

ARTSY

The New Generation of Transcendental Painters

by Salomé Gómez-Upegui | 28 February 2023

Seeking to expand the boundaries of American art, a small bunch of like-minded artists came together in New Mexico in 1938 to form the Transcendental Painting Group (TPG). Led by Raymond Jonson and Emil Bisttram, the TPG included painters such as Agnes Pelton and Robert Gribbroek. According to their original manifesto, the term “transcendental” best expressed their aim “to carry painting beyond the appearance of the physical world, through new concepts of space, color, light, and design, to imaginative realms that are idealistic and spiritual.”



By 1941, with the onset of World War II, the group officially dissolved, which might partly explain why their mystical oeuvres have often been overlooked by art historians and critics alike. However, these remarkable artists and their respective works have recently garnered renewed attention. Currently on view at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) through June 19th, “Another World: The Transcendental Painting Group, 1938–1945” is the first major traveling museum exhibition dedicated to the work of these painters.

Interestingly, this overdue spotlight comes at a time when there seems to be a growing number of contemporary artists exploring nonobjectivity and mysticism in styles reminiscent of the pieces produced by members of the TPG. However, unlike their predecessors who were strictly concerned with themes of idealism and spirituality, many of today’s artists are reflecting on pressing philosophical and societal issues.

Below, we highlight... artists who belong to a new generation experimenting with light, color, shapes, and space in new and unexpected ways.

Inka Essenhigh

B. 1969, Bellefonte, Pennsylvania. Lives and works in New York.

Lauded for her brilliant use of color, Inka Essenhigh creates otherworldly landscape paintings riddled with sprites and supernatural archetypes. While many of her earlier works contain references to graphic novels and animation, some of her latest pieces, such as *Purple Pods* (2019) and *Orange Fall* (2020), draw on botanical themes to create oneiric compositions that blur the boundaries between figuration and abstraction.

Essenhigh is, at times, associated with contemporary figurative painting. Yet her ethereal imagery is ultimately nonobjective, a genuine product of her imagination. Referencing this quality of her work, she has said, “The unknown comes from the painting process, putting brush to canvas. I do have an agenda and a world I want to create. I’m not interested in meaninglessness. But I am looking for the feeling that the images are coming to me.”