

*"Fusion of the abstract and the real in Nature"*

**THE TIME HAS COME TO FULFIL THE PROPHECY OF W. KANDINSKY AND  
TAKE VISUAL ART CREATION OUT OF THE IMPASSE**

Platon Alexis Hadjimichalis

Artist

[www.platon-socos.com](http://www.platon-socos.com)

After thirty-years of artistic research endeavors, I feel compelled to commit to paper some of my thoughts about the future of creation in visual arts, in the hope they might enlighten the debate within the contemporary art market.

I began working with nature and its elements in the Eighties. Back then – at the time I was collecting *laminaria* and *rodophyta-phycoerythromorpha* and drying them in my father-in-law's garage in Normandy to make a S.O.C.O.S painting (Structured Obsessive Compulsive Organic Surfaces), I nurtured the hope that the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> first century would carry the seal of a creative revolution, or at the very least an artistic revival similar to the one witnessed at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

All conditions were met back then, and are in fact still today. Value crises and global economic wars that wreak as much havoc as the old conventional wars, should have provided an impetus for inventive creation (superior dynamics?), one that lasts and does not fizzle away and, most importantly, that marks its times and takes art further ahead. Unfortunately, this has not been the case.

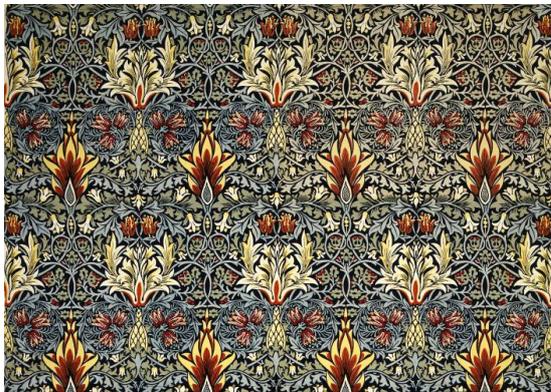
The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, coinciding with the Industrial Revolution, carried clear signs that heralded the advent of a creative revolution. Harbingers of this revolution, reform movements provided a context to challenge all the preconceptions held thus far about art. Thus, gradually, and from Turner to the Pre-Raphaelites, from William Morris to the Symbolists, and from Impressionism to Fauvism early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, creativity suddenly picked up momentum with the Expressionists, the Cubists and the Futurists, to finally reach the Abstract and Marcel Duchamp's "Ready Made".

A full-blown war then erupted between the figurative and the abstract, a labor that gave birth to Conceptual Art. Finally, we witnessed a historic break between the past and the future. Revolutionary artists put an end to three thousand years of a certain (classical) philosophical and creative conception of art, in the process sidelining many of the old values (beauty, aesthetics, and harmony). Thus began an era where the destination was simply the unknown.

## TOWARDS THE REVOLUTION: FROM TURNER TO DUCHAMP



Snow Storm—Steam-Boat off a Harbor's Mouth making Signals in Shallow Water, and going by the Lead. The Author was in this Storm on the Night the Ariel left Harwich, 1842.



Snakehead, printed cotton, William Morris, 1876.



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Gustav Klimt



*Blue Water Lilies (Nymphéas bleus), Claude Monet, 1916-1919*



*Henri Matisse*



*Georges Braque*



*Giacomo Balla, Abstract Speed + Sound, 1913–1914*



*Wassily KANDINSKY, Improvisation 7, 1910*



*Ready-made, Marcel Duchamp, 1917*

Wassily Kandinsky had not only seen but also predicted the future of artistic creation.

We should analyze his famous prophetic words contained in the book he published in 1910 and which continues to be regarded as the bible of Abstract Art, *On the Spiritual in Art and Painting in particular* (in German *Über das in der Kunst Geistige*). Wassily Kandinsky wrote:

**"Our era is one of the great division between the real and the abstract and of the ultimate development of the latter. However, when the 'new-realism', transformed either through new processes or a viewpoint that continues to elude us, reaches its full maturity and bears its fruits, maybe then an (abstract-realistic) concurrence will resonate and serve as new celestial revelation. But it will be a pure biphony, as opposed to the impure mix of the two forms that we are witnessing today."**

It would be pointless to dwell on this "Major Break " and the battles it gave rise to since rivers of ink have flowed in support of endless debates between the advocates of "realism" and those of "abstraction".

However, there is little doubt that that these new movements and this abstraction have managed to assert themselves side by side with conceptual art. Thanks to novel processes, they managed to evolve, reaching their apogee when they produced the 'outcome' that revolutionized the history of art, as predicted by the great Russian artist.

The true measure of the proliferation of non-figurative, abstract and conceptual art can be taken from the large number of artistic movements that emerged and developed over the last hundred years. We indeed find ourselves before a creative avalanche. The "fruits" of the creative revolution took on names such as Abstraction, Fauvism, German Expressionism, Cubism, and Dadaism; but also Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, New Realism, Minimalism, Outsider Art, Arte Povera, Cobra, Op Art, Land Art, Hyperrealism, Video Art, Flip Art, Installations, Performances, Constructivism, the '*isms*' are forever re-inventing themselves.

What extraordinary abundance of creative ideas! For more than a century now, art historians have been juggling with a plethora of concepts and phrases, such as:

"Using bright saturated colors for their suggestive and constructive function; lack of depth; opportunity to expose spots of the canvas; deformation of objects, characters and colors to convey an emotion or violence in the face of political and economic problems; multiplication of viewpoints and fragmentation of vision; deconstruction of volumes, objects and background; use of different materials glued to canvas; violent rejection of the past and exaltation in the modern world (electric light, speed, machines) embodied by the decomposition of colors and shapes of objects, the embodiment of movement; a concern to project emotions through the free play of shapes and colors; presentation of geometric shapes to reflect purity and perfection; the abandonment of color; the reutilization of industrial objects; collages; attacks on conformism; harnessing random effects (collage, frottage rubbings...); the world of fantasies; using a highly realistic representation for a better capture of the real or denouncing illusion; use of large formats; use of mass image production techniques (photography, screen printing); lack of technical difficulties; denial of individual expression; objects sourced from the reality of their times and expressing a critique of the

bourgeois and capitalist society; art of assembling and collating elements taken from everyday life; superimposing lines or frames; real movement in the work; light effects; effects resulting from color use; working with and in nature in a bid to bypass the conventional boundaries of art and re-establish the balance of man's relationship with nature; setting up in exterior or interior settings; work designed for a given location and featuring images and/or objects within a given space, usually for a set period and aiming to create a bond with the viewer, artistic activities combining visual arts and performing arts, performed before an audience for a limited period of time and challenging the relationship with the body."

All this appears to be absolutely fabulous.

Yet, more than a hundred years later, we are still unable to overcome what Kandinsky called the "impure blend of the concrete and the abstract" in order to achieve a pure "biphony", i.e. to achieve the fusion of one with the other. We are spinning in circles and no longer able to bypass the phase of pictorial and visual revolution. And thus, and at the risk of repeating myself, we find ourselves trapped in a creativity bottleneck.

Yet, there are reasons why the creative visual artist is spinning in circles.

In today's system, artistic creation works in similar ways to politics, as we have shown with Delmas Richard in our political sciences dissertation on "Art and Politics- A Beaubourg Model", defended at the Sorbonne in 1978. We can easily apply David Easton's simplified system to the creative process: "Black Box" (as in a plane); action and reaction; recovery; evolution.

But while the revolution did occur for visual artists, evolution itself never materialized.

To put this in clearer terms, ponder the following policy: the French Revolution brought terror and Napoleonic dictatorship before arriving at the Republic. Parliamentary democracy experienced an evolution. In 1917, the Tsarist regime brought about the Revolution and then Stalin, before achieving a semblance of democracy and a process that is yet to be completed as it continues to evolve. The Shah of Iran produced the Ayatollah Khomeini, and here again the process continues to evolve, and so on so forth.

Let us adapt the Estonian systemic application to Wassily Kandinsky's process of artistic creation:

The creative revolution of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century "flourished" and bore all its "fruits", the regime picked everything that was subversive and exploited it financially, and that is when creation came to a standstill, ceases to evolve, started spinning in circles and became a stock market value.

Still, Kadinsky's "impure mix" has evolved into some sort of biphony, but not the "pure biphony" through which a "**concurrence will resonate and serve as new celestial revelation**", in the painter's own words.

Nonetheless, the process had began to take shape as soon as real objects were incorporated in abstract creations, objects that were the product of either man or nature. Those of interest to me are not the products we manufacture, as was the case with Rauschenberg, Arman, Boltanski, Tinguely, Warhol and all those who introduced a product or some industrial waste into their creations. Artists of interest to me are those who began to include organic matter sourced in nature into their works such as Dubuffet, Klein, Anselm Kiefer, Marcel Broodthaerst, Jan Favre, Damien Hirst and many other known and less known artists.

This approach is clearly a step in the direction of achieving the fusion between the material and the abstract.

#### INCORPORATING ORGANIC MATERIAL IN ART



*Dubuffet, Tobacco, 1959*



*Yves Klein*



*Anselm Kiefer, Let a Thousand Flowers Bloom, 2000*



*Marcel Broodthaers*



*Jan Fabre*



*Damien Hirst*

But despite this step forward, the turning point never actually happened. These great masters of contemporary art have failed to create a perfect fusion between the concrete and the abstract.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century, a revolutionary century par excellence to judge by all the creations it witnessed, had somewhat experienced an excess of creativity that led to today's impasse in visual arts creation. The artist, now in the grip of a "star system", is trapped in a dead-end with no future in sight, held hostage by an elitist minority fuelled by greed for power and money. And thus, abstract art and conceptual art have lost the drive to lead to revival.

Behind this impasse lie three major factors: the corruption of creation with money; the limits of the human mind; and most importantly, the marginalization of creative values that are more than 3,000 years old by some "hip" art market movers and shakers.

It is obvious that creation, similar to our political system, has been corrupted by money. In recent years, art has become a value and has been operating in a fashion similar to the stock market, a prey in the hands of speculators and the nouveaux riches. In former times, art patrons and collectors had the connoisseur's "eye" having been schooled in this, and that appreciative eye was transmitted to the people who, in turn and even without possessing the know-how, could still appreciate the artist's work. Today, the quality of a work is no longer a concern, but its monetary value is very much so. This elite decides what is or is not art, an art has become the preserve of a few so-called educated, contrary to a past when art was an asset freely shared by all society. This phenomenon began when Marcel Duchamp rejected the relationship to the Other, the eye of the Other, an attitude that he defined as the rejection of visual appeal and seduction. He asserted the need to shed the notion of pleasing or displeasing. Yet, there can be no purely egocentric creation. One cannot survive in the absence of emotional exchanges. In fact, the higher the visual appeal, the more satisfactory it is. The act of creating has a universal vocation as opposed to being elitist in which case otherwise it would be doomed to die, misunderstood. That was certainly the fate of conceptual art and may easily be that of abstract painting if it fails to regenerate itself.

The creative man cannot be inspired to create by nothingness. Abstract and conceptual art have a well-delineated frame of creative imagination: the human mind.

But the brain certainly has its own limits: those of a computer. The "Con Art", as its name suggests, has no chance of surviving the evolution of art history, but abstract art can! It is crucial to proceed as painters and sculptors have always done in olden times and since prehistoric art: become dreamers-poets and derive inspiration from Nature. The universe as a framework of creation is so much broader than the human brain and can provide endless inspiration. It thus becomes absolutely necessary to retrace our steps, seek inspiration from the past and rescue the historical canons of art from the meanders of marginalization to which the caciques of contemporary art have relegated them. We need to find inspiration in old values in order to help creation evolve toward the pure biphony advocated by Kandinsky.

These values are aptly described by Jean-Pierre de Rycke, director and curator of the wonderful Belgian Museum of Fine Arts in Tournai, built by Victor Horta and where I had the chance to exhibit my works in July 2013. The man himself belongs to the minority of intellectuals, artists, dealers, collectors, museum curators, art critics, journalists, and citizens who favor sensitivity, emotions, beauty and harmony, are tired of the absurd, the repulsive, the unjustifiably shocking, the ridiculous and the supremacy of money, and strongly object to being taken for fools.

For his exhibition "*Beauty Shall Save the World*", JP de Rycke had the opportunity to write: "While recent art is too often overtaken by ugliness, cynicism or the simple concept that ignores the primarily aesthetic vocation of this universal expression of humanity, it is now time for poetry, harmony and spiritual transcendence to be reinstated into creation. The transfiguration of art will achieve the sublimation of the visible in a poetic surge that bows to the laws of natural balance. Artistic creation will revert to what it was at the beginning: an aesthetic transformation of cosmic reality, revealed to our astounded senses. "

This is so well expressed.

It is also the goal I am painstakingly pursuing in my work. I believe I was fortunate in that I acquired the "eye" because I had as my "masters" the greatest Greek painters and sculptors of their times (Nikolis Hatzikyriakos-Ghikas Yannis Tsarouchis, Yannis Moralis, Yannis Pappas, Giorgos Mavroidis, and Kostas Kouliantanos who are unfortunately unknown in the West) and who happened to be great friends of my parents. Thus, evolving as a child and then as a teenager among them, I had the chance to observe Art and Nature. At a later stage, this led to a moment of revelation for me – almost thirty years ago- as I gained the firm conviction that Nature can create not only landscapes but also abstract art that goes far beyond what the human imagination could possibly conceive.

At the last exhibition of Yannis Moralis (who, sadly, has departed this world since), I had the opportunity to show him a painting made in his honor out of salmon skins. This amused him so much that he immediately asked "why don't you paint it?"



My answer was swift and simple: "I don't know how to paint Master."

The Master had immediately felt that in there resided material for inspiration. In fact, he was sharing another lesson with me by helping me perceive and gain awareness that the abstract had already merged with the concrete centuries ago and that artists could follow this path. It was another moment of revelation.

The new path is here. All we have to do is immerse ourselves in it and use it as our artistic ancestors had done for centuries with natural landscapes and their surroundings in general.

The fusion is here, but as with any simple thing, we remain blind to it. The abstract is in Nature, yet the eye of today's artist glides right past it, never using it for inspiration since he perceives it, unconsciously and automatically, as "déjà vu" and far from being an ever evolving source of creation. The same applies to a large number of art professionals. Making this possible would have required knowledge of how to draw inspiration from the fragmentation of the natural object that gives rise to infinite abstract compositions.

Unlike us, our ancestors had grasped this both in the East and the West.

In 17<sup>th</sup> century China, Ruan Yua, imperial official of the Ming dynasty and fine scholar started the trend of the "dream stone": Mengshi or the "philosopher's stone." These were slabs of marble mined at the Dali quarries in Yunnan and selected for their evocative power. Signed and framed, complete with a poem, they became true artworks, natural prints that provided a support for pondering and meditation and served as focal pieces in the decoration of any rich house.

These were abstract works before abstraction was known in the history of art. They were abstract pieces etched by Mother Nature.

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Similarly, the pietra paesana of Tuscany, already known to Pliny the Elder, piqued the interest of curio cabinet aficionados and some painters who decorated them in Renaissance times. As he decorated some of these stones, the artist "implicitly recognized that nature, with or without the helping hand of the artist, can produce arrangements of shapes and colors that are acceptable as works of art."

Today, with the help of new technologies, we can easily demonstrate how bi-phonism or fusionism opens up new horizons. Before us are endless possibilities heightened by a major advantage, that of a homogeneous source of inspiration, orderly in its disorder, harmonious and, most importantly, aesthetically perfect.

Nature produces the abstract in its smallest to its largest representations; from plankton to the blue-skinned whale, from sand to the desert rose, from a mosquito's wing to that of an eagle (Sea, Land, Sky - Thalassa, Gaia, and Uranus).

Thus, the abstract shifts from the definite frame of creation that is the human brain to the infinite framework of Kadinsky's "celestial revelation", the work of the Creator, the Powers or Nature, or as labeled in each system of beliefs.

Following are some examples of the transformation of nature into abstract "paintings" produced from various organic materials.

## **ABSTRACT FUSIONAL –BIPHONIC IMAGES**

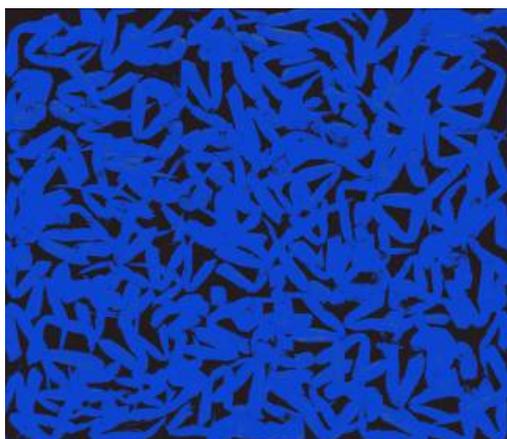


*Platon, H., Lobster, 2014*

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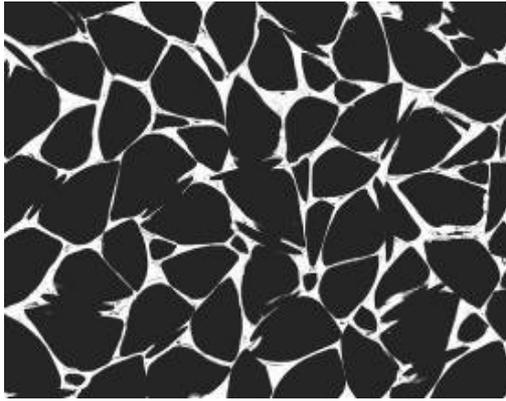
*Platon, H., Eels, 2014*



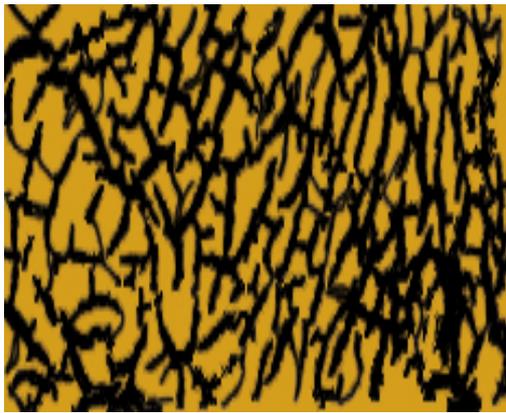
*Platon, H., Crab Legs, 2014*



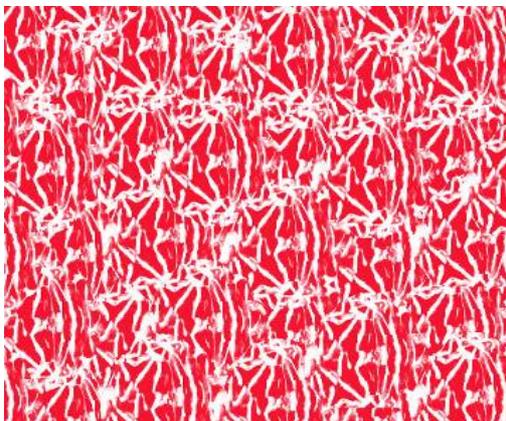
*Platon, H., Pineapple, 2014*



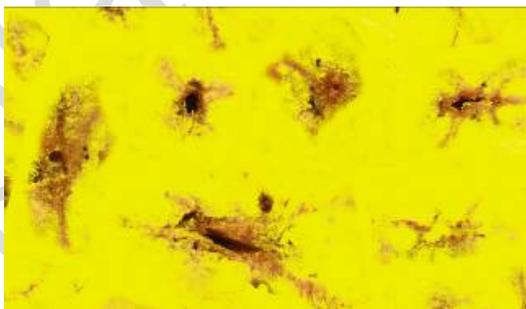
*Platon, H., Goose Barnacles, 2014*



*Platon, H., Melons Skins, 2014*



*Platon, H., Tortoise, 2014*

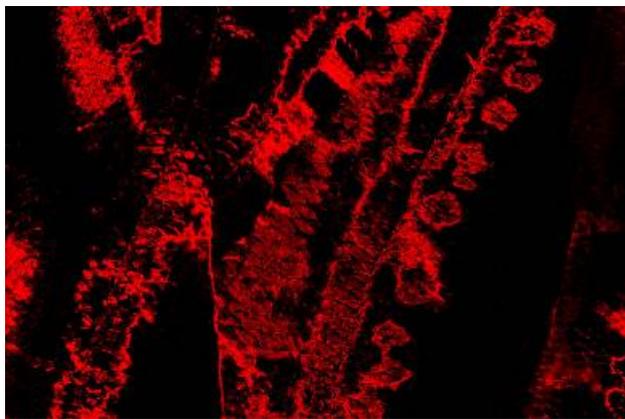


*Platon, H., Bananas, 2014*

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*Platon, H., Butterflies, 2014*



*Platon, H., Snake head fish skin II, 2014*

Will we ever free ourselves of this impasse? Who knows?

At all events, the abstract has definitely joined the concrete.

And will tomorrow's art historians speak of BIPHONISM or FUSIONISM?

Platon Alexis Hadjimichalis

Rabat, March 2014