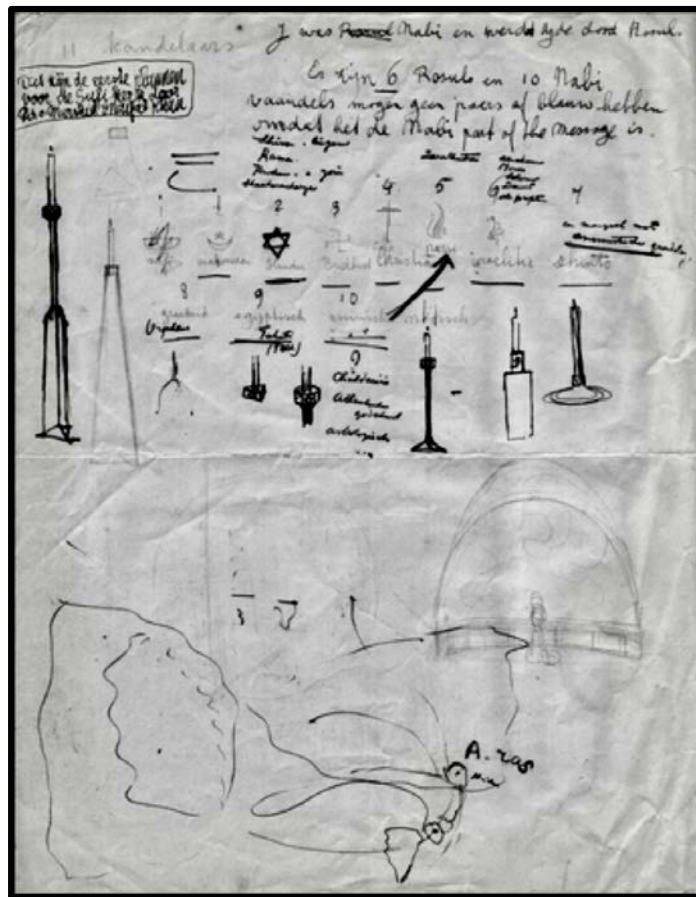


Building a Sufi Temple at Fazal Manzil

Hazrat Inayat Khan's Vision for a Temple Universel

by David Murray

In 1921 Hazrat Inayat Khan began developing his thoughts on how to give material expression to a 'Church of All' called, at the time, the Temple Universelle in Paris. It was envisioned with the assistance of his close initiate and artist Saida (Henriette) Willebeek who drew out some plans. This drawing has been preserved in the Anna Paulownestraat Sufi Archives (Archive AP) in the Hague. The top half of the drawing below contains an arrangement of coloured banners and emblemed floor candles, representing the ten principle religious sects to be encompassed at the time by Universal Sufism, espoused by Hazrat Inayat Khan. Underneath she sketched (now almost completely faded) a circular ground plan containing the placement of the candles, not yet on a table, but among the visitors. Next to it, a section showed the universal dome with heavenly beings bowing in different postures over a central human figure sitting in meditation.¹



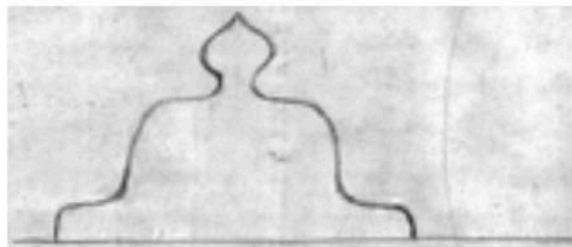
First Plans for the Sufi Church, 1921
Inayat Khan and Saida Willebeck le Mair (Archive AP)

Similarly Inayat Khan also worked with artist Bhakti (Griettie) Eggink-Van Stolk to envision a plan for a building that would emulate his admired Taj Mahal. She envisioned a meditating figure with a head shaped like a 'hanging tulip' resulting in an onion dome. Throughout the building the religions as encompassed by Sufism were to be represented by their own symbols and colours. Here, the number of ten religions was reduced to the primary six religious sects. His sufi temple would be an appropriate place for mediation, lectures, classes, spiritual healings, art and performances. It would be a grand temple building that would express religion, art and philosophy and would hold lectures on philosophy and mysticism, as well as mystery plays – art and music would blossom. ¹

The UNIVERSELLE

The Temple, called by Pir-O-Murshid the Universelle, Has been conceived by Him in the following plan:

The outside form would be like four persons, sitting back to back in the attitude of meditation. The roof of the building is neat to be like a hanging tulip, forming as it were the hat on the four heads of the four sitting men, covering their heads for the greatest part. The four heads should form one circle. The four walls, which are to form a square, have to be lightly curved, and the four angles must be made to go in, so that they are not angles which show outwardly to be angles. The lines of the white building must be softly curved, without any hard edge. The ground form is consequently like the picture below.



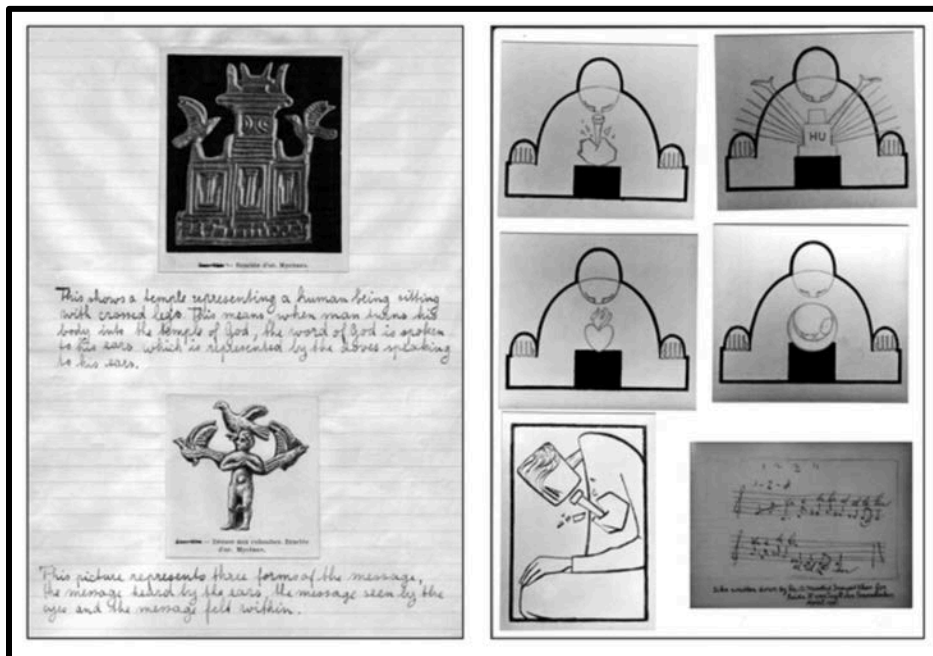
The inward form of the Universelle consists of three parts. The middle part represents the angel world. It forms the whole center from the bottom to the top. Pir-o-Murshid pictured it by four standing persons. The inner wall decorations of this middle part are to be expressive of the angelic world. Pir-o-Murshid indicated to me the six religions having each their own colour and their own symbology. With Pir-o-Murshid I spoke...

Bhakti G. van Stolk, after 1921 (Archive AP)



Bhakti G. van Stolk, Sufipedia Saida Willebeek le Mair, SSIFS

During the Sufi Summer School of 1926, Inayat Khan established a building committee consisting of Sirkar Van Stolk (Bhakti's brother), Saida Willebeek le Mair, Bhakti and the renown *Amsterdam School*² architect and initiate Musawwir (meaning the Bestower of Forms) Piet Kramer, to produce drawings for a Universal in Suresnes. If they were produced, these drawings do not remain. Piet Kramer also produced drawings for a meeting hall, a Sufi Church for the Hague, to be constructed in the rear yard of the home of Sirdar Van Tuyll, Saida's husband.¹ Inayat Khan died in India shortly after the initiation of the project and construction was never started.



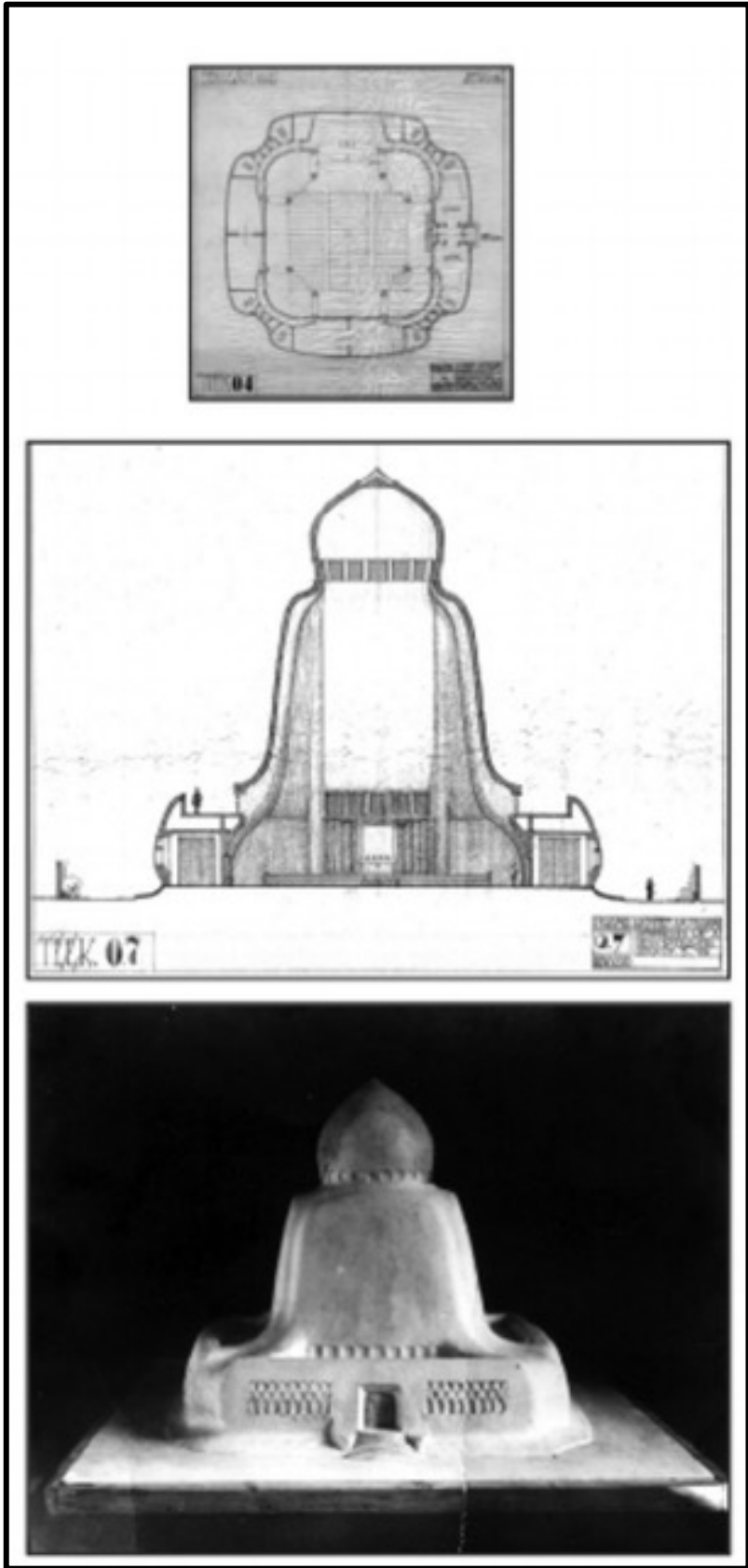
Early studies for a Universal, A: 'Symbols of Greece', Inayat Khan/Saida Willebeek le Mair, 1921 (Archive AP). B: Zikr and Zikr Cards, Inayat Khan/Saida Willebeek le Mair, April 1921 (Archive AP).¹

Temple Sufi Paris

Piet Kramer did produce plans for a 'Temple Sufi Paris' in 1929, of which a plan, sections and a model photograph were produced and still exist in the Anna Paulownestraat Museum in the Hague. We can assume that the design reflected the vision of Hazrat Inayat Khan as Piet Kramer understood it after his death.

“Since the municipality of Suresnes had started laying claim to the field (intended for construction of the Universel) in the public interest, at the beginning of 1928. (Sirkar) Van Stolk requested Kramer to finish his design as soon as possible, in order to be able to create a plaster model and to put it on display during the next summer school. He intended to send the sketch to Maheboob, Inayat Khan’s eldest brother, for mere approval. As he had gathered that Maheboob and Ali Khan planned to erect a ‘memorial monument’ for the departed master, he asked if it would have to be part of the temple or stand alone, and what shape and specifications it would have to have, so Kramer could take such details into account. From October 1928, Saida, Bhakti and Sirkar started to convene with the architect in the Hague in order to work out his design....They steered the designer towards an ever more literal representation of their master. Bhakti especially wanted to improve the shape of the head (presumed to be the dome) and Saida suggested that that it should incorporate Inayat Khan’s particular bodily proportion. In the recovered ground plan for a ‘Temple Sufi Paris’ of March 1929... we see how Kramer incorporated a number of their requests. Partly conforming to Bhakti’s colour scheme for the interior, the head (dome) was dark yellow and the body light yellow.”¹

Kramer’s 1929 Temple Sufi Paris was never constructed. At the time, there were conflicting ideas among his family and followers that the Paris sufi temple might also serve to be Inayat Khan’s dargah, his final resting place. This idea was abandoned after a visit to India in 1929 when it was determined that his dargah would remain in India where he died. This was, perhaps, one of the reasons why the vision of Piet Kramer was never realized.



Temple Sufi Paris (unbuilt), Piet Kramer, March 1929 (Archive AP)

Architect Piet Kramer

It is not known when Piet Kramer first became an initiate of Inayat Khan. He was 43 years old when he started working with Inayat Khan on plans for a Universel. At the time he was a well-known Dutch architect, having designed some notable buildings in Holland and was the recognized leader of the *Amsterdam School* ² until the end of the Movement in the early 1930s. Interestingly, buildings of the *Amsterdam School* (International Expressionist Style) were characterized by brick construction with a rounded or organic appearance, sharing many of the attributes of the influential architect Frank Lloyd Wright who introduced the word 'organic' into his philosophy of architecture as early as 1908.³



Credit: amsterdamopdekaart.nl/p/39/Piet_Kramer



Dageraad Housing Complex in Amsterdam, 1920.

Architects: Piet Kramer and Michel de Klerk. Source: Wikimedia

With the sufi initiation and engagement of architect Piet Kramer it is clear that Inayat Khan favoured the stylistic architectural language of those who followed the nature-based organic design philosophy, earlier espoused by Frank Lloyd Wright. This idea has carried through the 20th C to influence the architects in their designs for Hazrat Inayat Khan's 1970 Dargah in the Nizamuddin neighbourhood of New Delhi, designed by architect Mau Khan, and the 1990 Universel in the garden of Fazal Manzil, designed by architect Hervé Baley.

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