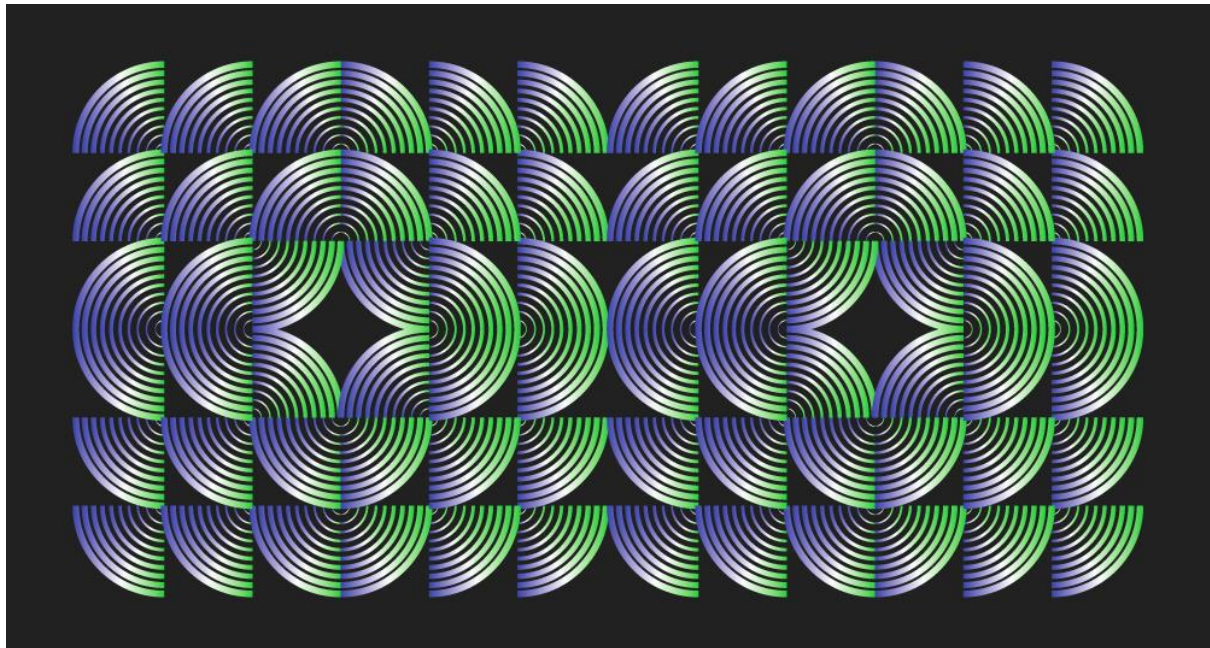


BLACK LIGHT Secret Traditions in Art since the 1950s



Exhibition at the CCCB from 16 May to 21 October 2018

Press conference: Tuesday, 15 May, at 11:00
Opening: Tuesday, 15 May, at 19:00

“Black light” is about the influence that various secret traditions have had on contemporary art from the nineteen-fifties to the present day. The exhibition, produced by the CCCB, where it will run from 16 May to 21 October, presents some 350 works by such artists as **Antoni Tàpies, Agnes Martin, Henri Michaux, Joseph Beuys, Ulla Von Brandenburg, William S. Burroughs, Joan Jonas, Jordan Belson, Goshka Macuga, Kenneth Anger, Rudolf Steiner, Alejandro Jodorowsky, Francesco Clemente and Zush.**

The exhibition brings together, in more or less chronological order, paintings, drawings, audiovisuals, sculptures, photographs, installations, books, music, engravings and documents by artists largely from North America, where secret traditions have historically enjoyed greater acceptance.

There are works by creators who are considered fundamental to the history of art, such as Antoni Tàpies, Barnett Newman and Agnes Martin, alongside less-known figures of the counterculture of the sixties and seventies. The show also presents young artists to reflect the renewed interest in these traditions. The work of all of them goes to show the relevance and continuity of these habitually overlooked trends, in many cases regarding art as a possible means to a higher cognitive level, as an instrument of connection with a more profound reality, or as a form of knowledge in itself. These ideas are contrary, for example, to a purely formalistic understanding of abstraction.

Specifically, the exhibition also explores the influence of esoteric ideas on areas of popular culture, such as comics, jazz, cinema and alternative rock.

Esoteric traditions can be traced back to the very origins of civilization, having served at different times to structure philosophical, linguistic, scientific or spiritual ideas. Despite their importance for the development of twentieth-century art, they tend to be ignored or disparaged these days due to the dominance of rationalistic thinking and the difficulty of talking about these subjects in clear, direct language.

In recent years, however, many artists have taken a renewed interest in subjects such as alchemy, secret societies, theosophy and anthroposophy, the esoteric strands in major religions, oriental philosophies, magic, psychedelia and drug-use, universal symbols and myths, the Fourth Way formulated by the Armenian mystic Georges Gurdjieff, etc., generating an interest in these fields that had not existed since the counterculture of the sixties and seventies. According to the writer **Enrique Juncosa**, curator of this exhibition, this interest *“may be due to the fact that we are, once again, living in a restless and unsatisfied world, worried about new colonial wars, fundamentalist terrorism, serious ecological crisis and nationalist populism, just as in the sixties and seventies people feared an imminent and devastating nuclear catastrophe. Furthermore, much of today’s mainstream art is actually rather boring due to its complete lack of mystery and negation of any kind of poetization or interpretation of our experience of it”*.

For the essayist **Gary Lachman**, author of the text “Occultism in Art. A Brief Introduction for the Uninitiated” in the exhibition catalogue, *“in recent years, the art world seems to have become aware of the importance of occultism [...]. Admitting the influence of Hermeticism on the Renaissance, or of theosophy on early abstract art, to mention just two examples, helps to resituate occult forces as an undeniable part of human experience and rescue them from the marginal position to which they had been exiled for a few centuries”*.

About the exhibition

In the fifties, US filmmakers **Harry Smith** and **Jordan Belson** made animated films that were precursors of the psychedelia and counterculture of the following two decades. Also at this time, painters associated with abstract expressionism in the US (such as **Barnett Newman**, **Ad Reinhardt** and **Agnes Martin**) and European Informalists, such as the Catalans associated with *Dau al Set* (including **Antoni Tàpies** and **Joan Ponç**), became interested in the writings of Swiss psychologist **Carl Gustav Jung**, oriental philosophies, the great myths and primitive shamanic rites. The cult US filmmaker **Kenneth Anger** made films that are still considered radical, influenced by the ideas of the well-known English occultist **Aleister Crowley**, who was also influential in the world of rock. And **Forrest Bess**, a self-taught, isolated artist, an unusual figure in the American art of the last century, painted symbolic, visionary images of the universal collective subconscious.

In the sixties and seventies, the emergence of counterculture and the hippy movement was accompanied by an upsurge in interest in esoteric matters and alternative spirituality. US writer **William S. Burroughs** and French artist and writer **Brion Gysin**, both interested in occultism and mysticism, developed the cut-up method to write texts using collage, actions which, like the origin of art itself, they considered magic. The American musician **Sun Ra**, one of the jazz world's most idiosyncratic figures (he claims he was born on Saturn), set up the secret society Thmei Research in Chicago, and was interested in the writings of Armenian philosopher and master mystic Georges Gurdjieff, and the Ukrainian Madame Blavatsky, creator of the esoteric current known as theosophy. Sun Ra's compositions, with a big band that performed in strange colourful clothing, were highly radical, embracing improvisation and chaos. In Europe, the German artist **Joseph Beuys** was inspired by the writings and activities of Austrian philosopher **Rudolf Steiner**, the founder of anthroposophy, as a model to explain his ideas. Beuys called for a return to spirituality and defended art as a vehicle for healing and social change. The French artist **Tania Mouraud**, interested in introspection and philosophy, with a strong analytical vein, creates installations that are spaces for meditation, and the Catalan artist **Zush**, in Ibiza, discovers psychedelia and draws fantastic beings connected by vibrant energies.

The eighties and nineties saw the consolidation of a large number of artists who saw artistic practice as something that can facilitate a higher cognitive level. Several American abstract painters, like **Terry Winters**, **Philip Taaffe** and **Fred Tomaselli**, became interested in spiritual themes. Winters, for example, who took scientific images as his inspiration, based a large series of paintings on knot theory, a mathematical concept that might be seen as an emblem of the hermetic. Taaffe, meanwhile, used ornamental forms from different cultures, combining them in complex configurations of an ecstatic nature, and Tomaselli produced compositions using all kinds of drugs in a reference to psychedelia. In Europe, the German sculptor **Wolfgang Laib**, interested in Zen Buddhism and Taoism, creates sculptures and installations with symbolic images, like stairs and boats, suggesting ascension, travel and inner transformation, while the Italian **Gino de Dominicis**, who claimed to believe in extra-terrestrials and was obsessed by Sumerian culture and mythology, creates invisible sculptures. The paintings by Italian **Francesco Clemente**, a representative of the Transavanguardia movement, feature images of an apparently hermetic nature, creating a singular narrative of spiritual symbolism. The Chilean-French artist **Alejandro Jodorowsky** explores esoteric ideas in his extraordinary films of great visual imagination and also creates highly celebrated comics. In the nineties, several alternative rock bands such as **Psychic TV** (led by the English musician, poet and artist **Genesis P-Orridge**) were also interested in occultism and magic.

Black light further includes a large number of works by artists from all over the world who refer in various ways to spiritual and occultist issues, such as **Carlos Amoraes**, **Paiva & Gusmão**, **Ulla von Brandeburg**, **Suzanne Treister**, **Louise Despont**, **Jonathan Hammer** and **Matias Khran**.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a catalogue with texts by specialists such as **Cristina Ricupero**, **Gary Lachman**, **Erik Davies** and **Enrique Juncosa**, and a series of activities that reflect on occultist traditions and their present-day context.

The title “Black light” refers to a concept of Sufism, the esoteric branch of Islam that teaches a path of connection with divinity leading via inner vision and mystic experience. Sufism, which regards reality as light in differing degrees of intensity, speaks of a whole system of inner visions of colours that mark the spiritual progress of initiates until they become “men and women of light”. The intention is to achieve a state of supra-consciousness that is announced symbolically by this black light.

Artists present in the exhibition:

Carlos Amoraes / Kenneth Anger / Antony Balch / Jordan Belson / Wallace Berman / Forrest Bess / Joseph Beuys / Howard Brookner / William S. Burroughs / Marjorie Cameron / Francesco Clemente / Bruce Conner / Aleister Crowley / René Daumal / Gino de Dominicis / Louise Despont / Nicolás Echevarría / Robert Frank / Joao Maria Gusmao / Brion Gysin / Jonathan Hammer / Frieda Harris / Derek Jarman / Collins Jess / Alejandro Jodorowsky / Joan Jonas / Carl Gustav Jung / Matías Krahn / Wolfgang Laib / LeonKa / Goshka Macuga / Agnes Martin / Chris Martin / Henri Michaux / Grant Morrison / Tania Mouraud / Barnett Newman / Pedro Paiva / Joan Ponç / Genesis P-Orridge / Sun Ra / Ad Reinhardt / Harry Smith / Rudolf Steiner / Philip Taaffe / Antoni Tàpies / Fred Tomaselli / Suzanne Treister / Ulla von Brandenburg / Terry Winters / Zush

General information

“Black light. Secret Traditions in Art since the 1950s”

Exhibition in Gallery 2 of the CCCB
From 6 May to 21 October 2018

Curator: Enrique Juncosa
Space design: Francesc Pons

Press Service of the CCCB

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