Welcome to Episode 89: Contemporary Painter Laurence de Valmy: #Storiesbehindtheart

Today we will journey through an early abstraction painting, by the Swedish pioneer painter of abstract art and spiritualist Hilma af Klint. And then we will see this work, titled "The Ten Largest, No. 7, Adulthood, Group IV," (1907), a 10 X 8 foot immersive painting engulfed in vivid colors, circles, curves and biomorphic forms, truncated to fit within the template of a Instagram social media post through the artistic hand of contemporary painter Laurence de Valmy--Through her vision, the massive, bewildering modernist work of art is transposed on canvas, the composition organized within an Instagram post template, the singular painting is conflated with the artist's profile picture, hash tags and shared comments by other artists and figures of her time, this new appropriated composition links the viewer beyond the painting to a spectrum of art historical perspectives. You will be able to listen in on a conversation I had with the Laurence that will enlighten you to her process and what she describes as "the stories behind the works, the links between the artists and to bring my viewers to consider these emblematic works with renewed interest by placing them in the context of their creation."

de Valmy is a prolific artist, she explores and appropriates a diverse population of iconic Western artists, both male and female through her painting series entitled POST, a project she started at the end of 2016 "through which she imagines what it would be like if famous artists from history used Instagram to promote their artwork as well as to connect with other notable artists friends and colleagues."---what completely drew me in her series and she has expanded her Post series to include other versions like "Duos,"" Trios" and "Her and Hisstory," was the lesser known female painter Hilma af Klint.

Have you heard of this innovator of abstract art? Before we dive into the painting, "The Ten Largest No. 7, Adulthood, Group IV," I want to share with you a little bit of her biography. Born in Sweden in 1862, she was one of the earliest women to study at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Stockholm. where she established herself as a respected painter. She painted botanical studies, landscape paintings, even her self portrait in the artistic traditions of her time. It was her experience with spiritualism and the science of the day that sparked her interest in new ideas. She explored many different spiritual realms. Her embrace of spiritualism manifested through séances she conducted with four other like minded women. They called themselves "The Five." They would communicate with spirits as mediums, the guides they encountered would send them messages, they documented in notebooks which eventually took the shape of art. They referred to these supernatural spirits as "High Masters" One of the spiritual guides commissioned af Klint to "prepare an artistic message for humankind." From this commission she produced 193 paintings that attempted to represent the spirit of the world. She leaped into non-objective abstraction, creating a sacred geometric languages, colors, for example, took on gender roles; blue female, yellow, male, green the unity of two, there is a collision of shapes, words and letters that populate her compositions. She codified and charted these images in a series of notebooks, one curator from the Guggenheim Museum referred to these notebooks as a "library of ideas". The Ten Largest are amongst her earliest abstract paintings--she painted the works, gigantic, beautiful, bright paintings on the floor and then pasted them into a canvas. The Ten paintings go through the lifespan of humans from birth to old age and are intended to be hung together in order to create what the artist described "a beautiful wall covering."

**In this episode, my focus on No. 7, Adulthood, is a work highlighted in one of de Valmy's Posts. Against a background of bright purple, with shades of pink seeping through, is a composition of recognizable forms, a fantastical realm of free-flowing forms of varying sizes. The dominant form is bright yellow, "reminiscent of a bloom emerging from a bulb." To the left a red floral motif composed of curvilinear lines and flat petals, and above the yellow bloom are roundish green circle shapes with faint yellow swirls within, there are some stylized letters that unfurl like ribbons, a kind of encrypted messaging. As you visually step into her painting, you float away in and around the shifting forms; the colors are just so immersive.**

And she did this years before male pioneer artist Vasily Kandinsky, proclaimed himself the original abstract painter alongside other male contemporaries and innovators of modernist abstraction like Piet Mondrian and Kazimir Malevich; af Klint with a painting practice guided by spiritual beings who essentially possessed her made the invisible, visible. She essentially blew open art history in her revolutionary works, yet she is not the anchor in the story of abstract art; Part of the reason is she worked primarily in secret, leaving instructions that none of her work be shown until 20 years after her death, she died in 1944 at the age of 82. This included all of her 193 paintings in this series, most of them made between 1906 and 1908. She wrote in her notebook she believed that people in the future would be better prepared to comprehend it.

Transposed by de Valmy, af Klint's painting, framed and appropriated in a social media post, creates a new looking experience and dialog with the viewer. Let's look at the same painting through de Valmy's vision. It is titled "Hilma and the 5,"from 2018 Using acrylic paint, her composition follows the Instagram post template. At the top is a portrait, a black and white photo of af Klint sits next to her profile name hilmaafklint, all one word. In the center, image is the No. 7 Adulthood painting fills the frame of the post. It is important to note de Valmy does not merely copy the works of the artist, as noted earlier she appropriates them. They are not just reproductions-- as you will see de Valmy visually merges the story behind the work in her images. What we see in her recreation are partial views of the organic forms from af Klint's painting, we see the dominant bright yellow form, just above we see partial views of the green circles with yellow swirls, the patterned red motif, and painted in white, a curvilinear string of letters are also revealed. Below the image 5 likes are noted, expressed by a red heart, There is a comment by hilmaafklint: "for your eyes only, my friends @the5 painting for the Temple sent by the High Masters #automaticpainting #EverythingisUnity #SpiritualArt. Added to the comment are emojis. There is a reply by is a reply by the Swedish painter and life- long friend of af Klint, annacassel; by her name are emojis of hearts, applauding hands, hands in prayer, and the hash tag #artforthefuture. At the bottom of the post the date September 9, 1907, the year she made the painting.

How engaging, how fun! de Valmy through carefully crafted juxtaposition of imagery and captions and comments, which she refers to as "dialogs" offers the viewer a new context to see and learn about artists from the modern world. Her "dialogs" are so astute, they are laced with humor above and beyond the story behind the art. de Valmy says, "when it comes to writing "dialogs" every word and emoji is integral to the painting's story."

In the work "Hilma and Rudolf," de Valmy creates another post from hilmaafklint profile, she highlights the geometric vocabulary of af Klint's work in the painting from 1915 Altarpiece No. 1. She includes one of three altarpieces af Klint produced. A triangular shaped ramp formed through rectangular blocks of color ascend to a round risen sun made up of discs of lavender, green and flat gold. de Valmy connects the viewer to possible interpretations of the painting through comments by her friend Anna Cassel and the medium Sigrid Heman. Heman comments "humanity reaching up towards heaven" next to her comment the emoji of a rainbow. Anna Cassel also comments "matter ascending into spirit." In this Post, de Valmy exposes us to the spiritual component expressed through af Klint's formal artistic vocabulary.

De Valmy exploration of art history and our relationship with social networks is an invitation for us to reevaluate art history, and to contemplate the story of Western art outside the walls of a museum or gallery. She democratizes art by inserting it into the social media platform Instagram, accessible to a far more broader audience. She obliterates the perception that art is not accessible. Because it is. Let's hear from the artist herself--In a moment, my conversation with Laurence de Valmy.