

*Conversations about Painting  
with Rudolf Steiner*

Recollections of Five Pioneers  
of the New Art Impulse

**Maria Strakosch-Giesler**

**Hilde Boos-Hamburger**

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**Margarita Voloschin**

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Translated and Edited  
by Peter Stebbing

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The interior model of the first Goetheanum by Rudolf Steiner. 1913.

Scale 1:20. (Detail showing the large cupola). Goetheanum Art Collection (Dornach).

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## EXPERIENCES IN PAINTING THE CUPOLAS OF THE FIRST GOETHEANUM

**Hilde Boos-Hamburger**

Every artistically striving person making closer acquaintance with Rudolf Steiner and his anthroposophy is likely to have experienced in a quite individual manner the agreeable shock: here lie all the possibilities for the further development of art. In one way or another it may have gone with him as with the writer of these recollections when she first read through (not yet actually studied!) the book *Theosophy*<sup>5</sup>, without understanding the essential, yet rivetted by the crystal-bright formation of this work, and having to say to herself: Even if I cannot survey it, it is nonetheless evident: Here lies a comprehensive work of art! This first impression did not deceive, for with every subsequent work taken up, every book, every lecture, not to mention the Mystery Dramas, there opened up new experiences and vistas previously undreamed of. – These will surely be found most felicitously expressed in the poem by *Christian Morgenstern* (1871–1914) dedicated to Rudolf Steiner:

*To beauty does your work lead:  
For beauty in the end  
Streams in through every revelation  
That surrounds us.  
Out of human-sufferings  
Upward to ever higher harmonies  
You release the dizzying feeling,  
Till, united  
In accord with the  
Inestimable proclaimer of GOD  
And HIS never-to-be-grasped splendor  
It vibrates in the love-light  
Of blessedness. . . .  
From beauty does your work come, to beauty does it lead.*

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<sup>5</sup>*Theosophy: An Introduction to the Spiritual Processes in Human Life and in the Cosmos* by Rudolf Steiner. Anthroposophic Press, N.Y. 1994.

In view of such lofty aims, the aims of the Expressionists of that time (1910) seemed narrowly circumscribed. In the first conversation I had with Rudolf Steiner, I therefore did not venture to mention the Expressionist movement, sensing his far-reaching knowledge. This dealt rather with general points of view. Repeatedly, he emphasized that the painter must devote himself again and again with intense interest and enthusiasm to the phenomena of light and air. And “work a great deal” (“*viel, viel arbeiten*”), he urged.

Those were the years when every August the Mystery Dramas were performed. In 1911, I was first able to participate in the work of preparing the scenery along with many artistically zealous individuals and other friends in the Munich *Schranneballe* (the old granary) under the direction of the three scenery painters, *Hermann Linde* (1863–1923), Haass and Volkert. The work began already in June and was continued over the next two months. Scenery, which sometimes included arches, had to be cut out and for the most part, as with complicated contours such as those involving foliage, sewed onto nets. Some pieces of scenery such as that for Scene 7 in *The Guardian of the Threshold* and the Cosmic Midnight in *The Souls' Awakening* were completely sewn from layers of organdy; various colored surfaces one over the other. Rudolf Steiner had made sketches for these, which I still recall quite well. Self-evidently, he had provided indications for all scenes, while still leaving artists maximum freedom. We also produced numerous smaller pieces of scenery for the stage, and in the last two years I was permitted to paint some side panels and the like for Hermann Linde.

As our “reward” we could go to scenery-rehearsals in the *Gärtnerplatz* Theater and in this way be present for the rehearsal of a number of scenes under Rudolf Steiner’s direction. In the goodness of his heart, Hermann Linde asked Rudolf Steiner’s permission for our participation at all dress-rehearsals as well, and right away brought along a number of entry-tickets signed by him. In this way, it was possible to take in these plays still more intensively and retain many details better in memory than when seeing them only once, since the wealth of impressions was overwhelming. One was dealing after all with comprehensive works of art. There were innovations as regards color and painting as well. The Cosmic Midnight scene had the most intense after-effect, particularly the colors of Luna’s garments, orange and violet, the strongest color impression of all. It seemed incredible. How on earth did Dr. Steiner come to such a provocative, marvelous color-chord? The answer only came in studying Goethe’s color theory several years later! *Imme von Eckardtstein* (1871–1930), who made the costumes according to the *Doktor’s* indications, had an unusually fine sensitivity for coordinating colors with each other; thus she showed us some fabrics she had “treated” so as to get the most varied nuances. These fabrics were often only obtainable in tones that were

too garish. She hung them for weeks in the open air in the shade, where they mostly faded only a little, taking on a fine silvery tone, and afterwards showed themselves to be splendidly attuned to each other.

In these years, keen negotiations were carried on with the purpose of erecting the *Johannesbau*<sup>6</sup> on the land acquired on the Ungererstrasse. When this project had to be given up on account of the building prohibition, and it became possible to choose the *Bluthügel* (“Blood Hill”<sup>7</sup>) in Dornach instead, many artistically striving individuals went there in the spring of 1914. *Sophie Stinde* (1853–1915), whose name and noble being is quite unknown to the majority of members today, was not only one of the most outstanding pioneers of the anthroposophical movement, but also the first and most energetic of those initiating the erection of our building. A few months earlier, in reply to the question as to whether I would also be permitted to join in the work there, she said: “Yes, we can use you. – I know you!” Her answer seemed to me brief, straightforward and clear – like her whole being, that consisted of truth and clarity. When she departed from us only a year and a half later, Rudolf Steiner dedicated the most moving words to her.<sup>8</sup>

Directly after the laying of the foundation stone on September 20, 1913, the preliminary excavation of the ground was begun. At that time there were only a very few members in Dornach. From March onwards, more and more came, since it became possible to begin with the sculptural work. On June 28, 1914, the ominous day of the assassination in Sarajevo, I found around 150 friends there, occupied with the most varied tasks. It was a Sunday morning. That afternoon the *Herr Doktor* held the third of the lectures given at the building site in the Carpentry Building. On ascending the hill, one came upon the eagerly awaited sight: already the cupolas were to be seen in their noble dimensions, though they did not as yet shine out into their surroundings, being still not yet covered with the greenish blue-gray shimmering slate from Norway. The whole building in its proportions had an effect, such that one directly sensed: there stands the fulfillment of all striving and all longing for the distantly-surmised and hoped-for renewal of the visual arts... Rudolf Steiner spoke to us of it in those lectures held in the Carpentry Building concerning the underlying impulses of

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<sup>6</sup> Later renamed the Goetheanum.

<sup>7</sup> In a tumultuous battle, Swiss confederate forces gained the victory here over 3000 Swabians on July 22, 1499. The “Peace of Basel” was signed the same year, recognizing Swiss independence.

<sup>8</sup> See memorial addresses, pp. 150–179, in Rudolf Steiner: *Unsere Toten* (Our Dead), Rudolf Steiner Verlag, Dornach, Switzerland 1984. (GA 261)

the new building: how the element of time, of movement, would have to be incorporated into the visual arts, if they are to be re-enlivened.

Wishing to have me as an assistant and co-worker, Hermann Linde sent for me. The next morning I discussed with him in his studio (the former office in the Carpentry Building) the first tasks to be done. As he was showing *Frl.* von Eckardtstein and me the first two sketches Rudolf Steiner had made for the painting of the large cupola, it so happened that Rudolf Steiner himself entered the room. *Herr* Linde interrupted himself and pulled out the early edition of the newspaper he had brought with him from the city, announcing in large headlines the murder in Sarajevo. There was as yet no radio! Never shall I forget Rudolf Steiner's expression at that moment. Tremendous horror and grief lay in his wide-opened eyes as he uttered the words: "Now the catastrophe has overtaken us!"

As a matter of course, the work went on as before. Hermann Linde had already done a number of experiments with grounding, and these were continued with united energies. Stress was laid by Dr. Steiner on finishing the building by September on account of the anticipated outbreak of war. As regards the practical work of painting the large cupola, it was conceived that the five painters who had been chosen by Dr. Steiner would each form a staff of co-workers. Thus *Herr* Linde assigned to me the task of making various studies, e.g., arm-studies, but also attempts at shaping the Elohim beings in the west. The two first motifs, the lowest of the triad in the west and east of the cupola, the *Herr Doktor* had sketched with both pencil contours and pastel, while all later ones are worked only in color and the details of form retained in separate black-and-white studies. The desired color nuances were often not available to him. Thus he added verbal indications. In the case of the Elohim, he said they would have to be painted entirely in warm yellow, with a golden shining effect. Nowadays we can hardly imagine the difficulties that arose with such tasks. *Herr* Linde and his colleagues were very capable, talented painters – pictures by the former hung in various museums – but they had come completely out of the naturalistic school, had worked more with light-dark values and less in terms of color. Thus their activity in Dornach signified a total readjustment. Right into the details, everything had to be worked out from scratch.

One day a long-standing acquaintance, *Johanna Wagenmann*, close friends with the spouse of the leading architect *Schmidt-Curtius*, drew me mysteriously into *Haus Brodbeck* (the old part of what is today the *Rudolf Steiner-Halde*). When she had me slip into a small room and under the enclosed interior model worked entirely by Rudolf Steiner, it was the height of all happiness. An unspeakable impression presented itself; for he had only quite recently painted the curves of color into the model of the large cupola – with a tremendous intensity. It was



The interior model of the first Goetheanum by Rudolf Steiner. Scale 1:20. 1913. Goetheanum Art Collection (Dornach). Rudolf Steiner Nachlassverwaltung (Dornach). Restored 2005. Photo Haiggi Baumgartner.



The interior model of the first Goetheanum. (Detail of the large cupola).

not the color alone which worked so powerfully, but the whole, quite new, singular formation of this sea of color with its flowing curves. One sensed something blossoming, growing and as though turning in on itself and out again: mysterious processes of becoming!

Soon many things changed: war had been declared! Many of our male friends were called up. *Herr* and *Frau Doktor* were at the Wagner festival performances in Bayreuth, but managed to get over the border just in time. *Frau Doktor* described this graphically. Hermann Linde had also gone north to fetch his wife and child, and remained absent for many weeks. In this way, a lot of tasks had to be postponed.

After a month or two, it was possible to form a picture for oneself of what was happening on the hill where our building was going up. Where so many artists were together, in order to serve a common goal out of enthusiasm, it could not be otherwise than that human weaknesses broke through now and again in the course of the work. Whether it was, for example, that more talented individuals found it difficult to look on while those perhaps less talented than themselves were able to accomplish certain tasks; or other things having to do with the various shades of temperament. At that time, however, it was moving to see how Rudolf Steiner always clearly indicated a particular necessary attitude, as the moment required, without ever moralizing. With rare exceptions, the indication was always heeded. In this way, each person's striving could keep pace with the work as a whole. He emphasized several times: For world events it was quite indifferent who carried out a particular task, if it is a matter of whether this task is done at all! The previous year, he had spoken of how impulses consciously held back, e.g., a seven-year renunciation of a favorite occupation, transform themselves into certain capacities. And in the last cycle of lectures held before the outbreak of the World War in Norrköping, he explained how, after death, Lucifer most easily spins a web around the human soul by means of its own ideals, and is then able to make its fruits his own, if the soul does not willingly during life give these ideals over to the spirit of humanity.

The situation of the Goetheanum, of the human race at that time, weighed heavily on the soul; the feeling reinforced itself, that only in attempting to give meaning to such teachings in one's own case, would one be doing one's part as an individual. Dr. Steiner had offered me the opportunity to involve myself in several other painting tasks. From similar motives to those given above, I renounced these and opted instead to take care of the grounding of the cupolas and the preparation of the painters' study-panels.

At that time a number of us also prepared the many thousands of oak shingles with which the exterior wall of the small cupola-space – actually of the storeroom (or magazine)

surrounding it – was to be covered. Each one was dipped in a hot bath of wax dissolved in turpentine, which was then vigorously brushed in. However, this recipe proved to be insufficiently weatherproof. Later, this wall was covered with another waterproofing agent. In such simple tasks, important friends took part. Among others, *Walo von May* (1879–1928), the ingenious illustrator, keenly involved himself the whole time in this shingle-brushing, for the most part silently, only now and again making a kindly-ironic remark.

After various tries, I learned only somewhat late from *Frau Dr. Thekla Schmiedel* (1886–1963), that together with her husband she had developed a painting ground, which was at first rejected by some painters, as it did not seem white enough to them, being mixed with ordinary chalk instead of with so-called champagne-chalk. All experiments showed, however, that the ground made with the latter was far less resilient than the former and did not withstand washing very well. In addition, the grounding of *Dr. Oskar Schmiedel* (1887–1959) had wax mixed into it, lending the colors a wonderful luminosity. I decided in favor of this one after *Herr Doktor* declared the color tests on it to be satisfactory. Thus in the course of the next two years, apart from the 650 square meter surface of the two cupolas, approximately another 800 square meters of study-panels were produced for the various painters. For this purpose, two square meter plywood panels were used, made from Gabonese mahogany. The painting ground consisted of two different layers: the first was a mixture of chalk, casein and saponified wax. It had the magnificent advantage that a second coat, by definition the thickest, could be applied in any desired degree of graininess. The second layer consisted of a mixture of dissolved cellulose, wax and medium. This was to prevent the watercolor from penetrating too deeply and grant it corresponding luminosity.

The following episode is reported because it could point the way in some cases. In the early summer of 1915 we had finished grounding the large cupola up to a point. The painting ground consisted – as already mentioned – of two main layers. The first, of chalk, wax and casein-glue had to be painted three times onto cork panels, which were screwed onto plywood panels. These cork panels, used for acoustic reasons, had previously been washed down twice with a strong solution of aluminum acetate so as to bond the tannic acid. This would otherwise have struck through the white ground and caused stains. Between each of these three chalk coatings it was necessary to wait two weeks so that the casein-glue set completely. As a precaution, however, we let each layer dry still longer – for how much depended on our cupolas being well grounded and durable! As stated above, it was possible to give this painting ground any degree of graininess with the final coat. The

wishes of the artists in this regard were diligently followed up and, in good time, we had made samples for them to try out. Even the most demanding requirements appeared to have been satisfied. However, one afternoon as I climbed down the scaffolding-steps 30 meters into the depths below, spattered from head to toe, eyes, nose and ears bespeckled with the precious white ground with which 450 square meters had been painted that day, I was met by one of the artists, asking for the key for the cupola lighting, saying he wanted to smooth the painting ground on his surface area with sandpaper right away. Horrified, I explained that we had made every effort to do all that was desired and that such an intention could definitely only be carried out in eight days time, after complete drying of the paint surface. To my astonishment, I got the answer: “The *Herr Doktor* has permitted it”! Assuming a misunderstanding, I climbed down to the bottom, and on meeting *Herr Doktor* in front of the Carpentry Building, I attempted to clear the matter up. “And why should N.N.<sup>9</sup> not do that on his part of the cupola?” he asked. “We have been working for months to prepare this ground properly so as to accord with all requirements, and the responsibility for it lies with me,” I retorted. “But if you have delivered on and completed your work, you bear no further responsibility; only the painter himself does,” Dr. Steiner replied. That did not make sense to me. “I can’t understand that,” I cried out, “aren’t human beings there for the Goetheanum? Is it excusable that the work is knowingly impaired in this way?” But with a tone of extraordinary earnestness the answer came back: “No, the Goetheanum is there for human beings!” However, only the next few months shed light on this answer. The individual in question was in a somewhat unstable state of mind, and on that account it was important to put the person first in everything. Such a word of Rudolf Steiner has its effects throughout one’s life and becomes decisive in certain situations.

Rudolf Steiner had as an ideal to use only organic plant material where possible for the interior space. Thus he also wanted specially produced plant colors rather than the usual mineral colors. These new plant pigments were developed and produced by *Frau* and *Herr* Schmiedel in their own laboratory. The old masters had already placed value on grinding the colors for as long as possible, since by this means the brilliance of the colors can be considerably enhanced. Thus a number of diligent hands applied themselves to grinding a portion of the pigments on matt plate-glass for up to 100 hours. These were mainly elderly friends who lacked the strength for carving and who now enthusiastically devoted themselves to this necessary work.

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<sup>9</sup> In more than one instance, where no name is to be given, Hilde Boos-Hamburger indicates this with the letters “N.N.” They do not necessarily stand for any actual initials.



The plant color laboratory at the Goetheanum, 1914. Verlag am Goetheanum (Dornach).



Thekla Schmiedel preparing plant colors in the laboratory. (When the first batch of plant colors stood ready for use, Rudolf Steiner was presented with a sheet of paper, on which he spontaneously painted the mythical beast dimly seen here in the background to the left.)  
Verlag am Goetheanum (Dornach).



The team of carpenters in front of the first Goetheanum. (To the left, holding a saw, is the lead carpenter, Heinrich Liedvogel, who worked with rousing energy on the construction of both the first and the second Goetheanum.) Dokumentation am Goetheanum-Bildarchiv.



The auditorium and part of the large cupola (toward the southwest). Rudolf Steiner Archive (Dornach).

The plasticine which Rudolf Steiner required for the 9.5 meter high model [about 31 feet] of the great wooden group of the *Representative of Humanity*, which was to stand in a central position in the Goetheanum, was produced by *Frau Dr. Schmiedel* in the laboratory. It was a matter of approximately 2000 kg. [4400 lbs]. After the mass of plasticine had been duly mixed, it was kneaded by *Herr* and *Frau Schuurman* and then delivered to Miss *Edith Maryon* (1872–1924) in the studio. Together with our exceedingly dexterous carpenter *Sonderegger* – here I am reaching ahead somewhat – she had built up the scaffolding for the large model, based on the small, approximately two meter high model and the calculations of the architects. The individual framework for each of the six large figures of the group was made according to her specifications. These consisted of iron rods and wire mesh, the latter being already adapted to the main forms. Miss Maryon was rather well known in England in the years leading up to the first World War. I had heard her name mentioned there years ago. She worked with an unparalleled devotion and selflessness for Rudolf Steiner, placing her considerable abilities entirely at his disposal. I myself helped at that time in the preparatory work of spreading the plasticine onto the rods and wire mesh, roughly shaping the forms so that it was possible to relieve Dr. Steiner, who was continually occupied in all manner of places, of the most onerous part of the work. Thus I experienced something of her manner of doing things. In his memorial address for Edith Maryon, Rudolf Steiner emphasized how necessary such selfless help was for his work, and held her up as exemplary in this regard. At the very beginning he had said, in the lecture of June 17, 1914, printed in *Ways to a New Style in Architecture*: “True healing from evil to good will in the future lie for human souls in true art sending a spiritual atmosphere into human souls and human hearts, so that these human souls and hearts, when sympathetically surrounded by what has come into being in architectural sculpture and other forms, if they are predisposed to lying, cease to lie, if predisposed to disturb the peace, cease to disturb the peace of their fellow human beings. They will speak a language which human beings today have as yet no presentiment of!”

Not only could these words be felt as profound truth, but increasingly also as an earnest admonition as, oppressive and threatening, the dull thunder of cannons began to roll across from nearby Alsace.

The work itself was a source of much satisfaction. While the fourteen painters – since Christmas 1914 those assigned to work on the small cupola had also begun making their studies – struggled intensively with the new painting problems, they needed an immense number of study panels, as already indicated above. I had to provide these according to need, so there was often the opportunity of visiting their work places and taking part in many

conversations and discussions. Ever new riddles came up: it even emerged that Dr. Steiner had said something to one artist which seemed to contradict what he had said to another. Much confusion arose on this account among the painters. We first had to learn to understand how subtly he entered into the various questions, answering them out of the whole mood and context from which they proceeded. It then occurred to one: you must first learn how to ask questions – how to formulate objective questions, free of wishes, that willingly accept either confirmation or denial in answer.

In the autumn of 1915 when difficulties had arisen in connection with several personalities that needed settling to clear the air, a number of evening sessions were scheduled for this purpose. Rudolf Steiner often let people talk for hours and began speaking himself only when a great deal had already come to light. Among other things, he tried to make comprehensible to us how problematic it is for the esoteric teacher, that he is under the strictest obligation not to encroach in the slightest degree on the free will of the pupil. He said: “If for example someone comes to me and says, ‘I know I was the Mother of God in my last life’” [a crass case, which had actually occurred – *the author*], “then as an esoteric teacher I do not even have the right to say: that is not true. Why? Because, if someone comes to me with a statement of that kind, the desire for confirmation is in fact already contained in it. And this I have to take account of. Thus I can at most reply: If you think so – but this answer is then taken as confirmation!” – (quoted from memory).

As a result of the outbreak of war much had changed, affecting the work. Of necessity it had to proceed much more slowly. Hermann Linde had returned in the autumn with his wife, who was also a painter. It then came about of itself, that the artists now had the time and the leisure to bring their studies for the large cupola to a conclusion on their own. Linde took on the three motifs lying one over the other in the west and later also the ones in the east which lead over to the small cupola. *Richard Pollack-Karlin* (1867–1943) and his wife painted “Lemuria” and “Atlantis” as well as the Greek cultural period. Baroness Paini-Gazotti – known at that time as *Lotus Péralté* (1862–1953) – painted the *Indian* period; *Fräulein Ottilie Schneider* (1875–1957) from Prague the “Persian” and “Egyptian” period. With all these colleagues, who differed in age, I was good friends in later years as well. Hermann Linde was well-known as an artist in Germany. Among other places, he exhibited regularly in the Berlin Secession. He was an Impressionist in the best sense of the word and a subtle chiaroscuroist. Especially charming are the many studies in which he was able to capture in the most exceptional way a sense of life and movement. It was admirable how he struggled for the changeover to immersing oneself in the life of color. His final

picture series of the *Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily*<sup>10</sup>, created on commission for the wife of privy councillor Röchling and often exhibited in the Goetheanum, bears witness to this.

Richard Pollack-Karlin was from Prague and had been associated in his youth with the circle around *Gustav Meyrink*, though he went rather his own way. He sought mystical deepening. When a number of friends, including Meyrink, had connected themselves with “*Meister Johannes*” (“Master John”), a significant, though outwardly unassuming man in Frankfurt, who was also known to Rudolf Steiner, Pollack visited him once, but continued following his own path, as he told me.

Knowledge of higher things shone from his eyes, which sparkled with great kindness. A deep seriousness and feeling of responsibility permeated his whole manner of striving. After a number of years he had come far enough that the stigmata could be seen to emerge, and a great weakness tied him to his bed. At this time he and *Hilde Kontanyi*, later his wife, heard of Rudolf Steiner and requested a visit from him. Dr. Steiner said to Pollack: “This is not a path for you” and gave him instructions leading onto the modern, Rosicrucian path. This was told me in later years by Pollack himself. I had often visited him and his wife in their studio in Vienna prior to 1914 and made friends with them. Both faced life with great interest and were connected with a wide circle of people. Hilde Pollack was a plump, unusually lively woman who in like manner turned out *Buchtehn* (yeast pastries), *Strudel* and *Zwetschgenknödel* (plum dumplings) and enjoyed inviting her friends to an excellent “*Kaffeetscherl*” (coffee party), just as she also worked out with loving care her – albeit *Jugendstil* (art nouveau) stylized – “*Viecherl*” (animals) for the task assigned her in the cupola painting, while Pollack had been allocated the “*Engerl*” (angels) by Dr. Steiner. They worked jointly on the Greek, Lemurian and Atlantean motifs. Hilde Pollack had seized the initiative in painting small program-posters for the eurythmy performances which, from 1915 on, took place regularly on Sunday afternoons. This pleased *Herr* and *Frau Doktor* so much, that they regarded the painted program-poster as an integral part of the event and retained this custom.

Admittedly these posters looked very different from those of today. They had rather something of Viennese *Jugendstil* about them. They were more like decorative drawings tinted with color. When the paintings in the large cupola were completed, *Frau* Pollack began to live out her phantasy in fine silk-embroideries. Several friends had made their view known, that her style would lend itself most favorably to a kind of embroidery or needlework-painting. Although her attitude was to reject this at first, she did in fact attempt

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<sup>10</sup> Goethe's fairy tale.

it, and came to astonishing results. She then later produced a great deal in Prague – where the couple had moved after the separation of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy – and acquired a name for herself. So much so, that when these loyal friends were both brought, under the Nazi regime, to Theresienstadt and were to go after a time to Auschwitz, the German National Socialists offered to spare her life, if she would embroider for them. In her upright, brave manner, she declined and preferred to go with her husband to her death. At the age of 76 he held hundreds of anthroposophical lectures for his companions in suffering in the camp. In view of such greatness and tragedy, one first comprehends the old biblical saying: “Be true even unto death, and I shall give you the crown of life.” May they now, adorned with this crown, help perhaps thousands of their blood-companions find paths into the future in earthly life.

Shortly before Christmas 1914, Dr. Steiner had allocated all the sketches for the decoration of the two cupolas. I could now yield to a long cherished wish to show him some work without seeming to drop a hint. I hoped for a fruitful conversation.

Upon stating my wish, he first of all replied: “Yes, but I have unfortunately already given out all the sketches for the cupolas.” I explained to him that I knew that and had intentionally waited so long with my request, in order that he would not think I wanted to force myself on him. He went into the studio of Lotus Péralté and looked at a number of my watercolor sheets there. Stopping at one in particular he suddenly exclaimed: “I shall still give you something to paint even so!” It was a somewhat naive-bold attempt, inspired by his description of the Old Moon evolution in *An Outline of Esoteric Science*. To my astonished question, whether there was anything at all left to paint, he answered: “Yes, in the *Skyoptikon*!”<sup>11</sup> And just what was to be done there, I ventured to ask. “It will be occult things,” was the reply. This story should be told, since almost no one knew about it, not even *Herr Linde* or *Herr Aisenpreis*, both of whom I asked about it. Only *Fräulein Stinde* had learned of it from the *Doktor*, but without further particulars.

Unfortunately, I forgot to ask *Frau* Dr. Steiner what she knew.

In these days, Rudolf Steiner also gave a sketch for the stage curtain.<sup>12</sup> It has the wanderings

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<sup>11</sup> Though it seems to suggest an observatory, *Skyoptikon* was then still a current term for what had been an early form of slide projector, as first used by Herman Grimm for his lectures on art history. This was a room designed to admit direct sunlight from an aperture in the ceiling.

<sup>12</sup> This sketch measuring 30 x 44 cm [12 x 17 in] is available in a full-size color reproduction published by the Rudolf Steiner Verlag, Dornach.



Sketch for the stage curtain in the first Goetheanum by Rudolf Steiner. Oil crayon. 1914. Rudolf Steiner Archive (Dornach).



The stage curtain in the second Goetheanum painted by William Scott Pyle. 1937.

of Brother Mark from the “*Geheimnissen*” (Mysteries) by Goethe as its motif. He said that Goethe had in some respects not fully grasped the underlying imagination. For example, the rose-cross which comes into question here is not chiseled in stone, but floats from the spiritual world over the monastery. This is actually the first Goetheanum, which has to stand on a crag of primary rock, while the mountain over which Brother Mark strides would have to show a limestone formation. It appeared to me decidedly odd that the painter [*Camilla Wandrey*] who carried out studies based on the sketch, wavered, because, as she lamented, she did not know the difference between primary rocks and limestone. Hence she wrote to Dr. Schmiedel in Innsbruck, who had been obliged to do his military service there in the hinterlands, requesting photographs of primary rock crags. I wanted to assist her, and when the opportunity presented itself, I asked the *Doktor* whether he had rock formations of a particular region in mind. Animatedly, he replied: “Well, you know the *Rosalien* chapel near Wiener-Neustadt. It stands on the foothills of the *Wechselgebirge* and that is primary rock!” It was for him simply a matter of the characteristic kind. The mountain range he mentioned subsides gently, undulating down towards the Hungarian lowlands; it shows bare rock in only a few places. On the other hand, the crag in the sketch juts up steeply. Nothing came of this painted curtain so far as the first Goetheanum is concerned. One problem lay in the difficulty of producing a suitable painting ground for a curtain which is to be gathered up, and maybe Rudolf Steiner also did not find it artistically satisfactory to gather up a painted curtain. Many years later our now-deceased American friend *William Scott Pyle* (1888–1938) painted the motif as a curtain for the new building – one can say, as his legacy.

Time flew by. The two cupolas were grounded, and the painters worked for the most part on painting them. We had performed several *Faust* scenes in eurythmy under the unforgettable direction of *Herr* and *Frau Doktor*. On Assumption Day on August 15, 1915, *Faust*’s ascent to heaven was presented on the stage of the Carpentry Building. A mood of consecration prevailed which recalled a similar one at the Munich performances of the Mystery Plays. *Jan Stuten* (1890–1948) had created the first version of his music for the Prologue. The previous Easter the Easter Night scene, and at Whitsun the Ariel scene, were performed. – All with the simplest means, for it was crucial to save. Yet these performances often had the strongest effect, arising quite especially from the specifications, the outstanding knowledge and ability, the true artistry of Rudolf Steiner. Those more qualified have already given an account of this.

It seems to me that too little is told of the wonderful humor of the great teacher. When describing the hats appropriate for *Faust* and *Wagner* to our old friend *Ellram*, who was

60-ish, but devoted herself with skill and enthusiasm to costuming, he took hold – for lack of other means at that moment – of the blue silk turban she always wore wherever one saw her. Startled, the poor woman shrieked, “Oh, *Herr Doktor*, my wig, my wig!” And, with a slightly mischievous, yet beaming smile, he said: “Excuse me, please!” It was his subtle way of treating people with humor. Years ago, our spirited friend had been in actual fact, as she often recounted, director of the boarding school of the officers’ daughters in St. Petersburg. One of her duties was to teach the girls the formal curtsy. She once declared to me grandly: “Never have I felt better than when these 500 girls, in practicing, sank to their knees in front of me!”

When we were rehearsing the scene in which Mephisto, in order to get away from Faust, calls upon the spirits who are to delude him with magical pictures, Dr. Steiner explained that these were the group-spirits of “flies, fleas, bugs and lice” which were being summoned hither by their lord and master. Noticing the startled faces around him, he said these beings were, however, very beautiful to look at. Thus this song was now rehearsed. During one of the pauses, a Russian friend asked: “*Herr Doktor*, what does it mean if one has great antipathy to spiders?” Beaming, Dr. Steiner looked at her and answered genially: “That means that one has great affinity with these creatures!” – eliciting shock.

He then fetched another eurythmist and showed her how to do the movement she was to carry out as a leaping rat sent for by Mephisto, in order to gnaw at the pentagram on the threshold. She likewise showed no enthusiasm at first for the role intended for her!

When the Easter march was rehearsed, it turned out that most of us were not good dancers, in many cases not even being able to dance a simple waltz properly! *Herr Doktor* almost despaired that no rhythm and fire could be infused into it! It should not be forgotten that he had grown up in Austria. *Mieta Waller* (1883–1954), who in her lively way at that time often liked to play the *enfant terrible*, suddenly cried out: “Oh *Herr Doktor*, couldn’t you demonstrate a *Schubplattler* (Austrian folk dance) for us?” “Oh yes, certainly,” was the immediate answer, and already he prepared to climb onto the stage. “Oh,” *Frau Doktor* quickly exclaimed, “it is already much too late, we absolutely must go home.” In her concern, she wanted, where possible, to avoid his overtaking himself by such strenuous exercise.

A while before that, at Christmas 1915, the Shepherds Play and Three Kings Play had been performed for the first time in Dornach. Dr. Steiner held various lectures on this subject. The plays took place at that time only within the limited circle of the members. It was wartime. Once he described how these plays gradually came about, how at first only a small crib was set up; but then every inhabitant of the village went up to it and wanted to

rock the child in it. It often came off rather crudely. Joseph was performed in a somewhat oafish manner – not yet as a worthy “alderman.” At this he stepped onto the stage himself and mimed this figure. All at once he stumbled and fell flat on his face. Taken aback and concerned, everyone jumped up – however, he was already up and said cheerfully: “Yes, but that belongs to it!” It had seemed so genuine that no one had the idea that it could have been intentional.

*Herr Doktor* devoted particular care to the scenes of Faust’s death and the battle for his soul. The burial scene had an unusually eerie effect. Jan Stuten, who took on all manner of difficult things and applied himself diligently to solving them – at that time he always played Faust as well – had skilfully sawn out the skeletons of the “Lemures” from wooden boards painted white, and these “bones” were then sewn onto black costumes. With the gestures indicated by Rudolf Steiner, the audience got the impression of real tottering skeletons on the stage. The Scrawny and Fat Devils had their realistic costumes. The latter, with short, straight horns, had a stomach protruding out almost a meter, made of a wire frame with which it was not easy to get around the scenery. Once, *Herr Doktor* was almost blown over by it! Having had enough of playing angels, I asked *Frau Doktor* to let me play a devil. “You are an angel, I think?” she replied. “Angels are a bit boring in the long run,” I said. “May I not play a Fat Devil?” This she laughingly took note of.

Dr. Steiner gave us an additional lesson in how these beings move. He explained that walking – in a way that comes clearly to expression in “threefold walking” – has a purely Christian element about it: establishing balance again and again in the act of walking. These sub-human demons are incapable of this. The Fat Devils, for example, can only move along, with their short, stumpy legs and broad, flat feet, in a half-shuffling, half-hopping manner, which Professor Petz, the violinist from Neuenburg, *Fräulein* Elisabeth Vreede (1879–1943) and three others among us then faithfully practiced. The Scrawny Devils did likewise – among them *Jeanne-Marie Bruinier* (1875–1951), who painted in the small cupola, and Richard Pollack-Karlin. They were to jump so as to hardly touch the ground. When Rudolf Steiner himself played the whole burial scene as Mephisto for the actor of Mephisto, *Max Schuurman* (1889–1955), most of us felt a cold shiver run down our spines. It was played with such realism, and to double effect, since it adhered to the boundaries of the artistic.

In her book *Eurythmy* (Verlag Waldhaus, Malsch), *Tatiana Kisseleff* (1881-1970) has reported a number of things concerning the rehearsals for the Romantic and Classical *Walpurgisnacht*.

Before the building in Dornach was begun, Rudolf Steiner had already held lectures on artistic questions and artist-individualities. Fundamental in this respect are “Goethe as the Father of a New Aesthetics” and, in 1909, “The Being of the Arts.” In the lecture cycles there are many further indications. In 1911 on the occasion of the cycle given in the *Prinzensälen* in Munich, he had selected and hung a number of pictures by *Frau Maria Strakosch-Giesler* and said certain things about them. The reader is referred to the report of *Frau Strakosch* in her book *Die erlöste Sphinx* (“The Sphinx Redeemed”). (See p. 6–7 of this volume.)

The actual basic lectures on painting with their far-reaching perspectives for the future were, however, held in 1914 and 1915. Again and again, he gave new indications. But as yet it could not easily be surmised how these new impulses would take effect. Of course, artists were still strongly tied to their old ways of expressing themselves and it was necessary to wait till the new seeds could really begin to take root. Apart from Rudolf Steiner’s sketches for the painting of the cupolas of the first Goetheanum, there was as yet nothing really new to be seen. Some things threatened to cause confusion! Other painters who visited Dornach brought along their own attempts. One case was interesting. Already a year or two earlier, following a lecture in Germany, Rudolf Steiner had once shown a few such attempts. He showed them again later on the occasion of the General Meeting in Berlin in 1914 and said, these were mirrorings in the objective world-ether. Very few people could make anything of this. That winter there was a circle of people who particularly interested themselves in these paintings. Among them, the paintings produced by two women were especially admired. One could hear of experiences in “lofty, spiritual realms.” Admiringly, the “initiation” of the person in question was spoken of. It continued like that for a while. Then, however, Rudolf Steiner began holding his clarifying, unambiguous lectures on “head and abdominal clairvoyance.” He also emphasized at that time that precisely those who were most affected, usually did not apply the distinction to themselves. From spring into the summer, he spoke about these questions again and again as was his wont, illuminating them from new sides. Among other things, the nature of Imagination was described, how it can be attained by means of a spiritual-scientific training, in contrast to the visions that easily arise as a result of the organic activity of the human body.

One of the personalities referred to had left Dornach for a time. When she reappeared, *Frau Stinde* let me know, adding that it would only be possible to grant this painter support for her stay if she were to obligate herself to do the necessary practical work, and not only to turn out her own paintings, as in the winter. She would need to actually assist in the work of grounding as planned. I then asked *Sophie Stinde* whether she could say how matters stood

with those paintings of which such a lot had been made in some quarters the past winter. I believed I had understood something of the recent lectures mentioned above, but even so, I did not trust myself to pass judgment immediately.

*Fräulein Stinde* then told me that Dr. Steiner had, at the special request of *Frau* Dr. Steiner, *Countess Kalkreuth* (1856–1929) and herself explained most of those painted sheets, since this painter had handed over her portfolio each time to Dr. Steiner. He told these ladies, it was a pity this artist had not been more modest and had again and again wanted to show her work in the Carpentry Building. If her paintings had not in this way become so generally known, one would now have the most beautiful anatomical atlas for the doctors of the movement. And with that, he began to describe each of the paintings exactly, showing how they brought to expression miscellaneous processes of digestion, of the sexual organs, etc.

In the lectures which Dr. Steiner held a short time later in the Carpentry Building, in connection with the premiere of “Faust’s Ascension” on August 15, 1915, he referred once again to this question from a wider point of view. On account of its interest, it is perhaps permissible to add a longer quotation from one of these lectures here<sup>13</sup>:

If you now disregard everything else – one can’t after all enumerate everything – you can then more or less imagine this physical part of the human being arising from the etheric organization in such a way – including, of course, everything else that I have presented in *Esoteric Science* and elsewhere, – that female and male forms arise. Whatever else plays a part, we now disregard, but female and male forms arise. If Lucifer and Ahriman had not participated, then female and male forms would not have arisen, but rather that which I once described in Munich: an intermediate. Thus we can really say; it is to be ascribed to Lucifer and Ahriman that the human form on earth became differentiated in a male and a female form. And in fact, if we already imagine the condition in which the human being approaches the earth, which gradually consolidates by means of the mineral kingdom, if we imagine in addition, that the Earth planet forms itself, physically densifies, that in the circumference of the earth there is the ether permeating the Earth, we can then picture to ourselves that human beings form themselves out of the ether of the whole Earth and thereby in their character also approach the physical of the earth, that at the same time the etheric-

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<sup>13</sup> Rudolf Steiner: *Spiritual-Scientific Annotations to Goethe’s Faust*, Vol. I, “Faust, the Striving Human Being” GA 272 (not yet published in an English translation).

mineral-physical in them meets with the mineral-physical of the earth. But Lucifer and Ahriman are there, are really at work there. They have a lot of means by which to exercise their influence on the evolution of humanity. And these diverse means they make use of for this or that process that they call forth.

Lucifer has above all the tendency to develop the spirit of what is light; he would actually always like to not let human beings become properly physical, would like to not let them quite descend to earth. Lucifer remained behind at the stage of the Moon evolution and wants to gain human beings for himself, not letting them enter into Earth evolution. He strives for this in such a way that he takes possession of the forces of warmth-ether and of light-ether. These forces he utilizes in his own way in the processes that now take place with the human being becoming physical. Lucifer mainly has power over warmth-ether and light-ether; he chiefly governs these. He prepared himself well for this already during the Moon evolution; he organizes them in his manner. By this means he can influence the development of the human being in a quite different direction. In letting the human being become physical out of the ether, he can by virtue of making use of warmth- and light-ether and asserting his power in these, give rise to the human form in a different way than would have been the case without this happening. As he now holds sway and weaves in the warmth-light-ether, it is not the intermediate human being that would otherwise come about, but the female form of the human being that arises. The female form of the human being would never have arisen without Lucifer. It is in fact the expression of what emerges from the ether when Lucifer takes possession of the warmth-light-ether.

Ahriman has power particularly over the tone- and life-ether. Ahriman is at the same time the spirit of heaviness. Ahriman has the desire to counteract Lucifer. By this means equilibrium is in a certain way substantially brought about, in that the ahrimanic power is placed by the wisely acting, progressive gods over against the luciferic power that wants to lift the human being above the earthly. Ahriman actually wants to draw human beings down into the physical. He wants to make them more physical than they would otherwise become as intermediate human beings. Ahriman is prepared for that by having power especially over the tone- and life-ethers. In tone- and life-ether Ahriman acts and weaves. And in this way the human physical form, in going out from the ether into the physical, becomes physical in a different way than it would have become through the progressive gods: it becomes the male form. Without the influence of Ahriman, the male form would not be thinkable at all, would not be

possible at all. So that one can say: the female form is raised through Lucifer out of the warmth- and light-ether, in that Lucifer infuses this form etherically with a certain upward striving. The male form is formed by Ahriman so that a certain striving toward the Earth is implanted in it.

This, which is now at the same time thus willed out of macro-cosmic world evolution, we can really observe in the human being by spiritual scientific means. If we take for the moment the female form, schematically drawn, then we have to say, there is etherically woven into it by Lucifer in his fashion, warmth and light. Thus the physical female form is so woven, that in the light- and warmth-ether not only the regular progressive gods have developed their forces, but luciferic forces are woven into this female ether body. Let us now assume, in this female ether body, that which the earth in particular has provided, the "I"-consciousness, the unifying consciousness, is dimmed down, a kind of subdued consciousness enters in, that some people already call "clairvoyance," – a kind of dreamlike, trancelike seeing. Then, in such a case, there emerges what Lucifer has woven in the warmth- and light-ether as a kind of aura; so that, if visionaries are in their visionary state, they are surrounded by an aura that has luciferic forces in it, namely those of the warmth- and light-ether. It is now a matter of this aura surrounding the female body not being seen as such when, in mediumistic fashion, visionary states enter in. For, self-evidently, if the female body is in the midst of this aura (a drawing was made), then the female organization sees into this aura and projects on all sides what it sees in this aura. It sees what is in its own aura. The objective observer sees something that can be designated as follows: the human being rays out Imaginations and has an aura that is in fact made up of Imaginations. That is an objective process which does not affect the one who observes it. That means: if this imaginative aura is viewed from outside, viewed by another, then quite simply, an aura is objectively seen as anything else is seen; whereas, if this aura is looked through from within by the visionary herself, then she sees only what Lucifer spreads out within her. There is a big difference whether one sees something oneself, or whether it is seen by others – a tremendous difference.

With this is connected the fact that when visionary clairvoyance occurs in a woman, great danger exists if this visionary clairvoyance appears in the form of Imaginations; there caution is especially necessary on the part of the woman. And it is always required that development be taken severely in hand, that it be a healthy development. – Not stopping short at everything one sees, for that can actually simply be one's luciferic

aura seen from within, which was necessary in order to mold the female body. And some things that visionaries describe are interesting for quite other reasons than those the female visionaries consider interesting. When they describe or regard what they see as though it were an interesting objective world, they are quite wrong, they are quite in error. When the corresponding aura is seen from outside, however, then it is that which made the female form possible out of the ether in the first place in earthly evolution. So we can say that the woman has to exercise particular care when visionary, imaginative clairvoyance begins or shows itself; for there a danger can very easily lurk, the danger of falling into error.

The male organism is different. If we consider the male organism, then Ahriman has power to enter into his aura but now woven into the tone- and life-ether. And as with the woman it is mainly the warmth-ether, so with the man it is mainly the life-ether. With the woman it is mainly warmth-ether within which Lucifer works and with the man, the life-ether within which Ahriman works. If the man now gets out of his consciousness, if the cohesion that expresses him as an "I"-consciousness is dampened-down, if a kind of passive condition occurs with the man, then one can once again see how the aura around him asserts itself, the aura within which Ahriman has his power.

But it is now an aura that chiefly contains life- and tone-ether within it. There is vibrating tone in it, so that one actually does not see this aura of the man directly. It is not an imaginative aura, but is rather something consisting of vibrating, spiritual tone that surrounds the man. All of this has to do with the form – not with the soul, of course, that has to do with the man in that he is physical. So that one who observes this form from outside can see: the human being rays out – one can now say – Intuitions. These are the same Intuitions of which his form is comprised, by means of which he is there as man in the world. There it resounds with living-vibrating tone around one. On that account another danger is present in the case of the man, if consciousness is dampened-down to passivity, the danger of now hearing one's own aura, inwardly hearing it. The man must take particular care that he does not let himself go, when he spiritually hears this aura of his, for there he hears Ahriman holding sway in him. For he has to be there.