

**The Kosmorganic Wave:  
A Manifesto**

**by Angie Eng**

*Every work of art comes into being in the same way as the cosmos, by means of catastrophes, which ultimately create out of the cacophony of the various instruments that symphony we call the music of the spheres. The creation of the work of art is the creation of the world.*

*-Wassily Kandinsky, Concerning the Spiritual in Art*

## **Preface**

### **First Kosmorganic Experience**

When I entered the space, nobody was inside. It was still early, and I had about an hour to wait. "Go at sunset," people had advised. It was not like my adventures climbing 2,000-year-old temples in Myanmar or waiting for sundown on the highest mountain of Borneo. Here, there were only blank white walls and a giant skylight. There was no signage to provide me with direction; the space was cold and austere, with pine paneling wrapped around a rectangular room. I took my place on the wooden bench and glanced up at the cloudless late afternoon skies through the skylight. I looked up and around, wondering which side of the room was best. I sat there, resigning myself to waiting for an entire hour in a city with a hyper-speed tempo that could make a ten-minute wait feel like hours.

I thought about the line, "Seeing is forgetting the name of the thing one sees." It is the title of a book of interviews with artist Robert Irwin by Lawrence Weschler. Weschler's title reminded me that to appreciate sensory art, I needed to leave behind my preconceived notions, which meant I needed to stop comparing the work to the skylight in my living room. I needed to

forget my discomfort. Forget that waiting reminded me of sitting on a pew at a church service. Forget analyzing why the room was even barer than most waiting rooms. Forget what a window, a sunset, or an artwork should do or be. Forget what I thought I was supposed to be seeing. I couldn't sit waiting for some singular *aha* moment; the art installation was a pure sensory experience that forced me to slow down and be present.

My mind stopped wandering through the hallways and into other parts of the museum or into my calendar of things to do. I noticed that the diagonal shadow cast on the wall from the skylight had moved and stretched across the wall. I felt a coolness set in as the rays of the sun diminished through the window. I saw the baby blue rectangle above me change its hue to soft lavender. The white walls and ceiling became orange against the square. A vibration emanated from the colors and geometrical shapes. I was no longer waiting but being. My awareness gradually shifted away from myself, my thoughts, and analyzing rather than sensing. I felt as if I was part of the room. This condition is what Tibetan Buddhists call *rigpa*, or non-dualistic awareness, a mental state that is open, free, and spacious, a human's true nature before the individual ego takes over.<sup>1</sup> Abruptly, a voice from a loudspeaker jolted me from my contemplative mood by announcing, "The museum will be closed in 10 minutes."

I walked out of James Turrell's light chamber, *Meeting*<sup>2</sup>, exited the museum, and reentered the city. The sky, street, buildings, cars, people, the hum of New York itself felt gentler than when I had ventured out that morning. My perception had shifted just enough that I

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<sup>1</sup> Chögyam Trungpa, *Cutting through spiritual material materialism* (Boston: Shambhala, 2002), 122-123.

<sup>2</sup> James Turrell, *Meeting*, 1985, room with skylight, P.S.1 Museum, Queens, New York. In James Turrell, *James Turrell: a retrospective*, ed. Justin Molony and Meredith McKendry (Canberra: Publishing Section National Gallery of Australia, 2014), 19.

appreciated the city again, felt round, smoother edges rather than the usual sharp, aggressive angles. The sounds, the smells, the shapes, the colors seemed more vivid and fluid, in harmony, without their usual discordant resistance. I felt like I had just been rebooted.

I coined the term *Kosmorganic art* 25 years later after witnessing the rise of these ambient, immersive, sensory art practices worldwide. This essay is an art manifesto on Kosmorganic practices, a type of art that I claim is one of the more riveting practices of our time, appropriate for a world of climate change, digital burnout, and civil strife. The text provides my holistic vision emphasizing phenomenological art's healing and metaphysical aspects. This essay lifts the veil of the current dominant, materialist perspective that masks the full potential and power of art in our lives.

# Introduction

## Catalysts

When a critical accumulation of snow on a mountain is reached, minor occurrences like temperature changes, a weak layer of snow cover, or falling rock disrupt the equilibrium of the landscape, causing an avalanche and transforming the entire shape of the mountain. Either nature or human-made inventions may serve as catalysts for avalanche-like shifts in how humans situate themselves in the world.<sup>3</sup> Travel in all its forms, outer space, overseas, and virtually, set the conditions for the rise of Kosmorganic art. Human ability to venture into outer space and see Earth from afar helped to expand a limited localized vision to include the entire galaxy. By the 1960s, teachers and spiritual leaders immigrated to America and Europe and transmitted Eastern ideas. The invention of the first consumer fax machine in 1964 allowed us to immediately send text and images across the world. Sociologist Martin Albrow called this expanded vision as part of the period of the Global Age,<sup>4</sup> where I situate the beginning of Kosmorganic aesthetics and its art that addresses interconnection with nature, healing and, spirituality.

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<sup>3</sup> This concept of analyzing a system changing over time and not by its properties is called *dynamical systems theory*. Poincaré (1890) developed this method, a qualitative theory on non-linear differential equations which helped explain periodic movements like planetary orbits or the combination of stable and unstable manifolds as in fractal patterns. John Briggs, *Fractals: The patterns of chaos: Discovering a new aesthetic of art, science, and nature* (Brattleboro, VT: Echo Point Books & Media, 2015), 19-21, 46.

<sup>4</sup> Albrow asserts that space travel, scientific invention of weaponry, a global communications system with the invention of the computer, and climate change provoked a shift in perceptual scope that he calls *globality* or the Global Age. Martin Albrow, *The Global Age: State and society beyond modernity* (London: Polity Press, 1996), 4, 79.

## **Kosmos + Organicism = Kosmorganic**

*Kosmorganic* is a portmanteau of *kosmos* and *organicism*. *Kosmos* with a 'K' is a Greek word referring to the physical universe and the patterned nature of all domains of existence, from matter to mind to an ultimate supreme being. Organicism advocates that the universe and living entities are an integral system. It emphasizes social relations that rely on natural self-regulating harmony between parts of living entities and takes a systems-based approach whereby each entity is viewed as a whole and not a collection of separate parts. Kosmorganic aesthetics encompass cosmological, social, and *resemblance organicism*. In *resemblance organicism*, works of art that contain references to nature are considered to have a kind of living presence.<sup>5</sup> For example, La Monte Young considered *Dream House*, his sound and light installation that has 'played' continuously for over three decades, a "living organism subject to its own tradition."<sup>6</sup>

## **Limitless Form**

Kosmorganic art comes in many forms; it can be dense or sparse and require a few minutes or a few hours to digest. Some works have immersive surround sound, and some have complete silence. Some works are made for a solo experience, while others are participatory.

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<sup>5</sup> Organicism is related to holism, which claims that parts of a whole are interconnected and cannot be understood without a reference to the whole. It is typical of a systems-based approach. One example is holistic health, such as Chinese medicine or acupuncture. Organicism differs from panpsychism, which asserts that all things of the universe and not just organic living things have a mind/consciousness. However, McDonough distinguishes "resemblance organicists" who assert that non-living things that resemble living entities, such as artworks, may be regarded as having 'soul' and 'mind' even if they are not living. In this respect resemblance organicism resembles panpsychism. Richard McDonough, "Plato: Organicism," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed May 26, 2020, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/platoorg/>.

<sup>6</sup> Silke Schmickle, "Transgressing boundaries" in *Minimalism: Space. Light. Object.*, edited by Eugene Tan and Russell Storer (Singapore: National Gallery Singapore, 2018), 34-40.

Among these, I cluster art practices currently labeled under 20+ titles.<sup>7</sup> To date, few historians have considered immersive media installations, sound art, and ritualistic performance art under one movement, as I do here.<sup>8</sup> With infinite styles and forms, Kosmorganic art can be challenging for visitors to recognize, especially if they tend to define cultural experiences by materials, styles, and processes alone, as has been the tradition in Western art interpretation over the last 80 years. For example, op art, light art, and digital art are named and categorized by the art world according to their form or style rather than conceptual themes or philosophy. There are exceptions such as Futurism, Surrealism, Fluxus, Gutai, Zero, and Dada which all encompass a philosophy of art but were named by groups of artists rather than critics. One way of distinguishing Kosmorganic art forms is not by their form but by the viewer's reception.

### **Internally Intelligent Reception**

Kosmorganic art practices provoke visitors to look inward and connect their existence with a greater non-physical realm. When determining whether a work is Kosmorganic, it is

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<sup>7</sup> At the time of writing (2021) the art practices under Kosmorganic aesthetics include but are not limited to: expanded media, visual music, mapping, light and space art, immersive media, intermedia, transmedia, ambient media, sound art, sound walks, art walks, ritualistic performance art, sublime, atmospheric art, contemplative arts, multisensory rooms, experimental architecture, installation art, and AV performance.

<sup>8</sup> Professor of religion J. Kosky examines different art practices such as land art, experimental architecture, and light installation and calls them "Arts of Wonder." Jeffrey Kosky, *Arts of wonder* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

Art historian Alexandra Munroe examines Eastern spirituality in contemporary practices that emphasizes perception such as painting, land art, installation art, sculpture, expanded media, photography, and music. Alexandra Munroe, "Art of Perceptual Experience," *The third mind: American artists contemplate Asia, 1860-1989*, ed. Alexandra Munroe, (New York, NY: Guggenheim Museum, 2009), 286-331.

Art historian Eugene Tan revisits the definition of Minimalism and offers an expanded interpretation that includes Buddhist notions. Eugene Tan and Russell Storer, *Minimalism: Space. Light. Object.* (Singapore: National Gallery Singapore, 2018).

Theologian and cultural critic Mark C. Taylor offers a spiritual reading of contemporary artists Joseph Beuys, Matthew Barney, James Turrell, and Andy Goldsworthy. Mark Taylor, *Refiguring the spiritual: Beuys, Barney, Turrell, Goldsworthy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

essential to consider its impact upon the visitor beyond the artwork. The intersection of all Kosmorganic art experiences lies in the stimulation of internal intelligence.<sup>9</sup> Internal intelligence relates to mental states of higher awareness and of spiritual and metaphysical connection. A Kosmorganic artwork may induce clarity, patience, creativity, serenity, and contemplation. Kosmorganic aesthetics align with contemplative arts, which focus on the spiritual and healing aspects of the creative process of artmaking as well as art appreciation. However, Kosmorganic aesthetics focus not on the creative process but the reception of the artwork. It is possible that a Kosmorganic artist may experience contemplation and higher awareness while making art, but it is not a definitive factor for identifying whether an artwork falls under Kosmorganic practices.

### **Historical and Social Context**

The precursors of Kosmorganic art arose in the late 18th century with Romanticism. During this counter-Enlightenment movement, philosophers, artists, and writers in Europe and America celebrated awe, unity, the metaphysical, and the sublime. Then, at the end of the 19th and early 20th century, European abstract painting arrived with its link with mysticism and the occult. These abstract artists drew from esoteric practices such as theosophy, Naturphilosophie, anthroposophy, Christian occultism, numerology, alchemy, and parapsychology. In conjunction with abstract painting, musicians and filmmakers experimented with moving images and music to explore cosmological worlds with the feeling of a void or infinite expanse. What I call Kosmorganic aesthetics became fully formed in the late 1950s and coincided with the first

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<sup>9</sup> Tibetan scholar Robert Thurman cautioned, “the Western privilege of the outer sciences over our inner sciences has been detrimental to civilization.” John James Clarke, *Oriental enlightenment: The encounter between Asian and Western thought* (London: Routledge, 1997), 151.



successful orbiting satellite, Sputnik, in 1957. The Kosmorganic philosophy that followed was a continuation of the Romantic ecocentric position, except the vision was forward-thinking rather than nostalgic for a pre-industrial age.

Global issues such as environmental concerns, plane and space travel, and digital communications fertilized the surge of Kosmorganic art in the 1960s. Human concern expanded from the nation-state to the entire planet and beyond. At that time, the Kosmorganic movement came in various forms, such as land art, ritualistic performance, minimal drone music, visual music, and multisensory rooms. The cultural exchange due to increased ease of travel and immigration also fostered this art movement. The West was exposed to Indian, Chinese, and Japanese philosophies. At this time, counter-culture Americans integrated aspects of these philosophies categorized as Taoism, Vedism, and Buddhism into their communities.<sup>10</sup> Secular yoga and meditation, the Human Potential movement, Waldorf schools, New Ageism, and EST are 20th-century movements that repackage Eastern notions for modern Western life.

### **Manifesto Summary**

In this text, I contextualize Kosmorganic art practices in history and identify factors in society that cultivate Kosmorganic aesthetics. I thread these art practices together with their common residual impact on visitors and put them into three branches: *ecosophic art*, *frequency bathing*, and *ritualistic performance*. In describing these overarching practices, I situate them in their social context while focusing on Western references with mention of Eastern artworks. I

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<sup>10</sup> John James Clarke, *Oriental enlightenment: The encounter between Asian and Western thought* (London: Routledge, 1997), 3, 108.

provide the trajectory and harbingers of Kosmorganic aesthetics from the last two centuries before describing why metaphysical and healing aspects of these practices have been largely ignored. Considering that Kosmorganic aesthetics encompass so many different artistic forms from the past 70 years, I focus on the reception of Kosmorganic art to help identify it. I elaborate on the internal aspects of the viewer provoked by a phenomenological experience that incorporates wellness and the metaphysical. Kosmorganic aesthetics' holistic nature requires cross-analysis with other disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, religious studies, neurobiology, consciousness studies, and anthropology. However, this text of Kosmorganic aesthetics is too short to go in-depth into a cross-disciplinary analysis. This art manifesto, although not articulated in the revolutionary tone of art manifestos of the early 20th century, is a call to action to consider the role of Kosmorganic art in our lives as metaphysical medicine.<sup>11</sup> This is the beginning of a journey where I link art with spirituality and wellness in hopes that it provokes reflection on the solace of Kosmorganic moments as we become more disoriented in the virtual world. Kosmorganic art practices that speak a universal language with the potential to promote higher consciousness may be what humanity needs to tackle current global issues of climate change, excessive screen time, and civil strife.

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<sup>11</sup> By *medicine*, I refer to more traditional or folk medicine that focus on holistic healing. Although some aspects of Kosmorganic aesthetics such as frequency bathing are slowly being tested and validated by Western scientific experimentation, for the most part, holistic healing and wellness are excluded from most Western medicine prescriptions. Some exceptions are sound, light, and color therapies that are prescribed for emotional or psychological illness. Biomedical techniques of Dry Needling in physical therapy and craniosacral therapy can be considered analogous with traditional medicine, Chinese acupuncture and Japanese Reiki.

# The Kosmorganic Wave

Kosmorganic aesthetics, like art movements such as Romanticism and American Transcendentalism, can be interpreted as a shift in social climate, or what I call *cultural pairing*. *Cultural pairing* is when a cultural movement serves as a counterbalance to a historical movement. Like the Taoist concept of *yin and yang*, these pairings form a dualistic system whose poles appear opposite but are interdependent. Examples of cultural pairings include Naturphilosophie and the Enlightenment, Hudson School Transcendentalism and the Age of Reason, and land art paired with an apex in anthropocentrism. Kosmorganic aesthetics pair with and balance the global digital age. This age is marked by an excess of time spent in front of screens with minds in virtual realities. Relationships and truth are validated more by external intelligence, or that which can be measured empirically and translated into numbers, than by internal intelligence, such as perceptual and metaphysical knowledge. While one could argue this high valuation of materialism has been present since the Enlightenment, the digital age marks its apex. There is no room for mystery, curiosity, or wonder in our quest for fact-checking, scientific validation, and algorithmic profiling. But then, how would we discover new possibilities or create unifying stories without an appreciation for the intangible?

Professor of Religion Jeffrey Kosky recognizes a shift of the West's attraction to wonder in the past few decades. He theorizes that a revival of art reflecting nature results from an imbalanced concentration on data and rational reasoning that scorns transcendental practices.

Kosky asserts that "the light of the Enlightenment has blinded modern eyes."<sup>12</sup> He speculates that too much reason paired with a decline in spirituality prompts modern humans to seek the mysterious, the invisible, a return to a divine cosmos. According to Kosky, certainty is doing a decent job of dissolving our wonder, which he claims humans have sought since ancient times, mostly through spirituality and metaphysics. If art can be more than pure aesthetic pleasure—more than neutral designs of awe—we need the vocabulary to articulate what these artworks represent. I offer the terms 'Kosmorganic aesthetics' and three main branches, *ecosophic* art, ritualistic performance, and *frequency bathing*, as the language to acknowledge the wonderment and metaphysical, healing aspects of contemporary immersive phenomenological art.

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<sup>12</sup> Jeffrey Kosky, *Arts of wonder* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 15.

## Three Branches of Kosmorganic Aesthetics

Kosmorganic aesthetics apply to works of transcendence with aspects from their three branches: *ecosophic art*, *ritualistic performance*, and *frequency bathing*. *Ecosophy* refers to ecological harmony, a shift from an anthropocentric to an ecocentric position proposed by Arne Naess in his deep ecology social movement of the 1970s.<sup>13</sup> Similar to Fuller's omni-sustainability, ecosophy calls for fundamental changes in society that question the meaning of life in balance with nature. It goes beyond shallow reformist sustainability action and explores spiritual, intellectual, and physical connection with the cosmos. Its followers are devoted almost religiously to a respect of holistic systems over individual parts.<sup>14</sup> The second branch is ritualistic performance, which focuses on ephemeral participatory actions led by artists in the landscape. These performances help unify the social body and resemble secular pilgrimages. The third branch is *frequency bathing*, a term I use to refer to phenomenological experiences with the potential to heal body and mind through immersive sound, light, color, and pattern. Kosmorganic artworks and artists can fall within all three of these branches or emphasize one branch more than the others. It is rare that any Kosmorganic art experience resides in only one branch. Their insistence on internal intelligence and on phenomenological and immersive, harmonic presentation with references to or incorporation of natural elements are the common threads that weave these three branches together.

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<sup>13</sup> Jan Van Boeckel, *The call of the mountain: Arne Naess and the deep ecology movement*, video, 50:54, August 22, 2015, <https://youtu.be/Wf3cXTAqS2M>.

<sup>14</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr defined *ecotheology* as an ecological movement paired with a similar structure as a religious one that offers ethical and emotional components lacking in the green movement. Abu Sayem, "The Eco-Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr: Spiritual Crisis and Environmental Degradation," *Islamic Studies* 58, no. 2 (2019): 271-295.

## **Ecosophic Kosmorganic Art: Art that Grounds**

The ecosophic branch of Kosmorganic art may be correlated with humanity's realization that it has the potential to annihilate the planet. Global natural crises such as weapons of mass destruction, deforestation, and accelerated extinction of species prompt artists and designers to replicate nature in their work. Art historian Lynn Gamwell observed how artists have returned to art's ancient role of reflecting nature.<sup>15</sup> Andy Goldsworthy, Bernie Kraus, Walter De Maria, Céleste Boursier-Mougenot, Lee Ufan, Richard Long, Nancy Holt, Robert Smithson, Ugo Rondinone, and members of Mona Ha are artists I consider Kosmorganic because they have consistently produced works that observe interrelations between organisms in their habitats. These artists tend not to make art that drives policy directly, but they make art that reflects a systems approach to harmonizing with nature. In a period when more than half the world lives in urban areas with limited access to green space, the more we desire and recreate the basic elements of frequency, wind, water, heat, and wood. Ecosophic Kosmorganic art exists today under labels such as land art, sustainable art, ecosophic art, Minimalism, sound art, monumental art, and immersive installation.

Andy Goldsworthy is an ecosophic Kosmorganic artist who explores and sculpts nature with the meticulousness of a Bonsai master. His art process includes thinking and moving in visual harmony with nature. He composes in space with leaves, ice, water, twigs, and rock,

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<sup>15</sup> Donald Kuspit and Lynn Gamwell, *Health and happiness in 20th-century avant-garde art* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), 89.

observing, feeling, and getting to know their visible and invisible natures.<sup>16</sup> He tears leaves, breaks stones and icicles, and cuts feathers to go beyond the surface of appearances and toward a primordial connection. Like any living entity in nature, his work is ephemeral and in constant flux. Another ecosophic Kosmorganic artist is sound artist Bernie Kraus, who has been recording the music of insects in their habitats for decades. To him, the ambient sounds of a natural ecosystem resemble a modern orchestra. Every creature has its sound frequency, timbre, duration, and uniqueness equivalent to the diversity of human singers.<sup>17</sup> He layers the sounds of nature to envelop listeners in the symphony of sounds usually only found in the deep recesses of the jungle or forest.

Like most Kosmorganic ecosophic artists, Goldsworthy and Kraus work so intimately with nature that in the process of composing, they merge with their art, which is a notion also found in traditional Eastern art aesthetics. In traditional Indian art, true vision is not obtained by registering an object's likeness, but when the artist and art merge into a transcending union or *anayor advaita*.<sup>18</sup> This aesthetic notion is not uniquely Eastern, as Western aesthetics intersected much more with Eastern philosophy in the Middle Ages.<sup>19</sup> However, Eastern aesthetics have articulated these internal intelligences more consistently and precisely than Western art analyses for millennia. Nature, not geographical or traditional borders, is what prompts this transcendental

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<sup>16</sup> Michael Lailach, *Land art*, ed. Uta Grosenick (Köln: Taschen, 2007), 48.

<sup>17</sup> Patricia M. Gray et al., "The music of nature and the nature of music," *Science* 29, no. 5501 (2001): 52-54.

<sup>18</sup> Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The transformation of nature in art* (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), 6-7.

<sup>19</sup> Coomaraswamy compares Ch'an Buddhism and Vedism with the sermons of Meister Eckhardt and the Scholastic tradition. Coomaraswamy, *The transformation of nature in art*, 3, 65-91.

creative process. Goldsworthy and Kraus exemplify how both the process and the reception are contemplative.

## **Kosmorganic Ritualistic Performance: Art that Unites**

In addition to seeking connection with nature, humans have engaged in religious rituals for social cohesion and communal activities for thousands of years. I attribute the popularity of Kosmorganic ritualistic performance and its emphasis on well-being with a decline in attendance to and affiliation with organized religion in contemporary Western societies. In 1911, Wassily Kandinsky asserted in his book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* that when religion is uprooted, and its external societal structures crumble, a rise in human introspection in the form of art, literature, and music will be at the forefront of a spiritual revolution.<sup>20</sup> Kosmorganic ritualistic performance in sound and art walks may fill the void once occupied by the spiritual ritual of the pilgrimage. According to anthropologist Victor Turner, the pilgrimage consists of a journey to a sacred space and a return, whereby one can experience a "communitas" mood with other participants.<sup>21</sup> One leaves the familiar world to explore another dimension, a ritualistic journey that ethnographer Arthur Van Gennep called a "liminal phase."<sup>22</sup> Unlike Turner, I consider the definition of a ritual to extend beyond extraordinary religious ceremonies. In this branch of

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<sup>20</sup> Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the spiritual in art*, trans. Michael Sadleir (Toronto: Dover Publications, 1977), 14.

<sup>21</sup> "Communitas is a relationship between concrete, historical, idiosyncratic individuals." Role and status dissolve and a sense of brotherhood is achieved. Local identities and nation-states dissolve, leaving participants feeling interconnected and "open-morality." Victor Turner, *Ritual process: Structure and anti-structure* (Massachusetts: Cornell University Press, 1966), 132-33.

<sup>22</sup> Van Gennep referred to the liminal phase as the transition period of a rite of passage. These phases help shape temporal and social experiences for individuals and groups that Turner calls *liminal states* rather than *phase* or *transition*. Victor Turner, *Ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*, (Massachusetts: Cornell University Press, 1966), 94.



Kosmorganic aesthetics, the art walk is a secular pilgrimage with the artistic experience replacing the religious shrine. Kosmorganic artists orchestrate art walks, sound walks, and collaborative ritualistic performances. Artists who compose Kosmorganic ritualistic pilgrimages include Janet Cardiff, Richard Long, Lita Albuquerque, and Hamish Fulton. Other leading figures such as Walter DeMaria, Wolfgang Laib, Robert Smithson, Nancy Holt, and Ugo Rondinone leave traces of their journeys to remote locations in the desert, jungle, or countryside.

Richard Long is among these artists engaged in pilgrimages; he practices hikes in nature and replicates the patterns of natural materials in sculpture. His sculpted geometric installations of rock and soil paths are like effigies to the natural world. In *Walking a Line in Peru*, Long retraced the Nazca ground markings made by the Nazca people two thousand years ago.<sup>23</sup> This walking in nature ritual exemplifies his series of walks around the world that demonstrates his ongoing concern with presence and impermanence. Although he does not claim any spiritual relationship in his art, his artwork illustrates a typical Kosmorganic aesthetic that echoes walking meditation. Buddhists practice walking meditation to exercise internal intelligences that stress stillness, presence, and contemplation.<sup>24</sup> Echoing the Aboriginal Walkabout ritual, Long saw his art walks as microcosms of the macrocosmic story of humankind.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Richard Long, 1972, *Walking a Line in Peru*, Photograph of performance, Peru. John Beardsley, *Earthworks and beyond : contemporary art in the landscape* (New York, NY: Abbeville Press, 2006), 41.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Lailach, *Land art*, ed. Uta Grosenick (Köln: Taschen, 2007), 70-75.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Lita Albuquerque captures ephemerality and unification with the natural world by conducting collaborative performances outdoors and far away from human habitats. Albuquerque orchestrates pilgrimages in ice and sand deserts to honor the cosmos and induce universal interconnectivity. With large groups, she recreated cyclical movement in the form of the spiral in Antarctica. In *Stellar Axis*, she installed 99 spheres in alignment with 99 stars. Their diameters correlated with the brightness of each star.<sup>26</sup> With 51 scientists and researchers, she walked along a spiral path to imitate the path of the stars. In *Spine of the Earth*, Albuquerque, with a group of students, laid red, yellow, and black pigment in a giant spiral in the Mojave Desert in 1980.<sup>27</sup> A later version in 2012 engaged 500 participants to connect the spectral line between the Earth's core and the sky above. Albuquerque's and Long's rituals exemplify Kosmorganic performance in nature with the emphasis on interconnection with one another, the environment, and the universe.

### **Kosmorganic Frequency Bathing: Art that Heals**

The third branch of Kosmorganic aesthetics, I call *frequency bathing*. This Kosmorganic practice promotes wellness through immersive sound, light, color, and pattern frequencies. Art forms referred to as immersive, atmospheric, sound art, light art, and ambient media environments fall under the frequency bathing branch of Kosmorganic aesthetics. These forms incorporate immersive light and patterns accompanied by electronic drone sounds. In this area of

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<sup>26</sup> Lita Albuquerque, *Stellar Axis*, 2006, 99 blue spheres, Antarctica. In Jones, John, "American artist Lita Albuquerque creates fictional female astronauts for Desert X AIUla." *Stir World*. March 30, 2020. <https://www.stirworld.com/see-features-american-artist-lita-albuquerque-creates-fictional-female-astronaut-for-desert-x-alula>.

<sup>27</sup> Lita Albuquerque, *Spine of the Earth*, 1980/2012, performance, Mojave Desert and Culver City, California, "Spine of the Earth," accessed December 24, 2020, <https://www.litaalbuquerque.com/spine-of-the-earth-2012>.

Kosmorganic aesthetics, artists design spaces where the visitor fuses with the environment. Their body physically attunes to the frequencies emitted by light, patterns, and sound. Ambient drone sounds, infinite expanses, and hypnotic fluid visuals allow visitors to focus on slowness, presence, and emotional attunement.

These practices coincide with a contemporary society in which histories and identities clash and divide. The collapse of nation-states as a symptom of globalism has disrupted a social sense of security tethered to local identities. Phenomenological experiences that transcend localized stories may help unite a new, global community. Sociologist and urban planner Jean-Paul Thibaud correlated ambient art experiences with a new way of perceiving the global world.<sup>28</sup> Frequency bathing art may be a creative solution to healing a fractured social body and appeasing collective anxiety brought on by the Global Age. In addition, brain imaging technology in neurological and psychological studies has helped prove that sound therapy, color therapy, *shinrin-yoku* (forest bathing), and *earthing* or grounding can be beneficial to the body and mind.<sup>29</sup> Although many art critics, artists, and historians address the technology and material of immersive frequency bathing environments, they often dismiss and neglect their healing aspects.

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<sup>28</sup> Thibaud claims that ambience is a recent movement of being in the world that emphasizes the sense of hearing. He explains that this new global vision is prompted by urbanization, ecological consciousness, marketing, and education. Ambience occurs because of the medium of air. “The notion of medium is of prime importance, summoning the air in the first instance, that imperceptible but no less vital medium.” In Jordan Lacey, “Translating ambience,” *Unlikely Journal for Creative Arts* 6, last modified 2020, <http://translating-ambience.com/>.

<sup>29</sup> “Earthing (or grounding) refers to the discovery of benefits—including better sleep and reduced pain—from walking barefoot outside or sitting, working, or sleeping indoors connected to conductive systems that transfer the Earth’s electrons from the ground into the body.” In Gaétan Chevalier et al., “Earthing: Health Implications of Reconnecting the Human Body to the Earth’s Surface Electrons,” *Journal of Environmental and Public Health* 2012, (2012). <https://doi.org/10.1155/2012/291541>

## Roots of Frequency Bathing as Sound Immersion

It is likely that living beings have been using sound for healing the social body and for improving social relations since the Neolithic period. Darwin theorized that the Neanderthals, who made flutes out of bones, played music for courting and group cohesion.<sup>30</sup> I add that there could be a biological instinct to use sound to strengthen the immune system by decreasing stress levels. Primitive humans were continually under stress, on constant alert for predators while also being subjected to intense weather conditions. The calming power of sound may explain its use in cultural practice and its eventual introduction into spiritual worship.

Frequency bathing elements such as drone sounds and immersive light patterns have their roots in communal spiritual rituals. The sweat lodge experiences practiced by the Plains Indians of North America include chanting, incense burning, and prayer to cleanse the body and spirit. Some believe the Pythagorean school incorporated visualization, incense, chanting, and harmonic music for healing body, mind, and spirit. The beautiful, sculpted light of the *hammams* of Mesopotamia, the ancient Jewish Mikvah bath accompanied by music, and traditional Japanese bathhouses in Zen temples are all examples of rituals that combine creative expression with physical and spiritual cleansing. The designs of ancient spiritual ceremonies demonstrate that the human body may need immersive phenomenological experiences for a balanced, healthier life. The long history of sensory rituals of water, steam, and music to nourish the body, mind, and spirit offers insight into the current appeal of immersive, atmospheric environments.

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<sup>30</sup> Jelle Atema, "Musical origins and the Stone Age evolution of flutes," *Acoustics Today*, Summer 2014, accessed October 19, 2020, <https://acousticstoday.org/musical-origins-and-the-stone-age-evolution-of-flutes-jelle-atema/>.

The drone sound common in frequency bathing can be characterized as sustained notes or clusters of notes with slight harmonic shifts. Drone sounds are at the heart of many ceremonies for spiritual and bodily cleansing. Chanting or vocalization of vowel sounds can be considered an early form of drone music and are used in Kabbalah, Sufi, Tibetan, and shamanic practice.<sup>31</sup> The Aboriginal people of Australia play the didgeridoo, a long one- to three-meter wooden wind instrument, for their ceremonial dance and singing rituals. The didgeridoo musician uses a circular breathing technique to emit long, deep, continuous drones. The drone is also a characteristic style of traditional Indian *rāga* music, in which one continuous note serves as the harmonic base under improvisation. Traditionally, Hindus and Buddhists believed music was not simply entertainment but a spiritual pursuit. They believed that *rāgas* were drawn from nature rather than composed by artists.<sup>32</sup> The drone in *rāga* music has inspired many contemporary musicians, including the Minimalist composers previously mentioned, to incorporate the spiral structure.

Musician La Monte Young was inspired by *rāga* music and believed sound vibration causes the highest perceptual awareness, like the highest state of meditation. Young composed sequences of single notes held for exceptionally long periods without immediately noticeable changes, which altered the notes' perception.<sup>33</sup> His intent with music for a "drone-state of mind"

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<sup>31</sup> Goldman writes about vocalization, chanting and hymns in the occult practices (Kabbalah, Sufism), Catholicism, shamanism in Mongolia, Mayans, Aborigines, Native Americans, and tantric meditation in Tibetan and Hindu cultures. Jonathan Goldman, *Healing sounds: The power of harmonics* (Rochester, VT: Healing Arts Press, 2002), 39-75.

<sup>32</sup> William Forde Thompson et al., *Music in the social and behavioral sciences: An encyclopedia* (Los Angeles: SAGE Reference, 2015), <http://www.credoreference.com/book/sagemuscbeh>.

<sup>33</sup> Gail Gelburd and Geri de Paoli, "Pointing to the Center of Experience," *The transparent thread: Asian philosophy in recent American art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 49.

was to transform the listeners' and players' psychic states. Young echoed a kind of neo-Pythagorean *Music of the Spheres*; he believed in the spiritual and healing power of harmonic frequencies that can be translated as numerical patterns that form the cosmic order of the universe.<sup>34</sup> For the more rational reader, Young explains the physical effects of his music on the listener. The music elicits a drone state in the nervous system. It establishes periodic patterns related to hearing, balance, and the internal clock or biorhythms. In a drone state, the mind is more open to exploring new directions.<sup>35</sup>

Kosmorganic ambient immersive experiences may be a modern form of sweat lodge ceremony that responds to the collective anxiety toward, among other things, artificial intelligence, urbanism, and a high-speed lifestyle. Could the computer be the new menacing lion and Kosmorganic sights the new place to go to have peace from the stresses in the world? Posthumanist Peter Sloterdijk would say so. He sees these artificial ambient environments as spatial, immunological, and metaphysical solutions that address urbanism. Sloterdijk asserts that human beings constantly and instinctually create a protective existential space around themselves that recreates natural environments.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Jeremy Grimshaw, "Music of a 'more exalted sphere': The sonic cosmology of La Monte Young," *Dialogue* 38, no. 1 (2005). 1-35.

<sup>35</sup> Alexandra Munroe, "Art of Perceptual Experiences," *The third mind: American artists contemplate Asia, 1860-1989*, ed. Alexandra Munroe, (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2009), 287-299.

<sup>36</sup> Erik Morse, "Something in the air," *Frieze*, November 1, 2019, <https://www.frieze.com/article/something-air>.

## Roots of Frequency Bathing as Light Immersion

Frequency bathing that focuses on light immersion may be traced back to filmmakers of the early 20th century who were fascinated with creating rhythm and harmony by marrying moving images with one another and with music. Narrative was absent from the moving image, and the viewer focused instead on pattern, rhythm, color, and light. Early pioneers of this film style include Marie Ellen Butte, Thomas Wilfred, Hans Richter, Viking Eggeling, Len Lye, and the Whitney Brothers. In 1919, Wilfred invented his color light organ, the *Clavilux*, or "light played by key" in Latin. In his "lumia" performances, he played light with a keyboard and projected slow-moving, ethereal colored light forms through tinted screens.

By the 1960s, Western artists exposed to Eastern culture and religion synthesized Japanese, Indian, and Chinese approaches and interpretations into their philosophies and creative strategies. Artists drew from Taoism, Ch'an Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, and Vedism in painting, music, performance, and sculpture. Minimalism is a prominent Western movement wherein artists articulate their exposure and influence from Eastern philosophies.<sup>37</sup> If any analysis resembles Kosmorganic aesthetics, it is the new genre of Ambient Media and the recent critical revisiting of the previously under-acknowledged impact of Eastern philosophies on Minimalism.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Eugene Tan and Russell Storer, *Minimalism: Space. Light. Object.* (Singapore: National Gallery Singapore, 2018), 8.

<sup>38</sup> Here I refer to two recent books that address healing and spiritual aspects of Ambient sound and media environments and art works categorized under the genre of Minimalism. Paul Roquet, *Ambient media: Japanese atmospheres of self* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016). Tan and Storer, *Minimalism*.

This amalgamation of what was once called 'Eastern thought' converges with Western art, and we enter Kosmorganic aesthetics. By 1960, the tempo had shifted to a contemplative pace and the visuals expanded into atmospheric, phenomenological experiences. Anthony McCall, Yayoi Kusama, Otto Peine, Joshua White, Aldo Tambellini, Joan Brigham, La Monte Young, and Stan VanDerBeek are early practitioners who orchestrated frequency bathing environments.

In the past decade, there has been an intensification of frequency bathing art practices, particularly in art forms referred to as digital art, expanded media, light art, and sound art. With the innovation of media technologies that allow for surround audio and video projection of digital animation, visitors gradually become increasingly immersed inside art installations. Contemporary artists who incorporate recent technologies in their frequency bathing installations include Leo Villareal, Anila Quayyum Agha, Ryoichi Kurokawa, UVA, Team Lab, and Ryoji Ikeda. Art in this branch of Kosmorganic aesthetics tends to be expensive to produce and therefore is usually sponsored by corporations or international digital festivals with large budgets. These types of commercial collaborations promote the *external* science or technique behind the art and often neglect to acknowledge the *internal* science or mindfulness in the reception. However, a recent convergence of art in the museum and art in the health lab has affected how artwork is presented as not only a creative experience but a healing one as well.<sup>39</sup> I

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<sup>39</sup> Since psychological research on healing chambers of the 1960s, there has been a recent increase in wellness spaces that promote stillness, presence, relaxation, calm, and focus. Although some of the language may be promotional and trendy, there are authentic designs that are leaving the museum and entering corporate offices (Google), universities, hospitals, and secular meditation centers in urban areas. Snoezelen was one of the first companies in the 1960s to design such multisensory frequency bathing rooms. Meir Lotan and Christian Gold, "Meta-analysis of the effectiveness of individual intervention in the controlled multisensory environment (Snoezelen®) for individuals with intellectual disability," *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability*, 34, no.3, (2009), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668250903080106>.



suspect within the next few years, the collaboration between the art and health sectors will flourish and result in more Kosmorganic design.

### ***Frequency Bathing Art Walk***

To illustrate my hypothesis that Kosmorganic art can promote wellness and spiritual connection, I designed the *Frequency Bathing Art Walk*. I define *wellness* as physical, mental, and social harmony. *Spiritual* implies contemplative introspection and a feeling of interconnectedness with the cosmos. I posit that through concentrated focus during an ecosophic frequency bath, one can reach a state of unification and harmony with the universe. This experience requires that one first be present. Sound is a universal medium that can induce deep attention and presence. To create the soundtrack for the art walk, I consulted sound healer Jonathan Goldman's vocalization chart when collaborating with minimalist composer Rhys Chatham, who composed and performed the vocals for the music. Goldman's system is like the late Sufi leader Pir Vilayat Khan's vowel vocalizations. Both are variations of ancient chanting reminiscent of Kabbala chanting.<sup>40</sup>

According to Goldman, different vowel sounds correspond to different bodily regions called *chakras* or energy areas located in the head, throat, chest, solar plexus, pelvis, and genital area, and each region corresponds with distinct sound vibrations or signals. Illness occurs when energy is 'blocked,' or the system is disharmonic. These blockages are translated in biomedicine

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<sup>40</sup> Jonathan Goldman, *Healing sounds: The power of harmonics* (Rochester, VT: Healing Arts Press, 2002), 39-40, 47-49, 118.

as knots, cramps, clots, stiffness, rashes, and in extreme cases, tumors. Emotions and mental states are attached to physical organs, and therefore the vocalizations work with both mind and body. In frequency bathing, body and emotions can be realigned by sound vibrations that stimulate the flow of subtle energy through the body.<sup>41</sup> *Qi* is a subtle energy in Chinese medicine that is stimulated in acupuncture and acupressure. In Ayurveda, tantra medicine, and hatha yoga, *prana* is a type of subtle energy that circulates while a person is in *asanas* or yogic positions. These subtle energies vary between each culture, and despite their 5,000-year history of application, they are not recognized in modern Western biomedicine.<sup>42</sup>

In the *Frequency Bathing Art Walk*, a drone sound is interspersed with vocalizations. I employ the drone sound to induce presence, interconnection, and introspection, echoing walking meditation or the religious pilgrimage. The sounds of the Frequency Bathing Art Walk resemble the chanting and drone aesthetics found in religious ceremonies. Drone sounds, choral music, and spiritual sounds are included in the work of other Kosmorganic examples such as Janet Cardiff (*40-part motet*), Yoshi Wada (*Earth Horns with Electronic Drone*), video artist Shirin Neshat (*Turbulent*), Rhys Chatham (*Crimson Grail*), Romauld Karmaker (*Byzantion*), and NYX with Dan Tobin Smith (*Void*).

Sound is not the only sensory stimulus that occurs in frequencies; colored light is governed by them as well. For the *Frequency Bathing Art Walk*, visitors use paddles with viewfinders painted with a color corresponding to one of the regions of the body as well as to

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<sup>41</sup> MACROmedia Publishing, *Cymatics: The healing nature of sound*, 1986, video, 28:02, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=57JpuMnWS1I>.

<sup>42</sup> Jonathan Goldman, *Chakra Frequencies: Tantra Of Sound* (Rochester: Destiny Books, 2011), 24.

several emotions and determined by their astrological sign. This is not so different from the way Westerners assign emotions idiomatically to regions of the body: Butterflies in the stomach mean worry, a pain in the neck means annoyance. Color resonates while the visitor looks through the viewfinder and focuses on patterns in the landscape. The astrological color frequency assignment is in accordance with the position of one's context; moreover, it aligns the body within the larger existence of the cosmos. Frequency researcher Anthony Fiorenza theorizes that the brain corresponds with planetary frequencies that he calls "Astrophysical-Bio-Harmonic Resonances."<sup>43</sup> According to Fiorenza, orbiting planets emit inaudible sounds which correspond to our brains, organs, and emotions. If one mathematically converts these astral frequencies into colors, they can be combined with sound compositions as audiovisual healing tools, as in the case of frequency bathing.<sup>44</sup>

The third aspect of the Frequency Bath Art Walk is pattern. Each viewfinder has a keyhole of a basic shape (square, triangle, rectangle, hexagon, or octagon) to help visitors focus on details of natural growth. The walk takes place along a creek lined with oak and maple trees with an expansive view of the mountain range to the west and an open cow grazing field to the east. There has been some research on how gazing at trees can accelerate healing.<sup>45</sup> I argue that it is not the tree itself that heals but the non-linear patterns found in tree growth that make us feel at ease. It is as if a mystical order structures the tree canopies, cloud formation, mountain ranges,

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<sup>43</sup> Gretchen Weger Snell, *The power of vibrational medicine: Healing with the bioacoustics of nature*, (Coppell, TX: Self-published, 2019), 31.

<sup>44</sup> Anthony Fiorenza, "Planetary harmonics & neurobiological resonances in light, sound, & brain wave frequencies," *Lunar Planner*, accessed December 24, 2020, <https://www.lunarplanner.com/Harmonics/planetary-harmonics.html>.

<sup>45</sup> Roger Ulrich, "View through a window may influence recovery from surgery," *Science* 224, no. 4647 (1984), accessed March 11, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1692984>.

creek flow, and plant growth. The Pythagoreans translated this mystical order into numbers and ratios, concluding that specific proportions such as the golden mean were harmonic and found all over nature, and hence must be signs of the divine.<sup>46</sup>

Pythagoras demonstrated the harmony of whole number ratios to the Western world by converting them into musical intervals with his monochord instrument.<sup>47</sup> He advocated that his pupils studied the monochord instrument and believed that once they could understand the microcosmic order playing this single vibrational stringed instrument, they would simultaneously explore a universal cosmic order. The Pythagoreans believed numbers were spiritual because life comes into being via numbers translated into angles that make up forms, the world, and eventually the entire universe.<sup>48</sup> To visualize this process, consider the wind blowing through water, sand, trees, and snow, shaping the landscape and forming rhythmic patterns. These patterns are combinations of harmonic and disharmonic geometrical shapes that can be reduced to ratios and proportions, which can be translated into numbers that describe oscillating waves or frequencies. Gazing at the dynamic flow in nature, we attune and connect ourselves to the waves of harmonies and disharmonies that make up the universe.

With frequency bathing, I propose that the mind attains resonance by entraining its own frequencies with the harmonic frequencies found in nature or natural forms. Because

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<sup>46</sup> Matila Ghyka, *The geometry of art and life* (New York: Dover Publications, 1977), 173.

<sup>47</sup> Jonathan Goldman, *Healing sounds: The power of harmonics* (Rochester, VT: Healing Arts Press, 2002), 29.

<sup>48</sup> Robert Lawlor, "Pythagorean number as form, color, and light," *Homage to Pythagoras: Rediscovering sacred science* (New York: Lindisfarne, 1980), 187-209.

Kosmorganic artworks imitate nature, visitors experience frequency attunement with them. This might also explain why patients in hospitals might experience faster healing times when they have a photograph of a forest in their room or a view of trees out the window rather than no representation nor view of nature.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Roger Ulrich, "View through a window may influence recovery from surgery," *Science* 224, no. 4647 (1984), accessed March 11, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1692984>.

# History of Kosmorganic Art:

## A Metaphysical Gap 1940-1985

At the turn of the 20th century, early Western Modernist abstract artists were inspired by esotericism and the metaphysical. Hilma af Klint, Kandinsky, František Kupka, Agnes Pelton, early Piet Mondrian, Mikhail Matiushin, Kazimir Malevich, and members of the Der Blaue Reiter group are examples of artists who explicitly referred to the occult and cosmology in their work. In Kandinsky's manifesto, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, he laid out the integral aspects of artmaking. By the end of the 1930s, the metaphysical internal intelligence of art focused on the mind, the internal science of perception and psychology. Maurice Merleau-Ponty offered a phenomenological reading of art that has been linked to abstract painting, Minimalism, and land art.<sup>50</sup> He asserted that the artist's work is a sensorial process connected with deep awareness, wonderment, introspection, and understanding of primordial nature. Critics and historians associate Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger with the internal intelligence of many forms I include in Kosmorganic aesthetics. However, most readings of abstracted Western art forms from the 1940s through the 1990s, with the exception of a few historical analyses, stop short of the sensorial.<sup>51</sup> If we reduce art interpretations to only physical description and perception, then

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<sup>50</sup> Eugene Tan and Russell Storer, *Minimalism: Space. Light. Object.* (Singapore: National Gallery Singapore, 2018), 44.

<sup>51</sup> Historians critique contemporary art theory for excluding spiritual explanations associated with art-making since Modernism. Secular art criticism omitted religious or spiritual connection to artists and their work. "Using the word 'spiritual' in art in the 30's and 40's was dangerous to an artist's career." Richard Pousette-Dart, in Maurice Tuchman, *The spiritual in art: Abstract painting 1890-1985*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1986), 18.

In "On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art," (2004), Art Historian James Elkins observed, "Straightforward talk about religion is rare in art departments and art schools, and wholly absent from art journals unless the art in question is transgressive." Spretnak remarks that although these attitudes toward the religious notions in art have changed in the past 25 years, overall the situation persists in the art world. In Charlene Spretnak, *Spiritual dynamic in modern art: Art history reconsidered, 1800 to the present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 1.

one may confuse a screensaver for expanded media art or a baby background noise machine for ambient media. Without the spiritual and metaphysical overtones, forms such as frequency bathing will continue to be read as decorative installations with the main focus on technology. One challenge to presenting Kosmorganic art as an integral creative practice is implementing a universal language that does not alienate a skeptical materialist disinclined to see the healing or spiritual aspects of art.

By late Modernism in the 1940s, few Western artists demonstrated precise language to articulate internal intelligence or spiritual connection. It is as if the Age of Reason that severed art from religion also dissuaded most contemporary Western artists from authentically expressing any metaphysical and spiritual links in their work. A formalist perspective toward non-referential interpretations of art became the dominant reading post-WWII. Formalist aspects—composition, contrast, skill, application, the pleasures of light and color, and material—are still relevant to the appreciation of Kosmorganic artworks. However, these aspects are the beginning of the art experience, not the end.

Many Western artists of the mid-1900s were drawn to French existentialism, which emphasized the individual, the meaning of existence, free will, and existence itself without the concept of the divine or God. Many influential French existentialist thinkers such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Simone de Beauvoir were atheists. In a time of global disruption, struggle, and social change marked by civil rights movements, students' movements, the sexual

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Critics hesitate to address Asian philosophy in contemporary American art because of a lack of knowledge, they fail to understand its influence, or they construe it as a fad. Gail Gelburd and Geri de Paoli, *The transparent thread: Asian philosophy in recent American art* (Hempstead, NY: Hofstra University, 1990), 4.

revolution, and women's movements, human thought focused on group transformation through external results, such as changes in laws and systems that would in turn impact individuals. Kosmorganic aesthetics work in the reverse direction, whereby the individual transforms their own internal intelligence prior to enacting transfiguration of the social body.

Western Modernist artists, without a common philosophy that they could articulate publicly to a conservative, rationalist art world, invented terms to express internal intelligence in their work. Barnett Newman called his paintings "plastic image," meaning art concerned with the sublime that captures the truth of life through symbols.<sup>52</sup> Malevich invented the term "Suprematism" to describe art beyond reason in a non-objective world. He claimed that through the simple geometric form, he was purifying the senses and transforming himself into a "zero."<sup>53</sup> Yayoi Kusama called her infinity rooms "self-obliteration" to connect with the cosmos.<sup>54</sup> American post-surrealist artist Helen Lundberg was concerned with higher consciousness and metaphysics and called her contemplative, intuitive paintings "enigmas."<sup>55</sup> Early 20th-century painter Agnes Pelton belonged to a group of artists called the Introspectives in New York and later to another art group called the New Mexico Transcendentalists.<sup>56</sup> Like Af Klint, Pelton felt

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<sup>52</sup> Charlene Spretnak, *Spiritual dynamic in modern art: Art history reconsidered, 1800 to the present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 87.

<sup>53</sup> George Adrian, "A circular timeline of nothingness," *Minimalism: Space. Light. Object.*, ed. Eugene Tan and Russell Storer, (Singapore: National Gallery Singapore, 2018), 52-57.

<sup>54</sup> Yayoi Kusama, *Yayoi Kusama: In infinity*, ed. Lærke Rydal Jørgensen (Humblebæk: Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, 2015), 9.

<sup>55</sup> Susan M Anderson, "Journey Into the Sun: California Artists and Surrealism," In ed. Paul J. Karlstrom, *On the Edge of America: California Modernist Art, 1900-1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 180-203. <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft5p30070c/>

<sup>56</sup> Barbara Haskell, "Ask a Curator: Agnes Pelton: Desert Transcendentalist," Whitney Museum of American Art, October 21, 2020, video, 32:30, <https://youtu.be/uM9MziL-6t8>.



that she was channeling her visions that manifested as paintings that depicted the divine in nature, she called "perfect consciousness."<sup>57</sup> It seems it was easier for modern artists to invent terms to include metaphysical notions and detach from religious terminology with its dogmatic references.

The end of World War II and the ease of travel opened the door for cultural exchange and Eastern philosophies that contrasted with Existentialism, Structuralism, Post-structuralism, and Neo-Marxism in the West. A group of artists living in California in the 1940s referred to as the Dynaton group drew from Zen Buddhism, Theosophy, shamanism, automatism, and mysticism.<sup>58</sup> Rather than learn about Eastern ideas from books or colonialism, as had been the case in the previous centuries, Westerners began to receive direct teachings from Eastern religious leaders who immigrated to America and Europe. Shunryu Suzuki lectured on Zen Buddhism at Columbia University in the 1960s. Swami Vivekananda transmitted ancient Vedic wisdom by lecturing around the United States, then founded the Vedanta Society. Chogyam Rinpoche established secular meditation centers worldwide and the first Buddhist University, Naropa, in Boulder, Colorado.<sup>59</sup> Eastern artists from the early Kosmorganic movement, such as Lee Ufan, Isamu Noguchi, Yayoi Kusama, Yoko Ono, and Nam June Paik, freely expressed their foreign

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<sup>57</sup> Barbara Haskell, "Ask a Curator: Agnes Pelton: Desert Transcendentalist," Whitney Museum of American Art, October 21, 2020, video, 32:30, <https://youtu.be/uM9MziL-6t8>.

<sup>58</sup> Artists considered part of the Dynaton group from 1949-1952 include Wolfgang Paalen, Onslow Ford, and Lee Mullican. Susan M Anderson, "Journey Into the Sun: California Artists and Surrealism," In ed. Paul J. Karlstrom, *On the Edge of America: California Modernist Art, 1900-1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 180-203. <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft5p30070c/>

<sup>59</sup> Alexandra Munroe, "Buddhism and the Neo-Avant-Garde, Cage Zen, Beat Zen and Zen," *The third mind: American artists contemplate Asia 1860-1989*, ed. Alexandra Munroe, (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2009), 199-215.

perspectives to Western audiences without the cultural restrictions Western artists had imposed on themselves.

By the 1960s, Western artists exposed to and inspired by Eastern teachings quickly adopted foreign concepts in their art process. John Cage embedded Taoism and Zen Buddhism in his "chance-controlled" compositions in visual art and music. Another experimental composer, Pauline Oliveros, combined meditation, improvisation, ritualistic ceremony, and Buddhism in her Deep Listening philosophy of music.<sup>60</sup> Ad Reinhardt, a scholar of Asian culture, believed, albeit idealistically, that Chinese art was a total system that encompassed philosophy, aesthetics, morals, and contemplation.<sup>61</sup> Modern artists who paved the way to Kosmorganic aesthetics like Mark Tobey, Brice Marden, Agnes Martin, Carl Andre, and Morris Graves articulated personal philosophies that drew from Taoism, Zen Buddhism, and Ch'an Buddhism. However, it would take nearly another two decades for non-literary contemporary art to be analyzed for its holistic aspects and not just its formal ones.

In the early 1900s, artists who depicted nature and metaphysical notions through color and abstract form hesitated or did not even exhibit their paintings out of fear of being misunderstood.<sup>62</sup> Georgia O'Keeffe expressed her anxiety to show her abstract painting and reasoned that Arthur Dove felt similar and therefore chose never to show his purely abstract

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<sup>60</sup> Silke Schmickle, "Transgressing boundaries," in *Minimalism: Space. Light. Object.*, ed. Eugene Tan and Russell Storer, (Singapore: National Gallery Singapore, 2018), 34-40.

<sup>61</sup> Alexandra Munroe, *The third mind: American artists contemplate Asia, 1860-1989* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2009), 30.

<sup>62</sup> Charles C. Eldredge, "Nature Symbolized: American Painting From Ryder to Hartley," In Maurice Tuchman, *The spiritual in art: Abstract painting 1890-1985* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1986), 112-129.

paintings. Spiritual abstract painter Hilma af Klint wrote in her will that her paintings were not to be exhibited until twenty years after her death, which is to say, not until 1964. She believed, and rightly so that the paintings drawn from esoteric magic, Rosicrucianism, parapsychology, and theosophy would be misunderstood if shown to her contemporaries.<sup>63</sup> Largely forgotten, her paintings were not exhibited until 1984. I mark this date as the beginning of Western historians and critics welcoming the spiritual and metaphysical back into contemporary art criticism. The following year, a large contemporary survey exhibit, *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*, was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Since that time, Western historians Leesa Fanning, Charlotte Spretnak, Alexandra Munroe, and Eugene Tan have re-examined abstract art, land art, and Minimalism of the past century. In doing so, they have connected these art forms with pantheism, Buddhism, Taoism, Vedism, Kabbalah, and the Christian occult.

It has been nearly four decades since *The Spiritual in Art* exhibit, and yet we have only recently heard from art critics and curators of the mystical and healing aspects of immersive environments and multisensory rooms in the past few years. Perhaps, as Kosky and Thurman have implied, this is due to the peak of the digital Global Age and its oversaturation with external intelligence. The additional minute of screen time or one more downloaded social media app may be the tipping point that brings forth a new vision. Information overload causes perceptual stress on the brain and wreaks havoc on our ability to analyze, judge, and make decisions. After we spend all day in front of computers, our consciousness undergoes constant distraction or total

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<sup>63</sup> Hilma af Klint and Tracey Bashkoff, *Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the future* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publishing, 2018), 18.

"psychic disorder." Confronted by endless scrolling data, the brain can no longer focus and enters a state of total distraction, which is the opposite of contemplation, stillness, deep attention, or "flow state."<sup>64</sup> The multisensory healing rooms that connect us with a grander cosmos appeared at the same time as the first computers in the late 1950s. In a future of digital overload combined with total urbanism, I envision Kosmorganic aesthetics, with its healing and spiritual potential, will thrive most in the form of experimental architecture.

### **Kosmorganic Architecture**

At a museum or gallery, the average visitor spends two seconds per artwork, or fifteen seconds if you count reading the label.<sup>65</sup> Hence, art houses are not the ideal context for Kosmorganic art, which necessitates a reflective and thoughtful pace and ample time. The most congruent cultural spaces for contemplation and introspection tend to be houses of worship such as the Catholic cathedral, the Buddhist temple, the Hindu temple, the Jewish synagogue, and the Muslim mosque. In an age where fewer and fewer Westerners attend religious places designed to immerse them in a communal, sensory space, perhaps a secular, permanent Kosmorganic dwelling could serve as an alternative. Architects and artists such as Buckminster Fuller, Louis Kahn, Olafur Eliasson, Einar Thorsteinn, Zaha Hadid, Frank Gehry, Tadao Ando, Robert Irwin, James Turrell, Future Systems, Anne Griswold Tyng, and Shigeru Ban often apply key

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<sup>64</sup> A flow state requires a steady attentive consciousness to allow for harmony between personal goals, skills, and heightened concentration. A person in a flow state, such as a composer or a skier, is so involved in their activity that their actions become spontaneous and automatic. Csikszentmihalyi defines *psychic disorder* as when experience contradicts personal intentions and distracts one from successfully fulfilling their goals. When this happens, consciousness becomes almost 'sick' and develops "psychic entropy" preventing one from focusing attention on goals and instead attention is diverted. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience* (New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 1991), 36.

<sup>65</sup> James Elkins, "How long does it take to look at a painting?" *Huffington Post*, November 8, 2010, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/how-long-does-it-take-to-\\_b\\_779946](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/how-long-does-it-take-to-_b_779946).

Kosmorganic elements that are sensory, immersive, ecosophic, harmonic, and metaphysical. Their designs correspond with Kosmorganic aesthetics that favor well-being, incorporating spaces of respite and contemplation with pavilions, liminal passages of sculpted light, water sources, labyrinths, and biomorphic forms. Such experimental architecture inspired by nature is a stark contrast to the austere, isolating, utilitarian, formalist designs of Modernism that favor efficiency over life's natural rhythm. The architecture and urban planning of Buckminster Fuller reflect a philosophy of existence that takes into account Earth's limited resources. He called his philosophy "omnihumanity that is omnisustainable."<sup>66</sup> Fuller traveled the world giving marathon lectures on this new global vision that he warned was vital to save humanity.

Kosmorganic architecture fosters an integral lifestyle in an age where remote digital life fragments our time and detaches us from the physical world. If we want to regain focused attention, clarity, interconnection, and creativity in our lives, Kosmorganic architecture may be a solution to providing a balanced habitat that does not force us to throw away our devices. Those shackled to computer screens immersed in cognitive data analysis will be encouraged to take a break and make space in their minds for more introspection and cosmic connection.

Kosmorganic phenomenological architecture is a framework in which we could be constantly reminded to slow down and become present in order to make the mental shift that would allow us to recognize possible realities beyond global destruction. However, the shift requires that we first become sensitive to the process of a contemplative state.

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<sup>66</sup> Richard Buckminster Fuller, *Critical path* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 254.

## **Ways of Meeting Kosmorganic Art: Presence, Boredom, and Slowness**

Kosmorganic art thrives when it is received in the spirit of contemplation and concentrated attention. This aesthetic counterbalances the digital Global Age characterized by speed, virtual spaces, remote socialization, constant interruption, automatization, and analytical reason. With adults spending, on average, eight hours a day in front of computers, attention and communal activity are endangered. Scientific research on the psychological and neurological effects of immersion in pure data has revealed that the digital lifestyle is noxious for our bodies, our minds, and our relationships. Scientists conclude that empathy and creativity are at risk due to excessive screen time.<sup>67</sup> Theorist Arden Reed proposes that slow art is an antidote to the computer age because this art stretches time and forces us to be present.<sup>68</sup> Not all the works that Reed describes as slow art are Kosmorganic since he focuses on narrative work. However, most of his examples share the common characteristics of requiring contemplation and prolonged viewing times.

Minimalist artist Carl Andre claimed that the perception of an artwork is two-fold. There is the initial stage of immediate apprehension in the glance and then the second stage, which occurs over a more extended period, in which one's perception is modified. The focused viewer

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<sup>67</sup> Studies reveal a correlation between a decline in empathy and the ability of perspective taking (looking beyond one's own perspective) with social media addiction. Mohammed Dalvi-Esfahani et al., "Social media addiction and empathy: Moderating impact of personality traits among high school students," *Telematics and Informatics*, 57 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2020.101516>.

<sup>68</sup> Arden Reed, *Slow art: The experience of looking, sacred images to James Turrell* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 21.

will experience a heightened sense of awareness by becoming more conscious of the artwork's exterior conditions rather than just the art itself. Transpersonal art therapist Michael Franklin asserts that contemplative art, like meditation or yoga, can slow us down and draw us in to inspire more creativity and clarity.<sup>69</sup> The art encounter is not just with the object but with the situation, the mood, and the environment. Franklin calls sensory orchestrated art experiences "imaginal culture" when they stimulate interior poetic narratives.<sup>70</sup> In line with Franklin's insight into the transformative role of the arts, artist Robert Irwin stresses that the purpose of art is not to remember the artwork but to be reminded of the beauty of the world.

Irwin composes serene installations of sheer white scrim to draw attention to the incidentals of a space that the analytical mind ordinarily ignores, having decided they are not necessary. He suggests that visitors may increase mental sensitivity and awareness if they concentrate on non-linguistic intelligence. The work is not so much about the scrim but the impact it has on the viewer.<sup>71</sup> He asserts that a strip of black tape that symbolizes nothing frames reorganizes and redefines space to shift the viewer's consciousness.<sup>72</sup> Irwin applies the principles of Gestalt psychology to alter perception. In Gestalt perception, the mind collapses into systems what the eye sees as parts. For example, in "multi-stability" or "figure-ground," the mind does

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<sup>69</sup> Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 2," *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, 15. First published in *Artforum* 5, no. 2 (October 1966).

<sup>70</sup> Michael Franklin, *Art as contemplative practice: Expressive pathways to the self* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018), 82-85.

<sup>71</sup> Arden, Reed. *Slow art: The experience of looking, sacred images to James Turrell*. (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 21.

<sup>72</sup> Lawrence Weschler, *Seeing is forgetting the name of the thing one sees: Over thirty years of conversations with Robert Irwin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 178.

not like uncertainty and will look for solid, stable objects in a scene. Irwin's scrim installations are ambiguous and lack central focus. Visitors must undergo a moment of discomfort as the mind slows down and becomes still to gradually make sense of just being in the space. Visitors must be fully present through a process that includes a sense of boredom. Here *boredom* is the mental state associated with daydreaming that scientists claim may be necessary for creativity.<sup>73</sup> There is a word in Sanskrit, *vedanā*, that may better describe the spectrum of boredom without its negative connotations. *Vedanā* is the word for 'sensation,' described as an affective quality that can lead to craving or clear comprehension. *Vedanā* is multifaceted and can refer to *boredom* with its negative connotations similar to the English definition or describe a mental state with no exterior stimulation, conceptualization, or judgment. The latter definition is the aspect that neurologists and psychologists apply when they correlate boredom with creativity.

Marina Abramović has worked with boredom and presence for many years in her ritualistic performance art. In her performances, *Transitory Objects* and *The Artist is Present*, Abramović requires the visitor to confront stillness and boredom.<sup>74</sup> In *The Artist is Present*, Abramović sits at a table for eight hours while waiting for visitors to sit with her, and no words are exchanged.<sup>75</sup> She acknowledges that perceptual shifts occur once one stretches performance to extended durations. Through meditative situations of hours in silence, visitors are engaged at the moment with close attention. Another artist whose work requires long durations to

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<sup>73</sup> Sandi Mann and Rebekah Cadman, "Does being bored make us more creative?" *Creativity Research Journal* 26, no.2 (April 01, 2014): 165-173.

<sup>74</sup> Marina Abramović, *Transitory Objects*, 1965-2001. "Marina Abramović Distinguished Speaker," *Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art*, November 18, 2019, video, 48:06, [https://youtu.be/aL2\\_4SHOqqE](https://youtu.be/aL2_4SHOqqE)

<sup>75</sup> Marina Abramović, *Artist is Present*, 2010, performance, Museum of Modern Art, New York. In Leesa Fanning, *Encountering the spiritual in contemporary art* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 2018), 262-263.



experience is Walter de Maria. Travelers to de Maria's *Lightning Fields* in the New Mexico desert will experience feelings of boredom as they wait hours, if not days, for the possibility of the lightning storm that completes the experience.<sup>76</sup> These prolonged periods are necessary for Kosmorganic art's reception because they require visitors to be fully present for an enriched experience.

Wonder, slowness, presence, and boredom are critical characteristics in the reception of Kosmorganic aesthetics. Such contemplative notions may elicit feelings of interconnectivity with the environment, then society, then possibly the universe. When the visitor attains a momentary state of *vedanā*, curiosity and understanding may increase and, in turn, nourish compassion for the other and acceptance of difference. In the fractured, digital Global Age, this mental shift may be what we need for social cohesion. Kosmorganic artists of today, who live in a world of constant war and urban isolation, recreate miniature universes on Earth to momentarily embody interconnectivity and harmony. The digitally overloaded mind is in desperate need of a consciousness cleanse, a return to internal concentration to reconnect with the social body (one another), the natural body (the world), and the spiritual body (the universe).

### **Tabula Rasa State**

Suppose one can be present, slow down, and attune to a Kosmorganic experience. In that case, one may enter a tabula rasa mental state or 'clean slate' mind that is unbiased, non-dualistic, and untainted by social influences. In this higher state of awareness, mental constructs dissolve,

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<sup>76</sup> Walter DeMaria, *Lightning Fields*, 1977, 400 stainless steel poles arranged in a grid 1 mile by 1 kilometer, Quemado, Mexico. In Jeffrey Kosky, *Arts of wonder* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 16-21.

which leaves space for an open mind. These mental constructs are difficult to cleanse under normal mental conditions because they mold our identity. Without categories such as race, nationality, gender, sex, class, age, political affiliation, ethnicity, religion, and ability, humans would be more readily able to recognize the interconnectivity between themselves and others, as well as nature. With a tabula rasa mind, there is more room for mental, emotional, and spiritual space for understanding, compassion, and creativity, the three essential human qualities depleted by social media habits, algorithmic profiling, and remote living. Neuroscientist Sam Harris connects happiness to just such a higher consciousness-based identity that is rooted in a sensorial experience. He asserts that we are barely aware of this higher state of consciousness but, while in it, do not identify or analyze sights, sounds, sensations, moods, and thoughts. If we identify with consciousness itself, which is sensorial, then we may be at peace.<sup>77</sup> Despite Harris being against religion, his attitude toward a higher state of consciousness resembles the Zen Buddhist notion of *shoshin*. According to Buddhism, humanity suffers because of minds attached to judgments and fears that prohibit true compassionate living. However, unlike Harris, Zen Buddhists do not believe that consciousness resides in the brain but outside the body.

Artist Yayoi Kusama and astronaut Frank White both address out-of-body consciousness. Since the 1960s, Kusama has made frequency bathing installations known as "infinity rooms" that elicit a tabula rasa state. Wall-to-wall mirrors painted with colored polka dots reproduce the infinite cosmos. Before creating these installations, Kusama made simplified performance versions where she painted polka dots on her body, the trees, the dirt floor, and even animals. She called her art process "self-obliteration," a strategy of interconnectivity and social

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<sup>77</sup> Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, terror, and the future of reason* (London: Free Press, 2005), 206.

cohesion.<sup>78</sup> According to Kusama, the dissolution of the self or ego allows the viewer to become part of a communal space, to feel interconnected with the universe. The dots eliminate cognitive constructs by neutralizing the elements in an area, thereby transforming space into what she described as a "vast outer space filled with microcosmic accumulations of stardust that lay underneath a simple yet complex unconscious."<sup>79</sup> Similar to Kusama's self-obliteration technique is the "Overview Effect," which Frank White described from the astronaut's perspective while in outer space looking back at Earth. White defines the Overview Effect as a cognitive shift in perspective about the planet and humanity's place in the universe. According to astronauts, one feels awe, a profound understanding of the interconnection with all life, and a "renewed sense of responsibility for taking care of the environment."<sup>80</sup> However, the average person cannot jump on a rocket and go to outer space to attain the Overview Effect so that we, as a collective species, can work together to confront climate change. Instead, the average person without easy access to a forest or the ocean might visit a Kosmorganic installation to experience a similar effect and achieve the clarity, introspection, and contemplation necessary to rethink and redesign a healthier and more compassionate world.

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<sup>78</sup> Mika Yoshitake, *Infinity mirrors* (New York: DelMonico Books, 2017), 19.

<sup>79</sup> Mika Yoshitake, *Infinity mirrors* (New York: DelMonico Books, 2017), 27.

<sup>80</sup> Guy Reid, "Overview," *Planetary Collective*, 2013, video, 19:00, <https://vimeo.com/planetarycollective/overview>.

## Conclusion: Back on a Kosmorganic Track

I have elaborated on the branches of Kosmorganic aesthetics, situated them in their historical context, and analyzed how the integral strength of these practices lies in contemplative reception. One challenge to a holistic interpretation of art is the contemporary Western Art world's resistance to recognizing the metaphysical and healing aspects of art since the 1940s. Unfortunately, this limited view of art's role in society is the fault of all members of the contemporary Western Art world industry, including artists, critics, art historians, curators, gallerists, auction houses, art academics, and art foundations. High modern and contemporary art history's failure to articulate art's spiritual, metaphysical, and healing aspects may be attributed to art considered as more and more a commodity and profession in the past few decades, with an emphasis on market value, auction resales, blockbuster exhibitions, and artist training toward the business of being an artist.<sup>81</sup> In addition, research institutions, foundations, governmental funding, and universities increasingly grant scientific research over the humanities. Consequently, artists and historians try to sound like scientists, avoiding notions deemed frivolous such as the mystical, poetic, spiritual, otherworldly, or ritualistic, which have been key aspects of art aesthetics throughout the ages.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Here I refer to mandatory curriculum in major art schools for the promotion and marketing of art and funding like Creative Capital where most of the grant funds is slated for fundraising, promotion, and marketing rather than production and artist fees.

<sup>82</sup> Geri DePaoli, "Meditations and humor; art as Koan," *The trans parent thread: Asian philosophy in recent American art* (Hempstead, NY: Hofstra University, 1990), 14-36.

Art historian James Elkins remarks that in academia, any references to spirituality are not taken seriously.<sup>83</sup> He is not alone. Art historians who have recognized metaphysical notions in contemporary art in the past two decades, Lynn Gamwell, Charlene Spretnak, Donald Kuspit, and Leesa Fanning, made similar observations. Contemplative art is one exception that has promoted the internal sciences in the process and reception of artmaking. However, it has been relegated to psychology and separated from the professional arts because it is assumed to emphasize just the art process and not the reception. Whether practitioners are in the art industry or therapeutic arts, art once served and can serve again as a catalyst for social transformation. My holistic interpretation of Kosmorganic art is on the cusp of reemerging after the resistance of the metaphysical during the past half-century. Yet, it is not only the relaxing of rigid material and technical readings of art that have led to the acknowledgment and accelerated rise of Kosmorganic aesthetics in the past decade. Social crises, such as a scarcity mentality, separatism, domestic terrorism, social media addiction, urbanization, climate change, and a global pandemic contribute to the need for a holistic application of art.

Humans are pillaging every corner of the planet for natural resources for consumption. New neurological, psychological, and social disorders are on the rise faster than the advance of biomedicine. Both the planet and its inhabitants are sick. Nature is at a critical juncture, a tipping point. If it's possible that some minor occurrence could catalyze a planetary harmonic balance, could that occurrence be Kosmorganic design en masse? Just in the past five years, there has been a shift in architectural design to incorporate contemplative spaces in corporate offices, hospitals, children's centers, schools, and senior centers. The German company Snoezelen has

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<sup>83</sup> Jeffrey Kosky, *Arts of wonder* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 171.

been at the forefront of frequency bathing spaces targeted at children with sensory challenges. French geodesic *Zomes* and *Sculpture Cabins* by Koto serve as DIY meditation cabin kits. The secular meditation centers *Inscape* by Winka Dubbeldam and *Arches* and *Coves* by the Office of Things exemplify commercial frequency bathing chambers for workers in the tech industry.

These immersive light and sound environments do not always fall under Kosmorganic aesthetics because of external frameworks such as their context and intention. Even more confusingly, marketing co-opts the language of contemporary social trends, such as wellness, sustainability, or organic food, to seduce customers to consume. For example, the installment of a James Turrell in a Las Vegas Louis Vuitton boutique entices tourists to shop and gamble and is a gesture by a billionaire company to boost its cultural capital.<sup>84</sup> Another example is the meditation chambers by Office of Things installed at Google's Bay Area headquarters, which may be another gimmick to encourage employees to work even longer hours on site. These strategies I label as *Diet Coke marketing*. In other words, billion-dollar companies use current trends such as wellness or, in the case of Turrell in the Louis Vuitton store, the prestige of art capital to market their products. The situation, setting, and function of an artwork affect the reception, and therefore Kosmorganic aesthetics distinguish themselves from some of these showrooms that appropriate frequency bathing to sell products (*Submerge-Pantone 19-4052 Classic Blue*), advertise equipment (LD Systems - New Year's Eve 2010 - 3D Projection Mapping - Sugar Land, TX), entertain families (*Meow Wolf*), or indulge and enthrall a subculture of wealthy, white, secular Millennials. (*Burning Man*).

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<sup>84</sup> Here I refer to Pierre Bourdieu's term *cultural capital*. Bourdieu describes cultural capital as including one's social relations, property that can be transmitted economically, academic credentials, and inherited knowledge that puts one at an advantage over another. Pierre Bourdieu, "Cultural reproduction and social reproduction," *Knowledge, education and social change: Papers in the sociology of education*, ed. Richard Brown (London: Tavistock Publications, 1974), 71–112.

A contrast to these examples of art's co-optation for marketing purposes is Kant's disinterested terms of art appreciation, whereby an artwork must be free of any hidden ulterior motive and unattached to functional desire in order for it to provide the utmost aesthetic fulfillment. Kosmorganic aesthetics call for a delineator that insists on some level of disinterested appreciation to avoid reducing art to entertainment or high-priced commodities. However, if Kosmorganic aesthetics serve more than just the role of beauty and artists authentically integrate their work into healing and spiritual practices, they do not fit Kant's claim that art appreciation must be entirely disinterested. The impact of Kosmorganic art's potential as a catalyst for social transformation is not pure aesthetic pleasure, and yet it risks association with the commercialization of art as a strategy to consume. This may be a risk it has to take. Perhaps Kosmorganic art installed in the middle of a shopping mall may be the compromise for mass higher consciousness. Japanese, French, and Chinese shopping centers have incorporated art for the past two decades.<sup>85</sup> One could argue that providing free and easily accessible art in public, if commercial, space is less elitist than conducting ritualist performances in Antarctica or the middle of the desert to which only the wealthy have access by invitation or prohibitive, inflated entrance tickets.

In the larger context of the planet, the more open access to Kosmorganic art, the more transformative the impact of the art, which needs to be experienced firsthand. Once one is inside a Kosmorganic space, one is tuned out of social media and away from their screens. The visitor

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<sup>85</sup> Printemps and Le Bon Marché in Paris host many large-scale reputable artists in their department stores. The Ginza Six department store in Tokyo exhibits art. Beijing- SKP-S, The Shanghai TX Huaihai, and K11 Shanghai all fuse culture with shopping.

has the opportunity to be still, ground themselves, reflect, and then return to their life to create and communicate more thoughtfully and ethically. In this respect, Kosmorganic art spaces in the mall, office, home, hospital, school, religious house, jungle gym, or adult gym will take art out of the art world and make it readily available and accessible to the entire world. The challenge is not one of resources or access but of social cohesion if we are to foster a global Kosmorganic vision. If Neanderthals designed flutes to play music to attune with their environment and one another, what might it take for us to get on a harmonic track and work together to make a more beautiful world? It's possible all that's required are painted polka dots, a window in a ceiling, or a few holes chiseled in wood.



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