

## Did astronomy inspire the artwork of Hilma af Klint?

By Christian Horgos



This visual essay aims to highlight a profound idea. The ultimate tool for exploring astronomy resides within our unconscious. The “abstract” painter **Hilma af Klint** achieved something remarkable in this regard. The author noticed that her main collection, “*The Ten Largest*”, painted in 1907, has at least ten similarities with ultra-modern astronomical images. A possible explanation could be the power of the unconscious or an astonishing intuition.

Otherwise, recently, in April 2025, astronomer Britt Lundgren has published in *Leonardo Journal* about striking similarity between the abstract geometric shapes in **af Klint**’s work and scientific diagrams in 19th century physicist Thomas Young’s Lectures (1807).

As **Hilma af Klint** painted in secret, her art-work was not known by Dr Carl Jung. Otherwise, the father of analytical psychology would have been interested in her visions with multiple reflections in science. We know, instead, from the book “*Man and his symbols*”, that Dr Jung has paid attention to the way Jackson Pollock painted the micro-matter in trance.

Based on the paintings of **Hilma af Klint** we can dare to think that not only the micro-cosmos but also the macro-cosmos can be intuited by the unconscious.

Another argument was found by astronomer Britt Lundgren from University of North Carolina Asheville. In 2019, Britt Lundgren visited the Guggenheim Museum in New York City to take in an exhibit of the works of Swedish painter **Hilma af Klint**. Lundgren noted a striking similarity between the abstract geometric shapes in **af Klint**’s work and scientific diagrams in 19th century physicist Thomas Young’s Lectures (1807). So began a four-year journey starting at the intersection of science and art that has culminated in a forthcoming paper in the journal *Leonardo*, making the case for the connection. It is about *Leonardo*, Volume 58, Issue 2, April 2025

<https://leonardo.info/journal-issue/leonardo/58/2>

And the abstract is the following one: “Swedish artist **Hilma af Klint** is known to have been influenced by scientific developments at the turn of the twentieth century. However, many of her paintings from 1914 to 1916 exhibit similarities to diagrams published much earlier in the English polymath Thomas Young’s 1807 *A Course of Lectures on Natural Philosophy and the Mechanical Arts*. Key elements and themes in **af Klint**’s *The Dove*, *The Swan*, *Parsifal*, and *Altarpieces* series suggest Young’s Lectures may have been a major source for her work. The author explores this idea and other parallels between the

lives and legacies of the visionary scientist and the abstract art pioneer”.

The same study was published by Press of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

<https://direct.mit.edu/leon/article/58/2/200/124515/Action-at-a-Distance-Did-Physicist-Thomas-Young-s>

In this study there is an astronomical quote: “The realistic paintings of swans, which precede the more abstract and geometric pieces in the same series, may also have been inspired by the engravings in Young’s Lectures. The black-and-white diagrams of Plate XXXI, which immediately follow the two color plates in Lectures, contain astronomical illustrations that bear striking resemblance to elements in **af Klint**’s The Swan, No. 5 (Fig. 7). In Figs 453 and 454 of Lectures, Joseph Skelton (1783–1871) engraved reproductions of the British astronomer William Herschel’s (1738–1822) observations of the constellation Lyra and French astronomer Charles Messier’s (1730–1817) observations of the Orion Nebula. The constellation Lyra includes the star Vega, also referred to as  $\alpha$ -Lyrae, one of the brightest stars in the night sky. There is a similarity between the speckled pattern in the background of **af Klint**’s swans and Herschel’s illustrated observations of Vega as seen through a telescope. The shape of the swan in **af Klint**’s series also appears to mirror the shape of the Orion Nebula as sketched by Messier and reproduced in Fig. 455 of Young’s Lectures”.

### **Af Klint, a scientific astro-physic Nostradamus**

This essay is not an academic paper but I really hope that it can be a starting point for future research of Jungian experts as the achievement of **Hilma af Klint** is quite an unusual one.

Indeed, Aniela Jaffé had an anticipation of the fact that the unconscious can intuit not only the micro-cosmos but also the macro-cosmos.

“(…) It does not matter at all that these relativities, discontinuities, and paradoxes hold good only on the margins of our world only for the infinitely small (the atom) and the infinitely great (the cosmos”, is a quote of Aniela Jaffé, see Jung, [1], p. 261.

Dr Carl Jung has paid attention to the way american abstract painter Jackson Pollock (1912 - 1956) painted the micro-matter being in trance. And Dr Carl’s explanation was deep in the psyche.

“The deeper layers of the psyche lose their individual uniqueness as they retreat farther and farther into darkness. Lower down, that is to say, as they approach the autonomous functional systems, they become increasingly collective until they are universalized and extinguished in the body’s materiality, i.e., in chemical substances. The body’s carbon is simply carbon. Hence, ‘at bottom’ the psyche is simply ‘world’ Jung, [1], p. 265.

Regarding the macro-cosmos, the collection “The Ten Largest” (1907) of **af Klint** reflects ultra-modern astrophysical imagery. This connection warrants further investigation, as **af Klint**’s work predates the direct observation of cosmic phenomena by the Hubble Telescope by several decades. For instance, she could not have known about concepts like gravitational waves or orbits around black holes.

### **Multiple clues that the “Ten Largest” collection is about Cosmos**

Maybe it deserves to note some clues that her “astral” paintings were about the cosmos. Firstly, **Hilma af Klint** was believed to be a clairvoyant who was told by spirit voices to paint ‘on the astral plane’. Of course, I would emphasize the word ‘astral’. Also, according to the book “*Hilma af Klint: Occult Painter and Abstract Pioneer*”, by Fant Åke, **Hilma af Klint** herself states: “Above the easel, I saw a powerfully illuminated Jupiter symbol 24, which appeared for several seconds. Then my work began at once, in such a way that the images were painted directly through me, without any preliminary sketches but with great vigor. I had no idea what the paintings were supposed to depict, yet I worked swiftly and confidently, without altering a single brushstroke”. Obviously, the planet Jupiter symbol puts things in an astronomical light. And, by searching on the internet for the keywords “**Hilma af Klint**, cosmic / cosmology” we can find multiple articles that are exploring this theme.

### Similarities between “The Ten Largest” and astronomical images

Now it’s the time to see the similarities between “The Ten Largest” and astronomical pictures searched online **based on keywords that I’m mentioning below each picture.**



The Ten Largest no 6

**Hilma af Klint, The Ten Largest No 6.**  
Courtesy of Hilma af Klint Foundation.



Comparison with a photo from an article about Gravitational waves around black holes

**Gravitational waves around black holes versus  
“The Ten Largest No 6”**

Link to *Science News* with the article:

<https://www.sciencenews.org/article/gravitational-waves-explained>

Courtesy of Science.org