CARRIE SECRIST GALLERY

ONLY CONNECT
November 21 - February 13, 2021
Carrie Secrist Gallery
Chicago, Illinois

The initial curatorial seed for this survey exhibition was planted in the fall of 2018 when I spent a most memorable day in New York visiting several of our gallery artists studios and their simultaneous museum exhibitions. The climatic viewing experience was a visit to the Guggenheim Museum to take in the much talked about US debut of a relatively unknown Swedish artist, Hilma Af Klint. Discovering what would become known as the most viewed exhibition in the Guggenheim's history, my artists and I joined the rest of the spiraling lines of visitors in a transformative sense of awe that the 193 paintings commanded. The inspiration for creating these "Paintings for the Future" came at the request of a spiritual being that had made connection with the artist during a seance. This commission that the "High Master" had described progressive visual images that combined equal parts spirituality and science, the mystical compositions to offer new meaning about the universe to humanity.

Passing away in 1944 with an infinitesimal amount of notoriety in comparison to her fellow abstract painters Kandinsky and Mondrian (who passed the same year), Af Klint had created the majority of this epic body of work with the intention that it be held back from public view, only to be released long after her death. She left very specific instructions and diagrams for the curation of the exhibition... envisioning a "spiral like temple" where her paintings and her viewers could ascend toward the heavens together. Offering the most optimal spiraling architecture without any knowledge of the artist's private journals, The Guggenheim Museum first opened its doors October 21, 1959 (exactly 15 years to the day after Af Klint's death) and presented the exhibition as dictated by her curatorial wishes... 100 years after she created it.

In addition to these paintings skyrocketing to the top of "My Dream Collection Wish List", I was deeply taken with the artist's motive and method of creating. Af Klint's metaphysical method was commonly practiced in connection with four other like minded artists at the turn of the 20th Century. "The Five" as they referred to themselves as, might have been seen as a coven of witches if their spiritual / scientific practices had received more attention. And in regards to the motivation to create, the artist's intention of keeping all the advanced inventions far away from the eyes of others (even from the male abstract artists that were receiving much accolades and riches at the time) would speak to her lack of interest in taking the place she now rightfully holds in art history. The importance of illustrating this message for a future audience that could have the ability to understand it struck me as the most pure, primal and purposeful intention for creation that I can think of.

Hilma Af Klint was a ground-breaking, forward thinking and in some mystical manner, all-knowing abstract artist whose discoveries preceded most others at the time. The fact that she is a woman seems almost secondary, save for the fact that she was excluded from art history for so long for that very reason: her gender. I have long wrestled with the ethics of presenting artists solely for their identity: be it gender, race, sexuality. I have seen the art world exploit each of these groups as they have become en vogue over the years and it always leaves a bad taste in my mouth. I have landed, over time, on seeking out the very best, truly exemplary works to represent a curatorial idea, while also bearing in mind that to exclude those very groups that have so long been overlooked, is to exclude a portion of that exemplary work I seek. So, at this centennial moment, in the era of Hilma, RBG, and Kamala, Only Connect has become a culmination of this idea. The works presented are truly exemplary and demonstrate most fully how artists connect. The fact that the artists are all women is both central, and irrelevant to the conversation.

- Carrie Secrist, November, 2020