

# APOCALYPSE WHEN

reflections on our collective psyche



A SPACE *for* DIALOGUE 116

HOOD MUSEUM OF ART, DARTMOUTH

Why does “apocalypse” now describe exclusively doomsday scenarios? The term derives from the Greek word, *apokálypsis*, translating to something that was previously hidden, an unveiling. Using this definition, an apocalypse could be anything once concealed and now revealed, rather than solely a cataclysmic event that annihilates humanity.

In modern usage, nevertheless, the word “apocalypse” has taken on two principal meanings. One refers to humanity’s reckoning with God as written in the last book of the New Testament, known as *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*. The other transcends the Christian context to capture the general onset of events that lead to disasters and eventual societal transformation. Such a broader, secular understanding of an apocalypse allows for a wide range of thematic possibilities in art.

Various cultures throughout history have produced apocalyptic literature that typically relays an analogous sequence of events. According to Edward Edinger in his 1999 book, *Archetype of the Apocalypse: A Jungian Study of the Book of Revelation*, an apocalypse narrative consists of four distinct features: (1) revelation, (2) judgment, (3) destruction or punishment, and (4) renewal.<sup>1</sup> The examples of 20th- and 21st-century art in *Apocalypse When: reflections on our collective psyche* all illustrate one or more of these apocalyptic aspects.

Carl Jung, a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst from the early 1900s, argued for an inherited, universal pattern of thought that he called an archetype, a model of thinking derived from the collective psyche. This form of unconsciousness is innate and present in all individuals regardless of race, gender, or age, and he further extended the concept by describing it as a living organism.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, archetypes manifest with complete autonomy and intentionality, including St. John’s revelation from God. Drawing upon Jung, Edinger believes that the psychological meaning of the apocalyptic archetype is the “momentous event of the coming of the Self into conscious realization.”<sup>3</sup>

Approaching this exhibition’s objects with these thoughts in mind, their apocalyptic events might be seen to simply represent an end to what was and the advent of something new instead of a horrifying prediction of humanity’s finite future. Jungian psychology would frame apocalyptic art as a manifestation of the collective human subconscious, and in that sense the exhibition offers a fascinating perspective on the connection between the human psyche and the apocalyptic narrative across cultures. It presents this apocalyptic work as the reflection of an individual’s awakening—one addressing fears about mortality, the unknown, and irreversible change.

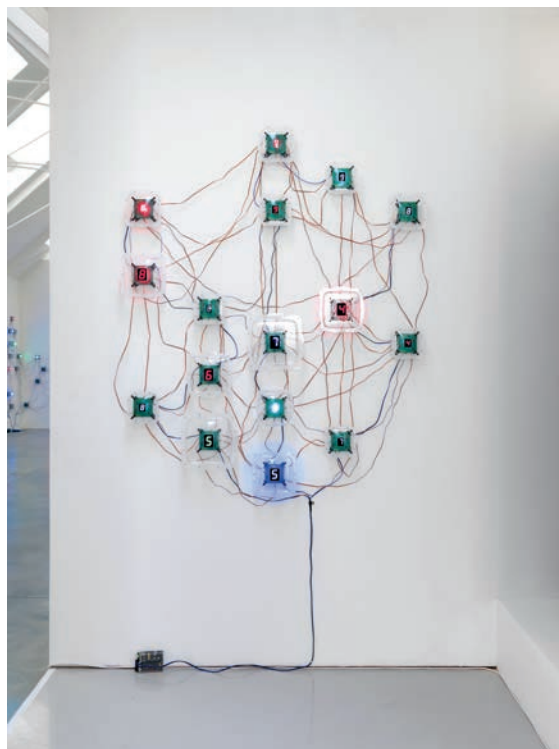
For example, apocalyptic imagery appeared in German artist Wassily Kandinsky’s work (below) in the first decades of the 20th century. During a time of widespread crisis and societal unrest, Kandinsky replaced war and politics with a concern for representing the spiritual. He wrote extensively about the capacity of non-objective art to convey inner emotions in his 1911 statement “Concerning the Spiritual in Art.” After experiencing an opera, for example, he described how the music not only presented itself sonically but also induced a display of the colors in his mind, activating both his auditory and visual senses.<sup>4</sup> The combination of musical elements such as the trumpet and



the visual elements in Kandinsky's work derives from his synesthesia, a neurological condition where one sense triggers another. While the trumpet retains its biblical association with the announcement of the apocalypse's arrival, Kandinsky's woodcut is more interested in the "sounds of colors."<sup>5</sup> In this instance, the term apocalypse conveys both biblical meaning and its archetypal function in Kandinsky's journey to consciousness.

Chris Doyle's animation *Apocalypse Management (Telling About Being One Being Living)* (cover) and Tatsuo Miyajima's installation *Life (Corps sans Organes) No. 5* (right) both engage with the renewal feature of the apocalyptic narrative. Doyle's video uses horror and struggle to visualize the endurance of humanity. An arrangement of panels such as triptychs strategically divides the screen, isolating human suffering and then zooming out to portray mass destruction. The video takes place after the destruction, in a period of renewal. Doyle's inclusion of "management" in the work's title appears to question contemporary society's preparedness for disaster and the regulation of its aftermath, rather than its ability to prevent the apocalypse in the first place. Perhaps, then, we are to view apocalyptic events as necessary and inevitable catalysts for humanity's evolution—the apocalypse not as an end but as an illumination in times of greatest darkness.

Miyajima's work directly relates to the Buddhist tradition's cyclical vision of time. The omission of zero transcends cultural boundaries to convey a universal message—death is absent in a system of living beings. When discussing the work, Miyajima states, "Time connects everything. I want people to think about the universe and the human spirit." The apocalypse assigns a finite timespan or limit to a space that theoretically has no end. The intersection of the contemporary usage of "apocalypse" as an end of time and the artist's focus on renewal again asks the question of how society recovers from apocalyptic events. Does humanity endure past this arbitrary end of time in the interests



of imagining a better civilization? Is this need to assign time to space a byproduct of the fear of mortality? Miyajima's work, while not inherently apocalyptic, sheds new light upon the human preoccupation with apocalyptic events.

*Apocalypse When: reflections on our collective psyche* invites contemplation of apocalyptic art as a product of the collective human unconscious. These works urge us to embrace the transformative power of the unknown and to find hope even in the face of catastrophe.

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Homma Family Intern

#### NOTES

1. Edward F. Edinger, *Archetype of the Apocalypse: A Jungian Study of the Book of Revelation* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), 3.
2. *Ibid.*, 2.
3. *Ibid.*, 5.
4. Shanley Chien Pierce, "Synesthesia, a Visual Symphony: Art at the Intersection of Sight and Sound," Guggenheim, 8 October 2021, <https://www.guggenheim.org/articles/checklist/synesthesia-a-visual-symphony-art-at-the-intersection-of-sight-and-sound>.
5. *Ibid.*

## CHECKLIST

Boris Mikhailovich Artzybasheff, American (born Russia), 1899–1965. *The Last Trumpet*, 1937, wood engraving. Purchased through the Appleton 1792 Memorial Fund; PR.937.14.

Chris Doyle, American, born 1959. *Apocalypse Management (Telling About Being One Being Living)*, 2009, digital animation. Purchased through the Contemporary Art Fund; 2010.7abc.

Andrew Guenther, American, born 1976. *Let Us Put Our Heads Together*, 2005, acrylic and colored pencil. Anonymous gift; 2018.37.134.

Damien Hirst, British, born 1965. *For the Love of God*, 2007, color screenprint. Gift of Linda Waterhouse in memory of Stephen L. Waterhouse, Class of 1965, Tuck 1967, Parent 1992; 2023.47.2.

Wassily Kandinsky, Russian, 1866–1944. *Large Resurrection (Grosse Auferstehung) (Sound of the Trumpet)*, 1911, color woodcut. Purchased through the Adelbert Ames Fine Arts Awards Fund; PR.984.27.

Tatsuo Miyajima, Japanese, born 1957. *Life (Corps sans Organes) No. 5*, 2013, L.E.D., IC, microcomputer by Ikegami program, steel, plastic cover, passive sensor, electric wire, LED type; Life D-R(3), Life D-BL(2), Life D-W(0), Life D-PG(1), Life G-R(4), Life G-BL(1), Life G-W(5), Life G-PG(0), 158.1 x 130.5 x 11.0 cm, 62 1/4 x 51 3/8 x 4 3/8 in. Purchased through a gift from Evelyn A. and William B. Jaffe, Class of 1964H; 2017.51.

Odilón Redón, French, 1840–1916. *Et celui qui était monté dessus se nommait la mort (And his name that sat on him was death)*, number 11 from the portfolio *L'Apocalypse de Saint-Jean (The Revelation of Saint John the Divine)*, 1899, lithograph. Purchased through the Julia L. Whittier Fund; PR.950.28.11.

Rufino Tamayo, Mexican, 1899–1991. Illustration from the *Apocalypse de Saint Jean*, 1959, color lithograph. Purchased through the Julia L. Whittier Fund; PR.965.98.

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Edinger, Edward F. *Archetype of the Apocalypse: A Jungian Study of the Book of Revelation*. Chicago: Open Court, 1999.

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The exhibition *Apocalypse When: reflections on our collective psyche*, part of the museum's student-curated *A Space for Dialogue* series, is on view at the Hood Museum of Art, January 6–March 2, 2024.

*A Space for Dialogue: Fresh Perspectives on the Permanent Collection from Dartmouth's Students*, founded with the support from the Class of 1948, is made possible with the generous endowments from the Class of 1967, Bonnie and Richard Reiss Jr. '66, and Pamela J. Joyner '79.

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Printed by Puritan

Cover image: Chris Doyle, *Apocalypse Management (Telling About Being One Being Living)*, 2009. © Chris Doyle.

Inside left: Wassily Kandinsky, *Large Resurrection (Grosse Auferstehung) (Sound of the Trumpet)*, 1911.

Inside right: Tatsuo Miyajima, *Life (Corps sans Organes) No. 5*, 2013. © Tatsuo Miyajima; Courtesy Lisson Gallery. Photography by Ken Adlard.

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