



# The Goetheanum

Study Materials for Foundation Studies  
Distance

*Collected by Nina Wallace-Ockenden*

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# The First Goetheanum

With the help of a few images and excerpts from writings, we may be able to form an inner picture of the first Goetheanum.

Most of these pictures are taken from hard copies of reproduction or the internet. The texts come from "The Journal of Fine Arts" V3 • I2 • 2020

Rudolf Steiner wanted the art of the Goetheanum to speak directly to the viewer without intermediary explanations:

"Sometimes I had occasion to show visitors the Goetheanum personally. Then I used to say that all „explanation“ of the forms and colours was in fact distasteful to me. Art does not want to be brought home to us through thoughts, but should rather be received in the immediate sight and feeling of it"

Less than a year after the opening of the Goetheanum, and even while the building remained incomplete (it was never entirely completed), Rudolf Steiner revealed that he was thinking of a Goetheanum Mark 2.

At a lecture in Berne on 29 June 1921 titled „The Architectural Conception of the Goetheanum“ Rudolf Steiner told his audience that: "Naturally one can criticise in every possible way this architectural style which has been formed out of spiritual science. But nothing that makes its first appearance is perfect, and I can assure you that I know all its flaws and that I would be the first to say: If I had to put up this building a second time, it would be out of the same background and out of the same laws, but in most of its details, and perhaps even totally, it would be different". As events played out just eighteen months later, it proved to be a remarkably prescient statement.

For sheer bad timing (and perhaps prolixity), a fund raising letter dated 25 December 1922 by the British Anthroposophical Society

in London would be hard to beat. The letter explained that: “the Goetheanum expresses in a language of line, form and colour those thoughts and ideas which a knowledge of higher spiritual worlds

The First Goetheanum: A Centenary for Organic Architecture produces in the artist. As a work of art the Goetheanum can only be compared, in its tendency to the supreme artistic achievements of humanity, for it produces in the onlooker the perception of that interpenetration of object and idea of which the true world of art is the outcome, while it raises him to that point within his inner being where an ideal spiritual world is felt to be born into physical reality”.

Then the fund raising letter gets to the point: “The Goetheanum still remains to be completed. The funds at Dr Steiner”s disposal are drawing to an end. Money is urgently needed to carry on the work. The work **MUST NOT STOP** ... Let each give what he or she can. In the old days ladies sold their jewellery to enable the foundation stone to be laid”.

Just six days after the date of the London fund raiser letter, the Goetheanum burned to the ground (on the night of 31 December 1922). Rudolf Steiner described the occurrence as a “dreadful calamity”. He reminded his audience of “The terrible catastrophe of last New Year”s Eve, the destruction by fire of the Goetheanum, which will remain a painful memory”.

A local newspaper, **Die Basler Nachrichten**, reported the news of the New Year fire at the Goetheanum:

“The Goetheanum in Dornach-Arlesheim is on fire, was the terrible alarm message that flew like wildfire ... just before the bells sounded in solemn ringing ... On New Year”s Eve ... at 7 pm , the Goetheanum had a presentation of Eurythmy and a lecture by Rudolf Steiner ... The last audience had left the lecture hall by 9.45 pm ... immediately after the seriousness of the situation was

clear, the calls for help were despatched to the surrounding villages and to Basel ... The Dornachers were the first to arrive at 11:45 pm, followed by the Arlesheimers a quarter of an hour later ... Because of repair work, there was scaffolding where the fire was first seen”.

Rudolf Steiner put the fire as starting between 5:15 pm and 6:20 pm [23].

Rudolf Steiner related that: “one hour after the last word had been spoken, I was summoned to the fire at the Goetheanum. At the fire of the Goetheanum we passed the whole of that New Year night”. He stated that it was “exactly at the moment in its evolution when the Goetheanum was ready to become the bearer of the renewal of spiritual life”.

Another newspaper gave an account of the events: “When the double cupolas fell in, there shot up heavenwards a giant sheaf of fire, and a torrent of sparks threatened the whole neighbourhood so that fire-men had to be sent in all directions to prevent the spread of disaster”. Later, on New Year’s Day “The sky was veiled in clouds as if to check the great outpouring of people which took place from Basel and its neighbourhood. For nearly the whole population there was one urge: Off to Dornach! Hour after hour unbroken streams of people climbed the muddy roads and slippery fields, whilst other streams, equally unbroken, flowed down again”.

Albert Steffen (1884-1963), Anthroposophist, writer and editor, wrote of the seat of the fire: “Unfortunately a scaffolding, necessary for certain work, had been put up just in the place where the fire was first noticed”. A local Basel newspaper had reported likewise: “Because of repair work, there was scaffolding where the fire was first seen”.

The timely payout of the insurance facilitated the rebuild of the Goetheanum, and the local Building Insurance Act was revised “to protect the state institution against such disasters” [30].

One person lost their life in the fire. That was Jakob Ott, a watchmaker from nearby Arlesheim, and a member of the Anthroposophy Society.

Assya Tergeniev recorded that: “When the glowing ashes had cooled, some days later, a human skeleton with a deformed spine was found therein. This deformity was the same as that of a watchmaker who had disappeared at the time of the fire. It was officially announced that he had come to grief while helping with the rescue work”.

Exactly a year on from the fire, Rudolf Steiner reflected on the events of New Year’s Eve, 1922, at the Goetheanum. The venue for the lectures was now the much less salubrious (and cold) Schreinerei, the carpentry workshop, adjacent to the site of the remnants of the fire.

Rudolf Steiner referred to the “painful memory” of the final lecture that he had delivered at the Goetheanum, what he now called “our old Goetheanum”. Remembering the night, Rudolf Steiner reminded his listeners that; “the flames burst from our beloved Goetheanum ... but out of the very pain we pledge ourselves to remain loyal to the Spirit to which we erected the Goetheanum, building it up through ten years of work”.

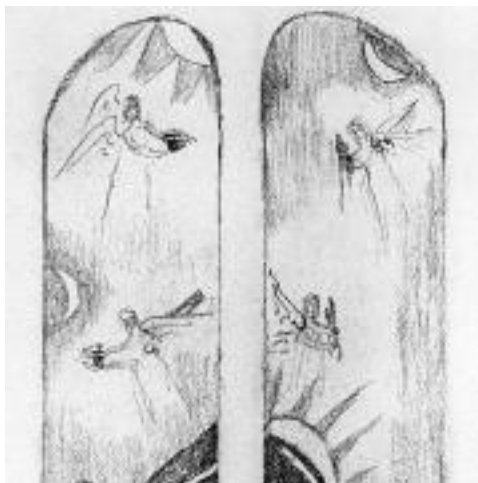
Changing tack, Rudolf Steiner urged his audience to move on from the “tragedy” and offered them the recipe for doing just that: “if we are able to change the pain and grief into the impulses to action then we shall also change the sorrowful event into a blessing. The pain cannot thereby be made less, but it rests with us to find in the pain the urge to action ... Let us carry over the soul of the Goetheanum into the Cosmic New Year, let’s try to erect in the new Goetheanum a worth memorial to the old!”.

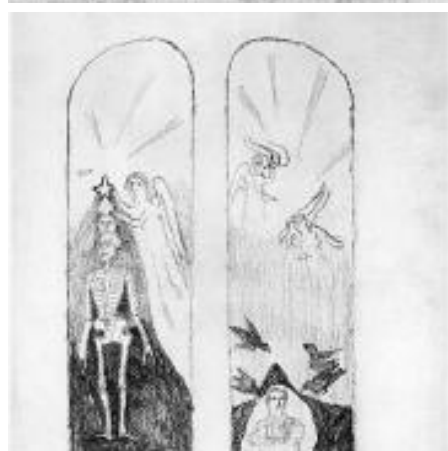
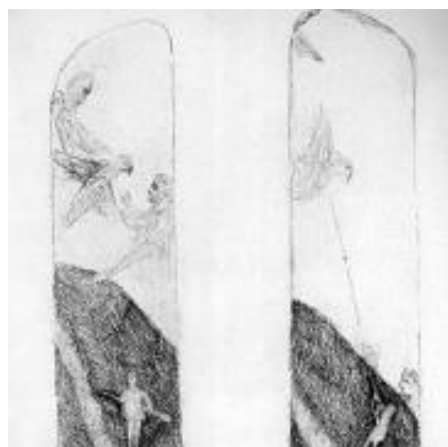


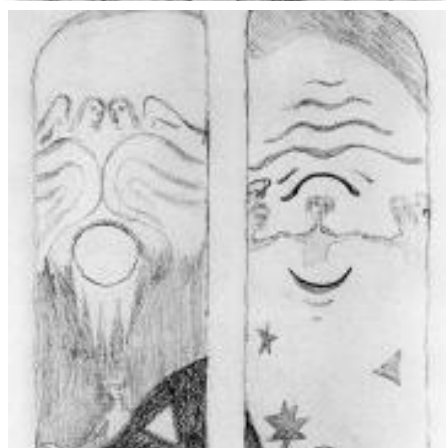
# The Interior

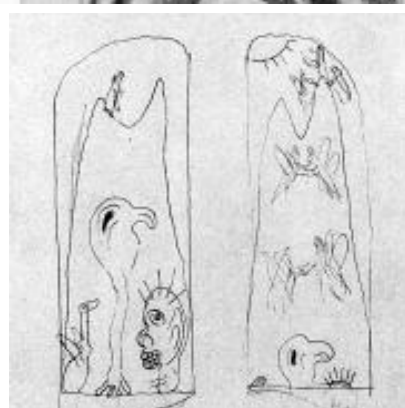
## Glass Windows - Black and White Sketches

Pencil sketches by Rudolf Steiner for the glass windows originally intended for the first Goetheanum, now installed in the second Goetheanum.



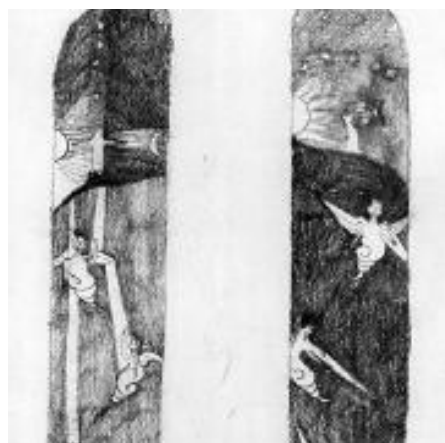














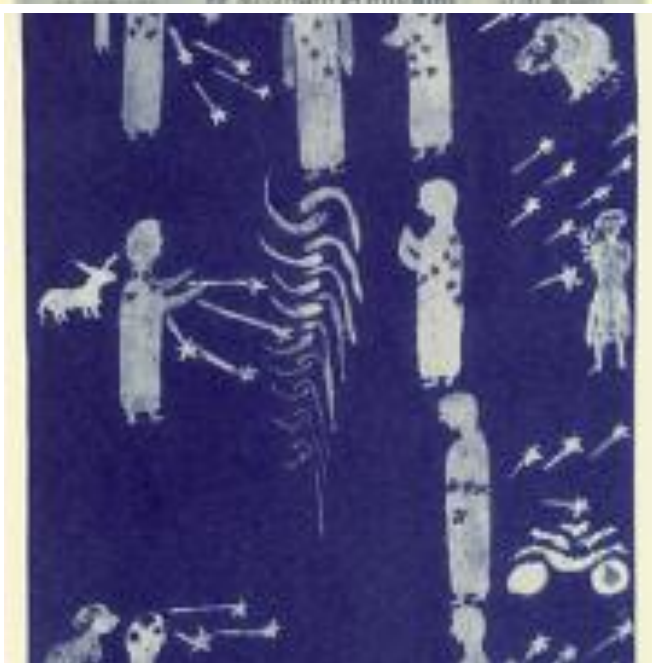
# Glass Windows - Coloured Sketches

Pencil sketch by Rudolf Steiner for the glass windows originally intended for the first Goetheanum, now installed in the second Goetheanum.

















## The Interior - The Sculpture

“The basis of artistic creation is not what is, but what might be; not the real, but the possible. Artists create according to the same principles as nature, but they apply them to individual entities, while nature, to use a Goethean expression, thinks nothing of individual things. She is always building and destroying, because she wants to achieve perfection, not in the individual thing, but in the whole.”

*The Aesthetics of Goethe's Worldview - Rudolf Steiner*

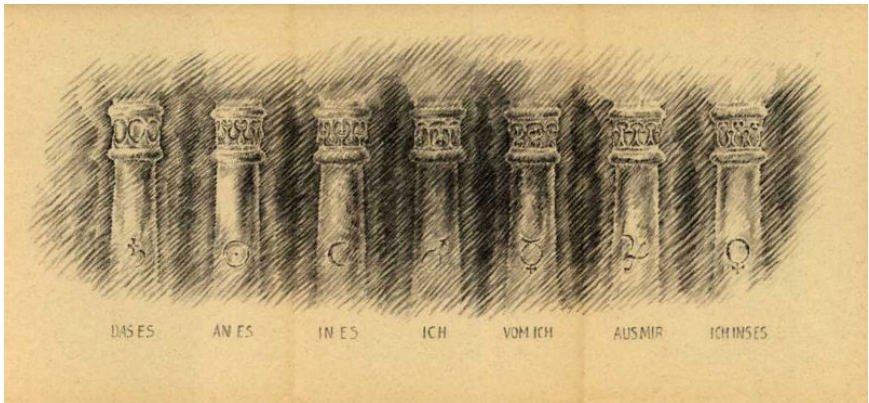
## The Interior - The Columns



*Model of the first Goetheanum*

When Rudolf Steiner was faced with the task of designing columns for the first Goetheanum, which was later burned down at the end of 1922, he recognized the spiritual necessity that

there should be seven columns, and chose for each one a different kind of wood. Old traditions, (Celtic and Druidic lore) which associated each tree or groups of trees with a certain planet were reawakened to a new life and significance by the eye of the seer and the hand of the artist.





## Verses for the 7 Trees

SUN

Thus speaks the high-reaching  
Light-flooded ash.  
The Tree of the golden sun.  
"O Man, be upright and noble  
Waste not yourself on the worthless  
Be conscious of the pure nobility  
of Man."

MOON

Thus speaks the silvery moon at  
May time, through the flowering  
Cherry Tree.

Whose blossoms in summer,  
to fruit ripen.

"O Man, like the plant, transfer  
the lower to the higher  
Purify the passions, grow mature  
And harvest the fruit of life."

#### MARS

Thus speaks the knotty oak,  
The servant of iron Mars,  
"O Man, take root in the depths  
and reach for the heights,  
Be mighty and strong  
Be warrior, knight and protector."

#### MERCURY

Thus speaks the mercurial planet  
Through the living growth of  
The Elm,  
And through her winged seeds  
"O Man, be stir yourself,  
Be active, lively and quick."

#### JUPITER

Thus speaks the broad-leaved maple  
The tree of Jupiter, to whom tin  
is sacred.  
"O Man, overcome the haste and hurry within you.  
Seek hours of quiet  
Which bring goodness and wisdom  
To birth."

#### VENUS

Thus speaks the coppery Venus



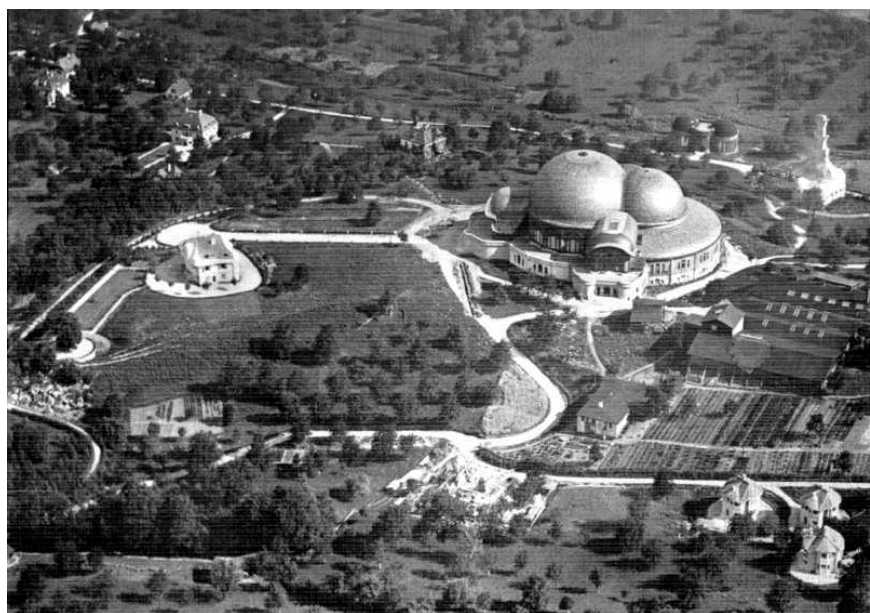
Through the virgin softness  
of Birch,  
Which is delicately rooted and  
drinks in the light.  
"O Man, work on your soul  
In Tenderness,  
Admire lovingly the beauty  
of the world."

SATURN  
Thus speaks leaden Saturn  
Through the trees of  
of shaded forests  
The pines, the beeches and  
cypresses,  
"O man, feel the responsibility  
for the need of your time  
and of all mankind.  
With inner devotion take hold  
of the work that life puts  
before you."

-Johannes Hemleben, Seven Trees & Seven Planets

## The Exterior







# The Second Goetheanum

In 1923 Rudolf Steiner wrote to the Central Administration of the local Swiss Canton Solothurn: “The new building will stand directly on the site of the old. With regard to the construction of the building as a whole, we bring to your attention that it is to be executed as a solid structure and that all its structural parts, all floors and bearing walls, as well as the roof trusses will be carried out in reinforced concrete. We plan to employ a purely steel construction for the support of the floor of the main stage alone. Timber will be used nowhere as a constructional element in the new building, but exclusively for doors, windows, flooring and floor construction over solid slab floors, for rafters and for fixtures and cladding. As roof material the same Norwegian slate as was used on the old Goetheanum is to be employed. ... We are convinced that the entire building, when completed in this type of construction, will be able to meet all requirements as to fire safety to an unusual degree”.

Steiner already had some experience building in concrete. The rather fanciful Heizhaus (Boiler House) of 1914, located nearby the Goetheanum, and still standing today, is a creative exercise in concrete. Rudolf Steiner described it as “a remarkable structure” and so it is.

Rudolf Steiner was well aware of criticism of his first adventure in concrete, the Boiler House. He proffered this rejoinder: “This is what is subject to the most severe criticism from some quarters ... I undertook to create ... a shell of concrete - a material which is extremely difficult to mould artistically. Those who criticise this structure today do not pause to reflect what would stand there if no endeavour had been made to mould something out of concrete - a material so difficult to mould. There could be nothing but a brick chimney. I wonder if that would be more beautiful than this, which of course is only a first

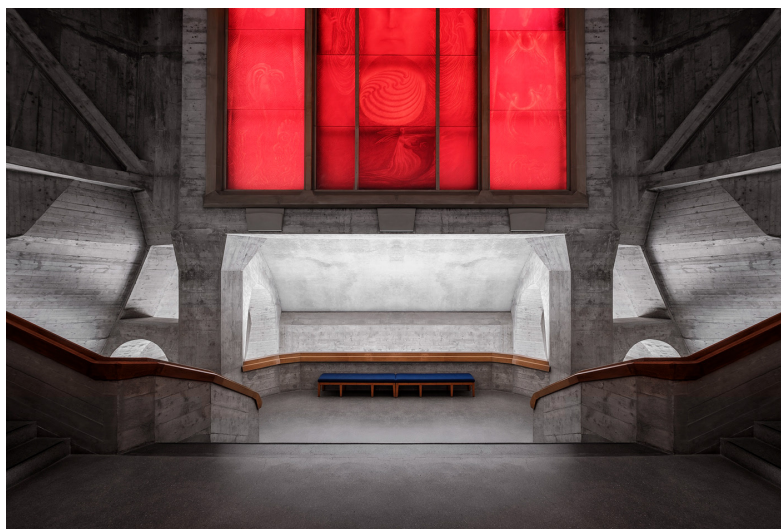
attempt to give a certain style to something made of concrete. It has many defects, for it is only a first attempt to mould something artistic out of materials such as concrete”.

## Interior

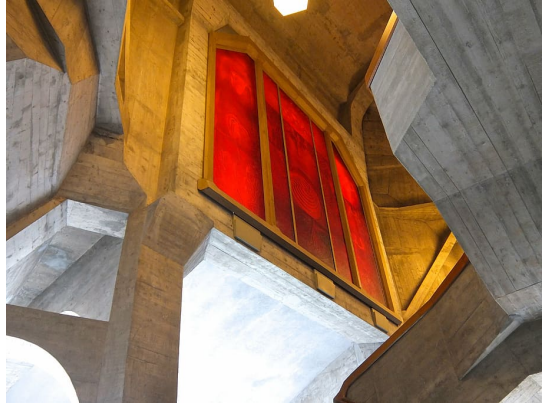




# Glass Windows







## The Exterior



# Sources

[www.rudolfsteinerweb.com](http://www.rudolfsteinerweb.com)

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goetheanum>

[https://hcommons.org/deposits/objects/hc:32758/  
datastreams/CONTENT/content](https://hcommons.org/deposits/objects/hc:32758/datastreams/CONTENT/content)

