

CEREAL

In this volume, we consider the subject of preservation. We visit the Goetheanum, and rediscover the work of Auguste Rodin and the designs of Hvidt & Mølgaard. We tour the collections of Sir John Soane's Museum and the Oxford Botanic Garden, and contemplate memory and identity.

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THE
GOETHEANUM

*A Rendering
of Ideals*

words

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A half-hour train ride from Basel, in the small Swiss town of Dornach, an enormous, surreal structure of flowing raw concrete rises high above the rolling hills, surrounded by satellite structures in similar curving lines. The Goetheanum was built by the Austrian philosopher and spiritualist Rudolf Steiner (1861—1925), and named for the German philosopher and poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. The concrete structure is the second Goetheanum, replacing the first wooden structure that burned down in 1922, which used steam-bent panels to realise Steiner's vision of organic, expressionist architecture. Construction for the replacement began in 1924 and was completed in 1928, three years after Steiner's death.

The Goetheanum was intended as an architectural rendering of the ideals of the Anthroposophical Society, the esoteric, mystical movement that Steiner founded in 1912. Today, it acts as the society's global headquarters, which has outposts in 50 countries, and continues to advocate Steiner's teachings. Steiner gave thousands of lectures over his lifetime on the subject of anthroposophy. The principle belief of the movement is in the existence of an objective and tangible spiritual realm, which can be studied with the intellectual rigorousness of the scientific method, just as physicists might study the atomic or electromagnetic realms. It follows from various movements of 19th century spiritism and German idealist philosophy, arising at a time when scientists were repeatedly discovering the invisible, such as atoms, waves, and magnetic forces.



Steiner first came into contact with the occult during his time as a member of the Theosophical Society, which was established in New York in 1875. He became general secretary of the German-Austrian division in 1902, and encouraged a growth in membership during his leadership. However, he began to disagree with the beliefs of the society, including their work in preparing the Indian teenager Jiddu Krishnamurti to become an advanced spiritual entity known as the World Teacher. In 1912, Steiner split from the group and formed the Anthroposophical Society, replacing the Greek word *theos* with *anthropos* to stress the human focus of his belief system.



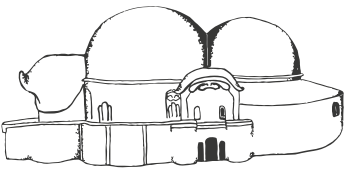


Steiner applied his spiritual doctrine to a wide array of subjects, including education, medicine, agriculture, banking, architecture, design, dance, and the visual arts. He is credited as one of the founders of organic farming, and his model of education is still followed in Steiner or Waldorf schools today. Among other differences, children at Steiner schools are encouraged to develop their artistic creativity before they begin learning maths and science. The schools make up part of the state-funded provision of education in many European countries, and are found in a total of 64 countries worldwide. It is estimated that over 10,000 institutions exist today with anthroposophical values at their heart. The Anthroposophical Society continues to apply Steiner’s teachings to various subjects: on their website, there is an article that seeks to use Steiner’s lessons to discover what form of spiritual intelligence the Covid-19 virus represents.

Steiner’s work also touched upon the visual arts: he gave several lectures on the subject of colour, edited an edition of Goethe’s *Theory of Colours*, and encouraged artists to adopt a specific painting style of ‘floating colour’. The Goetheanum includes examples of this style: at the centre of the building is a 1000-seat auditorium for concerts and lectures, where a psychedelic fresco along the ceiling illustrates the story of human evolution. In one of the main

staircases, a huge blood-red stained-glass panel dyes the light and the surrounding concrete walls and stairs. The panel comes from the original Goetheanum, and bears an image of the archangel Michael, whom anthroposophists believe has been orchestrating world events since the 19th century, and will continue to do so into the 22nd.

Several artists involved in the early development of abstraction were noted followers of anthroposophy, including Piet Mondrian, Wassily Kandinsky and Hilma af Klint. Af Klint, who has been posthumously recognised as the first modernist abstract painter, met Steiner in 1908, who was then part of the Theosophical Society and was visiting Stockholm. They shared an interest in the occult, and were both influenced by Goethe’s colour theory. Af Klint showed Steiner her recent works, *Paintings for the Temple: 111* compositions completed in 17 months, guided by a spirit that instructed af Klint during a medium session with her spiritist group, The Five. Steiner did not understand the paintings, and disagreed with her approach. Af Klint, apparently hurt by the rejection, stopped painting for a few years, and did not complete the series until 1912. She then visited Steiner at the Goetheanum in 1920, became a member of the Anthroposophical Society in the same year, and spent much of that decade in Dornach, studying the society’s archives to try and discover the message



FIRST GOETHEANUM
Steiner hired shipbuilders to construct the first Goetheanum in 1913, using steam-bent wood to create a double dome structure over a curved concrete base. The building hosted the annual theatre events of the Anthroposophical Society, and even after it burned down on New Year’s Eve in 1922, artists and actors continued to perform on its ashes.





in her mystical paintings. (Today, those archives also include letters addressed to Steiner from Franz Kafka, another passionate follower of his ideas.)

On the subject of architecture, Steiner taught that anthroposophical buildings should replicate the human form, eschewing straight lines, right angles and the traditional limitations of buildings wherever possible, in favour of swooping curves and organic, rounded shapes. He also designed bespoke furniture for the Goetheanum and other anthroposophical buildings in a style that adhered to the curving forms of the architecture. The furniture, sculpted purely from wood with no decoration, appears almost crystalline, as if it were formed naturally beneath layers of rock. The style is also known as Dornach design, and lies somewhere between the exaggerated forms of Antoni Gaudí and the humble motives of the Arts and Crafts movement. In the Goetheanum, desks, chairs, wardrobes, staircases, and an upright piano appear in this style. Several other anthroposophical designers such as Felix Kayser and Hans Itel were inspired by Steiner's work, and continued to design anthroposophical buildings and furniture after his death.

Steiner designed 13 buildings in his lifetime, including the first and second Goetheanum, and various other buildings around Dornach, such as the dramatic Heizhaus, or Boiler Building, whose towering concrete roof rises into the sky like a column of flame, or the fresh shoots of a sprouting plant. The second Goetheanum is considered a masterpiece of 20th century expressionist architecture, and a pioneering example of a structure made entirely of exposed concrete, anticipating brutalism by decades. Many architects have visited and expressed their admiration for the building, including Frank Lloyd Wright and Frank Gehry. Thousands of other homes and buildings in Dornach have since been built in keeping with this architectural style, erected by members of the Anthroposophical Society. •



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