

Mandalas



Carter's "Mandala Green No. C." 1976

"If you want to find the secrets of the universe, think in terms of energy, frequency and vibration." -- Nikola Tesla

The mandala holds a special significance at the Southern Ohio Museum. For the last 40 years of his life, Portsmouth's most famous and celebrated artist, Clarence Carter, worked on paintings that were part of his Mandala Series. In this series, Carter explored the iconography of the mandala superimposed with the artist's defining symbol: the ovoid, or egg.

"Mandala" means circle in the ancient Indian language of Sanskrit. In Hinduism and Buddhism, it represents the universe. Forms similar to the mandala are found in cultures

around the world. The ancient Aztecs and Mayas used a circular calendar reminiscent of the mandala. Native Americans still use mandala-like imagery today, especially in healing rituals. The mandala is represented in Christian iconography as the halo and is reflected in the circular rose windows of cathedrals. Mandalas are also found in Western psychology in the work of the German practitioner, Carl Jung. Jung regarded the mandala as an unconscious representation of the self.



Traditional Tibetan Buddhist Sand Mandala

In Hinduism and Buddhism, the mandala is considered a yantra. In Sanskrit, "yantra" translates literally as machine or device. In practice, it is a formal geometric expression of a mantra. A "mantra" is a sacred vibration, a sound or word in Sanskrit believed to have spiritual power. Mantras have been employed in India for over 3,000 years. Mantras have parallels in many cultures worldwide, including Christian chants and hymns. In Sanskrit, the mantra is the instrument of the mind, coming from the words "man," which means "to think," and "tra," which is "a tool."



Indian Mandala: the Sri Yantra

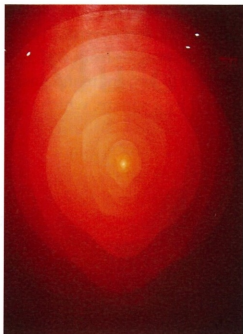
The most famous mantra is "Om" or "Aum." Om is the root mantra and is the most often chanted sacred sound in the world. Om is the sound of existence and the vibration of cosmic energy. Om is thought to be the original primordial creative sound from which the entire universe sprang forth. In Hinduism, Om is the purest name of God and supreme consciousness. Reciting the sound brings inner peace and mental stillness, which has begun to be substantiated by studies in neuroscience.



Mandala Painting by Carl Jung

So, a mandala, as a yantra, is a diagram depicting a sacred vibration of the universe. A mandala is a visual instrument utilized in meditation.

Psychologist Carl Jung became fascinated by mandalas after keeping a dream diary and encouraging his patients to do the same. The mandala was a recurring image in the dream diaries. Jung believed that mandalas spontaneously appear in the minds of individuals suffering from psychic dissociation because the circular image has an ordering effect on the troubled mind.



Carter's "Mandala No. 8" 1968-74

In his Mandala Series, Clarence Carter alternates the circle with the ovoid form in a gradient of color, creating the illusion of growth and pulsation. Carter was inspired by Eastern paintings where a deity was placed within a circle. For Carter, the ovoid was his deity. Carter calls, "...the egg – the ovoid shape – the germ and first principle of everything." Carter's pet goose, Cora, and the beautiful white eggs she laid brought the ovoid shape to his attention. Carter adopted this symbol, the egg, in the exploration of the transient nature of life, a theme recurring in Carter's work throughout his career.

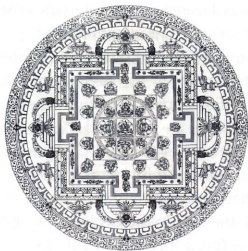
In his Mandala Series, Carter started with a light colored core – the seed – and alternated the shapes of the circle and egg. This is appropriate, as Jung considered the point at the center of a mandala as, "...the vital center of the personality from which the whole structural development of consciousness stems." To Jung, the mandala expresses therapeutic balance and wholeness by providing a central point to which all else is related. For Carter, the egg symbolized life, and the circle was a symbol of the universe.

In his ovoid paintings, Carter speaks to the allegorical origins of humankind and the difficulty in separating life and death. According to Carter, "The shape of the egg affirms life, but biological life, in time, passes away becoming spirit. The ovoid becomes simply a void. In death, the shape remains only in silence – eternal, all-encompassing silence." Carter's mandalas are the yantra of Om. In the mantra, or chanting of Om, the sound has four syllables: three of AUM and one of silence. The four syllables are symbolic.

Ahhh.....oooo.....mmm.....silence. The "a" represents the past, the "u" refers to the present, "m" is the future, and the silence is the place where time cannot flow – the place before time began.



Carter's "Icon-Space" 1971

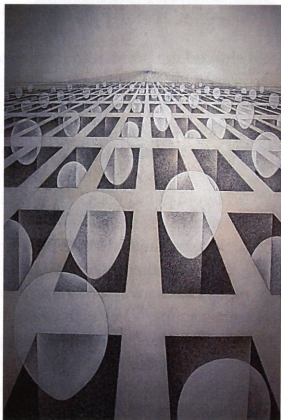


Buddhist Mandala

In Carter's ovoid Transections Series, he replaces the circle of the mandala with architectural settings, often crypt-like rectangles from which eggs ascend and descend. In ancient mandalas, the circle is encompassed by a square, which is called "the squaring of the circle." To Jung, this represents the "quaternity of one," the four aspects of personality: consciousness, unconsciousness, ego (attention or focus of consciousness) and the self. United, the circle and square depict wholeness of the self and God. The four sides also represent opposites: life and death, time and eternity.

To Carter, this expression of the infinite had a personal connection to the crypt and the square. In his youth, Carter would, "... spend days digging deep holes being careful to square up the holes I had so carefully dug, and contemplate the mystery of this cubicle shutting me off from the visible world. It was such a satisfying state to be enveloped in the rich brown earth with the smells that it gave off and to look up at the blue rectangle of the sky and try to relate these two elements – the confinement of the earth with the spaciousness of the universe outside."

This is the paradox of life: our limited existence juxtaposed with the infinite nature of the cosmos. The united circle and square of the mandala represent exactly this – the soul and the divine truth and knowledge of the entire universe.



Carter's "Study for Transection No. 1" 1966

Southern Ohio Museum & Cultural Center
825 Gallia St.
Portsmouth, Ohio 45662

Tuesday – Friday 10am-5pm, Saturday 1-5pm
(740)354-5629 www.somacc.com
Always Admission Free!

