

## Kandinsky in Govan: Art, Spirituality, and the Future

### Kandinsky and the Spiritual Task of the Artist Today

[Rick Visser's](#) Keynote [Conference](#) Address

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*Rick Visser has kindly allowed it to be posted in the form of this PDF to the conference website but he retains copyright. Any further significant reproduction beyond teaching, scholarly or personal use should first be cleared with him. Rick followed on from presentations by the Chief Medical Officer for Scotland and Edinburgh University's Professor Christina Lodder and was followed by Tom Block, the Rev Dr Georgii Zervershinsky, Mark O'Neill and Helen Kyle. He brought the first half of the day to a close in a way that many found profoundly moving - both from the intellectual content and his depth of presence.*

*Ouvri bayi pou' moi  
Ouvri bayi pou' moi*

I  
Must be given words to shape my name  
To the syllables of trees

I  
must be given words to refashion futures  
like a healer's hand

I  
must be given words so that the bees  
In my blood's buzzing brain of memory

will make flowers, will make flocks of birds,  
will make sky, will make heaven,  
the heaven open to the thunder-stone and the volcano and the unfolding land.

*Att  
Att  
Attibon*

*Attibon Legba  
Attibon Legba  
Ouvri bayi pou' moi  
Ouvri bayi pou' moi . . . <sup>1</sup>*

Good morning everyone! What I just read was an excerpt from Caribbean poet Kamau Braithwaite's beautiful poem, *Negus*. It is a kind of incantation that the gate of communication may be opened between us.

According to Kandinsky, the driving force of the creative process must be what he calls *inner necessity*. Kandinsky says, "All means [in painting] are sacred when they are dictated by inner necessity. All means are reprehensible when they do not spring from the fountain of inner necessity. . . . The artist must be blind to 'recognized' and 'unrecognized' form, deaf to the teachings and desires of his time. His open eyes must be directed to his inner life and his ears must be constantly attuned to the voice of inner necessity."<sup>2</sup>

One of Kandinsky's major contributions was to make it clear that theory must always follow practice, a view that seems completely reversed in today's art world. The starting point, reference point and ground of our work, should not be theory but inner necessity, the groundless resonance of the soul. Works deriving from ideas are not works of art in the way Kandinsky understood art. What he was after was something that operates at a deeper more direct level. "Any theoretical scheme, says Kandinsky, will be lacking in the essential of creation—inner need for expression—which cannot be determined. Neither the quality of the inner need, nor its subjective form, can be measured or weighed."<sup>3</sup> Though artists working from inner necessity may be inspired by spiritual, religious, and philosophical ideas, in their actual work they must cast all these away. The right hand must not know what the left hand is doing.

Kandinsky says that pure painting will affect the soul by its own original means of expression, by means of paint, color, form, the distribution of lines and planes, and their interrelations, in and of themselves."<sup>4</sup> For Kandinsky, this was not a rejection of the material world, as is often thought, but its spiritual, sacred fulfillment, expressing the inner depth of the material plane in terms of its direct resonance with the soul and expressing that sacred resonance in paint, in color, in line, in form.

I will come back to this in my discussion of fundamental imagination but first I want to speak to the issue of what spirituality actually is, or perhaps what it is not, because many artists (and many others) shut the window and pull down the shade when the word *spirituality* is mentioned.

The American poet Mary Oliver has a perfectly beautiful prose poem that reflects this. The poem is called, *The Word*, and it begins like this: "How wonderful! I speak of the soul and seven people rise from their chairs and leave the room, seven others lean forward to listen. I speak of the body, the spirit, the mockingbird, and the hollyhock, leaves opening in the rain, music, faith, angels seen at dusk--and seven more people leave the room and are seen running down the road. Seven more stay where they are but make murmurous disruptive sounds. Another seven hang their heads, feigning disinterest though their hearts are open, their hope is high that they will hear the word even again."<sup>5</sup>

Art critic and historian Donald Kuspit points out that it's not clear what Kandinsky meant by spiritual experience, "that he never exactly defines it, beyond associating it with religion, and declaring it to be at the center of inner life."<sup>6</sup> As he notes, too, part of the difficulty lies in the word *spiritual* itself. Over time, it has become a bit woolly and now carries an immense amount of baggage, often leading to confusion, apprehension, and misunderstanding. Many who would like to use the term are frightened off by the wide and sometimes bizarre range of claims and experiences associated with it. But Simone Weil—philosopher, radical visionary, and religious mystic—reminds us that "the word *spirituality* doesn't imply any particular religious affiliation, or any affiliation at all," and she reminds us that "it must not be attached to any cause or movement, nor even to a regime, nor to a nation."<sup>7</sup>

In his important book on art and spirituality, *True Perception*,<sup>8</sup> Tibetan meditation master, scholar, and artist, Chögyam Trungpa, makes a similar point. He says, "Some people look at a painting and think it looks sacred and holy because it invites the sanity of a particular religious tradition. They immediately label it as deriving from Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism. But in fact, they regard the artist as having been indoctrinated into a certain faith and therefore able to produce a work of art in accordance with his commitment."

He goes on to say that this "way of labeling works of art *sacred* is sacrilegious. It narrows it too much, cutting out the whole aspect of human dignity. . . . We are trying to go beyond that narrow sense of sacredness. A work of art is created because there is basic sacredness, independent of the artist's particular religious faith or trust."<sup>9</sup> This basic sacredness precedes the secular/religious split. It is the groundless ground of both.

Though we may never know for certain what Kandinsky meant by spiritual experience, Keiji Nishitani's concept of *fundamental imagination* speaks powerfully to the level and character of experience we have come to associate with Kandinsky. Nishitani lived from 1900 to 1990 and was widely regarded as the most authoritative representative of the Kyoto School of Philosophy,<sup>10</sup> and is best known for his important book, *Religion and Nothingness*.<sup>11</sup>

Kyoto University professor, Keta Masako, notes that in Nishitani's view, art is an undertaking "for expressing an event at the root point where fact is given and comes into existence,"<sup>12</sup> which means that such art possesses "a fundamental tendency to get in touch with the original nature of 'phenomena.'"<sup>13</sup>

One commentator, Hase Shōtō, describes this as "a knowledge that has been opened up from within,"<sup>14</sup> one that involves the production of primal images from the ground where both self and world are opened up in immediacy, the locus of the profound mobility of imagination.<sup>15</sup>

Fundamental imagination arises either out of lengthy preparation in openness, patience, and quiet contemplation, or suddenly, "out of the blue," often experienced with undeniable and compelling force. Fundamental imagination is experienced as a gift and is received as a gift. It has the quality of grace and cannot be seized. Fundamental

imagination is the expressive vitality of a quiet, open, receptive, empty, mind. Inner necessity, said Kandinsky, “calls forth a longing, an inner compulsion.”<sup>16</sup>

In all of this, the artist’s only standpoint can be that of immediacy, what Nishitani refers to as “the locus of absolute emptiness.” According to Nishitani, “true emptiness is nothing less than what reaches awareness in all of us as our own absolute self-nature. . . . It is an absolute openness.”<sup>17</sup>

Though it has been almost universally disregarded, it is important to note that Kandinsky said that an artist must not only train his eye but also his or her soul. This is not a small point, and I will argue here that it is extremely important, particularly in today’s world, where the soul of art, and the soul of the artist, are both highly contested. Donald Kuspit’s view is that “Kandinsky’s improvisations are in effect spiritual exercises . . . in the sense in which Loyola used the term, that is, artistic exercises meant to generate a sense of personal freedom and transcendence.”<sup>18</sup>

This is very suggestive and is in line with the thought of another Tibetan meditation master and artist, Kongtrul Jigme Namgyal who also sees art as a spiritual practice. He says that working with the natural state of mind, transcending grasping and rejection, entrenched and ingrained habits, and insecurities of all kinds, takes tremendous bravery and tremendous confidence in one’s own inherent sanity—a sense of freedom, non-conceptual awareness, and fearlessness beyond judgments—qualities that lend themselves not only to personal freedom and transcendence but also to greater sanity in this very troubled world.

When done in this spirit, he says, paintings become blessings of what one has moved through: ego, fear, uncertainty, and insecurity. The spiritual process is (1) the moving through ego contrivances of all sorts, (2) trusting in creative mind, and (3) offering this to the world.<sup>19</sup> And offering something to the world has a somewhat different tone than “getting a one-man show.”

Antoine Saint Exupery, author of *The Little Prince*, said that one sees clearly only with the heart and that what is essential is invisible to the eye. And if he is right, if that is true, then there is reason to consider abstraction as a powerful tool for exploring what is seen with the heart and not with the eye.

Clearly, there are many ways of approaching art and spirituality. But among all the various approaches, abstract expressionism as Kandinsky understood it, with its essential formlessness and freedom, may hold within it a most powerful way of attending these concerns. Could Abstract Expressionism be both a powerful art form that speaks to the needs of our time as an art form, and at the same time, act as a powerful spiritual discipline capable of awakening all who practice it and all those who view it with a fresh mind and open soul?

Perhaps abstract expressionism has not yet fulfilled its destiny. Perhaps today it can offer even more than it did at its cultural peak because it can now find its true role unencumbered by avant-garde pretensions, market pressures, and exaggerated and

unhealthy demands for constant innovation. Rather than the near frenetic search for the new that drives so much contemporary art, perhaps the artist's focus should be on opening the soul—the new may take care of itself.

Abstract art can be a laboratory for the refinement and growth of the soul. It can be a spring to contemplation, a mode of apprehending and engaging reality at its deepest levels, and a portal to novel aesthetic experience opening up deep layers of feeling and meaning, often unnamable. In essence, its content is indeterminate, non-describable, and inexhaustible—just as we are.

To say that Abstract Expressionism has exhausted itself is wrong, at least in the way Kandinsky meant it. What has exhausted itself is the spiritual capacity of its would-be practitioners who became unmoored from its spiritual inspiration and from its central law: inner necessity. Its formlessness and freedom must always be subservient to inner necessity. In this sense, its freedom is not the freedom of the ego, the small self, to splash around and express itself in a kind of colorful, slap-dash, loosely organized, soap opera of surface urges and emotions. It is not self-expression at all. It is much more serious than that. It is a powerful vehicle for touching, engaging, and giving expression to the awakened state of mind, the fountainhead of inner necessity.

Whenever an artist works from this level of experience—groundless, indeterminate, and inexhaustible—the question of what is real may get severely rattled, partly because of the nature of the work (that it is without reference point), partly because of its relation to the larger world, and partly because the small self is wondering what is going on and where it stands in a process that seems to be unseating it. In Kandinsky's introduction to *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, he speaks about the perception of reality in the age in which he found himself. "Our minds," he says, "which are even now only just awakening after years of materialism, are infected with the despair of unbelief, of lack of purpose and ideal. The nightmare of materialism, which has turned the life of the universe into an evil, useless game, is not yet past; it holds the awakening soul still in its grip. Only a feeble light glimmers like a tiny star in a vast gulf of darkness. This feeble light is but a presentiment, and the soul, when it sees it, trembles in doubt whether the light is not a dream, and the gulf of darkness reality."<sup>20</sup>

As artists, we must, in the midst of doubt and ambiguity, sense this tiny star as the reality it is, and then give expression to it in significant form. While the dominant tendency, both in ourselves and in those around us, will be to ignore it, to treat it as an illusion, or to pass it by as one might pass by a bird in a tree, oblivious to its song. And when we persist in this practice, we discover that the tiny star is actually an exceptionally bright light, and we will move toward it without fear or hesitation, seeing it as Nishitani says, as "the opening of the horizon of eternity in the home-ground of the present."<sup>21</sup>

Not surprisingly, such work will place demands on its audience, too, for not everyone will be immediately capable of entering into its spiritual atmosphere. Kandinsky said that there are many people who are incapable of seeing the spirit even when incorporated in a spiritual form."<sup>22</sup> Such seeing may require a special kind of attention. Simone Weil characterized this kind of attention as the suspension of thought, "leaving it detached,

empty, and ready to be penetrated by the object."<sup>23</sup> She said that this kind of attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity. And generosity is the virtue that produces peace.

German theologian, philosopher, and mystic, Meister Eckhart (c. 1260 – c. 1327), said that to understand his sermons the listener must “be a beginner with beginners.”<sup>24</sup> In a similar way, Zen master, Shunryu Suzuki, spoke of “beginner’s mind.”<sup>25</sup> By this he meant the mind that is innocent of preconceptions, expectations, judgments, and prejudices. From this perspective, the sensitive audience may discover, not merely a picture to look at, but, as theologian Paul Tillich puts it: “the joy of participating in a level of reality which we otherwise can never reach.”<sup>26</sup>

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Despite the courageous and pioneering work of Kandinsky, the connection between abstract art and spirituality was a difficult and tenuous one. Franz Marc acknowledged that it was “terribly difficult to present one’s contemporaries with spiritual gifts.”<sup>27</sup> Regrettably, this difficulty has not diminished over the years. In fact, Marc’s comment seems more germane today than it did in 1912. For art and spirituality have all but parted ways in the international contemporary art scene.

Russian film director Andrey Tarkovsky said that “Modern art has taken a wrong turn in abandoning the search for the meaning of existence in order to affirm the value of the individual for its own sake. What purports to be art begins to look like an eccentric occupation for suspect characters who maintain that any personalized action is of intrinsic value simply as a display of self-will. But in artistic creation the personality does not assert itself, it serves another, higher and communal idea. The artist is always a servant, and is perpetually trying to pay for the gift that has been given to him as if by a miracle.”<sup>28</sup>

How many artists think of themselves as servants? American artist Agnes Martin says “the only enemy is pride, the pride that says ‘we are the creators.’ “Pride,” she says, “leaves nothing in its path. It is death in life. . . .Where pride walks, nothing in life remains.”<sup>29</sup> Pull down thy vanity, I say pull down—Ezra Pound, Canto 81—Pull down thy vanity, it is not man/ Made courage, or made order, or made grace,/ Pull down thy vanity, I say pull down.<sup>30</sup>

Kuspit remarks that “the artist today seems to have less of Kandinsky’s inner necessity, less of an impulse for spiritual expression.”<sup>31</sup> We must ask ourselves why this might be so? I do not claim to have a definitive answer to this question. Perhaps in the past, more artists were grasped by what Paul Tillich referred to as *ultimate concern*. Tillich thought of ultimate concern as taking something with unconditional seriousness. It is something within us that impels us to go beyond the diminished sense of reality we feel around us and within us, that calls us to an encounter with the fullness of reality.

According to Tillich, ultimate concern cannot be produced, we “cannot say, ‘I will make this or that a matter of my ultimate concern.’ It has already grasped us when we begin to

reflect on it.” To say a person is grasped by ultimate concern “means that, as his life has developed, this seriousness was not produced by active, reflective, voluntary processes, but came to him, perhaps very early, and never left him.”<sup>32</sup> We do not produce ultimate concern. We find it in ourselves.

Undoubtedly, Kandinsky would find the contemporary art scene enormously troubling, since, if he dropped by for a visit today, he would witness an even greater intensification of materialism, a near worshipful attendance on ideology and theory, and an all but violent drowning of the immeasurable in the ocean of technological control and quantification. He would be astonished by the exponential increase in these anti-spiritual intensities as they now manifest in art and in our everyday lives. It takes little effort to see that, on the scale of international contemporary art, *ultimate concern* is not of great concern.

One of the reasons things go wrong, says Trungpa, “is that artists are very poor; and although they might have a lot of talent, intelligence, and vision, they have to struggle to make money. So day by day, hour by hour, their vision goes downhill. In order to make money, they have to relate with perverted, neurotic people who demand that they go along with their particular vision, if you can call it vision at all. So those who commission or underwrite the art and the artist [together] drag each other downhill. It all ends up in a neurotic psychological gutter. In the process you might become a glorious and famous artist, but your work of art is permeated with neurosis and cosmic garbage. In turn, the artistic standard of living of the world begins to go downhill, and we find ourselves living in a very degraded world.”<sup>33</sup>

He goes on to say that “cultivating other people’s sanity is obviously more difficult. Nonetheless, you cannot jump the gun and latch on to the easy way out for the sake of making lots of money or becoming a big name. There has to be the basic integrity of maintaining our human society in a state of sanity. That is and should be the only way to work with art. . . . This means that your production, manifestation, demonstration, and performance should be geared toward waking people up from their neurosis.”<sup>34</sup>

“We may become a target of criticism by presenting positive art,” says Trungpa, “but that might be the best approach. It is the same thing in our daily life: not negating everything that happens in our lives, negation being a lifestyle, but getting into and presenting certain positive steps, like an appreciation of beauty. So art in the transcendental sense becomes the real practice of awareness.”<sup>35</sup> We must address the basic questions of how to uplift ourselves and create sanity in the world.

The most important works of art are those that help us focus what it means to be a human being, helping us see who we are, how we are related, and what is the good. All such works carry within them basic sacredness. According to Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrance Kelly in their recent book, *All Things Shining*, such works orient us to the good, helping us to see where we stand and what we must do. As in Ancient Greece, “such works hold up to a culture what counts as life worth aspiring to.”<sup>36</sup> Such works ask us to reconfigure our lives in accordance with their call.

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One might ask how artists committed to inner necessity, grasped by ultimate concern, and actively engaged with fundamental imagination, would differ from those who take a less spiritual path.

First, such artists would comprehend their artistic practice as a vocation rather than a career. Though it may also be a career, great or small, its existential and spiritual status as a vocation would be paramount. Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset described vocation as “that grave and transcendental calling no one can fail to hear for himself, no matter how hard he may try to turn a deaf ear to it, since it arises from his heart of hearts.”<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, such artists might pursue a less conventional apprenticeship, one that would highlight soul training. In a recent documentary film interview, a “successful artist,” in his great wisdom, advised young artists to spend at least ten years creating a body of compelling work before moving to New York City, and then, after making the big move, to aggressively market themselves for an additional ten years. Rather than this, perhaps artists should spend twenty years exploring what it means to be a human being, in an open, honest, and fearless way, continually asking: Who am I?, How am I related?, and What is the good?—all the while creating works that give expression to this path of insight—‘offerings’ of what he or she has gone through. Kandinsky said the artist “must search deeply within his own soul, develop and tend it, so that his art has something to clothe, and does not remain a glove without a hand.”<sup>38</sup>

An artist committed to such a venture would also understand that his or her path may be one of indirection and uncertainty, sometimes feeling lost, crushed, or shipwrecked. Ortega y Gasset says that such an artist would understand that “to live is to feel oneself lost. He who does not really feel himself lost is without remission; that is to say, he never finds himself, never comes up against his own reality. . . . Life is, in itself and forever, shipwreck.”<sup>39</sup> He will understand that his work cannot be accomplished if he believes himself safe, that some discontinuity must intervene, in order that he may “renew his feeling of peril, the substance of his life. . . . All his life-saving equipment must fail, he must find nothing to cling to.” He will understand that “consciousness of shipwreck, being the truth of life, constitutes salvation. . . .”<sup>40</sup>

“Suffering is a problem for us” says Dzogchen Ponlop, another Tibetan meditation master and artist centered in Seattle, USA, “Suffering is a problem for us only when we can’t see any possibility of freeing ourselves from it. When we are willing to work with our pain, it becomes a productive experience. Suffering . . . acts like a catalyst; it boosts our resolve to work with our mind. . . . When we’re comfortable, our resolution doesn’t feel so urgent.”<sup>41</sup>

Again, Ortega says: “Life is our reaction to the basic insecurity which constitutes its substance. Hence it is an extremely serious matter for a man to find himself too much surrounded by apparent securities. A consciousness of security kills life.”<sup>42</sup>



American artist Agnes Martin brings this right down onto the floor of artist's studio when she says:

*“Defeated, you will rise to your feet as is said of Dry Bones.  
These bones will rise again.  
Undefeated you will have nothing to say but more of the same.  
Defeated you will stand at the door of your house to welcome the unknown,  
putting behind you all that is known.  
Defeated, having no place to go, you will perhaps wait and be overtaken.  
As in the night. To penetrate the night is one thing. But to be penetrated by the  
night that is to be overtaken.  
Defeated, exhausted and helpless you will perhaps go a little bit further.”*<sup>43</sup>

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Looking out at the world, many of us feel a deep sense of compassion and concern for human suffering, animal suffering, and planetary degradation . . . and feel compelled to directly address such concerns in our artistic endeavors. “We must know,” says Albert Camus, “that we can never escape the common misery and that our only justification, if indeed there is a justification, is to speak up, insofar as we can, for those who cannot do so. . . . Let us rejoice as artists, torn from our sleep and our deafness, forced to keep our eyes on destitution, prisons, and bloodshed.”<sup>44</sup> But even in this arena the basic ground remains the same, everything must derive from immediacy, inner necessity, and ultimate concern.

It is important to note that immense care must be taken that we not allow our artistic work to devolve into mere journalism, propaganda, or moral instruction. Though some may think that artistic commitment and social engagement is everything, it is not, and never can be. Russian literary critic Vissarion Belinsky (1811 – 1848) said that: “In the sphere of art . . . no commitment is worth anything at all unless there is talent. . . . No matter how beautiful the ideas in a poem or how powerfully it echoes the problems of the hour, if it lacks poetry, there can be no beautiful thought in it, and no problems either, and all that one may say about it is that it is a fine intention badly executed. . . .”<sup>45</sup>

Tarkovsky said “the allotted function of art is not, as is often assumed, to put across ideas, to propagate thoughts, to serve as an example. The aim of art is to prepare a person for death, to plough and harrow his soul, rendering it capable of turning to good.”

All such work must adhere to three basic criteria: First, it must be thoroughly based in non-aggression: non-aggression in the beginning, in the middle, and in the end. This is the very essence of spirituality and the highest perception of life . . . and it is the sacred seal of compassion. The power of non-aggression in the social and political spheres should not be underestimated. All aggression is anti-art.

Second, such work must be the expression of lived experience rather than political or social platitudes, programs, and platforms: it must be, says Belinsky, “not only in the

head, but above all in the heart, in the blood . . . it must above all be a feeling, an instinct, and only then perhaps a conscious idea – this commitment itself must be born, just as art itself must be born.”<sup>46</sup> It must derive from what is most real in the artist’s own experience. Isaiah Berlin remarks that Belinsky “does not demand of the artist anything save the gift of creation and authenticity, the investigation and expression in images of whatever is most real in his own experience. He condemns only what seems to him falsifications . . . all evasions of anything that has not been ‘lived through.’”<sup>47</sup> All of which is consistent with Kandinsky’s call to work only from inner necessity.

Third, such work must be connected to the magic of the present moment. Again, Chögyam Trungpa makes this clear when he says, “You may wonder what the best approach is to helping society and how you can know that what you are doing is authentic or good. The only answer is *nowness*. *Now* is the important point. . . .If you are unable to experience *now*, then you are corrupted because you are looking for another *now*, which is impossible. If you do that, there can only be past or future. . . .The way to experience *nowness* is to realize that this very moment, this very point in your life, is always *the* occasion. . . .It is a vision that tradition and culture and wisdom and dignity can be experienced *now* and kept *now* on everyone’s part.”<sup>48</sup>

There will always be a broad continuum of approaches to the sacred; a continuum that extends from solitary explorations of desert mystics to shining constellations of urban activists. And all these approaches must be encouraged and celebrated. Camus comes to mind again when he notes in his journals that “nothing is true that forces us to exclude.” To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under heaven.

Kandinsky suggests that for every artist working from inner necessity, “his [or her] own means of expression is the best, since it best incorporates what he [or she] is obliged to communicate.”<sup>49</sup> It does not follow that this will be the best for other artists also. Artists working in this way will maintain an imperturbable trust in themselves. They know, says Franz Marc, that “all works of art created by truthful minds, without regard for the work’s conventional exterior, remain genuine for all times.”<sup>50</sup>

The newest trend and the art scene are unnecessary distractions for such artists. The full force of the significance of life rests on the shoulders of each one of us. With poet Mary Oliver, each of us must ask ourselves what we plan to do with our “one wild and precious life”<sup>51</sup> and how our artistic efforts will refresh and uplift this one wild and precious world.

Wherever our vocation and calling take us, we must dedicate our work to the well-being of others, praying that all beings may be happy and at their ease. Each of us, and each of our works, can be such a prayer: a turning point, a bridge over troubled water. This is our challenge and this is how artists can bring sanity to the world. This is how artists can make an offering to the world.

And this has been mine to you.

*Ouvri bayi pou’ moi*

*Ouvri bayi pou' moi* . . . . .

Thank you!

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> This is a brief excerpt from Kamau Brathwaite's poem, *Negus*, published in *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy*. Oxford University Press, 1967. In Haitian Vodou, Papa Legba is the intermediary between the loa and humanity. He stands at a spiritual crossroads and gives (or denies) permission to speak with the spirits of Guinee, and is believed to speak all human languages. He is always the first and last spirit invoked in any ceremony, because his permission is needed for any communication between mortals and the loa - he opens and closes the doorway. In Haiti, he is the great elocution, the voice of God, as it were. Legba facilitates communication, speech and understanding. *Ouvri bayi pou' moi* may be translated as, "open the gate for me."

<sup>2</sup> Vassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, trans. W.T.H. Sadler, (New York: Dover, 1977), 35.

<sup>3</sup> Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 35.

<sup>4</sup> Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art, ed. Kenneth C. Lindsey & Peter Vergo, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), 103.

<sup>5</sup> This excerpt is from Mary Oliver's *What Do We Know: Poems and Prose Poems* (De Capo Press, Cambridge, MA: 2002)

<sup>6</sup> Donald Kuspit, *Reconsidering the Spiritual in Art*, published in Blackbird, an on-line Journal of literature and the arts, Spring 2003 Vol.2 No. 1, [http://www.blackbird.vcu.edu/v2n1/gallery/kuspit\\_d/reconsidering\\_text.htm](http://www.blackbird.vcu.edu/v2n1/gallery/kuspit_d/reconsidering_text.htm).

<sup>7</sup> Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots*, trans. Arthur Wills, (New York, Harper & Row, 1971), 97.

<sup>8</sup> Chögyam Trungpa, *True Perception*, ed. Judith Lief, (Boston: Shambhala, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Chögyam Trungpa, *True Perception*, 130.

<sup>10</sup> The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy describes the Kyoto School as "a group of 20th century Japanese thinkers who developed original philosophies by creatively drawing on the intellectual and spiritual traditions of East Asia, those of Mahāyāna Buddhism in particular, as well as on the methods and content of Western philosophy."

<sup>11</sup> Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.

<sup>12</sup> Keta Masako, *Emptiness and Fundamental Imagination*, 10, Nanzen Institute for Religion and Culture, *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy* 3, <http://nirc.nanzan-u.ac.jp/publications/EJPhilosophy/PDF/EJP3-Keta.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Masako, 39.

<sup>14</sup> Hase Shōtō, *Nishitani's Philosophy of Emptiness in "Emptiness and Immediacy,"* trans. Robert F. Rhodes, *Japanese Religions*, Vol.34 (1), 80. The NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions, [http://japanese-religions.jp/publications/assets/JR\\_34\\_1\\_a\\_Hase.pdf](http://japanese-religions.jp/publications/assets/JR_34_1_a_Hase.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Hosoya Masashi, "*Sensation and Image in Nishitani's Philosophy*," 185, Nanzen Institute for Religion and Culture, *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy* 2, <http://nirc.nanzan-u.ac.jp/publications/EJPhilosophy/>

- <sup>16</sup> Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art, 235.
- <sup>17</sup> Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 106.
- <sup>18</sup> Donald Kuspit, *Reconsidering the Spiritual in Art*, [http://www.blackbird.vcu.edu/v2n1/gallery/kuspit\\_d/reconsidering\\_text.htm](http://www.blackbird.vcu.edu/v2n1/gallery/kuspit_d/reconsidering_text.htm)
- <sup>19</sup> *The Awakened Eye* web site: <http://www.theawakenedeye.com/artisans/kongtruljigme.htm>
- <sup>20</sup> Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 2.
- <sup>21</sup> Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 269.
- <sup>22</sup> Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art, 235.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid. 111.
- <sup>24</sup> Franz Pfeiffer, *Works of Meister Eckhart*, (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 1992), 2.
- <sup>25</sup> Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. Trumbull, CT: Weatherhill, Inc., 1973.
- <sup>26</sup> Paul Tillich, *Existential Aspects of Modern Art*, found on-line at <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1568>. This link is Chapter 7 of *Christianity and the Existentialists*, edited by Carl Michalson and published by Scribners Sons, 1956, pp.128-146. Note that Kandinsky expresses a similar idea when he says: "*The 'what' is the internal truth only art can divine, which only art can express by those means of expression which are hers alone (Concerning the Spiritual in Art, 9).*"
- <sup>27</sup> Franz Marc, "Spiritual Treasures," *The Blue Reiter Almanac* (1912), ed. Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc; documentary edition edited by Klaus Lankheit (New York: Viking, 1974), 55.
- <sup>28</sup> Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 38.
- <sup>29</sup> Agnes Martin, *Schriften*, (Germany: Cantz, 1992), 138.
- <sup>30</sup> Ezra Pound, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*, (New York: New Directions Books, 1970) 521.
- <sup>31</sup> Donald Kuspit, "Concerning The Spiritual in Contemporary Art," *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890 – 1985* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986), 313.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ultimate concern: Tillich in Dialogue*. ed. D. M. Brown. New York: Harper & Row, 1992. The quotations given here are from the online version prepared for *Religion Online* by Harry W. and Grace C. Adams, *Ultimate Concern – First Dialogue*, <http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=538&C=598>.
- <sup>33</sup> Chögyam Trungpa, *True Perception*, 123-124.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid, 152-153.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid, 30.
- <sup>36</sup> Hubert Dreyfus & Sean Dorrance Kelly, *All Things Shining*, (New York: Free Press, 2011), 101.
- <sup>37</sup> Antonio Rodríguez Huéscar, *Jose Ortega y Gasset's Metaphysical Innovation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 138.

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<sup>38</sup> Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 54.

<sup>39</sup> Ortega y Gasset, “In Search of Goethe from Within,” *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Writings on Art and Culture* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1956), 127.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Dzogchen Ponlop, *Rebel Buddha*, (Boston: Shambhala, 2011), 57.

<sup>42</sup> Ortega y Gasset, “In Search of Goethe from Within”, 149.

<sup>43</sup> Agnes Martin, *Schriften*, (Germany: Cantz, 1992) 70, 71.

<sup>44</sup> Albert Camus, “Create Dangerously”, in *Resistance, Rebellion and Death*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 267, 270. Albert Camus (1913 – 1960), was a French novelist, essayist, and playwright who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957. He was closely linked to Jean-Paul Sartre in the 1940s, but broke with him over Sartre's support of Stalinist politics. Camus died in a car accident near Sens, France, on January 4, 1960. The essay, *Create Dangerously*, was first given as a lecture at the University of Uppsala in December of 1957, the year he won the Nobel Prize.

<sup>45</sup> This quote from Belinsky is found in Isaiah Berlin, “Artistic Commitment: A Russian Legacy”, in *The Sense of Reality*. New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1996. 207-208. This essay was first given as a talk in the United States in the early 1960s and was published for the first time in 1996. In a search of the citation index, I could find no references to it in any art-related journal or book.

<sup>46</sup> Berlin, 208.

<sup>47</sup> Berlin, 212.

<sup>48</sup> Chögyam Trungpa, *Shambhala*, (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1984) 96-97.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Franz Marc, “Two Pictures,” *The Blue Reiter Almanac*, 67.

<sup>51</sup> This is taken from Mary Oliver’s poem, “The Summer Day,” and can be found in her beautiful book, *House of Light* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990) 60.