

# Hilma af Klint: The Beyond

## Title

Hilma af Klint: The Beyond

## Venue

The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo

Special Exhibition Gallery (1st floor)

## Date

March 4–June 15, 2025

## Closed

Mondays (except March 31 and May 5), May 7

## Hours

10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. (Fridays and Saturdays open until 8:00 p.m.)

\*Last admission: 30 minutes before closing.

## Organized by

The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, Nikkei Inc., NHK

## Sponsored by

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## MOMAT Website

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The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo

3-1 Kitanomaru Koen, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 102-8322, Japan

<https://www.momat.go.jp>

Access: 3 minutes' walk from 1b exit, Takebashi station, Subway Tozai Line (T-08)

The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, Nikkei Inc., and NHK are pleased to present *Hilma af Klint: The Beyond* from Tuesday, March 4 to Sunday, June 15, 2025. This exhibition will be Asia's first major retrospective of Hilma af Klint (1862-1944), a pioneer in abstract painting.

In recent years, af Klint has been increasingly reappraised as the painter who invented abstract painting in the early 20th century, ahead of contemporaries such as Wassily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian. Born in Sweden in the latter half of the 19th century, af Klint received an orthodox art education at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Stockholm. She began her career as a painter by creating portraits and landscapes that gained her recognition. She became interested in esotericism and spiritualism which, along with her experiences with séances and other spiritualist practices, inspired her to develop abstract forms of expression worlds apart from her academic paintings. From 1906 to 1915, she created *The Paintings for the Temple*, a group of 193 abstract paintings that were intended to adorn an unbuilt temple that she envisioned. Hilma continued to produce works until her death at the age of 81, but almost none were exhibited during her lifetime, remaining solely in her possession.

Initially, af Klint's oeuvre of more than 1,000 works, her notes detailing her thought processes, and other creations that she left behind were known but only to a handful of people. In the 1980s, her art started to be shared with others through exhibitions, but it was not until the 21st century that she truly rose from obscurity and took the world by surprise. In 2013, a traveling retrospective launched at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm provided over one million visitors across Europe with a full introduction to af Klint. Another retrospective, hosted by New York's Guggenheim in 2018, attracted the museum's largest attendance ever, numbering over 600,000. With this, af Klint became firmly implanted in the global spotlight, and in the ensuing years other major exhibitions were held around the world.

Asia's inaugural af Klint retrospective will present some 140 selections, all of which will be shown for their first time in Japan. Among them will be what may be considered the crowning achievement of the artist's career, *The Ten Largest* (1907), a series of ten paintings measuring more than three meters high. The exhibition will center upon her signature *The Paintings for the Temple* and will also feature her sketches and notes. Together, these exhibits will provide a panorama of af Klint's artistry, including the contemporary influences that inspired her—esoteric thinking, the natural sciences, social thought, and women's movements.

## HIGHLIGHTS

### A panorama of af Klint's artistry through 140 works, including *The Paintings for the Temple*

The exhibition will bring together some 140 works that were rarely exhibited during the artist's lifetime, nor for many years after. To provide a panorama of af Klint's artistry, it will also present her notes and sketches that enable visitors to explore her sources of inspiration, including how her works relate to the science, social thought, and women's movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

### Experience boundless creativity through an encounter with the huge centerpiece, *The Ten Largest*

The exhibition's centerpiece will be af Klint's defining masterpiece, *The Ten Largest* (1907). This stunning series of ten paintings measuring over three meters high depicts the four stages of life: childhood, youth, adulthood, and old age. The breathtaking dimensions and effusive pastel colors will immediately whisk the viewer away to a unique experience of wandering across a strange new world.

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Guggenheim's af Klint retrospective drew 600,000, the museum's largest attendance ever  
New York's Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum hosted the major retrospective *Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future* from October 12, 2018, to April 23, 2019. The showing attracted over 600,000 visitors, a record for the museum, and received glowing reviews from many media outlets. Some of their comments are paraphrased below.

For me, the 2018-19 art season will always belong to the Swedish painter Hilma af Klint. ... *The Ten Largest*, a highlight of the exhibition, are made-yesterday fresh even though they were created in 1907. —The New York Times

The headline revelation from the exhibition is that a Swedish woman was making abstract paintings several years ahead of the modern artists usually credited with inventing abstraction. —The Washington Post

Her works have the potential to rewrite art history. —artnet.com

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## EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

### Chapter 1 — From an Education at the Academy to a Career as an Artist

Hilma af Klint was born in Stockholm on October 26, 1862, the fourth child in a wealthy family. Her father, Victor, was a naval officer who provided Hilma with encounters with astronomy, navigation, mathematics, and other disciplines that later shaped her artistic endeavors.

In 1882, she entered Sweden's Royal Academy of Fine Arts, where she received an orthodox art education. Although the academy had admitted women since 1864, female artists were still a rarity at the time of af Klint's enrollment. Her early mastery of artistic techniques can be seen in works such as drawings of the human physique that demonstrated a precise understanding of form, and detailed sketches believed to be from her academy years that look like pages right out of a botanical guide.

After graduating with honors in 1887, Hilma successfully launched a career as a professional painter who mainly dealt in portraits and landscapes. She also created illustrations for children's books and medical manuals, among other works. Her broad range of pursuits also included clerical work as the secretary of the Association of Swedish Women Artists, which was founded in 1910.

### Chapter 2 — Immersion in the Spiritual World

Af Klint was fascinated with spiritualism, the belief that humans comprise both physical matter and a spiritual being, and that the spirit continues acting upon the real world after the body's demise. This interest is believed to have emerged when she was 17, around 1879. Parallel to her studies at the Royal Academy, spiritualism shaped her thinking and expression and was also a factor in her decision making. Stockholm in this era was home to several societies that practiced mysticism, the belief that intuition, visions, meditation, and revelations are vehicles for coming closer to the divine or the mystical. She was particularly influenced by the theosophical teachings of Helena Blavatsky (1831-91). She deepened her knowledge of the spiritual by frequenting the meditations and séances.

In 1896, af Klint formed a group called De Fem (The Five) with four close female friends, including fellow Royal Academy graduate Anna Cassel. This group, which remained active until around 1908, would hold séances where they entered trances and received messages from spiritual beings that they recorded through automatic writing or automatic drawing. Many of those drawings still exist and span a wide spectrum of images, ranging from simple forms such

as wavy lines running together to concrete motifs such as plants, cells, and celestial objects. Through these experiences, af Klint began developing a new visual language that departed from the naturalistic style of her academic training.

### Chapter 3 — *The Paintings for the Temple*

During one of De Fem's séances in 1904, af Klint was instructed by a spiritual being to create paintings about theosophical teachings that could help humans evolve by liberating them from the material world and enhancing their spiritual abilities. This revelation inspired her to begin creating *The Paintings for the Temple*, a body of works that eventually totaled 193.

These paintings were produced over the roughly ten years from 1906 to 1915, albeit with a four-year break. They represent the essence of af Klint's artistic career in terms of size, quality, systematics, and all other aspects of creation. This body is divided into several series and groups, including *Primordial Chaos*, *Eros*, *The Ten Largest*, *The Evolution*, and *The Swan*. Although these works are truly diverse in their use of many different elements—including geometric figures such as circles and rectangles, ornamental botanical motifs like flower petals and vines, and forms reminiscent of cells or celestial objects—they all share the same desire to perceive and explore an invisible reality.

#### *Primordial Chaos*

This is the first group to be created for *The Paintings for the Temple*. It comprises 26 works that express the theosophical understanding of the world's genesis by recreating the oneness that came with the primordial unification of dichotomous forces such as good and evil, and masculinity and femininity.

#### *The Ten Largest*

In 1907, af Klint received a revelation calling on her to make ten paintings with a paradisiacal beauty that depicted the four stages of human life—childhood, youth, adulthood, and old age. In the short span of two months, she produced ten massive paintings with the tempera method, a traditional Western painting technique that uses a fast-drying paint mixture in which egg yolk serves as a binder. The technique, size, and certain other aspects of these paintings are reminiscent of the Italian Renaissance altarpieces that Hilma had admired earlier in her life.

In af Klint's time, the importance of invisible reality was not confined to just the spiritual world. Many of the epoch-making scientific advances of the late 19th and early 20th centuries pertained

to phenomena undetectable to the unaided eye, such as the electricity-related insights gained by Thomas Edison (1847-1931) and Nikola Tesla (1856-1943), the discovery of X-rays by Wilhelm Roentgen (1845-1923), and the research on radioactivity by Pierre (1859-1906) and Marie (1867-1934) Curie. Part of the appeal of spiritualism and other mystical movements of that era was the perception that they shared with science the quest to uncover the unseen world.

These spiritual and scientific explorations had an enormous impact on early 20th century art movements, especially abstract and symbolic expression. The works of *The Paintings for the Temple*, with their embodiment of interest in both the spiritual and the scientific, are why af Klint is today considered one of the most important figures in modern art.

### *The Swan*

The 24 paintings in this series follow a process of transforming figurative swans into abstract, geometrical shapes and finally restoring them to the figurative. They present on different levels the artist's fascination with the conflict and resolution of dichotomies such as figurative/abstract, light/darkness, life/death, and male/female.

## Chapter 4 — After *The Paintings for the Temple*: A Journey to Anthroposophy

Following the completion of *The Paintings for the Temple* in 1915, af Klint's artistry began evolving in several new directions. Works such as *The Atom Series* (1917) and the *A Work on Cereals* (1920) retain the same dual fascination with the natural sciences and the spiritual world, and continue the quest to perceive the invisible, but in terms of expression they show a more geometrical and schematic approach.

After the death in 1920 of Hilma's mother, whom she had been caring for, the artist turned more toward anthroposophy, an offshoot of theosophy that had interested her for some time. From that year to 1930, she frequently made long stays in the center of anthroposophy, Dornach, Switzerland. With her thinking and artistic ideals profoundly influenced by anthroposophy founder Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), af Klint shifted her style of expression away from geometrical and schematic works and moved toward paintings that focused on color itself and made use of the randomness resulting from watercolor blooms.

## Chapter 5 — Toward Perfect Systematization

The watercolor-focused creative activities that af Klint began in the 1920s continued on into her

late years, with the artist returning to specific motifs drawn from anthroposophy, religion, and myths. Among her works of this era was *A Map: Great Britain* (1932) that perhaps could be seen as a portent of World War II, an aerial view of a figure blowing an ominous wind toward the UK from the southeast (Germany).

As she continued with her artistic endeavors, af Klint also began editing and revising her past notes on her thinking and expression in the latter half of the 1920s. Her new undertaking as an editor and archivist may have been more important to her than her creative pursuits in the latter half of her life. Of particular note is her concept for a “temple” to house the works of *The Paintings for the Temple*. In the 1930s, more than 15 years after that group of paintings was completed, she described on paper her ideal for a spiral-shaped building, and repeatedly contemplated the details of how she would arrange the various paintings within that temple. Ultimately, this vision never came to fruition, but her unending process of compiling and refining her thoughts bears witness to how she sought to rigorously systematize not only her production of paintings but also her career as a whole.

In 1944, af Klint died at the age of 81, leaving behind to her nephew a collection of well over 1,000 works, notebooks, and other reminders of her life.

Images for the use of the Press

## Hilma af Klint: The Beyond

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For further information, PR Office for *Hilma af Klint: The Beyond* can be contacted by email ([hak2025@ypcpr.com](mailto:hak2025@ypcpr.com)).

Hilma af Klint

*The Ten Largest, Group IV, No. 2, Childhood, 1907*

Tempera on paper, mounted on canvas

315 x 234 cm

By courtesy of The Hilma af Klint Foundation



Hilma af Klint

*The Ten Largest, Group IV, No. 3, Youth, 1907*

Tempera on paper, mounted on canvas

321 x 240 cm

By courtesy of The Hilma af Klint Foundation



Hilma af Klint

*The Ten Largest, Group IV, No. 7, Adulthood, 1907*

Tempera on paper, mounted on canvas

315 x 235 cm

By courtesy of The Hilma af Klint Foundation





Hilma af Klint

*The Ten Largest, Group IV, No. 9, Old Age, 1907*

Tempera on paper, mounted on canvas

320 x 238 cm

By courtesy of The Hilma af Klint Foundation



Hilma af Klint

*Poppye, undated*

watercolor and ink on paper

58 x 35.5 cm

By courtesy of The Hilma af Klint Foundation



Hilma af Klint

*The Eros Series, The WU/Rose Series, Group II, No. 5, 1907*

Oil on canvas

58 x 79 cm

By courtesy of The Hilma af Klint Foundation,



Hilma af Klint

*Tree of Knowledge, The W Series, No. 1, 1913*

Watercolor, gouache, graphite and ink on paper

45.7 x 29.5 cm

By courtesy of The Hilma af Klint Foundation



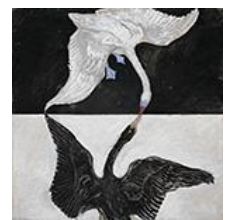
Hilma af Klint

*The Swan, The SUW Series, Group IX: Part I, No. 1, 1914-15*

Oil on canvas

150 x 150 cm

By courtesy of The Hilma af Klint Foundation



Hilma af Klint

*The Swan, The SUW Series, Group IX: Part I, No. 13, 1915*

Oil on canvas

148.5 x 151 cm

By courtesy of The Hilma af Klint Foundation



Hilma af Klint

*The Swan, The SUW Series, Group IX: Part I, No. 17, 1915*

Oil on canvas

150.5 x 151 cm

By courtesy of The Hilma af Klint Foundation



Hilma af Klint

*Altarpieces, Group X, No. 1, 1915*

Oil and metal leaf on canvas

237.5 x 179.5 cm

By courtesy of The Hilma af Klint Foundation



Hilma af Klint

*Untitled, 1934*

Watercolor on paper

50 x 35 cm

By courtesy of The Hilma af Klint Foundation



Hilma af Klint in her studio, Hamngatan, Stockholm, ca. 1902

By courtesy of The Hilma af Klint Foundation



Installation View; Hilma af Klint,

*The Ten Largest, Group IV, No. 3, Youth, 1907*



PR Office for *Hilma af Klint: The Beyond* (YOUTH PLANNING CENTER Inc.)

\*Weekdays 10:00–17:00 / Closed on Saturdays, Sundays and National Holidays of Japan