2. THE FRAGRANCE OF SPIRITUALITY: AN APPRECIATION OF THE ART OF MARK TOBEY

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ART has long been one of the highest expressions of human culture, and particularly of its religious and spiritual dimensions. The cave paintings of early man, the temples and tombs of the Egyptians, Greeks, Hindus and Buddhists, the churches, cathedrals and mosques of more modern times, are so often the greatest examples of a culture's artistic heritage, and still communicate their spirit to us today. Yet what survives is generally the reflection of a mature culture; there is seldom any trace of those creative attempts in periods of rapid cultural change and in particular in the early days of a new religious dispensation to break free from the confines of a traditional heritage and to seek fresh means of expression for the new beliefs.

Mark Tobey, the American painter who died in 1976 at the age of 85, lived and worked in what will probably be judged by history to be one of those periods of social and cultural transition. As one of the first Bahá'ís to achieve world recognition for his artistic accomplishments, especially for the creativity with which he sought to express the intangible and spiritual in human experience, it is appropriate to examine his contribution to art, with particular reference to the influence of the Bahá'í Faith.

Mark Tobey's development as a painter involved a slow maturation marked by many stages of creative synthesis and discovery as he explored new concepts and drew on new experiences. His rural childhood and almost complete lack of formal training isolated him from the customary European artistic heritage. Early success as a portraitist demonstrated his innate talent, and his evolution from figurative through symbolic to abstract forms of expression resulted more from his intense inner motivation and his cumulative life experiences than from any attempt to follow the trends of modern art. Since he was neither geographically nor emotionally in the mainstream of cultural fashion, his accomplishments were slow to be generally recognized, particularly in his own country where, in the artistic capital New York, it was inconceivable that an outsider could indeed be ahead of its own *avant-garde*. A few perceptive individuals supported his efforts, but the general reaction was one of vague interest, indifference or contempt. Tobey's first real acclaim came at an age when most people are ready for retirement. The first prize for painting at the Venice Biennale in 1958 (when he was 67), major retrospective exhibitions at the Louvre (Musée des Arts Décoratifs) in Paris in 1961 and at the New York Museum of Modern Art in 1962, and many other awards and exhibitions demonstrated the growing recognition of his accomplishments and the widespread acknowledgement that he was probably America's greatest living artist.[1] In the most significant study of Tobey to date, William Seitz calls him 'the most internationally-minded painter of importance in the history of art.'[2] Yet this recognition failed to divert him from his dedication to art. He resented the demands of fame which distracted him from his painting, and indeed continued to produce major works and to explore new forms of expression nearly to the end of his life.

In 1918, Tobey was already a fashionable portraitist in New York when he was introduced to Juliet Thompson, who arranged for him to travel to Green Acre and to meet the Bahá'ís gathered there. It did not take long for the spirit of the Faith to touch his heart, and he became a Bahá'í, a step that profoundly altered his life and art. He immediately began a lifelong search for means to express his beliefs and experiences in his paintings, a search that led him to abandon the glitter and tinsel of New York society for the quieter climate of Seattle, with extensive periods

[1] See for instance Alexander Watt, 'Paris Commentary', *The Studio*, December 1961, pp. 222–224 and 235.
[2] William C. Seitz, *Mark Tobey*, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1962, p. 53.

of travel and residence in Europe, the Far East, and elsewhere. He attended Bahá'í classes with a teacher sent to America by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and all his life was active in his service to the Cause, teaching, giving lectures, writing articles for *World Order* magazine, serving on administrative bodies, deputizing a pioneer to Europe in the second Seven Year Plan, and eventually moving himself to Basel, Switzerland, where he served as chairman of the Local Spiritual Assembly. His poems, letters, and the quotations frequently included in exhibition catalogues reflect a deep understanding of Bahá'í principles and contain many references to the Faith.

Indeed, he struggled with the often difficult choices involved in balancing his responsibility to his art and his direct service to the Bahá'í Faith, sometimes abandoning his painting for months at a time to undertake Bahá'í activities. Yet Bahá'u'lláh wrote: *The possessors of sciences and arts have a great right among the people of the world*,[1] and 'Abdu'l-Bahá has added: . . . *when the studying of art is with the intention of obeying the command of God this study will certainly be done easily and great progress will soon be made therein; and when others discover this fragrance of spirituality in the action itself, this same will cause their awakening*.[2]

It is at this level that the Bahá'í Faith has had the most profound and pervasive impact on Tobey's paintings. His dedication to art was reinforced by his beliefs. Indeed, his entire approach to art was conditioned by this potent combination. He wrote: 'This universal Cause of Bahá'u'lláh which brings the fruition of man's development, challenges him and attracts him to see the light of this day as the unity of all life; dislodges him from a great deal of automatic and environmental inheritance; seeks to create in him a vision which is absolutely necessary for his existence. The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh are themselves the light with which we can see how to move forward on the road of evolution.'[3]

Tobey was dislodged from his surrounding artistic inheritance by his discovery of the Bahá'í Faith, and launched a new direction in the evolution of art. For him, 'my whole idea of my painting is experiencing my life in paint,'[4] and this of course included the new spirit he had found, a spirit which he felt had died out of the art world.[5] 'To me an artist is one who . . . portrays the spirit of man in whatever condition that spirit may be. We can't expect too much of him when the rest is negligent of spiritual values such as today.'[6] He spent his life in a quest for means of expressing this new spirit, a spirit reflected not only in his Faith but also in the dramatic changes being wrought by science in society. 'At a time when experimentation expresses itself in all forms of life, search becomes the only valid expression of the spirit. . . .'[7] 'I am accused often of too much experimentation, but what else should I do when all other factors of man are in the same condition? Shall any member of the body live independently of the rest? I thrust forward into space as science and the rest do. My activity is the same, therefore my end will be similar. The gods of the past are as dead today as they were when Christianity overcame the Pagan world. The time is similar, only the arena is the whole world.'[8] He tried to balance his external and internal experiences: 'One is so surrounded by the scientific naturally one reflects it, but one needs (I mean the artist now) the religious side. One might say the scientific aspect interests the mind, the religious side frees the heart. All are interesting.'[9] Yet this was not basically a conscious process, but a reflection of the whole man. 'The development of my work has been I feel more subconscious than conscious. I do not work by intellectual deductions. My work is a kind of self-contained contemplation.'[10]

The Bahá'í Faith also gave Tobey a world view, an openness to the diversity of human experience both in the subjects he depicted and in the cultural traditions which he searched for techniques and inspiration. His openness to Oriental art and his synthesis of elements of that art into his own were some of the early creative achievements underlying his later development,

[1] Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith*, Wilmette, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1956, p. 189.
[2] ibid., p. 377.
[3] Mark Tobey, 'The Dot and the Circle', *World Order*, Vol. 14, no. 12, pp. 412–416, March 1949.
[4] Tape-recorded conversation with Arthur L. Dahl, 1962.
[5] Tobey, 'The Dot and the Circle'.
[6] Letter to Arthur and Joyce Dahl, 26 April 1957, in *Mark Tobey: Paintings from the Collection of Joyce and Arthur Dahl*, Stanford, California, Stanford Art Book 7, 1967, p. 15.
[7] Exhibition catalogue, Willard Gallery, New York, 1949, quoted in Seitz, pp. 13–14.
[8] Mark Tobey, 'Statement by the Artist', *Paintings by Mark Tobey*, Portland Art Museum, San Francisco Museum of Art, Detroit Institute of Arts, 1945–1946.
[9] Stanford Art Book 7, p. 15.
[10] *Mark Tobey*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1966, Catalogue no. 393.

leading some critics to consider this the fundamental aspect of his art. To this he responded: 'as to the content of my own work, well, in spite of the comments regarding my interest in Zen, it has never been as deep as my interest in the Bahá'í Faith.'[1] He was particularly attracted to cultural periods where the expression of faith or inner spiritual states was important, not only in Oriental art but also in the earliest Christian art (Byzantine and medieval) and that of the American Indians, and he frequently drew on themes from such art in his own work.

There is also in the Bahá'í Writings a new perspective on the history of man, the evolution of human society, and the particular point at which we find ourselves today, and this too helped Tobey to place his own accomplishment. 'New seeds are no doubt being sown which mean new civilizations and, let us hope, cultures too. If I do anything important in painting some age will bring it forth and understand. One naturally looks forward to the time when absolutes will reign no more and all art will be seen as valid. . . . Shall we, as we view the increasingly darkening sky, not hope for a Byzantium, some spot to keep alight the cultural values? For what else shall we live?'[2]

It is almost impossible to summarize Mark Tobey's accomplishments in art. He has treated such a wide range of subjects in an incredible diversity of styles and media that for every generality there are immediately exceptions. Most of his paintings are relatively small, intended for an intimate rapport with the viewer. Recognizable figures or forms become less and less evident as his art has evolved, yet there is still a strong feeling of 'representation' in the majority of his paintings. He was capable of selecting the most visually significant elements of a scene and concentrating them onto the paper in a way that would re-create in the viewer a more complete experience. It might be the colour and movement of blades of grass in a field, the flash of lights in night traffic, or stars and mists in an evening sky. He would search out striking visual impressions and natural beauty of every kind, the surface of a squashed tin can, radio beacons, old walls of buildings, the veins of a leaf, often noting similarities between disparate elements in a leap of creative recognition.

After an experience imagining himself to be a fly moving around a room, he was able to develop a kind of multiple space, a personal version of cubism, in which the viewer has no fixed perspective, but finds that his eyes wander through the painting as though viewing a three-dimensional object from many angles. This can be most easily understood in a painting like *Gothic*, in which the architectural elements are so concentrated that one wanders visually through the painting discovering new perspectives as though walking through a Gothic cathedral.

In his explorations of Oriental art, he learned the subtleties of expression of which the brush is capable in calligraphy, the art developed from Oriental writing in both the Far East and in the Arabic and Persian cultures associated with the early Bahá'ís. This discovery gave him freedom of form in artistic expression, and he first applied it to express what especially interested him in the life of cities, 'the lights, the electric cables of the trolleys, the human streams directed by, through and round prescribed limits.'[3] This was the beginning of his 'white writing' and of a concentration on the many characteristics of light which developed a larger symbolism. 'White lines in movement symbolize light as a unifying idea which flows through the compartmented units of life bringing a dynamic to men's minds, ever expanding their energies toward a larger relativity.'[4] He could capture certain qualities of light, soft moonlight or the bright lights of a carnival, and would often use this to convey a larger message. It is interesting to note the parallel with the frequent symbolic use of light for spirit in the Bahá'í Writings.

Tobey also developed the technical means for expressing space, energy and motion. His paintings can represent an empty, infinite depth as in *Void*, or burst with explosive energy as in *New Genesis*, a work that may well express the creative force of the new Manifestation. They often contain multiple layers of elements, charged with movement or submerged in a placid calm.

With this new artistic vocabulary at his disposal, Tobey was able to create, on his two-dimensional surface, images communicating normally non-visual concepts and even emo-

[1] Conversation with Arthur L. Dahl, 1962.
[2] Tobey, 'Statement by the Artist'.
[3] *Retrospective Exhibition Mark Tobey*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, 1962, pp. 11–12.
[4] *Mark Tobey*, California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco, vol. 8, no. 11–12, March–April 1951.

tions. In *Edge of August*, for instance, the shimmering heat and saturated greenish light of summer fades out into a nearly empty autumn in a potent depiction of the changing seasons. '*Edge of August* is trying to express the thing that lies between two conditions of nature, summer and fall. It's trying to capture that transition and make it tangible. Make it sing. You might say that it's bringing the intangible into the tangible.'[1] *Remote Field* (1944) conveys the emptiness and desolation of war, while a lighter touch is evident in such pictures as *Calligraphic Still Life #3*, a humorous play on normal concepts of perspective.

He explained his lack of a regular progression in his work in a 1955 letter. 'Over the past 15 years, my approach to painting has varied, sometimes being dependent on brush-work, sometimes on lines, dynamic white strokes in geometric space. I have never tried to pursue a particular style in my work. For me, the road has been a zigzag into and out of old civilizations, seeking new horizons through meditation and contemplation. My sources of inspiration have gone from those of my native Middle West to those of microscopic worlds. I have discovered many a universe on paving stones and tree barks. I know very little about what is generally called "abstract" painting. Pure abstraction would mean a type of painting completely unrelated to life, which is unacceptable to me. I have sought to make my painting "whole" but to attain this I have used a whirling mass. I take up no definite position. Maybe this explains someone's remark while looking at one of my paintings: "Where is the center?".'[2]

Since there were no precedents for him to follow, the creation of a successful painting was often a matter of trial and error under appropriately-creative conditions, and Tobey's letters often refer to many paintings wiped off or discarded as failures, and to periods when conditions were not right for advancing his work. 'A State of Mind is the first preparation and from this the action proceeds. *Peace of Mind* is another ideal, perhaps the ideal state to be sought for in the painting and certainly preparatory to the act.'[3] 'What matters most is keeping the eyes open for experience in new directions. Perhaps the Orient is inclusive of what we term the accidental. The accidental can lead one back toward the conscious again if accepted and used; it can lead to art.'[4]

A key to appreciating Mark Tobey's painting is a recognition of the effort he expected on the part of the viewer. He described his own experience in learning how to approach Oriental art: 'When I resided at the Zen monastery I was given a sumi-ink painting of a large free brush circle to meditate upon. What was it? Day after day I would look at it. Was it selflessness? Was it the Universe—where I could lose my identity? Perhaps I didn't see its aesthetic and missed the fine points of the brush which to a trained Oriental eye would reveal much about the character of the man who painted it. But after my visit I found I had new eyes and that which seemed of little importance became magnified in words, and considerations not based on my former vision.'[5] For him, understanding art meant exchanging human experiences: '... unless the person is willing to go through some of the actual experiences of the living artist and of those whose paintings are left behind in art museums all over the world as living symbols of their own experience, they remain as persons uninitiated.'[6] But he knew that the result could be highly enriching. 'The old Chinese used to say: "It is better to feel a painting than to look at it." So much today is only to look at. It is one thing to paint a picture and another to experience it: in attempting to find on what level one accepts this experience, one discovers what one sees and on what level the discovery takes place. Christopher Columbus left in search of one world and discovered another.'[7] Indeed, Tobey's friends and critics have often likened his paintings to the more emotional arts of poetry and music: 'Like poetry and music, his pictures have the time element, they unfold their contents gradually. With an active imagination they have to be approached, read, and their symbols interpreted. They reveal their tenor if one listens

[1] Mark Tobey *in* Selden Rodman, *Conversations with Artists*, New York, Devin-Adair, 1957, p. 17, quoted in Seitz, pp. 39–40.

[2] Extract from a letter dated 1/2/55, Whitechapel catalogue, p. 13.

[3] *Mark Tobey*, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Palais du Louvre, Pavillon de Marsan, Paris, 1961, *and* Whitechapel catalogue, pp. 18–19.

[4] Mark Tobey *in* Colette Roberts, *Mark Tobey*, New York, Grove Press and London, Evergreen Books, 1959, p. 41.

[5] Louvre catalogue *and* Whitechapel catalogue, pp. 18–19.

[6] Mark Tobey, 'Art and Community', *World Order*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 33–34, April 1939.

[7] Tobey *in* Roberts, pp. 41–42.

with the inner ear, "the ear of the heart," as Jean Paul calls it.'[1]

The most fundamentally significant of Mark Tobey's artistic accomplishments, underlying and indeed motivating much of his technical development, is his depiction of the spiritual dimension of man. For many years this side of his work was not understood and was either ignored or attacked, but it is now beginning to be appreciated. It was only natural that he should express his Bahá'í experiences and emotions both explicitly and implicitly in his paintings, and during the long development of his artistic career he returned again and again to Bahá'í themes.

In *Conflict of the Satanic and Celestial Egos* (1918), painted shortly after he became a Bahá'í, he uses the artistic language of William Blake and Michelangelo to convey the struggle between man's physical and spiritual natures. As in the past, human forms are used to represent spiritual realities.

The 1930s, when he was making the major breakthroughs in his artistic development, saw a number of Bahá'í works produced. *Rising Orb* (1935) symbolically depicts the coming of a new Revelation. 'When we wake up and see the inner horizon light rising, then we see beyond the horizon (and) break the mold of men's minds with the spirit of truth. Then there will be greater relativity than before. This light will burn away the mist of life and will become very, very great.'[2] *The Seekers*, probably done in this period although dated 1950, shows nine figures gathered on either side of a fountain of flowing waters, while another figure looks on.

The martyrdoms which so marked the early history of the Bahá'í Faith provided a recurring subject for Tobey, even though, as he put it, 'I know that martyr subjects aren't popular . . .'.[3] *Day of the Martyr* (1942) captures in its enclosed spaces, sombre reddish coloration and restrained figures, the anguish and oppression yet spiritual calm that must have surrounded the martyrs and their families. *The Red Tree of the Martyr* (1940), long one of Tobey's favourites, communicates the reverence and respect that the Bahá'ís feel for those who have given their lives for their Faith. 'It has the same inner spirit as the *Emerald Hill* (see below) but clearer—in beautiful dark warm reds. . . . The rise of the grey wall behind is beautiful. Two Bahá'is bow on either side. It is certainly expressive of the beauty of the Bahá'í Religion . . .'.[4]

A similar historical foundation, but viewed in a different spirit, can be found in *The New Day* (1945?), in which scattered architectural elements and figures in nineteenth century Persian dress are enmeshed in a white writing based on Persian calligraphic motifs. Since Tobey has said that 'multiple space bounded by involved white lines symbolize higher states of consciousness, or dimensions spoken of in the Father's Kingdom,'[5] the white writing may represent the enveloping power of the Word of God as brought in the Bahá'í Revelation, while the scenes seem derived from *The Dawn-Breakers* (Nabíl's Narrative). The result concentrates the spirit of the early years of the Bahá'í Faith. *The Retreat of the Friend* (1947) seems similarly based on events associated with the early history of the Faith. Even in a less representational work like *Extensions from Baghdád* (1944), the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh's declaration in Baghdád is suggested in the 'fragments of the East, elements which writhe and coil, drawn into the western zones and evoking, for eternity, the unity of the human spirit.'[6]

A broader scope, that of the cultural development that comes with progressive revelation, is condensed into *Arena of Civilization* (1947). 'The idea of layers of cultures or strata of civilizations existed from the moment of the picture's conception: this idea being that such layers break up and are disclosed so that the next layer can expand. This painting is a kind of miniature and for this reason is connected with the art of the Near East, but the subject uses material of both the east and the west: east in origin and west in manifestation ('Abdu'l-Bahá). In the same way one religion originates in the cradle of another religion, Christianity in that of Judaism, Buddhism in that of Hinduism, and reaches maturity with time and exerts an influence accordingly. The new makes its appearance and

[1] Julia and Lyonel Feininger, 'Comments by a fellow artist', *Paintings by Mark Tobey*, Portland Art Museum, San Francisco Museum of Art, Detroit Institute of Arts, 1945–1946.

[2] Mark Tobey *in* Betty Bowen, 'Introduction', *Tobey's 80. A Retrospective*, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle and London, University of Washington Press, 1970.

[3] Letter to Marian Willard, October 1947, Louvre catalogue.

[4] Letter to Arthur L. Dahl, 28 July 1966, Stanford Art Book 7, p. 12.

[5] Whitechapel catalogue, p. 16.

[6] Whitechapel catalogue, p. 21.

is liberated; the old founders and becomes exhausted with time.

'The draped forms of the East symbolize the spirit of Bahá'í which I believe to be the religion of our time and of the future, even if it is little known at the moment. . . .

'The upper part of the painting symbolizes the new and higher forces of our age, those which we call modern; for this reason they are less formed but will take shape in the course of growth. These symbols do not only refer to the efficient machines of our modern age, but also to the spiritual and mental concepts connected with material progress. "Everything becomes evident by degrees." ('Abdu'l-Bahá). It is the same with civilizations, and I personally think that man always ends up experimenting with truth. In Bahá'í the stress on "the unity of human beings" is something new, it is even the crux of the matter if we are to have peace. This is an age of new communications which necessitate a fresh kind of perspective or a new kind of eye with which to see. And so I have composed this picture from the richly loaded Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and His son 'Abdu'l-Bahá.'[1]

The Bahá'í view of the dangers of material civilization carried to excess is graphically depicted in *Void Devouring the Gadget Era* (1942), in what might be termed a spiritual interpretation of the effects of war. It represents an interesting development of Tobey's earlier paintings of the forms associated with modern material society.

In a more positive vein, *Concourse* (1943) symbolically depicts the 'army of light', the rank upon rank of the Supreme Concourse marshalled by the saints and prophets of bygone ages, waiting to come to the aid of those who arise to serve the Cause. An even more joyful and harmonious heavenly celebration is captured in the warm colours and active brushstrokes of *Celestial Concert* (1954).

The subdued coloration of *The Emerald Hill of Faithfulness* (1952) reinforces the calm strength of the clustered forms seemingly anchored in place and bowed but not broken, set on a vast plain under an energy-charged sky. The faithful appear even more solidly placed than the green hill on the horizon in the distance. The four scenes of *New World Dimensions I, II, III* and *IV* (1954), with their strong composition and harmonious colours, suggest states of society in a new world brought to fruition by the observance of the Divine teachings for today. They radiate a dynamic peace in which the human forms and their surroundings are dimly perceived, as becomes our images of the future society.

One of the most difficult subjects for a painter would seem to be prayer and meditation, yet even here Mark Tobey has succeeded in capturing a profound sense of a spiritual state, particularly in his *Meditative Series* of 1954, of which William Seitz has said: 'Visual prayers, these small, profound communions with God, nature, and the self transcribe the *activity*, as distinct from the subject matter, of meditation.'[2] Of *Meditative Series VIII*, Tobey said it 'can suggest so much—cosmic or just minute forces of nature.'[3] 'I try to make of each picture a world in itself, and perhaps this one seems uninteresting however much one looks at the variations in the relations of lines and in the accents of touch which I have used in the center. A much vaster world can be found here than would appear at first glance. The use of many entwining rhythms indicates my search for height and depth. One must search while one is contemplating or else there will be no reward.'[4] In the exquisite *Lovers of Light* (1960), painted when Tobey was 70 years old, the 'white writing' with which he has depicted both physical and spiritual light is refined to a crystalline delicacy and clarity, while being condensed into an unbelievably small space (the painting measures 12·2 × 17·2 cm; $4\frac{3}{4}$ × $6\frac{3}{4}$ in.). The technical perfection of the extremely fine brushwork creates a complex of interconnected space and line that absorbs the viewer into an intimate spiritual communion.[5]

It was only natural that Tobey's interest in spiritual subjects would go beyond the explicitly Bahá'í to draw on the great periods of spiritual expression in earlier cultures. He once wrote: 'I wouldn't mind revisiting the old beauties of Europe although my tendencies tend toward the Orient, or if in Europe, to the medieval where the two strains and attitudes meet in the abstraction of the human and divine ideas,'[6] and referring to a 12th century sculpture, 'somewhere in this

[1] Whitechapel catalogue, p. 22.

[2] Seitz, p. 31.

[3] Letter to Arthur L. Dahl.

[4] Whitechapel catalogue, p. 24.

[5] When at one point a portfolio of reproductions of Tobey's work was proposed for distribution to Bahá'ís, this was the one painting that he specifically mentioned for inclusion.

[6] Letter to Marian Willard, February 1953, Louvre catalogue.

spirit I'd like to find an art which would represent the age to come. . . .'[1] He frequently painted Christian and Biblical subjects such as the Last Supper, Adam and Eve, Jacob and the angel, or the dormition of the Virgin, drawing often on Byzantine or Gothic sources. He said with reference to one such painting: 'I have used some of the identical forms in improvisation similar to musicians using a motif by earlier or contemporary musicians. I did not have any specific painting in mind, rather more or less the feeling of these paintings upon and into which I built a modern complex structure.'[2] Tobey's experience here would seem to parallel that of many Bahá'ís; his new Faith clarified and purified his understanding of the spiritual realities of earlier religious traditions as expressed in his own field of art.

Even beyond the obviously religious themes in Tobey's work, almost everything that he has done can be seen as an expression of the joy of discovering the beauties and attributes of God reflected visually as well as spiritually in the entire creation. As he himself wrote in *World Order* magazine in 1935, 'When we attempt to contemplate the *One Spirit* we come to an abstraction unknowable in any manner akin to our three-dimensional state of being or existence. So we look to Its manifestations, numberless pluralities of Its rich reflections, Its valleys of grandeur, the powers of Its exuberance as forms flow from forms—expressing this same richness in massive rocks or opening to us in some delicate blossom, as though an eye of extreme beauty had opened, fresh on its birth from harder and less reflecting substances but fed and related to them by some secret stream of life.'[3]

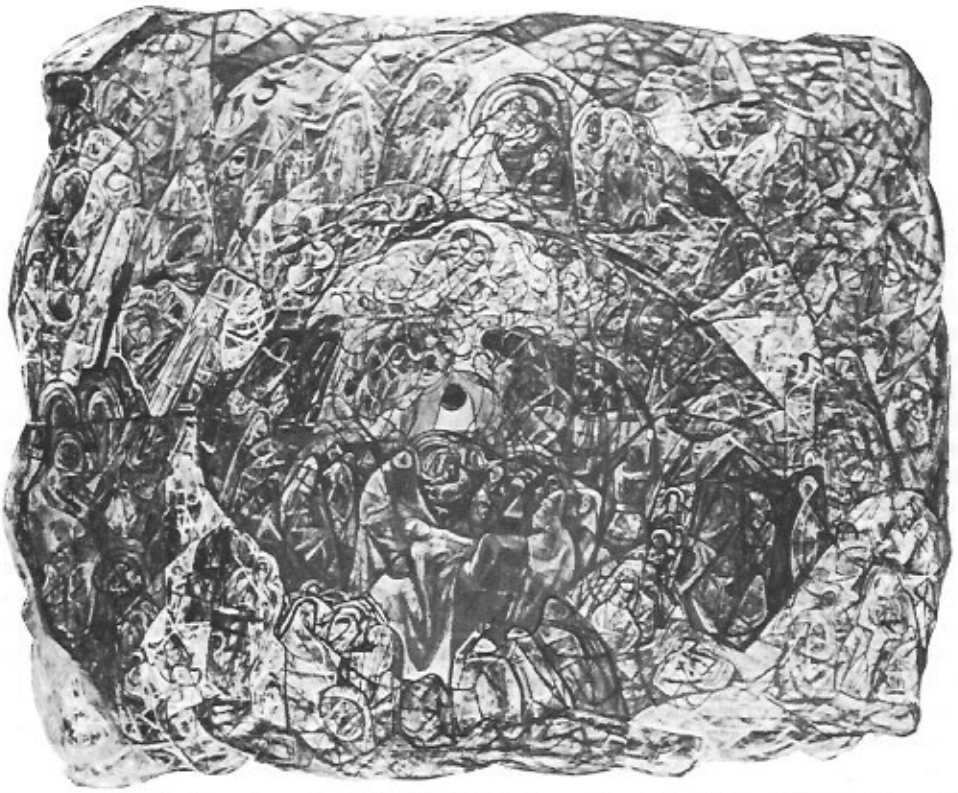
It is generally agreed that Mark Tobey was a unique figure in contemporary art, standing aloof from yet often pioneering in the trends and directions of twentieth century painting. The distinctive character of his work is obviously due not only to his innate talent and sensitivity, but also to his experience of the Bahá'í Faith, which provided him with a philosophical basis and approach totally different from that of his contemporaries. Indeed, even his move towards abstraction came from a different motivation, the search for an artistic language capable of expressing the spiritual and intangible.

He knew that only time could decide how his life and work related to history and human society, and how much influence the Bahá'í Faith exercised on his painting. 'I can only say that it has brought a tremendous impulse to me which I have tried to use without propaganda. . . .'[4] He believed there would never be a 'Bahá'í art', but rather an evolution towards an acceptance of all art and a universality of expression. 'Of course we talk about international styles today, but I think later on we'll talk about universal styles . . . the future of the world must be this realization of its oneness, which is the basic teaching as I understand it in the Bahá'í Faith, and from that oneness will naturally develop a new spirit in art, because that's what it is. It's a spirit and it's not new words and it's not new ideas only. It's a different spirit. And that spirit of oneness will be reflected through painting.'[5] Mark Tobey pioneered in the expression of that oneness and thus endowed his work with the 'fragrance of spirituality'.

[1] Letter to Arthur L. Dahl, 7 May 1957, Stanford Art Book 7, p. 12.
[2] Whitechapel catalogue, p. 16.
[3] Mark Tobey, 'The One Spirit', *World Order*, vol. 1, no. 5, pp. 174–176, August 1935.
[4] Conversation with Arthur L. Dahl, 1962.
[5] Conversation with Arthur L. Dahl, 1962, Stanford Art Book 7, p. 15.

NOTES

Mark Tobey Paintings Cited	*Collection*
p. 640	
GOTHIC 1943 widely reproduced, colour plate in *Tobey's 80, A Retrospective* Seattle Art Museum, 1970	Mrs. Berthe Poncy Jacobson, Seattle
pp. 640, 641	
VOID 1960 two versions exist	
EDGE OF AUGUST 1953 widely reproduced	The Museum of Modern Art, New York
REMOTE FIELD 1944 widely reproduced	The Museum of Modern Art, New York
CALLIGRAPHIC STILL LIFE #3	Joyce and Arthur Dahl, Carmel (perhaps recently sold)
p. 642	
CONFLICT OF THE SATANIC AND CELESTIAL EGOS 1918 Seitz, no. 1, p. 10	
RISING ORB 1935 colour plate in *Tobey's 80, A Retrospective*, no. 16	Seattle Art Museum
THE SEEKERS 1950? Stanford Art Book 7, no. 11, pl. 7 M. Knoedler catalogue, 1976, no. 17	Joyce and Arthur Dahl, Carmel
DAY OF THE MARTYR 1942 Stanford Art Book 7, no. 7, pl. 5	Joyce and Arthur Dahl, Carmel



'Movement Round a Martyr', a painting by Mark Tobey bequeathed to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United Kingdom by Mrs. Constance Langdon-Davies.

p. 642

THE RED TREE OF THE MARTYR 1940 — Arthur Lyon Dahl, Noumea
Stanford Art Book 7, no. 2, colour plate 3

THE NEW DAY 1945? — Joyce and Arthur Dahl, Carmel
widely reproduced, colour plate in Knoedler catalogue, no. 12

THE RETREAT OF THE FRIEND 1947
Seitz, no. 51, p. 13

EXTENSIONS FROM BAGHDÁD 1944 — Marian Willard, New York
Whitechapel catalogue, pl. XIX

ARENA OF CIVILIZATION 1947 — Mrs. Martha Jackson, New York
widely reproduced, colour plate in Colette Roberts, *Mark Tobey*, also available as postcard

p. 643

VOID DEVOURING THE GADGET ERA 1942 — artist
Seitz, no. 14, p. 11

CONCOURSE 1943 — Joyce and Arthur Dahl, Carmel
Knoedler catalogue, no. 11, colour plate, p. 26

CELESTIAL CONCERT 1954
colour plate in *Mark Tobey* by Schmied, (Abrams, New York)

THE EMERALD HILL OF FAITHFULNESS 1952 — Joyce and Arthur Dahl, Carmel
Stanford Art Book 7, no. 12, pl. 8
Knoedler catalogue, no. 18, p. 29

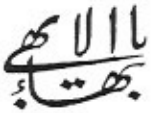
NEW WORLD DIMENSIONS I 1954 — Joyce and Arthur Dahl, Carmel
NEW WORLD DIMENSIONS II
NEW WORLD DIMENSIONS III
NEW WORLD DIMENSIONS IV
Knoedler catalogue, nos. 25–28, pp. 36–37

MEDITATIVE SERIES VIII 1954 — Joyce and Arthur Dahl, Carmel (perhaps recently sold)
widely reproduced, colour plate in Knoedler catalogue, no. 30, p. 39

MEDITATIVE SERIES IX 1954 — Miss Darthea Speyer, New York
colour plate in Colette Roberts, *Mark Tobey* and postcard, Le Musée de Poche, G. Fall, Paris

from the MEDITATIVE SERIES 1954
colour plate in Schmied, *Mark Tobey* (Abrams, New York)

LOVERS OF LIGHT 1960 — Arthur Lyon Dahl, Noumea
Stanford Art Book 7, no. 46, colour plate 21



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