In spite of all that has been written about it, art remains a curious thing. It is a drama whose scenario of governing values shifts inexplicably, mysteriously, almost always beyond the comprehension of the ordinary mortal. And often these values are so fleeting that the contemporary sociologist finds it difficult to grasp them long enough to dissect them before they disappear into a forgetful past, to be quickly replaced by new values that drift by and recede equally swiftly.

At any rate, this is the scenario that best describes the modern art movement, and certainly the art of the last twenty years. At various times in the past, art endured longer before it was replaced by evolving or revolutionary forms. The modern cadence of new forms, new messages, new ideas of art has accelerated until each art season of shows and museum exhibitions has brought startling annual shifts in form and fashion. Some of these pleased the onlooker, some irritated; almost all receded and are left to the future historian to place in some sort of significance.

This cadence also has increasingly driven ideas of art far away from the human awarenesses of the intangible. It has forced art toward the hard objective exterior worlds, those perceived and appreciated solely by and via the senses. In this wise, recent art has become preoccupied increasingly with form alone, and indeed any novel change in form has sufficed in many cases to constitute the ultrafashionable in contemporary art. It would have to be held, of course, that this recent trend has not been without merit in some cases. Regrettably, however, some of this art will not persist as valuable expression even though it has been given vast space in the media and art annuals. Far more unfortunate is the fact that this cloying search for novel form—reflecting what can only be called the materialistic approach to vision
and imagination—has served to act as a juggernaut of suppression over the vast human realms of the subjective, the transcendental, the mythic, the metaphysical, the parapsychological and the psychic, and even the religious.

This juggernaut, and its inevitable and frequent outcomes of sterility and abortive trends, has not altogether gone unnoticed. The protests have been many and varied, and many of these protests have reached publication. The critic, the collector, and the curator have found themselves "embattled"; the arts have been "in crises," and the "culture gulches" have widened. But, above all, the intuitive human, seeking something beautiful to respond to, has been left high and dry in the aesthetic aridity that has come to characterize the greater portion of today's art.

If the subjective visions of the inner man have found themselves out of place in relation to contemporary artistic values and standards, they have nevertheless suffered to develop out of sight of those powerful curators and critics who have looked askance on such departures from the materialistic norms. And in retrospect, this underground growth of artistic expression in the transcendental, the psychic, and the metaphysical can be seen to be not unmighty, but rather grand and poignant, deeply meaningful, and of vast importance to modern discovery in the realms of extended human consciousness.

There is always something subtle flowing and thrilling through the limited sensuous consciousness of the human being, something that moves contrariwise and adjacent to what eyes can see and ears can hear. Those who seek to limit their possibilities to what their senses perceive have lost themselves to the perceived world, a world that often is cruel and unyielding in its limitations. But before the grand inner man, that humanistic potential that can transcend physical limits via imaginative, visionary, and paranormal perceptual qualities, the walls to consciousness inbuilt in the physical universe drop away and disintegrate in trails of cosmic dust, infinite pathways that sparkle before his supranormal inquiring mind.

How it is exactly that these barriers are human-born in the first place and how they drop away in certain individuals remains yet to be discovered. But the fact that they do at times drop away is today no longer contested; the sciences of consciousness continue to verify this premise. It is worthy of thought that if a person begins merely to be curious about the universe beyond immediate sensual perception, in all probability the limiting walls of material consciousness have gained a few cracks. Such a person senses or glimpses the potential beyond physical senses and no longer exists as a slave to his body and the external world. In the thousands of reports of such shifts in consciousness, a sense, a portent of mental and psychic liberation, is always intuited.

Perhaps the individual finds himself confronted with even more awesome mysteries than he must deal with in the physical universe; but once the dice of the infinite fall in his consciousness, life is never again the cloying prison demarcated by the solely physical.

It is because of such a moment in the life of Raymond Piper that the contents of this book were collected and assembled in the meaningful form here presented. In Paris in 1920, the then famous but now almost quite for-
gotten Independent Artists' exhibition was on view at the Grand Palais, an exhibition that included some four thousand artistic works. Piper, in his notes, wrote that the jumble of eccentricities was unimaginable, and that the works were mostly banal, fantastic, infantile; and if some were masterful, he was nonetheless overwhelmed by the lack of congruity. Among the four thousand works an inspirational quality seemed to be missing.

As he was about to leave, he noticed a painting that, he said, changed his life.

He describes it as a painting some four by two feet, from which, in the bottomless abyss of the foreground, streams of color flowed up and over a wide ledge, like a waterfall in reverse. Near the top, the color bands receded and converged toward an invisible point far beyond the frame.

I found I was contemplating a prism without beginning or end. A pure, cold mathematical idea became incarnate, warm, and glowing before my astonished eyes. It generated in me a strange joyful illumination, a warm feeling of an aesthetic conversion. I became keenly aware of color for the first time, and of the cosmic in art.

In a sort of expansive explosion, I saw the enchantments, the adventures, the possibilities of color patterns. Most importantly, I reasoned eventually that if one artist could so successfully embody a profound metaphysical abstraction in eloquent pigments, then other artists might also objectify their philosophical and religious insights.

At the same time, it was clear that the effect of delight and illumination requires a style that communicates feeling, and that the distinctive contribution of the artist is the creation of significant forms. I determined to find out if there were other artists who were working along such masterful insights.

The experience was never forgotten. Joined by his wife, Lila, an educator, Dr. Piper sought to determine if there were living artists who were artistically portraying their philosophical, religious, and later, psychic, insights in aesthetic forms. In thirty years of research, the Pipers were able to amass interviews with over two thousand artists from sixty-four countries. The Piper records include over twenty-five hundred photographs of art works, supported by statements, personal histories, and inspirational writings from most of the artists interviewed.

The backbone of this research centered on an unconventional questionnaire that, in addition to biographical material and educational background, asked the following six questions in search of an aesthetic of cosmic art:

1. Can you formulate the special symbolic meanings in your work?
2. Please put down a frank, clear, compact statement of the mood, sentiment, idea, or vision which you experienced.
3. Please name any religious, metaphysical or occult society, organ-
ization, or movement in which you are, or have been, actively interested, and indicate its effect upon your viewpoint and art.

4. If you have had any extraordinary mystical, aesthetic or psychic experience, or conceptions of God, beauty, or the spiritual life, which might explain your creations, would you kindly summarize them?

5. Please state briefly your idea of God, of man, and of man's goal or purpose in existence.

6. If you have formulated any striking or illuminating aphorisms or maxims about art, religion, or God, please record them.

While numerous art forms have come and gone since the turn of the century, psychic, transcendental, and spiritual art has flourished without overzealous applaudings from the art establishment. These artists, termed "cosmic" by the Pipers, have worked alone and apart. As a result of for the most part being denied access to the usual showing places, they have not formed an integrated art movement. Their work, therefore, stands unusually fresh, individualized, and undiluted by establishment critical standards.

As a group, the psychic and transcendental artists interviewed by the Pipers respond to the historical concept of aesthetics, that is, an involvement with the nature of beauty and with the laws governing the expression of psychic and subjective beauty in concrete forms.

At least 850 artists in many different countries attest to the existence of common aesthetic principles underlying the portrayal of subjective awareness, and most attest to the important underlying theme of the expansion of awareness. Yet another of the sustaining characteristics common to most of these artists interviewed by the Pipers is the magnitude and personal responsibility by which they view the goal of the artist and the meaning of art.

In their involvement with the intangible concepts, transcendental artists seek to reveal their expansive mental and spiritual experiences, their inner and subjective as well as psychic awarenesses—those universes beyond the concrete where images, emotions, and infinite but familiar understandings of ideas endlessly unfold. In considering any of the transcendental peripheries, the mind or the spiritual awareness of self does not float on a stream of temporal or visual concrete conclusions but does defy space and time, as well as usual arrangements of matter and energy.

The arena of "mind" in which this type of creation takes place, this "space of mind," has dimensions that consist of all imaginable basic kinds of values that the human spirit—the immortal element of the human—might wish to realize. We know and generally acknowledge that the universal concepts that illuminate the greatest reaches of even concrete realities are metaphysical concepts. And these are the most general and fundamental predicates of being, without which life would become exceedingly dull.

It might be said, succinctly, as the Pipers do, that metaphysical categories are the beams in the building of existence. People in general, and the artists represented in this book in particular, have in their "inner spaces" become
involved with discovery in the various metaphysical categories they have become aware of.

Considering the modern abysmal ignorance of the magnitudes of the human mind and spirit, anything constituting a psychological interpretation of this book and its contents would probably be a fruitless and nonilluminating task. And if during the last half-century it has been the fate of the West to experience inundations of Eastern spirituality much of this esoteric ancient spirituality has served to create treacherous viaducts, mainly through false and incomplete understandings of those seeking to compensate artificially for the inherent limitations in Western concepts of psychology and spirituality. If, therefore, certain of the artists represented in this book have found encouragement by absorbing Eastern concepts, the Eastern forms of spirituality alone are not adequate to account for the magnitudes of the artists in toto.

There is inherent in the work of the artists represented here a certain withdrawal of the center of psychic gravity from the external worlds, including the worlds represented by the past, towards an immanent future, where the mind and spirit of the human will soar beyond limitations both of things physical and of present ideas about thought itself. This withdrawal represents not a retreat to old ideas of mind and spirit, but an encompassment of them with a strange, often befuddling, but certainly exciting drift to the frontiers of mind and awareness themselves.

This drift seems to want to approach a new consciousness that perhaps is the heritage of the future man, but that can, indeed, be touched upon by those in the present, and has been so touched by many in the past. As the Pipers indicate in their notes, this consciousness appears to be spread out, like a magnetism, a field of awareness always immanent in the selfic sky. This cannot be expressed in terms of three dimensions alone, since it seems to belong to a higher, more expansive order.

It will be observed that much of the art represented is indebted to the modern movements of abstraction and surrealism, as well as to others. It is usually accepted that the nonfigurative, abstract movement began as a rebellion of painters against the realistic portrayal of natural objects, and that they liked to call their revolt purification and liberation. They rejoiced in being released into the vast world of forms and colors. And freedom is indeed intrinsic to that familiar universal power of mind called abstraction.

This consists of man’s marvelous native capacity, through selective attention, to pull out of his available environment whatever materials he needs for constructing anything he wants from golf balls to Gothic cathedrals and metaphysics. But, actually, abstraction was not new to the nonfigurative movement, being found in art in every age.

As Raymond Piper wrote, unfortunately many of these nonfigurative artists usually could not see the true nature of their products for lack of a clear philosophy of purpose. This lack lies in the nature of abstraction itself; it is a method or process, not an end or an ideal. Without a significant human goal, such art becomes chance and accident, tending to produce the wildest monstrosities, vacuities, nonsense, and junk in the history of art.
To abstraction, the mature artist might bring deep vision and understanding, a more solid philosophy, and a determination to use accumulative mastery of form and color in portraying important human values. These creations may echo the structures and textures, the laws and agents of nature itself, often as revealed by the marvelous instruments of modern science. But they should express also the new emotions, problems, and aspirations of contemporary man. And the abstract artist may recall that abstraction alone can be a path away from as well as towards human reality.

The surrealistic artists sought to explore and express subconscious mysteries, feeling that the subconscious has symbolic language that can be universal. It is a vocabulary of great vital constants: sexual fantasy, death, morbidity, and the enigmas of space and time. All these vital constants are repeatedly echoed in our very being. But, in the total surrealistic output, demonic themes have predominated over the intimations of the infinite and the divine. As such, surrealists usually possessed no lofty or liberating insights into the nature of man.

During the last century, three kinds of human interests have resulted in three types of dominant styles of art. These interests have been in nature, in man himself, and in beautiful patterns of forms. First, one may identify depictive art, art that is representational, figurative, descriptive (realism, naturalism, classicism, impressionism). Second are the emotive arts, the subjective, emotional, humanistic, and dramatic (romanticism, expressionism, surrealism and "pop"). Third, there would be morphotic art, "morphotic" being from the Greek morphe, meaning "form." These are abstract, geometric, nonfigurative (cubism, nonobjectivism, constructivism, abstract expressionism, "op," and so forth).

To these a fourth type of art can now be added, the synthetic art form. "Synthetic" is here used in the constructive sense of characterizing the mental or spiritual and psychic activity of putting together some new individual thing. Its synonym, "integral," likewise characterizes any individual whole in which a variety of components has been suitably harmonized or blended. In synthesis, the integrating creative self combines and makes use of the best of each of the other three general art sources mentioned above, seeking to construct new orders of awareness itself of the psychic, of the paraphysical, of the cosmic in self and in things. Synthetic art, therefore, is an ordering of form towards revelation of idea, of awareness, of thought, of experience beyond form.

This book grew out of the experiences, decades long, of Raymond and Lila Piper, experiences in science and education, in theology, in metaphysics, in cultures of other countries, all these joining and ending in the vast territories of aesthetics. They discovered how great art can communicate, creating deep emotions and insights.

In October 1961, barely two months before Raymond Piper passed on, the Pipers noted:
The world today is witnessing unprecedented growth in both space and spirit. In the realms of space, our vision is reaching out into the magnitudes of the universe and deep into the minutiae of electronic energy. While growth of our knowledge of space is most dynamic and obvious, there is also in the world today notable discovery and growth in the realms of spirit and the psychic. Yet the wonders of exploration into the vast outer universe must be matched by discovery of even greater wonders within the hidden powers of the human self.

These wonders, of whatever kind, always come as a personal experience, as the discovery for oneself of a new distance in space or a new dimension in spirit, as the discovery of enduring values and therefore of cosmic security.

And now, five decades after Raymond Piper began his search for metaphysical artists, stalwarily supported in the following years by his wife, Lila, here are but a small part of the Piper researches. But it is a part from which many will find an echo bouncing around in themselves; an echo that comes alive beyond physical boundaries, a sound that hums and encourages, a timbre that intimates the cosmic in every man.

**Ingo Swann**