. 86), however, the serpent represents evil as it did in his Expulsion (fig. 31). This is underscored by the depiction of Adam in agony, turning away as if he were going to resist. While Adam is undoubtedly a veiled self-portrait, a graphic effort to grapple with personal issues, he is also a universal symbol representing the psychological dimensions of resisting temptation.

The Combat, 1932 (fig. 87),[32] is a part of this series because "combat" is a specifically Swedenborgian term that represents temptation in the Swedenborgian process of the regeneration of man:

> In the course of regeneration, when man is being made spiritual, he is continually engaged in combat, on which account the church of the Lord is called "militant"; for before regeneration cupidities have the dominion, because the whole man is

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[29]Antonio Rodriguez, Diego Rivera Mural Painting (Mexico City: Fondo Editorial de la Plastica Mexicana, Trusteeship in the Banco Nacional de Comercio Exterior, 1991), 57.

[30]Folgarait, 22.

[31]Favela, 123.

[32]Combat and Los Penitentes were included in the exhibition Artist Fellows of the Guggenheim Foundation at the Whitney Museum, 3-27 April 1933. Combat was also illustrated in the 1934 Cassidy article, in which Bisttram made his statement about "eternal search." Cassidy, 17.

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> composed of mere cupidities and the falsities thence derived. During regeneration these cupidities and falsities cannot be instantaneously abolished... In the time of combat, the evil spirits, who bear the utmost hatred against all that is good and true, that is, against whatever is of love and faith toward the Lord...[33]

Swedenborg interpreted all the wars in the Bible as temptations and combats:

> In very ancient times also, many things were represented by wars, which they called the wars of Jehovah, and which signified nothing else than the combats of the church, and of those who were of the church, that is, their temptations, which are nothing but combats and wars with the evils in themselves, and consequently with the diabolical crew that excite the evils, and endeavor to destroy the church and the man of the church.[34]

Bisttram's depiction of two men on horseback engaged in battle is thus a symbolic interpretation of the struggles or "labors" that a man must undertake in order to perfect himself. The contrast between weapons, the triumphant man in the upper part of the composition wielding a sword, and the man with face averted wielding a wooden club, supports the interpretation of the struggle as a confrontation between the higher and lower selves. The nudity of both figures, their undefined faces, and the lack of saddles on the horses muster an array of primal, archaic, and psychological symbols that depict an internal battle between good and evil. The symbols also serve to depersonalize and universalize the composition.

Like The Temptation of Adam and Eve (fig. 86) and Sleeping Adam (fig. 85), Combat references regeneration, self-perfection, and "cosmic consciousness," goals set by Heindel, Ouspensky, and Swedenborg. This Swedenborgian interpretation of Combat may also be applied to Bisttram's use of the knight on a horse with a sword in a cloud

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[33]Swedenborg, Arcana Coelestia, I, para 59.

[34]Ibid., 2, para. 1659 [3]. Bisttram's representation similar to Swedenborg's interpretation of "Jacob Wrestling with the Angel" as a combat of temptations. Ibid., VI, para. 4274.

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(fig. 60). Bisttram returned to the theme of the man on a horse with a sword in an extensive series of drawings and paintings in the 1950s; the drawings for this series are in the collection of the Harwood Museum.

The Combat is more schematically and symbolically drawn than, for example, Adoration, which is rendered in more detail. This is probably due to the difference in subject matter. It should be noted, however, that for his figural compositions Bisttram often worked up an image in a number of successively more refined drawings. The Family,[35] for example, the study for Adam and Eve and the First Born (fig. 87) discussed below, is in a similar stage of development as The Combat.

Bisttram's intentions for Adam and Eve and the First Born, 1931 (fig. 87), are similarly steeped in Swedenborg. Adam and Eve sit on a couch with their eldest child on Eve's lap. Adam rests his head on his hand in a traditionally melancolic pose, which, combined with the staff in his other hand and the dog at his feet, separates him physically and psychologically from Eve. This separation is reminiscent of old master depictions in which Joseph is iconographically distanced from Mary and the Christ child. The source, however, is Picasso's Deux Femmes Nues (fig. 90),[36] which provides elements of the poses (the figure at the right leans her head on her hand), the fullness of the figures, and the drape behind the figure at the right. Bisttram's depiction, unfortunately, does not do justice to Picasso's work. Picasso has emphasized the relationship between his two figures by a complex system of gesture and pose that is lacking in Bisttram's interpretation.

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[35]The Family is in the collection of U.S. Bank, Minneapolis.

[36]Picasso's Deux Femmes Nues is reproduced in The John Quinn Collection of Paintings, Water Colors, Drawings & Sculpture, 98.

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Adam and Eve and the First Born is a fairly unusual subject. Since Cain, the eldest son of Adam and Eve, murdered his younger brother Abel, the picture is clearly about original sin. Supporting the doctrine of original sin, Swedenborg held that the sins of the parents are visited on the children. For Swedenborg, Cain represents faith, and Abel represents love, two that should live together as brethren.[37] If Bisttram is following the symbolism that Blake used in Job, then the forward thrust of Eve's left foot indicates a state of evil. The nudity of Adam and Eve in this context is unconventional since nudity usually characterizes their state before their fall from grace. The mother feeds the child with her hand; the intimate relationship between mother and child displayed in Adoration is missing here. [38]

A close reading of Swedenborg suggests that Adam and Eve and the First Born may, like Sleeping Adam and Combat, depict one of the states of the regeneration of man. Swedenborg distinguishes between two types of hereditary evil, hereditary evil from the father, which is in the internal man; and hereditary evil from the mother, which is in the external man. Hereditary evil from the mother, which is clearly the subject of Adam and Eve and the First Born, is that which is combated during the period of temptations and leads to regeneration:

> The Lord's heredity from the Father was the Divine, but his heredity from the mother was the infirm human. This infirm nature which a man derives hereditarily from his mother is something corporeal that is dispersed when he is

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[37]Swedenborg, Arcana Coelestia, 1, para. 367. Swedenborg's theology is based on the idea that falsities arise when faith (truth) is separated from love (good, charity); for Swedenborg, faith is secondary to good; regeneration is the process of reuniting faith with love.

[38]While Blavatsky gives numerous interpretations of the figure of Cain, most are unconventional and do not seem to apply here. Moreover, Blavatsky does not advocate original sin, although she does advocate karma, a related concept.

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> being regenerated, while that which a man derives from his father remains to eternity.[39]

Furthermore, Swedenborg calls hereditary evil from the mother "the Canaanite then in the land." [40]

Other references in Swedenborg and Blake connect Consolation (fig. 82) with regeneration. According to Damon's interpretation of Blake's Book of Job, Blake considered regeneration a series of seven steps, which he referred to as "The Seven Eyes of God," and as the series "Lucifer, Molech, Elohim, Shaddai, Pahad, Jehovah, Jesus."[41] Bisttram includes this series of seven names on a sheet titled "The Five Mystical States" located in his Book of Notes. Referring to Swedenborg's explanation of Shaddai, it is found that Shaddai represents consolation, or the state just following temptations:

> For Jehovah or the Lord was called by the ancients "God Shaddai" with reference to temptations and consolation after them; consequently "God Shaddai" signifies a state of temptation that is past, and now Divine consolation.[42]

While the interpretation of Adam and Eve and the First Born and Consolation as states of regeneration presupposes a fairly close reading of Swedenborg on Bisttram's part, the inclusion of "Seven States of Man's Regeneration" on his list of subjects to paint, cited in Chapter 6, and his use of this concept in the structure of his Three-Year Course, discussed in Chapter 8, suggests that he read deeply into this aspect of Swedenborg's

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[39]Swedenborg, Arcana Coelestia, 2, para. 1414.

[40]Ibid., para. 1444, 1573.

[41]Damon, 224.

[42]Swedenborg, Arcana Coelestia, 6, para. 4572. Swedenborg is interpreting the line "I am God Shaddai" (Gen. 35: 11); the translation of this line in the King James Version, however, is "I am God Almighty." Swedenborg's interpretation of Shaddai at Arcana Coelestia, 2, para. 1992, provides the citations to Job from which Blake undoubtedly worked in his interpretation of Job as a narrative devoted to temptations.

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theology.

Another group of religious subjects Bisttram executed at this time are based on the rituals of the Penitentes, a Hispanic religious sect derived from Catholicism that was active in Taos and across the Southwest. Since their practices were prohibited by the Catholic Church, their rituals were conducted in secret.

New Mexican Wake, 1932 (fig. 91) depicts the part of the Penitente funeral rite in which the deceased is prayed over continually until the body is taken in procession for burial.[43] The depiction of the crucifix confirms that this is a specifically Penitente subject. The blood on the legs of Christ is an iconographical element found exclusively on Penitente crucifixes. The setting is the chapel of a morada, the house of worship for the Penitentes, usually consisting of two rooms, a chapel and a meeting room. Moradas, however, unlike Bisttram's depiction, usually don't have any windows.[44]

The source for this picture may very well be Orozco's El Muerto, 1922 (fig. 92), which Bisttram could have seen in New York since it was in the collection of Alma Reed.[45] Bisttram follows Orozco fairly closely, especially in the insistent horizontality of the composition. Orozco's composition is centered along the horizontal axis by two

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[43]When Bisttram donated this painting to the University Art Museum, University of New Mexico, he told the director, Robert Ellis, that the subject of the painting was the Penitentes. "I'm wondering about the title that is written on the back. You said it was a painting depicting the Penitentes, so would you rather we title it New Mexican Wake?" Robert M. Ellis to (Emil Bisttram), SLT, 20 July 1970, BP, AAA 2893:23.

[44]Marta Weigle, Brothers of Light, Brothers of Blood: The Penitentes of the Southwest (Santa Fe: Ancient City Press, 1976), 154-6. Another piece of evidence is the title for the study, La Entrada. La Entrada is the name of the ritual enacted when an individual enters the morada. Bisttram's drawing, La Entrada, is in the collection of the Art Museum of Western Virginia, Roanoke, VA.

[45]Reed, 185. Bisttram's lithograph Peace, 1930 (fig. 66), may also be derived from Orozco's El Muerto and provides a precedent for New Mexican Wake.

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candles. He further reinforces the horizontality by the reach of the corpse from one end of the composition to the other, and by the mourners, lined up in two rows, five in front of the deceased and five behind. Bisttram, by contrast, distributes the mourners unevenly in order to define the primary mourner by position. Orozco's interpretation is more mysterious and almost lyrical due to the focus on the lumpy features of the body hidden under the white shroud. Bisttram, by contrast, depicts the casket closed, and displays the body in the form of Christ on the crucifix as a symbol of salvation. Orozco's painting is dark and moody while Bisttram's interpretation is well-lighted and crisp, and, as expected, much more geometrically conceived.

Bisttram constructed New Mexican Wake with three side-by-side vertical root-five rectangles (fig. 93). The two vertical lines that divide the composition into thirds pass through the hearts of Christ on the crucifix at the left and the primary mourner at the right. To enhance this relationship, the crucifix, offered by the hand of an unseen priest, cuts two of the smaller horizontal root-five rectangles into right triangles. The combination of three side-by-side vertical root-five rectangles has occult and astronomical implications that bear on this composition, as well as on Adoration and Consolation.

In Ancient Freemasonry, the second book on Bisttram's reading list of 1930, Frank Higgins gives an astronomical correspondence to the root-five rectangle. He shows that three points of the root-five rectangle, with its ratio of 9 to 4, replicate the geometrical relationships between the pole star, the sun, and the earth (fig. 94). These relationships demonstrate that the inclination of the earth's axis to the pole of the ecliptic, 23-1/2 degrees, is embedded in the diagonal of the root-five rectangle. He also shows that when three vertical root-five rectangles are placed next to each other,

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producing a rectangle in the ratio of 3 to 4, the relationships between the sun, earth, and pole star are also demonstrated (fig. 95). Higgins also asserts that these "macrocosmic" astronomical measurements correlate to the "microcosmic" relationships found in molecular structure.[46] What is most interesting about this structure is that when the three side-by-side root-five rectangle shape is extended by the distance to the pole star, two side-by-side root-five rectangles are obtained. Also of interest is that the 3 x 4 rectangle, when divided diagonally, resolves into two Pythagorean triangles (right triangles with sides 3, 4, and 5).

For Higgins, the changing relationships between pole star, earth, and sun, that is, the passing of the solar year, are symbolized in the Egyptian myth of the murder of Osiris (the sun) by his brother Typhon (the Pole Star), the search for his mutilated body by his widow Isis, and the marriage of Isis to their son Horus (the new year, spring). Higgins also associates Osiris, Isis, and Horus with the three sides of a Pythagorean triangle and with spirit, matter, and nature.[47] Likewise the myth, as well as the geometrical relationships, represent the evolution of the soul.[48] Or, put another way,

> The Nile was Osiris, who fecundated Egypt, or Isis, the harvest was Horus. Osiris was manifested in Horus, so that when in winter Osiris symbolically died, he rose

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[46]Frank C. Higgins, Ancient Freemasonry: An Introduction to Masonic Archeology (New York: Pyramid Book Company, 1928), 367. In addition to being a Mason and a follower of Blavatsky, Higgins (b. 1867) served as president of the New York Numismatic Club in 1910. His theories were mainly derived from a study of ancient coins. Higgins's primary argument is a rationale for the use of the 23-1/2 degree angle in one of the two keystones used in masonry.

[47]Higgins, 12.

[48]Higgins, 18-19, 66.

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again in the spring as Horus, who grew to be Osiris at maturity.[49]

Thus, by the use of the Pythagorean rectangle, that is, three root-five rectangles together, for New Mexican Wake, Bisttram makes connections between the solar year, the death and resurrection of Christ, and the death, resurrection, and evolution of an individual. The emphasis on the hearts of Christ and the chief mourner make further connections that magnify the aspects of love, comfort, and compassion that characterize the symbolism of Christ. The major difference between the pencil study and the painting is that in the painting the smaller vase on the window ledge is cracked and chipped.

Bisttram's painting Penitente Crucifixion, 1932 (fig. 96), one of the larger works he painted during this period (78 x 48 inches), depicts the most controversial of the Penitente rituals, the reenactment of the crucifixion of Christ during Holy Week. Bisttram described the painting as follows:

> This painting... depicts an actual scene that I have observed in one of their sacred Penitente symbolic crucifixions. An organization that exists in New Mexico uses a living person who is being initiated into the Society. It is rather cruel. But not fatal. The backs of the initiates are cut up with flint stones into stripes. They bleed very badly and then they are tied with ropes on their feet, their hands, and their arms. Their heads are covered so that no one knows who they are, especially no outsiders. It is very seldom that anyone has the opportunity to see one of these things. Usually guards stand outside during this ceremony and no one is permitted to come near. I happened to be friends with some of these people and I was allowed to look at it. It was rather gruesome and sometimes a person dies in the process; however, they all take the initiation and believe me it is something to go through.[50]

This painting expresses the horror of the crucifixion by depicting the moment when the crucified man on the cross is being hoisted into an upright position by three men. The

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[49]Higgins, 317. Bisttram's interest in the Osiris, Isis, Horus myth was noted in Chapter 8.

[50]Bisttram, comment on Penitente Crucifixion, Bisttram File, Anschutz Collection.

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crucified man is not nailed to the cross, but is tied with ropes, according to Penitente custom. The black cloth over the man's face and the white pants he is wearing are also part of the prescribed ritual. The stress and confusion of the scene is emphasized by the close cropping of the composition and by the diagonal thrust of the body of the man being crucified. The dripping blood from the backs of the two men whose backs are to the viewer add to the gruesomeness of the scene. The one on the left is flagellating himself, another practice of the Penitentes. The bearded face of the priest, who reads from a book, is visible at the upper left.

Bisttram used the whirling square rectangle for the composition (fig. 14). The skewed position of the body of the crucified is the primary carrier of the message. This has been obtained by orienting the body along the diagonal axis of the picture, and siting the head at the intersection of the central vertical axis and the diagonals of the upper rectangle. The drawing, Man Crucified on Three-Limbed Tree, 1931 (fig. 35), depicts a dejected lonely Christ. The sight of a Penitente crucifixion undoubtedly changed Bisttram's mind about the approach to take to this subject.

Bisttram was probably so fascinated with the Penitentes because of Blavatsky's assertion that a symbolic crucifixion was the last and most secret of the Egyptian mysteries. For Blavatsky, the symbolic crucifixion in the crypt of the Egyptian pyramid taught the lessons of reincarnation, rebirth, and regeneration, and also involved testifying before a tribunal, equivalent to a "last judgment." It was based on this ritual (and other evidence) that she asserted that the life of Christ was a symbolic reenactment of the lives of all the past avatars, such as Buddha and Krishna, and that Christianity was

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essentially a distorted rehash of pagan traditions.[51] Given his concern with regeneration and his readings in Blavatsky, Bisttram must have been shocked to see this ritual enacted in real life; it undoubtedly reinforced his belief in Blavatsky's assertions.

Anglo artists were fascinated by Penitente customs, and depicted their rituals frequently. Bert Phillips, the first artist to settle permanently in Taos, and a friend of Bisttram's, painted two scenes of their rituals, Penitentes' Ceremony and Penitente Burial Procession, and published an article on them in 1903. Phillips was introduced to Penitente rituals by his Indian model Nudl-Tut as early as 1899.[52]

Blanche Grant (1874-1948), painter and writer, who settled in Taos in 1920, was also very interested in the Penitentes, and included a chapter on them in her book When Old Trails Were New. Grant was invited to view Penitente rituals, while Bert Phillips's observations were made surreptitiously from afar. In her chapter on the Penitentes she included a reproduction of a painting of a Penitente subject by the Santa Fe artist William P. Henderson (1877-1943). The inclusion of this work may very well be an acknowledgment of her friendship with Henderson's wife, the writer Alice Corbin, whose book on the Penitentes, based on observations at Abiquiu, was published a few years after Grant's.[53] Grant's one short reference to Bisttram, "The latest [artist] to remain is Emil Bisttram, formerly of the Roerich Museum of New York, who is bringing new life

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[51]For Blavatsky's description of this ritual, see Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, III, 273.

[52]Julie Schimmel and Robert R. White, Bert Geer Phillips and the Taos Art Colony, (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 128-130, 142, figs. 64-67.

[53]Blanche C. Grant, When Old Trails Were New: The Story of Taos (New York: The Press of the Pioneers, Inc., 1934), 238-247. Alice Corbin Henderson, Brothers of Light: The Penitentes of the Southwest (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1937).

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into the colony and has established an art school."[54] indicates that Grant and Bisttram were good friends, and suggests that the Penitentes were a mutual interest of theirs.

Depictions of Women

The occupations of Mexican women was a subject that particularly appealed to Bisttram. He depicted them in groups, making tortillas, doing the laundry, and in the marketplace gossiping and shopping. Bisttram may have taken his cue here from Lawrence Binyon's comments on figure painting. Binyon points out the beauty and dignity of individuals so engrossed in their work that they are unconscious of their surroundings or of observers. Binyon takes Utamaro as an example of an Oriental artist who has achieved this dignity, then criticizes the artificiality of pose in many western paintings.[55] Bisttram expressed the harmony he observed in the daily activities of Mexican women with an insistent use of the number three.

Tortilla Makers (fig. 97) is a sympathetic interpretation of Mexican women at work in the home. The composition is resoundingly symbolic as each of the three

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[54]Grant, 270. Another indication that Grant and Bisttram were good friends is Bisttram's involvement with the founding of the Taos Fire Department, one of Grant's initiatives (see Chapter 9). Another artist who treated Penitente subjects was B. J. O. Nordfeldt, who observed, with Gustave Baumann, two Penitente crucifixions during Holy Week at Abiquiu. One of the first depictions of this cult was made by Birge Harrison, whose The Penitentes (1885) was illustrated in Harper's in 1885. Schimmel and White, 129. Mexican and southwestern motifs were also interpreted in dance by Martha Graham who made a number of visits to Taos; her El Penitente was produced in 1937. The overwhelming presence of the Penitentes in Abiquiu is reflected in the crosses in Georgia O'Keeffe's paintings.

[55]"And I think that it is a test which we may apply to all figure-painters--a test which will often discover the secret of unsatisfactory design--if we ask whether the figures are really occupied by what they are doing, if the movements of the body are concentrated on the particular business of the moment." Binyon, 57.

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women represent a different moment in the process of making tortillas, and correspond by number to the three tortillas on the stove. Bisttram began his composition with Rivera's The Grinder, 1924 (fig. 98), which provided the figure of the kneeling woman grinding corn. Bisttram lifted the entire arrangement including the three tortillas, which provided him with the theme of three that he developed into three figures.

The preparatory drawing (fig. 99) shows that Bisttram used the whirling square rectangle for the organization of the figures. The primary form, the woman working at the stove patting out a tortilla, dominates the central vertical axis of the composition. The diagonals of the upper rectangle intersect with the vertical axis in the woman's throat. The kneeling woman grinding corn is sited along the lower left to upper right diagonal of the lower rectangle, with the top of her head at the exact midpoint of the composition. The woman standing with her back to the viewer is confined to the space within the major upper left to lower right diagonal. The vertical sections of the doorway at the right were added on to the whirling square shape. In the painting these lines reach all the way to the bottom margin, omitting the diagonal and horizontal of the threshold included in the drawing. These revisions strengthen and reinforce the primary figure, her echo in the stovepipe, and the vertical format of the composition. The highly organized composition, with the women engrossed in their work, dressed neatly in clean white aprons in a well-managed kitchen, communicates stability, contentment, and cooperation.

It is worth noting that the "grinder," the woman who dominates the lower part of the composition, is not rolling out tortillas, but rather is grinding corn. The stone metate that she uses for this procedure is a precious object passed down from generation to generation. In ancient Indian religion, the grinding of the corn was part of the sacred

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ritual of propitiating the growth of the corn and was accompanied by ritual song attended by flute music.[56] Additionally, the posture of the grinder is correct since the metate is embedded in the ground or attached to the floor.[57] Similarly, the bowl at the left, sited along one of the minor diagonals of the lower rectangle, contains ground corn; the woman at the upper left is presumably mixing the cornmeal into dough.

The Marketplace, 1931 (fig. 100), is another example of Bisttram's use of the theme of three figures in a composition devoted to the activities of Mexican women. The composition is ordered by three root-five rectangles horizontally stacked one on top of the other. This format provides a wider and more ample arena than the whirling square rectangle used in Tortilla Makers. The three women are again symbolically and sequentially posed, with the primary figure, like in Tortilla Makers, sited along the vertical axis. Also, like in Tortilla Makers, the diagonals of the upper rectangle cross the vertical axis in the throat of the primary figure. The women's engagement with what they are doing is convincing as is the perspective view of the buildings in the background.

A third work in this series, Mexican Women, 1931 (fig. 101), shows the three women in a more lively arrangement, standing and conversing, probably arguing. The composition is organized within a triple root-five rectangle like The Marketplace, but is more austere. The theme of three is insistently repeated in the folds and creases of the clothing--in the shawls around the necks of all three figures, and, additionally, behind the knee, near the right foot, and in the pleats over the right shoulder of the woman with

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[56]Reily, 201.

[57]Erna Fergusson, Dancing Gods: Indian Ceremonials of New Mexico and Arizona (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931), 10.

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her back to the viewer. The two props, a basket in the left foreground and another basket under the arm of the woman at the right, comprise the most obvious circular elements of the composition; in addition, the outline of the leg of the woman in the center is the arc of a circle projected from a point outside the right margin of the picture. The meticulous shading relieves the insistent geometry of the structure and forms.

This was probably Bisttram's favorite work from the group since it was reproduced in two articles of the period. One of these was an announcement of his upcoming talk, "The Art and Work of the Women of Mexico," at the Springfield [Illinois] Woman's Club. In this talk he discussed how impressed he was with the art education being provided to children in Mexico, and how enthusiastic parents were about cultivating artistic talent in their children. He also encouraged the women of Springfield to make art themselves.[58] This is an odd topic for a talk especially since other commentators assert that it was the men who were behind the artistic renaissance in Mexico in contrast to the United States where women were the greatest supporters.[59] Since the women in the Mexico pictures are not treated as individuals, and it is mainly

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[58]Bisttram changed the topic of his talk to "The Art Movement of Today, The Whys and Wherefores of Various Isms." After briefly discussing his impressions of Mexico, he launched into a discussion of his theory of art, discussed in Chapter 12. "Says Modern Art Tends to the Abstract: Emil Bisttram Addresses Woman's Club at Elks Auditorium," clipping, Dec. 1932; also, "Modern Artists Need Sympathy Bisttram Says," clipping, Dec. 1932, Bisttram Archives, Harwood Museum.

In Springfield that weekend he also gave a class in dynamic symmetry and a talk on Religion in Art. The previous week he gave a talk, "How the Modern Painter Thinks and Works," at the University of Cincinnati, arranged by Alma Knauber, who had studied with him in Taos the previous summer. Bisttram made these two speaking engagements on the return from his first trip back to New York after settling in Taos. Bisttram made a second trip to New York in 1933 for his exhibition at the Delphic Studios, and on the way back stopped in Pittsburgh to see the Carnegie International and gave another talk in Springfield.

[59]Weston, I, 25.

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native women that are depicted, Bisttram was probably looking at them for signs and symbols of primitive rituals surviving from ancient cultures. The persistent theme of three in these works may relate to Blavatsky's description of the individual as made up of the trinity of body, soul, and spirit that Bisttram emphasized so strongly in his Three-Year Course. In these compositions the trinity of figures seems to symbolize the unity of cooperation between individuals.

During this period Bisttram also executed a series of portraits of Hispanic and Native American women he met in Taos. The most impressive of these is the very large (72 by 44 inch) full-length portrait, Commadre Rafaelita, 1934 (fig. 102).[60] This woman of advanced years looks directly and unselfconsciously out at the viewer. Her lack of pretension combined with the warm interior setting gives the picture the qualities of a genre scene, thereby taking the edge off the stiffness and formality of the full-length portrait format. Her pose, although insistently frontal with hands folded across her stomach, is not rigid or intimidating--it's as if she just stood up to greet the viewer in a very friendly manner. Bisttram commented on this work as follows:

> [The model for this picture] lived across the street from me. She intrigued me because of her facial character, her general demeanor and her costume, when I saw her walk up and down the street, rolling her own cigarettes.... What was interesting about this painting is that when she came she wore a blue polka dot dress and a white shirtwaist, she had no shawl... I began to sketch the figure on to that large canvas. I already saw in my vision how it would fit in that

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[60]Commadre Rafaelita was exhibited at the 14th Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Oil Paintings, The Corcoran Gallery of Art, 24 March-5 May 1935, no. 128 and at the 46th Annual Exhibition of American Paintings and Sculpture, Art Institute of Chicago, 24 Oct.-8 Dec. 1935, no. 21. Bisttram also exhibited a full-length portrait, Juanita of Taos, an Indian woman with a basket on her head, at the Thirteenth Exhibition of Contemporary American Oil Paintings, The Corcoran Gallery of Art, 4 Dec. 1932-15 Jan. 1933, no. 255. The newspaper reported that Commadre Rafaelita was included in the catalogue of the exhibition at the New York World's Fair. Taos Review, 23 Nov. 1939.

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> composition and what I would put on the wall. I didn't have a portrait of the Madonna and Child, but I included one because I needed it in the composition and because they [Hispanics] need it as they traditionally have them in their homes. The chair and the knitting material and the bookcase are my own paraphernalia and I included those and the Indian rug. I changed the dress to a terra cotta (deep red) and the shirt into blue with a white collar, because this is what I needed for the composition. I had her put on an old black Spanish shawl, which had a greenish cast because it was much sun faded. Then I got an Indian pot and put it up on the bookshelf so that it would make a composition...[61]

The complete transformation of Bisttram's ability to conceive and execute major figural works as soon as he settled in Taos reflects the impact of his study with Rivera as well as the stimulation of subject matter he found in Mexico and Taos. The mural project Bisttram worked on in Mexico was primarily made up of figures; the experience gained in scaling up Rivera's figures and seeing how they worked together in a geometrically conceived space was clearly a revelatory experience for Bisttram.

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[61]Bisttram, comment on Commadre Rafalita, Bisttram File, Anschutz Corporation.

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Chapter 11

Mural Painting

One of the factors to be taken into account when considering Bisttram's murals is that he was not in sympathy with the social realist position that was associated with murals and art criticism in general in the 1930s. For Bisttram, cultural traditions were useful only in so far as they provided a platform for some greater idea. The themes he used in his murals--the value of hard work, education, and application to morality and religion--he followed in his personal life. Cultural conditions were to be overcome (transcended) by the personal will developed by the individual. He shows the overcoming of these conditions as a personal achievement and as an example for others to follow, using forms and images he thought appropriate to his audience. His symbolism, which is heavy handed by today's standards, should be viewed as a call to order and an effort to point the way during the doubt and disillusionment of the period.

Bisttram stated his position as follows:

> They [the Taos Court House murals] were "moralistic" as against the "socialistic or social conscious" portrayals of depression days. A recent historian, one Francis O'Connor came to Taos to study these murals for his book - "Art for the Millions"... I received a gift of this book and discovered that he excluded the Taos murals. His concern was primarily with those murals that presented the sociological trends of the day.[1]

During the 1930s Bisttram received four government commissions to decorate public buildings--the Taos County Court House (1934), the Roswell Court House (1935-6), the Department of Justice Building, Washington, D.C. (1936-7), and the Post Office in Ranger, Texas (1938-9). Additionally, Bisttram was appointed supervisor for

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[1]Bisttram to (Charles C. Eldredge, Lawrence, KS), LT, 16 Mar. 1974, BP, AAA 2893:78.

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Treasury Relief Art Projects in northern New Mexico in 1936. The first three mural commissions are of particular interest because of their related subject matter--the idea of justice--and are treated in depth.[2]

Taos County Court House Murals

The mural project for the Taos County Court House, executed under the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) in 1934, was collaborative, with individual murals executed in true fresco by Victor Higgins, Bert Phillips, Ward Lockwood, and Bisttram. The project was occasioned by the opening of the new Court House in 1933, built in the new Pueblo revival style on the north side of Taos Plaza, the same site as the first Court House that burned on 10 May 1932. Shortly after contracts were signed by Bisttram, Higgins, and Phillips, at craftsman wages of $42.50 per week, Bisttram wrote to Jesse Nusbaum, chairman of the PWAP Regional Committee for New Mexico and Arizona, requesting that Ward Lockwood be added to the project.[3] Charles N. Lane was hired as an assistant, Irving Couse was the volunteer advisor, and Gustave Baumann, an artist living in Santa Fe, was project supervisor.

The theme of the murals is The Use and Misuse of Justice. Scenes from the history of Taos would have been a logical subject, but the history of Taos was so controversial, and the relations between the Anglos, Hispanics, and Native Americans

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[2]The Crossroads Town, Bisttram's mural for the Post Office at Ranger, TX, installed by June 1939, is not discussed in this chapter. The subject is a view of Main Street in a rural town peopled by men in overalls and on horseback peacefully going about their business on a hot summer day.

[3]Bisttram to (Jesse Nusbaum), TLS, 22 Dec. 1933. This contradicts Baumann's statement that Phillips was added last to the chagrin of the other artists.

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were so strained, that it was probably decided not to tackle this subject. The two most famous events in Taos history were violent: the only successful rebellion by the Native Americans against the Hispanics was organized at Taos Pueblo in 1680; and Charles Bent, the first American governor of New Mexico was murdered in Taos in 1847 shortly after his appointment. Largely unjustified reprisals against Taos Pueblo for Bent's murder resulted in the burning of their church.

Furthermore, the violence of Taos had been experienced first hand by Bert Phillips who started a riot in Taos when he and a friend refused to take off their hats during the religious procession celebrating the Feast of Guadalupe on 12 December 1898. Fortunately for Phillips, he was in jail when the sheriff was shot later that night.[4] One of the first things that Mabel Dodge Luhan noticed when she arrived in Taos was that the social atmosphere was dominated by rivalry, feuding, and gossip. She experienced this personally when her landlord, Arthur Manby, after spying on her, called in officials to accuse her and her then husband Maurice Sterne of anti-American activities.[5] The murder of Arthur Manby, which occurred in 1929 and was never solved, was another of the violent episodes in Taos's history. Events such as these may have convinced the artists that moral and religious subjects would be appropriate for the Taos Court House.

The scheme is comprised of ten compositions, executed in two campaigns. The first campaign includes six works: the largest, Victor Higgins's Moses, The Law Giver

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[4]Robert R. White "Life in Taos, 1898-199," in Schimmel and White, 43-44.

[5]Mabel Dodge Luhan, Edge of Taos Desert (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1937; reprint with an introduction by Lois Palkin Rudnick, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 114, 118, 129-131.

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(fig. 103),[6] on the east wall over the Judge's bench, states the theme and sets the tone for the cycle; the other four are on the south wall. Bisttram's Transgression (fig. 104) and Reconciliation (fig. 105) are nearest to Higgins's mural, to the right of the Judge's bench. Ward Lockwood's Superfluous Law Oppress (fig. 106) is next, divided from Bisttram's murals by the only door. Bert Phillips's The Shadow of Crime and Sufficient Law Protects (fig. 107), at the far end of the south wall, complete the first campaign. Since the project took longer than expected, a six week extension was granted on 1 May 1934.

The second campaign, funded locally, began right away and included four murals on the north wall in between the four windows. Bisttram's Aspiration (fig. 108) is closest to the Judge's bench; Lockwood's Avarice Breeds Crime and Justice Begets Content follow; and Phillips's Obedience Casts Out Fear completes the second campaign. Titles are written at the top in English and at the bottom in Spanish. Higgins was assigned to paint two murals on the rear wall as part of the second campaign; however, they were not done.[7] In 1994 Federico Vigil, who studied with Rivera assistants, painted Respect Creates Harmony. There is space for one more mural. Since wall space assignments were decided by lot for the second campaign, they were undoubtedly decided in the same manner for the first.[8] Spud Johnson reported that the second campaign was not funded by the P.W.A.P because politicians decided that they would rather fund movable

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[6]Oil sketches have been used throughout to illustrate the murals.

[7]Alexandre Hogue, "Taos Artists Under PWAP, New Courthouse Decorated by Famed Colony," newspaper clipping, Dallas [1934], BP, Harwood Museum.

[8][Spud Johnson], "Six More Panels of Frescoes to be Painted in Courtroom," Taos Valley News, 10 May 1934.

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pictures they could hang on their walls than immovable murals.[9]

The leading image in the mural cycle, Higgins's Moses the Lawgiver (fig. 103), establishes religion and the religious origin of the law as the theme of the cycle. A reading of Spengler's views on the law shows that the ideas expressed in the murals take up a specific problem that he discussed at length. Spengler characterizes Western law as a morass of contradictory texts that reflect the conflict between temporal and spiritual law that was inherited from the old conflict between the Empire and the Papacy. He contrasts the mixed character of Western law with Magian (Byzantine and Arabian) law that is completely religious, and analyzes the situation in the West as a conflict between book and life. He argues that what is needed is a law based on social and economic existence.[10] Higgins's mural takes the position that religious law takes precedence over temporal law. Lockwood's mural Superfluous Laws Oppress (fig. 106), which shows figures being crushed by gigantic books, expresses Spengler's conflict between book and life literally.

In this context Bisttram's murals become an extrapolation of the main statement by Higgins and a foundation for and transition to the subjects by Lockwood and Phillips. Bisttram's two works for the first campaign, Transgression (fig. 104) and Reconciliation (fig. 105), shown in sketches, were conceived as a pair: the former depicts a murder, the latter is a vision of how life should be led. The murderer in Transgression is represented by a man wrapped in a dark red cloak holding a knife; his pose follows the lower right to upper left diagonal established by the root-two rectangle used for

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[9][Spud Johnson], "No More Frescoes in Taos Court House," Taos Valley News, 22 Mar. 1934.

[10]Spengler, II, 79.

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organizing the composition. His movement toward the left clearly indicates that he is fleeing the scene. The use of green in the sky behind him complements his red cloak and reinforces the idea of opposition. Another man, partially obscured behind the murderer, carries a sack suggesting that the motive for the murder was theft. At the feet of the murderer, a man lies face down, nude from the waist up, along a diagonal from the lower left to the mid-right. A woman wrapped in a white cloak kneels over him weeping. The only face shown--that of the murderer--places the focus on the criminal. Broken pieces of lumber at odd angles throughout the composition echo the forms of the dead man signifying that murder is a sign of chaos and universal destruction. This panel may represent the first crime described in the Bible, the murder of Abel by Cain. A religious interpretation is warranted by its location next to Higgins' Moses, The Law Giver (fig. 103).

The second work, Reconciliation (fig. 105), provides the optimistic reverse of the first with its depiction of affection, constructive work, and the passing on of knowledge. A man and woman with faces hidden embrace in the background; the man's sombrero identifies him as Hispanic. In the middle ground, a man, hard at work, builds a brick wall; in the foreground, a woman with hand raised teaches a child to read. The composition is organized within a 1-1/3 vertically-oriented root-four rectangle, which means that the root-four rectangle was divided into thirds vertically, and then an extra third was added at the left.

Aspiration (fig. 108), the only work Bisttram executed for the second campaign, is essentially a religious scene since the forms used for the mother and child are typical of those used in depictions of the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child. Bisttram adapted his drawing Adoration, 1931 (fig. 79), for the composition; however, its translation into a

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long narrow format and the changes in pose--completely hiding the face of the child and partly obscuring the face of the mother--divest the earlier composition of its feeling and intimacy.[11]

To this composition Bisttram added a young, muscular father with arms upraised in supplication. The rejection of the traditional attributes of Joseph provides a secular element that expresses the material difficulties of family life and suggests the advisability of seeking guidance from a higher power. The physical relationship of the three works suggests that Transgression and Reconciliation provide answers, the former negative and the latter positive, to the question posed by the father in Aspiration, and implies choice and free will in the decision-making process. Additionally, given Bisttram's interest in the occult, another interpretation can be proposed. Aspiration is the first stage of meditation: "The student begins by aspiring to that which lies beyond his ken."[12] Right aspiration leads to right choice.

Bisttram's use of the priority of religious law as the theme of his next mural commission, Uphold the Right and Prevent the Wrong for the Roswell Court House, shows his engagement with the theme. Given the cohesiveness of Bisttram's concept for his murals in the Taos Court House, his past interest in religious themes, and the lack of interest in religious themes by the other artists,[13] he may very well have been the originator of the religious and moral concept for the murals.

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[11]The Mother, the drawing for the mother and child in the mural, is reproduced in Sotheby's Arcade Auction Catalogue 1426, New York, 31 March 1993, lot 353.

[12]Alice Bailey, The Light of the Soul (New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1927), 37.

[13]Ward Lockwood exhibited a Crucifixion in a later exhibition at Berkeley, newspaper clipping, n.d., Lockwood Papers, AAA 534: 822.

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One of the most interesting aspects of the Taos County Court House project is that all of the works were composed using dynamic symmetry. Higgins's completed mural and the various studies for it show that he used dynamic symmetry in every step of the design process. Higgins (1884-1949), however, had been using dynamic symmetry since the 1920s. Since he was from Chicago, he could even have attended Hambidge's 1921 Scammon Lectures at the Art Institute. His interest in inventing and mechanical drawing[14] undoubtedly attracted him to dynamic symmetry. An unlocated painting, Red-Orange, Blue-Green and Yellow, also known as Still-Life Dynamic Symmetry, which was included in his 1928 exhibition at the Grand Central Art Galleries, provides the earliest documented instance of his use of the system.[15] The title of the painting shows that Higgins was also interested in color theory, in this case synchromism. A photo of his painting Sleeping Nude, ca. 1932, on which he inscribed the lines of a whirling square rectangle, shows how he used the system.[16] Ernest Blumenschein's comments on Higgins's "little gems" paintings--small landscapes produced for the tourist trade--furnishes additional evidence:

> His [Higgins's] art had developed an intellectual side through his adventure with Dynamic Symmetry and other abstract angles. Not that he used the mechanical formulas. He always had, as most good artists, an instinct that guided his form structure. Dynamic Symmetry helped him to verify his artistic feelings regarding the basic principles of proportion, spacing, and spotting.[17]

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[14]Dean Porter, Victor Higgins: An American Master (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith Books, 1991), 84.

[15]Porter, 134, 138.

[16]Ibid., fig. 38. The dynamic symmetry lines were drawn on the reproduction of the painting that had appeared in the Feb. 1933 issue of Art Digest.

[17]Blumenschein in Laura M. Bickerstaff's Pioneer Artists of Taos, 5, cited in Porter, 222-3.

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Higgins's mural Moses, the Lawgiver, shown in a sketch (fig. 103), depicts Moses standing to the left of center under a rainbow and clouds, looking up, with both hands pointing down, the left hand toward the tablets of the law. The composition is enclosed within a horizontally oriented whirling square rectangle that determined the placement of Moses, the angles and shapes of the tablets of the law, the altar on which they sit, and the surrounding landscape. An earlier study shows Moses centrally placed within a root-two rectangle with his right arm raised to heaven and left arm pointing down to the tablets. Two earlier studies of Moses, both drawn within vertically oriented whirling square rectangles, are much more energetic, showing Moses falling backwards in response to the powerful force of God's message.[18] A photograph of the work in progress shows that Higgins changed his mind about the pose of Moses at the last moment.

Higgins's mural came under a fair amount of criticism by his colleagues. Baumann, for example, reported that Higgins, whose subject he identified as Fundamental Law (fig. 103), "ignored the general idea decided upon by the majority."[19] Hogue reveals that the disagreement was over both color and composition:

> It is obvious that Phillips, Bisttram and Lockwood have co-operated in the use of a unified color scheme and composition that Higgins has ignored altogether. The Higgins panel, although technically well done, seems too busy and diffuse in design, as the center portion would have stated the theme sufficiently.[20]

Higgins's mural is decidedly lighter in color than the others, and does resemble a watercolor sketch as Hogue also noted.

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[18]Porter, figs. 21a-e, 266.

[19]Gustav Baumann, "Public Works of Art Project Reports," 1934-35, Baumann Papers, AAA D155:25.

[20]Hogue.

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Higgins studied in Europe before settling in Taos. Coincidently, two artists he knew at the Club of American Artists in Munich, E. Martin Hennings and Walter Ufer, also settled in Taos. All three artists made their first trips to New Mexico courtesy of the Chicago collector Carter Harrison, Ufer being sent first, Higgins in 1914, and Hennings in 1917.[21] The longevity of these relationships underscores the extent to which Bisttram was a newcomer. Higgins, like Lockwood, was a member of Taos Heptagon. Bisttram's strained relationship with Higgins may have begun during this mural project.

Lockwood's mural, Superfluous Laws Oppress (fig. 106), with its expressionist style and convivial rebelliousness, is arguably the most successful of the compositions. The concept, figures being crushed by books with an image of a capitol building in the background, is lively and original. For the organization of the forms he used a whirling square rectangle. The major lower left to upper right diagonal determines the direction and angles of the two largest books. The crease behind the knee of the largest figure who is being crushed by the two books marks the exact center of the composition. The direction and angle of the smaller book that crushes the reclining woman at the bottom of the composition follows the diagonal of the bottom register of the whirling square rectangle. Lockwood's two murals on the opposite wall, Justice Begets Content and Avarice Breeds Crime, were both designed within root-five rectangles.

Lockwood's comments in his journal show that he had been listening to Bisttram's theorizing about dynamic symmetry and had some reservations:

> I cannot bring myself to believe completely in any set of rules for composition, any color method, or any formula I have yet heard for the making of a painting. Dynamic Symmetry or allied geometric and mathematical divisions of space theories for composition and space division are helpful. To have the knowledge

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[21]Porter, 85.

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> of such is of value even if it only brings the realization of the futility of dependence on such systems for the creation of works of art. Arguments for dynamic symmetry, for example seem plausible. But the system, for one thing, ignores the effect of lines placed in such a way to create what is known as optical illusion. Neither does it take into consideration the balance and harmony which can be achieved by compensating directions. That is, a painting may be thrown out of this so called symmetry--but it can be again harmonized by the placing of a compensating "dis-harmony" in another part of the painting. One always returns to the intuitive taste of the individual artist to achieve a unity above that procured [by] ordinary methods.

Clearly responding to Bisttram's criticisms of perspective, he concluded that it really was not of much use:

> Perspective. The term "linear perspective" as I was taught it, is the theory that all lines in a landscape, for instance, vanish at a point on the horizon, is no value to the art of painting. It is a fallacy. It precludes that the observer always fixes the eye on a point on the horizon. This is false. One's "vanishing point" is the top of a mountain far above the horizon, if one fixes his gaze there--or deep in a valley under the horizon; if one fixes his gaze in that direction. Things tend to vanish toward the direction one gazes--if one insists on having that kind of linear perspective--which is of use only in reproductional painting.
>
> Far better to have a perspective--not only of the eye--but of all senses--that is a perceiving and bringing into unity of expression those things which contribute to the aesthetic emotion of a motif--whether one can see them or not looking in one direction. When I look at Taos mountain my esthetic emotions may be aroused--if so they are partly aroused by the stretch of valley behind me--the sky over me, and the ground beneath my feet![22]

His comments about the Oriental concept of perspective show conclusively that his journal notes were made in response to Bisttram's ideas:

> I have been told that the Orientals believe the exact opposite of our "linear perspective." That is, an oriental considers himself the diminutive "vanishing point" and that the world and things grow larger and greater the farther they may be from that small point. There is a good "perspective" for you--particularly if you want to use it in constructing of yourself a philosophy![23]

Bisttram's views on Oriental art may have been of interest in Taos, since so many Taos

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[22]Ward Lockwood, "Journal," 24 Feb. [1933], Lockwood Papers, AAA 534:365-358.

[23]Ibid.

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artists were collectors. These collections were shown in an exhibition of Oriental art at the Harwood Gallery in September 1934. A large selection of Japanese prints were loaned to the exhibition by the artist J. H. Sharp; and Chinese and Tibetan paintings on silk were loaned by Sharp, Mabel Dodge Luhan, and Nicolai Fechin. Also, prints, vases, and furniture were loaned by Mrs. Blumenschein, Mrs. Imhof, Mrs. Couse and Mrs. Harwood.[24]

Lockwood's treatment of subject shows his bias in favor of the Pueblos, an opinion shared by most Anglo artists in Taos. For Justice Begets Content he depicts a peaceful scene composed of three Native Americans: a seated man plays a drum in the foreground, a woman is shown in the middle distance, and a man rides a horse in the background. For Avarice Breeds Crime he depicts a violent scene composed of three Anglos: the major figure holds a sack, presumably of money, and two figures try to get it away from him.

Bert Phillips was more of a convert to dynamic symmetry than Lockwood. It was in his studio that Bisttram gave his first lectures on the subject; also, Phillips described his use of dynamic symmetry in detail to fellow artist Ted Egri. Since Egri studied dynamic symmetry with Howard Giles in the early 1930s, Egri would have fully understood Phillips's explanations.[25] Finally, of course, the evidence is in the paintings themselves.

One of Bert Phillips murals for the first campaign, Sufficient Law Protects, shown

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[24][Spud Johnson], "Oriental Art From Taos Homes Amazes Crowds," Taos Valley News, 13 Sept. 1934. [Spud Johnson], "Oriental Exhibit Still Popular," Taos Valley News, 20 Sept. 1934. Witter Bynner and Thornton Wilder both viewed the exhibition.

[25]Ted Egri, interview with the author, Oct. 1998.

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in a sketch (fig. 107), takes up and complements Lockwood's theme of large books; however, in Phillips's composition--the positive interpretation of the theme--the books are positioned vertically at the left. For this composition, Phillips uses a whirling square rectangle. The main figure, a man at work planing a log into a beam, follows the major lower left to upper right diagonal; a woman holding a child stands at the left and a man plasters at the upper right.

Fresco presented a number of technical problems. Bisttram and Lockwood had worked with fresco previously, while neither Higgins nor Phillips had. Lockwood's first experiments were undertaken during the summer of 1933 while he was teaching summer courses at the Broadmoor Art Academy in Colorado Springs. He executed a fresco on the outside wall of one of the school's buildings under the direction of Boardman Robinson, who had been working in fresco for at least seven years. For the Taos murals, Lockwood supervised the mixing and application of the plaster.[26]

The major technical complication, as pointed out by Alexandre Hogue, was that since the walls were made of adobe,

> the artists had to set steel frames into the walls to a depth of two or three inches, as a safeguard against cracking. As a consequence the architectural unity which would have resulted from a more continuous use of wall space between doors and windows is lost.[27]

The tall, narrow dimensions of the four murals along the north wall, executed during the second campaign, were determined by the size and spacing of the four windows with which they alternate. On the south wall, Bisttram could have painted, for example, one

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[26]Charles C. Eldredge, Ward Lockwood, 1894-1963 (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Museum of Art, 1974), 56. Boardman Robinson made a trip to see the murals and approved of them. Schimmel and White, 103.

[27]Hogue.

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large mural between the Judge's bench and the door; however, he chose to paint two separate tall, narrow murals. Similarly, Phillips could have painted one large mural in his space, rather than the two tall, narrow ones he painted. The decision to paint similarly sized and scaled works was undoubtedly made for the sake of uniformity. Works by each artist face each other across the room in a general manner. Because the door on the south wall and the windows on the north wall are not aligned, a more rhythmic sequence was impossible.

The project was plagued by a number of mishaps. Bert Phillips fell off his scaffold, Victor Higgins got sick in the middle of the project, and after Bisttram had completed his murals on the south wall, Lockwood noticed that Bisttram had inadvertently painted six fingers on the hand of the teacher in Reconciliation (fig. 105); the whole hand had to be chiseled out and re-done. At a critical point they ran out of sand and had to order more from Rinconada, which then had to be washed in the river at Placita.[28] David Witt suggests that the reason the murals are dark and lack luminosity is because river sand was used rather than fine grained marble sand.[29]

The supervisor of the project, Gustave Baumann, was skeptical of true fresco and in his reports referred sarcastically to the group as the "Fresco Quartette." Baumann made four trips from Santa Fe to Taos between 16 January and 1 February 1934. He clearly detested the trips, writing in one report:

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[28][Spud Johnson], "What's Wrong With This Picture, Artist Produces Freak in Court House, More P.W.A.P. Fresco Mishaps; Victor Higgins Goes to Hospital," Taos Valley News, 1 Mar. 1934. The sand was washed in soft river water at Placita to remove alkali. [Spud Johnson], "Preparations for Frescos In Court House Near End," Taos Valley News, 25 Jan. 1934.

[29]David L. Witt, "The Courthouse Frescos," 26.

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> Oh, Mr. God in Washington, deliver a poor co-ordinator from Taos mud and Taos lightning. The mud is something awful--it gums up the car, swallows his rubbers, and the lightning eats holes in his inner tubing.[30]

Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP) and the Roswell Court House Mural

In August 1935, Bisttram, who was serving as secretary of the Taos Artists Association, was advised of the establishment of the Treasury Relief Art Project to commission decorations for federal buildings and support easel painting. The Taos Artists Association recommended four artists to take part in the project, Andrew Dasburg, Joseph Fleck, Kenneth Adams, and Bisttram; E. Martin Hennings had already been appointed.[31] In October, Olin Dows, Chief of the Treasury Relief Art Project, wrote to Bisttram that there were six sites in New Mexico--at Carlsbad, Clovis, Albuquerque, Gallup, Raton, and Roswell.[32] Dows, without telling Bisttram, sent the blueprints for the Roswell Court House to Dasburg, who turned it down and gave it to Bisttram. Bisttram then wrote to Dows saying that the method of handing out the assignments was confusing, and suggested the appointment of a supervisor to coordinate the projects.[33] After Fleck took the Raton Post Office and Loren Mozley the Gallup project, Bisttram took the remaining blueprints--Albuquerque, Clovis, and Carlsbad--down to Santa Fe to

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[30]Baumann, PWAP Report, 24 Jan. 1934, Baumann Papers, AAA D155.

[31]Dows to (Bisttram), TLS, 27 Sept. 1935, BP, AAA 2892:276.

[32]Dows to (Bisttram), TLS, 16 Oct. 1935, BP, AAA 2892:286.

[33]Bisttram to (Dows), TLS, 22 Oct. 1935, BP, AAA 2892:295.

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show them to Josef Bakos.[34] In December, after Dows asked the artists to submit votes,[35] Bisttram was elected supervisor.[36] Bisttram supervised eight artists: six worked on easel paintings--Kenneth Adams and E. Martin Hennings in Taos; and Josef Bakos, William P. Henderson, Willard Nash, and Sheldon Parsons in Santa Fe; two Taos artists were painting murals--Joseph Fleck, the Raton Post Office; and Loren Mozley, the Albuquerque Post Office. Bisttram's supervisory duties included writing reports, shipping paintings to Washington, and monitoring disputes; additionally, his salary was raised slightly.

Bisttram was clearly enthusiastic about undertaking another mural project:

> There is nothing I want more right now than space, lots of it to test my ability as a designer and muralist and also to produce something of sufficient importance to justify the effort and interest of the government.[37]

In early December 1935 Bisttram submitted sketches for the Roswell Court House based on the plans that he had received from Dasburg. Shortly afterwards he made a trip to Roswell and found that the interior arrangement was entirely different from the blueprints.[38] The blueprints showed a small space in back of the Judge's bench flanked by two larger spaces. What he found was that the space behind the Judge's bench was very large, seven feet high by thirteen and a half feet wide, with two smaller areas above

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[34]Bisttram to (Dows), TLS, 30 Oct. 1935, BP, AAA 2892:296.

[35]Dows to (Bisttram), TLS, 10 Dec. 1935, BP, AAA 2892:309.

[36]Dows to (Bisttram), TLS, 25 Jan. 1936, BP, AAA 2892:326.

[37]Bisttram to (Dows), TLS, 20 Oct. 1935, BP, AAA 2892:287.

[38]Bisttram's Roswell Court House Mural was installed in the 6th floor lobby of the U.S. Courthouse and Federal Building, Albuquerque, NM, in 1983. Jesse Casaus, Clerk, U.S. District Court to (Bisttram), TLS, 1 Mar. 1983, BP, AAA 2893:97.

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the doors. On his way back from Roswell, some 200 miles from Taos, Bisttram stopped in Santa Fe to discuss the design with Judge Neblitt, Federal Judge for the district. They decided that the best solution was to consolidate the three compositions into one central panel and to design symbolic representations for the two spaces over the doors.[39] The final scheme for the main panel depicts Justice Tempered by Mercy in the central section; Uphold the Right on the left side, and Prevent the Wrong on the right side (fig. 109).

On 26 December Bisttram sent two rough sketches in oil, his preference being the one done in a blue scheme. Dows replied that they liked the other one better, but that the left side needed simplification.[40] Dows's other suggestion, that clothes be placed on the figure of the old witch in the Prevent the Wrong side, was followed in the final version.[41] The accepted sketch, the one that Bisttram did not prefer, now in the collection of the University of Maryland Museum (fig. 109), relied to a large extent on motifs developed in the Taos County Court House mural project. The rejected sketch, the one that Bisttram preferred, now in the collection of the Roswell Museum (fig. 110), has a less naturalistic color scheme, is more chaotic and abstract in the Prevent the Wrong side, and has more figures in the Uphold the Right side. The rejected sketch would have provided more of a challenge.

In both sketches, however, the theme is similar. The central area of the mural, Justice Tempered with Mercy, presents the idea that law was entrusted to man by God--

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[39]Bisttram to (Dows), TLS, 10 Dec. 1935, BP, AAA 2892:306.

[40]Dows to (Bisttram), TLS, 4 Jan. 1936, BP, AAA 2892:319.

[41]Dows to (Bisttram), TLS, 9 Mar. 1936, BP, AAA 2892:472.

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the same idea expressed in the central panel of the Taos County Court House murals. The primary motif is the sword of justice suspended from heaven along the central vertical axis, splitting the composition into halves, the domains of right and wrong, good and evil, organization and chaos, life and death. The sword hangs over a still life composed of the two tablets of Mosaic law, books, and the scales of justice protruding out into the viewer's space. These are the symbols of mercy referred to in the title.

The divine origin of the law is symbolized by the hand of God emerging from the heavens and touching the sword of justice with two fingers. Behind the sword, the upraised arm of a man with his hand clenched in a fist symbolizes the transfer of power from God to man, giving him the right to enforce His laws and to dole out punishment. In the final drawing and in the completed version, the hand of God emerges from a circle that overlaps the circle enclosing the arm of the man, representing the macrocosmic-microcosmic relationship between God and man.[42] While the musculature of the man's arm suggests a worker, the garment he wears–probably a toga–is classical.

The right side, Prevent the Wrong, features a criminal that closely resembles the murderer in Transgression (fig. 104). He is accompanied by an old woman and a robber; in the foreground a mother spanks a child. The left side, Uphold the Right, repeats themes developed in Reconciliation (fig. 105) including the mother with raised hand teaching a child to read and building as a constructive activity. Building is developed more elaborately, however, with three men working on a project, one of whom is carving a classical capital. Given the placement of the architect at the apex of

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[42]The final drawing for the central panel is illustrated in Edward Bruce and Forbes Watson, Art in Federal Buildings: An Illustrated Record of the Treasury Department's New Program in Painting and Sculpture, Vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Art in Federal Buildings, Inc., 1936), unpaginated.

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the group representing good, and Blavatsky's mystical interpretation of the role of the architect in the creation of the world, Bisttram may have intended this mural to be a grand scheme of creation.

Using hands as symbols, the over-door panels reinforce the symbolism of good and evil developed in the main composition. One panel shows two hands clasped in friendship against a large shining sun. The other shows two hands rising against each other, the one on the left attacking the one on the right with a knife. The hands are seen behind a pane of shattering glass that falls in downward pointing triangles. Bisttram used his preferred color scheme--tones and shades of blue--in these panels. There are various sources for these compositions. Hands in isolation, for example, were used frequently by Rivera in his mural projects. Also, broken windows were used by Orozco in Broken Glass, 1929. Additionally, the theme of children being taught by a woman with one arm raised is found in Orozco's The Teacher, 1929, and in one of Rivera's murals.[43]

Justice Department Mural

Before the Roswell Court House mural was complete, Bisttram received notice that his proposal for Women Emancipated through Justice (fig. 111) for the fifth floor lobby of the Department of Justice Building in Washington, D.C. had been accepted in open competition. The jurors were Leon Kroll, Bancel La Farge, Jonas Lie, Ernest Peixotto,

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[43]For a reproduction of Orozco's Broken Glass, 1929, and The Teacher, 1929, see Reed, 208, 196. For Orozco's use of two shaking hands over an archway in his frescos for the National Preparatory School, Mexico City, see Reed, 42.

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Henry Schnakenburg, and Eugene Speicher.[44]

In November 1936 Bisttram made a trip to Washington to personally present his sketches to the committee, to look at the space, and to see the Corcoran Exhibition in which his Roswell Court House mural was being exhibited.[45] For the execution of the Justice Department mural, which was to cover a space eleven and a half feet by seven feet, three inches, Bisttram added a studio onto the front of his house.[46] The mural was installed by May 1937.[47]

Bisttram may have had a special reason for submitting sketches for this particular subject. In a taped interview, made probably in the 1970s, Bisttram recalled that Nicholas Roerich predicted that the New Age--the Aquarian Age--that was beginning in 1936, would be the Age of Women.[48] Roerich's essay "To Womanhood," shows that his prediction was based on spiritual ideas:

> Teachings speak of the epoch of the Mother of the World which has now begun. The Mother of the World, Near-to-all-hearts, Revered-by-all-minds, again takes Her place at the great helm... Who if not woman, must now rise and unite in the name of Culture and the Beautiful? Because it was precisely a Woman who was destined to be first to proclaim the Resurrection.[49]

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[44]Edward B. Rowan, Superintendent, Section of Painting & Sculpture, Treasury Department, to (Bisttram), TLS, 23 June 1936, BP, AAA 2892:495.

[45]During this trip Bisttram visited Florence Pierce, who had studied with Bisttram that summer. Pierce saw the reproduction of the Roswell mural in the Washington papers and invited him to lunch. As a result of this visit, Pierce returned to Taos to resume studies with Bisttram. Interview with Florence Pierce, June, 1998.

[46]Bisttram to (Merwin), TLS, 3 Sept. 1936, BP, AAA 2892:546.

[47]Maria Ealand to (Bisttram), TLS, 28 May 1937, BP, AAA 2892:757.

[48]Bisttram, "Interview," tape recording, n.d., BP, Harwood Museum.

[49]Nicholas Roerich, "To Womanhood, Dedicated to Woman's Unity of Roerich Museum, 1930," in Realm of Light by Nicholas Roerich, 45, 53.

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Bisttram must have felt that being awarded the commission was highly symbolic--especially as it was awarded in 1936, one of the dates he ascribed to the beginning of the New Age. He must have taken this commission very seriously since he undoubtedly felt that it was his opportunity to promulgate Roerich's views.

In Women Emancipated Through Justice, Bisttram personifies Justice as a woman wielding a sword (fig. 111). She is shown in action, separating forever the old woman from the new. Old woman is depicted as a hooded and chained figure huddled at the feet of Justice. Emancipated woman is shown as a young woman stepping up and through an open doorway into the light of a blazing sun. She is dressed in classical clothing like the other figures in the central panel. A judge, representing male authority and perhaps knowledge gained through books since he carries one in his left hand, cedes dominion to women by allowing the more visionary emancipated woman to enter first through the doorway.

In eight panels, four at the right and four at the left, women's activities of the new era are represented by women participating as professionals in the fields of writing, painting, dance, music, sports, business, education, and science. In a horizontal band running across the bottom of the mural, below the chained woman and above the title Tradition, Fear & Ignorance Bound Woman, women's activities of the old era are represented by washing, baking bread, weaving, cooking over an open fire, and caring for children.

The structure of the composition, with a horizontal panel below and stacked side panels, recalls old master precedents, as does the allegorical approach to the subject. For Bisttram, like Roerich, the new role of women in society--as promoters of culture and renewed compassion--signaled the beginning of a new evolutionary development for the

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human race. The sword of justice, like in the Roswell mural, represents a great division, in the former between wrong and right, in the latter between past and future, old and new.

Roerich's Messenger (fig. 111) may have provided the precedent for Bisttram's composition; it depicts a woman answering the door of an ancient monastery to admit a female visitor.[50] Although it is less formal than Bisttram's composition and is decidedly Oriental in setting, there is a similar sense of transition and admittance in both works.

[50]Bisttram could have worked from the reproduction of Roerich's Messenger in Roerich (New York: Corona Mundi International Art Center, 1924).

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THE POLITICS OF REDEMPTION: DYNAMIC SYMMETRY, THEOSOPHY, AND SWEDENBORGIANISM IN THE ART OF EMIL BISTTRAM (1895-1976)

by

RUTH PASQUINE

VOL. II

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Chapter 12

Experiments in Proto-Abstraction: Native American Themes

Bisttram's transition to abstraction was conditioned by his study and interpretation of Pueblo ceremonies, and by his introduction to Jungian ideas. Dane Rudhyar was developing his theory of transcendental art at the same time within a similar framework, and influenced Bisttram at critical junctures along his path toward abstraction. Furthermore, the complex relationships between Bisttram's use of representational, proto-abstract, and abstract styles can be traced most closely in his Native American paintings.

Not unexpectedly Bisttram's first experiments in proto-abstraction were accompanied by a modification of his theoretical point of view. His basic argument for proto-abstraction was that it represented a more evolved and sophisticated point of view, and that by studying it individuals would likewise become more evolved and sophisticated. He also associated it with symbolism, intuition, psychology, and science. The development of Bisttram's ideas on proto-abstraction can be traced in reviews of a number of lectures he gave in the early 1930s, and in the paintings he executed during this period.

The earliest records of his views on proto-abstraction are preserved in reviews of his lecture, "The Art Movement of Today, the Whys and Wherefores of Various Isms," given to the Springfield Woman's Club in December 1932.[1] In this lecture he divided art

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[1]This talk was originally titled the "Art and Work of Mexican Women." Before the lecture in Springfield, IL, he stopped in Cincinnati where he gave a talk demonstrating how he applied dynamic symmetry to his work, and how his thinking was influenced by Oriental philosophy. "How a Painter Thinks and Works," clipping, n.d. BP, Harwood Foundation. The Cincinnati talk, given on 28 Nov. 1932, was arranged by Alma Knauber, a teacher at the School of Administration, University of Cincinnati, who had

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into four graduated categories, corresponding and appealing to four types of people:

> The first, "practical application of knowledge or ability," deals with the physical and emotional man, surroundings for the comforts of the body. This group includes paintings of still life, and pleasure in them is gained through the association of ideas."[2] This "emotional and physical group...would include any picture arousing the physical emotions of a person, such as a picture of food that would arouse the gastric juices."[3] The second group, "principles of construction applied to use," includes the emotional and yet intellectual side of man. The paintings are something to think about, and have to do with history, myths, love stories and storytelling in themselves."[4] "The third, or moral and spiritual group, pictures the ideas of philosophers as seen in the pictures of Japan, Egypt and other older peoples who have something more cosmic in their work."[5]

The fourth type of art, according to Bisttram,

> "is the power to cause expansion, transcend time and space, and give pleasure, and at present results in abstractness and symbolic interpretation. It includes architectural and intuitional painting. The modern artist now thinks in terms of psychology and science and must study the fundamental elements of the things he paints. Modernistic art is an experiment to discover what is lacking in this art cycle. Artists are studying the effect of this type of painting on people as they see it. They are interested in their own development instead of people, and as he expands through his own work, changes to a new type of work and another movement."[6]

This classification recalls the hierarchy of subjects adopted by the French Academy that privileged invenzione and ranked religious and moral painting above still life. Bisttram's

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studied with Bisttram that summer. The lectures in Cincinnati and Springfield were given on his way back from a trip to New York where he presumably made arrangements for his exhibition of Indian "abstractions" at the Delphic Studios.

[2]Bisttram, quoted in "Says Modern Art Tends to the Abstract: Emil Bisttram Addresses Woman's Club at Elks Auditorium," clipping, Dec. 1932, BP, Harwood Museum.

[3]Bisttram, quoted in "Modern Artists Need Sympathy Bisttram Says," clipping, Dec. 1932, BP, AAA 2894:230.

[4]Bisttram, quoted in "Says Modern Art Tends to the Abstract."

[5]Bisttram, quoted in "Modern Artists Need Sympathy."

[6]Bisttram, quoted in "Says Modern Art Tends to the Abstract."

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placement of works that appeal to the senses in the lowest sector shows him already predisposed to an abstract approach that rejected physical sensations in favor of ideas and intuitions. The terms of his series--physical, emotional, intellectual, moral, and spiritual--suggest that he was thinking along theosophical lines. Theosophy proposed that the evolution of the individual progressed from a concern with the physical to a concern with the mental and spiritual, passing through the emotional, by becoming successively conscious in the three "bodies" that correspond to the first three planes of reality--the physical, astral, and mental (see fig. 73). Bisttram's fourth division, an abstract and symbolic art causing expansion and transcending time and space, shows that he was already developing a theory of transcendental art.

Bisttram's characterization of modern art (the fourth type) by change and development placed his own struggles in the larger context of the necessity for evolving a new style for the New Age. The larger problem was:

> that there has been nothing great since the Renaissance, that in back of modern artists is a 500 year decline, and that students and philosophers declare that a new cycle started about 1875."[7]

These ideas are in line with Bisttram's adherence to Ouspensky's concept of art as an "eternal search" and Katz's Spenglerian theory of art cycles. His urgency to create a new style may also have stemmed from the theosophical concept of evolution--that it was the mission of all individuals at this particular period in history to develop on the mental plane. According to theosophical theory, mankind evolved successively in root races that had assigned tasks.

> Now each race has its own special lessons to learn, its own special quality to unfold. The quality of the fifth-race is what is sometimes called manas--the type

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[7]Bisttram, quoted in "Modern Artists Need Sympathy."

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of intellect that discriminates, that notes the differences between things.[8]

By extension, this new mental development would manifest in a new approach to art achieved by those in the forefront of artistic innovation.

One of the problems involved in developing this new style, according to Bisttram, is that the works still must provide pleasure to the viewer. This recalls classical art theory that conceived of beauty as a way to engage the viewer. This problem, Bisttram went on to say, was critical to modernism because cubism, the major development in twentieth-century art, held little appeal for the public. His concern with giving pleasure to the viewer may be tied to the importance of pleasure in Swedenborg's theory of love and of good and evil. For Swedenborg a person's life is filled with the things that he loves because they give him pleasure.

> What is life without delight and pleasure? It is not something living but lifeless. If you reduce delight and pleasure you will grow cold and torpid; and if you take them away you will certainly die. Vital heat is derived from the delights of the affections and from the pleasures of the perceptions and thoughts. Since every affection has its own delight and every thought thence derived has its own pleasure, it may be evident what is the source of good and truth, and also what good and truth are in their essence.[9]

Swedenborg considers affection, thought, and action to be a series;[10] consequently, pleasure becomes an important component of form. The other side of this theory is that, conversely, an individual can find pleasure in evil. Bisttram's charge then is to create works of art that will resonate in the hearts and minds of his viewers in a positive way without recourse to their sensuous appetites.

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[8]Leadbeater, I, 160.

[9]Swedenborg, Divine Providence, para. 195.

[10]Swedenborg, Divine Love and Wisdom, para. 214-216.

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In a lecture given in January 1933 in Santa Fe, Bisttram again associated modern art, in this case, geometric painting, with a more sophisticated personality.

> He [Bisttram] said you can appreciate the kind of art that is within the range of your own intelligence, and that those [who] like the 'pretty things' are of a lower grade than those who get excited over geometrically arranged pictures.[11]

Suggesting that taste could be improved by attending exhibitions, he related that his interest in abstraction, specifically in the type practiced by Kandinsky and Klee, was first aroused by attending an exhibition of flower pictures. At first he didn't want to go because "he had seen pretty flowers all his life and felt no need of pictures of them." Urged by a friend, however, he finally went. He was impressed--but not inspired--by the pictures of the French School (Corot, Daumier, Monet, Renoir, Cézanne, and Picasso); instead, he was astounded by the pictures of Klee and Kandinsky.

> There was not a flower visible but the effect, Mr. Bisttram said, was like that given by the perfume, color and variety of forms of flowers. In fact, the flower effect was much stronger than if great bunches of pansies or roses or what-not had been pictured there. Mr. Bisttram described these so called flower pictures very graphically in great detail.[12]

In an article that appeared about the same time, Bisttram expressed his ideas about modernism in spiritual terms, declaring that the principles he was using formed the modernist credo, that is, a spiritual approach to the problem of form.

> A premise for the modern movement was stated by a Hindu philosopher in answer to the question, "What direction will art take in America?" He said, "The problem of the artist of the past was to overcome matter by form, while the problem of the artist of the present and the future will be to overcome form by spirit." That is, plainly put, what the modernist is striving to achieve and what, in

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[11]Bisttram, quoted in "Our Taos Artists," clipping, Jan. 1933, BP, AAA 2894:205.

[12]Ibid. The reviewer of Bisttram's talk also mentioned that the audience was large and enthusiastic and "applauded his remarks many times." The reviewer also added that Bisttram "emphasized his remarks with forcible expressions that are not usually considered parlor language."

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> the main, he is missing through the complexity of his studio patter, his hoping for the Happy Accident, his emphasis on mannerism rather than basic qualities.[13]

Bisttram went on to say that the foundation of this new art would be geometry, that it would be sustained by a system such as dynamic symmetry, would effect a synthesis of religion and science, and would usher in the New Age.

> Such an artist will study the past only for principles--for reasons rather than methods. He will find that art is created on a foundation of geometry--"the one unique and indispensable transformer by which chaos resolves itself into order." Used by the Egyptians and Greeks, dynamic symmetry, rediscovered by the late Jay Hambidge, is the geometric law which can be indispensable to the contemporary artist. By the understanding and use of symmetry, proportion and growth the creative artist is furnished with a basis for his elaborations.
>
> The New Age promises to be one in which humanity will strive through many avenues of expression, an era of a new kind of freedom--not a thoughtless, haphazard freedom of befuddled intellects, but one where realization of self will be brought about by the understanding of laws and principles... Through self-discipline and contemplation, tolerance and vision he will become the synthesizer of the reality of religion and the truth of science.[14]

Bisttram's assertion that the modern artist should use dynamic symmetry may have been based on the interest in Hambidge's ideas in Dallas by Jerry Bywaters, the editor of the magazine in which the article appeared. Alexandre Hogue (b. 1898), a Dallas artist whom Bisttram knew from Taos and who probably introduced him to Bywaters, was also

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[13]Emil Bisttram, "Art's Revolt in the Desert," Contemporary Arts of the South and Southwest 1, no. 2 (Jan.-Feb. 1933). These remarks were cited earlier in their relationship to Oriental art. This magazine only appeared in three issues. This article was based on his essay "The New Era of Art and Life," discussed in Chapter 10. The Hindu philosopher is undoubtedly Keskar.

[14]Ibid. There was some fallout from this article. Bisttram's assertion that modern art had come to the Southwest, was rebutted in the next issue by the Taos artist C. T. Woolsey with quotes he gathered from six Taos artists, E. L. Blumenschein, W. H. Dunton, Bert G. Phillips, W. Ufer, O. E. Berninghaus, and F. I. Couse. "No Revolt," Contemporary Arts of the South and Southwest 1, no. 3 (March-April-May, 1933), 7. John William Rogers, "Fourth [sic] Issue of New Art Magazine of South and Southwest out Tomorrow," clipping, 7 May 1933, BP, AAA 2894: 339.

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a supporter of dynamic symmetry.[15] Another link to this article was the exhibition tour of Bisttram's work that opened at the Houston Museum of Fine Arts in February 1933 and subsequently traveled to the Texas State College for Women, Denton (located just outside of Dallas), in March, and to the Witte Museum, San Antonio,[16] in April. James Chillman, Jr., director of the Houston Museum of Fine Arts, who organized the three-city tour, was one of ten advisory editors for Bywaters's magazine, and so it may have been Bywaters who introduced Bisttram's work to Chillman.[17] Furthermore, Bisttram's lecture

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[15] Bisttram could have met Hogue in New York where Hogue worked as a commercial artist between 1921 and 1925. Hogue began visiting Taos in 1920; his annual summer school in Taos for art students at Texas State College for Women, Denton, begun in 1932, brought him to Taos every summer. Taos Review, 30 July 1936. Bisttram and Hogue shared a spiritual attitude towards the landscape and Indian culture, an approach that Hogue found compelling after breaking with organized religion. Hogue, like Bisttram, made prints on Joseph Imhof's lithograph press, and was good friends with Dr. Edgar L. Hewett, who loaned Hogue rare books on ethnology and anthropology. DeLong, Alexandre Hogue. Bisttram also held exhibitions at the Dallas Women's Club in 1934 and 1936 with contacts that were most likely provided by Hogue. Bisttram continued his friendship with Hogue in Tulsa, where Bisttram often taught classes, after Hogue's appointment as chairman of the art department at the University of Tulsa in 1945. Olivia Marino, Hogue's daughter, confirmed that Hogue and Bywaters were very interested in dynamic symmetry, and that Hogue used it in his painting and taught it in his classes. Hogue also owned one of Bisttram's 1933 Indian "abstractions." Olivia Marino, telephone interview with the author, May, 1999.

[16]The Witte Museum exhibition and lecture was underwritten by Mrs. Donald T. Atkinson, more widely known as Marion Koogler McNay (1883-1950), whose home in San Antonio and extensive art collection opened to the public as the Marion Koogler McNay Art Institute a few years after her death. Bisttram met Mrs. Atkinson the summer before his exhibition when she was in Taos looking for Santos paintings for her collection. Bisttram probably met her through Victor Higgins, whose marriage to her lasted between 1937 and 1939. Mrs. Atkinson, who was a watercolorist herself and an avid collector of works in this medium, may have purchased Bisttram's watercolor Knight of the Evening, 1928 (fig. 60), during their first meeting.

[17]Bywaters was also a printmaker and made frequent trips to Taos. Adams, 44. Bywaters was clearly interested in Bisttram's work, because, soon after being appointed director of the Dallas Museum in 1943, he gave Bisttram a solo exhibition of his non-objective works. Patricia Peck, "Solo Show of Emil Bisttram Art Now Current at Museum," Dallas News, 15 April 1943.

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tour of all three cities coincided with his jurying of the Sixth Annual Allied Arts Exhibition in Dallas; Alexandre Hogue, who had won first prize at the previous year's Allied Arts Exhibition, was probably instrumental in getting Bisttram a seat on the jury. Accompanying newspaper coverage launched Bisttram into the Texas art scene, and gave Bisttram a further opportunity to expound on his theory of modern art.

In remarks made to a reviewer after the jurying, Bisttram stated that he and the other two jurors used two sets of standards, selecting works from both the modern and traditional camps. Bisttram also expanded on his idea that the modernist was attempting to create universal symbols and that creating a work of art produced changes in the artist as well as in the viewer:

> So in practice the modern artist does not copy life, but tries to create a symbol of it--in a particular picture to achieve something that, as well as being particular, has the quality and truth of universality about it. Just how to go about doing this? Well, that is the most discussed problem in the field of art today. And being a problem which is as yet only faintly solved is why we find so many different and conflicting answers. We have already learned enough from the great painters who have made positive steps in that direction, however, to know that it must come through the artist seeking within himself and having the courage to express boldly what he finds there. And while the modern artist is first of all trying to lift himself up, to expand his own consciousness of the universe, it is characteristic of his work that once he has done this, what he creates has a definite message for others of his time.[18]

Bisttram's assertion that the modern artist does not imitate life but creates a symbol of it, reflects his ongoing interest in symbolism dating back to his Three-Year Course in which he gave students a choice of executing problems in abstract, symbolic, or literal styles. Bisttram's remarks may reflect Bragdon's idea that "The highest function of art is to reveal the world-order; to publish cosmic truths by means of symbols apprehensible by

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[18]Bisttram, quoted in John William Rodgers, "Explains Basis of Awards in Show This Year," Dallas Times Herald, 17 March 1933, BP, AAA 2894:283.

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the senses, more powerful than words."[19] It may also reflect his view that Rivera's painting was symbolic. Bisttram's commitment to symbolism plus his repeated references to psychology in his Springfield lecture may also have been strengthened by exposure to the theories of Carl Jung, outlined in his commentary on The Secret of the Golden Flower.[20] This text provides an overview of Jung's theory of the symbol as the sign of a transcendent experience; it also provided Rudhyar with key elements for his theory of transcendental art that he was developing in Taos as early as 1933.

Another document, lecture notes for his 1933 summer school class, shows that Bisttram was aligning himself with synthetic cubism. As soon as he rejected religious subject matter, he found that his use of a geometric structure and his rejection of sentimentality was compatible with the aims of the cubists:

> The "Nude Descending a Staircase" is an attempt to achieve the feeling of Time--she is always in motion, rather than frozen in one spot.
>
> The Cubists used geometric forms in an attempt to solve the problem of space relationships and to discover the underlying structure of form, but, finding that these forms in themselves were not sufficient to express their meaning, they went to Nature and applied the geometric scheme to human and natural forms.
>
> This led to the study of forms which are universal to nature, for a work of art does not have to have a literal idea, in the sense of religious meaning, etc. The true meaning should lie in the organization of the subject in spots, lines, planes, solids, colors, etc. They found that any sentimental meaning would confuse the idea of space relationships.[21]

Bisttram's examination of synthetic cubism is shown in his painting Flower Forms, Spring, 1932 (fig. 113), which was based on Charles Sheeler's Flower Forms, 1917 (fig.

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[19]Claude Bragdon, The Eternal Poles (1931), 54.

[20]C. G. Jung, "Commentary," in The Secret of the Golden Flower: A Chinese Book of Life, trans. into German by Richard Wilhelm, trans. into English by Cary F. Baynes (London: Kegan Paul, 1931; New York, Harcourt Brace & Co., 1932).

[21]Emil Bisttram, "Lectures by E. J. Bisttram, Taos School of Art, NM, 1933," TMs, Frank and Margel Hinder Papers, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia.

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8). For Flower Forms, Spring Bisttram borrowed the shapes of Sheeler's flowers and stems as well as the concept of echoing these forms in larger, more generalized shapes placed on either side. Bisttram regularized, rearranged, and flattened Sheeler's forms. His palette, using yellow shaded into an acid green in the larger forms on either side of the flowers, for example, is also much brighter than Sheeler's.

Bisttram's Flower Forms, Spring is constructed using two vertical side-by-side root-five rectangles (fig. 114). Three circles, placed to the left of the vertical axis, the lower one with a dot in it, suggest that the theme of this work is the correspondence between "point, line, plane, and solid" and "seed, stem, leaf, and flower." This correlation is made in Bisttram's Three-Year Course and by Bragdon and others, as previously mentioned. The play of two against three is developed in form, color, and placement, in the circles, vases, stems, and stamens. Of the three circles to the left of the central vertical axis, the lower two are red, while the one at the top is yellow. The vase is shown in three modes: the first, containing two of the circles, is depicted as a solid; the other two are depicted as planes framing the composition, with one of them inverted. The three stems, located to the right of the central vertical axis, are distinguished by color: the one abutting the axis is blue, the other two are red. A similar theme is developed with the stamens: two emerge from the flower forms, the third emerges from an implied but hidden third flower form.

Given his concern with audience reaction, Bisttram undoubtedly selected still life as an avenue for experimentation with proto-abstraction because of its ease of understanding. Flowers, however, are an unusual subject for Bisttram even though they play a large part in Chinese painting, one of his great interests.

Bisttram could have seen a reproduction of Sheeler's painting in either the

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catalogue of the John Quinn collection[22] or in Sheldon Cheney's A Primer of Modern Art (1924).[23] Cheney's books were clearly important to Bisttram since he included two of them on his 1945 reading list, although much further down on the list than Katz's book.[24] Cheney was undoubtedly brought to Bisttram's attention by Raymond Jonson. Cheney (1886-1990), editor of Theatre Arts Magazine, met Jonson in Chicago while Jonson was working as a scenic designer for the Little Theatre; also, it was Cheney who provided Jonson with a copy of Kandinsky's The Art of Spiritual Harmony in 1921. Cheney's acknowledged sources for A Primer of Modern Art are Clive Bell, Willard Huntington Wright, John Quinn, and Alfred Steiglitz; his references to "expressive form in the fourth dimensional sense" and a "divinely inspired" aesthetic emotion clearly indicate his spiritual approach to art. Cheney's admiration for Jonson is shown by his inclusion of Jonson's Earth Rhythms, No. 11, in the second and subsequent editions of A Primer of Modern Art, and three of Jonson's paintings in his chapter "Abstraction and Mysticism" in Expressionism in Art (1934).[25] Bisttram's appreciation of Jonson's painting in this early period is shown by a laudatory review he wrote of Jonson's January

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[22]Quinn, 181. Bisttram's dependence on Sheeler for Flower Forms, Spring was first noted by Udall, Modernist Painting, 197.

[23]Sheldon Cheney, A Primer of Modern Art (New York: Horace Liveright Publishers, 1924), 223. Leo Katz may also have brought Sheeler's Flower Forms to Bisttram's attention during the 1920s as Katz reproduced it in his 1936 book with the caption "example of an abstract composition; purified impersonal treatment." Katz, fig. 17, facing p. 20.

[24]For Bisttram's 1945 Reading List, see Appendix II.

[25]Sheldon Cheney, Expressionism in Art (New York: Liveright Publishing Corp., 1934). Cheney's interest in mysticism culminated in his book Men Who Have Walked With God: Being the story of mysticism through the ages told in the biographies of representative seers and saints with excerpts form their writings and sayings (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1945).

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1933 Santa Fe exhibition.

> His [Jonson's] work, symbolic, architectural, deals with the things of the imagination. His world is of intuitions, that subtle, hidden side of nature which only your true artist contacts.[26]

Bisttram's article may have been a response to a review of a group show in Santa Fe, written by Jonson's sister, in which she says "Emil Bisttram, who is considered something of a god by certain group hereabouts..."[27]

Cubist Nudes (fig. 115) is another experiment with proto-abstraction from the same period. The drawing (fig. 18), discussed earlier, shows that Bisttram utilized the major diagonals of the root-four rectangle as the structure for the figures. The concept for the figures as symbols of the duality of male and female undoubtedly derives from Bragdon's theory of In and Yo, discussed earlier. Bragdon develops this theory further in his book The Eternal Poles (1931); his terms now, however, are the masculine and feminine aspects of polarity:

> Sexuality and polarity ought to be thought of as interchangeable terms, and in order to fix this idea firmly in mind let us think of the bisection of humanity by sexual differentiation as microcosmic polarity, and the bisection of everything by polarity as cosmic sex.[28]

Bisttram follows Bragdon literally by deriving his organizing lines for the male and female principles from two diagonal bisections of the root-four rectangle. The root-four

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[26]Emil Bisttram, "Taos Painter Finds Jonson Show at Museum Truly Great," Santa Fe New Mexican, 14 Jan. 1933, BP, Harwood Museum.

[27]E. L. J. [Esther L. Jonson], "Visiting Critic Finds Almost Everything in Fiesta Art Show," Santa Fe New Mexican, 6 Sept. 1932, Raymond Jonson Papers, AAA RJ9:6551. Bisttram's two paintings in this exhibition were Mexican Funeral and Sunlightning, a portrait of a Native American.

[28]Bragdon, The Eternal Poles, 43-44. Bragdon goes on to illustrate this principle by the logarithmic curve embedded in the Whirling Square rectangle. Ibid., 52.

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rectangle also symbolizes duality since it is made up of two side-by-side squares; the square, a symbol of man, further reinforces this symbolism.[29]

The universal character of the composition is reinforced by the color scheme: the figures are enclosed by a blue oval set against a pink background; red, yellow, and blue planes that define the features of the pink figures function as decorative rhythms equalizing the male and female principles. The impersonality of the composition is secured by the suppression of sensuality. Bisttram's treatment of the human figure was always undertaken with the utmost respect. Nudity was only used for its symbolic or universal value rather than for its sensual impact. Bisttram, in fact, criticized Leon Kroll's nudes on this count, asserting that his subject matter was cheap and lacked refinement.[30]

Native American Themes

Bisttram's experiments with proto-abstraction, however, were made primarily with Native American material. He began with traditional portraits and an interest in ethnographic accuracy. The Taos painter Joseph Imhof (1871-1955) probably provided Bisttram with his first insights into Pueblo culture. Imhof and his wife Sallie moved to Taos in 1929 from New York, after having lived in Albuquerque between 1907 and

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[29]Bragdon discusses the symbolism of man as a square in his chapter "Man: The Magic Square," in The New Image (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1928); and in A Primer of Higher Space: the Fourth Dimension; to which is added, Man the Square, A Higher Space Parable. Bragdon also reserves specific praise for the root-four rectangle, and uses it for constructing his interpretations of musical notes. The New Image, 131. Bragdon uses the terms In and Yo in The New Image, 132.

[30]Bernard Stone, telephone interview with the author, 10 Feb. 1998. Stone, now an art therapist, studied with Bisttram between 1953 and 1955, at the same time Edith Carson studied with Bisttram.

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1912, during which time Joe had been initiated into the Turquoise Clan at Cochiti Pueblo. Imhof had established intimate relationships among the Taos Pueblos and was a great collector of artifacts.[31] His research culminated in a series of sixty paintings that recorded the role of corn in Pueblo cultural and religious life.

The Imhofs took a parental interest in the Bisttrams: the Bisttrams were only a few years older than the Imhofs's daughter who tragically committed suicide soon after the Bisttrams's arrival in Taos. Imhof and Bisttram had a lot in common--both had worked in commercial art in New York; both had even worked for the American Lithography Company. Imhof also had the only lithography press in Taos, a Rutherford flatbed hand press, which he purchased from Currier & Ives, where he had started his career in commercial art. Imhof allowed Bisttram and others to use this press. Most important, however, was Imhof's devotion to dynamic symmetry, an interest that predated his move to Taos. While there is no record of how Imhof became interested in dynamic symmetry, it was surely discussed at the annual gatherings of Fourteenth Street artists at the Imhof studio at 28 East Fourteenth Street, just down the way from Howard Giles's studio at 35 West Fourteenth Street.

After Bisttram's initial talks on dynamic symmetry in Bert Philips's studio, a group of artists continued to meet for discussions at Imhof's studio. One of their activities was examining Imhof's collection of Anderson of Rome reproductions of old master paintings, looking for confirmations of dynamic symmetry in the compositions. They were undoubtedly aided by Irma Richter's Rhythmic Form in Art (1932), which provided

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[31]Imhof's collection of artifacts is at the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.

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geometrical analyses of old master paintings as well as Greek and Egyptian examples.[32] Although she utilized Hambidge's concepts, she provided a new theory, that Egyptian and Greek art, as well as old master paintings, were designed by inscribing a pentagon in a circle. The basis for this idea was that the pentacle, the five-pointed star inscribed within the pentagon, contains exclusively golden section ratios. The presence of golden section ratios in the pentacle was noted by Euclid and by Hambidge. Richter's in-depth discussion of Plato and Pythagoras would have kept classical concepts in the forefront of Bisttram's mind.

Many of the artists in Taos, including Imhof, looked to the old masters for inspiration. Bisttram's Pueblo Woman, 1932 (fig. 116), shows this influence both in the pose, which recalls Renaissance precedents, and the execution on a wood panel in tempera with oil glazes.[33] Bisttram was always interested in mediums. In fact, Bisttram wrote a number of letters before his departure for Mexico to experts requesting information on procedures and recipes for fresco and tempera painting. Henry Mayer, for example, provided Bisttram with a recipe for gesso based on conversations with

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[32]Irma A. Richter, Rhythmic Form in Art: An Investigation of the Principles of Composition in the Works of the Great Masters (London: John Lane The Bodley Head Limited, 1932). This book, included in Frank Hinder's library, was probably recommended to him by Bisttram. Free, 14. Giles was also in correspondence with Richter. Irma Richter to (Howard Giles), ALS, 1 Nov. 1946, Giles File, Forbes Papers, Fogg Art Museum Archives. Irma Richter was the sister of Gisela Richter, curator of classical art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Gisela Richter was one of the most outspoken supporters of Hambidge's theories.

[33]Bisttram's Portrait of Bing Abbott, 1932, oil on canvas, 91.4 x 68.9 cm., Harwood Museum, is another important work from the period using the old master format. In this work, however, Bisttram uses it with humor. He shows Abbott in half-length seated in front of a ledge. Abbot's hands rest on the ledge; he holds a six-shooter in one hand, and a glass of Taos lightning in the other. He wears a Stetson, and a scarf tucked into a black coat.

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Daniel Thompson, who was preparing a new translation of Cennini's handbook on painting techniques.[34]

Bisttram's drawing Geronimo, 1934 (fig. 117), also shows a traditional old master approach.[35] Comparing it with Imhof's lithograph Geronimo of Taos (fig. 118) shows the similarity of their approaches and suggests that the two works may even have been executed at the same time since Imhof's is a front view and Bisttram's a three-quarter view, and both treat just the head and neck. Geronimo (d. 1987), also known as Joe "Sunhawk" Sandoval, was one of Imhof's models and a regular presence in the Imhof household. Imhof taught him to paint and how to run the lithography press. Geronimo was a medicine man and belonged to a Peyote cult; he made a large sand painting next to the front door of the Imhof house. Geronimo's drooping eyelids, shown in both Bisttram's and Imhof's depictions, were the result of a condition known as ptosis.[36]

Bisttram, however, was most stimulated by the Indian dances. While the ceremonial dances were perhaps the most attractive aspect of life in New Mexico, Bisttram's reading during the 1920s prepared him for a special appreciation of this art form. Binyon, for example, in Flight of the Dragon (1911), reserves the highest praise for dance, calling it the embodiment of the essential rhythm of the first canon of Chinese painting.[37]

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[34]Henry Mayer to (Bisttram), ALS, 27 May 1931, William Warder Papers.

[35]This is undoubtedly the drawing Blind Geronimo, Apache Indian included in Bisttram's 1936 exhibition of 11 drawings and 10 watercolors held at the H. Sophie Newcomb College Art Gallery, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA, in April, 1936.

[36]Reily, 257, 272-3.

[37]Binyon, 13-15.

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Havelock Ellis's (1859-1939) The Dance of Life (1923), a book on Bisttram's 1930 reading list,[38] develops a philosophy of life based on the history and culture of dance. Starting with Heraclitus's famous dictum, "No man bathes twice in the same stream," and citing Spengler's demonstration of "the unity of spirit underlying the most diverse elements in an age's productivity," he asserts that life, like the dance, is unity modified by change and regulated by mathematics:

> That is why life must always be a dance, for that is what a dance is: perpetual slightly varied movements which are yet always held true to the shape of the whole.[39] ...it is necessary to insist upon life as a dance. This is not a mere metaphor. The dance is the rule of number and of rhythm and of measure and of order, of the controlling influence of form, of the subordination of the parts to the whole. That is what a dance is. And these same properties also make up the classic spirit, not only in life, but, still more clearly and definitely, in the universe itself. We are strictly correct when we regard not only life but the universe as a dance. For the universe is made up of a certain number of elements, less than a hundred, and the "periodic law" of these elements is metrical. They are ranged, that is to say, not haphazard, not in groups, but by number, and those of like quality appear at fixed and regular intervals. Thus our world is, even fundamentally, a dance, a single metrical stanza in a poem which will be for ever hidden from us, except in so far as the philosophers, who are to-day even here applying the methods of mathematics, may believe that they have imparted to it the character of objective knowledge.[40]

He goes on to demonstrate the primacy of the dance in all cultures, excepting the Protestant aberration, showing that essential truths for modern life are found in the classics and other non-Christian traditions.

During the summer of 1933 Bisttram's interest in dance was focused and refined by his relationship with his student Alice Sherbon (1910-1985). Sherbon, who had

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[38]For Bisttram's 1930 reading list, see Appendix I.

[39]Havelock Ellis, The Dance of Life (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923), vii-viii.

[40]Ibid., xi-xii.

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studied dance at the University of Kansas, went to Bisttram

> to find some fundamental principles from which to build a kind of dance that could satisfy my demands. Mr. Bisttram told me about Martha Graham's work and that she had already done what I was trying to do.[41]

Under Bisttram, Sherbon undertook a thorough study of dynamic symmetry and applied it to her dance compositions. She went on to study with Martha Graham and Louis Horst between 1934 and 1937; she returned to Taos to teach dance at Bisttram's school in 1939 and 1940.

Bisttram's earliest interpretations of Pueblo dances focus on establishing rhythmic forms and ethnographic accuracy. Domingo Corn Dancers (fig. 119),[42] depicts four dancers--two male figures at the left followed by two female figures at the right. A comparison between Bisttram's watercolor and D. H. Lawrence's (1885-1930) drawing Pueblo Indian Dancers, ca. 1924 (fig. 120), published in a 1926 issue of Spud Johnson's magazine Laughing Horse, shows that Bisttram essentially doubled Lawrence's two figures. Bisttram's two figures at the left correspond to Lawrence's figure at the left: both are male, face left, have the left leg raised, hold a rattle and evergreen sprigs, and wear boots and large shell necklaces. Similarly, Bisttram's two figures at the right correspond to Lawrence's figure at the right: both are female, face left, follow the male figures, stand motionless, wear dresses that exposes one shoulder, and are barefoot. Tablitas, perched

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[41]Alice Sherbon, "Application for Guggenheim Fellowship," 1943, Alice Sherbon File, J. S. Guggenheim Foundation. Sherbon (Mrs. Menford L. Bauman) unsuccessfully applied for Guggenheim Fellowships in 1943, 1944, and 1945. Arvella R. Frazier, "The History of the American Dance Symposia" (M.A. thesis, University of Kansas, 1986).

[42]This work was exhibited at the 33rd Annual Watercolor Exhibition, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, 1935, no. 121, and at the 15th Annual Watercolor Exhibition, Art Institute of Chicago, 12 March-10 May 1936, no. 162. It was illustrated in both catalogues. Santo Domingo Pueblo, located along the Rio Grande just south of Santa Fe, has the reputation for giving the most authentic interpretation of the corn dance.

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on their heads, are about a foot high and are held in place by strings tied under the chin. Bisttram ostensibly "corrects" Lawrence's composition by doubling the figures and organizing them with a dynamic symmetry structure. Bisttram aligns and joins the waists of the figures along the horizontal axis; then separates and defines the two groups by orienting the women along verticals, and the bent heads and knees of the more active men along diagonals.

Although Bisttram probably worked from the reproduction of Lawrence's drawing in Laughing Horse, it was first published in Lawrence's article on the Corn Dance in Theatre Arts Monthly (1924).[43] In this article Lawrence explains that he has shown the woman with her head bent to show the submission of the women to the men. Bisttram, however, shows the heads of the women held high. Erna Fergusson's description of the part of the Corn Dance in which the women follow the men, favors Lawrence's depiction:

> In form it [the Domingo Corn Dance] falls into two figures: first men and women dance facing, with occasional turnings of the whole group; then they form in couples, each man prancing ahead, his head high, his feet spurning the ground, and the women following, eyes downcast, movement slow and gentle. [44]

Bisttram undoubtedly looked through back issues of Laughing Horse to familiarize himself with Taos cultural life since its editor and founder, Spud Johnson (1897-1968), was an important literary figure in Taos when Bisttram arrived. The issue

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[43]D. H. Lawrence, "The Dance of the Sprouting Corn," Theatre Arts Monthly 8, no.7 (July 1924), 449. Lawrence also published an article on the snake dance in the same magazine in Dec. 1924, followed by one on the Pueblos by Luhan in the same magazine in May 1925. Her article includes an illustration by her good friend the theater designer Marc Edmund Jones, who published widely in Theatre Arts and may have suggested this forum for their articles.

[44]Erna Fergusson, Dancing Gods: Indian Ceremonials of New Mexico and Arizona (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931), 59. Fergusson's title was clearly the source for the title of Bisttram's Delphic Studios exhibition, The Dancing Gods Series: Exhibition of Water Colors by Emil Bisttram,

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of Laughing Horse in which Lawrence's drawing appeared was Johnson's tribute to his friendship with Lawrence that developed during the Lawrences's visits to New Mexico in 1922-23 and 1924 at the invitation of Mabel Dodge Luhan. During the course of the visits Johnson published a number of Lawrence's writings in Laughing Horse and even accompanied the Lawrences and Witter Bynner to Mexico in 1923.[45]

Bisttram's watercolor Indian Dancers, 1933 (fig. 121), also probably meant to evoke a scene at Santo Domingo Pueblo, is a more complex composition featuring three male dancers. The essential rhythm of the composition is set up by the contrast between the more active movements of the dancer in the foreground and the less active movements of the two in the background. The profile of the foreground figure symbolizes his movement along the horizontal, and the full face of the two background figures symbolizes their movement along the vertical, and by extension, the two directions of the picture plane.

Type and costuming further reinforce the distinction between the two primary rhythms. The main figure, a Koshare, painted in black and white stripes, functions in Pueblo rituals as a clown. He is naked except for a type of apron tied around his waist; his hair is tied with corn husks. In each hand he holds sprigs of evergreen, trees sacred to the Pueblos. His legs, arms, and stripes, oriented along the diagonal, provide the major design elements that move the rhythm along the horizontal plane. This strategy,

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[45]Lawrence continued to have a presence in Taos even after his death: the publication of Luhan's Lorenzo in Taos (1932), Dorothy Brett's Lawrence and Brett: A Friendship (1933), and Frieda Lawrence's Not I But the Wind: Unpublished Letters and Material by D. H. Lawrence and Memoirs by His Wife (1934) kept Lawrence's ties to Taos in the forefront of conversation. His widow Frieda created a stir when, in 1935, she brought Lawrence's ashes from Italy where he had died, and erected a monument to him on nearby Lobo Mountain where they had spent a winter together.

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using diagonals along the plane to create rhythm rather than to create deep perspective space by advancing or receding thrusts, follows the design principles of Denman Ross.

The two figures in the back, representing rhythm along the vertical, are aligned along the major vertical axes of the dynamic symmetry format--three horizontally stacked root-five rectangles--with crossing diagonals marking the centers of their foreheads. They wear a more decorated white apron, a sash with fringe reaching from the right knee to the ankle, a fox tail hanging from the back, and in one hand a sprig of evergreen and in the other a rattle. They wear parrot feathers on top of their long hair, and ankle-high moccasins on their feet.[46]

Koshares, 1933 (fig. 122), focuses more on the role of the Koshares as clowns in the dances in the Rio Grande Pueblos. Their antics serve a corrective function in Pueblo society, humorously criticizing any and all departures from acceptable behavior. W. Jackson Rushing identified this watercolor as one of Bisttram's most successful proto-abstractions. He identified the black dashes as tassels, the dots as seeds of watermelon slices, and noted how the tongues in some cases become stripes.[47] The association with watermelons is confirmed by Koshari dolls that are often shown with watermelons.[48]

Koshares achieves an increase in energy and movement by reducing natural

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[46]All of these costuming details are mentioned in Frank Waters's description of the Santo Domingo Corn Dance in his book Masked Gods. Frank Waters, Masked Gods: Navaho and Pueblo Ceremonialism (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1950), 263-4. While Waters's books were published after Bisttram's Native American works were executed, Waters was chosen as a source for the ethnographic details of the ceremonial dances because he reflects a point of view that Bisttram shared. Waters was a Taos writer, provided a mystical interpretation, and was someone Bisttram knew.

[47]Rushing, 87.

[48]Barton Wright, Clowns of the Hopi: Tradition Keepers and Delight Makers (Flagstaff, Northland Publishing, 1994), cover, 14, 46, 48.

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forms to geometric shapes and design considerations. Instead of overlapping forms, Bisttram uses shapes defined by black stripes on a white ground that seem as though they could have been cut out with scissors. The black stripes, which function like bars in a cage, provide a sense of transparency. The play between positive and negative spaces is strengthened by the widths of the white spaces, which are actually greater than the black lines. The extension of the design to the edges of the sheet, the use of five figures, and positioning the faces both frontally and in profile, contribute to the complexity of the design. Viewer interest is sustained by the difficulty of keeping the figures in focus.

The long-tailed figure crawling on his hands and knees along the lower edge, facing the lower right corner, evokes the humor characteristic of the Koshares. The position of this figure also refers to the identification with an animal that is an essential part of his role. The stripes are a form of body art functioning in the dance to identify the individual with the totem being propitiated. The totem is the animal, or plant, or force of nature that a group identifies with and believes to be descended from.

Bisttram's choice of the self-ornamentation of the Koshares for the theme of this work may have been influenced by reading Otto Rank's Art and Artists (1932), a book on his 1945 reading list. Rank, a student of Freud, traces the origins of art to body painting, even preceding object ornamentation; he identifies it first as a sign of the inclusion of the individual in the tribe, and then, with differentiation, as an enhancement of individuality as he becomes associated with a sub-group within that tribe.[49] In this way he associates art (body decoration) with both imitation (identification) and individuation,

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[49]Rank, 30.

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psychological functions necessary for personality development.[50] The depiction of body painting and signs of identification with animals in Koshares, could therefore represent the evolution of art itself from its primitive origins. This reading is reinforced by the personification of the primitive elements of art, that is, points and lines that become planes, by fingers and toes that become claws.

The source for Koshares is undoubtedly Awa Tsireh's Chiffonettis Climbing (fig. 123), which was reproduced in Grant's Taos Indians (1925). The cap, tassels, and tails of Bisttram's figures are similar to Tsireh's. Most important, however, are Tsireh's figures who crawl up the pole. These figures are very similar to Bisttram's figure who crawls along the bottom edge of his composition.

An examination of the other six works reproduced by Tsireh in Grant's book shows that Lawrence's drawing (fig. 120) and Bisttram's Domingo Corn Dance (fig. 119) were also influenced by Tsireh. Lawrence and Bisttram's short, stocky female figures shown in profile are very similar the figure of the woman in Tsireh's Tanoan Peace Ceremony (fig. 124). Additionally, another work by Tsireh, Pueblo War Dance,[51] also reproduced in Grant's book, shows postures that could be the model for the central figure in Bisttram's Indian Dancers (fig. 121).

Awa Tsireh (1898-1955), one of the most popular of the self-taught artists from San Ildefonso Pueblo, was widely-known in New Mexico through the patronage of such individuals as Dr. Hewett, William and Alice Corbin Henderson, and Mabel Dodge Luhan. Alice Henderson first saw Tsireh's pictures in 1917. Subsequently, Tsireh

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[50]Ibid., 356-8.

[51]Awa Tsireh [Alfonso Roybal], Pueblo War Dance, in Grant, The Taos Indians, facing p. 120.

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modeled for Bill Henderson; Bill Henderson also encouraged him to paint and provided him with art books. Tsireh particularly responded to Egyptian art and Oriental prints.[52] Alice Henderson purchased works by Tsireh and sold them to her friends, including Mabel Dodge Luhan. Luhan even commissioned Tsireh to paint a mural on the portal of Los Gallos, the house she built with Tony Luhan.[53]

While Tsireh and other self-taught Pueblo artists were generally thought to represent the inherited traditions of a primitive culture, J. J. Brody argues that these artists, essentially divorced from their cultures which disavowed painting separate from ritual, were actually more influenced by Anglo artists and were producing work that would appeal to their patrons.[54] In any case, it is clear that Bisttram (and Lawrence) were looking at contemporary painting by Native American artists in order to gain insights into the primitive mentality. By studying Tsireh's work, Bisttram found a way of transmuting his preferred elements--a rejection of perspective, an emphasis on line, a design approach, and the watercolor medium--into a proto-abstract style.

Hopi Snake Dance, 1933 (fig. 125), like Indian Dancers (fig. 121), features three male dancers in an ethnographically accurate setting. The most important aspect of this painting, however, is that it is the first instance of Bisttram using the snake as a positive symbol, following Blavatsky's extensive writings on the snake as a symbol of wisdom. Bisttram must have been fascinated by this ritual since it confirmed Blavatsky's assertions that the snake was a universal symbol, and that it was brought to Mexico by "priests of

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[52]J. J. Brody, Pueblo Indian Painting, 75-82.

[53]The Tsireh mural is no longer extant. Rudnick, Utopian Vistas, 109-110, 310.

[54]J. J. Brody, Indian Painters & White Patrons (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971), 87-102.

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the ancient wisdom." For Blavatsky, the snake's casting off of its old skin symbolizes the individual's rebirth and regeneration into a "son of wisdom."[55] She even cites "Quetzo-Cohuatl," which Bisttram mentions in his description of this painting:

> The Hopi Snake Dance was one of a number of paintings resulting from an extended tour of the Indian Country in 1930. The series was begun in 1931 and completed sometime in 1934.
>
> The Hopi Snake Dancers is an actual portrayal of the scene and may be considered a documentary painting. The dancers brought their snakes in bags which they had captured and prepared, including themselves. As the dancers picked up the snakes they "feathered" it with a large feather, a kind of stroking technic that was constant. It was only when the dancer broke the rhythm of "feathering" during the dance that he might be bitten. For this they had special herb remedies which seemed to take care of the bite. Meanwhile the medicine man kept up a rhythmic chant in the background. The dance was given sometime in August.
>
> The dance was both awesome and impressive and obviously symbolic. There seemed to be a tie-up with the "Feathered Serpent" of the Aztec, Mayan and Toltec cultures. There were small bundles of feathers tied to the arms. Perhaps this dance may have been a remnant of the Quetzal-coatl culture, he who was the Feathered Serpent.[56]

Frank Waters confirms the red and white color scheme of the figures in the dance: the body is painted red; white paint is used around the lips, on the arms up to the elbows, and in circles around the breasts. The way Bisttram depicts the snake held between the teeth just below the head is also a documented aspect of the ritual.[57]

The diagonal rhythms of Hopi Snake Dance, established by the lines of the arms of the three male figures, are set off and accented by red and white body paint. The

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[55]Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, II, 380.

[56]Bisttram, Bisttram File, Gerald Peters Gallery, Santa Fe. Hopi Snake Dance, 1933, was deaccessioned by the Anschutz Corporation in 1982. Bisttram painted a larger version of this work containing seven figures now in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe.

[57]Waters, Masked Gods, 309, 313; The Book of the Hopi (New York: Viking, 1963; reprint New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 227.

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place of dominance is given to the snake by aligning it along the central vertical axis. The snake is given additional emphasis by the placement of the hand that holds it in the exact center of the composition. Deferring to the snake, the three figures are moved off center. The central figure maintains his prominence, however, by the triangle created by his head and shoulders; his priority is also signaled by his face shown in full view compared with the profile of the two figures in the background. This strict adherence to a hierarchy of forms and motifs is typical of all Bisttram's work. The derivation of the diagonals for the upper arms from the lines of the three horizontally stacked root-five rectangles that form the shape of the composition also follows Bisttram's usual methods.

The insistent divisions into three, characteristic of Bisttram's work of the early 1930s was undoubtedly inspired by Pythagorean concepts:

> Pythagoras taught that everything in nature was divisible into three parts and that no one could become truly wise who did not view every problem as being diagrammatically triangular. He said, "Establish the triangle and the problem is two-thirds solved"; further, "All things consist of three." In conformity with this viewpoint, Pythagoras divided the universe into three parts, which he called the Supreme World, the Superior World and the Inferior World.[58]
>
> The triad--3--is the first number actually odd (monad not always being considered a number). It is the first equilibrium of unities; therefore Pythagoras said that Apollo gave oracles from a tripod and advised offer of libation three times. The keywords to the quality of the triad are friendship, peace, justice, prudence, piety, temperance and virtue... The sacredness of the triad and its symbol--the triangle--is derived from the fact that it is made up of the monad and the duad...[59]

Three is also symbolic for the Hopi since they live on three mesas in Arizona, and some of their dances shift in location from one mesa to the next every year. The public

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[58]Manly P. Hall, An Encyclopedic Outline of Masonic, Hermetic, Qabbalistic and Rosicrucian Symbolical Philosophy (San Francisco: H. S. Crocker, 1928; reprint Los Angeles: The Philosophical Research Society, 1997), lxvii.

[59]Ibid., lxxii.

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dances, of which the Hopi Snake Dance is one, given in the main plazas of the Pueblos, are culminating rituals preceded by other rituals performed in the underground kivas that last sometimes twenty days. The kivas are large ceremonial rooms where the most sacred parts of the rituals are performed. The dancers, in fact, emerge from and retreat back into their respective kivas at the beginnings and endings of the dances. The public is generally barred from kiva ceremonies although ethnographers and other interested observers are occasionally permitted to observe and document the proceedings.[60]

The Snake Dance is the final event in the Snake-Antelope Ceremony, the last major ritual of the year that begins at the winter solstice. The purpose of the ceremony is to produce one last great rainfall for the crops. This is effected by conjuring up and joining the two great forces of the universe, the male and the female. The snake, because it lives in the earth, is associated with the female; the antelope, because of its horn, is associated with the male. The snake rituals are performed in the snake kiva by the snake society, and the antelope rituals in the antelope kiva by the antelope society. The snake society devotes four days of the ritual to collecting the snakes. Once the snakes are captured, they are brought into the kiva. On one evening the snakes are brought out and "entertained" in the kiva by members of the snake society. Bisttram's painting accurately shows how the snakes are handled. The two buzzard feathers in the left hand of the main figure are thought to posses a smell that tames the snake. These feathers are waved over the head of the snake to make it uncoil. Bisttram's painting shows how, after picking up the snake, it is brushed with the side of the hand to keep it straight. Snakes were never handled when they were coiled up.

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[60]The ceremonial dances in the plazas of the Rio Grande pueblos are similarly preceded and followed by ceremonies in underground kivas.

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The marriage of the snake princess to the antelope prince is performed in the antelope kiva before the snake dance. The antelope dance, performed on the day before the snake dance, uses squash, melon, and bean vines as its symbols. The forces of the antelope produce the clouds, and the forces of the snake produce the rain. If someone is bitten by a snake, or if it doesn't rain, it reflects on the way the ceremony was performed or the attitude or thoughts of one or more of the participants. Waters compares the snake ceremonies with the Buddhist practice of raising the power of kundalini, symbolized by the snake, during meditation; and the marriage of the snake and the antelope to the "mystic marriage" of the medieval alchemists.[61]

Waters's comparison between Pueblo and Buddhist rituals throughout his books reflects a viewpoint widely held in Taos. Mabel Dodge Luhan probably encouraged him to pursue these similarities inasmuch as it was she who introduced him to the I Ching and the writings of Gurdjieff.[62] Luhan considered it her duty to interest writers in Pueblo culture because an occultist told her that her mission in Taos was to act as a bridge between the Indians and the Anglos. Her charge, to heal the world by becoming a conduit for the "secret doctrine" possessed by the Indians was stymied, however, by her Pueblo husband's unwillingness to reveal any of their secrets.[63] Nonetheless, her reference to a "secret doctrine" is an allusion to Blavatsky's book that postulated the

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[61]Waters, The Book of the Hopi, 218-230.

[62]Frank Waters, Of Time and Change, 73, 81.

[63]Lois Palken Rudnick, Mabel Dodge Luhan: New Woman, New Worlds (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 165.

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ultimate origin of all religions in Buddhism.[64]

Blanche Grant's Taos Indians (1925) suggests that she also believed in a Buddhist origin for the Taos Indians, citing among other things the origin of their name in the word tao, the Chinese word for the mystical way.[65] Additionally, a comment that Imhof made, that one of his Tibetan artifacts looked very much like the tablita, the Pueblo headdress,[66] is another indication that the connection between Tibetan and Pueblo religions was a topic of discussion among artists and writers during the early 1930s in Taos. Eleanora Kissel, an original member of Taos Heptagon, who took mostly Indian subjects for her paintings, hosted weekly discussions of the occult in her studio; she probably also contributed to the circulation of this viewpoint.[67] Dorothy Brett, another founding member of Taos Heptagon and devotee of the occult, also depicted primarily Native American themes. Taos Heptagon may indeed have been founded based on a common interest in the occult dimensions of Native American rituals.

Schuré's The Great Initiates (1889), which was on Bisttram's 1930 reading list, provides a key to what Bisttram may have thought about the Native Americans. Schuré's

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[64]Rudnick suggests that the poet Witter Bynner, one of the first Americans to translate Chinese poetry into English, introduced Luhan to the relationship between Taoism and Pueblo religion in the early 1920s. Luhan developed her ideas about the relationship between Taoism and the Pueblos in Taos and Its Artists (1947). Ibid. 242-249. Mary Cabot Wheelwright, founder of the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian, Santa Fe, was also fascinated with the relationship between Asian and Pueblo religion. Udall, Spud Johnson, 408, note 11.

[65]Blanche Grant, The Taos Indians (Taos, NM: n.p., 1925; reprint Glorieta, NM: The Rio Grande Press, 1976), 14.

[66]Reily, 260.

[67]Dolores Montoya, one of the Bisttrams's closest friends, recalls first meeting Bisttram at one of these meetings in the Kissel studio in the early 1930s. Dolores Montoya, interview with the author, October 1998.

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theory of races, which held that the yellow, red, black, and white races each developed on its own continent, placed the red race on Atlantis. For Schuré, the Indians of Mexico, Polynesia, and North America were the remains of that red race.[68] In another reference that would not have escaped Bisttram's notice, C. W. Leadbeater connected the Taos Indians and the Atlanteans with the statement:

> The Atlantean sacred word was Tau, and it has been said that the sacred words given to the root-races in succession are all of them consecutive syllables of one great word, which is the true sacred Name."[69]

Luhan's reference to Atlantis in her description of her motivation for settling in Taos indicates she may have held the same idea:

> Whether it was to Atlantis I went or not I do not know, nor have I ever been interested in conjecturing about it. I suppose when one gets to heaven one does not speculate about it any more. And the same must be true of hell. Anyway, I was through with reading books about Atlantis, Rosicrucianism, the Seven Worlds of Theosophy, or about any other mystical things. I entered into a new life that they were concerned with and I was done with reading any books for a long time.[70]

In Ancient Freemasonry (1928), Higgins also supports the contention that Native Americans possessed the "ancient wisdom," citing specifically the relationship between the Masonic apron, garments worn by the Pharaohs on ancient Egyptian statues, and the short skirts worn by the Hopi during ceremonial dances.[71]

Hopi Snake Dance is based on the watercolor reproduced on the cover of the

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[68]Schuré, 36-7.

[69]C. W. Leadbeater, The Inner Life, I, 139.

[70]Luhan, Edge of Taos Desert, 6.

[71]Higgins, 16.

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catalogue for Bisttram's 1933 exhibition of Indian "abstractions" at the Delphic Studios.[72] This watercolor, however, only includes two figures. A reviewer of this exhibition, when it was shown in Santa Fe, commented on how this work reminded him of the similarity between the Indians and the Orientals:

> The simple dark figure--or half figure--of a snake dancer is important in that it portrays surprisingly the same deep seated Orientalism that one feels so often in connection with the Indian and particularly in their dances, which after all are the Indian.

He concludes with very generous praise for Bisttram's work:

> The entire alcove is vital. The movement, both in the line and color is varied and in each work completely significant, and this is a test of the man's versatility, for in every work the basis is obviously the Indian. In my estimation this is the first work of real importance that has come out of the southwest, using the Indian as material for starting point. This is positive work as a direct result of deep thinking and concentration coupled with a fine spirit.[73]

Only a few works from this exhibition can be positively identified. Hopi Katchina, Humming Bird Dance, 1933 (fig. 123), however, is listed in the catalogue as a loan from Mrs. Howard Giles, and she later willed it to the Hood Museum, Hanover.

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[72]This exhibition included 17 works: Hopi Snake Dance; Hopi Katchina Mask, War God No. 1 (Black Mask); Hopi Katchina, War God; Hopi Katchina of the Coyote Clan; Hopi Katchina, Sheep Dance; Hopi Katchina, Sheep Dance; Hopi Katchina Dance; Hopi Katchina, Humming Bird Dance, Loaned by Mrs. Howard Giles; Domingo Indian Koshares or Clowns; Zuni Indian Shalako (Rain God Messengers); Indian Masks; Indian Medicine Man; Indian Lovers; Indian Koshares, Clowns or Earth Spirits; Indian Koshares, Delight Makers; Hopi Snake Dance with Mask; Hopi Katchina Dance.

The watercolors for this exhibition must have been executed fairly quickly since in a letter of Oct. 1932 to John Myers at the Pennsylvania Academy, he states that he regretted not having any watercolors to show in this year's Philadelphia Water Color Club exhibition, and that it was because he was so involved in oil painting. Bisttram to John Myers, Secretary, The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, LT, 25 Oct. 1932, BP, AAA 2892: 175. Bisttram's article, "Art's Revolt in the Desert," Contemporary Arts of the South and Southwest 1, no. 2 (Jan.-Feb. 1933) announced the Delphic Studios exhibition would be held in March and April; however it was postponed until November.

[73]V. W., "Emil Bisttram's Exhibition," Santa Fe New Mexican, 19 July 1933, BP, AAA 2894:335.

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The first two words of the title, Hopi Katchina, preface the titles of seven works in the exhibition. The word katchina has several meanings. Most importantly it is a spirit; it can also refer to a person who impersonates a spirit in a ceremonial dance; it can also refer to a doll that is made for children to teach them the name and appearance of a particular spirit. According to the Hopi religion the katchina spirits come to earth for six months each year to assist man in carrying out his universal mission. The katchina dances, held during the six months of katchina activity on earth (between the winter and summer solstices), are the forms through which the Hopi tune into and work with the katchina forces. A katchina dancer impersonates a specific katchina spirit by wearing a specific mask and costume; the right to impersonate a specific katchina is hereditary.[74] The figures in Bisttram's katchina works may very well be derived from katchina dolls.

Hopi Katchina: Humming Bird Dance (fig. 126) shows Bisttram experimenting with some of the strategies of proto-abstraction: reduction of natural forms to geometric shapes, overlapping transparent planes, and repetition. The organizing principle, a diagonal thrust from lower left to upper right with figures facing right in profile, is a departure from Bisttram's usual approach, which is to organize figures along the vertical axis. Four similarly sized circles drawn with a compass represent the heads of the dancers. Movement to the right is reinforced by the overlap of the heads of the two birds at the right, following Denman Ross's concept of "diminution of measure" in the repetition of forms to show movement in a direction. The other elements of the design--pointed beaks, fluttering wings, and confusion of hands and feet--evoke the idea of humans impersonating birds in a dance.

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[74]Waters, Book of the Hopi, 165-8.

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Earth Spirits, 1933 (fig. 127), in the Hood Museum collection, also donated by Mrs. Giles, and presumably purchased from the Delphic Studios exhibition, is executed in a similar style, depicting various figures in an organized confusion of heads, hands and feet using overlapping, transparent planes. The composition is organized, however, along the central vertical axis; the profile again dominates, serving to keep the design to the front plane of the paper. The Delphic Studios exhibition undoubtedly included a fair number of works executed in this style.

Bisttram's sacrifice of ethnographic accuracy for the energy and movement of pure forms found an appreciative eye in the local press:

> To me the most beautiful and satisfying work in the show is that of the Hummingbird Dance. Through the rhythm of the wings and the particular color used I had a very distinct impression of the humming sound. Very rarely does one get a feeling of the audible through visual contemplation.[75]

A possible source for these works is David Burliuk's Woodchopper, 1923 (fig. 128), which depicts the movements of a man chopping wood with repetitions of the arm and ax similar to the repetitions of arms and legs in Bisttram's composition. Burliuk's painting, however, executed with a heavy impasto, lacks the transparent overlaps of Bisttram's watercolor. Additionally, Burliuk shows the various movements of one individual in a time-sequence, whereas Bisttram shows a group of individuals moving in coordinated rhythms.

Burliuk (1882-1967) was an important futurist proselytizer in Russia before immigrating to the United States in 1922. Bisttram certainly knew his work from his numerous exhibitions in New York in the 1920s, and would not have missed his solo

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[75]V. W., "Emil Bisttram's Exhibition," Santa Fe New Mexican, 19 July 1933, BP, AAA 2894:335.

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exhibition at the Roerich Museum in 1930.[76] Bisttram could have worked from the reproduction of Woodchopper in the catalogue of Burliuk's 1925 exhibition at J. B. Neumann's.[77] Bisttram's choice of futurism to represent the dance is logical given its concern with depicting movement and time. Burliuk's ideas about futurism would have been appealing to Bisttram because they were based on a "theory of repetition,"[78] possibly similar to Denman Ross's. Additionally, Bisttram's lecture notes for his 1933 summer school class show that he connected transparency with science and the fourth dimension:

> In 1906 Lenard[79] proved that matter did not exist by photographing a plant through six feet of lead. The artists took this idea of the "transparency" of matter and the Four-dimensional school developed, in which one thing could be seen

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[76]Works by Burliuk were acquired by Roerich and the Roerich Museum. The Message of 1930, 85-6. No Burliuk works, however, went to the Rose Art Museum. In 1930 Burliuk published a pamphlet in Russian on Roerich. Burliuk's relationship with Roerich is not mentioned in either David Burliuk: Years of Transition, 1910-1931 (Southampton: The Parrish Art Museum, 1978) or in Katherine S. Drier, Burliuk (New York: Société Anonyme and Color & Rhyme, 1944).

[77]Exhibition of Recent Works by David Burliuk, ed. V. Vorontzovsky, essays by Ivan Narodny, Louis Lozowick, and others. (New York: J. B. Newmann Print Room, 1925), unpaginated. The Woodchopper was also reproduced in Katz's Understanding Modern Art; while Katz's book was not published until 1936, Katz may have discussed The Woodchopper in Bisttram's class. Katz, fig. 260, facing page 246.

[78]Drier, 87. The Taos painter Nicolai Fechin, who was a good friend of both Bisttram and Burliuk, may have had additional publications on Burliuk's work that Bisttram could have studied.

[79]The German physicist Philipp E. A. Lenard (1862-1947) won the 1905 Nobel Prize in physics for his cathode ray experiments. Katz undoubtedly introduced Bisttram to Lenard's concepts: "Lenard--Discovered the solar system of the atoms. Each atom had its planetary system with space in the same relation that planets are to the sun. He proved that matter is penetrable. A spot of platinum spread over a cubic meter of space becomes very thin and is filled in with space. Atoms and planets are fields of energy. Matter itself is a delusion. Energy is the cause of the effect. But we always come to the same fundamental question--'What is the cause.'" Leo Katz, "Lecture to Bisttram's class," 11 Dec. 1929, in Bisttram's Book of Notes.

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> through another. Four-dimensional painting has always existed, for all pictures that deal with symbols are four-dimen[sional].[80]

Also, like the futurists, Bisttram may have connected transparent forms with the transparency of bodies on higher planes postulated by the theosophists.[81]

Eagle Dance, 1933 (fig. 129), builds on design strategies Bisttram used previously. Like Flower Forms, Spring (fig. 113), the forms are organized within an oval in two side-by-side vertical root-five rectangles. The arrangement of the motifs, however, follows the futurist-style repetition of figural elements--eyes, beaks, feathers, legs, and arms--to show movement, but without transparent planes. Using five figures, and the additional motif of a ruff of feathers around the necks of the dancers, Bisttram makes the oval directional by placing most of the feet in the lower left quadrant and the heads and other motifs in the other three quadrants, obtaining the idea of a circle moving clockwise. The full-face view and facial markings of the dancer at the mid-left identify the starting place for the rotation. This idea of cyclic rotation may symbolize the larger nature cycles that are propitiated in the dances.

Indian Abstraction (fig. 130), with its series of male figures wearing ruffs around their necks and arranged more or less in a circle, is similar to Eagle Dance. Indian Abstraction, however, is more complex since the figures are not arranged centrally or rotationally; additionally, the shape of the composition is not regular, being just somewhat higher than it is wide. The main figure, located at the top with one arm raised,

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[80]Emil Bisttram, "Lectures by E. J. Bisttram, Taos School of Art, NM, 1933," TMs, Frank and Margel Hinder Papers, Art Gallery of New South Wales. Bisttram's assertion is confirmed in Linda Henderson, "X Rays and the Quest for Invisible Reality in the Art of Kupka, Duchamp, and the Cubists," Art Journal 47 (Winter 1988), 323-40.

[81]Germano Celant, "Futurism and the Occult," Artforum 19 (Jan. 1981), 35-43. Tuchman, 40.

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moves toward the right, while the two figures at the left and the figure at the right point down. A fifth figure at the upper left facing up adds another element and direction. The table form at the lower right balances the composition and gives it the character of a still life. The elongated beaks inscribed with zig-zags, however, add an element of terror. The association of fear with the zig-zag is confirmed by Blavatsky who identifies it as a symbol of the serpent and of the Cosmic Electric Entity.[82] Katz's inclusion of this work in his book indicates that it was the one he most admired.[83]

Indian Abstraction may have appealed to Katz because of the stability of the composition. Katz may have discouraged Bisttram from continuing with his futurist compositions since he considered signs of movement personal. "Anything connected with motion will not be impersonal because it already depends upon an individual expression."[84] Indian Abstraction may also have appealed to Katz because of the element of terror that he believed characterized primitive art. In his discussion of circles in a lecture on primitive art to Bisttram's class, he suggested that eyes made up of concentric circles characterize the offensive animals, the eagle and the snake, and represent the hypnotic influence of nature. "Wild animals who are attacking have round eyes. Strongest possible manner of expression, yet absolutely impersonal." By contrast, he

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[82]Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, I, 76.

[83]Katz, Understanding Modern Art, III, facing p. 732. This work was also illustrated in a review of Bisttram's Delphic Studios exhibition that appeared in Art Digest (1 Nov. 1933); the exhibition was also noticed in Art Digest (15 Nov. 1933), 12; Art News 32, no. 7 (18 Nov. 1933), 9; "Painter Turns to Indian Art," New York Sun, BP, AAA, 2894:nf.; and The Herald Tribune.

[84]Leo Katz, "Line," lecture to Bisttram's class, 30 Oct. 1929, in Bisttram Book of Notes.

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suggested that the oval eye is found in domestic animals such as cows and oxen.[85] Both Indian Abstraction and Eagle Dance use concentric circles to depict eyes, as do others discussed below. Katz's focus on the primitive in his essay on Bisttram's Indian "abstractions" is a tacit recognition that Bisttram was following his ideas about primitive art. Katz's assertion that "abstraction" is a universal language gave priority to primitive "abstraction" over European modernism:

> Of course, there is the superstition that all abstractions are French importations, whereas, in fact, there never was a language in art less local, more universal, than the language of abstract elements.

Katz described primitive "abstraction" as magic because of its ability to connect man with higher forces:

> They [the ceremonial dances of the American Indian] are their means of keeping on intimate contact with the secret forces of Nature. This communion with higher powers outside awakening the powers of the subconscious, inside, accompanied by rhythmic physical movements, becomes an experience of reality --a higher--a super-reality. The masks and other ritual designs used in connection with such ceremonials are therefore never naturalistic but are "magic abstraction" of age-old tradition.

Katz concluded by claiming that Bisttram had achieved a sense of what the dances were trying to accomplish.

> I see a great modern abstract movement born from the pains of intellectual isolation, longing for a higher reality in life--and the great old magic abstraction of the Indian, grown out of the powers of soil and sun, and saturated with deep meaning.--The two had to meet.--There had to be an attempt for an interpenetration where there was so much for us to envy and to learn.
>
> This is what Emil Bisttram's mission means. It is a courageous and

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[85]Leo Katz, "Optical Elements," lecture to Bisttram's class, 16 Oct. 1929, in Bisttram, Book of Notes. In chapter 16 the author suggests that Bisttram's addition of a circle within a circle at the top of the logo for the Transcendental Painting Group refers to this motif of circular the eye of the offensive animals, representing the hypnotic influence of nature and the priority of primitive art.

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valuable service. Let us be grateful.[86]

Katz's use of the term "magic abstraction" reveals his dependence on Lévy-Brühl's concept of "mystic abstraction:"

> Here we have very clear instances of what we shall call mystic abstraction which, different as it is from logical abstraction, is none the less the process which primitive mentality would frequently make use of. ... Beyond and above aught else, they are those which establish relations between the visible, tangible, concrete objects and the invisible and mysterious forces which compass them about, the spirits, phantoms, souls, etc., which secure to persons and things their mystic properties and powers. [87]

Lévy-Brühl's analysis of "magic abstraction," however, holds that an abstract design element holds no independent meaning for the pre-logical mind, thus a design on one object does not necessarily mean the same thing when placed on another object. According to Lévy-Brühl, modern thinking associates a group of ideas with a symbol, whereas for the "pre-logical mind" the object on which the symbol is placed gives the meaning to the symbol.

Native American figures were a perfect vehicle for Bisttram's symbolism because with their masks and costumes they were impersonal--much more impersonal than the biblical figures that he had experimented with earlier. Pueblo forms were not related to European culture and were not narrative; also they were primitive and archaic, attributes

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[86]Leo Katz, The Dancing Gods Series, Exhibition of Water Colors by Emil Bisttram, The Delphic Studios, New York, NY, 30 Oct.-12 Nov. 1933. Katz's essay was written in Santa Fe during the summer of 1933. He probably saw the works while they were on exhibition at the Museum of New Mexico, Santa Fe. Katz visited New Mexico after completing his mural for the Johns Mansville pavilion at the Century of Progress exhibition in Chicago; when the weather got cold, he left New Mexico and went on to Los Angeles. Katz's 1,800 square foot mural, Give us this Day Our Daily Light for the Mansville pavilion, was executed on 114 panels of asbestos cement. Interview, Leo Katz with Gerald E. Markowitz and Marlene Park, 9 May 1975, courtesy Marlene Park.

[87]Lévy-Brühl, 117-118.

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that he was searching for as he attempted to evolve a new style for the New Age employing Katz's theory that the use of archaic forms signaled a new cultural period. A talk given in connection with Bisttram's 1936 exhibition in Tulsa confirms that this idea was very much alive for him at this time. "According to Mrs. Martin he [Bisttram] considers it [his work] as the archaic phase of a new period. His work like all archaic art is precise and linear and characterized by distortion."[88] This comment shows that Bisttram had revised his aesthetic position from classical to archaic within Katz's sequence of styles.

In a statement prepared for the 1945 exhibition of his Indian works in Tulsa, Bisttram provides additional confirmation that his interest in Native American subjects was an effort to replicate the processes used by the Indians themselves and that he was inspired by objects and artifacts as much as by the dances:

> Mr. Bisttram, after several years residence in Taos, and much interested in the Taos and other pueblo Indians' place in the artist's creative activities, felt that any 'realistic copy' no matter how true to life, would not express the spirit of this interesting people.
>
> Several old katchinas, decorations, sand paintings, etc. finally convinced him that in the Indian's own approach to the problem, that of giving their religious symbolism an understandable form, lay the answer. And so, after considerable research and study in an effort to understand what these early American artists had tried to convey, Mr. Bisttram finally arrived at the creative designs in watercolor. In some of them he retained almost all of the original, in others an element of movement was introduced and in still others he allowed his interpretation of the idea to inspire the creation of the final form.[89]

The Indians even approved of the works: "Altho they might approve of a well done

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[88]"Exhibit Interpreted by Artist, Wife and Pupil," Tulsa World, 7 June 1936, BP, AAA. This exhibition was held in the WPA-Tulsa Art Association Gallery in the Central Library, Tulsa. Bisttram's student Helen Pettey Martin (1896-1946), who gave the gallery talk, lived in Tulsa. Mrs. Martin donated the print, Creative Forces, to the Philbrook Museum.

[89]Publicity statement for Philbrook exhibition, January, 1945, BP, AAA 2892:15.

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Indian portrait, etc., it is, nevertheless a foreign art to them. In Bisttram's watercolors they recognize their own abstract approach to the story of Indian life and beliefs."[90]

Male and Female Contrasted

Mudhead Figures, 1933 (fig. 131), represents a separate group of Indian "abstractions" that contrast a male and female figure. Waters describes the participation of the Mudheads in the forty-nine day Shalako ceremony conducted at the Zuni Pueblo in the Four Corners region:

> On the fortieth day [of the ceremony] the first kachinas appear in public, parading into the plaza, where they are greeted with sprinkles of meal and taken into seclusion for their eight-day retreat. We recognize them as the Mudheads, the Koyemshi, the clowns. Their masks are those of pitifully deformed human faces, colored like their bodies with the pinkish clay of the sacred lake. Like idiot children born of incestuous union they warn against sexual license. Theirs is the most dangerous of all masks. No one dares touch them for fear of going sexually crazy.[91]

In their role in the blessing rites of the Hopi winter solstice ceremonies, Waters offers a description that mentions the knobbed headdresses in Bisttram's depiction:

> As they [Qoaquakleum] stop in a long line to dance, four Kokoyemsim [Mudheads] stand behind them, wearing masks of buckskin colored to give the appearance of reddish mud heads knobbed and hairless, and with grotesquely distorted eyes and mouths. They symbolize the early stage of mankind upon its first Emergence to this world, muttering incoherently, as men had not yet learned to talk--just like the Zunis, it is said, when the Hopis met them upon their Emergence and gave them food. Hence Zuni also has Kokoyemsin. The purpose of these spirit people and the Qoaquakleum with them is to entertain the people and distribute gifts to the children. So despite the freezing cold they dance quickly at four places, hurry through a little horseplay, and give watermelons, sweet corn that has been baked in a pit, and their rabbit sticks to children. [92]

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[90]Ibid.

[91]Waters, Masked Gods, 283.

[92]Waters, The Book of the Hopi, 163-4.

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Mudhead Figures depicts a male and female figure joined together by interlocking forms that advance or recede according to the strength and size of color areas. The male, placed in front, is distinguished by his headdress made up of four large, rounded swellings, eyes without eyelids, and a large beak with teeth indicated by a zig-zag. The female, whose nose is described by the negative space between the first two knobs of the man's headdress, is set behind the man. She is partially hidden by the dark colors of her face and hair. Her neck and dress, however, with their bright colors and larger relative size, press into the foreground. The composition is executed in a limited palette of pure, highly-saturated colors: purple, red, orange, blue, brown, and black. There are no transparent overlaps; the watercolor is applied evenly and flatly; dots or dashes in various color areas compensate for the lack of shading. Shapes are outlined crudely as if they were cut out with scissors.

The format is a square topped by two horizontal root-two rectangles next to each other. The dislocation of space inherent in the composition is reinforced by the treatment of the border. The border is of different widths on each of the four sides; additionally, some of the design elements protrude into the margin areas. The eyes of the two figures--the man's indicated by circles and the woman's by lines--provide key markers in the composition. The right eye of the male figure identifies the exact center of the composition. The eyes of the female mark the top edge of the square, and her left eye identifies the center of that edge. The division of the square into overlapping root-five rectangles provides many of the lines for the composition.

The inclusion of Mudhead Figures in the background of Bisttram's Self-Portrait,

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ca. 1935 (fig. 66),[93] shows the importance of this work. The self-portrait is in many ways alarmingly pompous. Bisttram depicts himself dressed in a most unlikely outfit--wearing a beret and, underneath a painting smock, a white shirt and tie. His gesture--holding his brush aloft, showing off the ring that was given to him by Nicholas Roerich--is very dramatic. The contrast between his flamboyant pose in the foreground and the primitive head of the Indian woman in the background suggests that the Self-Portrait is based on Jung's distinction between persona and anima. Jung identifies the persona as the public image of the individual:

> Fundamentally the persona is not real. It is a compromise between the individual and society as to the kind of semblance to adopt, what a man should 'appear to be.' He takes a name, earns a title, represents an office, and belongs to this or that. In a certain sense all this is real, yet in relation to the essential individuality it is only a secondary reality, a mere compromise formation in which others often have a greater share in the making than the individual himself. The persona is a semblance, a two dimensional reality, to give it a sort of nickname.[94]

In opposition to the persona, Jung proposes the anima, which, for a man, is the feminine archetype or soul-complex that resides in the unconscious. Giving sole priority to the persona and totally ignoring (repressing) the anima is, for Jung, a dangerous trap for modern man. The result is that the anima rises up and asserts its identity, endangering the equilibrium of the individual. The anima must be cultivated and absorbed by the persona, according to Jung, rather than repressed.

For Jung the anima and the persona are the totality of the personality and act in a

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[93]Self-Portrait (fig. 66) was probably complete by April 1935, since "a large and severe self-portrait by Bisttram" is mentioned in a review of an Heptagon exhibition. [Spud Johnson], "Heptagon Hangs Interesting Portraits," Taos Valley News, 11 April 1935.

[94]C. G. Jung, "The Ego and the Unconscious," in Two Essays on Analytical Psychology, trans. H. C. and C. F. Baynes (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1928), 165.

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compensatory manner by reciprocal action to effect change and growth in the individual.[95] The dynamic play between opposites is critical for Jung and he even suggests developing a dialogue with the anima to make it become more objective:

> Because the things of the inner world influence us subjectively all the more powerfully the more we are unconscious of them, the man who intends to deepen fundamentally his own culture (and does not a culture always begin in the individual?) must learn to objectify the anima-effects, and then try to understand what those contents are which underlie these effects. Thus only can he gain his adaptation to, and his defence against the invisible ... Unfortunately our western mind, from a profound lack of culture in this relation to the soul, has never found a concept, not to mention a name, to represent that most fundamental mainspring of inner experience, namely, the union of the opposites in a middle way, which could in any way compare with the Chinese Tao. This conception is at the same time the most individual fact, and the most universal and immutable significance of the living creature.[96]

For Jung, this process is effected by fantasizing, that is, by allowing unconscious contents to be made conscious. This is not a passive process, however, but one that requires participation by the individual. Jung asserted that transformative changes in personality could be effected from these experiences, which he called the transcendent function and characterized as a resolution of opposites.

> This remarkable capacity for transformation existing in the human soul, expressed in the transcendent function, is the principal object of the late mediaeval alchemistic symbolism... The secret of its vitality lay in the fact that it embraced the transcendent function, namely the transformation of the personality through the merging and binding together of the noble and the base elements, of the differentiated and the inferior functions, of the conscious and the unconscious.[97]

Jung also calls this process individuation or self-realization, and characterized it as redemptive. In his patients he also saw that a symbol appeared as a sign of that

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[95]Ibid., 188.

[96]Ibid., 224-225.

[97]Ibid., 243.

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transformation. In one patient he even saw the sign of the four points of a square followed by enclosure within the circle as the signifier of "the moment of liberation from the state of identity with the four functions, a fourfold 'nirdvandva' ('freedom from the opposites')."[98]

> The achievement of such a symbolic unity is beyond the power of the conscious will because, in this case, the conscious is partisan. Its opponent is the collective unconscious, which does not understand the language of the conscious. Therefore it is necessary to have the "magically" effective symbol which contains those primitive analogies that speak to the unconscious. The unconscious can only be reached and expressed by the symbol, which is the reason why the process of individuation can never do without the symbol. The symbol is, on the one hand, the primitive expression of the unconscious, while, on the other hand, it is an idea corresponding to the highest intuition produced by consciousness.[99]

Bisttram's intentional depiction of the Pueblo woman as his anima is suggested by the placement of her head appearing like a shadow behind and higher than his. The unseen painting on the easel, depicting the feminine vase, fruit, and bowl at the lower left, suggests that he is cultivating and objectifying the anima. The symbiotic relationship between artist, woman, and still life is a tacit acknowledgment that the source of his creativity lies in his unconscious, feminine side. That the woman in Bisttram's Self-Portrait may indeed be functioning as his soul is suggested by Otto Rank, who considers the depiction of the soul the primary function of the artist, and associates it with "abstraction:"

> The urge for abstraction, which owed its origin to a belief in immortality, and created the notion of the soul, created also the art which served the same ends, but led beyond the purely abstract to the objectivizing and concretizing of the prevailing idea of the soul. Everything produced objectively in any period by the contemporary idea of the soul was beautiful, and the aesthetic history of the idea of the beautiful is probably no more than a reflection of the changes in the idea

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[98]Ibid., 247.

[99]Jung, "Commentary," The Secret of the Golden Flower, 105.

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> of the soul under the influence of increasing knowledge. The most illuminating demonstration that the source of the beauty-ideal lies in the contemporary ideal of the soul is found in the religious art of all times and peoples, but most conspicuously in the higher cultures, where the already unified idea of the soul was ideally embodied in the forms of their gods.[100]

For Rank, art and religion are identical because what the artist does is concretize and make real the eternal and the immortal for the average person. For the purpose of depicting the abstract soul, the aesthetic interpretation must be abstract, and the content, to speak to all people, must be collective rather than individual.

Since the artist has to develop his own individuality in order to create, the problem of the artist, for Rank, is the conflict between the need to assert his own individuality and the charge to represent collective ideals. Furthermore, Rank asserts that the first work of the artist is defining himself as an artist:

> The creative, artistic personality is thus the first work of the productive individual and it remains fundamentally his chief work, since all his other works are partly the repeated expression of this primal creation, partly a justification by dynamism.[101]

In this context Bisttram's dramatic gesture becomes an assertion of his power to project himself in the image of an artist, creating himself by artistic fiat. For Rank, the critical defining factor in the productive artistic personality was the will, and it was expressed most purely in "abstract" primitive art.[102] Since Rank elaborates on many issues vital to Bisttram, it may have provided Bisttram with much of his ideology during this period.

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[100]Rank, 12.

[101]Ibid., 28.

[102]Rank based his ideas on Alois Riegl's concept of the "will to form" in which art objects becomes vessels of that will, and style is defined by collective, ideological contents. Ibid., 5. Bisttram would have also been influenced in considering the will all important by Swedenborg's emphasis on it.

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For example, Rank felt that art was essentially religious, that the main problem facing the artist was that between individuality and collectivity, between the lower and higher self, that freedom lies in submission to law, and that ideology is primary, and biography is unimportant.[103]

Bisttram's pictures are particularly ripe for a Jungian interpretation, however, since for Jung unconscious contents are always projected. Bisttram's drawings of Mexican women discussed at the end of Chapter 10, for example, represent a state of mind that is reversed in his subsequent depictions of men in his works devoted to the Pueblo dances. Along with these are the concentration of pictures that achieve reconciliation between the two forces.

Bisttram was probably first introduced to Jungian ideas by reading The Secret of the Golden Flower, a Chinese text on meditation, translated by Richard Wilhelm, with a commentary by Jung that provides an overview of his theories.[104] Given that Jung was widely read in Taos, Bisttram could easily have been exposed to his texts soon after his arrival. Jungian ideas were promoted in Taos primarily by Mabel Dodge Luhan. She was particularly interested in psychology and had been in analysis off and on from 1916. She worked hard at enticing Jung to come to Taos, and, partly due to her efforts, Jung visited Taos for two weeks in January 1925; during this visit Jung interviewed Antonio Mirabal, a favorite model for Taos artists, and others from Taos Pueblo as part of his

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[103]Ibid., 81.

[104]Rudhyar recalls first reading the Secret of the Golden Flower in the spring of 1932. Dane Rudhyar, Astrology and the Modern Psyche: An Astrologer Looks at Depth Psychology (Davis, CA: CRCS Publications, 1976), vii.

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research in primitive religion.[105] Luhan, however, never met Jung; she was in Mexico with the Lawrences, Dorothy Brett, and Spud Johnson, at the time of Jung's visit.[106]

The most influential advocate of Jungian ideas for Bisttram, however, was Dane Rudhyar. In his article "The Indian Dances for Power" (1934), Rudhyar specifically relates psychological processes to Pueblo rituals. Rudhyar's first visit to Taos in August 1925, as a guest of Mabel Dodge Luhan, was made ostensibly to observe the dances and study Pueblo music.[107] Rudhyar, who was vitally interested in avant-garde developments in music, dance, and art, had seen the première of The Rite of Spring in 1913, and was well-aware of the connections that were being made between modernism and primitive ritual and dance. His mention of Martha Graham and Ruth St. Denis in his 1925 correspondence with Mabel Dodge further reinforces this idea. Rudhyar returned to the Southwest for the summers of 1933, 1934, and 1935.

Rudhyar's 1933 trip to New Mexico, which lasted from May until August included a lecture-recital in Taos in June, and three lectures at the Don Fernando Hotel in August; the three at the Don Fernardo were titled Integration, Vibrancy, and Significance. His summers were spent primarily at Marie Garland's ranch in Espanola,[108] writing music

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[105]Rudnick, Utopian Vistas, 97.

[106]Luhan raised funds for Robert Edmund Jones's treatment by Jung in Zurich in 1926. She considered making a trip to Zurich to consult with Jung herself; however, he apparently discouraged her visit. Rudnick, Mabel Dodge Luhan, 185.

[107]Dane Rudhyar (to Mabel Dodge Luhan), SLA, 19 May; 14 June; 2 July; 14 July, 27 Aug. [1925], Mabel Dodge Luhan Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University. All the letters relate to the same visit. Rudhyar arrived 3 Aug. and met Luhan at Santo Domingo Pueblo. Although these letters lack a year, Rudhyar listed going to Taos in 1925 on his chronology; additionally, internal evidence suggests 1925.

[108]Marie Tudor Garland (b. 1870) was an important member of the New Mexico occult scene. Her books include The Potter's Clay: Poems (New York: Putnam, 1917),

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and preparing his book The Astrology of Personality (1936), which is based mainly on a reading of Jung. Rudhyar undoubtedly met Raymond Jonson and renewed his friendship with Bisttram during his 1933 visit. Nicholai Fechin's daughter, Eya Fechin, who married Rudhyar in 1945, met him for the first time in 1933.

While Rudhyar doesn't specifically mention Jung in "The Indian Dances for Power" (1934), his description of the Indian dance as a way of joining the opposites of earth and sky to produce rain, and his use of terms such as psyche, archetypes, and symbols, are unequivocally Jungian.

> What is dancing for? I believe it is to generate, by the magic of enacted relationship, more vital power in soul, mind and body. Dancing is for the purpose of drawing together by the magic of rhythm (which is the essence of form) the sky and the earth within the human psyche. The sky, for primitive races, is the symbol of order--the archetypal world, symbolized by the periodic motions of stars and planets. The earth, represents chaos, the substance to be fecundated and made into the likeness of the celestial order. This is a universal belief.
>
> It is of course a symbol. But symbols, as modern psychology has discovered, are the most powerful realities of the inner realm of mind and feelings. And we may soon realize--if we have forgotten it--that art's essential value resides in what it effects psychologically. The effect of art--and above all of such arts as dancing and music, arts of motion and rhythm--is, or can be, to release a new psychological vitality.[109]

This quotation shows that his ideas on art and creativity had developed from those he presented in "Art as Release of Power" (1930). In the earlier essay he described the artist as a transformer of energy, as one who, by an act of will, steps down cosmic energy

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Hindu Mind Training (1917), and The Winged Spirit, and Other Poems (New York: Putnam's, 1918.)

[109]Dane Rudhyar, "The Indian Dances for Power," The Dance Observer (August-September, 1934), 65. A reproduction of Dorothy Brett's Koshares accompanies this article.

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into forms that can be understood by the public.[110] In the 1934 article, he describes it as a symbolic act (the dance) effecting the reconciliation of opposites between sky (order) and earth (chaos) within the psyche.

Rudhyar's inclusion of the role of the symbol recalls Jung's concept of the symbol as the sign of the unity of individuation, effected by a resolution of opposites and the absorption of unconscious contents by the conscious. Additionally, Jung identifies Pueblo mandalas and sand paintings as examples of these symbols.[111] Rudhyar's recognition of a process involving opposition, reconciliation, and symbolism operating within the Native American ritual cycles shows that the Pueblo culture functioned in his understanding and absorption of these concepts, and points to their role in the development of his concept of transcendental art, and by extension, to the ideology for the Transcendental Painting Group in 1938.

Rudhyar's proposal, "Project of Studies in the Evolution of the Social and Individual Psychology of Music" (1933) shows that he was interested in the relationships between primitive music and anthropological and psychological studies of primitive mentality. This proposal, which was the basis for his 1934 application for a Guggenheim Fellowship, specifies studying with Jung in addition to studying music produced by Native Americans in Taos and Zuni. He mentions Jung's concept of fantasy as the most compelling part of his theory. Another aspect of his proposal, the relationship between endocrine-gland functioning to musical experience, is directly

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[110]Dane Rudhyar, "Art as Release of Power" in Art as Release of Power (Carmel, CA: Hamsa Publications, 1930), 12. This book is a binding together of seven essays that Rudhyar first published in pamphlet form.

[111]Jung, "Commentary," in The Secret of the Golden Flower. 97.

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related to the occult literature, specifically to the chakras.[112] Rudhyar's interest in primitive mentality was conditioned by reading Lévy-Brühl.

> Primitive man lives still in the womb of Nature. His entire life is an experience which is at the same time psychological and physiological, because he is as yet hardly able to differentiate the outer world from the inner, the objective from the subjective. He is so completely one with Nature that he constantly finds himself dissolved into natural phenomena, now projecting his infant selfhood into them, then building them into his psyche as states of consciousness which by a process of unconscious identification he calls his own. Levy Bruhl has used the term "participation mystsique" to describe this or a similar process of psychological identification with objects.[113]

Lévy-Brühl's concept of "mystical participation" was also basic to Jung:

> But it must be remembered that our individual conscious psychology develops out of an original state of unconsciousness, or in other words, a non-differentiated condition (termed by Lévy-Brühl, 'participation mystique'). Consciousness of distinctiveness, therefore, is a relatively late achievement of mankind--and presumably a relatively small section of the indefinitely large field of original identification. Discrimination is the essence, the conditio sine qua non of consciousness. Hence everything unconscious is undifferentiated, and everything happening unconsciously proceeds from a basis of non-differentiation. That is to say, there is no certainty at all as to whether an unconscious content belongs, or does not belong to the self. It cannot be determined a priori whether it pertains to me, to others, or to both. Moreover, feeling is no sure guide in this respect.[114]

The undifferentiated primitive mind, according to the theory, identifies more with nature (chaos) than with the individual self. Rudhyar's concept of "identification with nature," mentioned in connection with the influence of Oriental art on Bisttram's watercolors of the 1920s, posits that this is the method the transcendental artist used, seeking to control

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[112]The proposal is included in the Rudhyar-Luhan correspondence in the Mabel Dodge Luhan Papers, Beinecke Library, and forms the basis for the 1934 application to the Guggenheim Foundation. Rudhyar unsuccessfully applied for Guggenheim Fellowships in 1928, 1931, 1934, and 1951. The relationship between the chakras and endocrine gland functions is discussed in Chapter 14.

[113]Rudhyar, The Astrology of Personality, 7.

[114]Jung, "The Ego and the Unconscious," in Two Essays, 226.

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nature in the same way the Indians sought to effect rain through their rituals.

> The process of artistic creation is primarily one of gaining mastery over nature, of making natural elements subservient to the organizing will of the creator--this will being previously stirred into operation by the imagination, or image-making faculty. Creative activity as such does not bring fulfillment. It brings release and increase.[115]

Rudhyar's contended that the artist should identify with the archetypes of the collective unconscious:

> There is also fulfillment through understanding for the artist who deals with the great Images-Symbols or racial Archetypes which are the potent centers of power and integration of what Jung calls the "Collective Unconscious." In such a case the creative artist is not merely releasing or projecting himself, but he is relating himself to entities of the Unconscious, which have power and universal reality--even if the scientific approach of today insists they have no substance, a disputable point indeed.[116]

For Rudhyar, the animistic approach to art as used by the transcendental artist, is an alternative to the analytic approach.

> The mind which seeks for control over nature and mastery uses essentially one of two types of technique or method of operation, the magical technique and the analytical technique...
>
> The magical technique is the most ancient one, in fact the one almost exclusively used by creative artists up to the Renaissance. It is based essentially on a process of identification with that part of nature--be it outer physical nature or inner psychological nature--which is to be controlled or organized for efficient use. To be brief, we shall take the oldest examples of magical technique. If a shaman or "medicine man" wants to control a bear, he will try to identify himself with the essential nature of the bear species--then, using the method of sympathetic action, he will utter the growl of the bear, or walk like a bear, or pronounce in a sacred incantation the "sacred name" of the bear (that vocal sound which tradition has established, through long series of "identifications" with the "soul" of the bear species, to be the potent symbol of bear life).
>
> Through identification with, through projecting in ritual action of the essential characteristics and symbol pattern of the bear-life, the magician, using moreover his will to power, gains dominion over any particular bear. Become one with a living entity, name it or draw it or imitate its characteristic behavior in

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[115]Rudhyar, The Transcendental Movement, 9.

[116]Ibid., 10.

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> ritual action--and, if your will is concentrated enough and operating in terms of a collective need, you shall have power over that entity.[117]

Rudhyar asserts that medieval religious painters operated with an animistic method when they painted images of Christ or saints, identifying with the archetype they were depicting.

> Between the Negro fetish-carver and the illumined monk painting his ecstatic vision of the Crucifixion there is only a difference of level. The former deals with elemental nature-forces rooted in earth; the latter strives after psychological integration and its fruits--ecstacy, glowing happiness, peace--through an identification with a form-projection of potent spiritual symbols. Christ or Buddha are essentially symbols of the integrative self that is latent in every human being; their saints or Bodhisattvas are symbols of "soul-forces" which have reached a state of harmony and integration--while "sinners" and "common people" are symbols of psycho-mental energies which have a centrifugal, disintegrative tendency or which are still inchoate and undeveloped.[118]

Rudhyar emphasizes this concept of animism as the approach that the transcendental artist takes, rather than emphasizing the function of opposites; he does, however, treat this theme in depth in The Astrology of Personality.

Bisttram continued his exploration of the theme of opposites in another pair of paintings in which male and female Indian figures are depicted full-length. In Corn Dancers, 1934 (fig. 132), the contrast between male and female figures is more clarified, more intentional, and less menacing than in Mudhead Figures. The color palette is softened: large areas of white are included, blue is banished, the reds and oranges are toned down, and green is used as an accent color. Texturing in many parts of the painting and shading in the man's garment and fox-tail sustain a more naturalistic and less symbolic atmosphere than Mudhead Figures. Extending the figures from bust-length

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[117]Ibid., 11.

[118]Ibid., 12.

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to full-full length takes the focus off of the ghoulish heads, and further reduces the element of terror.

The decreased element of fear in the painting is, according to Jung, a sign of the absorption of the anima by the persona.

> ...the most immediate goal has been achieved, namely, the overcoming of the anima as an autonomous complex, and her transformation into a function of relation between the conscious and the unconscious.... Through this process the anima loses the daemonic power of the autonomous complex, that is, she can no longer exercise the power of possession, since she is depotentiated... Instead she has become a psychological function of an intuitive nature, a function... [119]

Corn Dancers and Mudhead Figures are also linked by a reversal of dynamic symmetry forms. In the former the square is placed in the upper portion of the design and two root-two rectangles at the bottom; in the latter the square is in the lower portion and the root-two rectangles are in the upper.

The companion to Corn Dancers, Hopi Katchina Coyote Claw, 1934 (fig. 133), also shows reversal. Hopi Katchina Coyote Claw depicts two full-length dancers, one female and the other male; the female figure, however, is shown in front of the male figure. This reversal in the priority of male and female shows how seminal the idea of opposition and reciprocity is to these works. The dominance of one figure over the other, compared to the earlier Cubist Nudes, in which the equality of functions was shown, is another indication of Jungian thinking.

A number of elements suggests that Hopi Katchina Coyote Claw, 1934 (fig. 133)

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[119]Jung, "The Ego and the Unconscious," in Two Essays, 252. Furthermore, it could be said that Bisttram's abandonment of male-female imagery by say 1939, in favor of pure non-objective material, would indicate that he had obtained "release from his possession, and the anima-phenomenon comes to an end." Ibid., 258. The transcendental works could then be considered a sign of the evolution to the next step, which is, according to Jung, the mana personality. Ibid.

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was executed after Corn Dancers, 1934 (fig. 132). First of all Hopi Katchina Coyote Claw is somewhat larger, indicating confidence with the theme; also, it seems to be more unified and less horrific. Additionally, Bisttram has included more "points" in the picture, in the rattles and in the feet. Furthermore, Bisttram redrew this work for the 1937 "Calendar by Taos Artists."[120] In the 1937 version, he reverses the image again, but this time he uses a right-to-left reversal, placing the woman at the left and the man at the right, retaining the woman in the front of the man.

Shalako Zuni Rain Gods, 1936 (fig. 134), shows the most important element of the dances--the actual relationship of the dances to natural forces.[121] Additionally, it is one of the earliest examples of Bisttram using pure geometric forms symbolically, showing the key importance of Indian rituals to the development of his abstract style. Two Shalako gods, one off-set in front of the other, are placed between the sun and moon with thunder and rain at the upper right and the lower left. Although the scene is composed as a landscape, all the elements are treated as if they were flat; the lack of modeling or shading is particularly apparent in the treatment of the costumes as fields for geometric designs.

The purest geometric symbols are the three downward pointing arrows at the lower left, symbolizing rain. The geometrical symbolism is further elaborated with clusters of dots below the arrows, and a wave-like design below the dots. The sun

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[120]For a reproduction of this image, see Ward Lockwood Papers, AAA 535:161.

[121]While Bisttram's dates are generally unreliable, this date seems secure; another drawing, based on this design, now in the U.S. Bank Collection, was executed in 1937, which was then reproduced in a 1938 calendar. Bisttram's 1936 Tulsa exhibition contained a painting of the same title. "Exhibit Interpreted by Artist, Wife and Pupil." Also the Delphic Studios exhibition included a watercolor titled Zuni Indian Shalako (Rain God Messengers).

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becomes an abstract symbol by its transformation into a compass. The arrows at the ends of the lower left to upper right line of the compass emphasize the importance of direction to the meaning of the composition. The sun is further abstracted by its transformation into a swirling logarithmic spiral, from which emerges a shadow that produces the black swath running across the bottom of the composition.

Other directions, associated with the moon, are depicted at the right. At the lower right another compass-like figure with arrows at all four points is set in front of a trapezoid. This figure emerges from the black swath running across the bottom of the picture and shows the change of direction to the upper right. This movement is continued by the ladder that leads up to two clouds, which are depicted as semi-circles.[122] The lightning and rain that emerge from the clouds run in two directions, the rain toward the lower left and the lightning to the lower right.

The directional movement of invisible forces seems to be the subject of the picture. The sun, which dominates the left part of the picture, and the moon, which dominates the right part of the picture, act together to produce the rain. These dual forces, circulating throughout the atmosphere, producing the effects of nature, undoubtedly represent the dual nature of Blavatsky's "universal ether," discussed in Chapter 2. This dual force also becomes a major theme of Bisttram's transcendental works, which are discussed in Chapter 15.

In 1938, upon the formation of the Transcendental Painting Group, Alfred Morang, an artist and one of the group's spokesmen, discussed the parallel between the

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[122]The ladder, however, is a motif found in Pueblo culture; ladders are used for entrance to the underground kivas, as well as to get from level to level in the pueblo compounds.

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influence of African art on the cubists and Pueblo art on the transcendental painters. Morang, however, discounted any direct influence on the transcendental painters by the Pueblos:

> Significantly, the American Southwest was the ground where the Transcendental group was formed. Significant, because this section of the country was the seat of a culture still retaining some of the primitive impulses that more or less offer a kind of sub-conscious back-drop for the civilized creative mind.
>
> But the American Indian culture has not exerted any direct influence upon the Transcendental painters; rather, paralleling the part played by Congo sculpture in relation to the Cubists, it has only served to present a background more in relation to creative progress than that of city streets.[123]

Morang was naturally hampered in his analysis by speaking for all of the members of the group; since he was newly arrived in New Mexico when he started writing for the Group, he had no real first-hand knowledge of the stylistic or ideological development of the work produced by the members.

In Bisttram's case it is fairly clear that Native American themes were providing him with a pretext for developing both a transcendental outlook and a symbolism of point, line, plane, and solid that were forming the basis of his purely abstract works begun about the same time as Shalako Zuni Rain Gods. The most important aspect, however, was the way that the rituals of the Penitentes and the Native Americans so confirmed the assertions Blavatsky made about the primacy and reality of ritual in primitive religions.

Bisttram's inclusion of his proto-abstract Indian paintings rather than his abstract paintings in the exhibition directly preceding the formation of the Transcendental Painting Group was a tacit acknowledgment that his abstract works had their origin in

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[123]Alfred Morang, "The Transcendental Painting Group, Its Origins, Foundation, Ideals and Works," The New Mexico Daily Examiner, 21 Aug. 1938.

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Native American themes. This exhibition, held in June 1938 at the Museum of New Mexico, included the artists who were contemplating joining the group at that time. Of all the artists included in the exhibition only Gina Knee and Cady Wells declined membership. In his review of the exhibition, Morang described the work of Raymond Jonson, Stuart Walker, and Bisttram's three students, Horace T. Pierce, Florence Miller, and Robert Gribbroeck, as "non-objective." Two of Bill Lumpkins's works were described as "non-objective," and one was described as "abstract." Works by Gina Knee and Cady Wells were described as "abstractions."[124] Morang's use of the term "non-objective" shows his familiarity with the terminology used by Hilla Rebay in her essays for the Guggenheim catalogues she began publishing in 1936. Bisttram's use of the term "non objective" is discussed in the following chapter.

Illogically, however, Bisttram specifically discouraged Florence Pierce and his other "transcendental" students from attending Indian dances, looking at Indian motifs, and associating with any of the "conservative" Taos painters.[125] This is a reversal of his practice during the early 1930s when he regularly took his students out to the Pueblos to sketch, a practice demonstrated by works executed by Bisttram's students Frank Hinder and Sue Martin.[126] Also, Bisttram, did not disavow his proto-abstract Indian paintings after turning to his transcendental style, and continued to exhibit them whenever he

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[124]Alfred Morang, "Abstract and Non-Objective Painters in Show at Museum are the 'Adventurers of Art,'" Santa Fe New Mexican, 4 June 1938. Agnes Pelton, Lawren Harris, and Ed Garman joined later.

[125]Florence Pierce, interview with the author, 1998.

[126]Sue Petty Martin (1896-1945) was a devoted student of Bisttram; she gave the lecture accompanying his 1936 exhibition in Tulsa. Her woodcut, Corn Dance at Taos Pueblo, 1935, is in the collection of the Philbrook Museum, Tulsa. For works based on visits to the Pueblos by Frank Hinder, see Free, cat. nos. 19 and 26.

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could. Solo exhibitions at Stanford University (February 1937), the Dallas Museum of Art (March 1941), the Shreveport Museum (1941), and the Philbrook Museum, Tulsa (1945), in fact, included only Native American works.[127]

Corn Dancers, 1934 (fig. 132), shows Bisttram already developing a preference for geometric forms. The man's face is reduced to a square, and the woman's head to a circle. By dividing the plumes of the man's headdress into two groups of two and three, he introduces number symbolism. His repetition of the zig-zag in four places in the design follows his basic ideas of rhythm in a less menacing way than in earlier pictures. With his emphasis on positive and negative space, however, he is still working stylistically within the synthetic cubist idiom.

His reworking of Mudhead Figures into a black and white drawing for a 1939 calendar (fig. 135)[128] provides additional links between his proto-abstract Indian paintings and his transcendental works. In the later version, the man is set more distinctly in the foreground and the woman in the background without any dislocation of space. The man's head is turned into a rectangle capped with a semi-circle, and his eyes and mouth are much larger and more prominent. The woman's nose is still articulated by negative space, but is separated from the man's headdress. Furthermore, the square, which was an integral part of the composition of the earlier work but hidden, is, in the later work, made a major part of the design. The ease with which Bisttram applied geometric terms to a synthetic cubist work reveals the similarity of intention in both cases.

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[127]The Dallas and Shreveport exhibitions included 17 watercolors and 3 paintings; the Philbrook Museum exhibition also included his Mexican women paintings.

[128]Calendar by Nine Taos Artists 1939, Ward Lockwood Papers, AAA 535:173.

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Birkhoff's Aesthetic Measure (1933) sustained Bisttram's interest in pure geometric form in the mid-1930s. Following Denman Ross, but taking a mathematic approach, Birkhoff proposed that aesthetic emotion was produced by complexity within order and could be measured. His standard, like Ross's, was formal order, and considered elements such as repetition, similarity, contrast, equality, symmetry, balance, and sequence.[129] The most perfect type of triangle, for Birkhoff, was the equilateral because of its symmetry about its vertical axis in all positions. In support of this contention he cited Plato's preference for the right triangle because when doubled it produces the equilateral, and when multiplied, most of the geometrical figures. Birkhoff illustrated ninety polygonal forms, rating them in order of decreasing aesthetic measure; he rated the square the most pleasing, the rectangle made up of two squares the next most pleasing, the equilateral triangle third, the diamond fourth, the hexagon fifth, the six-pointed star sixth, the pentagram seventh, the five-pointed star sixth, and so on.

Although Birkhoff felt the square exhibited the most pleasing aesthetic character, he did not recommend it for the shape of a picture. He submitted that a square, or a rectangle with neutral characteristics, that is, one with obvious dimensional consonance (such as 1:2), did not provide the best shape for a picture composition.[130] He also proposed that the shape of the Golden Rectangle was not any more pleasing than any other rectangle because he didn't think that the eye could appreciate irrational fractional measures. He felt that the Golden Rectangle was pleasing by virtue of the fact that the ratio of its sides (1.618+) falls within the 1:2 ratio that he considered the limit for

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[129]Birkhoff, 9. Bisttram highly recommended this book in his draft of his teaching materials, William Warder Papers.

[130]Ibid., 30.

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pleasing rectangles within a composition.

Bisttram's close study of Birkhoff may have led him to a rejection of the square format and a less obvious use of dynamic symmetry on the one hand, and an increased interest in pure geometric form on the other--manifesting in his experiments with embedding the square in other types of rectangles in Mudhead Figures and Corn Dance, and the increased emphasis on reducing form to geometric shapes in Corn Dance.

Swastika, 1941 (fig. 136), further underlines Bisttram's continued interest in Native American themes well into his transcendental period. Bisttram began teaching in Phoenix in 1941, and may have been inspired anew by artifacts he saw at the Heard Museum.[131] The swastika is used in Native American rituals and Bisttram's use of a palette of deep rusts and oranges confirms the association. Set in front of a landscape, the swastika is clearly intended as a cosmological symbol. Blavatsky identifies the swastika as one of the most ancient symbols, found in all ancient cultures; she associates it with the four directions, with movement, and reincarnation.

> Verily many are its meanings! In the Macrocosmic work, the 'hammer of creation,' with its four arms bent at right angles refers to the continual motion and revolution of the invisible Kosmos of Forces. In that of the manifested Kosmos and our Earth, it points to the rotation in the cycles of Time of the world's axes and their equatorial belts; the two lines forming the Svastica meaning Spirit and Matter, the four hooks suggesting the motion in the revolving cycles. Applied to the Microcosm, Man, it shows him to be a link between heaven and Earth: the right hand being raised at the end of a horizontal arm, the left pointing to the Earth.[132] It symbolizes our human existence, for the circle of life circumscribes the four points of the cross, which represent in succession birth, life, death, and immortality.[133] One initiated into the mysteries of the meaning of

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[131]Bisttram gave a talk at the Heard Museum in 1942. "Exponent of Egyptian Art to Speak at Heard Museum," clipping, 18 Jan. 1942, BP, AAA.

[132]Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, II, 99.

[133]Ibid., II, 557.

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> the Swastica, say the Commentaries, 'can trace on it, with mathematical precision, the evolution of Kosmos and the whole period of Sandhya.' Also, 'the relation of the Seen to the Unseen,' and 'the first procreation of man and species.'[134]

Bisttram's interpretation seems to follow Blavatsky's comments as he distinguishes the upward and downward pointing arms by making them four lines wide, while the arms pointing to the left and right, and the major vertical and horizontal, are only three lines wide. He connects the swastika to the forces of nature by setting it against landscape forms, with mountains in the background and a sun or crescent moon rising above them. Furthermore, the upward pointing arm overlaps the sun, reinforcing the association with heaven, while the downward pointing arm touches the ground. Additionally, a number of the lines that describe the mountains become independent forming an abstract design, probably depicting lightning, but also suggesting five-pointed stars that cross over and under the swastika. In this way the swastika becomes a symbol of the generating forces of nature.

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[134]Ibid., II, 587.

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Chapter 13

Taos School of Art

Bisttram opened the Taos School of Art in the summer of 1932. Blumenschein helped him get the classes going for the first season. One of Bisttram's major competitors for students in the 1930s was Andrew Dasburg. Bisttram had the advantage in one sense, his was a formal school that was advertized in national arts magazines. Many of Bisttram's students, however, were beginners, a type that would not have appealed to Dasburg. Also, Bisttram's teaching methods, with their emphasis on the basics of form and color, were geared toward the beginning artist.[1]

Horace T. Pierce, Florence Miller Pierce, and Robert Gribbroeck, who became fellow members of the Transcendental Painting Group, were Bisttram's most important students.[2] Bragdon's The Beautiful Necessity (1910) was used like a textbook in

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[1]Some of Bisttram's summer students from the early 1930s have been mentioned: Alma Knauber, a teacher at the University of Cincinnati, in 1932; Temima (Fanny) Nimtowitz, Giles's teaching assistant at the Master Institute, in 1932 and 1933; and Frank and Margel Hinder in the summer of 1933. Hinder's portrait drawing Eva, depicting the Bisttram's maid who also doubled as a model, demonstrates the kind of drawing from the model that was practiced in Bisttram's class; Hinder's Dance of the Koshares, inspired by the rain dance at Santo Domingo Pueblo, shows that Bisttram took his students out to sketch at Pueblo ritual events. Free, figs. 19, 20. Frank Hinder also recalls playing tennis--mixed doubles with "Blumey" and the sculptor Hildebrandt, who was working in Taos that summer.

Sandor Bernath (b. 1892), a Hungarian-born artist Bisttram knew in New York, also painted in Taos in 1933. That summer Leo Katz also visited; Alice Sherbon was also studying at the school that summer, returning in 1939 and 1940 to teach dance. Howard Giles and his wife visited in 1936. Lorentz Kleiser and his wife, friends from New York, also visited in 1936. Kleiser, whose studio was in Edgewater, New Jersey, was a designer and weaver of Aubousson tapestries, Taos Valley News, 26 Mar. 1936, In 1940, Eero Saarinen and his wife were house guests. Taos Review, 8 Aug. 1940.

[2]William Warder, with whom Mrs. Bisttram entrusted many of Bisttram's papers, studied at the school in the late 1930s, as did Harry Wood, who was later appointed chairman of the art department at Arizona State University. Sue Pettey Martin of Tulsa was also a student in the 1930s. Duane Van Vechten (d. 1977), another Bisttram

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Bisttram's teaching.[3]

In 1940 the school began offering courses for college credit through Eastern New Mexico College, Portales, where Bisttram was appointed to the faculty.[4] Ralph Pearson includes a brief discussion of The Taos School of Art in his book The New Art Education (1941). He reproduces Pointed and Round, a painting by Bisttram's student Maurine Bush, with the following description: "One of a series of nonobjective paintings planned with Dynamic Symmetry proportions and directions as taught by Mr. Bistram [sic]."[5] While the book is mostly about the results Pearson achieved at his own school, The Design Workshop, he also discusses the methods of Hans Hofmann and Moholy-Nagy.

The Logo

The logo for the school (fig. 137), used on letterhead and brochures, is an equilateral triangle inscribed in a square, which is inscribed in a circle within another circle. This emblem may be based on Leo Katz's diagram, mentioned in Chapter 4, in

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student, who had studied at the Art Institute of Chicago and in France, moved to Taos in 1928. She entertained the Taos artists in her lavish home and purchased works by them, developing a substantial collection. Ms. Van Vechten studied with Bisttram both in Taos and later in Los Angeles, and acquired works from him. After her death, her husband Edwin Lineberry built a museum in her honor on their property. The Van Vechten-Lineberry Taos Art Museum holds a number of works by Bisttram. Ms. Van Vechten also provided land to a number of Bisttram students so that they could settle in Taos. Only Cliff and Barbara Harmon remained.

[3]"...The Beautiful Necessity has become something of a text book to students studying with Mr. Bisttram." Mayrion Bisttram to (Claude Bragdon), ALS, 21 April 1939, Bragdon Papers, Rochester University Library.

[4]Taos Review, 18 July 1940.

[5]Ralph M. Pearson, The New Art Education, with a foreword by Eduard C. Lindeman (New York: Harper & Bros., 1941), 29, fig. 8A.

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which he placed a triangle in a square and titled it "Man in the Temple." It is probably also based on Blavatsky's division of the individual into the upper trinity and the lower quaternary, the triangle and the square, discussed in Chapter 8. In both cases, the diagram refers to the individual. While the temple is often referred to as the body of the individual in occult literature, another interpretation of this phrase is provided by Ghyka, who calls the temple, the link, or the proportional mean between the macrocosm and microcosm.[6] In both interpretations, the temple as architecture, and the temple as the upper trinity of the individual's being, must be built by the individual through will power and good deeds. In both cases the concept is Pythagorean.

Bisttram's logo can also be connected to Bragdon's adaptation of Leonardo's well-known drawing of a man inscribed in a square and a circle (fig. 37). Bragdon adds a downward pointing equilateral triangle to Leonardo's drawing in order to show the proportional relationship between the man's arms and his feet. While Bisttram's logo excludes the figure of the man, he is present symbolically.

The 1933 Lectures

In the 1933 lectures, cited from in the previous chapter, Bisttram repeats the analogy between point, line, plane, and solid; seed, stem, leaf, and fruit; and the four periods of Katz's "Cycles of Taste." Additionally, Bisttram develops the idea that certain geometric forms characterized different cultures:

> Each particular age is expressed by the Philosopher, Scientist and Artist, working together, and the Artist crystallizes these ideas. Every art period also has its particular "key" note for composition.

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[6]Ghyka, The Geometry of Art and Life, 111.

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For the Egyptian period, Bisttram gives the "vertical and the right angle, giving dignity and strength." For the Persian culture, he gives a cluster of small circles, and characterizes it as "romantic and joyous, gay patterns of dots and lines, and a love of life in a material sense." For the Renaissance, he gives an equilateral triangle, "expressing the Trinity, the form on which most religious compositions were built." For the Greek, he gives the Pythagorean right triangle configured with the hypotenuse as the base, characterizing it as "stressing leisure and the love of comfort." For the culture of the present day, Bisttram gives a 3.5.8. triangle, calling it

> the extreme and mean ratio, or 3.5.8. A dynamic and moving key-note, stressing the "off" movement of a composition.[7]

This series of numbers, 3, 5, 8, is part of the Fibonacci series, or summation series, that relates to the golden section.[8]

Bisttram derived this concept from the lectures Katz gave to Bisttram's Master Institute class in New York. Katz, however, didn't give a geometric form for the current period of art. Also, Katz did not include the Persian period, although he did include the gothic, assigning a pointed triangle to it.

This again reiterates how important Katz's theories were to Bisttram's concept of his own place in the general art historical development.

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[7]Bisttram, "Lectures by E. J. Bisttram, Taos School of Art, NM, 1933." In this document Bisttram also quotes from Clive Bell, Art, 1914, confirming that he indeed did read this important book.

[8]The Fibonacci series is 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 33, etc. This series is generated by adding 1 and 1 to produce 2, the third term in the series. The next term is generated by adding the previous two terms, and so on. As the numbers progress they approach the golden section ratio more exactly. Hambidge used the findings of biologists that the Fibonacci series is found in plant growth to justify his system. Bisttram's definition of a triangle as 3.5.8, however, is incorrect; 3.5.8 is a straight line.

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The Curriculum

For the Taos School Bisttram adapted and rewrote the curriculum that he had prepared for the Master Institute. The new course is typed on thirteen legal sheets, prepared as a hand-out for students; Bisttram used this course for the remainder of his teaching career.[9] Although this new course outline is not dated, it was probably developed some time between 1937 and 1938. This is suggested by the fact that in the course outline Bisttram distinguishes between "abstract" and "non-objective" painting. Bisttram was undoubtedly influenced to use the term "non-objective" by reading Rebay's Guggenheim collection catalogues. Bisttram's use of this term is discussed below.[10]

Bisttram started work on this new curriculum by writing it out as if it were to be published as a book. The handwritten draft, divided into chapters, runs seventy pages and is the primary text from which excerpts were taken for the hand-out. The text covers design fundamentals, and the preliminary four problems devoted to points, lines, planes, and solids, and the seven-subproblems associated with each. In the beginning Bisttram highly recommends Birkhoff's book Aesthetic Measure (1933).[11] Except for the references to Birkhoff and "non-objective" painting, the manuscript could easily have been written to accompany the Three-Year Course since the concepts presented in the later manuscript are similar to those presented in the earlier course.

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[9]Bisttram, Pure Design, TMs, Bisttram Papers, Harwood Museum.

[10]As discussed in footnotes in Chapters 1 and 2, the author has not used the term "non-objective" because of the deceptive nature of the term, and because both Kandinsky and Mondrian disavowed it. (R. C. W. Long, "Non Objective," in Guggenheim Museum: A to Z, 200.) The author distinguishes between Bisttram's terms "abstract" and "non-objective" with the terms "proto-abstract" and "abstract."

[11]Bisttram, Part I: Design, AMs, William Warder Papers.

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One of the major changes is that the first four problems, those dealing with point, line, plane, and solid, are to be executed in black and white, before color is introduced. Also, these preliminary problems deal solely with issues of rhythm, that is, Denman Ross's sequences of continuation, alternation, and progression, corresponding to the sub-problems of problems one and two in the Three-Year Course.

This redesign of the problems to correlate more with Ross's A Theory of Pure Design is also reflected in the text which, after a definition of design, provides definitions for design harmony, measure harmony, shape harmony, tone harmony, design rhythm, design balance, and unsymmetrical balance. It then goes into the orders of sequence: sequences of continuation and repetition, sequences of alternation and rhythm, sequences of progression, and variety. Then it proceeds to the design elements: point, line, plane, solid, tones, and textures. Then follow the preliminary four problems mentioned above, with seven sub-problems for each of four problems, one each devoted to points, lines, planes, and solids. The manuscript concludes with a discussion of color principles.

The course outline continues, however, with new problems. The new problems begin with assignments to use the following three themes: dominant vertical, dominant horizontal, and dominant diagonal. These three problems are executed first using spots; then spots and lines; then spots, lines, and planes; and finally spots, lines, planes, and solids. Beginning with these problems, Bisttram worked them out himself, and they are in the Harwood Museum collection. For example, Figure 138 shows the working of the problem "lines and spots in a dominant diagonal executed within three horizontally oriented root-five rectangles stacked on top of each other." In the instructions for this problem he allows:

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> Spots may be light, heavy, thin or thick. Lines may be straight and curved, light and heavy, or thin, thick, flowing, zig-zag, firm, jerky, uniform, tapering, mechanical, fluid, wide, narrow, short and long. The relationship of such lines is to be rhythmical, oppositional, parallel, repetitive, radiating, symmetrical, unsymmetrical, balanced or unbalanced.

Even though Bisttram has allowed his students to work quite freely, giving a fairly wide choice of variations to select from, in his own working of the problem, he has interpreted the problem fairly strictly. He has chosen the lower left to upper right direction and has used straight lines all of the same thickness. The alternations that he has used--the lengths of the lines and the spacing in between them--are fairly subtle. For balance he has added two horizontal lines at the upper left and two at the lower right, but has spaced them differently.

The dots are also all of the same size and mostly follow the diagonal lines, except for the dot at the upper right, which is offset to the right. Furthermore, he has employed number symbolism by using four horizontal lines to set off the twelve diagonal lines. The only vertical designation is the two dots at the lower right, and the only element out of strict alignment is the dot at the upper right corner.

The work that is shown is, however, only the end result of the working of the problem. Figure 138 is actually only a section of the sheet. At the bottom of the sheet the problem is worked three times in various designs. Bisttram selected the one he liked the best from the three, enlarged it, and filled it out in the upper section of the sheet, which is what is shown in Figure 138. One of the three trial compositions is based on an upper left to lower right direction; the other two use the lower left to upper right. Of the two lower left to upper right designs, he selected the simpler of the designs to enlarge as his final solution.

Figure 139 shows the working out of the problem "planes, lines, spots, dominant

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vertical within a whirling square rectangle." In this composition he used downward pointing triangles to provide the essential theme of the composition. The use of three series of small circles, all arranged in verticals, each within one of the three major divisions of the whirling square rectangle, reinforce the downward movement. The idea of descent is also strengthened by increasing the number of circles in descending order--three circles at the upper left, four at the middle right, and six at the lower left. A distinction between right and left is also made. At the left two rectangular planes float in front of a third; on the right the lines don't quite make rectangles, thus emphasizing their function as constituents.

Figure 140 provides a solution for the assignment "planes, lines, spots: controlled variety within unity, executed within a whirling square plus root-five rectangle." This is one of the two compositions worked at the bottom of the page, not selected for final development at the top. It combines vertical, horizontal, and diagonal themes to demonstrate that the vertical and horizontal are static and the diagonal is dynamic. The effect of the two overlapping triangles, pointed diagonally down to the lower left at a 45 degree angle against the vertical-horizontal configuration, produce a vibrating, oscillating motion shown by the curved lines. The interaction of this energy, the force of a diagonal against the stability of the horizontal and vertical, is reinforced by the dots. The three dots within the triangles grow larger as they approach the point of contact, signifying the increased pressure being brought against it; the circles that move along the horizontal grow larger as they move away from the point of contact, signifying the resistance of the stable elements. These works demonstrate Bisttram's very close study of the elements and how they function in a work of art. They also demonstrate the clarity with which he worked.

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Although Bisttram assigned root rectangles for the designs, in the manuscript he specifically instructed students to work out their design before placing it within the root rectangle:

> The best way to approach these problems is first to make a number of experiments without the root rectangles, and select the one design that pleases us most and the one that best expresses the idea. Then use the direction and intersections in the root rectangle chosen for the more perfect placing of the elements in your design. In other words always work freely at first; play with the problem letting the intuitions and feeling guide you and only then use the trellis of a root rectangle for placing of the elements used.[12]

Bisttram's manuscript also provides a number of other indications of his approach to art. In his discussion of variety in composition he expresses his central concept of art, that art is about resolving chaos into order by having an overarching idea that transcends sense experience; and that it is the idea that transports the individual into the realm of beauty:

> All good design must show variety as well as harmony. However, variety is not a principle in design. Life shows infinite variety and the variety of life comes into art inevitably, art being the expression of life. But art takes the variety of life and puts it into order. Art classifies and arranges, separates and selects, and organizes them into a unified whole, expressing an idea; two or more ideas provided they make one.
>
> Therefore the function of art is to show us the variety of life in unity of a single idea; to show variety of life without unity would be to imitate the facts of sense and the accidents of vision. For we must not imitate nature in her effects we must follow her in her laws and principles. We must paint not what we see but what we think, creating order and unity out of the variety and disorder of life, for art shows us the consistency, unity, order and beauty of nature. We must realize that by art and art alone are we lifted up into the world of ideas and ideals of beauty.[13]

The concept of art being able to lift an individual up into the world of ideas has references to Plato, but it is also an occult concept--that ideas exist on separate, invisible,

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[12]Ibid., 55.

[13]Bisttram, "Part One: Design," 6.

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higher planes of reality, and that the goal of meditation is to contact these planes, bring the ideas down into consciousness, and finally bring them into form. Theosophy also maintains that the mental plane, the plane of ideas, is made up of seven sub-planes, concrete ideas existing on the lower four sub-planes and abstract ideas on the upper three. This then provides the primary motivation for Bisttram working abstractly: that by using abstract forms, he is working with pure ideas from the upper mental plane.

Following the four problems from which examples by Bisttram were shown, is a fifth set titled "Variety of Line, Mass, Pattern and Textures." This set includes six assignments that require the use of objects: a composition to give "the feeling of reality;" a composition to be "decorative in feeling;" a composition to give an "emotional or suggestive treatment;" a composition to express "one hard and one soft" using hard and soft textures; a composition to utilized a variety of textures; and finally a composition using "non-objective or abstract" elements for texture.

The sixth and seventh sets of problems deal with abstraction, using Rebay's distinction between "abstract" and "non-objective," the distinction the author has been making with the terms "proto-abstract" and "abstract."[14] In giving these problems, Bisttram defines and distinguishes between the two terms. He defines "abstraction" by the following seven qualities:

1. Distortion
2. Twisting of forms to suggest new forms

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[14]Rebay also uses the word absolute to describe the pure geometric forms found in "non-objective" painting. The author has not encountered any instances of Bisttram using the term "absolute" painting, although it was used by Raymond Jonson. For Rebay's distinction between "abstract" and "non-objective," and her use of "absolute," see Hilla Rebay, Second Enlarged Catalogue of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Collection of Non-Objective Paintings (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Art Alliance, 8-28 Feb. 1937), 7-8.

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3. Using sections or part of objects instead of the whole
4. Dislocation of parts or shifting
5. Superimpositions
6. Introduction of new lines or shapes, either straight or curved
7. Breaking of continuous directions

Bisttram then defines "non-objective" as "a general systematization of elements... erected on the relationships of:

I. Form already present, mathematical and geometrical forms
II. Newly produced forms--free forms. The production of new forms may be founded on:
1. Relationship of measurements, golden section and other proportions
2. Position measurable in angles
3. Movement, speed, direction, push, intersecting, telescoping, interlocking, penetration, interpenetration, material values, structure, texture, surface treatment, light, color; the relation of form may become effective as: contrasts, deviations and variations, transparency, interpenetration."

Bisttram's distinctions between "abstraction" and "non-objectivity" are important because they testify to Bisttram's intense interest in definitions and distinctions, his intense involvement with separating and defining these two phases of abstraction, and his debt to Hilla Rebay.

Bisttram's first three problems in "abstraction" are:

1. Create a composition for a study of line, mass and pattern by abstracting or creating a new design with the use of three or more objects, such as a table, chair, vase, bowl, glass, plate, flowers, fruit, bread, picture frame, table cloth, etc., Color, one of the double complements.

II. Create a composition for a study of line, mass and patterns by abstracting from straight flat rectangular and cubic forms only. Color, double complements.

III. Create a composition for a study of line, mass and pattern by abstracting from circular, round, elliptical forms.

Bisttram's "non-objective" problems are divided into three sections. The first section is composed of the following five problems:

I. Create a design with the use of any previously given elements to express:

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Pointed and Round. Color, choice

II. Light and Heavy

III. Accent on Angles

IV. Strange Forms in Space

V. Penetration

The second set of "non-objective" problems include assignments on musical themes to be executed in oil or tempera: I. Andante; II. Allegro; III. Fugue; IV. Symphony in Red; V. Symphony in Yellow; VI. Symphony in Blue; VII. Symphony in White; VIII. Symphony in Three Movements.

The third set of "non-objective" problems includes a list of sixteen words or phrases from which the student may select: 1. Interlocking; 2. Swinging; 3. Harsh and Mild; 4. Loud and Soft; 5. Circular Rhythms; 6. Sustained Melody; 7. Superimposition; 8. Peace; 9. War; 10. Love; 11. Hate; 12. Joy; 13. Depression; 14. Confusion; 15. Silence; 16. Prayer.

The titles of the problems also suggest that Bisttram was looking at Rebay's Guggenheim collection catalogues; the 1937 catalogue, for example, includes paintings by Kandinsky titled Pointed and Round, 1925 (no. 93); Light and Heavy, 1929 (no. 102); and Great Fugue, 1913 (no. 75); and a painting by Rudolph Bauer titled Light and Heavy, 1928 (no. 35).[15]

Bisttram's course concludes with color. At the same time that students are working on their designs, they make a total of thirty-six color palettes. Barbara Harmon, who studied with Bisttram in Los Angles in the late 1940s, recalls doing the design

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[15]Ibid.

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problems in the mornings and making color palettes in the afternoons.[16] The essential elements of Bisttram's course then are still in tact--teaching dynamic symmetry and Denman Ross's color system and beginning with problems based on points, lines, planes, and solids.

While the documents at the Harwood Museum do not include examples of Bisttram working either the problems in "abstraction" or the "non-objective" problems, many of his paintings have titles corresponding to the assignments. For example, he did a number of paintings with based on themes from the "non-objective" problems, including Strange Forms in Space, Penetration, Allegro, Fugue, Symphony in Yellow, Symphony in White, and Symphony in Three Movements.[17]

Also, there is a large series of works on paper which are exercises in pure design. These are finished works of art, executed in color, and signed and dated. The signature and date are part of the design, since they are usually in one of the colors featured in the design. Figure 141 shows one such design executed in pastel and dated 1937. Most, however, are in water media. As a rough guess, Bisttram executed at least a hundred of these between 1937 and 1942, presumably completing one at a sitting.

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[16]Barbara Harmon, telephone interview with the author, 12 Sept. 1998.

[17]For example, in a 1954 exhibition, a work entitled Strange Forms in Space was included. This same exhibition included a work entitled Interpenetration, a term Bisttram used repeatedly in the course outline. "Art Display and Forum Sunday, Witchita Daily Times (Texas), 17 Jan. 1954, BP, AAA 2894:401. Bisttram exhibited a work entitled Penetration at his solo exhibition at the Pasadena Art Institute (1949). Bisttram proposed to send his paintings, Allegro, Largo and Presto, to an exhibition of musical themes in art from the Middle Ages to the present. Bisttram to (Dr. Lavera Pohl, Director Milwaukee Art Institute), TL, 8 Mar. 1954, BP, AAA 2892:1029. This series is undoubtedly the one currently in the collection of Mrs. Hubert Alexander. Mrs. Alexander also has a work entitled Fugue. A work entitled Symphony in Yellow appeared on the checklist of a group of works sent for an exhibition to Furniture, Inc., Dallas, in 1957. Symphony in White is discussed in Chapter 15.

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Figure 141 shows a design composed of dots, lines, planes, and solids, organized in a way to show the pressures and interactions between shapes and colors. One of the most interesting aspects of this work, and the entire body of work that it represents, is the way that it approaches decoration and ornament, and its relationship to primitive art, a subject broached in Chapter 4. The inspiration for executing this series clearly derived from the emphasis on the elements of art in his teaching methods. Additionally, there is a sense of play to these works since the elements are not forced to substantiate a particular idea other than the qualities of the elements themselves.

The combination of ornament and decoration seen in these works reflects Bisttram's contact with primitive art. The author suggests that Bisttram's interest in this approach resulted as much from his contact with Pueblo artifacts as from his course design or from the interest in abstraction shown by other artists. That much of Bisttram's interest in combining decoration and ornament into his work was gained from the Pueblo culture is shown by Swastika, 1941 (fig. 136), which also belongs to this series.

Bisttram's course essentially shows the high discipline that he expected both from his students and from himself; especially the careful study of forms, their characteristics, and how they worked together. Most importantly, however, it shows that the principles and methods he developed during the 1920s while working in a representational mode were flexible enough to serve him when he turned to abstraction.

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Chapter 14

Cosmic Egg and Time Cycle Series

The works discussed in this chapter, primarily drawings from the Cosmic Egg Series and the Time Cycle Series, were begun about 1936. Bisttram considered them his most important works, mentioning them in his statement for Rudhyar's book (see Chapter 4), and focusing on them in his only published remarks from this period, his 1941 article, "The New Vision in Art." In this article he identified them as "metaphysical" and asserted that meditation was the process used to develop the images:

> The reproductions shown with this article are the result of my meditation and contemplation of universal concepts such as time, space, creation, at-one-ment. The approach in each instance was what is, for lack of a better term, known as metaphysical. With some theme of particular interest to me I sat as relaxed as possible and quietly meditated on the cause, the meaning and the eventual effect of the particular idea involved. Having quieted my mind, a certain state of readiness or awareness ensued. There followed after a while a sense of the momentary availability of the unconscious levels of the mind and intuitions. As the meditation process continued, answers to my problem-questions appeared vaguely, and then more clearly in the form of symbols, shapes, lines, masses and colors. These were sometimes in motion, sometimes quiescent; often they appeared in unmistakably pure geometric figures. I can usually recall these at will. Modifications also occurred by the association of ideas in relation to the symbols or shapes appearing before the inner vision.
>
> My next step was selection and rejection. I made careful notes of what I had experienced through this meditation. By elimination I determined what shapes, lines, colors or symbols had the greatest emotional value and best expressed the original concept. But no matter what changes and additions were made the result must answer to the original idea mediated upon.[1]

Meditation plays a large part in these works both in terms of subject matter and process and is specifically related to Jungian psychology. Bisttram's reference to "non-objective" painting as "psychological painting" in a 1939 letter to Frank and Margel Hinder,[2]

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[1]Bisttram, "The New Vision in Art," 57.

[2]Bisttram (to Frank and Margel Hinder), TLS, 13 Feb. 1939.

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becomes intelligible when the connections between meditation, psychology, and image-making presented in The Secret of the Golden Flower by Richard Wilhelm, the translator of the text from Chinese into German, and Jung in his Commentary, are examined. The Secret of the Golden Flower is an eighth-century text that provides instructions for meditation, the goal of which is to produce the "Golden Flower in the Heart." Speaking of those who follow the methods described in the book, Wilhelm connects meditation with psychology:

> ...there exists an esoteric movement which has devoted itself with energy to the psychological method, that is meditation, yoga practice. The followers of this method, in contra-distinction to the European "yogis" to whom these Eastern practices are only a form of sport, achieve almost without exception the central experience. Thus it can be said that, as far as the Chinese mentality is concerned a completely assured method of attaining definite psychic experiences is commanded.[3]

Jung also takes this view, essentially turning what previously had been a metaphysical problem into a psychological problem:

> All this [meditation] is a step in the developmental process of a higher human consciousness that finds itself on the way toward unknown goals; it is not metaphysics in the ordinary sense. In the first place, and thus far, it is only "psychology", but also thus far it can be experienced, it is intelligible, and--thank God--it is real, a reality with which something can be done, a reality containing possibilities and therefore alive.[4]

What Jung means is that any position an individual takes on a metaphysical issue can be viewed as a psychological attitude or state of mind, and that meditation can be effective in altering a given attitude.

In his Commentary, Jung relates that he has his patients make drawings to

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[3]Richard Wilhelm, "Origins and Contents of the T'ai I Chin Hua Tsung Chih," in The Secret of the Golden Flower, 5-6.

[4]C. G. Jung, "Commentary," in The Secret of the Golden Flower, 135.

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facilitate the individuation process since drawing released "the cramp in the conscious."[5] The drawings produced by his patients resulted in the production of "mandala" images:

> When the fantasies are chiefly expressed in thoughts, the results are intuitive formulations of the dimly felt laws or principles and these tend to be dramatized or personified.... If the fantasies are drawn there appear symbols that are chiefly of the so-called mandala type. Mandala means a circle, more especially a magic circle, and this form of symbol is not only to be found all through the East, but also among us; mandalas are amply represented in the Middle Ages. The specifically Christian ones come from the earlier Middle Ages. Most of them show Christ in the centre, with the four evangelists, or their symbols, at the cardinal points. The conception must be a very ancient one because Horus was represented with his four sons in the same way by the Egyptians. (It is known that Horus with his four sons was closely connected with Christ and the four evangelists.)... For the most part, the mandala form is that of a flower, cross, or wheel, with a distinct tendency toward four as the basis of structure. (One is reminded of the tetraktys, the fundamental number in the Pythagorean system.) Mandalas of this sort are also to be found in the sand drawings used in the ceremonies of the Pueblo Indians.[6]

This aspect of Jung's interpretation must have been quite inspiring to Bisttram since it brings together so many of his interests--Egyptian, Pythagorean, Christian, and Pueblo symbolism. Jung's identification of the symbol with the number four and the symmetry that it implies was undoubtedly an important influence on Bisttram's continued use of symmetry as the basis for his work. More important, however, is Jung's confirmation that image-making and meditation are closely related. Jung also emphasizes the healing nature of both making and studying the symbol:

> Moreover, quite in accord with the Eastern conception, the mandala symbol is not only a means of expression, but works an effect. It reacts upon its maker. Very ancient magical effects are associated with this symbol because it comes originally from the "enclosing circle", the "charmed circle", the magic of which has been preserved in countless folk-customs.[7]

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[5]Jung, "Commentary," 91.

[6]Ibid., 96-7.

[7]Ibid., 100.

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With his interest in meditation Bisttram certainly studied this book very carefully.

Additionally, Bisttram's drawing The Compassionate Heart (fig. 142) seems to be a meditation on the "Heavenly Heart," one of the central images in The Secret of the Golden Flower. The text is stylistically vague and flowery and full of enigmatic images. In the main text, the Golden Flower appears in various stages of blossoming, as a symbol to the individual while meditating, that the process of uniting with the higher self is being accomplished. The Heavenly Heart is mentioned throughout the text and seems to be a symbol of the higher self. The first chapter is titled "Heavenly Consciousness (The Heart)" and describes the purpose of meditation:

> By collecting the thoughts one can fly and will be born in Heaven. Heaven is not the wide blue sky, but the place where the body is made in the house of the creative. If one keeps this up for a long time, there develops quite naturally in addition to the body, yet another spirit-body.[8]

The commentary following on this passage by a later Chinese writer makes direct references to the Heavenly Heart:

> The Heavenly Heart is the germinal root of the Great Meaning. If a man can be absolutely quiet then the Heavenly Heart will manifest itself. When the feeling springs up and flows out in the natural course, the person is created as primordial creature. This creature abides between conception and birth in true space.[9]

Bisttram's drawing shows the heart growing upwards in space, in heaven, with a germinal root at the base. The text associates the Heavenly Heart with both birth and death. It seems to be both the giver of life and that which at death splits off from the lower self and rises to heaven. The Heavenly Heart manifests at birth as the animus (the higher self) and the anima (the lower self); a successful life spent in meditation is a

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[8]The Secret of the Golden Flower, 25.

[9]Ibid.

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process in which the higher takes control of the lower:

> The one effective, true essence (logos united with life), when it descends into the house of the creative, divides into animus and anima. The animus is in the Heavenly Heart. It is of the nature of light; it is the power of lightness and purity. It is that which we have received from the great emptiness, that which has form from the very beginning. The anima partakes of the nature of darkness. It is the power of the heavy and the turbid; it is bound to the bodily, fleshly heart. The animus loves life. The anima seeks death. All sensuous pleasures and impulses to anger are effects of the anima; it is the conscious spirit which after death is nourished on blood, but which, during life, is in direst need. Darkness returns to darkness and like things attract each other. But the pupil understands how to distill the dark anima so that it transforms itself into Light (yang).[10]

Thus the dark circle under the heart in Bisttram's drawing may be the anima that is developing from the Heavenly Heart at birth, or the anima that has been almost completely transformed into the higher self at death. The commentary on the text just cited emphasizes the birth aspect and mentions the role of polarity in the process:

> In this part there is described the role played by the primordial spirit and the conscious spirit in the making of the human body... The true essence proceeds from that which has no polarity and receives the primordial force of polarity whereby it takes the true essence of Heaven and Earth into itself and becomes the conscious spirit...[11]

Bisttram probably meant both birth and death since both are described as similar and opposing processes. The primordial force--the Heavenly Heart--creates life by pouring itself in, followed by the lower self taking over and becoming active during life. Then at death the lower self withdraws and falls away, and the higher self, after having evolved, returns to heaven. Bisttram emphasizes the aspect of polarity in the vertical line within the heart; also the dark circle below is shaped like a heart.

Another work specifically dealing with meditation is The Oversoul (Pulsation)

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[10]Ibid., 31.

[11]Ibid., 32.

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(fig. 143),[12] the first work reproduced and discussed in his 1941 article. Bisttram provided the following interpretation for The Oversoul:

> The drawing entitled The Oversoul is one of a series of drawings produced while meditating upon at-one-ment, union or illumination. To me this drawing shows quite clearly the union of the lower and higher natures of Man.[13]

Following Bisttram's interpretation, and adding aspects of theosophical theory from Alice Bailey's (1880-1949) Letters on Occult Meditation (1922), an expanded analysis of The Oversoul can be undertaken.[14] Uniting the lower self with the higher, according to Bailey, is the purpose of meditation. Fundamental to the unification process are the relationships between the three elements--the lower self (the personality), the higher self (the ego), and the Logos--operating within the framework of seven planes of reality (see fig. 73), with each element acting on successively higher planes. When the lower self unites itself with the ego, and then with the Logos, the individual is complete on all seven planes.

In The Oversoul, the lower man (the personality) is represented by the smallest circle composed of three concentric rings, that symbolize his physical, astral (emotional),

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[12]The drawing was titled The Oversoul in Bisttram's 1941 article; when the painting done after it was exhibited, it was titled Pulsation.

[13]Bisttram, "The New Vision in Art," 37.

[14]Although Alice Bailey founded her own organization, The Arcane Society, she follows Blavatsky's theosophical ideas closely. The appraisal of Bisttram's library (see Appendix III) shows that he had her books. Furthermore, Dane Rudhyar was a close personal friend of Bailey's; the Lucis Trust, founded to publish Bailey's books, published two of Rudhyar's books. Additionally, Harriet Richards, one of Bailey's financial supporters, spent the summer of 1937 meditating with Bisttram in Taos, and funded a meditation loft and studio. She also provided Horace Pierce with funds to purchase an air brush and compressor. Florence Pierce, interview with the author, 7 May 1998. Richards, who had a print of The Oversoul, also recommended Bisttram to the editor of the magazine in which his 1941 article was published. Florence Brobeck, Managing Editor, The Creative Age Press, to (Bisttram), TLS, 5 Mar. 1941, BP, AAA 2892:843.

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and mental bodies, which operate on the three lowest planes, the physical, astral, and mental. The lower nature of man interpenetrates the lowest circle, the earth, to symbolize man's existence on the earth plane. The lower nature also interpenetrates the large circle above, the higher self (the ego), but only partially.

The largest circle, composed of five unevenly spaced concentric rings, represents man's higher nature, or in the occult vocabulary of the 1920s, the ego, or individuality. The ego overlaps the individual from above. The Ego, like the personality, has three aspects that manifest on three planes. The purpose of meditation--aligning the lower self with the ego--is effected on the mental plane because that is where the personality and ego overlap. This alignment, according to Bailey, begins with abstract thinking. Abstract thinking is effected by refocusing and repolarizing the mind from the four lower sub-planes (concrete thought) of the mental body into the three higher sub-planes (abstract thought).

> Real abstract thought becomes possible only when the Personality has, by vibration reciprocal to that of the Ego, aligned itself sufficiently to form a fairly unimpeded channel.[15]

This repolarization by reciprocal action leads to the building up of what Bailey terms the "causal body" on the third sub-plane of the mental plane. Bisttram assuredly associated this idea of repolarization using reciprocal action with the reciprocal divisions of space used in dynamic symmetry, as well as with Jung's theory of opposites.

The force emanating from the top of the picture along the central vertical axis is the Logos (the Monad, Pure Spirit), penetrating to the center of the Ego. The light emanating from the center of the lower nature reaches up, through meditation, and joins

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[15]Bailey, Letters, 3-4.

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the light emanating from the Logos in the Ego. This alignment, the goal of meditation, produces a channel through which "the inspirational writers and dreamers can bring down their inspirations and dreams; and then the synthetic and abstract thinkers can transfer their conceptions to the world of form."[16] This promise of meditation, the bringing down of abstract ideas into form is the essential attraction of meditation and theosophy for Bisttram.

Bisttram probably depicted the Ego with five concentric circles because Bailey assigns the number five to the Ego when she describes the method of aligning the personality with the Ego. The process of "reciprocal vibration" involves combining the colors and tones of the Personality and the Ego "until beauty is achieved," terming the personality and matter in general as the major third, the ego as the dominant fifth, and the Monad or Spirit as the final element of the chord. She follows this with a larger musical analogy that provides the essential interest of all occultists in music:

> It is the dominant we seek at adeptship, and earlier the perfected third of the personality. During our various incarnations we strike and ring the changes on all the intervening notes, and sometimes our lives are major and sometimes minor, but always they tend to flexibility and greater beauty. In due time, each note fits into its chord, the chord of the Spirit; each chord forms part of a phrase, the phrase or group to which the chord belongs; and the phrase goes to the completion of one seventh of the whole. The entire seven sections, then complete the sonata of this solar system,--a part of the threefold masterpiece of the Logos or God, the Master-Musician.[17]

Another use of the symbolism of five, associated with the joining of the lower to the higher nature of man, held out what was surely an irresistible promise to Bisttram: "When the fifth Initiation is taken, the interplay between the three centres is perfected,

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[16]Alice Bailey, Letters on Occult Meditation (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1922), 1-2.

[17]Ibid, 4.

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and the alignment of the bodies is geometrically rectified; you have then the perfected fivefold superman."[18]

Bailey goes on to describe three forms of meditation, one of which is most suited to the scientist and the artist and involves meditating on archetypes. This is undoubtedly the type Bisttram was most interested in:

> 3. The Line of the Mahachohan. This is the line of mind or intelligence, of knowledge and of science. It is the line of abstract mind, and of archetypal ideas. The man broods not so much upon the Law, not so much upon the Life, as upon the effects of both in manifestation , and upon the reason why. The man on this fivefold line ever asks why, and how, and whence, and seeks to synthesize, to comprehend and to make the archetypes and ideals facts in manifestation. He broods on the ideals as he senses them; he aims at contacting the Universal Mind, at wresting its secrets from it, and giving them expression. It is the line of business organisation, the line also in which the artists, musician, scientists and the workers of the world have their place.[19]

Bisttram's idea for using concentric circles to represent cosmic forces was most likely inspired by Raymond Jonson's Time Cycle: Noon, 1930 (fig. 9), the central panel of his triptych Time Cycle. Jonson's central disk, comprised of three concentric circles, represents the sun. This is in line with the theosophical concept of the sun as a symbol of the tripartite Logos. The larger ovoid light from above overlapping the central sun could represent the theosophical idea that the physical sun is energized by the great spiritual sun from another plane. An interpretation of this sort would have to be confirmed, however, by examining at Jonson's work in a larger context. While Bisttram certainly saw this work in Jonson's studio, Bisttram was probably also attracted to it by Katz's inclusion of it in Understanding Modern Art with the caption "a purely impersonal

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[18]Ibid.

[19]Ibid., 172.

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abstraction."[20]

The title of this drawing--The Oversoul--is also important because of the link to Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay of the same name. This reference to Emerson is interesting on two counts, first because Emerson's term derives from a translation of the Buddhist term "At-man" or Spirit,[21] and secondly, because it provides a link between Emerson's transcendentalism and Bisttram's.

Rudhyar defined transcendental art as a process of "self-induced transformation" through meditation that produced archetypal symbols of a sacred nature. Rudhyar's description of the method, identification with nature, was given in the previous chapter. Bisttram's answer to the question, "What is it that makes a form esthetic and meaningful?" shows that his aesthetics during this period were derived from Rudhyar's essay "Art As A Release of Power" (1930) as much as from Jungian psychology:

> The answer, to me, is the Life Principle animating it. No matter whether the artist uses lines, planes or masses as a medium of expression they are nevertheless forms or vehicles for the embodiment of some phase of energy and intent, in quite the same manner that organic forms are the vehicles of expression for the special life-energy which animates and characterizes them.
>
> Similarly all great art forms, pregnant with inner meaning, are vehicles for the release of emotional energy to those whose consciousness can encompass this truth. These art forms achieve their beauty through the spirit motivating them and through their power to release within the beholder an equal or nearly equal charge of creative thought and emotions. Designed and built on universal laws and principles of proportion, line and color, they function as engines constructed for the release of their assumed power. Art forms have no value unless these forms generate energy of a peculiar nature, an energy, the release of which is desired or willed by the creative artist.

A reading of Dane Rudhyar's book Astrology and Personality (1936), which correlates

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[20]Katz, Understanding Modern Art, I, fig. 19.

[21]"...the Indian scriptures, from which he [Emerson] borrowed several Sanskrit terms such as Brahma and Over-Soul (a translation of At-man, the supreme and universal soul). Gay Wilson Allen, Waldo Emerson (New York: The Viking Press, 1981), xi.

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occult theory, astrology, and Jungian analytical psychology, shows how closely Bisttram's concepts are tied to Rudhyar's interpretation of Jung. Adopting Jung's vocabulary of collective unconscious, primordial images, archetypes, and individuation, Rudhyar proposes that the astrological birth chart of an individual is the framework or archetype of the personality that complements psychological analysis.

> Astrology does not deal primarily with life-contents, but only with the structure of individual selfhood. It is, strictly speaking as formal a system of knowledge as algebra. Its formulas apply to any contents--therefore they do not embody fate. For this reason, astrology needs psychological analysis, which deals with empirically determined personal contents. Astrology is the male element: that which gives the formula. Psychology is the female element: that which gives the substantial contents. Thus they complement each other in the determination of, and for the purpose of serving the integration of, the whole man: the Living Person.[22]

Following Jung, Rudhyar postulates that personality individuation occurs by a reconciliation between the conscious and the unconscious, or, more specifically, by the absorption and synthesis of elements from the collective unconscious by the conscious; for Rudhyar, like Jung, this is a symbol-making process.

> What this function of reconciliation of the opposites is can be ascertained from our previous study of Jung's analytical psychology as well as from the contents of our chapter "Individual, Collective, Creative"... This function manifests in various ways; mainly, on one hand in dreams, on the other in creative phantasy. In the former, the unconscious predominates; in the latter, the conscious. But in both cases we find a linking or integrating process at work; and this process manifests through the projection of images, which are symbols.[23]

Rudhyar, following Jung, also suggested that this symbol-making activity could benefit others.

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[22]Dane Rudhyar, The Astrology of Personality: A Reformulation of Astrological Concepts and Ideals in Terms of Contemporary Psychology and Philosophy (New York: Lucis Publishing, 1936), 514.

[23]Rudhyar, The Astrology of Personality, 333.

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> Any one who has a new idea and discovers a new significance in any experience, or relates together certain facts of experience in a new, and especially in a symbolic way--is a creator. As what he has thus created is assimilated by several men of his group, a new step is taken toward group-integration or generic individuation.[24]

The symbol-making process becomes a viable approach for the artist. Bisttram's duplication of a number of the works discussed in this chapter as gifts for his friends indicates that he took this seriously.[25]

Furthermore, Rudhyar specifies that the solar system should be the subject of that symbolism:

> The cosmic whole, the solar system, is also apparently a part of some greater cosmic whole, which is either our galaxy the Milky Way, or a fragment of this galaxy, or a group of such galaxies--the point being still more or less in doubt, on strict scientific grounds (as far as we know). However that may be, we have a somewhat accurate knowledge of the solar system as a physical unit (with the possibility of yet unknown planets, probably very remote); and that knowledge must be the basis of our symbolism. No extraneous elements should be retained, such as would follow from a purely geocentric viewpoint.[26]

Rudhyar rationalizes this symbolism by citing Jung's identification of the sun with the psyche:

> ...we shall place the Sun as the symbol of the integrating energies of the Self, which is described by Jung as the "center of the totality of the psyche." The psyche includes both unconscious and conscious contents. To integrate these contents--that is, consciously to assimilate the contents of the unconscious--is the essence of the process of individuation, of which the Sun is the active symbol.[27]

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[24]Ibid., 142.

[25]The author has identified three works that Bisttram so reproduced--The Oversoul and Creative Forces in black and white, and Projection No. III in color. In the 1939 letter to the Hinders, one of these prints was sent, mentioning that it was planned to issue a portfolio of 20 images and that they were being printed with "a special printing process," which was probably offset lithography.

[26]Rudhyar, 88.

[27]Ibid., 270-1.

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Moreover, Rudhyar clarifies that the symbolism that relates man to the solar system is also the relationship between the microcosm and the macrocosm:

> It is true that we may say that the individual man (microcosmos) is an image or correspondence of the solar system (macrocosmos), and that cycles of motion in the one cause analogical responses in the other. But if such a statement means anything at all, it means that the solar system is assumed to be the symbol of the individual man; and that the cyclic motions of the celestial bodies around the Earth correspond to cyclic processes of the life-force in any living organisms on Earth. Obviously, there is no difference between saying "correspond to" or "are symbols of." If anyone sees a difference between these two phrases, it is a proof either that he has not understood the vital reality of symbols--especially of collectively valid symbols such as the "primordial images" or "archetypes" of which Jung speaks--or that he uses the term "correspondence" without entering into the real meaning of such a term, often as loosely used by students of occult philosophy.[28]

One of the major concepts Rudhyar develops in Astrology and Personality is "wholeness." By this he means considering the personality as part of a larger whole, that is, as a part the universe. This enlarges Rudhyar's idea of symbol to include any image which shows the personality as part of a larger whole, and provides his rationale for using the astrological birth chart as a symbol since it diagrams an individual's relationship to the solar system.

Cosmic Egg Series

The importance of the "Cosmic Egg Series" is confirmed in Bisttram's correspondence with Raymond Piper (1888-1961), Professor of Philosophy at Syracuse University, who was collecting material for his book on cosmic art.[29] In his reply to Piper's initial inquiry,

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[28]Ibid, 435.

[29]Piper initiated this correspondence in 1949 at the suggestion of Dane Rudhyar and Raymond Jonson. Raymond F. Piper to (Emil Bisttram), TLS, 21 Feb. 21, BP, AAA 2892:706.

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Bisttram enclosed fourteen photographs, the majority of which were from the Cosmic Egg series,[30] and reiterated the essentially occult stimulus for these works:

> My later efforts have been much concerned with depicting man's eternal search for God. I am inclined to believe these works could be called symbolic ideographs, interpreting the soul's desire for union with its source or First Cause. Relative to Art as a whole I have always contended that the primary purpose of the integrated artist dealing with form and content should be to express the highest ideals of human desire. For me that desire is union with the eternal cause, at-one-ment with God or the I AM in terms of consciousness.
>
> Naturally there are infinite approaches to the problem of expressing such ideas, each in accordance with his awareness of the inner promptings. My work, regardless of medium employed, is the result of contemplation upon such problems. The stimuli may have been music, the poetry of such as Walt Whitman, or the philosophies of the East in which I have always been intensely interested.[31]

In the occult literature the egg is a highly-charged symbol called variously the Mundane Egg, the Auric Egg, the World Egg, and the Cosmic Egg. It is a most elastic symbol and can refer to either the macrocosm or the microcosm or both. Rudhyar, for example, identifies the auric egg as a symbol of the zodiac, the macrocosmic Planetary Logos. "In brief, the zodiac is what astrologers-scientists call the 'magnetic field' of the Earth, what occultists call the 'aura of the Earth,' or the auric egg of the planetary Being."[32]

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[30]Bisttram sent the following photographs: Aspiration, sketch for mural panel, Taos Co. Court House; Man Crucified, pencil drawing; Union, pencil drawing; Time Cycle, Cosmic Egg Series, 1938-39, pencil drawing; Mexican Funeral, 1931, drawing; Creative Forces, pencil drawing; Auric Egg, Cosmic Egg Series, pencil drawing; At-one-ment, Cosmic Egg Series, pencil drawing; Energy Projection, Time Cycle Series #2, pencil drawing; Cosmic Sacrifice, Cosmic Egg Series, pencil drawing; Cosmic Head, Cosmic Egg Series, pencil drawing; Cosmic Order, Cosmic Egg Series, pencil drawing; Meditation, Cosmic Egg Series, pencil drawing; Incarnation, Time Cycle #3, pencil drawing. BP, AAA, 2893:929.

[31]Emil Bisttram to (Raymond Piper), TLS, 1 Mar. 1949, BP, AAA, 2892:708

[32]Rudhyar, Astrology of Personality, 245.

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Blavatsky calls it "that mystery of mysteries," and, in a chapter devoted to the Mundane Egg, describes it as a universal symbol, expressing the "First Cause."

> The egg was incorporated as a sacred sign in the cosmogony of every people on the Earth, and was revered both on account of its form and its inner mystery. From the earliest mental conceptions of man, it was known as that which represented most successfully the origin and secret of being.[33]

Blavatsky goes on to provide a history of the symbolism of the egg and relates it to Pythagoras's number symbolism, using it ultimately to substantiate his knowledge of the role of zero in decimal notation.

Manly Hall, in his book Man: Grand Symbol of the Mysteries, devotes a chapter to this symbol, referring to it as the World Egg. In this context the most important meaning he attributes to it is generation, which he describes geometrically as the point within the circle: "Generation is the essential point around which, in eccentric orbits, circle accident and incident." He then launches into a discussion of occult embryology.[34]

Bisttram interprets Creative Forces (fig. 144), his primary work from his Cosmic Egg series, as follows:

> ...Creative Forces, is one of a series produced while meditating on creation--in general and in particular. In this instance I illustrate the cosmic egg fecundated by the seven major forces which received their source out of the One, which is within the egg and yet outside of it, the One being suspended out of another still larger egg or Infinity. However, the drawing has infinite interpretations depending upon the level of consciousness possessed by the observer.[35]

The primary visual source for this work is a photograph from one of one of Thomas

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[33]Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, I, 359.

[34]Hall, Man, 69.

[35]Bisttram, "The New Vision in Art," 37.

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Wilfred's color-organ performances (fig. 145).[36] Bisttram reorients the composition into a vertical format to set off the motif that he borrows--rays shaped like nibs from a pen. Wilfred's image is particularly suited to Bisttram's need because of the way the rays seem to issue from a void.

Another source can be found in The Macrocosm and the Microcosm (fig. 146), an illustration in Manly Hall's The Secret Teaching (1929). In this image the streams of light emerging from the mouth of the bearded old man are similar to those streaming from the Logos in Bisttram's image. While Bisttram's form is borrowed from Wilfred, the meaning is from Hall. The legend for Hall's illustration, which heads the chapter "The Pythagorean Theory of Music and Color," provides an interpretation similar to Bisttram's cited above:

> In the Mysteries the seven Logi, or Creative Lords, are shown as streams of force issuing from the mouth of the Eternal One. This signifies the spectrum being extracted from the white light of the Supreme Deity. The seven Creators, or Fabricators, of the inferior spheres were called by the Jews the Elohim. By the Egyptians they were referred to as the Builders (sometimes as the Governors) and are depicted with great knives in their hands with which they carved the universe from its primordial substance.[37]

In response to a later, more specific request for information about Creative Forces, in which Piper was most interested, Bisttram mentions the spectrum that Hall also refers to:

> This was finally developed in oil the colors of the spectrum band dominating

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[36]Bisttram undoubtedly worked from the reproduction in Cheney's A Primer of Modern Art, 184. Cheney, whose primary interest was theater, was most impressed with Wilfred's Clavilux and devoted an entire chapter of his book to it. He was most impressed with the way the colors were not projected onto a screen, but rather seemed to exist independently in space. This source for Creative Forces was suggested by Hay, 203.

[37]Hall, An Encyclopedic Outline... [The Secret Teachings], lxxxiv. Piper noted the relationship between the forces issuing from the mouth of Hall's Eternal One and Bisttram's Creative Forces. Raymond Piper, "Emil Bisttram," BP, AAA, 2893:183.

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> against a medium-dark blue background. In this composition the attempt was made to present a Symbolic interpretation of our Universe showing the seven major forces activating our Universe--(seven the number of same) plus two, a total of nine (the number of Man.) Above the composition is the Logoic eye[38] contemplating His creation...[39]

Bisttram's reference to the spectrum colors against a blue background recalls Hall's depiction, but it also points to a source in Alice Baily's Letters on Occult Meditation (1922), in which she associates the breaths of the logos with the spectrum, and blue as the background color, which Bisttram uses in the painting:[40]

> When the Logos uttered the great cosmic Word for this solar system, three major streams of colour issued forth, breaking almost simultaneously into another four, so giving as the seven streams of colour by which manifestation became possible. These colours are: 1. Blue, 2. Indigo, 3. Green, 4. Yellow, 5. Orange, 6. Red, 7. Violet... These seven streams of colour were the product of logoic meditation. The Logos meditated, brooded, conceived mentally, formed an ideal world, and built it up in thought matter. Then our objective universe flashed into being, radiant with the seven colours, with the deep blue or indigo for synthetic undertone.[41]

While Hall also uses blue in the background, it is a light blue, whereas Bisttram uses the very deep blue that Bailey requires:

> The true indigo is the blue of the vault of heaven on a moonless night. It is the culmination, and at the attainment by all of synthesis, the solar night will supervene. Hence the colour corresponds to what the sky nightly proclaims. Indigo absorbs.[42]

One of the major points of Bailey's Letters is that it is the causal body (auric egg) that is

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[38]The Logos, according to Bailey, is the highest divinity in the hierarchy ruling the solar system in which we live, and is undergoing evolution as man is. In this cosmology there are other solar systems with other Logoi in various stages of evolution.

[39]Bisttram to (Raymond Piper), TL, 18 Dec. 1956, BP, AAA 2892:1126.

[40]The painting is illustrated in color in Piper, plate 8.

[41]Alice Baily, Letters, 205-6.

[42]Ibid., 212.

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developed through meditation. For Bailey, the causal body is built up on the third sub-plane of the mental plane by the accumulation of good deeds. The attainment of a specific density and circumference of the causal body is a prerequisite for further progress toward union with the higher self, and, once attained, is a sign of immanent unification. Hall, like Bailey, associated the Auric Egg with the microcosm, and the Kosmic Egg with the macrocosm:

> In the secret teachings of the Qubbalah it is taught that man's body is enveloped in an ovoid of bubble-like iridescence, which is called the Auric Egg. This is the causal sphere of man... In reality, therefore, the supreme consciousness of man is in this aura, which extends in all directions and completely encircles his lower bodies. As the consciousness in the Kosmic Egg is withdrawn into a central point, which is then called God--the Supreme One--so the consciousness in the Auric Egg of man is concentrated, thereby causing the establishment of a point of consciousness called the Ego [the higher self]. As the universes in Nature are formed from powers latent in the Kosmic Egg, so everything used by man in all his incarnations throughout the kingdoms of Nature is drawn from the latent powers within his Auric Egg. Man never passes from this egg; it remains even after death. His births, deaths, and rebirths all take place within it, and it cannot be broken until the lesser day "Be With Us," when mankind--like the universe--is liberated from the Wheel of Necessity.[43]

In another letter to Piper, Bisttram confirms that Creative Forces represents both the macrocosm and the microcosm, and further identifies the forces within it as those that create form:

> This drawing is one of a series in which an attempt is made to express the idea of the creative forces within and animating form, giving it life, from a cell to a Cosmic scheme...with the "All-seeing" and "All-knowing Eye," symbolic of the Spirit ever concerned with its structure and Destiny.[44]

Another possible source for Bisttram's image can be found in one of the mandala images that Jung included with his commentary on The Secret of the Golden Flower. Jung's

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[43]Hall, An Encyclopedic Outline [The Secret Teachings], cxvii.

[44]Bisttram to (Piper), TL, 17 June 1957, BP, AAA 2893:181.

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note on this image (fig. 147) reads "Separation of the light, from the dark world; the divine from the earthly soul. In the centre a representation of contemplation."[45] This image shows one circle overlapping another to represent the interpenetration of the higher and lower worlds much as in Bisttram's concept. This comparison suggests that it may have been Jung's description of the mandala as both a "magic circle" and a symbol of individuation that led Bisttram to select the Cosmic Egg for so many of his images. Jung's selections also show that he did not require mandala images to be strictly centered or exactly symmetrical.

The most important clue to the meaning of this image, however, is provided in Bisttram's reference to the "All-seeing" and "All-knowing eye." This refers to the overlap between the circles in his drawing, and to the relationship between man's third eye and the eye of God.

> There is much to be discovered concerning sight for this study will include not only physical vision, but the development of the third eye, clairvoyance, perfect spiritual vision and on up to that inconceivable mystery covered by the terms the "All-seeing Eye" and the "Eye of Shiva."[46]

The critical connection is that the third eye is one of the chakras, which connects Creative Forces to the other works in the "Cosmic Egg" series.

The Chakras (fig. 148), also from the Cosmic Egg series, shows the cosmic egg in its microcosmic form. While Leadbeater is usually considered the authority on the chakras,[47] Bisttram was probably following Alice Bailey's ideas, particularly those

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[45]Jung, Commentary, 138.

[46]Bailey, Light of the Soul, 354.

[47]C. W. Leadbeater, The Chakras (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1927).

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developed in The Soul and Its Mechanism: The Problem of Psychology (1930). Bailey's approach attempts to reconcile Eastern and Western teachings by addressing the position of behavioral psychologists "that 'emotion is an hereditary pattern-reaction involving profound changes of the bodily mechanism as a whole, but particularly of the visceral and glandular systems...'"[48] Ultimately Bailey associates the glands of the body's endocrine system with the emotions and the seven chakras. Seminal to Bailey's concept of the chakras is the theory of the ether, a tenet of Buddhism, which was first proposed in the West by Newton, and was discussed in Chapter 2. The theory of the ether holds that forces such as magnetism, gravitation, radiation, and electricity act through a primal etheric substance. Buddhism goes even further, however, and supposes that every individual as well as every object also has an etheric body through which these forces regulate the physical manifestation. Following the Buddhist precedent, Bailey proposes that the chakras are energy centers existing in man's etheric body through which cosmic forces are lowered and finally manifest in the glands of the body's endocrine system.[49] These ideas appear throughout the occult literature and do not originate with Bailey. Her discussion of the ether and her description of it as an invisible "web of light" are also important for providing a framework for understanding Bisttram's commitment to dynamic symmetry. When the ether is presumed, space is vivified to a much greater degree.

In his drawing Bisttram depicts the chakras aligned along the central vertical axis

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[48]Morton Prince, Psychologies of 1925, p. 208, cited in Alice Bailey, The Soul and Its Mechanism: The Problem of Psychology (New York: Lucis Publishing Co., 1930), 20.

[49]Bailey associates the glands as follows, beginning with the highest chakra: pineal, pituitary, thyroid, thymus, pancreas, adrenals, gonads.

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receiving an influx of divine force through a downward pointing triangle of light at the top of the central vertical axis passing through a circle within a circle. The chakras themselves are embedded within a six-pointed star, which is the union of upward and downward pointing equilateral triangles. The directional nature of these triangles symbolizes the two-fold nature of the chakra energy. While the Logos sends energy down to the individual through the chakras, the individual, in turn, raises himself up to the Logos through meditation, which manifests in increased movement of the chakra centers. The placement of the chakras within a circle within the egg distinguishes the etheric body--in which the chakras function--from the Cosmic Egg.

Bisttram actually depicts six chakra centers rather than the usual seven. This arrangement shows a combination of the top two chakras into one, signifying the completion of the purpose of meditation--the combination of the sixth chakra, the third eye, corresponding to the pituatary gland, with the seventh chakra, the top of the head chakra, corresponding to the pineal gland. Bailey describes this as follows:

> A relationship is set up between the negative centre and its counterpart, the pituitary body, and the positive centre and its counterpart, the pineal gland. As time proceeds, it is claimed, a magnetic field is set up, soul and body meet, the father and mother come into relationship and the soul is brought to the birth in the consciousness of man.[50]

The number of petals Bisttram uses for the lower chakras identifies them. The first or lowest (base of the spine) chakra (adrenal glands) is depicted with four petals. The second chakra, with six petals, is the sacral center (gonads). The third, with ten petals, represents the solar plexus chakra (pancreas). The fourth is the heart center (thymus) with twelve petals. The fifth is the throat chakra (thyroid) with sixteen petals. The

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[50]Bailey, The Soul and Its Mechanism, 142

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source for Bisttram's ideographs of the individual chakras, however, is drawings in Sir John Woodroffe's Serpent Power.[51] This highly technical treatment of the chakras and the raising of kundalini is a translation of two Sanskrit texts. Bisttram's use of this text indicates the seriousness of his investigations of the chakras and of meditation in general.

Bisttram's identification of art, religion, ritual, and redemption was also fostered by Woodroffe. This is shown by the following quotation from Woodroffe's Shakti and Shakta, which was typed on Bisttram's school letterhead:

> Ritual is an art, the art of religion. Art is the outward material expression of ideas intellectually held and emotionally felt. Ritual art is concerned with the expression of those ideas and feelings which are specifically called religious. It is a mode by which religious truth is presented, and made intelligible in material forms and symbols to the mind. It appeals to all natures passionately sensible of that Beauty in which, to some, God most manifests Himself. But it is more than this. For it is the means by which the mind is transformed and purified. In particular according to Indian principles it is the instrument whereby the consciousness of the worshipper is shaped in actual fact into forms of experience which embody the truths which Scripture teaches. The Shakta (worshipper of power) is thus taught that he is one with Shiva and His Power or Shakti. This is not a matter of mere argument. It is a matter for experience. It is a ritual and Yoga-practice which secure that experience for him.. How profound Indian ritual is, will be admitted by those who have understood the general principles of all ritual and symbolism, and have studied it in its Indian form, with a knowledge of the principles of which it is an expression. Those who speak of "mummery", "gibberish" and "superstition" betray both their incapacity and ignorance.[52]

Psychic Energy Centered (fig. 149) also seems to be a depiction of chakra energies because of the number of spokes in each energy wheel. Three types of energy are stacked vertically in successively larger circles defined by four, ten, and sixteen spokes, corresponding to the lowest chakra (with four petals), the solar plexus chakra

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[51]Sir John Woodroffe, The Serpent Power (London: Luzac and Co., 1919; reprint New York: Dover, 1974).

[52]Woodroffe, Shakti and Shakta, Bisttram Papers, Harwood Museum.

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(with ten petals), and the throat chakra (with sixteen petals). These energies are then focused at the right in a similar energy pattern with twelve spokes, corresponding to the heart chakra (defined by twelve petals).

These numbers relationships also correlate with Jung's description of the individuation process that requires a lowering of the highest energy and the raising of the lowest energy. "As we have seen, the release of repression brings a collision between the opposites, causing an equalization that necessarily results in a lowering of the value that was highest."[53] The method for starting this process is, according to Jung, creative fantasy, "an irrational instinctive function which alone has the power to supply the will with a content of such a nature that it can unite the opposites."[54] Creative fantasy is then "a diving down into the source of the first beginnings. Out of this there rises, as an image of the incipient progressive movement, the symbol, which is a condensation of all the operative unconscious factors–'living form'..."[55] The progressive nature of this symbol-making process, when repeated, leads to what Jung terms individuation.

The energy symbol made up of twelve spokes at the right essentially resolves and assimilates the energy symbols at the right, raising the lowest defined by four, and lowering the highest defined by sixteen. Capping the three energy symbols at the left is an energy system made solid, substantial, and light-filled, presumably the causal body created on the mental plane through meditation. The precedence given to the heart chakra at the right suggests that Bisttram's drawing The Compassionate Heart may also

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[53]C. G. Jung, Psychological Types, trans H. G. Baynes, (1923; revised translation by F. F. C. Hull, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 107.

[54]Ibid., 115.

[55]Ibid., 125.

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relate to ideas about the chakras.

Bisttram's continuing interest in the chakras is shown in Kundalini (fig. 150), another drawing from the Cosmic Egg Series. Kundalini is the force that resides in the lowest (base of the spine) chakra, and is also called the World's Mother. Through meditation the kundalini force is aroused and brought to the head, thus symbolizing the unification of the mother with the father. According to Bailey this is the same meaning as that found in the Christian concept of the "Assumption of the Virgin." Bailey emphasizes that the kundalini force is aroused by the magnetism in the head centers rather than by focusing on the lower chakras. She also identifies kundalini as one of the three forces that flow through the ether. The purpose of raising the kundalini energy is to effect consciousness in the soul. Bisttram shows the kundalini force as a snake rising in a spiral toward the top of the head towards union with the Logos. The snake is specifically associated with the egg because it is oviparous; it is associated with the kundalini force because of the way it rises making use of its coils.

Bisttram shows the kundalini spiral rising within the cosmic egg culminating in a circular head that at the same time achieves union with the ego, is fecundated by the Logos, and generates concentric circles of energy. Bisttram's composition also includes a depiction of the seven planes of reality. The first three planes, those of the personality, are shown in horizontal bands across the bottom of the picture. The cosmic egg, within which the kundalini force is operating, interpenetrates the three lower planes as well as the tripartite ego, attaining unity with the center of the Ego, which is penetrated by the Logoic force along the central vertical axis.

Rudhyar's association of the raising of the kundalini force with personality individuation underlines Rudhyar's essential aim, that is, connecting theosophy with the

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ideas of Jung:

> The process of development of the personality is analogical to the Kundalini process, insofar as we deal in both cases with the progressive shift of the balance of individual and collective forces, toward integration or disintegration. But strictly speaking the "raising of Kundalini" is an occult process--in a sense, a forced process, hence, the great danger involved in it. In the new psychological sense, the process is that of individuation (in Jung's sense); and it presupposes at the start a conscious development of the psyche, a relatively strong emphasis on the individual ego. For this ego is the focal point for the assimilation of the collective energies.[56]

Bisttram's drawing, Omniscience (fig. 151) also belongs to the "chakra" series, as the third eye is associated with the sixth chakra, the chakra located between the eyes associated with the pituitary gland. This drawing shows one eye with the phrase "I AM" inscribed in the pupil. "I am" refers to the revelation of God's name to Moses (Exodus 3:14), which is interpreted by occultists to mean that the divine spark exists within each individual. The drawing suggests the macrocosm since the three emanations from the center of the eye undoubtedly refer to the first three emanations from the Logos that subsequently resolved into seven. "I AM" also refers to the "I Am" movement, based on the Mosaic revelation, founded by Godfrey Rae King. This movement was active in the 1930s in Chicago and Santa Fe.[57]

There are many possible sources for this image: Jung identifies the "philosophical eye" or the "mirror of wisdom" as a mandala image.[58] Burliuk's The Eye of God, 1926, and Rudhyar's image of an eye used on the cover of Art as Release of

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[56]Rudhyar, The Astrology of Personality, 157.

[57]According to one of Bisttram's friends, Bisttram's brother Stephen was a member of this group. Jan Vann, telephone interview with the author, August, 1997.

[58]Jung, "Commentary," in The Secret of the Golden Flower, 97.

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Power are other possible sources.[59] Magritte's The False Mirror, 1928, which depicts an eye, could also be mentioned. Peter Fingesten, for example, devotes an entire chapter of his book The Eclipse of Symbolism to the symbolism of the eye. In his discussion, he uses the terms "the all-seeing eye of God" and "eye of the sky," phrases that Bisttram used, and also shows the association of the eye with the sun in Egyptian mythology, an association Bisttram makes repeatedly in the works discussed in the next chapter.[60] For Bisttram, this symbol refers to the central spiritual sun that, according to both Blavatsky and Swedenborg, was behind the physical sun and represented the source of energy for our solar system.

Another drawing from the Cosmic Egg series, Blue Center (fig. 152) is particularly interesting because it may be the first instance of Bisttram working from Kandinsky. The source is Kandinsky's Circles in a Circle, 1923 (fig. 10), which was reproduced in Leo Katz's book, but which Bisttram could have seen earlier.[61] A comparison between the two works shows that Bisttram changed the essential meaning of Kandinsky's work. Kandinsky's painting depicts a group of circles and lines within a large centrally-placed circle. The asymmetric overlapping of circles within the circle, with smaller circles at the periphery of the enclosing circle, shows the idea of energy

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[59]David Burliuk, The Eye of God, 1926, Yale University Gallery of Art. For a reproduction of Rudhyar's image, see Blankenship, and Garman, 33.

[60]Peter Fingesten, The Eclipse of Symbolism (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1970), 37, 38.

[61]Katz, III, fig. 449. Circles in a Circle was included in the exhibition of the Blue Four at the Arts Club of Chicago in 1932; it was also reproduced in Axis, 1 (Jan 1935), an issue which Raymond Jonson owned. Walter Arensburg, whom Jonson visited in Dec. 1935, purchased Circles in a Circle in 1931 from Galka Scheyer; Jonson met Scheyer when she stopped in Santa Fe in 1925. Lorenz, in Levin and Lorenz, 82, 113, 157, 94.

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expanding outward. The direction of the movement is strengthened by the force lines that cross each other along diagonals above and to the right of the center of the composition.

Bisttram regularized the composition by centralizing the circles within the circle and showing the two streams of energy in the form of a cross. Bisttram has also narrowed the line of the largest circle, and has placed some motifs outside of it. Bisttram's circles within the circle introduce a counterclockwise rotation within the circle: the rotation begins in the upper left quadrant with the circle cut just to the right of center by the upper vertical of the cross; the rotation continues in the lower left quadrant with the circle cut by the left arm of the cross; the rotation continues in the third quadrant and is completed with a full circle centrally placed in the upper right quadrant. The lines connecting the larger and smaller circles with the center indicate the complexity of the organization. Bisttram's work is much more controlled, while Kandinsky's is much more powerful and active, even explosive. The two works could be further contrasted by the terms centrifugal (expanding) force to describe Kandinsky's work and centripetal (contracting) force to describe Bisttram's work.

Centrifugal and centripetal forces, which are central to Blavatsky's theory of the ether, are analyzed as aspects of the creative life-cycle by Rudhyar in his essay "The Cycle of Culture and Sacrifice." Rudhyar calls centrifugal motion involution, the first impulse of spirit expanding outward to its limits, and centripetal motion evolution, spirit returning to the center as an organizing force. Rudhyar applies this model to the birth of a culture as follows:

> An Impulse arises at a certain point of space (let us say in Europe) and at a certain time. A new sense of life, a new Tone of life, a new Ideal and Thought are brought out, expounding through some human agencies which we shall

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> consider later. This Spirit-Impulse spreads, pervading as it were many lands and many souls. It does no, not really as a doctrine or system--but rather as a Faith, as a wave of enthusiasm for a new Spirit flowing outward. This flow however does not and cannot last indefinitely. A reaction is bound to follow. Powers of opposition are aroused; the old ideals, old faiths, old systems oppose more and more powerfully the spread of the new spirit which eventually reaches the limit of its expansion. This marks the end of the Involutionary Period
>
> After this occurs, the Impulse as it were turns back to the center whence it sprang and there begins the second Evolutionary period of the cycle--that of concentration. Centrifugal expansion of radiating Energy sweeping through the surrounding regions transforms itself into centripetal concentration, into the effort to stabilize, to organize the ground conquered--whenever such ground is not lost and reconquered by the reactionary powers of the old.
>
> Then form appears. The boundaries are surveyed, the meaning and powers of the substance which they encompass is studied; this substance is organized, that is, differentiated into specialized organs whose functions become defined. The "life-form" reveals itself progressively as an entity, as a culture; a process culminating at the time the center is reached back; then the second phase ends.[62]

Rudhyar goes on to explain that the completion of the two-fold process of involution and evolution, when the evolutionary force returns to the center, produces consciousness as well as form. This consciousness, effected by reconnecting with the center, is what Rudhyar terms "ethos," giving substance to the form. The cycle begins again, with another expansion from the center, called transvolution or the seed period, but this time the now organized and conscious spirit acts in a sacrificial manner. This third period is manifested by individuals or ideas that have internalized the full cycle, and expand out in an impersonal or universal form. This is termed a sacrifice because the actions and forms are sacramental and symbolic and the personality is given up. Seed is used as a symbol of sacrifice in the sense that the seed gives up or sacrifices its identity when it evolves into the plant. Sacrifice is symbolized in Blue Center by the intersection of the vertical and horizontal lines of force in the center in the form of the cross. The use of

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[62]Dane Rudhyar, "The Cycle of Culture and Sacrifice," in Art as a Release of Power, 8-9.

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three horizontally stacked root-five rectangles for the organizational structure of the composition further enhances the symbolism of cycles of change.

Evidence that Bisttram intended the idea of sacrifice in Blue Center is shown in a more transcendent conception, Cosmic Sacrifice (fig. 153), which is a rearrangement of the composition, placed within the cosmic egg. The edges of the egg are softened, and the idea of coming into manifestation is developed by the egg's emergence from the black background. The idea of sacrifice is emphasized by the light that emanates from the center.

In Rudhyar's theory of "culture and sacrifice" he cites Christ as the major impulse for the two thousand year cycle, and identifies the year 1000, the flowering of the Romanesque, as the limit of the involutionary impulse, with an intellectualizing, organizing, evolutionary period setting in afterwards. Rudhyar criticizes Spengler's concept of the Magian (Arabic, Byzantine) culture, because he felt that the Byzantine period was not a separate culture, but rather was the first flowering of the Christian idea. This same point is made by Clive Bell. Bell is most noted for his concept of "significant form," a vivifying spirit within form, that is free from extraneous naturalistic detail. For Bell, it began with the Christian impulse, evolved in Byzantine art, and culminated in Romanesque art. Bell's theories provided momentum to the modern movement by identifying Cézanne as the rediscoverer of significant form. Raymond Jonson was particularly moved by Bell's book, which was also the major source for Cheney's ideas about modernism, and in fact for many of the ideas about the importance of primitivism in modern art. What Rudhyar, Spengler, Bell, Cheney, and Katz have in common is that they examine art and culture in terms of cycles and points of spirituality, measured against materialism and dependence on sensory experience.

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Blue Center can also be read as an astrological chart. While the circular form is not divided into twelve parts (the essential identification of a birth chart), the various smaller circles, depicted as solids, function within the circle much as planets in the birth chart. This is substantiated by the lines that emanate from the center and connect the circles, forming the angular relationships known as aspects, an important part of reading a birth chart. The meaning of these uneven angular relationships is a significant element of Rudhyar's analysis of the personality as an unbalanced entity that needs to be balanced through individuation.

> If we now proceed from the universal to the particular, we shall see that birth as a particular personality means establishing linear or angular disequilibrium within the circle or sphere. A particular being is one in whom some elements (or viewpoints) are emphasized, others subdued. He is no longer a "perfectly rounded" individual, but an angular being, with points of stress and concentration of energy, and zones of relative emptiness.[63]

In this interpretation, the circle becomes a symbol of the "Planetary Logos," and the cross of sacrifice becomes the process by which the individual actualizes the universal.

At-one-ment (fig. 154) sums up in a most transcendent fashion many of the ideas developed earlier. The personality is shown as an upward pointing triangle containing a circle and a Tau cross interpenetrating the cosmic egg, the Ego, and the Logos. The lower five planes, shown in horizontal bands across the bottom of the composition, interpenetrate both the Personality and the lower portion of the Cosmic Egg. This shows the theosophical idea that the seven planes of reality are not hierarchically arranged but are ever present and available at any given point in space.

For Rudhyar and Bisttram, Jung's most important ideas were his theory of opposites, his concept of individuation, his recognition of Oriental philosophy as

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[63]Rudhyar, Astrology of Personality, 391.

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providing a method for the reconciliation of opposites, and the emergence of the symbol as a sign of the individuating process. The Cosmic Egg series shows, however, that his concepts of the magic circle and the mandala were just as influential on Bisttram.

Bisttram was probably not ultimately interested in Jung, however, because Jung expressed deep reservations about the value of identification with archetypes. For Jung the goal of individuation was separation from the archetypes, whereas for theosophy the goal was identification with the archetype. For Jung, identification with the archetype was loss of individuality and domination by the collective unconscious. Jung's name for the individuation process--the transcendent function--may, however, have been influential in the naming of the Transcendental Painting Group. Jung was against Westerners practicing yoga and thought very little of theosophy; he even made a veiled attack on the Taos community:

> Western imitation of the East is doubly tragic in that it comes from a psychological misunderstanding as sterile as are the modern escapes in New Mexico, the blissful South Sea Islands, and Central Africa, where "primitivity" is being staged in all seriousness, in order that western civilized man may covertly slip out of his menacing duties, his Hic Rhodus hic salta.[64]

Otto Rank's Art and Artist, which was on Bisttram's 1945 reading list, was undoubtedly more to Bisttram's taste. Rank, like Jung, considered the primitive and archaic phases of man's development critical to the evolution of civilization, but Rank put a more positive spin on his analysis and discusses a number of problems directly addressed to the artist. One of the major topics Rank undertakes is the interplay between individual and collective contents in a work of art that in many ways takes Katz's idea of personal and impersonal to a new level.

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[64]Jung, "Commentary," in The Secret of the Golden Flower, 80.

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> For this very essence of a man, his soul, which the artist puts into his work and which is represented by it, is found again in the work by the enjoyer, just as the believer finds his soul in religion or in God, with whom he feels himself to be one. It is on this identity of the spiritual, which underlies the concept of collective religion, and not on a psychological identification with the artist, that the pleasurable effect of the work of art ultimately depends, and the effect is, in this sense, one of deliverance.[65]

Rank's emphasis on the ideological contents of a work of art over the personal elements would have been very appealing to Bisttram. Furthermore, for Rank, the mission of the artist from primitive times was the depiction of the soul as a confirmation of immortality; even crediting art and artists with contributing to the formation of religion. The residue of the belief in immortality is found in the desire for immortality that, for Rank, formed the modern tragic hero.[66] Hence Bisttram's belief in his own immortality freed him from the self-destructive tendencies that plagued so many modern artists.

Rank also has a chapter devoted to games, relating them to art via their origin in ceremony, magic, and ideology. For Rank, game-playing is a prelude to art because it develops the will, while at the same time constraining destructive tendencies. Most interesting is the occult history he gives for chess, a game to which Bisttram was devoted.[67] The relationship between chess and painting by an eighteenth-century

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[65]Rank, 109.

[66]Rank, 289.

[67]Bisttram's favorite opponent was the painter Leon Gaspard, playing three nights a week at the Columbian Hotel. By 1937 there was a chess club; the March tournament consisted of 88 games over 12 evenings. The press reported that "some very tight and interesting games were played between Gaspard and Bisttram." Bisttram won 30 games; Gaspard won 25. Other members of club were Bright, Martinez, Secrest, Hennings, Fleck, and Kitte. Hennings and Fleck were artists. The club usually met at the Columbian Hotel; regular meeting nights were Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays; Bisttram was in charge of membership. "Chess Tournament," Taos Review, April 8, 1937.

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Chinese painting theorist provides a similar analysis that suggests a heightened intellectual development for the painter who plays chess:

> In a way, painting is like chess. An ordinary player may fight hard for some particular position, but the loss to the general plan is great. First-class players neither fight nor yield, but from the beginning to the end there is not one idle move. This applies to painting. For although the artist works alone, what he is aiming at and struggling for is like playing against an opponent. The smallest error may have grave consequences. When one's art reaches maturity, the artist feels like a first-class hand; he can give away certain advantages and yet is able to do what he wishes with freedom and ease.[68]

Tsung-ch'ien's approach to painting was classical, methodological, and based on precedent, not on attachment to public opinion, many of the same qualities observed in Bisttram.

Time Cycle Series

In Time Cycle No. 1 (fig. 155), the final work illustrated in Bisttram's 1941 article, he uses the circle, triangle, and square in a composition that depicts the relationship between time and space as well as between life and death.

> The third drawing, Time Cycle No. 1, is also one of a series resulting from the meditation process on time and space. In this particular drawing the lines of force or energy permeating space, manifesting out of one source, having passed through the various organizing centers, take on the geometric shapes of our world before matter condenses or crystallizes on them. At the same time the drawing has the suggestion of a pendulum in the shape of a scythe, the reaper swinging in eternal space.[69]

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[68]Shen Tsung-ch'ien (fl. 1781), The Art of Painting (Chieh-chou Hsueh Hua P'ien), 1781, in The Chinese Theory of Art by Lin Yutang (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1967), 172.

[69]Bisttram, "The New Vision in Art," 37-8. Time Cycle No. 1 (the drawing) was acquired by Lawren Harris in the late 1930s. Worts, 74, fig. 58. Worts says that Harris acquired another drawing also, but does not mention which one. Time Cycle No. 1, the painting, is in the collection of the Museum of Art, University of New Mexico.

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The depiction of circle, triangle, square, and cube becoming progressively more dense is achieved by increasing complexity. The successive movements of the scythe are depicted by the repetitions around each shape. A source for the symbolism of the scythe is found in Heindel. Heindel links the scythe with the idea of "seed-atoms" or "permanent atoms" that are probably the bright spots in the centers of the major forms of Bisttram's composition.

> So man builds and sows until the moment of death arrives. Then the seed-time and the periods of growth and ripening are past. The harvest time has come, when the skeleton spectre of Death arrives with his scythe and hour-glass. That is a good symbol. The skeleton symbolizes the relatively permanent part of the body. The scythe represents the fact that this permanent part, which is about to be harvested by the spirit, is the fruitage of the life now drawing to a close. The hour-glass in his hand indicates that the hour does not strike until the full course has been run in harmony with unvarying laws. When that moment arrives a separation of the vehicles takes place. As his life in the Physical World is ended for the time being, it is not necessary for man to retain his dense body. The vital body, which as we have explained, also belongs to the Physical World, is withdrawn by way of the head, leaving the dense body inanimate.
>
> The higher vehicles--vital body, desire body and mind--are seen to leave the dense body with a spiral movement, taking with them the soul of one dense atom. Not the atom itself, but the forces that played through it. The results of the experiences passed through in the dense body during the life just ended have been impressed upon this particular atom. While all the other atoms of the dense body have been renewed from time to time, this permanent atom has remained. It has remained stable, not only through one life, but it has been a part of every dense body ever used by a particular Ego. It is withdrawn at death only to reawaken at the dawn of another physical life, to serve again as the nucleus around which is built the new dense body to be used by the same Ego. It is therefore called the "Seed-Atom." [70]

The permanent atom or the seed-atom is widely referred to in the occult literature, and expands the interpretation of the symbolism of the seed so frequently found in the occult literature, and widely used by Bragdon and Rudhyar. The various theosophical writers,

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[70]Heindel, 96-7.

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however, disagree about how many permanent atoms there actually are.[71] All agree, however, that the permanent atoms are harvested from man's various vehicles at death and serve as the basis for rebirth into the next life.

In Bisttram's depiction, the two spots, the one in the center of the square and the one in the center of the triangle, both with seven tails, could very well be the permanent atoms being gathered at death. The two other bright spots in the centers of the circles along the upper portion of the handles could also represent the rising of the permanent atom through the individual's various vehicles. This movement is reinforced by the sequence of forms from square to triangle to circle.

Likewise, Bisttram's drawing The Cosmic Web, Time Cycle Series (fig. 156) could very well be the permanent atom rising at death along the silvery cord. This possibility is suggested by Heindel:

> During life the seed-atom is situated in the left ventricle of the heart, near the apex. At death it rises to the brain by way of the pneumogastric nerve, leaving the dense body, together with the higher vehicles, by way of the sutures between the parietal and occipital bones. When the higher vehicles have left the dense body they are still connected with it by a slender, glistening, silvery cord...[72]

Bisttram depicts this "permanent atom" as a circle within a six-pointed star, within a square, within a circle.

While at first glance the web looks like a continuous line, it is actually a series of orbits increasing in size from the center. Orbital revolution is an important part of Rudhyar's astrological psychology. For Rudhyar, orbital rotation, the yearly rotation of the earth around the sun, represents influences to the collective unconscious, while axial

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[71]According to Leadbeater there are four permanent atoms. Leadbeater, I, 226.

[72]Heindel, 97-8.

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rotation, the daily rotation of the earth on its axis, represents influences to the personality.

> Thus all values which deal with the individual and his problems of consciousness as an individual will be referred symbolically to the axial rotation of the Earth and to the astrological factors created thereby, mainly the circle of houses and its two axes, vertical and horizontal. On the other hand, collective values which pertain to the behavior of man as a racial and generic being will be referred to the orbital yearly revolution of the Earth around the Sun. It is this orbital revolution which constantly alters the relationship of the Earth to the Sun and to the planets. It is in order to be able to chart such a constantly changing pattern that this idea of the "zodiac" originated, or at least is to be used in an astrology reformulated at an abstract and symbolic level. The zodiac becomes thus a series of points of references which enables us to plot accurately the position of all planets and of the Sun in relations to the orbital motion of the Earth.[73]

Rudhyar's association of "collective" with orbits suggests that the use of orbits around the permanent atom in The Cosmic Web indicates that what Bisttram may have intended was the cycles necessary for the ultimate unification of the Earth, or the Planetary Logos, with the Solar Logos. The division of the square within the permanent atom into seven horizontal planes further reinforces the microcosmic-macrocosmic relationship of the process of integration.

Planetary Evolution (fig. 157) shows the same idea depicted in a more conventional manner. The most obvious element is the Zodiac, identified by the series of planets along its curved band made up of seven streams of energy. The eye at the upper left becomes the Solar Logos by its relation to the zodiac. The largest circle, evolved to the point where it is in the form of a cosmic egg, is presumably the Planetary Logos of the earth. It is connected to the Solar Logos by a "silvery cord," and the circles along the cord are the permanent atoms signifying the death of the earth as it rises to join the Solar Logos, making its ascension, that is, joining its lower nature to its higher nature, at

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[73]Rudhyar, The Astrology of Personality, 178.

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some future date after all the individuals on the earth have joined their lower natures to their higher natures.

Projection No. III (fig. 158) is another work from the Time Cycle series. This is Bisttram's most reproduced work from this series, and was nicknamed "Eye in the Sky" by scientists at the Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory when it was used in one of their employee recruitment campaigns in the early 1960s. It was also reproduced on the cover of the catalogue for the Art and the Atom exhibition that included works used for these recruitment ads, and traveled to a number of sites throughout the Midwest and West.[74] Bisttram was undoubtedly pleased at the recognition he received from the scientific community since he clearly believed that these works depicted phenomena that would ultimately be verified by scientific investigation.

Projection No. 3 is similar to Time Cycle No. 1. Here, however, the Logos has been included as a source of energy for the lower forms. Bisttram repeats this "sun as eye" form in many works; the concentric circles may symbolize the spiritual sun behind the physical sun. The lower forms, made up of a moving series of geometric shapes, form an independent unit or cluster. The centers of the lower forms are lit up, and two of the centers are depicted with tails like in Time Cycle I, and so probably also represent permanent atoms. The two smaller circles that also send rays to the cluster may be

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[74]The title for this exhibition was taken from the article by Peter Blanc, "The Artist and the Atom," The Magazine of Art 44, no. 4 (April 1951), 145-152, a copy of which Bisttram sent to Frank Hinder. The exhibition opened at the Mesa Public Library, Los Alamos, NM (May, 1963); it was also shown at the San Diego Museum of Art (Jan. 1964), the California Palace of the Legion of Honor (Mar. 1964), and at the Philbrook Museum (Nov. 1964). Projection No. III was the only work from the 1930s included in this exhibition.

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"masters" who are assisting the entities to evolve.[75]

Bisttram's assertion that the Time Cycle series related the ideas of time and space has specific correlations to Rudhyar's Astrology of Personality (1936). For Rudhyar time and space are not commensurate, and exemplify the principle of indeterminacy, which he explains in terms of pi. This is particularly relevant since one of the reasons Bisttram changed the spelling of his name was so that he could make the sign of pi out of the two ts. Rudhyar identifies the three motions of the earth as the rotation of the polar axis (the precession of the equinoxes), axial rotation (one day), and orbital revolution (one year). He further identifies axial rotation as the time factor, characterizing it as subjective and individualistic; and orbital revolution as the space factor, characterizing it as universal and objective, and notes that they are not commensurate.

> Life is not as mathematical as we might think; and modern physics has discovered this while investigating the behavior of electrons. The result has been Heisenberg's principle of indeterminancy: You cannot know accurately and at the same time the position and the speed of an electron. Likewise no two planetary motions of different orders can be related quantitatively by rational numbers. Perhaps the most universal symbol of this law of cosmic relationship is to be found in the value of Pi which measures the relation of circumference to diameter, 3.14159. It would seem logical that the circumference should contain 3 diameters or 6 radii. But it contains more than 6 radii, just as the year contains more than 6 x 60 days.
>
> This "more" represents the coefficient of indeterminancy in all integrative processes. It represents the freedom of the Soul, the Seventh Day of Creation, the Atman of Hindu philosophy, the Imprevisible. Occultists speak of the Seven Rays. But the seventh is not really a Ray; it is a bridge between two sixfold scales of being. Musically speaking, it is the "leading note" of the major scale. It is the irrational value by which the length of the circumference is more than the sum of the lengths of six radii; that is .14159.... It represents the freedom of all Rays, that by which they can be more than they are. Likewise if one divides 365 1/4 by

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[75]"All is beautifully subject to law, and as the work of developing the egoic body is dependent upon the progress made in the threefold personality, the Ego is consequently aided on lower levels by two different disciples, one working on emotional levels, and reporting to another disciple who works upon the mental vehicle." Bailey, Letters, 35.

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> 360 one gets a decimal value which represents symbolically that by which, each year, the individual may grow to a higher state of selfhood. This value, curiously enough, gives again the number 14--being .014+.[76]

Rudhyar's interest in irrational numbers may have been the basis of his interest in dynamic symmetry. In his essay "The New Sense of Space" Rudhyar indicated his support of the system by associating dynamic symmetry with atonal music, and static geometry with consonant music.[77]

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[76]Rudhyar, The Astrology of Personality, 340-1. Blavatsky gives even more complex interpretations for Pi. See Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, 90, 114, 131, 230.

[77]Dane Rudhyar, "The New Sense of Space: A Reorientation of the Creative Faculty of Man," in Art as a Release of Power.

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Chapter 15

Transcendental Works

In the late 1930s Bisttram's transcendental paintings became more abstract as he became more aware of its possibilities for expressing spiritual and theosophical ideas. The themes that Bisttram expressed with this new vocabulary were based on those he had been working with previously. Most importantly he continues with the theme of the redemption and regeneration of the individual by working with the dual evolutionary processes occurring within the "universal ether."

> The centripetal and the centrifugal forces, which are male and female, positive and negative, physical and spiritual, the two being the one Primordial Force.[1]

The primary symbol that Bisttram works with is the square, which he uses to represent man as the site of the working out of the opposing forces. He also develops the themes of "point-line-plane-solid," vertical and horizontal, interior and exterior, and upper and lower, to represent the movements of these oppositions. He also explores the subject of electricity, and Claude Bragdon's concept of the fourth dimension.

The use of these terms and forms shows that he has now fully assimilated the "Neo-Pythagorean" approach as defined by Blavatsky:

> The Symbolism of Pythagoras requires still more arduous labour. His symbols are very numerous, and to comprehend even the general gist of his abstruse doctrines from his Symbology would necessitate years of study. His chief figures are the square (the Tetraktys), the equilateral triangle, the point within a circle, the cube, the triple triangle, and finally the forty-seventh proposition of Euclid's Elements, of which proposition Pythagoras was the inventor. But with this exception, none of the foregoing symbols originated with him, as some believe. Millenniums before his day, they were well known in India, whence the Samian Sage brought them, not as a speculation, but as a demonstrated Science, says Porphyry, quoting from the Pythagorean Moderatus.
>
> The numerals of Pythagoras were hieroglyphical symbols by means

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[1]Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, I, 282.

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whereof explains all ideas concerning the nature of things.[2]

The visual sources that influenced this phase of Bisttram's development were primarily the catalogues of the Guggenheim Collection prepared by Hilla Rebay. These relatively lavish catalogues, five of which were published between 1936 and 1939, included many full-page color reproductions of abstract paintings by Kandinsky, Rudolph Bauer, and others; these catalogues were widely disseminated by Rebay in her efforts to promote "non-objective" painting.[3]

In addition to the reproductions, Rebay's essays also undoubtedly stimulated Bisttram. She attributes the spirituality of "non-objective" painting to its concern with rhythm and space relationship. For Rebay, the qualities of balance, harmony, and rhythm embodied in "non-objective" paintings exert a spiritually uplifting influence on the individual by releasing him from the stress and strain of modern life and its dependence on objects. Although she does not provide specific interpretations for any of the paintings, she identifies the circle, square, and triangle as the most important forms, and gives priority to the square. Her comment that the square includes four sides within and four sides without may even have been a reference to the fourth dimension:

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[2]H. P. Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion and Philosophy, Occultism, vol. 3, introduction by Annie Besant (published posthumously, reprint: Montana: Kessinger Publishing, n.d.), 98.

[3]Solomon R. Guggenheim Collection of Non-Objective Paintings (Charleston: Gibbes Memorial Art Gallery, 1 Mar. - 12 Apr. 1936); Second Enlarged Catalogue of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Collection of Non-Objective Paintings (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Art Alliance, 8-28 Feb. 1937); Third Enlarged Catalogue of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Collection of Non-Objective Paintings (Charleston: Gibbes Memorial Art Gallery, Charleston, SC, 7 Mar.- 17 Apr. 1938); Fourth Catalogue of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Collection of Non-Objective Paintings (Baltimore: Baltimore Museum of Art, 6-29 Jan 1939); Art of Tomorrow: Fifth Catalogue of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Collection of Non-Objective Paintings (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1939).

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> Seeing a circle does not imply sensation nor memory for any known or unknown happening. It is no symbol and has no sense. It is a perfect form with beauty of shape. The three basic forms: square, triangle, circle offer manifold possibilities for interrelation. The circle is a concentrated continuity in itself, isolated and floating in its own importance, not influenced by what is within or without. The square has eight sides, four within and four without. It gives and receives space, and also points with its corners in further directions. The square, it seems is a more spiritual form in relationship to space. The triangle perhaps, less spiritual, emphasizes by pointing from an indifferent base. These are perfected absolute forms of purity and beauty.[4]

She concludes, however, by stating that "Non-objective pictures, being worlds of their own, have no meaning, and represent nothing."

Bisttram presumably obtained the Guggenheim catalogues shortly after they came out. Bisttram's enthusiasm for these catalogues is shown in Mayrion's 1939 letter to his former students Frank and Margel Hinder. With this letter he sent a copy of the 1937 Guggenheim catalogue, and recommended Alfred Barr's Cubism and Abstract Art (1936) and Circle: International Survey of Constructive Art (1937). In this letter the art scene is described as divided between two movements, the first characterized by those who paint realistically after profiting from "abstraction," and the second, by those painting "non-objectively," which she also refers to as "psychological" painting. The second type is further distinguished into two groups--those who use geometric forms to express ideas and those who use them aesthetically:

> This group is also split, one definitely attempting to express ideas, the other adhering to the "purist" or space problems, creating forms merely to create space relationship. It really is two sides of the same fence.[5]

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[4]Rebay, Second Enlarged Catalogue, 9.

[5]Mayrion Bistttram (to Frank and Margel Hinder), SLT, 13 Feb. 1939, Frank and Margel Hinder papers, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia.

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In The Transcendental Movement in Painting (1938), Rudhyar makes similar distinctions and also identifies painting with geometrical figures as psychological painting. In his discussion of the larger historical development, Rudhyar identifies the Romantic period--when man collectively asserted his individuality--as the period in which psychology becomes important because of a transition from a physical to an emotional outlook. He then represents the twentieth century as an evolution to a mental outlook, "of which the Machine is the outer symbol of this metamorphosis." This follows theosophical theory that holds that man developed his physical, emotional, and mental bodies successively, and that currently mankind is engaged in developing its mental body.

Rudhyar then classifies modern symbols in a hierarchy of categories: individual, traditional, universal, and geometrical. Traditional symbols are cultural, in contrast to universal symbols, which are instinctive and reside in the Collective Unconscious. The universal type include nature symbols such as:

> solar and lunar symbols, sex and mating symbols, storm and crop symbols, sea and mountain symbols, etc. Such symbols are parts of the common experience of the human race as a whole and are usually intelligible by everyone who is open to the deeper realms of the Unconscious and not crystallized with the narrow frame of modern intellectual materialism.

Geometric symbols, on the other hand, express man's psycho-mental awareness of cosmic evolution, and are more evolved:

> ...a higher or more mental type of symbol, also universally valid: geometrical symbolism. Each of the basic geometrical forms--dot, line, circle, square, up and down-pointing triangles, cube, spiral, etc.,--have very real emotional and spiritual significance beyond any personal theorizing. Every sincere person, functioning mentally at the abstract level and open to vital depths of being, will agree fundamentally on the broad meaning of such geometrical figures--once he is made to think about and feel them. Why "made to?" Because human beings are very inert by nature and they have been satisfied for countless millennia to deal with natural or physiological symbolism. Thus they need to make an effort of

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> concentration in order to reach the level of geometrical symbolism (cosmic symbolism, one might also say); to becomes aware of and experience the vital, organic, meaning-releasing reality of these "building stones" of the psycho-mental nature of man.

For Rudhyar, The process of formulating nature symbols, however, is similar to the process of forming geometrical symbols, except at a higher level. It is this process of symbol-making which Rudhyar calls transcendental. These transcendental symbols are archetypes, replicate psychological growth structures, and are related to ancient ritual:

> But just as mental concepts arise from the common sense-experience of man through a complex process of analysis, generalization, abstraction, synthesis and concentration--so that thought is the quintessence of sense experience; likewise geometrical symbolism arises by means of the same transcendental process from the common experience of natural forms and objects...
>
> In other words, whether our conscious mind knows it or not, geometrical forms are the language of expression of our innermost being at the unconscious abstract level; the level at which Archetypes or principles of psycho-mental and cosmic organization operates--a purely transcendental level...
>
> It may be safe to assume that the most significant and real of ancient "Initiations" and "Mysteries" were meant to lead men to an awareness of such innermost structures (Archetypes) and bio-psychological processes (as symbolized in Rituals). The basis of these initiatory Mystery-Rituals was the two types of universal symbolism above mentioned: geometrical and bio-psychical or bio-dynamic.[6]

Rudhyar's identification of the use of geometric forms in painting to express "higher" ideas is based on the importance of geometric forms to theosophy; he applies Jungian psychology to theosophy by identifying Jung's collective unconscious as the site of theosophical archetypes. Then, using Jung's concept of the transformative power of the symbol-making function, Rudhyar developed his theory of transcendental painting as the leading-edge of a movement to evolve consciousness to new levels. Jung's concept of the symbol as a "mandala," an essentially geometric design, made this a credible mix. Rudhyar's ability to express this mix of ideas, in fact, enabled him later to gain a foothold

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[6]Rudhyar, The Transcendental Movement in Painting,

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within the psychological community with his concept of "transpersonal" psychology.[7] Although Rudhyar adapted Jung's ideas to further theosophical theory, it should be noted that Jung rejected and was always highly critical of theosophy.

The link between Rudhyar and Bisttram is strengthened by Bisttram's subjects--inner processes of development and evolution, the very subjects Rudhyar identifies as appropriate to the higher type of geometric symbolism. The similarities between Rudhyar and Bisttram's ideas, and the closeness of Raymond Jonson to Rudhyar during this period, suggests that the concepts for the Transcendental Painting Group were being developed among these three as early as 1933, when Rudhyar began lecturing regularly in Taos and Santa Fe.

The Transcendental Works

Developing a chronology for Bisttram's transcendental works is difficult since most of them are undated. Also, since Bisttram did not exhibit many of his transcendental works during the critical period between 1936 and 1940, dates cannot be deduced from checklists. The most valuable works for following Bisttram's thinking are those at the Anschutz Collection because he provided comments for them; their dates are not reliable, however, since he undoubtedly signed and dated them in 1975, when they were acquired by Anschutz. Additionally, the author has not been able to locate enough works from this period to present a stylistic development.[8] From an examination of the works

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[7]Richard Nichol Fragomeni, "A Critical Analysis of the Transformative Character of the Cosmological Symbolism in the Transpersonal Psychology of Dane Rudhyar," (Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 1990).

[8]There are, however, a group of works on paper in which the signature and date are part of the overall design; these are mostly exercises in pure design, rather than

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available, however, it is clear that Bisttram studied the Guggenheim catalogues carefully. The analysis that follows is based on themes and his sources in the Guggenheim catalogues.

The Redemptive Nature of the Circulating Energy

One of Bisttram's most persistent themes was the depiction of circulating energy. Bisttram's interest in representing this concept pictorially was shown in Shalako-Zuni Rain Gods (fig. 134); it was seen even earlier in his depiction of reincarnation in Peace (fig. 41). In his transcendental works this theme becomes more focused as he begins to use geometrical forms in ascending and descending series. In his "Interior" series, Bisttram developed a specific way of depicting this energy within interpenetrating planes that was borrowed from Kandinsky's Confirming, 1926 (fig. 159), which was illustrated in all of the Guggenheim catalogues.

Bisttram's drawing Interior (fig. 160), which is in the Anschutz Collection, most closely resembles Kandinsky's composition, and may have been the start of Bisttram's "Interior" series. Kandinsky's painting depicts three interpenetrating planes, each of which contains a series of geometric forms. The curve along the top edge suggests a fourth overarching plane of curved space, and a fifth behind it. Bisttram follows Kandinsky's model fairly closely, placing a sequence of ascending geometric forms within the plane at the right, shading the plane at the left darker than the one at the right, and

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works that provide clues to the development of his ideas. An intensive comparison between the dated exercises in pure design and the undated transcendental works would undoubtedly provide answers to questions of chronology and stylistic evolution. An undertaking of this sort, however, is outside the scope of this inquiry. For an example of a work executed in pure design, with a signature as part of the design, see fig. 141.

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placing a checkerboard motif in the middle plane where the two outer planes overlap.

Bisttram alters Kandinsky's arrangement by organizing the composition within a square format. He also adds a square background plane rotated so that it is parallel with the diagonals of the interior root-five rectangles, and angled at the cosmic inclination of 23-1/2 degrees. Bisttram also gives the two outer planes sharper angles.

In the plane at the right, Bisttram changes Kandinsky's sequence of three forms to a series of four forms ordered along an invisible vertical axis; Bisttram makes his series more occult by terminating his series with a circle interpreted as a "Logoic Eye." Additionally, by placing a vertical within the circle in the Logoic Eye, Bisttram gives the occult symbol for the number ten, which is the sum of the first four numbers.[9] By using the square format, a square background plane, four terms in his series, and embedding the number ten in his design, Bisttram emphasized the number four. Bisttram, however, retained Kandinsky's essential idea, which was to represent the descent of spiritual energy into the material, and the subsequent ascent of the material into the spiritual. Bisttram's emphasis on the square and the number four was undoubtedly to show that theses transitions were occurring within man.

It is interesting to note that Foster Damon interpreted one of William Blake's images, the title page for The Book of Job (fig. 161), as depicting this same idea. Blake's title page shows a series of seven angels swirling in a curve at the bottom of the page. Damon interprets this as "the descent of God and the ascent of Man." The seven angels are the Seven Eyes of God, the Seven of the Apocalypse, or the seven states "divinely

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[9]Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, I, 361; II, 36. [1+2+3+4=10] This Logoic Eye is similar to that used in Projection III (fig. 158).

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instituted so that man should mechanically be brought back to communion with God:"[10]

> TITLE PAGE: The first symbol appears in the flight of the angels. They are the Seven Eyes of God, the Seven of the Apocalypse. They descend on the material side of the plate and ascend on the spiritual: this is a summary of the entire book, a representation of the greatest Christian mystery, a statement of the secret which every mystic tries to tell.[11]

For Blake, the idea of self-sacrifice is implicit in the final ascent to the spiritual, but it is a sacrifice of the "lower self;" for Blake it is also inspiration over technique that assists in the final ascent from matter. Damon finds Blake's source in Thomas Taylor's reinterpretation of Greek mythology and drama, specifically in the myths of the "secret dramas of the descent and ascent of the soul," told mostly poetically in the myth of Proserpine.[12] The concept of the descent and ascent of the soul is treated in depth by Schuré, and is in fact the main subject of his book The Great Initiates (1889).

Bisttram clearly recognized this as the subject of Kandinsky's picture. Bisttram provided the following explanation for Interior (fig. 160):

> It is a composition of elements of dots, lines and planes... and the large flat areas seem to represent doors opening and closing, or the inside of something. Then, this material that you see in small squares, rectangles and verticals and horizontal lines, etc. creating a checkerboard is something that is going on in the interior of it. The circle and the One is very important because what is going on in this interior is striving towards a unification with the interior of that individual or the soul or the spirit (whatever you wish to call it) that through evolution we contact in various stages of our consciousness.[13]

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[10]Blake's seven states are Lucifer, Molech, Elohim, Shaddai, Padah, Jehovah, and Jesus, man's customary sequence through experience. Damon 224. Bisttram includes this series on a sheet titled "The Five Mystical States" in his Book of Notes. (See Chapter 10 for another discussion of this series.)

[11]Damon, 225.

[12]Ibid, 105-6.

[13]Bisttram, "Comment on Interior," Bisttram File, Anschutz Collection. This work is dated 1942.

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Bisttram's description suggests that he intended to depict integration or individuation as process and motion. The initial, involutionary impulse is indicated by the three vertical downward pointing lines that enter the darker plane at the upper left. The chaotic arrangement of the interior squares, some of which move toward the right and some to the left, represent the middle process which is organizational, much like Rudhyar's explanation of involution and evolution discussed in the previous chapter. Resolution is achieved when the geometrical forms are resolved into a vertical series at the right.

Kandinsky also depicts these same directions. The initial, involutionary impulse is shown with a triangular form that enters the dark plane at the upper left corner; three graduated circles beneath the square in the center plane show a progression of the process to the right. Kandinsky's composition is more airy and free-floating because of the more subtle angles and the wider rectangular field. Bisttram's compression of Kandinsky's forms into a square is more diagrammatic, concrete, and constricted.

Bisttram may have been attracted to Kandinsky's composition because of the checkerboard motif. Frank Higgins provides an occult history for the checkerboard by analyzing its survival in the floor of the masonic temple.

> It [the lodge floor] should be precisely three by four in dimensions, not a square or any odd size. It should be paved with a mosaic work of square black and white tiles, for this arrangement not only represents the disposition of the pavements in the old Egyptian temples, for the measurement of solar shadows from the pillars or obelisks, by which the phenomena of terrestrial motions around the sun were observed, but represented the checkered alternation of lights and shadows marking all human careers.[14]

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[14]Higgins, 417. "The multiplication of the Pythagorean triangle by four gives the base for the Magian's philosophy and develops the form of the masonic apron just as worn today in the lodge room, it is the sixty-four square that I refer to and this square (our familiar checker board) also has hidden within it the exact geometrical proportions of the Gizeh Pyramid." Higgins, 20.

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Bisttram's use of the checkerboard may also refer to his fascination with chess, and Rank's occult interpretation, which was cited earlier.

Another work in this series, Interior No. 1 (fig. 162), develops this theme further by focusing on the central plane of Kandinsky's Confirming.[15] Bisttram uses a vertically-oriented rectangle (two interlocked root-four rectangles) for the organization of the composition, but compresses all of the action within the central square. The highly stable square, however, is destabilized and made to float in space by embedding it into three tilted planes enclosed within larger planes.

Reversing Kandinsky's interior arrangement of the central plane, Bisttram places the checkerboard at the right and the vertical geometric series at the left. Bisttram's depiction of the involutionary energy entering at the upper right refers to Kandinsky's composition by depicting it as three diagonal lines. The checkerboard pattern is more organized to show that the individuation process can be more methodical when proportional reduction is used. The large circle within the vertical series at the left may be the causal body, discussed in the previous chapter, which is developed in the individual along with the will and other organizational powers.

Evolution (fig. 163), another work based on the horizontal side-by-side working of the energy established in Kandinsky's Confirming (fig. 159), shows the transformation from involution to evolution as a transition from four to five, or from square to pentagram. Bisttram describes Evolution as follows:

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[15]Interior No. 1, oil on canvas, is in the collection of U.S. Bank, Minneapolis; the pencil study is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Interior No. 1 was exhibited at the Museum of Non-Objective Art in 1940. "Transcendental Painting Group Invited to Send Examples to Guggenheim," clipping, 11 April 1940, Raymond Jonson Papers, AAA, RJ9: 6641. Another painting from the "Interior" series is in the collection of the Taos Volunteer Fire Department.

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> If you look at it carefully you will see on the right hand side a vertical panel upon which is a dot, a vertical, a horizontal, a horizontal and a vertical crossing--creating the cross of sacrifice;[16] then evolving into the triangle and then descending into the square, in the square through evolution becoming the pentagon, the five pointed star and so on until we have gone through the various rounds necessary for our own evolution. This is one of the many sketches I have done on that thought. [17]

His explanation confirms that the sequence of forms at the right is a "descent into matter" rather than an ascent. Bisttram's explanation that this descent is a sacrifice is an important aspect of theosophical theory. The "ascent to heaven" at the left, represented by the partially formed five-pointed star, is a reversal of that on the right and shows the redemptive nature of the process. The use of the five-pointed star is an important aspect of the symbolism since, according to theosophy, taking the fifth initiation, that is, expanding the consciousness into the fifth or spiritual kingdom, is a sign of mastery.

> A Master of the Wisdom ... has become the five-pointed star, and when that moment is reached He sees that star flash out above the One Initiator, and recognises it in those of equal place to His. He has sanctified (in the occult sense)

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[16]It is worth noting that Blavatsky, in contrast to Bisttram, gives the horizontal line precedence over the vertical in the descent into matter. "The first illustration being a plain disc, the second one in the Archaic symbol shows a disc with a point in it--the first differentiation in the periodical manifestations of the ever-eternal nature, sexless and infinite "Aditi in that" (Rig Veda), the point in the disc, or potential Space within abstract Space. In its third stage the point is transformed into a diameter, thus it now symbolises a divine immaculate Mother-nature within the all-embracing absolute Infinitude. When the diameter line is crossed by a vertical one, it becomes the mundane cross. Humanity has reached its third root-race; it is the sign for the origin of human life to begin. When the circumference disappears and leaves only the cross it is a sign that the fall of man into matter is accomplished, and the fourth race begins. The Cross within a circle symbolises pure Pantheism; when the Cross was left uninscribed it became phallic... By the third symbol--the circle divided in two by the horizontal line of the diameter--the first manifestation of creative (still passive because feminine Nature was meant). The first shadowy perception of man connected with procreation is feminine, because man knows his mother more than his father. Hence female deities were more sacred than the male..." Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, I, 4-5.

[17]Bisttram, "Comment on Evolution," Bisttram File, Anschutz Corporation. Evolution is dated 1941.

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> the Quaternary, has used it as the foundation stone upon which to erect the Temple of Solomon. He has grown beyond that Temple itself and has come to recognise it as limitation. He has withdrawn Himself from its confining walls and has entered within the Triad. He has done this always by the occult method, that is, consciously and with full knowledge of each step taken. He learns the meaning of each confining form; then, He has assumed control and wielding the law upon the plane consistent with the form. He has then outgrown the form and has discarded it for other and higher forms. Thus He has progressed always by means of the sacrifice and death of the form. Always it is recognised as imprisoning; always it must be sacrificed and must die so that the life within may speed ever on and up. The path of resurrection presupposes crucifixion and death, and then leads to the mount whence Ascension may be made. In meditation the value of the life, and the confines of the form, can be appreciated and known, and by knowledge and service can the life be set free from all that limits and trammels.[18]

Bisttram's depiction of the five-pointed star is not fully formed; it enters the center as a bolt of lightening to show the explosiveness that accompanies the change of state between the fourth and fifth stages. This is further reinforced by the spiraling motion of the rectangular planes behind the star.

While Evolution (fig. 163) shows the transformation in process, The Pentagon (fig. 164) shows it completed. The pentagon, depicted with a shining white center and surrounded by a circle within a larger circle, floats in a sea of space amid an infinity of smaller entities represented as squares. Bisttram explains that the squares represent individuals at various stages of evolution working toward the same goal:

> Another philosophical concept trying to portray the idea of evolution through the various periods of many incarnations represented by the various types of squares, which is always a symbol of the earthly existence, out into space where we evolve into higher and higher states of consciousness. The Pentagon representing the fifth state of consciousness, the mind. And the evolution of one's being to that state of awareness.[19]

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[18]Bailey, Letters, 261-2.

[19]Bisttram, "Comment on The Pentagon," Bisttram File, Anschutz Corporation. The Pentagon is dated 1942.

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Most of the squares contain circles within them; presumably, the larger the circle, the more evolved the form. Bisttram depicts the evolution to the fifth stage, however, as a reversal, a repolarization, a kind of turning inside out, in which the circle becomes both the outer form as well as the form within. The preliminary stage of this process is shown in the largest of the squares, at the lower left, in which a pentagon is inscribed in a circle. Bisttram's idea that this transformation may occur as an explosion from the center is shown by the white shining circle within the main form, which, in the square, is still dark.

Bisttram's use of the circle in the square to describe infinity and evolution of form in The Pentagon is undoubtedly derived from Rudolph Bauer's Squares, 1937 (fig. 165). Bauer depicts squares as evolutionary elements by prioritizing them in terms of position, size, color, and tonality. The three largest squares are enclosed in a swath of horizontal energy that runs across the middle of the composition. The central square is emphasized by size, position, and color. The smaller squares, which are inscribed with circles--the motif Bisttram has borrowed--are also distinguished by size, position, and color. The larger squares in the upper area, which seem to be emerging from the three largest squares, seem to be more evolved than the ones below, which are more shaded.

Cactus (fig. 166) is another work that follows the model established by Kandinsky's Confirming (fig. 159). In this case landscape elements are used to represent the essential transformation. The "logoic eye" at the upper left symbolizing the sun indicates that this is an occult work. The stalk of the cactus plant at the right provides the downward movement of energy; the disengaged leaves of the cactus plant, which are about to enter through a doorway, are the central motifs. The doorway is in the form of a flying buttress; five horizontal lines located at the springing of the arch, mark the

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height of a capital. The upward movement of the two flying elements at the left complete the energy circuit.

The cactus leaves are the most occult elements, and are found in Blavatsky's diagram of the seven root races (fig. 167). Blavatsky's diagram shows a tree that has seven branches, each of which has seven sub-branches; the trunk refers to a root race, the larger limbs refer to the seven sub-races. She explains that the current fifth root-race has already been in existence for some one million years. In her explanation, she specifically uses the cactus as a metaphor:

> After this the cactus-plant is a better illustration, for its fleshy "leaves" are covered with sharp spines, each of which may be compared to a nation or tribe of human beings.[20]

Bisttram's depiction of the leaves of the cactus in the form of a root plus seven fleshy leaves is very much like Blavatsky's. By using this symbol, Bisttram is able to embed the concept of vast periods of evolutionary time into his picture. Additionally, at the left, just below the lowest flying form, there is a red dot. Issuing from this red dot are five curved lines, one of which intersects the center of the Logoic eye. The five lines may represent the five root races; the intersection of the last line with the center of the eye may indicate that the fifth root-race is the current one.

To reinforce his message, Bisttram uses the symbolism of "point, line, plane, and solid." The cactus motif and the Logoic eye are both depicted as planes; the stem of the cactus, the three horizontals that move toward the left, and the two flying elements have very definite shadow lines. This contrast between plane and solid reinforces the sense of movement and development through the infinity of open space.

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[20]Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, II, 435.

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It is also interesting to note that in Cactus, like in Interior No. 1 (fig. 162), and Evolution (fig. 163), the energy flow begins at the upper right; this is in keeping with the Blake model (fig. 161). That Bisttram began the energy flow at the upper left in the Anschutz Interior (fig. 160), following Kandinsky, supports the argument that the Anschutz work was the beginning of the series, and suggests that Bisttram consciously decided to follow Blake's use of symbolism.[21]

Interior (fig. 168), a painting in the Jonson Gallery collection, develops this theme in a larger composition, but in a different format.[22] The major forms are two vertically oriented planes, one of which is slightly offset from the other. In contrast to these two planes, two similarly disposed horizontal planes are placed at the bottom of the composition. The horizontal planes, however, are made up mostly of lines, which serve as connecting links between the upper and lower areas. A number of features suggest that the subject of this picture is electricity: two semi-circles situated along lines in the lower part of the composition look like switches along a circuit. The semi-circle at the lower right, in fact, seems to be making electrical contact with a plate that is the lower section of one of the vertical planes. The semi-circle at the lower left is similarly situated along a line in a configuration that suggests switches and wires. The circuitry of lines and semi-circles in the horizontal configurations in the lower half of the

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[21]Damon explains Blake's symbolism as follows: "Blake developed to its extreme possibilities the traditional significance of 'right' and 'left.' ...interpreting the right of the characters (the 'stage-right,' but our left as we face the picture) as the spiritual half of the plate, and the left (our right) as the material... This symbolism can be traced back to ancient Zoroastrianism. The Gnostics laid great stress on it; from them it passed into the Kabalah." Damon, 225.

[22]The Jonson Gallery Interior is undated; the date 1938 has always been associated with the painting; there is no record of when the work entered the collection, and was presumably a gift to Jonson by Bisttram.

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composition, indeed, seem to be projecting the more solid vertical planes. The composition becomes a demonstration that planes are projections of lines. The use of circles to represent electrical contacts further suggests that dots or points are the generating force behind lines.

The composition can also be interpreted as a depiction of the idea that reality as we know it is a transitory projection of appearances powered by unseen causes. Blavatsky states this idea as follows:

> All the Christian Kabalists understood well the Eastern root idea: The active Power, the "Perpetual motion of the great Breath" only awakens Kosmos at the dawn of every new Period, setting it into motion by means of the two contrary Forces, and thus causing it to become objective on the plane of Illusion. In other words, that dual motion transfers Kosmos from the plane of the Eternal Ideal into that of finite manifestation, or from the Noumenal to the phenomenal plane. Everything that is, was, and will be, eternally is, even the countless forms, which are finite and perishable only in their objective, not in their ideal form. Neither the form of man, nor that of any animal, plant or stone has ever been created, and it is only on this plane of ours that it commenced "becoming," i.e., objectivising into its present materiality, or expanding from within outwards, from the most sublimated and supersensuous essence into its grossest appearance. Therefore our human forms have existed in the Eternity as astral or ethereal prototypes; according to which models, the Spiritual Beings (or Gods) whose duty it was to bring them into objective being and terrestrial Life, evolved the protoplasmic forms of the future Egos from their own essence.[23]

Blavatsky's explanation that these causes work from within outwards also provides a rationale for the use of "Interior" for the titles of this group of works.

The interiors of the planes are further developed with larger versions of the semi-circle that were used to represent the electrical switches. One of the most obvious elements is the half-sun aligned along the left side of the central vertical axis. A half-

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[23]Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, I, 282.

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moon with a serrated edge, set slightly higher and to the right, faces it.[24] These are part of a larger sequence of alternating semi-circles that introduce another direction into the composition. Since the semi-circles become larger as the reversals between vertical and horizontal move downward, this series may represent the involutionary phase of the process, powered by the moon and sun. Since the switch at the lower right is part of this series, the implication is that a stepping down of solar and lunar forces power the cycles of manifestation. The series becomes theosophical when the association is made between the sun and the great spiritual sun that powers it. Furthermore, by using the organizational structure of two side-by-side root-five rectangles, the cosmic 23-1/2 degree inclination is embedded into the diagonal lines, and the idea of the yearly cycle is embedded into the composition. By showing the forces working vertically up and down, Bisttram has essentially "freed" himself from the Kandinsky model of forces working horizontally from side to side.

Bisttram's repeated use of "Interior" for the titles of this group of works may also have its origin in his reading of Swedenborg. Swedenborg's distinction between interior and exterior is fundamental to his theology and to his idea of how man is regenerated by God, one of the concepts Bisttram used as a model for his Three-Year Course. For Swedenborg, the interior of man is most pure and represents heaven and the exterior of man is less pure and represents hell; man is born in evil, according to Swedenborg, with his externals open and his interiors closed. Regeneration, for Swedenborg, is a step-by-

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[24]In the study for this painting, the sun also has a serrated edge. The study, executed in gouache, measuring 8-3/8 x 7-1/2 inches, is reproduced in American Images: The SBC Collection of Twentieth-Century American Art, with an introduction by Walter Hopps; essays by Betsy Fahlman, Matthew Baigell, et. al., (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1996). Blavatsky also associates the serrated edge with electricity. Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, II, 65.

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step process whereby God opens man's interiors. The following passage shows this concept in connection with opening and closing doors, an image Bisttram used in his description of the Anschutz Interior (fig. 160) cited above.

> Good and the truth of good can be introduced by the Lord into man's interiors only so far as the evil and the falsity of evil there have been removed. This is a necessary consequence of what has gone before; for as evil and good cannot exist together good cannot be introduced before evil has been removed. The term man's interiors is used, and by these is meant the internal of thought; and in these, which are now being considered, either the Lord or the devil must be present. The Lord is there after reformation, but the devil is there before it; therefore, so far as man suffers himself to be reformed the devil is cast out; but so far as he does not suffer himself to be reformed the devil remains. Everyone may see that the Lord cannot enter so long as the devil is there; and he is there so long as man keeps the door closed, where man acts together with the Lord. That the Lord enters when that door is opened by man himself He teaches in Revelation.[25]

Swedenborg uses the opening and closing door more specifically as a metaphor for man in the following passage:

> He [man] is like a hinge on which a door can turn either way, one way when a person enters and the other when he goes out; and like a sail by which a ship can be turned either way as the captain sets it.[26]

A further confirmation of this interpretation is Bisttram's placement of the sun and moon in the Jonson Gallery Interior (fig. 168). According to Swedenborg, one of the signs of regeneration is the placement of the luminaries in the interiors of man.[27]

By showing evolutionary processes occurring within planes in his "Interior" works, Bisttram is mapping the internal changes that the individual effects as he purifies himself and achieves union with God. By contrasting vertical and horizontal planes and

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[25]Swedenborg, Divine Providence, para. 233.3.

[26]Ibid., para. 235. This passage suggests an interpretation for Bisttram's abstract pictures that depict sailboats; these, however, are not treated in this study.

[27]Swedenborg, Arcana Coelestia, I, para. 30.

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semi-circles, Bisttram implies that this is a process that involves opposites and reversals, which also refers to Swedenborg's theory of opposites involved in redemption, discussed in Chapter 8.

Bisttram further developed the metaphor of electricity as an energy transformation moving up and down in a pair of works, Ascending (fig. 169) and Descending (fig. 170).[28] The distinction between upper and lower, established in the Jonson Gallery Interior (fig. 168), is followed, but with more clarity and a more insistent reference to the picture plane. Like in his earlier pairs, Adoration and Consolation (figs. 79, 82), and Corn Dancers and Hopi Katchina Coyote Claw (figs. 132, 133), two opposing forces are expressed in two separate compositions.

Employing the square format, Bisttram divides the compositions into an upper area containing floating vertical planes corresponding to spiritual energy, and a lower area containing horizontal planes corresponding to earthly energy. The distinction between ascending and descending energies is made by the position of the floating vertical planes in the upper area. In Ascending (fig. 169), the planes are opened, while in Descending (fig. 170), the planes are closed. This corresponds to Woodroffe's concept that upward motion is expansive and downward motion is contractive.[29]

In Ascending, the upward action is represented by an inverted "V" that moves into the upper area from the lower area along the central vertical axis. In Descending, the downward action is represented by a "V" that is completely immersed in the lower

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[28]Upward, the painting, is in the collection of the National Museum of American Art; the study for it, Ascending, is in the collection of the Phoenix Museum. Descending, the drawing, is in the U.S. Bank Collection, Minneapolis.

[29]Woodroffe, 70.

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section and is located to the left of center. The position of the sun in the two works also indicates its role in the process: in Ascending it is placed high in the composition, while in Descending it is lowered to the horizon line. The position of the electric plug, one end of which is in the heavenly realm and the other end of which is in the earthly realm in both pictures, is also keyed to the position of the sun. In the heavenly realm of Ascending, the sun is placed in the upper reaches, while the electrical contact is lowered; in Descending, the electrical contact is raised in response to the lowered sun.

This is a more highly organized and "scientific" interpretation of electricity than the Jonson Gallery Interior (fig. 168). The motives, however, are similar. Again, the dots represent electrical contacts and the circles represent the sun, to symbolize the generating power that produces lines, and then planes. Color symbolism is also used more symbolically in this pair. In Upward, the painting based on Ascending, the upper spiritual area is dominated by the deep blue recommended by Alice Bailey. Also, the floating white planes are striped with the primaries. This more outright use of electricity as a metaphor is clearly an elaboration on Blavatsky's concept of the universal ether. The opening and closing of the planes also undoubtedly continues to refer to the opening and closing of an individual's interiors according to the Swedenborgian theory of redemption.

Dualities (fig. 171) presents another example of this theme and, in keeping with the subject, Bisttram executed two versions in two different color schemes.[30] Dualities is based on Hélion's untitled painting of ca. 1935-6 (fig. 172) reproduced in Circle

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[30]Dualities is in the collection of Utah State University, Logan; it may be the same work, Duality No. 2, 1938, 36 x 48, that was sold at auction, Christie's Georgia, sale no. 6288, 5 Dec. 1986, lot 1248. Duality was exhibited in "Loan Exhibition," Museum of Non-Objective Painting, 15 October 1944. BP, AAA 2894:44.

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(1937).[31] The Hélion painting is from his "equilibrium" series, for which a set of scales was the general model.[32] Hélion's "equilibrium" series was an intermediate stage between his closely measured "orthogonals" and his later figurative works. Hélion began his "orthogonals" series about 1929, when he joined Art Concret, which took as its motto "We are the painters who think and measure." Although Hélion's looser "equilibrium" works challenged Mondrian's concept of a picture strictly respecting the picture plane by using only horizontals and verticals, they were still meant to depict Mondrian's basic concept of what a painting should represent, that is, equilibrium and tension.

Bisttram's Dualities (fig. 171) takes up Hélion's theme, and untypically, makes it more complex. He reverses Hélion's balance, placing the heavier side of the scale on the left rather than on the right. The heavier side is further emphasized by the placement of two larger circles in the left portion, and only one smaller circle in the right. Hélion's tendency was to layer his forms, giving them a sense of solidity, while Bisttram's was to make his forms transparent, interpenetrating, and parallel to the picture plane. Bisttram, however, depicted one of his forms--the curved form at the middle left that just grazes the edge of the canvas--as a solid by tilting it upwards to show the plane underneath; Hélion used a solid in the lower left section of his canvas. Hélion's hesitant use of solids in this work was the beginning of a trend in which his forms became increasingly irregular and shaded, emphasizing convexity and concavity, as he came under the influence of Léger and to a lesser extent of purism. Bisttram did not pursue this interest

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[31]Circle: International Survey of Constructive Art, ed. J. L. Martin, Ben Nicholson, N. Gabo (1937, reprint New York: Praeger Publishers [1970), fig. 24.

[32]Merle Solway Schipper, "Jean Hélion: The Abstract Decade," Art in America 64 (Sept-Oct, 1976), 89.

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in depicting solids; his transcendental works, with only a few exceptions, tend to depict planes and to respect the front plane of the canvas.

By titling his canvas Dualities Bisttram shows that he understood Hélion's motives and was essentially working within the framework promulgated by Mondrian. The concept of duality expressed as one pole dominating over another, but related by interpenetrating forces, clearly appealed to Bisttram.[33] Bisttram's concern with the contrast between masculine and feminine elements, discussed previously, provided the specific precedent in his work.

Bisttram's interest in dual forces is also shown in The Magic Square (fig. 173). The square is situated on the earth plane receiving fecundating rays from the sun, which is placed slightly above the horizon line. The setting, plus the title for the pencil study, Street Scene (fig. 174), suggests that the square represents an individual. This is supported by Bragdon's essay, "Man the Square," which is headed with the quotation from Blavatsky identifying man as a square becoming a cube:

> The phenomenal world receives its culmination and reflex of all in Man. Therefore he is the mystic square--in his metaphysical aspect--the Tetraktys; and becomes the cube on the creative plane.[34]

Since Bisttram's "Magic Square" is larger on the right side, it could be described as a square in a state of expansion into a cube. The quotation from Revelation also used to head up Bragdon's essay, given in Chapter 6, shows that for Bragdon, the process of

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[33]Douglas Worts remarks that markings in Lawren Harris's copies of the magazine Axis indicate that he was particularly interested in Hélion. Harris had a complete run of Axis, except for issues 5 and 8. Worts, 61.

[34]Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, cited in "Man the Square." Claude Bragdon, A Primer of Higher Space: The Fourth Dimension, to which is added "Man the Square, A Higher Space Parable (Rochester: The Manas Press, 1913).

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developing from the square into the cube was also redemptive.

The Magic Square is undoubtedly a homage to Claude Bragdon. This is suggested by the fact that magic squares were one of Bragdon's major interests. A magic square is a numerical acrostic in which the numbers when added horizontally, vertically, and diagonally give the same sum. Magic squares also have embedded in them other more complex orders of mathematical relationships. In Primer of Higher Space (1913), Bragdon used magic squares to illustrate and demonstrate the existence of the fourth dimension.[35] In other works, he used the connecting lines of the internal relationships as the basis for deriving geometric ornament. One of the chapters in Projective Ornament (1915), for example, is devoted to "Magic Lines in Magic Squares." All Bragdon's research was based on his ultimately theosophical belief in geometry as the language of the "world order," and the necessity for developing a form language to express it.[36]

Bisttram's Magic Square is a representation of the four dimensional cube, the hypercube or tesseract, as described by Bragdon. Bisttram's construction of his magic square as a series of eight squares, one inside the other, is the primary indication. The eight squares in Bisttram's depiction can be best counted in the drawing (fig. 174). Since the cube is shown at an angle, counting has to begin from the right side of the cube. Bragdon conceived of the four-dimensional cube as eight cubes folded into one another.

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[35]Demonstrating the fourth dimension by a series of magic squares placed back to back to form a cube was developed by the British mathematician Philip Henry Wynne, whose drawings Bragdon includes in Primer of Higher Space.

[36]Claude Bragdon, Projective Ornament (Rochester: Manas Press, 1915, reprint New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1992); Claude Bragdon, "Pattern from Magic Squares," Architectural Forum XXVI, no. 3. (March 1917), 71-76. "Magic Lines in Magic Squares" also forms a section of Bragdon's The Frozen Fountain (New York: Knopf, 1931), 74-83.

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He arrived at this number first by flattening the cube into its six sides, and then building it back up with cubes (fig. 39). The similarity of the unfolded cube to the Christian cross provides the redemptive meaning for Bragdon, and as mentioned in Chapter 6, was derived from Blavatsky. Bisttram's depiction of squares within squares also suggests Bragdon's concept that three-dimensional space is wholly immersed within four-dimensional space.

The horizontal line that hovers over the horizon at the right in The Magic Square also represents a four dimensional cube, but one that has not fully entered into the third dimension. For Bragdon, four-dimensional forms enter the third dimension over time. The form in which it appears is dependent upon the angle at which it enters and the moment in time being depicted. In contrast to other theorists who used the plane as a metaphor, Bragdon uses it literally as the medium of transition. He takes the surface of a pond as an example, explaining that it functions to separate above and below. A downward pointing cone passing through a plane, viewed from below, for example, appears first as a point, then as a circle, and then disappears. These manifestations are apprehended in terms of expansion, contraction, and time. For Bragdon, events in the fourth dimension cause appearances in the third dimension to change over time, that is, they cause growth and change.[37]

Bragdon's diagram The Projections Made by a Cube in Traversing A Plane (fig. 38), shows that the appearance of a cube in the third dimension depends upon its angle of entry from the fourth dimension. Cubes entering a plane at a regular angle are shown in Figure 38 at A, B, and C at the upper right; cubes entering at odd angles are shown at

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[37]Bragdon, A Primer of Higher Space, 25.

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D at the left. In A, the cube enters the plane vertically by one of its angles, resulting in triangular and other forms; in B, the cube enters by one of its edges, which results in a straight line, a horizontally oriented rectangle, a square, and then diminishes through the same sequence of forms. Based on B, the horizontal line in The Magic Square is a four-dimensional cube entering the third dimension by its edge. Bisttram's horizontally oriented rectangle that cuts the horizon line and overlaps the "magic square," can then be seen as another term in the same evolution, and in fact, the middle term of the same series of forms evolving from the fourth dimension.

The three semi-circles in the upper area of The Magic Square similarly depict the entrance of the involutionary force as a four dimensional entity entering three-dimensional space. The pencil study shows that Bisttram rethought the direction of the progression. In the study (fig. 174), the semi-circles become progressively larger as they approach the sun or Logoic eye; in the painting (fig. 173), the progression is reversed, diminishing as the semi-circles approach the Logoic eye. In another diagram Bragdon shows the sphere entering through a plane much like Bisttram's semi-circles; in this diagram, Bragdon again explains that the series represents the time necessary for a four-dimensional object to enter the third dimension. With this series of forms, then, the energy of the sun is stepped down as it enters the denser earth atmosphere. A stepping down action is similarly shown at the lower right where the ground line steps down due to the horizontally oriented rectangle that overlaps both the ground line and the "magic square."

The color scheme for the painting is dominated by yellows and blacks; the sky is yellow and the ground is black. The three semi-circles in the sky are also black, as is the background circle of the logoic eye. The depiction of the sun as a white circle against a

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black circle may again refer to the idea that the universe is double, and that there is a "spiritual sun" behind the physical sun, which both Blavatsky and Swedenborg posited.

Bisttram's depiction of circulating energy, and his use of black in the semi-circles, in the circle surrounding the Logoic Eye, and in the ground recalls the opening image in Blavatsky's Isis Unveiled:

> One of its [the Siphra Dzeniouta] illustrations represents the Divine Essence emanating from Adam like a luminous arc proceeding to form a circle; and then, having attained the highest point of its circumference, the ineffable Glory bends back again, and returns to earth, bringing a higher type of humanity in its vortex. As it approaches nearer and nearer to our planet, the Emanation becomes more and more shadowy, until upon touching the ground it is as black as night.[38]

Blavatsky, however, expressed some scepticism about the use of the term the fourth dimension, since she felt that there were many more dimensions than four.[39] But she fostered the concept of the fourth dimension by expressing rounds, or the passing of the life-force around the various globes, which was discussed in Chapter 8, in terms of dimensions and elements; for example, she attributed the development of a sense of "one-dimensional space" to the first round, and the development of two elements, fire and earth, and a type of humanity that could live in "two-dimensional" space to the second round. For Blavatsky, humanity is currently in its fourth round, and so lives in a world of the four elements, fire, air, water, and earth. Likewise, in the next round, humanity will be sensitized to the fifth element, ether. For Blavatsky, this new sensitivity will be characterized by permeability:

> It will only be in the next, or fifth, Round that the fifth Element, Ether--the gross body of Akasa, if it can be called even that--will, by becoming a familiar fact of

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[38]Blatatsky, The Veil of Isis, I, 1.

[39]For Blavatsky's comments on the fourth dimension, see Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, I, 251-2.

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> Nature to all men, as air is familiar to us now, cease to be as at present hypothetical, and also an "agent" for so many things. And only during that Round will those higher senses, the growth and development of which Akasa subserves, be susceptible of a complete expansion. As already indicated, a partial familiarity with the characteristic of matter--permeability--which should be developed concurrently with the sixth sense, may be expected to develop at the proper period in this Round. But with the next element added to our resources in the next Round, permeability will become so manifest a characteristic of matter, that the densest forms of this will seem to man's perceptions as obstructive to him as a thick fog, and no more.[40]

Blavatsky's ideas relate to a large extent to Plato's association of the five regular solids with the five elements in the Timeaus. Bisttram likewise associated point, line, plane, and solid with the four elements, which is shown in one of his charts in his Book of Notes. Blavatsky's association of "permeability" with the next sense to be developed goes a long way in explaining Bisttram's interest in emphasizing sequence and transparency in terms of the four elements of form--point, line, plane, and solid.

Another picture, Sun and Moon, 1940 (fig. 175), with its untypically irregular shapes, may also be derived from Bragdon's concept of four-dimensional form.[41] In this picture, the moon takes precedence since it is placed higher than the sun. Since according to Pythagorean theory even numbers are feminine and odd numbers are masculine, the two planes behind the moon may symbolize its femininity, and the three planes behind the sun may symbolize its masculinity. The irregular planes, typical of those made by a cube entering a plane at odd angles (see fig. 38D), may represent the distortions that the "three-dimensional" eye would see looking into "four-dimensional" space.

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[40]Ibid., I, 256-257.

[41]The author assigned the title Sun and Moon to this work for convenience; the date, however, is secure: it is one of those works on paper where the date was clearly inscribed at the time it was executed.

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Sun and Moon, 1940 (fig. 175), seems to be a depiction of forms evolving in the ether. This is confirmed by the depiction of the background with a deep orange ground enlivened by black squiggly lines that undoubtedly refer to fire. According to Blavatsky, sun (fire), moon (water), and pneuma (air), "the primordial Cosmic Trinity," are the generative forces that produce terrestrial life as well as the three higher principles in the individual. For Blavatsky, man's physical senses evolved along with the evolution of the elements.[42] By embedding dots in the evolving semi-circles Bisttram was able to express this evolution in terms of "point, line, and plane."

Sun and Moon, 1940 (fig. 175), like The Magic Square (fig. 173) and the Jonson Gallery Interior (fig. 168), uses semi-circles to represent moving forces. In Sun and Moon, 1940, however, the semi-circles are shown in outline form with a solid black circle at the midpoint of the lower edge. One group issues out of the plane behind the moon in a series that indicates movement and change. This series of semi-circles recalls Blavatsky's "pitris," the Lords of the Moon, who were the progenitors of the first root race.

For Blavatsky, the earth was created from a conjunction of the sun and the moon, followed by the earth separating from the moon. At the upper right, the "eyes" formed by the semi-circles intersecting with the moon and a plane of the sun, suggests this interrelationship. These semi-circles may be the monads, the "ethereal shells," falling to earth to form the first "mindless" humans.[43] Some of the "pitris" possessed fire, which

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[42]Blavatsky gives the order of the elements and physical senses as follows: ether (hearing), air (touch), fire (sight), water (taste); earth (smell). Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine II, 107.

[43]For Blavatsky's description of the creation by the "pitris," see Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, I, 179-182; II, 75-80.

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may be represented by the circle in the center of the semi-circles; the circles could also symbolize seeds, as the pitris essentially "seeded" the earth.

Higgins interprets the crescent moon with a circle in it as a symbol of the fully independent soul:

> When a person has these [right belief, right knowledge, right conduct] he will certainly go higher until he reaches a state of liberation, which is represented by a crescent moon, which is always growing larger. A circle in the crescent represents the omniscient state of the soul, when it attains full consciousness, is liberated and lives apart from matter.[44]

For Bragdon, the fourth dimension is made up of larger agglomerations of solids. The logic is as follows: in the same way that a line is made up of many points, a plane is made up of many lines, a solid is made up of many planes, and a hypersolid is made up of many solids. He concludes:

> By analogy, the three dimensional correlatives of the circle, the square and the triangle namely the sphere, the cube and the tetrahedron might be boundaries and cross-sections of some single four dimensional form of which such figures as the cylinder, the prism and the pyramid might also be projections. If the personality is the projection on the physical plane of the individuality or higher self, a single individual might project itself in many different personalities separated from one another in time.[45]

Bragdon's concept of a single fourth dimensional individual projecting itself in many different personalities may well be the subject of Bisttram's Suspension (fig. 176). Like many works from this period, Suspension utilizes interpenetrating planes within a square format.[46] A series of squares and oblongs move in all directions in space but are yet held together by the three circles placed above them. Infinite space is represented as free-

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[44]Higgins, 457.

[45]Claude Bragdon, Primer of Higher Space, plate 13.

[46]Bisttram dated Suspension 1936. Suspension was exhibited in "Loan Exhibition," Museum of Non-Objective Painting, 15 October 1944. BP, AAA 2894:44.

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floating but hierarchical, by placing squares in various states of evolution in the lower portion of the composition, and triangles in the upper portion.

Bisttram's interpretation of Suspension indicates that the squares represent people and that the three circles represent "guides" from other planets watching over them:

> Originally I called it [Suspension] "The Three Kings." There are three initiates overlooking the physical world, which is the earth. The symbol is always in squares and within that square there is another overlapping square which is more highly evolved and aspirational. The guides of the planets (which are these three kings) or the three principles that we use in the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, are portrayed as floating above these squares. And that should give you some idea of what I was dreaming about and what I thought it would do and those many little figures in space, those many triangles, representative of other consciousnesses existing in outer space.[47]

This idea of a hierarchy of invisible "masters" working on other planes to guide the evolution of individuals and the planet is fundamental to Theosophy.[48]

> The whole Kosmos is guided, controlled, and animated by almost endless series of Hierarchies of sentient Beings, each having a mission to perform, and who--whether we give to them one name or another, and call them Dhyan-Chohans or Angels--are 'messengers' in the sense only that they are the agent of Karmic and Cosmic Laws.

The idea that the "hierarchy" is made up of a series of group souls guided by a higher "ego" is also fundamental to Theosophy. Alice Bailey described this in her definition of "Egoic Groups:"

> On the third subplane of the fifth plane, the mental, are found the causal bodies of the individual men and women. These bodies, which are the expression of the Ego, or of the individualised self-consciousness, are gathered together into groups according to the ray or quality of the particular Ego involved.[49]

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[47]Bisttram, "Comment on Suspension," Bisttram File, Anschutz Corporation.

[48] Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, I, 274.

[49]Bailey, Letters on Occult Meditation, 352.

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This emphasis on working in groups also undoubtedly informed Bisttram's concept for the Transcendental Painting Group. Mondrian also mentions the importance of working in groups.

In Suspension, the mounting of triangles on squares specifically symbolizes individuals in their total essence as seven-fold beings. According to theosophical theory, the four lower principles are called the lower man or the quaternary (square); and the three upper principles are called the higher man or the trinity (triangle);[50] at death these two parts separate:

> Considering these constituents in another manner, we would say that the lower man is a composite being, but in his real nature is a unity, or immortal being, comprising a trinity of Spirit, Discernment, and Mind which requires four lower mortal instruments or vehicles through which to work in matter and obtain experience from Nature. This trinity is that called Atma-Buddhi-Manas in Sanskrit, difficult terms to render in English. Atma is Spirit, Buddhi is the highest power of intellection, that which discerns and judges, and Manas is Mind. This threefold collection is the real man; and beyond doubt the doctrine is the origin of the theological one of the trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost...
>
> These four lower material constituents are transitory and subject to disintegration in themselves as well as to separation from each other. When the hour arrives for their separation to begin, the combination can no longer be kept up, the physical body dies, the atoms of which each of the four is composed begin to separate from each other, and the whole collection being disjoined is no longer fit for one as an instrument for the real man. This is what is called "death" among us mortals, but it is not death for the real man because he is deathless, persistent, immortal. He is therefore called the Triad, or indestructible trinity, while they are known as the Quaternary or mortal four.[51]

These seven-fold bodies may be the "etheric bodies" of individuals that, according to Blavatsky, will become visible as man becomes aware of the fifth element, the ether, in the fifth round.

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[50]For Blavatsky's diagram of man as a square capped by a triangle, see Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, II, 591.

[51]Judge, 35-6.

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The source for Suspension is Rudolph Bauer's Counter Fugue, 1937 (fig. 177), which depicts a similar series of floating squares and oblongs surmounted by circles, which undoubtedly are meant to represent individuals. Bauer's figures, however, are not presented in groups. Additionally, Bisttram's depiction of the etheric bodies using a semi-circle with a dot in it to separate the triangle from the square may derive from Bauer's In Memory, 1927 (fig. 178), which depicts the end-view of a casket. This element imbeds the idea that at death the quaternary is separate from the trinity in Suspension. Bisttram's use of the semi-circle in works previously discussed may also have been influenced by Bauer's use of it in In Memory.

The concept of man's seven-fold nature breaking up at death provides an interpretation for Transcendence (fig. 179).[52] The clustering of the shapes, three at the right and four at the left, also supports this interpretation. The black background, the form at the lower right in the shape of a casket, and the glittering geometric forms within the shapes are the primary symbols. The eighth form--the trapezoid centered along the central vertical axis with a circle above it and penetrated by a V shape--may represent the reverse of the process--reincarnation or the soul's descent into matter. The organization of the composition within two side-by-side vertical root-five rectangles, symbolizing the yearly cycle of seasons (fig. 94), identifies the circle at the top of the central vertical axis as the pole star and further supports the meaning of death as part of a larger cycle like that of the passing year. The irregular shapes of some of these forms may also be influenced by Bragdon's association of irregular forms with the fourth dimension.

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[52]The Ghost, a study for this painting, is in the Anschutz Collection. The title Transcendence was assigned by the dealer.

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Support for this interpretation is found in Blavatsky's descriptions of ancient traditions that used caskets as metaphors for reincarnation or regeneration. As part of the Egyptian initiation rites the initiate was placed in a sarcophagus in the King's Chamber of the Pyramid of Cheops for three days.[53] Also, a sarcophagus was placed in the Sancta Sanctorum of the temples of the ancients; the sarcophagus represented "the matrix of nature and resurrection." She attributed the same symbolism to the Hebrew Arc of the Covenant.[54]

Many of Bisttram's transcendental works depict microscopic life. Origination (fig. 180) is clearly about growth processes in the womb.[55] The shape of the central figure is an egg poised on a triangle. The egg contains a diagrammatic interpretation of internal processes. The central diagram, three overlapping circles within a triangle within a square is taken from Heindel, whose diagram is titled The 1.3.7 & 10 Aspects of God and Man.[56] Bisttram follows Heindel's diagram by coloring the three circles red, yellow, and blue. Heindel explains that the diagram demonstrates the "oneness of God with the Seven Spirits before the Throne," and that the circles

> correspond to the three aspects of God, which are without beginning, and end in God, though externalized only during active manifestation. When these three colors are interblended, as shown in the diagram, there appear four additional colors, the three secondary colors--each due to the blending of two primary

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[53]Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, II, 558.

[54]Ibid., II, 459-460.

[55]Another work on this theme is Two Cells at Play; for a reproduction of this work see American Images: The SBC Collection of Twentieth-Century American Art, with an introduction by Walter Hopps; essays by Betsy Fahlman, Matthew Baigell, et. al. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1996).

[56]Heindel, fig. 11, facing 253.

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> colors--and one color (indigo) which contains the entire gamut of colors, making in all the seven colors of the spectrum. These colors represent the Seven Spirits before the throne. The colors are different, as are also the Seven Spirits, each having a different mission in the Kingdom of God--our Solar System.[57]

These Seven Spirits are round in form and are, according to Heindel, the seven planets of the solar system. Heindel likens these to the shape of man's body during pre-natal life (involution) "because the intrauterine development is a recapitulation of past stages of evolution." Consequently, the spheres over and interpenetrating Bisttram's egg shape may represent prior stages of development. The placement of Heindel's diagram in the heart of the major form symbolizes the spirit of God dwelling within every living organism.

Another confirmation that Heindel is the source for this picture is Bisttram's color scheme--violet in the background scaled towards pink in the area just inside the egg. In the same passage that describes the meaning of the interpenetrating red, yellow, and blue circles, Heindel asserts that while most people only see the seven colors of the spectrum, the occultist sees twelve. These extra five colors, according to Heindel, lie between red and violet, and the mid-tone "is similar to the tint of a new-blown peach blossom" and is the color of the vital body.

The serpentine curve within the egg is borrowed from Kandinsky's bent form in Rigid and Bent, 1936 (fig. 181). Bisttram also borrows the "rigid" form for another work, Affection (fig. 182). In Affection, however, Bisttram transformed Kandinsky's "rigid" form into two interpenetrating figures. This division of Kandinsky's work into two pictures may be a criticism of Kandinsky, following one of Rudhyar's admonitions. For Rudhyar, juxtaposed forms are not transcendental, while interpenetrating forms are:

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[57]Ibid., 253-255

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> The Transcendental Movement features necessarily an organic approach to problems of integration. This means that any work of art, or any system of social organization, which is really transcendental, functions as an organism, if parts are functional and related through organic interdependence, within a consistent and self-conditioned whole. Moreover it has a center or organization and radiation, whether it be implied or actually in evidence...
>
> Events can be called thus "organic" as well as complex forms. An event is "organic" in which all the component factors in the meeting participate, reacting upon one another. Abstract paintings thus often are not organic because they picture contacts between forms which do not react upon each other. They are in a state of static juxtaposition; and not of vital or dynamic inter-relationship or inter-penetration. A painting can become a focus for the whole universe if it pictures such an organic event through the inter-penetration of forms which not limited by the frame, draw the entire universe by implication to the center of the pictured event.[58]

Bulldogging (fig. 183) is also derived from Kandinsky's Rigid and Bent. Bulldogging is a term used in cowboy rodeos that means to throw a steer by gripping its horns and twisting its neck. The man at the left corresponds to Kandinsky's "rigid" figure; Bisttram, however, has oriented him at a slight diagonal; the steer, corresponding to Kandinsky's "bent" figure is also in an "s" shape, but the head of Bisttram's figure is at the left, lunging into the man, rather than being set to the side as in Kandinsky's work.

Bisttram may have been inspired to translate Kandinsky's composition into a rodeo scene because of the horns on the main figure. The horns, or crescent, identify the figure as mythological. Blavatsky interprets the depiction of both Venus and Isis with cow's horns as a symbol of mystic nature, generative power, and the moon.[59] She also provides a description of a man's struggle with the bull as part of a larger nature cycle:

> Ahriman destroys the Bull created by Ormazd--which is the emblem of terrestrial illusive life, the "germ of sorrow"--[so]... that the perishing finite seed must die, in order that the plant of immortality, the plant of spiritual, eternal life should

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[58]Rudhyar, The Transcendental Movement in Painting,

[59]Blavatsky, The Secret Doctrine, II, 31.

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sprout and live...[60]

This again is a psychological interpretation of sacrificing the lower in favor of the higher. Bisttram also follows Kandinsky by embellishing the steer with colorful patterns and decorations. This may refer to the theosophical concept of the "glamour" of earthly life that exerts the attractive force which binds man to matter.

Additionally, Bulldogging refers back to Combat (fig. 88), in which Bisttram depicted the higher and the lower forces as a struggle between two men on horses. Furthermore, Bulldogging undoubtedly relates to Bisttram's earlier Knight of the Evening (fig. 60); while Rigid and Bend undoubtedly relates to Kandinsky's earlier images of St. George and the Dragon.

Affection (fig. 182), based on Kandinsky's "rigid" form, depicts two figures joined together on the spiritual plane. "Affection" is a term used specifically by Swedenborg to describe one of the highest forms of love. Spectre (fig. 174), another figure functioning on an invisible plane, shows an evil, out-of-control "entity" in the astral world.[61] In contrast to Affection, in which the divinity and compatibility of the two figures is shown by overlapping them along the vertical axis, Spectre is aligned along the diagonal to show irrational action. The spectre is constructed with circles for head and heart, interpenetrating trapezoids for the body, and triangles emanating from the heart and head to show extraordinary activity. Echoing the forms with thin, slightly offset lines increases the sense of motion and instability. The ground line, depicted with horizontals, is relatively small, emphasizing by comparison the monstrosity of the spectre. That this

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[60]Ibid., II, 93.

[61]Spectre was exhibited in "Loan Exhibition," Museum of Non-Objective Painting, 15 October 1944. BP, AAA 2894:44.

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may be an "astral body" on the prowl while an individual is asleep is suggested by the vertical that connects the figure to the ground.

Upward Flight I (fig. 185) also depicts a figure acting on the astral plane in a composition of the same dimensions as Spectre, and similarly organized within three horizontally stacked root-five rectangles. Upward Flight I is perhaps even more predatory than Spectre because it floats freely above the ground, dislodged from its square mooring on the earth plane. Moreover, it seems to be attacking two squares that float below it.

The existence of the astral body is fundamental to theosophy. Theosophical wisdom argues that the astral body of an individual is a model or archetype and is created before the physical body; during life the individual can, with training, act at distance through the astral body; at death the astral body separates from the physical and floats freely until it dissipates. After death it is more capable of evil because, separated from the triad (the higher man), which goes on to another state, it has no conscience. Bisttram's depiction of the astral figure in Upward Flight with an eye, acting purposefully, is also confirmed in theosophical belief:

> The astral body has in it the real organs of the outer sense organs. In it are the sight, hearing, power to smell and the sense of touch. It has a complete system of nerves and arteries of its own for the conveyance of the astral fluid which is to that body as our blood is to the physical. It is the real personal man.[62]

Another of Bisttram's great interests during this period was the depiction of musical themes. Enclosed Sound (fig. 186) shows sound as a spiral force developing from the motion of a sphere. The two straight lines connecting it with the earth indicate its fecundating function. The composition derives from Rudolph Bauer's Green Form,

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[62]Judge, 47.

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1936 (fig. 187). Enclosed Sound is Bauer's composition merely turned 90 degrees so that the circle presides over the horizontal, rather than balancing a vertical. Bisttram altered Bauer's composition slightly by organizing it within two side-by-side vertical root-five rectangles. Green Form also provides the source for Bisttram's depiction of the earth in a series of horizontals in Spectre (fig. 184) and Upward Flight (fig. 185).

Bisttram's comment on Enclosed Sound reveals that he thought that sound was produced by the movements of the planets:

> I had the vision then of music of the spheres. Thinking of what one sphere would contain I portrayed here the idea of one sound in the sphere projected into space and the earthly plane receiving it. I hope someday that we can recapture some of these sounds from other planets. Scientists are working on this problem now and they feel that they will invent an instrument that will find these sounds out in space.[63]

Symphony in White (fig. 188) is a more original experiment by Bisttram to express his ideas about sound and music. The logoic eye, embedded in three white overlapping planes, is the source for a black decorative line that curves around to a lower, proportionally smaller form. A white, curving line in the upper area behind the white plane echos the black line and introduces the element of repetition. Rhythm is provided by the three major verticals that cut the three white planes. Minor rhythms and a sense of direction are provided by the series of circles and lines along the bottom edge and the curving arrow at the right. The use of the logoic eye as the central motif, placed within three planes, cut by three verticals, and as the source for the black line, shows Bisttram's belief in the divinity as the ultimate source of all manifestations.[64] The curved

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[63]Bisttram, "Comment on Enclosed Sound," Anschutz Collection. Enclosed Sound is dated 1942.

[64]There are eight studies for Symphony in White in the Anschutz Collection, one of which is titled Sound of a Saxophone; two others are titled The One-Eyed One and

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black line is used in combination with the planes to represent the second of the two forces operating in all manifestations. The form at the lower right, a scaled-down image of the primary form, shows Bisttram's belief that an image of the divinity is embedded in all manifestations.

The foregoing examination of Bisttram's transcendental works demonstrate that Bisttram was dependent on Kandinsky and Bauer for the formulation of his geometric vocabulary of moving forces. Bisttram, however, applied and adapted this vocabulary to express his own understanding of the occult forces that vivify the universe, and his own understanding of picture composition, thereby ultimately freeing himself from dependence on their precedents. Additionally, by removing references to narrative or archaic themes, Bisttram achieved his goal of impersonality.

The Single-Eyed One.

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Chapter 16

The Transcendental Painting Group

The founders of the Transcendental Painting Group (TPG) joined together on the basis of enthusiasm for shared ideals about forging a new American style rooted in abstraction. Admiration for Kandinsky and a sense of mission for finding ways to take his forms and ideas further created a strong bond among its members. With this they hoped to make a place for themselves in the larger art historical development. Their admiration for Kandinsky was affirmed in all their publicity. Horace Pierce (1914-1958), one of the student members of the Group, expressed it as follows:

> Cubism reared its geometric head under the guidance of Picasso and Braque. The cubists painted pictures, though independent of natural forms used nature as an inspiration. From this time on painting became more abstract till painters asked themselves if there was not a place for painting entirely divorced from realism, basing itself in mental concepts. Kandinsky and the Blue Rider Group of Munich formed in 1912 gave the answer.[1]

In his first public statement announcing the formation of the Group, Alfred Morang (1901-1958), one of the official writers for the Group, drew a parallel between the unity of the Transcendental Painting Group and Kandinsky's Blue Rider Group:

> One of the most important art events in the history of American cultural development has taken place in the Southwest: the formation on June 10th of the Transcendental Painting Group. Not since the forming of the Blue Rider group in Munich in 1912 has any one move sounded a note of such definite progress toward a blending of separate creative forces into a whole.[2]

Morang characterized the members as "non-objective artists," galvanized by a common

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[1]H. Towner Pierce, "The Transcendental Painting Group is Introduced to Taos," Taos Review, 15 Sept. 1938. This article was accompanied by a reproduction of Bisttram's work Creative Forces (fig. 144), but it was titled The Creators.

[2]Alfred Morang, "Introducing the Transcendental Painting Group Which Dismisses Traditions in Art," Santa Fe New Mexican, 20 Aug. 1938. This article was accompanied by a reproduction of Agnes Pelton's Day.

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rejection of "the mere static imitation of natural objects" in favor of an interest in "unexplored regions of mental experience." The ultimate goal, however, was to express "the significance of those creative impulses emanating out of the life of the American continent." This assertion--that the TPG was taking the lead from Kandinsky and transforming his concepts into an American idiom--was also a show of vitality and strength in an arena where regionalism held sway.

In his second article, that appeared the following day, Morang credited Cubism with breaking the hold of representational painting; he singled out Kandinsky, however, as the artist who made the final break by bringing painting to new emotional and mental levels.

> But Kandinsky dared to take the leap into the unexplored. The result was: Paintings that did not depend upon the external world, paintings that reached the state of pure painting: Arrangements of color and line that conveyed emotional states rather than reactions, no matter how highly personal, derived form the external world.[3]

Kandinsky was also preferred because, according to Morang, Cubism, Surrealism, and Dadaism were disintegrating styles; he even associated social scene painting with communism and socialism. In his article on the transcendental movement in music and dance that appeared with Morang's second article, Rudhyar went even further, calling neo-classical styles Fascist:

> Neo-classicism is the direct opposite of transcendentalism in art. It is a defeatist movement, based, like Fascism, on the fear of the unknown. Yet there is no doubt that in the long run it will be seen to have served a purpose. It showed the danger of unbridled and chaotic individualism, unbound by traditional forms and objects. It was a reaction against German "Expressionism" and French "Dadaism"--just as Fascism was a reaction againt Anarchism and the chaos of the incipient stages of

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[3]Alfred Morang, "The Transcendental Painting Group, Its Origin, Foundation, Ideals and Works," New Mexico Daily Examiner, 21 Aug. 1938, p. 3.

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Communisitic dictatorship.[4]

Morang's primary thrust, however, was emphasizing the creative and constructive aspect of the movement compared to the current political turmoil, touting transcendental painting as offering an antidote to the failure of government and social structures, while at the same time maintaining that it had no political or social content.

> But in the arts new and truly creative forces are functioning. From prehistoric times some form of art has been the means of carrying one cultural phase into the next. And it is significant that such a movement as the Transcendental painting group in the Southwest has come into existence at a time when world affairs border on complete chaos.[5]

Morang also stressed that the Transcendental Painting Group did not represent a specific style, but that members worked from different motives and methods, even mentioning the occult.

> Nor is any one point of approach stressed by the Transcendental Painting group. To some the occult or metaphysical path may lead to a more complete grasp of transcendental painting. Others must approach these problems through intuitive awareness. While still others will feel the need of using a more scientific or intellectual method.[6]

In his second article, however, he carefully distanced the Group from Theosophy, and Blavatsky in particular:

> Possibly the mystic teaching of Blavatsky offered another approach, but seen broadly the purely mystical point of view can never serve the skeptical mind. Art has always been concerned with at least a semblance of physical or mental reality, and theosophic thought while it may offer an escape to the individual afraid to face things as they are, can hardly become anything but the most insecure of

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[4]Dane Rudhyar, "The Birth of the Transcendental Movement and Its Manifestations in Music and the Modern Dance," New Mexico Daily Examiner, 21 Aug. 1938, p. 3.

[5]Morang, "The Transcendental Painting Group, Its Origin, Foundation, Ideals.."

[6]Morang, "Introducing the Transcendental Painting Group."

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foundations.[7]

This criticism of mysticism may have been because of the unfortunate associations of spiritualism and Nazism that Morang mentions at the conclusion of his second article. Morang's mother, however, had been a "practicing spiritualist,"[8] so he was also at least somewhat in sympathy with the occult point of view that dominated the thinking of the Group.

The inclusion of the Group's logo (fig. 189) with the second article, and the explanation that it represented a butterfly, was perhaps the clearest statement of their point of view.

> This symbol of the Transcendental Painting Group suggests the essential keynote of the entire movement: Metamorphosis, which means the "constant renewal of forms towards a higher, freer, always transcendent life." The butterfly, in antiquity was the symbol of this transcendental process, which is the deeper reality of what is called 'psyche' or 'soul'--the metamorphosis of the worm into the colorful butterfly whose wings were the first 'transcendental painting' of animate nature.

This text, undoubtedly written by Rudhyar, shows how the Group followed Rudhyar into the realm of psychology and mythological symbolism. In Jung's essay proposing the independent existence of the soul, he analyzes the derivation of the words soul and psyche, and gives butterfly as the translation for the Greek word psyche.[9] The reference to the butterfly as soul may also refer to Otto Rank's assertion that the true subject of art, since primitive times, was the depiction of the soul. While Jung is not mentioned in

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[7]Morang, "The Transcendental Painting Group, Its Origin, Foundation, Ideals..."

[8]Walt Wiggins, Alfred Morang: A Neglected Master (Roswell, NM: Pintores Press, 1979), 16.

[9]C. G. Jung, Modern Man In Search of a Soul, trans., W. S. Dell and Cary F. Baynes (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1933), 181.

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Rudhyar's or Morang's articles, Morang criticized Freud and associated him with Surrealism.

Rudhyar's article, which appeared with the symbol and explanation, widened the definition of transcendental art to include dance and music. Rudhyar identified music as the ultimate transcendental art based on its independence from imitation of sounds in nature. Experiments in atonality by composers such as Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and Charles Ives, according to Rudhyar, were taking music to new transcendental heights. Likewise he identified Isadora Duncan, Rudolf von Laban, Mary Wigman, Valentine de Saint-Point, and Martha Graham with the same in dance.

Solidarity among the Group was also effected by the sympathy between the two writers. Rudhyar's approach, shown most clearly in his manuscript The Transcendental Movement in Painting (1938), was theoretical and historical, while Morang's approach, shown in statements made for the most part in the Santa Fe newspapers, was more general and, in some cases, humorously inflammatory. Their very close relationship is shown in Morang's highly flattering pamphlet Dane Rudhyar: Pioneer in Creative Synthesis (1939), issued by Alice Bailey's Lucis Publishing, that also announced the forthcoming publication of Rudhyar's manuscript, which, however, never materialized.[10]

While Rudhyar and Morang were not official members of the Group, both were elected officers of the American Foundation for Transcendental Painting (AFTP), the

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[10]Alfred Morang, Dane Rudhyar: Pioneer in Creative Synthesis (New York: Lucis Publishing Co., 1939). This pamphlet, dedicated to Raymond Jonson, includes a review of Rudhyar's poetry, music, and painting. Rudhyar began painting under Jonson's tutelage, and had an exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe, in Oct. 1938. A. D. [Alison Dane], "Exhibition of Rudhyar's Drawings," New Mexico Examiner, 2 Oct. 1938, Dane Rudhyar Papers, Syracuse University Library. While many publications on the TPG include Rudhyar's paintings, none include Morang's.

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TPG's administrative and publishing arm, with Rudhyar as one of two vice-presidents, and Morang as publicity director. Morang was particularly suited to writing on Rudhyar since he, like Rudhyar, worked in a variety of artistic disciplines. Newly arrived in Santa Fe from Maine with his wife Dorothy in 1937, Morang played the violin, wrote short-stories, and painted. Morang was particularly close to Raymond Jonson: his pamphlet on Rudhyar was dedicated to Jonson, and he wrote more articles on Jonson than on any other member of the Group.[11]

Other members of the transcendental circle also came from out of town, similarly contributing new enthusiasm for the visionary ideals of the Group. Lawren Harris (1885-1970) met Jonson in Santa Fe in 1938 while making a cross-country trip; on his return he joined the TPG. Harris was a well-established and well-heeled Canadian artist and an avowed theosophist. He was well connected in the art world; for example, he arranged for an exhibition from the collection of the Société Anonyme to be shown at the Art Gallery of Toronto in 1927.[12] His membership in the Canadian "Group of Seven" was a sign of his interest in collaborative undertakings. During his Santa Fe residency (1938-1940) he became completely won over to abstraction based on geometry, partly influenced by his study of dynamic symmetry with Bisttram.

Agnes Pelton (1881-1961), a theosophical painter living in Cathedral City, California, never met with the Group but sent paintings for their exhibitions. Her spiritual

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[11]A list of Morang's published short stories is provided in his three rejected Guggenheim applications, 1937, 1938, and 1941. Maurice Lichtmann wrote a recommendation for the 1938 application, and Jonson wrote a recommendation for the 1941 application. Morang File, J. S. Guggenheim Foundation, New York.

[12]Dennis Reid, Atma Buddhi Manas: The Later Work of Lawren S. Harris (Toronto: The Art Gallery of Ontario, 1985), 15.

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approach to painting was admired by all the members, and is reflected by her appointment as honorary president of the Foundation; her inclusion in the 1913 Armory Show gave her additional status. Her membership was effected by Rudhyar when he encouraged Jonson to get to know her work. Following upon correspondence between Jonson and Pelton, she was included in an exhibition at the Museum of New Mexico with Jonson and Cady Wells in September 1933. Each artist had a separate alcove; their works were related by Rudhyar's catalogue essays.[13] Jonson became completely won over to her work after visiting her in Cathedral City, California, in 1935.

Bill Lumpkins (b. 1910), the only artist born in the Southwest, like Rudhyar and Morang, brought an interdisciplinary energy to the Group: in addition to painting, he was an architect specializing in active and passive solar design.[14] Lumpkins took an intuitive approach, working in a proto-abstract expressionist style similar to John Marin's. He was also interested in Zen Buddhism, which led him to write koans[15] to accompany his paintings.[16] Lumpkins, like many of the other artists in the group, felt that he was engaged in scientific research:

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[13]Dane Rudhyar, "An Exhibition of Paintings by Agnes Pelton, Drawings by Raymond Jonson, Watercolors by Cady Wells." Sept. 25-Oct. 25, 1933, Raymond Jonson Papers, AAA RJ9: 6557-6559.

[14]William Lumpkins, Casa del Sol: Your Guide To Passive Solar House Designs (Santa Fe: Santa Fe Publishing Company, 1981).

[15]A koan is an insoluble riddle. "The purpose of such a riddle, they tell us, is to make a seeker realize there is no intellectual solution to it. When the seeker finally reaches this impasse, a simple incident is enough to reveal its meaning. It can be triggered by a word, a touch, anything. But one must be ready for such an instant realization." Waters, Of Time and Change, 91.

[16]Hay, 250-255. Walt Wiggins, William Lumpkins: Pioneer Abstract Expressionist (Ruidoso Downs, NM: Pintores Press, 1990).

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> "We are not transcendentalists in the sense that Emerson was one... We are not interested in the philosophy. We are interested in esthetic transcendentalism... Transcendent esthetics is the doctrine of space and time as the [a] priori forms of sense perception. You know something of Einstein's theory of space and light? Art must keep up with science, that is creative art must, and as science discovers new angles in life, the creative artist must discover new forms of expression... We are not, like the early masters, religious painters, we are scientific painters. We are trying to reach beyond the illusory forms of materialism into the reality of form of the immaterial. We certainly are not trying to formulate a philosophy of life or religion."[17]

Stuart Walker (1904-1940), a painter of ethereal abstractions, was ill when he joined, and died shortly after the formation of the Group.[18] After serving in the Navy and studying art in Indiana and Delaware, he moved to Albuquerque in 1925; in 1929 he served as president of the Art League of New Mexico. Bisttram's three students, Florence Miller (b. 1918), Horace Pierce, and Robert Gribbroeck (1906-1971), all hailing from different parts of the country, provided a very special youthful energy. Miller studied at the Phillips Studio School in Washington, D. C. before going to Taos to study with Bisttram for the summer of 1936; she returned the following winter. Horace Pierce studied at the Maryland Institute of Art before going to Taos to study with Bisttram in September 1936. Robert Gribbroeck, born in Rochester, New York, studied at the Rochester Institute of Technology and at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts before going to New Mexico in 1929 where he lived at Isleta Pueblo. His studies with Bisttram began in 1936.

While, as is shown below, Bisttram provided the initial impetus for the Group, it was Jonson who sustained it. Jonson kept the records, called meetings, sought exhibition

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[17]William Lumpkins, quoted in Ina Sizer Cassidy, "Transcendental Painters," (July 1940), 28, Raymond Jonson Papers, AAA RJ9: 6657.

[18]Tiska Blankenship and Ed Garman, Vision and Spirit: The Transcendental Painting Group (Albuquerque: Jonson Gallery, 1997).

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opportunities, and, in 1950, built a studio-gallery-home on the University of New Mexico campus as a kind of shrine to the TPG. The unity Jonson sought in his painting manifested in a spiritual approach that carried over to the constructive nature of organizational work, an ideal he had explored in his founding of Cor Ardens in Chicago (1921), his Atalaya Art School (1926), the Santa Fe exhibition group Six Men (1927), and the art supply store he ran out of his garage; these activities indicate the socially inclusive energy he had available to meet the challenges presented by the creation of the Transcendental Painting Group.

Formation of the Transcendental Painting Group.

The idea for the Group was first proposed in Bisttram's studio by Bisttram to his three students, Horace Pierce, Florence Miller, and Robert Gribbroek, early in 1938. This claim was made by Mayrion Bisttram in a 1939 letter to Alfred Morang, disputing the assertion that Morang had been making in a number of articles crediting the founding of the Group to a meeting in Santa Fe on June 10. Mrs. Bisttram made this assertion ostensibly to emphasize that the organization was founded in Taos rather than in Santa Fe.[19]

Mrs. Bisttram further asserted that Bill Lumpkins, on one of his visits to Taos, had been invited to join in a discussion with Bisttram and his three students, and during this meeting was asked to contact artists in Santa Fe about joining this group.[20] This assertion is confirmed in a letter of 19 April 1938, from Lumpkins to Bisttram stating that he had

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[19]Mayrion Bisttram to (Alfred Morang), LT, 1939. See Appendix XV for the complete text of this letter.

[20]Lumpkins visited Taos in February 1938 to encourage the Taos Artists Association to Adopt the Coffee Bill (Fine Arts Bill). "Taos Artists Hold Meeting," Taos Review, 2 Feb. 1938, p. 4.

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held a meeting in Santa Fe, with Raymond Jonson, Cady Wells, Gina Knee, and himself to discuss the possibilities of forming a group. He reported that an exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe, in June, "to see how a group of this sort is going to look as an exhibit" was already planned. He also mentioned that Alfred Morang had been suggested as a "possibility for handing the editing of publicity and as a critic" and that he had already been contacted.[21]

The Santa Fe exhibition opened in early June, and was reviewed by Morang.[22] The exhibition included works by all of the above-named artists, plus Stuart Walker. On 7 June, Raymond Jonson gave a dinner at his home to celebrate the event. Those attending the dinner were Emil Bisttram and his wife Mayrion, H. Towner Pierce and Florence Miller, Bill Lumpkins and his wife Janette, Robert Gribbroek, Cady Wells, Gina Knee, Alfred Morang and his wife Dorothy, Lawren Harris and his wife Bess, Dane Rudhyar, and the hosts, Raymond Jonson and his wife Vera.[23]

The next meeting was held at the Bisttram studio in Taos on 10 June. In later articles, after Mrs. Bisttram had corrected him about the place of the 10 June meeting, Morang reported that the meeting had been held in Taos. There is no record of who attended this meeting, but presumably Cady Wells and Gina Knee, having decided not to join the Group, were not in attendance. Lawren Harris, who joined the group later, and his wife Bess, were also not at the meeting, having left to resume their cross-country trip.

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[21]Bill Lumpkins to (Emil Bisttram), TLS, 19 April 1938, William Warder Papers. For the full text of this letter, see Appendix XVI.

[22]Alfred Morang, "Abstract and Non-Objective Painters in Show at Museum are the 'Adventurers of Art.'"

[23]Typed note, Raymond Jonson papers, Jonson Gallery, Albuquerque, NM.

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Stuart Walker also did not attend as he was still in the hospital. In addition to the four Taos members, Jonson, Lumpkins, Rudhyar, and Morang presumably attended.

Following this meeting, Jonson wrote to Bisttram confirming that there were now six members in the group, Bisttram, Miller, Pierce, Gribbroeck, Lumpkins, and Jonson. Jonson hoped that Walker would become the seventh member, and indeed Walker's name appears among the final roster. Jonson also reported that he and Lumpkins were working on the publicity material. He also commented on the logo for the group, stating that he, Lumpkins, and Rudhyar all thought that the one Bisttram submitted was not quite right, and sent along a revised design which incorporated some of Bisttram's ideas. The logo that Jonson sent is the final logo (fig. 189) except for the circle at the top of the composition. This circle was undoubtedly Bisttram's contribution--a nod to Leo Katz's concept of the single unblinking eye discussed earlier. In this letter Jonson also suggested that the name of the group should be the Transcendental Painting Unit based on the fact that the word "transcendental" had been agreed upon by all.[24]

In Jonson's July 14 letter to Bisttram he referred to the group as the Transcendental Painting Group, the final name decided upon, so there may have been another meeting between the members or communication by phone. Jonson also included a copy of the statement and the by-laws for Bisttram and the other Taos members to review. He also stated that he sent the material to Agnes Pelton asking her to join, and to Morang so that he could write an article.[25]

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[24]Raymond Jonson to (Emil Bisttram), TLS, 15 June 1938, William Warder Papers.

[25]Raymond Jonson to (Emil Bisttram), TLS, 14 July 1938, William Warder Papers.

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Bisttram replied that the Taos group approved the by-laws and symbol and invited Jonson, Rudhyar, Morang, Lumpkins, and their wives for a picnic and meeting in Taos on 30 July. Bisttram also mentioned that the four Taos "transcendentalists" currently had a wall at the Harwood where their work was being hung along with two works by Dorothy Brett.[26] Jonson replied that for sure he, Lumpkins, and Rudhyar would be at Bisttram's for the meeting.[27] It may have also been at the 30 July meeting that Raymond Jonson was elected Chairman, and Bill Lumpkins, Secretary-Treasurer. Agnes Pelton, Stuart Walker, and Lawren Harris were not present. Jonson, however, had been keeping the Harrises informed of the progress of the group by mail, and in a letter of 5 August asked Harris to be a charter member. In this letter Jonson also discussed the formation of the American Foundation of Transcendental Painting, the administrative arm of the group. Evidently this second group was Harris's idea. In a letter of 11 August to Bisttram, Jonson reported that the by-laws for the Foundation were finished and that he had received a letter from Lawren Harris agreeing to membership in the group.[28] In the August articles published in the Santa Fe papers, however, Harris was not listed as a member.

In Jonson's 18 October letter to Bisttram, he reported that he was still working on the material for the folder. This folder, outlining the goals of the Group, was not published until January 1939. Jonson asked for votes from the Taos group on the

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[26]Emil Bisttram to (Raymond Jonson), TLS, 19 July 1938, William Warder Papers.

[27]Raymond Jonson to (Emil Bisttram), TLS, 26 July 1938, William Warder Papers.

[28]Raymond Jonson to (Emil Bisttram), TLS, 11 Aug. 1938, William Warder Papers.

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membership of Lawren Harris, who had just returned from his trip. Jonson also called meeting in Santa Fe for Wednesday, 26 October to elect officers for the Board of the Foundation. He proposed that the meeting be in his studio because Stuart Walker was going to be able to attend and that a trip to Taos would be a strain on his health. Jonson also requested that Bisttram bring proofs of the letterhead and folder to the meeting.[29] The officers elected for the Foundation were: Raymond Jonson, secretary; Agnes Pelton, honorary president; Lawren Harris, president; Dane Rudhyar, vice-president; Emil Bisttram, vice-president; Bill Lumpkins, treasurer; and Alfred Morang, publicity director.[30]

In Jonson's 3 November letter to Bisttram, he sent material for the folder for approval by the Taos group and proposed a meeting in his studio for 12 November. He also sought approval for inviting Hazel Dreis and Ed McLean to the meeting in relation to a publication project. He also mentioned the World's Fair exhibition in San Francisco. Bisttram replied in a letter of 7 November that the Taos group approved the materials and that he would be spending the night with the Harrises when he comes down for the November 12 meeting.

Hazel Dreis may have been invited to the meeting in an effort to get her to publish Rudhyar's manuscript The Transcendental Movement in Painting. This is suggested by that fact that the handwritten draft of Rudhyar's manuscript was complete by November 6, and that in the summer of 1938 Dreis had been involved with the publication of

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[29]Raymond Jonson to (Emil Bisttram), TLS, 18 Oct. 1938.

[30]The officers were listed in Alfred Morang, Transcendental Painting (Santa Fe: American Foundation for Transcendental Painting, Inc., Monograph No. 1, August 1940). This pamphlet reproduces two works of art, Jonson's drawing Ecstasy and Bisttram's Fulfillment, the painting titled Pulsation when it was exhibited at the San Francisco World Fair; this painting was based on the drawing Oversoul (fig. 143).

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Rudhyar's book of poems White Thunder. [31] After being turned down by Dreis, Rudhyar presumably turned to Lucis Publishing.

In a letter of 27 November Bisttram advises Jonson that he will be sending down the canvases for the San Francisco World's Fair exhibition. With this letter Bisttram enclosed his statement on Transcendental painting:

> The aim of this group is to present and to promote a type of painting non-representational in character and dealing with forms transcending the static, concrete objects of everyday sensorial experience. It is 'transcendental painting' in the sense that it reaches beyond the reproduction or interpretation of familiar objects and into the realm of a mental and spiritual awareness of the more individual elements of creative life--these elements, however, being made universally significant through a technique of projection based on principles of composition and integration having universal validity.

The critical idea here is that transcendental painting involves discarding the data provided by the five senses. This concept is in line with Swedenborg's idea that data from the five senses is not to be given priority over belief in the Lord.

Jonson's statement, made in a letter to his brother, is equally spiritual, but does not mention the rejection of sensorial experience.

> It [The Transcendental Painting Group] hopes to become a focal point for the development of a type of Art vitally rooted in the spiritual need of these times and expressing the most truly creative, fundamental and permanent impulses emerging from the American continent; an art which releases from its creators the deepest springs of vitality and consciousness and which aims to stimulate in others, though deep and spontaneous emotional experiences of form and color, a more intense participation in the life of the spirit.[32]

Arsuna

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[31] White Thunder included Rudhyar's drawing Storm Gods as a frontispiece; Dane Rudhyar, White Thunder (Santa Fe: Hazel Dreis Editions, 1938). Four hundred copies were printed by Lynton Kistler and case-bound by Hazel Dreis.

[32] Raymond Jonson to (Arthur Jonson), after July 1938, RJ1: 531, cited in Lorenz, 88.

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In addition to the articles by Morang and Rudhyar discussed above, the founding of the Transcendental Painting Group was marked by an exhibition and lecture at Arsuna Galleries. This exhibition, however, was not totally dedicated to the TPG. Rather it was a large group show made up of regional artists in which four of the TPG members were represented--Jonson, Bisttram, Lumpkins, and Gribbroeck. Morang's review, however, singled out the TPG members and discussed their new association. Rudhyar's lecture on transcendental art, given on the weekend of the major newspaper articles, was reviewed by Jimmy Gartner (1893-1969), husband of the founder of Arsuna, and others. Also, a "non-objective" drawing by Gartner, and one by Rudhyar were included in the exhibition.[33] Rudhyar's talk on Transcendental Painting was one of a series that he was giving at Arsuna.[34]

The role of Arsuna in supporting the activities of the Group is particularly relevant because it was founded on the ideals of Nicholas Roerich. Founded by Mrs. Clyde Gartner (1900-1967) in 1938, the Arsuna School was modeled on Roerich's concept of uniting all the arts in one school. The name for the school, derived from the Latin phrase

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[33]Alfred Morang, "American Artists Still Alive Says Critic of New Arsuna Gallery Show," Santa Fe New Mexican, 16 Aug. 1938, Raymond Jonson Papers, AAA, RJ 9:6610 Jimmy Gartner, "Rudhyar Discusses Transcendentalism," New Mexico Daily Examiner, 25 Aug. 1938, Jonson Papers, Jonson Gallery.

[34]L. L. Partlow, "Abstract Art Lacking Appeal to 90 Per Cent of Public Not Always 'Dolled Up Doodling' Says Rudhyar," Santa Fe New Mexican, 24 Aug. 1938; L. L. Partlow, "Rudhyar's Closing Lecutre at Arsuna Full of Power and Beauty," Santa Fe New Mexican, 31 Aug. 1938, Raymond Jonson Papers, AAA RJ9: 6612. Some other undated articles from Rudhyar's papers at Syracuse show his activities in Santa Fe: L. L. Partlow, "Modern Political Trends Are Ascribed to Century's Rhythm by Dane Rudhyar at Arsuna," Santa Fe New Mexican, n.d.; "Rare Recordings Illustrate Lecture on Oriental Music;" Harold Butcher, "Rudhyar Talks of New Music; Plays Own Compositions." Rudhyar also gave an eight-session course on 20th century music in Santa Fe at the home of Mrs. Albert H. Schmidt, organized by Mrs. Raymond Jonson, "Music Course to be Given in July."

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meaning art is one, was chosen to express the idea of the unity of the arts, Roerich's concept for the Master Institute.

Mrs. Gartner, whose husband was a wealthy Tulsa oilman, purchased a large number of paintings by Roerich through Maurice Lichtmann, vice-president of the Roerich Museum, for the purpose of spreading the Roerich gospel in the Midwest. She showed Roerich's paintings in Oklahoma and looked around Tulsa for a location for the school. Dissatisfied with locations in her home state, she brought her venture to Santa Fe, opening the Arsuna Galleries at 922 Canyon Road in August 1937. The Canyon Road location included two galleries, one devoted to paintings by Nicholas Roerich and the other to paintings by Santa Fe artists.[35] Lichtmann made the move to Santa Fe upon the establishment of Arsuna and guided the development of the school along Roerich's principles and headed the music department. The August showing featured piano recitals by Lichtmann,[36] and lectures and readings. One such event was a reading by Alexandra Fechin, dressed in native costume, from her recent book Ancient Russian Legends.[37] Additionally, thirteen of Roerich's paintings, depicting "lonely lamaseries

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[35]Paintings by Gerald Cassidy, B. J. O. Nordfeldt, Olive Rush, Raymond Jonson, Jozef Bakos; sculpture by Eugenie Shonnard, Bruce Walder Saville. Books by Nicholas Roerich, Dr. Edgar L. Hewett, Alice Corbin Henderson, Paul Horgan, Marion Storm, Ruth L. Barker, Will Robinson, Stanley Vestal, Peggy Pond Church, Irna Ferguson, Dane Coolidge, Lynn Riggs, Wesley Bradfield, Frances Grant, Alexandra Fechin, Hanile Long. Arsuna Galleries Brochure, Jonson Gallery, Albuquerque.

[36]Lichtmann presumably spread the Roerich gospel in Taos while in town for a piano recital at the Harwood in 1940. "Lichtmann's Recital Success Applauded," Taos Review, 27 June 1940, p. 1.

[37]"Alexandra Fechin to Lecture," Taos Review, 19 Aug. 1937, p. 1. Alexandra Fechin was by this time divorced from her husband Nicholai Fechin, now living in California, but making two-week trips back to work in his studio in Taos in the summers. The Fechins had not known the Roerichs when they lived in Russia.

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against towering mountains or of snow covered peaks of the Himalayas, of unusual color and composition" were shown one weekend in Taos in Blanche Grant's studio.[38]

The following summer Mrs. Gartner opened the school in a 200 year-old Spanish hacienda at 435 Manhattan Avenue in Santa Fe. The building housed two galleries, one devoted to Roerich's paintings, the other to changing exhibitions of works by Southwest artists. The facility included a tea room that served Russian delicacies and tea made according to an old Russian recipe in an authentic samovar.[39] These specifically Russian details underscore the Roerich influence at Arsuna. Furthermore, the school was dedicated to teaching all of the arts; the list of courses included music, writing, speech and dramatics, crafts, and fine arts, and lectures on anthropology and Pueblo art. This summer Bisttram offered a course in dynamic symmetry. In 1939 the location of the school changed again when Mrs. Gartner purchased La Casa Querida, the former home of the writer Mary Austin, on Camino del Monte Sole.

All of the members of the Transcendental Painting Group were included in group exhibitions at Arsuna at one time or another. Lawren Harris had a solo exhibition in May 1939 and Raymond Jonson taught painting. Alfred and Dorothy Morang were also vitally associated with Arsuna. Alfred taught writing and Dorothy served as an assistant to Maurice Lichtmann and taught piano privately.[40] In December 1940 Mrs. Morang was

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[38]"Roerich Paintings Shown Here," Taos Review, 26 Aug. 1937, p. 1.

[39]Mrs. Gartner also arranged an exhibition of Roerich paintings at the Tulsa Federal art center in the spring of 1938. "Clyde Gartner's School of Fine Arts in Santa Fe is Realization of Dream of Many Years," Tulsa Daily World, 3 July 1938.

[40]The Morangs were divorced in 1950. Dorothy worked for the Museum of New Mexico for many years. Wiggins, Alfred Morang. Alfred exhibited frequently at Arsuna as did Dorothy. Wiggins quotes from an uncited review of a solo exhibition of Alfred's by Lawren Harris.

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appointed secretary to the school through the WPA.

One of the most interesting lectures given at Arsuna was "The Utility of Beauty" by Edgar Hewett, director of the Museum of New Mexico. This lecture shows how completely in sympathy with Roerich's art principles he was. Most interesting is his antipathy to Rivera's murals, which he certainly saw first-hand since, as mentioned above, Bisttram met Hewett in Mexico City while he was assisting Rivera.

> The great Russian philosopher-artist, Nicholas Roerich, has long contended that art will unify humanity. For a generation he has borne aloft a steady oriflamme of goodwill through art that no tumult of a discordant world has ever caused him to lower. European, American, oriental, world-thinker, he has proclaimed art to be the unifying world-force. With Roerich's thesis, I am in full accord, understanding, of course, that by art is meant all those agencies that bring beauty and harmony into the lives of men. Art that does not do that is misnamed. Ugliness, strife, propaganda (another hateful word), do not belong to the province of art. This eliminates the work of the much publicized Diego Rivera, he of the vast murals dedicated to strife, unrest, war spirit. The propagandist who incites the mob to violence is no friend of mankind. The artist who brings beauty into life is a bearer of peace and joy.[41]

Bisttram is listed in the 1938 Arsuna course catalogue as teaching dynamic symmetry on Saturdays afternoons. The course description, however, notes that six students will be required since Bisttram will have to come down from Taos. Evidence that he did teach this class is provided by Dorothy Morang's sketchbook, now in the collection of the Jonson Gallery, which includes dynamic symmetry exercises that were probably executed for this class.

Dynamic symmetry becomes relevant to the Transcendental Painting Group because it was presumably under Bisttram's influence that Lawren Harris began using the system. Two letters from Lawren's wife Bess (1890-1969), state that she was studying

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[41]This lecture, presented at Arsuna on 20 July 1937 was printed in Edgar Hewett, "The Utility of Beauty," El Palacio 63, nos. 7, 8, 9 (18-25 Aug.-1 Sept. 1937): 37-47.

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dynamic symmetry.[42] The letters are enigmatic because, while she states that the teacher lives 75 miles away, she does not mention Bisttram by name. She also mentions that two other younger married women are taking the course with her. Also, the two letters, one written in December 1938, the other in February 1939, bracket a trip the Harrises made to New York in mid-January 1939. Most problematic is the question of transportation between Taos and Santa Fe during the winter; at this time of the year the road between the two cities was treacherous and was not even paved. Mrs. Harris's remark that she doesn't even go outdoors to paint because she wants to be available for her husband whenever he might need her, indicates he took the course with her. Bisttram probably came down to Santa Fe, although at this time he did not have a car. More important, however, are Mrs. Harris's comments suggesting that she saw the study of dynamic symmetry as a way to develop an abstract style. Harris's employment of dynamic symmetry suggests that Mrs. Harris's comments echoed the views of her husband.[43]

One of the indications that Harris thought very highly of Bisttram was that a number of the Harrises's Canadian friends studied with Bisttram when they came down to visit. Among these were Isabel McLaughlin, Yvonne McKague Hausser (1897-1996),[44]

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[42]Bess Harris to Doris Huestis Mills Speirs, 18 Dec. 1938 and 19 Feb. 1939, Speirs Papers, cited in Dennis Reid, Atma Buddhi Manas: The Later Work of Lawren S. Harris (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1985), 29, 32.

[43]For Harris's dynamic symmetry drawings, see Murray and Fulford, 191, 198. and Reid, 31.

[44]Joan Murray, The Art of Yvonne McKague Housser (Oshawa, Canada: The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1995). There are three letters from Mayrion Bisttram to Yvonne Housser among Housser's papers, National Archives, Canada. In one of these letters Mrs. Bisttram says she has been in correspondence with the Harrises; none of these letters, however, have survived.

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and Alexandra Luke (1901-1967).[45] Isabel McLaughlin went down for the summers of 1938 and 1939,[46] and Hauser and Luke in 1939.[47] McLaughlin acquired three works by Bisttram and one by Rudhyar.[48] Harris also acquired two drawings by Bisttram.

Dynamic symmetry is also relevant to the Transcendental Painting Group since the student members were also using the system. The most important work to emerge was Horace Pierce's The Spiral Symphony, a group of thirty watercolors executed under Bisttram's guidance. The airbrush he used was purchased for him by Harriet Richards when she was in Taos visiting Bisttram in 1937. The concept for this project was that these works were to be the basis for a film for which music would be composed using similar principles. The film, however, was never made. Another indication of the vitality of dynamic symmetry at this time was a dance performance by Linde Gayl which featured a series of dances titled "Studies in Dynamic Symmetry." For this performance Jonson designed and ran the lighting effects, and Maurice Lichtmann provided the piano

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[45]She [Mrs. Margaret Alexandra Luke McLaughlin] and her husband [Clarence Ewart McLaughlin] were founders of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery; the gallery was named in honor of his grandfather, who was also the grandfather of Isabel McLaughlin. Joan Murray, Alexandra Luke: Continued Searching (Oshawa, Canada: The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Dec 1, 1987-Jan. 3, 1988).

[46]Joan Murray, Isabel McLaughlin: Recollections (Oshawa, Canada: The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1983), 19. See figs. 26, 27, 28 for works she executed in New Mexico.

[47]Joan Murray, telephone interview with the author Nov. 1998. Sharyn Udall alerted the author that Isabel McLaughlin studied with Bisttram.

[48]Joan Murray, The Isabel McLaughlin Gift (Oshawa, Canada: The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Part 1, 1987; Part 2, 1990. See Part 1 for Bisttram's Corn Dance (fig. 132); see Part 2 for Bisttram's Indian Child, 1932, pencil on paper, and Bread Makers, 1935, and Rudhyar's Storm Gods, engraving. The last two were gifts from the artists.

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accompaniment.[49]

Bisttram was clearly interested in making some changes in his own school curriculum at this time. One indication is the short essay written by Dane Rudhyar on Bisttram's school composed on Sunday, 21 August 1938, the day the announcement of the TPG appeared in the New Mexico Daily Examiner. The essay, which was to be part of a new brochure for the school, was, however, totally inappropriate for distribution to a mass audience. It does reveal though that Bisttram was in the midst of planning to add a dance department to the school. The accompanying letter from Rudhyar also reveals that Alice Sherbon was in Taos working on details.[50]

Exhibitions

During the life of the Transcendental Painting Group the members exhibited together only a few times. One of the first events was the 1939 San Francisco World's Fair, in which Bisttram exhibited Pulsation (fig. 143).[51] The Group's inclusion in this exhibition incited criticism among local artists since no other New Mexico artists were included. Lawren Harris, in a letter to the editor, explained that indeed he knew Roland McKinney,

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[49]Alfred Morang, "Dancer Brings Same Elements that Nature Presents, Critic Says of Linde Gayl Recital," Santa Fe New Mexican, 15 Dec 1938; "Linde Gayl's Hands Completely Expressive," New Mexico Daily Examiner, 16 Dec 1938, Raymond Jonson Papers, AAA RJ9: 6620.

[50]Dane Rudhyar, "The Taos School of Art," AMsS; Dane Rudhyar to (Emil Bisttram), ALS, 21 Aug. [1938], William Warder Papers.

[51]Alfred Morang, "Transcendental Painting Group Sends Exhibition to San Francisco to Be Shown During World's Fair," Santa Fe New Mexican, 17 Jan 1939, Raymond Jonson Papers, AAA RJ9: 6622. Bisttram identified the measurements of this painting as 60 x 45"; 64 x 49" with frame. Emil Bisttram to (Raymond Jonson), LT, 27 Nov. 1938, William Warder Papers.

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former director of the Baltimore Art Museum, who was in charge of selecting the paintings for the San Francisco World's Fair. Harris explained that [in 1931] he had assembled a collection of Canadian pictures for McKinney for the Sesqui-Centennial exhibition in Baltimore, and that he had also selected twenty-five canvasses from Canada for McKinney for the San Francisco exhibition. He also explained that he had seen the exhibition of Guggenheim paintings at Charleston, and felt that since these were being shown at San Francisco, that American artists working in a similar idiom should also be represented. Harris further explained that when he brought McKinney to Santa Fe and Taos to look at the works, he was not a member of the Group.[52]

The representation of Transcendental Painting Group members in the exhibition at the New York World's Fair also aroused some controversy in the Santa Fe newspapers, even though not all members were included.[53] In this case the jury was made up of R. Vernon Hunter, chairman, Raymond Jonson, Randall Davey, and Russell Cowles. Members of the TPG exhibiting at the Fair included Harris, Lumpkins, Walker, and Jonson.

Jonson also organized an exhibition of the Group at the University of New Mexico in April 1939; this exhibition was subsequently shown at the Museum of Fine Arts in Santa Fe. Bisttram's works for this exhibition were Symphony No. 7, Composition No. 1, Time Projection. and Interior No. 2. Jonson gave the introductory lecture for the

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[52] Lawren Harris, "Letter to the Editor," Santa Fe New Mexican, 16 March 1939, Raymond Jonson Papers, AAA RJ9:6625.

[53] Jozef Bakos, "Letter to the Editor" Santa Fe New Mexican, 9 March 1939, Raymond Jonson Papers, AAA, RJ9: 6625.

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University of New Mexico opening.[54]

The most important exhibition was that held at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, arranged by Jonson's friend Charles Morris, who taught philosophy at the University of Chicago. This idea may have been formulated during Morris's visit to Santa Fe in October 1939.[55] The paintings by Bisttram included in this exhibition were Symphony in Red and Interior No. 1. At this same time Horace Pierce's drawings for his Spiral Symphony and four "non-objective" paintings were included in an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art.[56] The Guggenheim exhibition, however, was not exclusively dedicated to the Transcendental Painting Group; it was a group show, 12 American Non-Objective Painters (May 14-June 27, 1940).[57]

Personal considerations and the outbreak of the war made it impossible to continue exhibiting as a group: Stuart Walker died in 1940; Horace Pierce and Florence Miller married in Bisttram's studio in April 1938; in 1940 they left for New York to pursue

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[54]Peggy Lee, "Jonson Explains Modernists, Transcendental Painters' Work," New Mexico Lobo, 22 April 1939, RJ 9: 6627.

[55]"Chicago Philosophy Professor Visiting Raymond Jonsons," New Mexico Daily Examiner, 28 Oct. 1939, Raymond Jonson Papers, AAA RJ9:6638.

[56]Alfred Morang, Transcendental Painting Group Invited to Send Examples to Guggenheim," Santa Fe New Mexican, 11 April 1940, Raymond Jonson papers, AAA RJ9: 6641.

[57]The artists in this exhibition were Bisttram, Florence Brillinger, Manuel Essman, Robert Gribbroeck, Noah Grossman, Lawren Harris, Raymond Jonson, Hanany Meller, Agnes Pelton, Rouben Sanberg, Ralph Scarlett, Charles Smith. Bisttram was also included in "Loan Exhibition" (#40) opening 15 Oct. 1944, exhibiting 13. Time Cycle Series No. 1, 14. Suspension, 15. Spectre, and 16. Duality. Alfred Morang's 60. Psychic and Plastic and Dorothy Morang's 61. Dynamic Forms were also included. Bisttram was also included in "Loan Exhibition" (#44) opening 6 June 1945 exhibiting 5. Two Cells at Play and 6. Dark Forces. Art of this Century: The Guggenheim and Its Collections, ed. Tom Krens (New York: The Guggenheim Museum, 1993).

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the making of Horace's film. The Harrises moved back to Canada in October 1940 mainly because they were unable to obtain funds from their Canadian bank during the war. Bill Lumpkins was called up to serve in 1941. Rudhyar left for California about 1941. Clyde Gartner closed Arsuna to volunteer with the Red Cross.

What did they accomplish? By banding together in a group to promote aesthetic principles, they confirmed that art-making encompassed shared ideals and was not totally an individualistic enterprise. Their most important achievement was articulating aims for painting that offered an aesthetic based on inner knowing rather than external reality, thus providing an antidote to materialism. By working together they were able to keep their cultural program of advanced art-making before the public eye. Their program essentially contributed to the furtherance of Nicholas Roerich's ideal that a life dedicated to art and culture charts a path towards unifying humanity.

Bisttram achieved increased recognition from his activities with the Transcendental Painting Group. This recognition was partially eclipsed, however, by World War II, which completely restructured national life. These changes were even felt in Taos as a new group of younger artists settled in the area and a commercial gallery system took hold.[58] Bisttram, like many others, began to travel, and in the early 1940s he established a school in Phoenix, and then in the late 1940s, a school in Los Angeles,[59] returning, however, to Taos to teach in the summers. In 1950 he returned to Taos and remained year-round except for short teaching stints.

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[58]For this trend, see David Witt, Taos Moderns: Art of the New, forward by Gerald Nordland (Santa Fe: Red Crane Books, 1992).

[59]Grace Y. Clements, "Directions in Education: The Bisttram School of Fine Arts," Arts & Architecture (Los Angeles), (May 1946), 35, 50-52.

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Bisttram's aesthetic development was fairly straightforward, essentially rehearsing the major international developments in aesthetic style. His late work seems to be less monolithic and more facile as he worked with a multiplicity of subjects and styles. He continued to work with abstract material until his death. In the 1950s, however, he returned to landscape subjects, which were undertaken primarily from financial need. He also experimented with surrealism and abstract expressionism. His reconnection with Agni Yoga, which occurred about 1960 through the Roerich-disciple Ralph Houston, inaugurated a new series of spiritual paintings. He kept up an active involvement with museums, and exhibited widely across the Southwest and West; he had numerous solo exhibitions, won various awards in juried exhibitions, and was frequently invited to serve on juries.

In the 1950s he began to paint with casein on masonite. In the early 1960s, continuing his interest in painting mediums, experimentation, and a scientific approach, he became involved with Dr. Lewis Trenner, a Denver chemist; together they developed a new transparent paint made of polyester resin, with which he executed a series of paintings. He also continued his public service activities, most notably founding the Taos Artists Association in the early 1950s, after the earlier organization languished. His ability to rally the younger artists attests to his continued vitality as an organizer and innovator, and his ability to operate in the increasingly complex Taos political arena. In 1970 Governor David F. Cargo appointed Bisttram to the New Mexico State Arts Commission. On his eightieth birthday, Governor Jerry Apodaca proclaimed "Emil Bisttram Day."

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Appendix I: Bisttram's Reading List, ca. 1930.[1]

Symbol Psychology	Adolf Roeder	Swed Soc

Adolph Roeder (1857-1931). Symbol Psychology: A New Interpretation of Race-Traditions. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1903.

Ancient Free Masonry	Frank C. Higgins	Redding & Co., 23rd St. & 5th Ave

Frank C. (Francis Carlos) Higgins (b. 1867). Ancient Free Masonry: An Introduction to the Study of Masonic Archaeology. New York: Pyramid Book Company, 1923.

The Edinburgh Lectures on Mental Science	Troward

Thomas Troward (1847-1916). The Edinburgh Lectures on Mental Science. Chicago: Arcane Book Concern, 1909.

The Idea of the Holy	Rudolph Otto

Rudolf Otto (1869-1937). The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation in the Rational, trans. John W. Harvey. London: Oxford University Press, 1923.

The Man of Genius	Herman Turck

Hermann Türck (1856-1933). The Man of Genius (1896), trans. George J. Tamson. London: Adam and Charles Black, 1914.

Seraphita	Balzac

Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850). Seraphita (1835), trans. Katharine Prescott Wormeley. Boston: Roberts Bros., 1889.

William Blake	Foster Damon

Samuel Foster Damon (1893-1971). William Blake, His Philosophy and Symbols. New York: P. Smith, 1924.

The Dance of Life	Havelock Ellis

Havelock Ellis (1859-1939). The Dance of Life. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923.

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[1]This list is from Bisttram's Book of Notes. Bisttram's list includes authors and titles, and some publishers. The order and form of Bisttram's list has been retained; following his citation is the full bibliographic citation of the earliest publication [indented], with birth and death dates of the authors when they could be established.

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Tertium Organum Ouspensky

P. D. Ouspensky. Tertium Organum, A Key to the Enigmas of the World (1911), trans. Nicholas Bessaraboff and Claude Bragdon, with an introduction by Claude Bragdon. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1920.

Gitanjali Tagore

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). Gitanjali (Song Offerings). London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1913.

The Inner Life Leadbeater

C. W. Leadbeater (1847-1934). The Inner Life. Los Angeles: Theosophical Publishing House, 1910.

The Nature of Spirit Chauncy Giles Swed. Soc.

Chauncy Giles (1813-1893). The Nature of Spirit (first delivered as a lecture, 1864). The Nature of Spirit, and of Man as A Spiritual Being, 8th ed. New York: New-Church Board of Publication, 1894.

The Language of Parable Worcester Swed. Soc.

William Loring Worcester (1859-1939). Lessons in Correspondence. 1882; reprint The Language of Parable: A Key to the Bible. New York: The New-Church Press, n.d.

Divine Providence Swedenborg Swed. Soc.

Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). Angelic Wisdom Concerning The Divine Providence (1764), trans. John C. Ager. New York: American Swedenborg Printing and Publishing Society, 1909.

The Life of Swedenborg Trowbridge [sic] Swed. Soc

George Trobridge (1851-1909). A Life of Swedenborg. London: Swedenborg Society, 1920.

Travel Diary of a Philosopher Keyserling

Count Hermann Keyserling (1880-1946). The Travel Diary of a Philosopher, 2 vols., trans., J. Holroyd Reece. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1925.

Compensation and Essays Emerson

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882). Compensation, Self-Reliance, and Other Essays. Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1907.

The Beautiful Necessity Bragdon

Claude Bragdon (1866-1947). The Beautiful Necessity, Seven Essays on Theosophy and Architecture. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1910.

Old Lamps for New Bragdon

Claude Bragdon (1866-1947). Old Lamps for New. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1925.

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Four Dimensional Vistas Bragdon
Claude Bradgon (1866-1947). Four Dimensional Vistas. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1916.

The New Image Bragdon
Claude Bragdon (1866-1947). The New Image. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1928.

Ocean of Theosophy W. T. Judge
William Quan Judge (1851-1896). Ocean of Theosophy. Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, 1893.

The Impersonal Life Sun Pub. Co., Akron, Ohio
Joseph S. Benner (1872-1941). The Impersonal Life. Akron, Ohio: Sun Publishing Co., 1914.

The Enjoyment and Use of Color Walter Sargent
Walter Sargent (1868-1929). The Enjoyment and Use of Color. New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1923.

Ancient Wisdom Annie Besant
Annie Besant (1847-1933). Ancient Wisdom: An Outline of Theosophical Teachings. London: Theosophical Publishing Company, 1897.

Plato's Republic
The Republic of Plato, trans. B. Jowett. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1881.

The Outline of History H. G. Wells
H. G. Wells (1866-1946). The Outline of History: being a plain history of life & mankind, complete in 24 fortnightly parts. London: Cassell, 1925.

The History and Power of Mind Ingersol [sic]
Richard Ingalese (b. 1863). The History and Power of Mind. New York: The Occult Book Concern, 1903.

My Brother's Face Mukerji
Dhan Gopal Mukerji (1890-1936). My Brother's Face. New York: Dutton, 1924.

Faust Goethe
Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749-1832). Faust (Part 1, 1808; Part 2 published posthumously), trans. Bayard Taylor. Boston: Houghton, Osgood & Co., 1879.

Zanoni Bulwer Lytton
Edward Bulwer Lytton (1803-1873). Zanoni (1845). New York: P. F. Collier & Son., 1902.

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Jean Christophe Romain Roland

Romain Rolland (1866-1944). Jean Christophe, trans. Gilbert Cannan. New York: Modern Library, 1913.

Decline of the West Spengler

Oswald Spengler (1880-1936). The Decline of the West (1918, 1922), 2 vols., trans. Charles Francis Atkinson. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926, 1928.

Travel Dialogues Keyserling

[This is probably a duplicate entry, referring to a similar entry on the first page.]

Whither Mankind Charles A. Beard

Charles Austin Beard (1874-1948). Whither Mankind: A Panorama of Modern Civilization. New York: Longmans, Green, 1928. [collection of essays]

Toward Civilization Charles A. Beard

Charles Beard (1874-1948). Toward Civilization. New York: Longmans, Green, 1930. [collection of essays]

At the Feet of the Master Krishnamurti

J. Krishnamurti (1895-1986). At the Feet of the Master. Chicago: Rajput Press, 1911.

The Voice of the Silence H. P. Blavatsky

H.P. Blavatsky (1831-1891). The Voice of the Silence and other chosen fragments from the Book of the golden precepts: for the daily use of Lanoos (Disciples). New York: Alliance Publishing Company, 1889.

Great Initiates Eduard Schure

Édouard Schuré (1841-1929). The Great Initiates, Sketch of the Secret History of Religions (1889), trans. Fred Rothwell. London: William Rider & Son, 1912.

Isis Unveiled Blavatsky

H. P. Blavatsky (1831-1891). Isis Unveiled, 2 vol. New York: J. W. Bouton, 1877.

The Secret Doctrine Blavatsky

H. P. Blavatsky (1831-1891). The Secret Doctrine, 3 vol. London: Theosophical Publishing Company, 1888. Vol. 3 published posthumously.

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Appendix II: Bisttram's Reading List, ca. 1946.[2]

Understanding Modern Art — Katz, Leo

Leo Katz, Understanding Modern Art, an interpretation of the historical, psychological, philosophical, and scientific backgrounds of modern art, prepared under the direction of The Delphian Society for the use of its Chapter members in connection with the programs provided for the meetings of their chapters, 3 vols. (n.p.: The Delphian Society, 1936). This book was issued first as a serial, one chapter per week.

The Modern Movement in Art — Wilenski

Reginald Howard Wilenski (b. 1887) The Modern Movement in Art. New York: Stokes, 1926.

The Meaning of Modern Sculpture — Wilenski

Reginald Howard Wilenski (b. 1887), The Meaning of Modern Sculpture: An Essay on Some Original Sculpture of the Present Day together with Some Account of the methods of Professional disseminators..., London: Faber and Faber, 1932.

Understanding the Unintelligibility of Art [*sic*] — Rothschild, Prof. U. of Chicago Press

Edward Francis Rothschild. The Meaning of Unintelligibility in Modern Art. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1934.

Cubism and Abstract Art — Museum of Modern Art

Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Cubism and Abstract Art. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936.

Art and the Artist — Rank, Otto

Otto Rank (1884-1939), Art and Artists: Creative Urge and Personality Development, with a preface by Ludwig Lewisohn; translated from the German by Charles Francis Atkinson. New York: A. A. Knopf, 1932.

The Circle — Faber

Leslie Martin (b. 1908), ed., Ben Nicholson (b. 1894) and Naum Gabo (b. 1890), joint eds. Circle: International Survey of Constructive Art, London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1937.

Art as a Release of Power — Rudhyar, Dane

Dane Rudhyar (1895-1985). Art as a Release of Power. Carmel, CA: Hamsa Publications, 1930.

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[2]This document is in the William Warder Papers.

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Modern Art — Ozenfant

Amde Ozenfant (1886-1966). Foundations of Modern Art, trans. by John Rodker. London: Rodker, 1931.

Art and Society — Read, Herbert

Herbert Read (1893-1968). Art and Society. New York: Macmillan Co., 1937.

Art Now — Read, Herbert

Herbert Read (1893-1968). Art Now: An Introduction to the Theory of Modern Painting and Sculpture. New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1933.

The Psychologist Looks at Art — Danz, Louis

Louis Danz. The Psychologist Looks at Art. New York: Longmans, Green, 1937.

Painting and Drawing — Ross, Dr. Denman

Denman Ross. On Drawing and Painting. Boston: Houghton, 1912.

Painters Palette — Ross, Dr. Denman

Denman Ross. The Painter's Palette; a Theory of Tone Relations; an Instrument of Expression. Boston: Houghton. 1919.

The Enjoyment and Use of Color — Sargent, Walter

Walter Sargent (1868-1929). The Enjoyment and Use of Color. New York: Scribners. 1923.

Color — Biren [sic], Faber

Faber Birren (b. 1900). Color Dimensions: Creating New Principles of Color Harmony and a Practical Equation in Color Definitions. Chicago, 1934.

Primer of Modern Art — Cheney, Sheldon

Sheldon Cheney (b. 1886). A Primer of Modern Art. New York: Horace Liveright, 1924.

Expressionism in Art — Cheney, Sheldon

Sheldon Cheney (b. 1886). Expressionism in Art. New York: Liveright, 1934.

How to See Modern Pictures — Pearson, Ralph

Ralph M. Pearson (b. 1883). How To See Modern Pictures: An Extension of the Design Principle into Three Dimensions and an Explanation of its Basic Application to the Work of the Moderns, the Primitives, and the Classics of both Europe and the Orient, Together with an Appendix Containing Practical Suggestions for Bridging the Gap between Artist and Public. New York: Lincoln MacVeagh, The Dial Press, 1st ed., 1925, rev. ed, 1930.

Modern Art Education — Pearson, Ralph

Ralph M. Pearson (b. 1883). The New Art Education, foreword by Eduard C. Lindeman. New York, Harper, 1941.

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Cezannes Composition — Loran, Earle [sic]

Erle Loran (b. 1905). Cézanne's Composition: Analysis of his Form with Diagrams and Photographs of his Motifs. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1946.

Art and Beauty — Schoen, Max

Max Schoen (b. 1888). Art and Beauty. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1932.

Psychology of Art — Ogden, Robert Morris

Robert Morris Ogden (1877-1959). The Psychology of Art. New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1938. [Ogden was a translator of Hildebrandt's Problem of Form]

Language of Vision — Kepes, Giorgore

Gyorgy Kepes. Language of Vision. Chicago: Paul Theobald & Co., 1944.

The New Vision — Nagy, Moholy

Laszlo Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946). The New Vision, (1928), 3rd rev. ed., trans. Daphne M. Hoffmann. New York: Wittenborn and Co., 1946.

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Appendix III: Appraisal of Bisttram's Library[3]

Nicholas Potter, Bookseller, 203 E. Palace, Santa Fe, NM 87501, 505-983-5434

December 15, 1984

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

I have examined a collection of books donated to the Library of St. John's College in Santa Fe, New Mexico, as a bequest of the estate of Emil and Mayrion Bisttram of Taos, New Mexico. The collection consisted of just over 1250 volumes of which roughly half were clothbound. Included in the group were concentrations of philosophy, theosophy, literature, southwest Americana, foreign language books, and the major concentration of art. Mr. Bisttram was a noted Taos painter, and it is obvious that he loved and used his art books, as they are generally only in good condition, and many are fair to poor. Many have his signature in them, however, which makes them more interesting copies, if not more collectible. There were some very esoteric titles in the group, but overall, it contains a very balanced view of World art (as opposed to just the art of Europe and America), and it contains many of the early 20th century studies that have become the standard classics in the field.

Some of the high points of the collection should be noted. The first edition of Bickerstaff's Pioneer Artists of Taos. A very good copy in dust jacket, it is a scarce book and quite sought-after by the collectors of Southwest art, and this copy is especially desirable because it is signed not only by the author, but by two of the artists who are included in the book, Bert Phillips and Ernest Blumenschein. There was a nice copy of Coke's Taos & Santa Fe in the dust jacket. Another signed book of value is a monograph on the Mexican muralist Jose Clemente Orozco published by the Delphic Studios in 1932, signed by Orozco. Some other art books worth noting as valuable (worth upwards of $100) in the current market would include a fine copy in dust jacket of Hobson's Chinese Art (1927), Paul Klee–Paintings, Watercolors 1913-1939 (contains 2 original serigraphs), a 2-volume set of Siren's Giotto and Some of his Followers (1917), Sparrow's British Sporting Artists (1922) and Dorothy Dunn's American Indian Painting. These books are all sought-after among collectors, and these particular copies are in collector's condition.

There are many fine books which I would put in the $40-60 price range on today's market. In this group I would include Eberlein and Richardson's The English Inn–Past and Present (1926), Lambotte's Flemish Painting Before the 18th Century (1927), Dobie's The Flavor of Texas (1936), two titles inscribed by Dane Rudhyar (White Thunder and Art as Release of Power), Moskowitz and Collier's Patterns and Ceremonials of the Indians of the Southwest (1 of 1475 copies), Barbara Morgan's Martha Graham in dust jacket, Boberman's Tapis (1 of 750 copies), Binyon's Poems of Nizami in dust jacket, Moholy-Nagy's Vision in Motion in a 1st edition in dust jacket, and a limited signed edition of Alice Corbin's Sun Turns West.

Some of the other items of particular interest include a large selection of Museum of Modern Art publications from the 1930's and 1940's, a number of titles from the

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Bollingen series, Southwestern titles by Erna Fergusson and Frank Waters, the 32nd Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, a broken set of the writings of Swedenborg from the 19th century, and many editions of the writings of Madame Blavatsky, Alice Bailey, Rudolph Steiner and some Rosicrucian Fellowship magazines.

Books which are in need of some repair but are still worth a special mention would include Binyon's Drawings and Engravings of William Blake (1922), Hausenstein's Fra Angelico (1923), Sparrow's Prints and Drawings by Frank Brangwyn (1919), Rockwell Kent's Wilderness (1920), and Basil Stewart's Subjects Portrayed in Japanese Color Prints (1922).

There were many other good solid monographs on artists and histories of world art too numerous to mention in good used condition.

A collection like this is a representation of many years of a very full life. To assemble such a collection today would take years and money and interests and taste and a pretty special collector. This is not the collector who must own the valuable first editions in mint condition. Rather it is a reference library of a working artist and teacher who enjoyed using his books. Hence, it does not have the value that it would have if these books were untouched, though as I mentioned, some of the most valuable books are in fine collector's condition. This library would make a solid contribution to a small undergraduate college library's art and humanities collection, and based on auction records, price guides and the experience that I have accumulated in 11 years in the book business, I would appraise the overall value of this donation at $5,500.00.

Sincerely,
Nicholas Potter
Member, A.S.A.A.

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Appendix IV: On the changing of the spelling of Bisttram's name.[4]

EMIL BISTTRAM

The symbols illustrating this name are sound symbols. They were formed by the sound of the human voice. The geometric figures pictured in the name are exact copies of the light patterns produced when the name was spoken.

The creative Law of the Universe works through four mediums: Sound, Colour, Number and Geometric forms. Sound builds all things in the physical world. As geometric figures are created by drawing a violin bow over the edge of a glass plate which contains sand or fine powder, so all forms that we see around are crystalized sound figures. They are the result of the creative forces which play in the invisible word. Man himself is a geometric figure - a pentagram or five point star.

From the beginning of creation throughout all eternity, each soul bears its own eternal identity. Never two souls alike. Each has its own place in the universe. Each has its own wave-length, its creative tone, or sound. Its cosmic pulse beat.

Sound is the identical mark of each individual. It brands every characteristic and function of his physical plane life. His blood stream is coursing with thousands of tiny geometric forms of life. His spoken words produce sound figures or geometric patterns of light.

Forms which are produced by thought vary in color. The creative patterns of the Archetype are always in color. But the sound figures which flow through the blood stream, and the sound figures produced by the human voice are in golden yellow light only. Never in color.

It is due to the basic note of the Ego that the same symbols appear in the Archetype, in the composition of the blood and in the spoken name.

This pattern of your name is an energy pattern, which is built by the sound of your voice. You may think of it as your identification mark, your Crest or your Seal. Your cosmic thumb print.

"He had a name written that no man knew, but he himself." (Ep. 19-12)

NANCY LANSDALE

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[4]This document is in the Bisttram Papers, Harwood Museum.

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Appendix V: Letter from Hastings to Mrs. Luhan.[5]

The Wardell, Detroit, Mich.
28th April, '32.

Dear Mrs. Luhan:

I have just had a long talk with Diego Rivera and mentioned your letter and the questions in it.

In the first place, Diego says that he never got your letter, that he always wanted to go and see the Indian country, but as he would like to stay a whole year to see it all, he has found it difficult to arrange to find the time to do so.

As regards Dynamic Symmetry - he divides painting into two categories - 'mural or architectural,' including all mural paintings, studied portraits and decorations generally; and 'spontaneous and purely emotional', - such are direct pictures, watercolor sketches, drawings, etc., in which spontaneous emotion is realized, as directly as possible on paper or canvas - and for this no mathematics or rules are necessary.

However, the end of painting should be decoration, particularly (if possible) in relation to architecture, and as good architecture should consist of good proportioning, mural painting which above all should be related to and carry out architecture, should also consist of good proportioning and for this dynamic symmetry - as they call it in this country, is absolutely essential.

The mathematical plan, an artistic conception itself, is laid out first, and then the design is drawn on it (tho possibly both plan and design may be conceived together) in the same way a portrait is planned, as otherwise it tends to become banal and ugly.

All the best periods of art have in their architecture used these golden proportions including Greek, Aztec, Egyptian, and it would almost seem they are the basis of the structure of the world we live in.

The Italian Masters from Giotto on used it, also the Dutch and I think the best way to understand its application is in the analysis of the early Italian paintings. Unfortunately, as far as I know, there has been no good book written on the subject. Hambidge never realized that it was used in paintings and while putting in endless root rectangles, did not realize the important figures and relationships.

Naturally everything is based on the relationship of the section d'or, or golden section: 1:1:1.618, and the spiral, and the important or most pleasing forms are the Puerta Harmonia - 1:1.4142, the Pythagorean rectangle, 1:1.272, the Golden rectangle - 1:1.618, the Pythagorean triangle 1.618-1-1.272, the hexagon 1 60, and the famous

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[5]BP, AAA 2892: 172-3. This is labeled "copy," perhaps typed by Mrs. Bisttram from the original.

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chalice of gold.[6]

Reasonably it should follow that if a design is built on harmonious shapes (without being too obvious) the whole design gains in composition. But while D. S. is a good servant, it is a bad and dangerous master.

After all one can go on talking forever on the theories of art, and one cannot really give any exact rules for painting. As Diego says, the means don't matter, as long as you can achieve your end, and the criterion of any work of art, is ultimately that it should be beautiful.

I was terribly sorry that we could not go to Taos before leaving the West, as I have also longed to see the Indian country, but perhaps some day I shall be more fortunate.

Please let me know if there is any other information you would like to know, or if there are any obscurities in the writing of what is at best a complicated subject.

Yours most sincerely,

Hastings.

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[6]Rivera's "Puerta Harmonia" is the equivalent of Hambidge's root-two rectangle.

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Appendix VI: Bibliography from Theodore Bolton's Design and Color.[7]

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[7]Bolton's manuscript is in the Bisttram Papers, Harwood Museum. Bolton's format and comments have been retained, as well as his notes in parentheses.

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Appendix VII: Cycles of Taste[8]

CYCLES OF TASTE

1 - Geometric Period.

Universal	eternal	impersonal	Egypt
Cosmic	permanent	symbolic	Archaic Greek
Static	nonchanging		Primitives
Inactive	infinite		

2 - Classical Period.

Beginning of action	Later Greek
Study of the external	
Study of things as they are	
Beginning of decadence	
Signs of geometry still evident	

3 - Impression.

Greater action	Sargent
Penetration of self	
Complete break with geometry	
More and more personal	
Temporary	
Changing	

4 - Self Expressionistic.

Man's reaction to certain phenomena	Leonardo
Most personal	Michel Angelo
Lowest period in Art - furtherest [sic] away	
From the Universal	

5 - A return to Geometry.
A search for a Universal language.

Pure Design is an end in itself, done for its own sake, has no external use, aesthetic only - universal arrangement of space.

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[8]From Bisttram's Book of Notes. Bisttram's format and spacing have been retained.

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Appendix VIII: Outline of a Course over a Period of Six Weeks at Moriah, N.Y. Summer School.[9]

First week: The education begins with Apollo and the Muses. (Plato)
History of Art, Purpose, the Beginning and End, the
Cycles of Art (from Geometric to Impressionism)
a - Pure Abstract Form and Symmetry: Cubes
Triangles
Cylinders
Oblongs

Second Week Technique of Art, for perfect expression, not individual expression.
The great periods in Greece, Egypt, China, Renaissance.
Water color and Tempera the Spiritual mediums.
b. - Dancing (in time)
Poetry (to ears and eye)
Music (appeal to ears)
Pure design (time in space)
Rhythm in time and space using forms for composition.
First principles in color.

Third week Renaissance Perspective
Two, three and four dimensional art.
Ancients using two dimensions.
Material age - Apollinian, Magian and Faustian.
c - Composition with natural forms.
Symbols
Color Harmony
Pure design becoming a means to an end
Color

Fourth week Modern Art breaking down forms to their elements
in place of using elements to build Ideals from.
Distortion
Proportion
Mass mind
Grand Man
d - Compositions in color
Symbology
Super realism
Complete composition and color.

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[9]From Bisttram's Book of Notes. Bisttram's format, spacing, and punctuation have been retained. Note that only four weeks of the curriculum are included.

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Appendix IX. Sizes Bisttram used for the Root Rectangles.[10]

A square and one-half is 4 x 6, or 8 x 12, or 15 x 24.

A root-two rectangle is 4 x 5-11/16, or 8 x 11-3/8, or 16 x 22-3/4.

A root-two and one-half or two root-twos interlocked is 6 x 5-11/16, or 12 x 11-3/8, or 24 x 22-3/4.

Two root-twos vertical is 8 x 5-11/16, or 16 x 11-3/8, or 32 x 22-3/4.

A whirling square is 4 x 6-1/2.

Two whole whirling squares vertical next to one another is 8 x 6-1/2, or 16 x 13, or 32 x 26.

A whole square and one-half horizontal is 6 x 6-1/2, or 12 x 13, or 24 x 26.

A root-three is 4 x 6-11/16, or 8 x 13-3/8, or 16 x 26-3/4, or 32 x 53-1/2.

A root-three and one-half is 6 x 6-11/16, or 12 x 13-3/8, or 24 x 26-3/4.

A root-four is 4 x 8, or 8 x 16, or 16 x 32.

A root-four and one-half is 6 x 8, or 12 x 16, or 24 x 32.

A root-five is 4 x 9,or 8 x 18, or 16 x 36.

Root-fives vertical next to one another are 8 x 9, or 16 x 18, or 32 x 36.

Three vertical root-fives next to one another are 9 x 12, or 18 x 24, or 36 x 48.

A root-five and one-half vertical is 6 x 9, or 12 x 18, or 24 x 36.

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[10]Bisttram gives these dimensions (in inches) in his manuscript, The Practical Application of Dynamic Symmetry for the Contemporary Creative Artist. This list is an adaptation from his text found at BP, AAA 2893:246. Bisttram also used the root rectangles in combination; some of these are described at BP, AAA 2893:247. Although he provides diagrams of the combinations, he does not supply dimensions for them.

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Appendix X. Seven Days Creation.

1-3 Preparation. 4-6 Initiation. 7 Illumination.

Gen. I:1-5	Fire I Day Greens	1-7 years	Inanimate Innocence Guidance	Dark Waste Inception & Formation	Infancy to Regeneration. Internal of spirit separated from external of man. Temptation Misfortune Sorrow	Physical World World of Form	Region of Passions Low Desire	
Gen. I:6-8	Air II Day Green & Gray	8-14 years	Growth Worship Obedience	Light and Distinction Between Light and Darkness	Repentance Good Works under Compulsion. Charitable works dead because of self	Desire World; World of Color	Region of Impress-ionability	
Gen. 1:9-13	water III day Gray	15-21 years	Motion Desire Responsibility	Waters, division between lower and higher	Experience Suffering	World of Concrete Thought; World of Sound	Region of Wishes	
Gen 1:14-19	earth IV day Slightly Bronze	22-28 years	Mind Inspiration Revelation	Earth formed grasses, sun moon. stars, seasons	Good from spiritual love illuminated by faith	World of Life Spirit	Region of Feeling	
Gen. I: 20-23	water V day Redish	29-35 years	Activity Fear Service	Animals created on land, sea & air; animals, fish, birds	Faith Confirms Self in Good	World of Divine Spirit	Region of Soul Life	
Gen, I: 24-31	air VI day Rose	36-45 years	Imagination Faith Wisdom	Man formed	Faith and Wisdom (Living Soul) Image of Creator	World of Virgin Spirit	Region of Soul Light	
Gen. II:1-3	fire VII day cold yellow& violet	43-49 years	Will Devotion love	Man God Rest. Prep. for New Beginning	Faith, love and wisdom one Man God rest	World of God	Region of Soul Power	

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Appendix XI. Bisttram's correlations for point, line, plane, solid.[11]

POINT	LINE	PLANE	SOLID
EAST	SOUTH	WEST	NORTH
GOD	FATHER	SON	HOLY GHOST
LOVE	WISDOM	SPIRIT	
SPIRIT	SOUL	MIND	BODY
BIRTH	GROWTH	MATURITY	DECAY
AIR	FIRE	WATER	EARTH
CHILDHOOD	YOUTH	MATURITY	AGE
SPRING	SUMMER	AUTUMN	WINTER
SPIRITUAL	INTUITIONAL	MATERIAL	CHAOTIC
GEOMETRIC	CONVENTIONAL	PHOTO-ANALYTIC	
IMAGINATION	DREAM	FANCY	
INTUITIONAL	INTELLECTUAL	EMOTIONAL	PERSONAL
UNIVERSAL	RACIAL	NATIONAL (TRIBAL)	INDIVIDUAL
ARCHAIC	CLASSICAL	IMPRESSIONISTIC	EXPRESSIONISTIC
SPACE	LIGHT	FORM	EMOTION
SEED	STEM	LEAF	FRUIT
MINERAL	VEGETABLE	ANIMAL	HUMAN
WILL	MEMORY (SCIENCE)	DESIRE (MORAL)	COMPLETION
BODY	IMAGINATION	EMOTION (COLOR)	FORMS
	PAST	PHILOSOPHY (ETHICS)	
		ESOTERICS	
CANVAS	OBJECT	LIGHT	ARTIST

[11]This list is from Bisttram's Book of Notes.

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Appendix XII: Articles of Agreement of the Taos Heptagon, August 1936.[12]

1. This organization shall be known as TAOS HEPTAGON.

2. The purpose of this organization shall be:
To promote the sales of the work of its members.
To make possible the presentation of this work in a dignified and favorable manner.
To encourage in every feasible way the production of vital works of art in the region by members or non-members

3. It shall be a function of the organization to support a gallery for the exhibition of members' work.

4. The members agree to pay to the Treasurer each month their own and separate pro-rata share of expense and to share equally in assuming the duties and obligations of the organization.

5. Questions of policy and such matters necessary to the proper functioning of the organization are to be decided by majority vote of all the members and all agree to abide and conform to, the dictates of this majority.

6. As an exception to the above rule, new members of the group will be elected only by the agreement and vote of seven-eighths of the members.[13]

7. New members will be required to pay an initiation fee approximating the equity in the organization of each existing member.

8. All statements, knowingly made for publicity concerning Taos Heptagon by the group or any member, shall be made in writing and shall be released for publication only with the approval of the majority of the organization.

9. The name, HEPTAGON, is to be common property of the organization and each member agrees that he or she will not adopt or use this name in connection with any gallery of art or similar organization, whether or not the original, TAOS HEPTAGON, exists.

10. I any member is delinquent in the payment of dues or assessments or any money owed to the organization, the commission on such members work sold by the organization automatically becomes fifty per cent of the sale price and remains at that

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[12]This document was provided by David Witt, Harwood Museum, Taos.

[13]This item implies that there were eight members, probably Bisttram, Brett, Kissel, Lockwood, Higgins, Dasburg, Wells, and Mozley. These articles were probably rewritten when Wells and Mozley joined in June 1936.

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rate until full payment of debt to the organization is made. Then the commission on the sale of such person's work will conform to the prevailing rate fixed by majority agreement.

11. Any member of the organization may resign at any time, provided, however, that the written resignation be presented at least one month in advance of its effective date and that all dues are fully paid to include that effective date.

We, the undersigned members of the TAOS HEPTAGON agree to abide by and conform to the above Articles of Agreement.

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Appendix XIII. Letter from Dorothy Brett to Mabel Dodge Luhan, 1932.[14]

Mabel dearest:

Alas and alack, why is art so difficult for two people saying almost the same things to make themselves understood. My feeling is simply this... that you show me suddenly a book that SPIRITUALLY belongs to me. Here are men... feeling and working along the same lines as one is oneself, men who have studied deeply the various formulas of art from the Chinese to the Modern Movement [,] studied it deeply... taken the fruit thereof and banding together use it to reveal the beauty and trajedy of their country, to their own countrymen as well as to the world.

In England before the war, the young ardent painters, the most talented also banded themselves together, carrying the modern French movement into England, also to express the beauty and trajedy of life, and also to stand against the horrible genre painting of the time. I was in the movement so I know what I am talking about.

In New York Stieglitz, a man of vision, gathered together a small group, also to portray the beauty and trajedy of life. Thousands of schoolchildren are brought as part of their education to see Georgia'[s] pictures, and stand as the Peons stand in front of Rivera, and they say, in front of a Calla Lilly, "This is my life too, this belongs to me." Trajedy and love all the emotions can be as finely expressed in a flower, as in a weeping woman. It is neither more nor less difficult, it is no harder, merely something we have no control of that decides the vehicle for expression.

As for myself, I feel that here in Taos there is a movement linking us (finally a very few of us) with the group in the Room and Rivera's group. Bisttram's endeavour is a human one too. It is the human side that he has been trying to draw together, for himself he gives freely to one and all, what he knows, what more can he do, for his own work, he is experimenting, seeking, going through varying stages, knowing what he is about. I respond to certain things in his work that are brought about by form and colour. He is only thirty eight, and there is no rule as to when an artist will reach his highest creative powers. One of those men in your book died at nineteen!

In regard to my own painting, I have as you know tried to paint the life behind the life of the Indian, my equipment was not good enough but I struggled along, it means time and observation, it is slow, but now all this winter I have studied along the same lines as Rivera and his group, the English group, in fact the whole Modern Renaissance and out of that I am hoping to paint the life of the Indian in the way I feel it. But the thing is, that your lack of sympathy, your antagonism will inevitably make me hide my painting away from you. There will be none of the fun, the joyousness of cooperation, because the whole artistic emotion is so sensitive [,] so quick to fold up and withdraw from

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[14]This letter is in the Mabel Dodge Luhan Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT.

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antagonism. When you first came back it was different, one felt you with the movement, now I feel you against it, against me and my painting, and that means out of sheer self preservation, that I will hide all the most vital, the most intense part of my life. To stand against the movement begun this winter here, is to stand against the movement in Mexico, against the Indians here.

Bisttram's contact with the Indians, has like most people here, been the usual one of constant begging, [Joseph] Imhof spent nearly $100 a week when he first came here appeasing "Can you lend me a dollar Indian". The children follow strangers around the Pueblo crying "Five cents, five cents" and yet through this Bisttram has felt and recognized the great esoteric life of the Indian, and when he really meets them he will go farther than most people, they will recognize something of themselves in him.

The movement here will grow, because it is a spiritual one, and only those capable of it will remain in it, and because of that it will be an expression of life that streams out of the Pueblo. In spite of the harm the Spanish and the American have done the Indian, they still have their spiritual force. Meet that spiritual force with spiritual force and something will happen, it has happened as far as I am concerned, or else how would I have attained the little reputation that I have managed to grow in this country. There are no battles, I cannot paint a picture or an Indian scalping or an American shooting them to bits. But I can use them as the vehicle to express the life of this country as it streams from the Indians, and paint it so that peons in Mexico could stand in front of it and say "This is my life too". It is to make this great link that the world as we knew it, is crumbling today, not the old, one race against, or above another, but the great meeting place of all nations. England may sink into the sea, in fact it is profesied that she will, but certain numbers of the English people will survive, as some of the races of Mu survived. But all that doesn't matter, my point is, that if you feel the human movement in Mexico, the human movement beginning here, then a great cooperative link will be between us, and cooperation not in idea but in fact. Bisttram never hurries, he lets thing[s] develop in their own time and pace. Yet it is almost impossible for me to believe that you do believe in humanism, because you will not even lend a book to those who are suppose to be your friends. And yet Rivera and his group, paint on each others canvasses, a far more intimate thing. Since the war I will uphold no nation above another, every nation is struggling, to me a fine Indian is as good as a fine white man, or yellow, the colour and country doesn't matter.

I shall not "come around" until I am asked, but if you realise that painting to me is as deep and vital as the Indian life is to you you will see where the meeting place lies.

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Appendix XIV. Bisttram's House on Ledoux Street, Taos.

The House on Ledoux Street

After receiving his Guggenheim Fellowship, and before setting out for Mexico City, Bisttram installed his wife and mother-in-law in a guesthouse on the property of the painter Irving Couse.[15] The guesthouse, shown in a drawing by Fanny Nimtzowitz, was quite spacious and included two stories.[16] When Bisttram returned from Mexico to rejoin his family in the fall of 1931, they remained in the Couse guesthouse, located just north of Quesnel Street,[17] until June 1933 when they moved across town to a house on Ledoux Street that they eventually purchased and in which they remained until their deaths. This house, located next door to the Harwood Museum, was conveniently situated within a five minute walk of Taos Plaza. The Blumenscheins and Eleanora Kissel, artists with whom the Bisttrams became close friends, also lived on Ledoux Street, Blumenschein on the other side of the Harwood, closer to the Plaza. Kissel lived at the head of Ledoux Street at the corner of El Camino de la Placita. Ward Lockwood and his wife lived just in back of the Bisttrams.

The extensive correspondence between the Bisttrams and their landlord during the 1930s reveals that the Bisttrams had a very difficult time financially all throughout the decade, but that in the end they survived and were able to purchase their home. Their landlord, Louis B. Merwin of Bloomington, Illinois, purchased the property from A. A. Cummings in 1929 for his daughter Hester Merwin Handley, who lived in it while she

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[15]David Witt, "Interview with Mayrion Bisttram," 18 Mar. 1983, TM, 1, BP, Harwood Museum.

[16]Gezari, 7.

[17]David Witt, Emil Bisttram, unpaginated.

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was in Taos. Coincidently, Mrs. Handley had studied dynamic symmetry with Giles and Bisttram in New York. Merwin, who owned a laundry service and cemetery in Bloomington, was fairly well off, and did not pressure the Bisttrams when they were behind in their payments. Merwin was sympathetic to the plight of the artist since his daughter was also an artist.

The house, composed of four rooms with thirty vigas,[18] was situated on a 53 x 185 foot lot. The very low rent--$15 per month–was due to its poor condition, which is revealed in a rider to the lease that stipulated the repairs they were to make:

> to re-roof, install electric lights, install sink, drain, plaster outside, replace windows that are broken, put locks on doors, refinish ceilings and walls and keep in repair the property during the two years' term of said lease.[19]

The property also included a garage, which Bisttram used for storing his paintings; he later added a new garage. Merwin had paid $3,000 for the property, but offered it to Bisttram for two-thirds the price at the expiration of the two-year lease. Much of the correspondence between the Bisttrams and their landlord was related to an effort to get a reduction in the property valuation, which had been raised by $800 the previous year, even though property values had decreased due to the depression. Other correspondence deals with the problems that the Bisttrams were having meeting their rent, being a month behind beginning in November 1934, and their efforts to acquire the house.

By the beginning of 1935, it was clear that the Bisttrams would not be able to

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[18]Vigas are ceiling crossbeams set about three feet apart that serve as a general measurement for describing homes typical of the region.

[19]"Rider to Lease," BP, AAA, 2893:962.

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exercise their option to purchase the property and asked for a renewal of their lease.[20] The Bisttrams reported that in addition to building the new garage they also deepened the well six or seven feet, moved the toilet to the end of the lot, wired the house, repaired the roof, completely re-plastered the house in and out, rebuilt the fence, put a new ceiling in the kitchen, and installed a sink and closets.[21] By April, their financial situation forced them to sell their car.[22] A heavy rain in May made the roof collapse and the house uninhabitable for a few days.[23]

In February 1936, again faced with the expiration of the lease, the Bisttrams made an offer on the house that would increase their payment to $30 per month, and take care of the taxes, but with no down payment. The Bisttrams were not in much of a position to make this offer since they enclosed September's rent with the offer, indicating that they were five months behind in their rent.[24] Merwin essentially accepted their offer, provided that it was paid off within three years.[25] By May the Bisttrams were able to make payments that brought them up to date on their rent. After Bisttram was awarded a mural commission for the Justice department, he added a studio on the front of the property; water and sewer services were finally in place, although they were not

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[20]Bisttram to (Merwin), TLS, 14 Jan. 1935, BP, AAA, 2892:237-8.

[21]Bisttram to (Merwin), TLS, 18 Feb. 1935, BP, AAA, 2892:244.

[22]Bisttram to (Merwin), TLS, 9 April 1935, BP, AAA, 2892:248.

[23]Bisttram to (Merwin), TLS, 29 May 1935, BP, AAA, 2892:255.

[24]Bisttram to (Merwin), TLS, 12 Feb. 1936, BP, AAA 2892:355.

[25]Merwin to (Bisttram), ALS, 29 Feb. 1936, BP, AAA 2892:374.

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subscribing to them.[26]

By December 1937, the Bisttrams were behind in their mortgage payments, and by May, 1938, having built another studio for his school, he wrote to Merwin that he was unable to make further mortgage payments.[27] Presumably not having made any more payments that year, Bisttram wrote again to Merwin in February 1939 apologizing for not keeping up his end of the agreement. The excuse was that the previous summer's classes were a dismal failure because he had not had the finances to do the usual advertising, but that the upcoming summer should be promising because of a planned addition of a dance department to the school.[28] He again mentioned that although city water and sewer services were available, they were not connected.[29] By July, the Bisttrams were able to make a substantial payment on their indebtedness to Merwin, but were still not current. Shortly thereafter the Bisttrams were able to call their house their own.

Dramatic Club

The Bisttrams were founding members of the Taos Dramatic Club in October 1934. The Club revived an earlier group that had disbanded in 1931. Officers were Mrs. Mary Ufer, president; Helen Blumenschein, secretary; and Donald Hughes, treasurer. Bisttram

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[26]Bisttram to (Merwin), TLS, 16 July 1936, BP, AAA, 2892:504.

[27]Bisttram to (Merwin), TLS, 17 May 1938, BP, AAA, 2892:766.

[28]Bisttram to (Merwin), TLS, 1 Feb. 1939, BP, AAA, 2892:782.

[29]Bisttram to (Merwin), TLS, 16 June 1939, BP, AAA, 2892:789.

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chaired the first meeting.[30] Mayrion Bisttram played a part in The Neighbors, which was produced in January 1935. The next play, presented in April, Lord Dunsany's A Night at an Inn, featured Bisttram in the part of Sniggers, and Mrs. Bisttram in a silent part as a priestess; Mrs. Bisttram was also in charge of stage design and costumes. Spud Johnson gave the second production a fairly bad review.[31] There were no more productions.

Skiing

The Bisttram were also instrumental in establishing skiing in Taos. Joining with Mary Hamlin (Mrs. Charles D. Brooks), Virgina Nagle, Mary and Jim Valentine, George Boyd, the Fechin family, and a few others, they established a lodge in an old cabin and began to promote skiing. In 1936 they formalized their activities by founding the Taos Winter Sports Club. Then they convinced the Forest Service to develop the site into a public ski area, which they named Agua Piedra, and where in 1939 they organized the first annual Ski Carnival. For the second Ski Carnival, Bisttram made a large snow sculpture of a polar bear and donated a picture as a prize in the women's Slalom event.[32] In October 1940 Mayrion Bisttram began writing a series of articles for the local paper promoting the upcoming third annual Ski Carnival which was held in March 1941 at Agua Piedra.[33]

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[30][Spud Johnson], "Taos Little Theatre Group Organized," Taos Valley News, 25 October, 1934.

[31][Spud Johnson], "The Neighbors' Makes a Hit," Taos Valley News, 24 Jan. 1935. [Spud Johnson], "The Drama Club Plays," Taos Valley News, 4 April 1935.

[32]Taos Review, 29 Feb. 1940.

[33]Mayrion Bisttram, "Taos Winter Sports Club," Taos Review, 17 Oct. 1940. Mayrion Bisttram, "Paste in Your Scrap Book," Taos Review, 24 Oct. 1940. Mayrion Bisttram, "Taos Winter Sports Club," Taos Review, 31 Oct. 1940. This article was continued on 14, 21, 28 Nov. 1940; 5, 12 Dec. 1940 and 16 January 1941. In 1941 the

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Bisttram's interest in sports is also reflected in his service as President of the Taos Game Preserve Association for two terms beginning in 1939.

Taos Review was bought out and its name changed to The Taoseno.

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Appendix XV: Letter from Mrs. Bisttram to Alfred Morang, 1939.[34]

Studio of the Bisttrams, Taos, N. M.

Box #46
1939

Dear Alfred:

Emil and I feel we should express a few words of appreciation for the several splendid articles on the Transcendental Painting Group. The last on Raymond Jonson was particularly good; well expressed and clear in statement.[35] It's a good job you are doing and the Group is indeed fortunate to have so understanding a "wielder of the mighty quill."

It will take considerable "education" to prepare the minds of a large portion of our public who should and who probably want to be art-lovers. Provincial prejudice, particularly relative to so radical a departure as the Group represents, will be the most difficult to overcome. And that is where you have been doing so able a job. More power to you; we sincerely hope that the gods will keep you as a part of the Group for many years to come.

Apropos of a statement in the last article, I personally feel the need to make a correction. It has appeared several times in a number of ways which leads me to believe that there is a misunderstanding in your mind regarding the inception of the Group and its formal founding.

The Transcendental movement as related to the existing Transcendental Painting Group cannot and must not be accredited to Santa Fe. As all the members know it received its original impetus in the Bisttram studio and was composed at that time of the same four members now representing Taos.

Bill Lumpkins, during one of this visits to our community, was invited to join in a discussion concerning the feasibility of a group that would include the artists working along non-objective lines in Santa Fe and Albuquerque. At that time he was asked to present in outline the general idea of the Taos group to a number of the Santa Fe artists that are now it's members.

The first formal foundation meeting of the Group as an organization was held at Taos in the Bisttram studio sometime in the early summer. A record of this is in the

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[34]This letter is in the William Warder Papers.

[35]Morang reviewed Jonson's January 1939 exhibition twice, "Raymond Jonson's 10th Annual Art Exhibit at Museum, " Santa Fe New Mexican, 4 Jan. 1939; "Raymond Jonson's Exhibit Calls Attention to Transcendentalists," Santa Fe New Mexican, 28 Jan. 1939.

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minutes.[36]

Since we are all convinced on the significance of the Group and it's eventual contribution to the development of art in the U.S. I think it very important as a historic record that the above facts receive proper recognition and importance in all publicity touching on the beginning of the group. Especially that which finds it's way into newspapers, always a source of information for casual researchers. All this, of course, in recognition of an injustice to those first members who were originally responsible for the idea and also in recognition of those Forces in all our lives that made Taos the place for this particular manifestation.

Copies of this will be sent to Raymond Jonson for the Transcendental Painting Group files so that any future possible controversy can be avoided by reference to the foregoing statements.[37] So much excellent progress has been made to date it behooves every member of the group to be every aware of anything that might have a tendency to jeopardize the ultimate goal.

We're having a nasty taste of winter to-day, snow and high winds which makes that spot next to the stove that most congenial in the house. Hope this finds your health improving. Emil joins me in all good wishes to you and Mrs. Morang; we may manage a trip to Santa Fe soon at which time we hope to see you both.

Fraternally yours,

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[36]No minutes of any of the meetings have been located.

[37]No copy of this letter was found in the Raymond Jonson Papers.

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Appendix XVI. Letter from Bill Lumpkins to Emil Bisttram.[38]

100 Llano Largo
Santa Fe, New Mexico
April 19, 1938

Mr. Emil Bisttram
Taos School of Art
Taos, New Mexico

Dear Mr. Bisttram:

Just a delayed note in regard to the abstract group. We (Jonson, Wells, Knee and self) had a meeting Saturday night.

Result of meeting: (1) The formation of a local organization or association to act as a part of a regional group. There was no constitution or election of useless officers. We, as a unit, are opposed to that sort of thing.

(2) Plans for a regional meeting of Taos, Albuquerque and Santa Fe were left indefinite. Write what your group thinks in regard to a state "Get-Together".

(3) We formed plans for a beginning exhibit to take place at the State Museum at Santa Fe in June. The purpose of this exhibit is constructive on our part and not for "bally hoo" or educational. We feel it is necessary to see how a group of this sort is going to look as an exhibit. Mr. Wells has offered to call for the Taos group works on or about the 31st of May. Each painter is to send three works of which I imagine two will be hung.

(4) Mr. Morang was discussed as a possibility for handling the editing of publicity and as a critic. Everyone agreed he would be an excellent person for the job. Sunday I contacted Morang and he was very enthusiastic about the whole scheme.

The group are very enthused over the idea and feel that it is the beginning of a great movement that will eventually lead to another "Armory Show".

Sincerely yours,

Bill Lumpkins

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[38]Bill Lumpkins to Emil Bisttram, SLT, 19 April 1938, William Warder Papers.

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