



The Arts

Art, Music and Spirituality

Issues for Discourse with Youth

Bahá'í Discourse - Arts

Art

O people of Bahá! The source of crafts, sciences and arts is the power of reflection. Make ye every effort that out of this ideal mine there may gleam forth such pearls of wisdom and utterance as will promote the well-being and harmony of all the kindreds of the earth.

(Bahá'u'lláh, "Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas")

Art

I rejoice to hear that thou takest pains with thine art, for in this wonderful new age, art is worship. The more thou strivest to perfect it, the closer wilt thou come to God. What bestowal could be greater than this, that one's art should be even as the act of worshipping the Lord? That is to say, when thy fingers grasp the paintbrush, it is as if thou wert at prayer in the Temple.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, tablet to Juliette Thompson, 1919)

Art

While it is quite true that individual artists such as Mark Tobey and others have undoubtedly been inspired and influenced by their love for the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, it is far too early in the Bahá'í Dispensation to talk about the influence of the Faith on the arts in general. Indeed the beloved Guardian himself has pointed out that there is, as yet, no such thing as Bahá'í art although there is no doubt from statements in the writings that a wonderful efflorescence of new and beautiful arts may be anticipated in the future.

(17 January 1973, Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly. Compilation: The Importance of the Arts in Promoting the Faith §46)

The Arts

The arts are highly praised in the Bahá'í Faith, including painting, music, poetry, architecture, and many other crafts, in particular their capacity to express higher spiritual values and feelings.

An example of an artist who tried to express his Bahá'í Faith through his art, Mark Tobey (1890-1976), will illustrate some of the possibilities.

Mark Tobey

- American artist, born 1890 in midwest
- Little art training
- Fashionable portraitist in New York
- Became Bahá'í in 1918 through Juliette Thompson
- Lived in Seattle 1923-1960
- Won Venice Biennale 1958, retrospectives Louvre 1961, MOMA NY 1962, etc.
- Moved to Basel, Switzerland
- Died in Basel in 1976



Mark Tobey, Geyserville Baha'i School 1945

RED TREE OF THE MARTYR

It has the same inner spirit as the Emerald Hill but clearer - in beautiful dark warm reds.... The rise of the grey wall behind is beautiful. Two Bahá'ís bow on either side. It is certainly expressive of the beauty of the Bahá'í Religion...

(Mark Tobey, letter to Arthur L. Dahl, 7/28/66, Dahl catalog, p. 12)

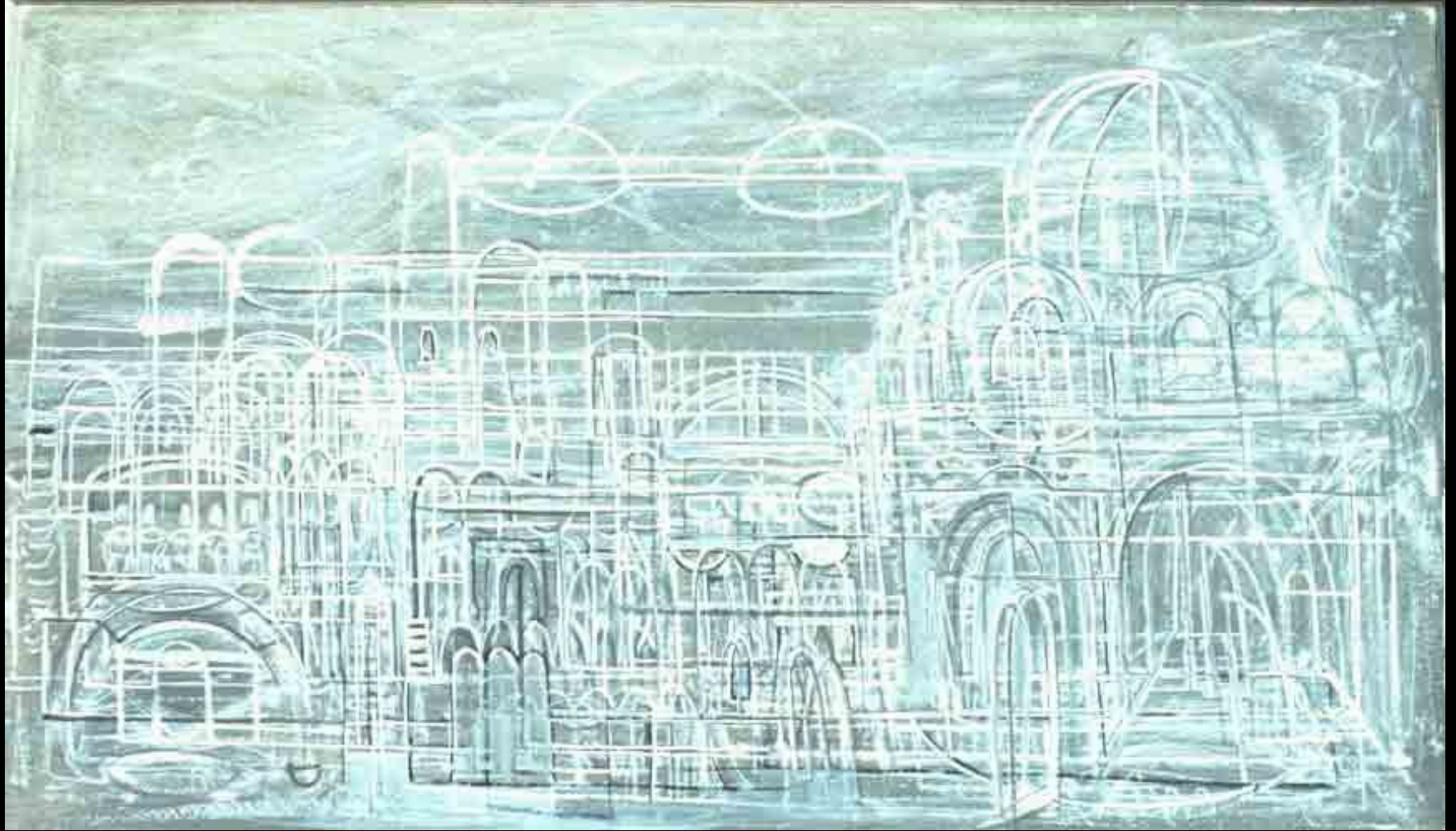




Mark Tobey 1940 – *Red Tree of the Martyr*



Mark Tobey 1943 - *Concourse*



Mark Tobey 1943 – *Space Architecture*
(perhaps inspired by the Wilmette Bahá'í House of Worship)

Bahá'í Faith

As to the content of my work, well in spite of the comments regarding my interest in Zen, it has never been as deep as my interest in the Bahá'í Faith. The need of a unifying idea is so clearly stated in the writings of its founder, Bahá'u'lláh, and so necessary as an explanation of our age with its new horizons for all men and its relative dangers from men of our age, it would seem to me to be the living core of what I could term Modernism.

(Mark Tobey, conversation with Arthur L. Dahl, 1962)



Mark Tobey ca. 1945 – *The New Day*
(Persian figures, Arabic calligraphy)

DAY OF THE MARTYR

I know that martyr subjects aren't popular but there it is and I believe I achieved what I wanted in space with content. Gothic though it may look, still one never saw this kind of space in the Gothic. But people must attempt to identify with labels.

(Mark Tobey, letter to Marion Willard, October 1947, Louvre catalog 7th page)





Mark Tobey 1947 – *Day of the Martyr*



Mark Tobey 1948 – *Enclosed Garden*



Mark Tobey ca. 1950 – *The Seekers*



Mark Tobey, Seattle 1949



Mark Tobey 1952 – *Emerald Hill of Faithfulness (Seven Valleys)*



Mark Tobey 1954 – *New World Dimensions I*



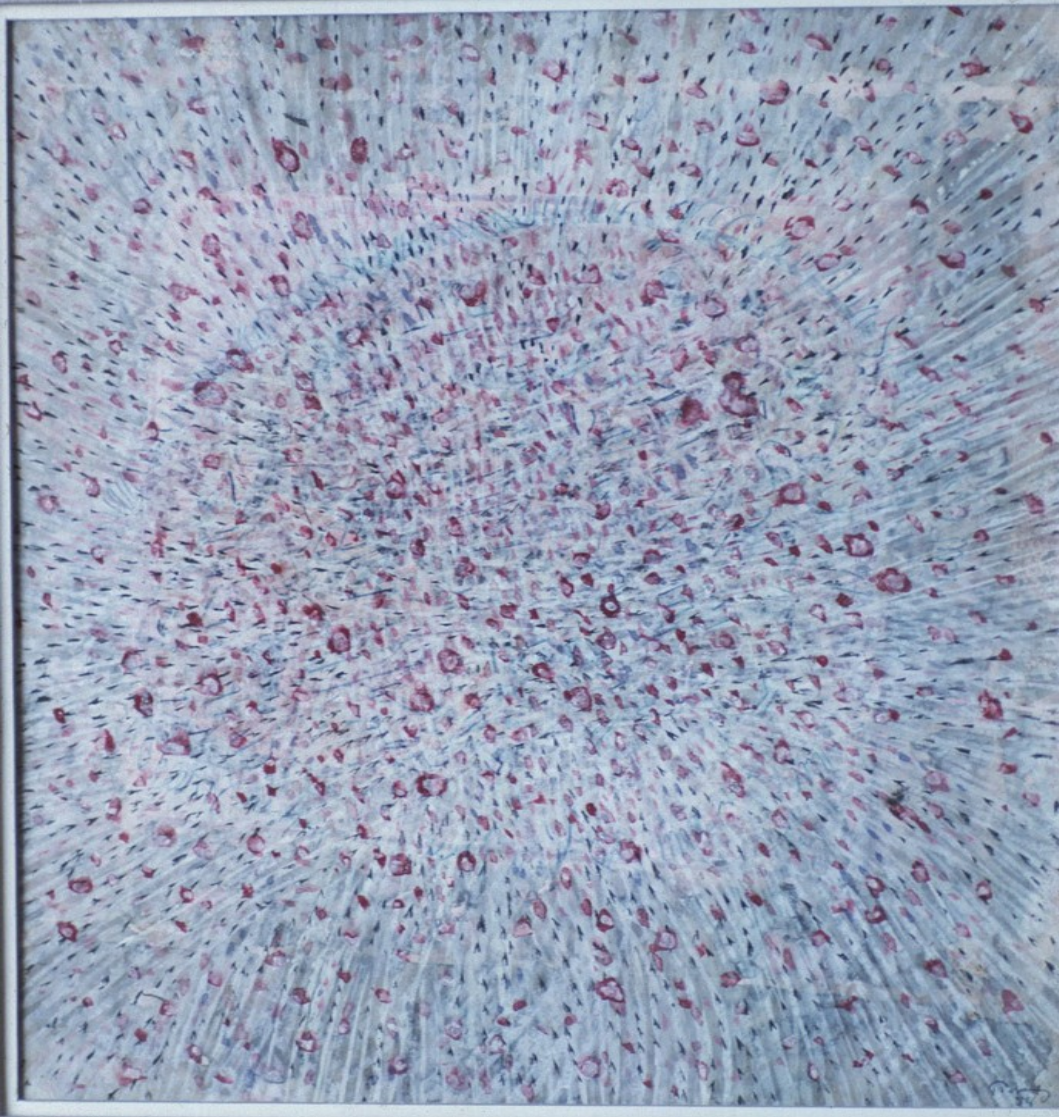
Mark Tobey 1954 – *New World Dimensions II*



Mark Tobey 1954 – *New World Dimensions III*



Mark Tobey 1954 – *New World Dimensions IV*



Mark Tobey 1958 – *New Genesis*



Mark Tobey at his retrospective of 300 paintings at the Louvre, Paris, October 1961



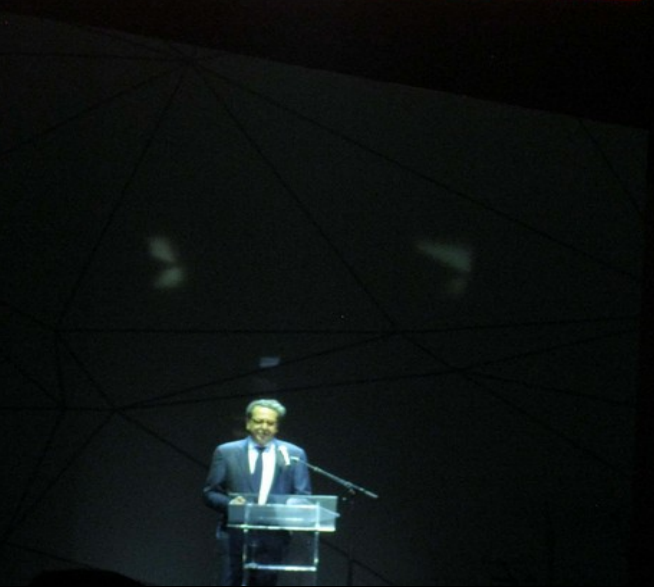
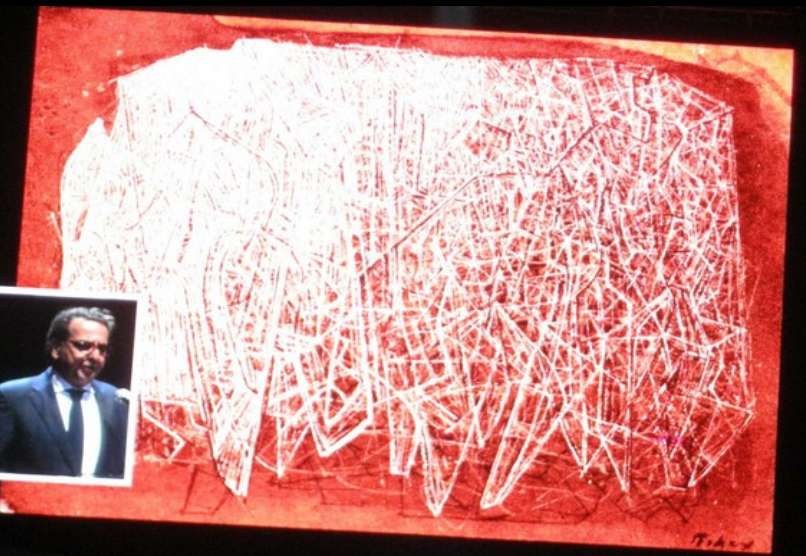
Mark Tobey 1960 – *Lovers of Light* (was in the Louvre show)

Siamak Hariri

architect of the
Santiago temple

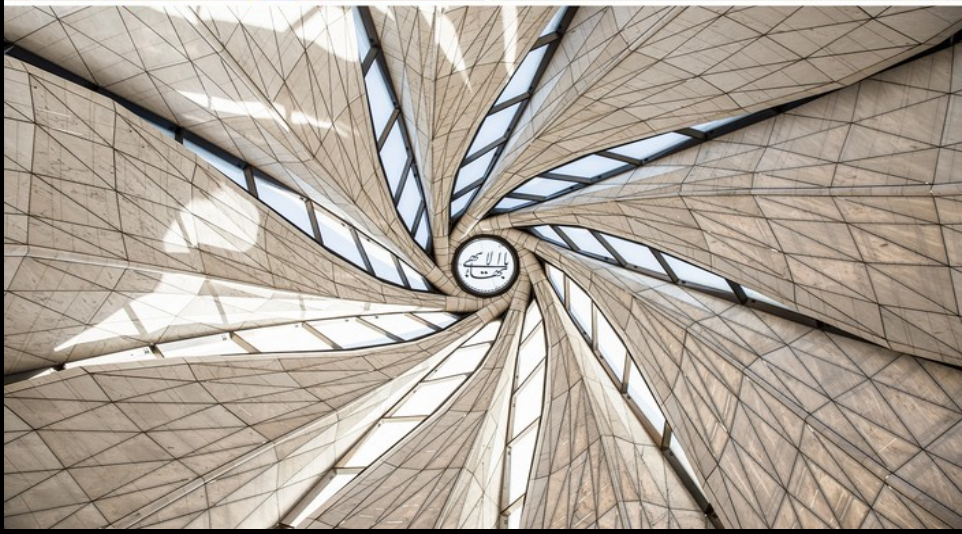
explains the origin
of the concept for a
temple of light
in the
Mark Tobey
painting
Lovers of Light

at the dedication





Bahá'í House of Worship, Santiago, Chile



A NEW SPIRIT OF ONENESS

Of course we talk about international styles today, but I think later on we'll talk about universal styles... the future of the world must be this realization of its oneness, which is the basic teaching as I understand it in the Bahá'í Faith, and from that oneness will naturally develop a new spirit in art, because that's what it is. It's a spirit and it's not new words and it's not new ideas only. It's a different spirit. And that spirit of oneness will be reflected through painting.

(Mark Tobey, conversation with Arthur L. Dahl, 1962, Dahl catalog, p. 15)

Arts

‘Abdu’l-Bahá said...: “All Art is a gift of the Holy Spirit. When this light shines through the mind of a musician, it manifests itself in beautiful harmonies. Again, shining through the mind of a poet, it is seen in fine poetry and poetic prose. When the Light of the Sun of Truth inspires the mind of a painter, he produces marvellous pictures. These gifts are fulfilling their highest purpose, when showing forth the praise of God.”

(Lady Blomfield, “The Chosen Highway” (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1954), p. 167)

Arts

With the evolution of the Bahá'í society, which is composed of people of many cultural origins and diverse tastes, each with his conception of what is aesthetically acceptable and pleasing, those Bahá'ís who are gifted in music, drama and the visual arts are free to exercise their talents in ways which will serve the Faith of God. They should not feel disturbed at the lack of appreciation by sundry believers. Rather, in knowledge of the cogent writings of the Faith on music and artistic expression ... they should continue their artistic endeavours in prayerful recognition that the arts are powerful instruments to serve the Cause, arts which in time will have their Bahá'í fruition.

(9 August 1983, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual. Compilation: The Importance of the Arts in Promoting the Faith §53)

Music

We have made it lawful for you to listen to music and singing. Take heed, however, lest listening thereto should cause you to overstep the bounds of propriety and dignity. Let your joy be the joy born of My Most Great Name, a Name that bringeth rapture to the heart, and filleth with ecstasy the minds of all who have drawn nigh unto God. We, verily, have made music as a ladder for your souls, a means whereby they may be lifted up unto the realm on high; make it not, therefore, as wings to self and passion. Truly, We are loath to see you numbered with the foolish.

(Bahá'u'lláh, [The Kitáb-i-Aqdas](#), para.51, p. 38)

Music

'Abdu'l-Bahá, for example, asserts that
*"music, sung or played, is spiritual food for
soul and heart"*.

(in Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, p. 201)

Music

The art of music must be brought to the highest stage of development, for this is one of the most wonderful arts and in this glorious age of the Lord of Unity it is highly essential to gain its mastery. However, one must endeavour to attain the degree of artistic perfection and not be like those who leave matters unfinished.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, translated from the Persian, *Compilation: The Importance of the Arts in Promoting the Faith* §9)

Music

The musician's art is among those arts worthy of the highest praise, and it moveth the hearts of all who grieve. Wherefore, O thou Shahnáz, play and sing out the holy words of God with wondrous tones in the gatherings of the friends, that the listener may be freed from chains of care and sorrow, and his soul may leap for joy and humble itself in prayer to the realm of Glory.

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá", paragraph 74.2)

Music

The Guardian was also pleased to know of your deep interest in music, and of your desire to serve the Faith along this line. Although now is only the very beginning of Bahá'í art, yet the friends who feel they are gifted in such matters should endeavour to develop and cultivate their gifts and through their works to reflect, however inadequately, the Divine Spirit which Bahá'u'lláh has breathed into the world.

(Shoghi Effendi, 4 November 1937, to an individual. Compilation: The Importance of the Arts in Promoting the Faith §36)

Youth and the Arts

Rejecting the low sights of mediocrity, let them scale the ascending heights of excellence in all they aspire to do. May they resolve to elevate the very atmosphere in which they move, whether it be in the school rooms or halls of higher learning, in their work, their recreation, their Bahá'í activity or social service.

(8 May 1985, Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'í Youth of the World. Compilation: *The Importance of the Arts in Promoting the Faith* §56)

Youth and the Arts

Indeed, let them welcome with confidence the challenges awaiting them. Imbued with this excellence and a corresponding humility, with tenacity and a loving servitude, today's youth must move towards the front ranks of the professions, trades, arts and crafts which are necessary to the further progress of humankind—this to ensure that the spirit of the Cause will cast its illumination on all these important areas of human endeavour.

(8 May 1985, Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'í Youth of the World. Compilation: *The Importance of the Arts in Promoting the Faith* §56)

Youth and the Arts

Moreover, while aiming at mastering the unifying concepts and swiftly advancing technologies of this era of communications, they can, indeed they must, also guarantee the transmittal to the future of those skills which will preserve the marvellous, indispensable achievements of the past. The transformation which is to occur in the functioning of society will certainly depend to a great extent on the effectiveness of the preparations the youth make for the world they will inherit.

(8 May 1985, Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'í Youth of the World. Compilation: The Importance of the Arts in Promoting the Faith §56)