

# THE IMPORTANCE OF ART FOR MANKIND

The section for the visual arts team interviewed by Wolfgang Held  
March 1. 2020

**What was on your mind during your last retreat?**

**Barbara Schnetzler:** We studied Rudolf Steiner's lectures "Art as seen in the Light of Mystery Wisdom" (CW 275), which greatly enhanced our Ascension Conference theme. The conference is now being postponed to Ascension Day 2021 due to the Corona crisis. Rudolf Steiner begins the first lecture by looking at the technical side of artistic work and how to handle it. He emphasises that we as human beings should not turn away from technology. If we reject the technological process, we would in some way try to elude the world and foster the illusion that we free ourselves from Ahriman's influence. But this is not possible, because Ahriman is always present in every creative process. We should rather find a way to learn how to handle the transformation process. We exchanged our views on this question by discussing examples of different works. Pieter van der Ree contributed to our discussion by showing the architectural design of Arnhem's central railway station, which was designed using a computer-programmed model. The forms are beautifully organic, almost perfect. But in our conversation the difference in quality, in comparison to a man-made model, became very clear. The Arnhem forms seem too thin, have no inner life and no inner creative power. The supporting columns do not really seem to bear the weight. The living structure does not find its corresponding sequel in the interior.<sup>1</sup>

This raises the question about the creative human being and human needs. This should also be the focus of our conference: how can the arts contribute to the becoming of man? Never before has man been so existentially threatened as in the present. The whole tendency of modern art bears witness to this break in creativity. In the age of transhumanism, we want to illuminate the human being by looking at him through different forms of art with regard to their impact.



UNTITLED  
110 x 13 x 28 / Carrara Marmor  
2018 / Barbara Schnetzler

1 <https://www.architektur-online.com/schlagzeilen/station-arnhem-centraal>

Travelling exhibition Organic architecture,  
Estonian Museum of Architecture, Tallinn,  
Design: Pieter van der Ree



**What role does Rudolf Steiner's assigning certain arts to the members of man's nature play in this context?**

**Pieter van der Ree:** It is in this context that our mutual work really began.

Christiane Haid approached us last summer with the question: „Would you like to join in?“ And then she already had the idea to start with the first lecture from “Art as seen in the Light of Mystery Wisdom“, i.e. to work on the relationship of the human being to various forms of artistic expression. We had already worked intensively on this topic in recent years in the Dutch section and I would conclude: up to our retreat, this was what we focussed on and the aspect of the new digital technology and transhumanism was included later. That's when we realised that the relationship between man and art and especially the significance of the arts for humanity, was becoming blatantly relevant. What happens when art becomes possible without craftsmanship? In computerising one uses programmes that are fed with corresponding data, so that the computer then designs the forms, and I as a designer, am made redundant. What does that mean for us now and what else can emerge from this fact? Can the outcome nourish us if it is not created by human hands? This question, against the background of Rudolf Steiner's description, has now become the theme of the conference.

**Is it impossible to imagine architecture without computer work ?**

**Yaïke Dunselman:** Yes, that's so. But I also think that incredibly exciting things are happening at the same time. The question for us is then: what is the difference between really organic, humane, anthroposophically inspired architecture and this sculpture-free architecture designed by the computer? I see that as a question for further research and I would like to be on the front. At the same time this is my motivation to participate in the Section. My experience is that Steiner's anthroposophical, organic architecture was at the forefront of its time. Today, unfortunately, we anthroposophical architects are no longer. I am sorry about that and I think that we should make an effort to regain our status as a cultural factor!

New construction museum building  
GeoFort, Herwijnen NL, Design 2019,  
Realization 2024, Yaike Dunselman



**How can this be done? Is it still about freeing oneself from a narrow-minded idea about style?**

**Christiane Haid:** It is very important for me not to get lost in theoretical questions. Rudolf Steiner speaks about developing a style in several lectures. That cannot be denied. But it is a question of understanding: is style in Steiner's intention a repeated repetition of purely formal characteristics, of exterior forms, or does it imply a challenge to discover the source from which the forms were created. This is a theme that will come up in any case, and I also think that the centennial of the School of Spiritual Science will demand it. We will be faced by the challenge to reflect the initial impulses anew. We are not only asked to look back but more to look forward to how the spiritual activity enabled the impulses to come into being, and from there to discern our relationship towards the described creative moment. Even a painter like Max Wolfhügel, Stuttgart's first art teacher, distanced himself from imitating or repeating anything that had been done in Dornach. He emphasised that the "substance forces" in art must remain free. The impulse in the sense of a mental movement can be taken up, but how it unfolds, is an individual matter. I think it's about the fact that we might be in danger of becoming formal or narrow here, but if we meet in the sphere of the impulse and ask ourselves: what moves me personally and where is my approach? Then on that basis, we could try to create something together.

**What does that mean for the next conference?**

**Rik ten Cate:** Our meeting drew my enthusiasm to several themes: the first was that this series of lectures („Art as seen in the Light of Mystery Wisdom") is not only limited to architecture, sculpture and painting, but also, especially in the second half, refers strongly to eurythmy, poetry and music. So we have to look at the whole human being and as a consequence we have also invited eurythmists, writers and musicians to take part. So this is the first thing we are doing as a new team: we are crossing our borders, the borders implied by the faculties of the fine arts. I find that important.

The second thing is that we had great fun working together. We understand each other, we share ideas, we complement each other and we

Uriel (Detail), Bronze,  
Rik ten Cate



haven't had any rows. So the wind is blowing in the right direction. That is very important for a Dutchman; you always have to pay attention to that.

And the third thing for me is that I hope that, as Christiane Haid says, we succeed in connecting to the sources - the really essential ones. What about these laws of the etheric body? I can study them and read about them and think about them, but what is it really like to experience them? And what does it mean that plastic art - as sculpture - refers to these laws and is then projected beyond my body into the world? We will have to study this, try it out and we will most likely fall short of the complete answers.

**Barbara Schnetzler:** I think our time yearns for different art forms to support and augment each other. It also means we have a chance to get out of the narrowness of having to specify, which we have had to experience here now and again. May be even to having seen art become illustrative. If you open your soul to other areas, art comes out more naturally and connects directly to the sources. I feel much freer when I move into other fields, for example painting or playing music - and experiencing these with my artistic background. Depending on the situation, something much fresher can come out. I see that as a good way to connect to the sources.

**Hans Dieter Jendryko, actor and director from Basel, emphasises that artistic activity is something others assign to you and that you cannot use it to distinguish yourself. It is a profession that one acquires. You are active within art and live on it. Do we have to distinguish more clearly between the artist and the person interested in art?**

**Christiane Haid:** That is not an easy question. I know this from my work in the section for the Literary Arts and Humanities, because here there is also a wide range of participants, professional scientists, some of whom are professors at the university or freelance writers and then the laypersons and lovers of the special fields. Bringing the two together is not easy, in some cases even impossible. You have to come up with a new kind of programme which both groups are able to approve, sometimes even offering separate events. We have already indicated this before: it is important to us that you have a certain awareness of professionalism and standard. It is the same case with every profession, certain skills and standards are taken for granted and if you mix them, you lose the clarity of your profile. For example, we would like to attain a certain level of quality with

Golgatha  
Acrylic and chalk on canvas  
Christiane Haid 2003-11



Germ  
Acrylic and chalk on canvas  
Christiane Haid 2005

some exhibitions and then also organise exhibitions to which everyone is invited. But this is a social event and it has to be communicated clearly.

**Rik ten Cate:** It's an eternally difficult problem. Everybody uses a language but only a few become poets. Art belongs to everyone, that's true. Everyone enjoys it, everyone thinks about what to wear today, how to design one's house and so on. It concerns everyone. Everyone enjoys it, everyone tries to play a guitar or a violin, but not everyone is an artist. That's the area of tension and everyone would like to be an artist, that's a huge problem. Yaïke Dunselman expressed clearly that we try to get ahead with quality. To have the ambition to serve the world and really advance culture with our arts, that is not only his concern but our concern as well and that is of course an ambitious aim. But that is the goal.

#### What are your next goals?

**Pieter van der Ree:** Our joint work will thus be presented to the general public with this joint conference, which, as mentioned, is now being postponed to Ascension Day 2021, due to the Corona crisis, but there will be various conferences on specific fields before that date.

And then there is a further perspective if we look at the years 1922 and 1923, they show the transition from the First Goetheanum to the design of the Second Goetheanum. This is what we are also planning internationally.

**Christiane Haid:** In 2022 we want to look back on the fire of the First Goetheanum a 100 years before. We are planning a large international Christmas Conference concentrating on the First Goetheanum's creative impulse for the individual arts. We will be beginning regular work on this theme this autumn here in Dornach, together those who live here and who have been studying the First Goetheanum for many decades. This will give us the opportunity to become aware of all the different research results. We will also organise international meetings once or twice a year up to 2022, to bring people from around the world together, to exchange ideas about their work. What we are interested in is that the focus should turn from the ashes to the impulse and what was meant

Administration building of the Housing association IJsselstein, The Netherlands. Design: Pieter van der Ree, Orta-Atelier.



by its inner motivation. And from here we look once again, to where we stand today in relation to this impulse and happening a hundred years previously. And then we are already thinking about the follow-up project. We will examine more closely the enormous step that was taken to create the second Goetheanum in 1925, 1926.

### What was the fire of the Goetheanum in this context, a myth, a wound?

**Christiane Haid:** Of course. One becomes aware of an incredible number of different viewpoints and personalised circumstances. Yaike Dunselman said this morning during our retreat: “Just imagine not having the second Goetheanum. First of all, the practical construction of the first Goetheanum would have led to problems. It would not have been suitable in every respect for a modern, larger society. Also in terms of style or design. This was so wonderfully developed out of the contents of Anthroposophy and it’s amazing that one can still study it, discover and experience a lot about it, again and again, even though the First Goetheanum no longer exists. The second Goetheanum seems like a toss into the future.

**Rik ten Cate:** I don’t think the fire has healed anything. We talked a lot about it with our colleagues in Holland. Maybe I feel this fire is still present, because the centenary is approaching. The word heal is not the right word at all. It was an event and it had to happen; I think so too. There seems to be logic in it, but also a huge tragedy.

**Yaike Dunselman:** That’s true, but the following is also true. Rik, if you drive past the Glass House now, for example, then you return to the last century and if you stand near the south front of the Goetheanum, then you are in the future. And that is incredible!

**Pieter van der Ree:** I find it so exciting that Rudolf Steiner created something new out of the catastrophe. That is perhaps the most impressive thing for me.

**Rik ten Cate:** And in general that he was artistically active for 18 years. From 1907 to 1925 - that is incredible. A creative power that is hard to understand. The inner metamorphosis is amazing.

**Christiane Haid:** I have the impression that by gaining an overview of this moment, it will give us another opportunity to enter into a different relationship. It will depend on how one takes this up constructively as a society and start to work on it together. We know that when a pain-

Phaniel (Detail), Bronze,  
Rik ten Cate



ful wound slumbers in the subconscious, yet still continuing to hurt, a conscious process will be able to transform it by generating something different. In this sense I can also see this - if you compare it to now - in relation to our current situation. With the building of the Goetheanum, anthroposophy was presented for the first time to the general public in Switzerland as its visible expression. Before this moment it lived a quiet life and was hardly visible. Steiner describes how people were then actually stimulated by the building: Anthroposophy had become visible. Today we have - for example, as far as medicine is concerned - major public controversies. Debates about the effectiveness of homeopathy. Today we are confronted with question about the spiritual position in relation to medicine and thus confronted with the spiritual understanding of the human being. In France you can see very clearly how dramatic this is. In the end, it will lead to an extensive examination of materialism. So I ask myself: how does this battle, which manifested itself then through the fire, manifest itself now, and how do we cope with it?

**Pieter van der Ree:** That is a very interesting dilemma: Rudolf Steiner advanced the idea that the arts and architecture shouldn't really come out of the personal. It has to be created from the objective - or in architecture from the building task. This cannot be done other than individually. But the individual is something other than being subjective. In this respect, as organic architects, we face a much more difficult task than functionalist architects. They have a much simpler starting point and even a more or less unambiguous language of form with which they work. For the „Weißenhofsiedlung“ (1927), for example, it was laid down that all the participating architects should construct flat roofs and white walls. Such a thing would be unthinkable in organic architecture. Everyone, whether in China, America or Norway, has the possibility to use their own imagination to design something suitable for the task at hand. It goes without saying that a lot of mediocrity is also created in the process. In architecture there is a lot of mediocrity anyway, and we are no exception.

**Christiane Haid:** I think it is a question of how to deal with laissez-faire and individualisation. The effort in trying to handle these tensions, brings us together. How to cope with these tensions has to do with the question how intensively we shape our relationship to the sources. I believe the more this happens, the more freedom can be attained. It only becomes

Vague éternelle  
Carrara Marmor, 25 x 80 x 50  
Barbara Schnetzler, 2018



restricted when you forget that these two are interconnected. Were one to look at the first section leader Edith Maryon, it comes to mind that she had put all her abilities completely at the disposal to the task of carving the „Representative of Man“. And this led to a special relationship which allowed Rudolf Steiner to say: “What she does, I have done” What does this mean for us? You can’t say it means that everyone simply does what they feel like doing. Because then one would also conclude: why do we need this source-connection at all? And how do we solve the question today? What is the relationship between the individual and the impulse, and where do we get to such a depth that we really try to work in accordance with this impulse and nothing else. That is a big question and I also have the hope that perhaps the community - and that’s why I think it’s so important to work together - can develop a field of mutuality, where anyone can voice his or her opinion without hurting his or her brothers and sisters when you say: I have the feeling that this is somehow tendentious or it affects me in this way. That will allow us to enter into a much more open and free dialogue.

**What role does the coming generation and the generation after next play for you - do you work with younger people?**

**Yaike Dunselman:** What I find interesting is that In my office, when we talk about the content, the others take it so surprisingly naturally. You can simply address the content. And here at the Goetheanum this content is even outwardly visible. For example Haus Schuurman is on the one side of the Goetheanum and Haus Duldeck on the other. They are so incredibly different, but that doesn’t mean that Haus Schuurman is not organic and Haus Duldeck is typically organic. That doesn’t mean that every anthroposophical architect has to design a Haus Duldeck, thinking that only then the building would be organic. It is rather a matter of understanding the conditions and impulses. It is about asking oneself what is actually happens there? Why is this house like this? What is its relationship to the Goetheanum and what is the relationship of the other to the Goetheanum? And it also has to do with courage, I would say. We spoke about what Steiner did before. The first Goetheanum burns down and he immediately starts conceiving the second Goetheanum using a completely different language of forms and even a different material. The

New residential building ‚De Vijfprong‘,  
Assisted Living, Vorden NL, Realization 2019,  
Yaike Dunselman



Michaelian atmosphere  
Acrylic and chalk on canvas  
Christiane Haid 2003



First Goetheanum was made out of the softest building material there is: wood; the second Goetheanum out of the hardest building material, reinforced concrete. That is extraordinarily courageous! Or was Haus Duldeck built the way it was because Steiner was building it right next to the First Goetheanum? It isn't really clear. I always find the western façade of the Goetheanum a good example: it is so free, so sculptural, and then Steiner simply cuts a square shaped window right into it. No anthroposophical architect would do that. No one has the courage to simply cut a square into such a free form!

#### Do you understand this as typical for the questions younger people have?

**Yaike Dunselman:** Yes, because the younger ones are open to it. That's really the case, there are no inhibitions. Sometimes there are real concerns about the outer forms. But young people quickly relate to the contents. I notice this in the talks I give. Other architects come up to me and say: „I gain access to what Steiner did, through what you do. I wasn't able to understand that before, but you are doing something similar, and now I suddenly understand what it's all about.“ There is no prejudice. I can even show pictures of the First Goetheanum and the „Representative of Man“, they find it interesting.

**Christiane Haid:** When it came to putting the team for the fine arts together, I found it important to choose one participant from the older and one from the younger generation. Also in relation to the particular fields: the painters, the jewellers, the graphic artists, the furniture makers, the clothing artists, the photographers and so on. It is essential to include the next generation right from the very beginning. Once we have done that, I have something like a summer art camp in mind, where we invite young people to ask them what their intentions are and what motivates them in their work. We would strive for an open space that lets people generate something together. I see this as an important task and I am pleased that all the members of the team here are such experienced professionals. So we have the best prerequisites to come together with the younger generation.