



Canolfan Sophia
The Sophia Centre



Y Sefydliad Cytgord
The Harmony Institute

Nick Champion

Harmony and the Sky in Visual Art

Joseph Turner, Joan Miro, Geoff MacEwen

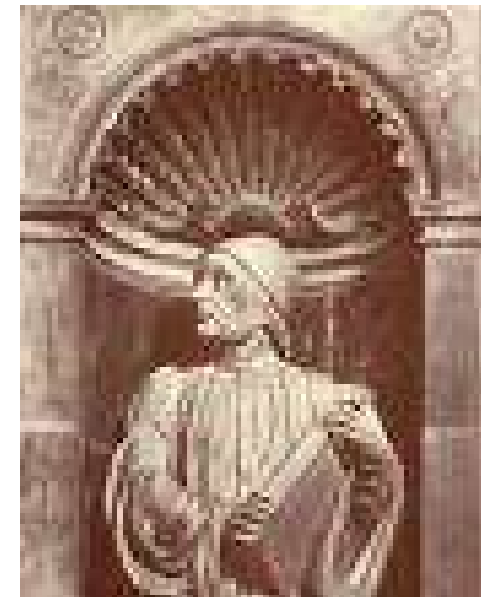
Marsilio Ficino 1433-1499

‘When we fashion images our spirit, if it has been intent upon the work and upon the stars through imagination and emotion, is joined together with the very spirit of the world and with the rays of the stars through which the world-spirit acts’.

Marsilio Ficino, *Liber de vita*, III.20.36, in Marsilio Ficino, K. Caske and J. Clark, *Three Books on Life* (Binghamton: MRTS 1989), p. 351.



- 'In looking more closely at Ficinian music therapy, I want to emphasise two further vital ingredients, which we find continually emphasised in his practical writings. These are the *desire* and *imagination* of the human being, which, when focused on images such as music, stars, or talismans, somehow **facilitate an interplay with the cosmos and allow the qualities of a particular moment in time to be seized and recognised. This very process may effect a change in being.**'
- Voss, Angela, 'The Music of the Spheres: Marsilio Ficino and Renaissance Harmonia', in , in Nicholas Campion, (ed.), *The Harmony Debates: Exploring a practical philosophy for a sustainable future* (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2020), pp. 247-267.



Harmony in Art

Jared S. Moore writes of six, sometimes overlapping, kinds of harmony:

Formal, or 'the pattern or arrangement of sensuous materials – colours, shapes, tone; Ideal, as beauty and 'defined entirely in terms of [Platonic] Idea';

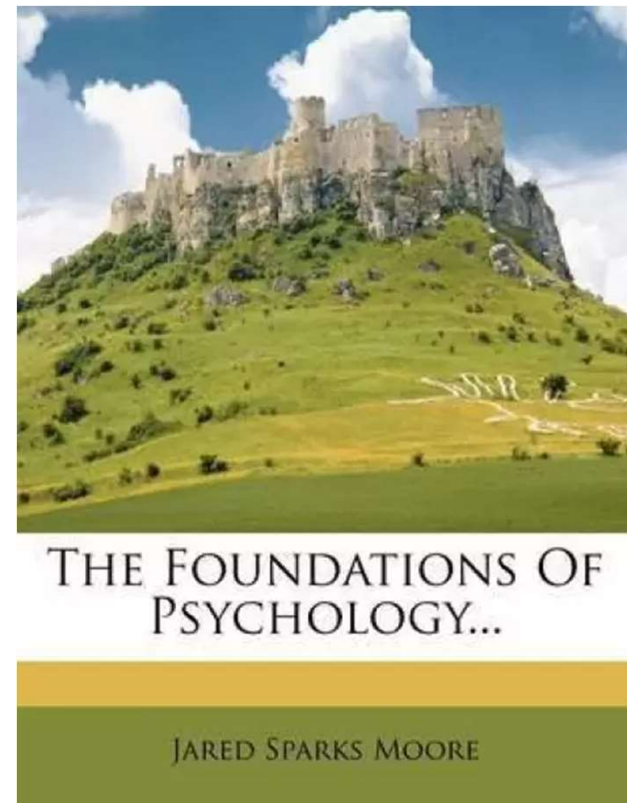
Expressive, meaning 'having significance, or as expressive of certain emotions, ideas and images';

Spiritual, as in responding to spiritual needs;

Psychophysical, which may be expressed through empathy, or a 'feeling of oneness with the object';

Psychological, or a 'purely subjective harmony within the mind of the observer'.

Moore, Jared S.. 'Beauty as Harmony.' *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 2, no. 7 (1942): pp. 2 + 40-50.



Joseph Turner 1775–1851



Famous for his exploration of Light

Influenced by

(1) recent translations of Persian sacred texts – the Zend Avesta

(2) the colour theories of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe[\[a\]](#) (1749 – 1832)

(3) Romanticism – the direct experience of nature

William Jones: an influence on Turner

‘It seems a well-founded opinion that the whole crowd of gods and goddesses in ancient Rome and modern Varanes [Varanasi], mean only the powers of nature, and principally those of the SUN, expressed in a variety of ways, and by a multitude of fanciful names.’

A.M. Jones (ed.), *The Works of Sir William Jones with the life of the author by Lord Teignmouth*, London 1807, vol. 3, p 385-6, cited in Gage, Turner, p 42.

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Turner and the Sun

Well versed in classical mythology

Studied Hinduism

Aware that the Christianised imagery of the west was just one way of representing the sky as an allegory.

Sun could represent

The power of Apollo,

Brahma, who had created the world by means of a 'spirit of the colour of flame', ideas which Turner may have picked up from Alexander Dow's 1768 *History of Hindostan*

- According to John Ruskin, just a few weeks before he died, Turner remarked 'the Sun is God'.



Joseph Turner: 'The Fighting Temeraire, tugged to her last berth to be broken up', 1838 Exhibited 1839



Famous for its use of the Sun: the Sun's light pervades and colours everything in the picture. On the right-hand side it balances the two boats on the left-hand side.

The Temeraire was one of the last great sailing ships: it had been in combat at Britain's greatest ever naval victory at Trafalgar in 1805.

It was being towed from Sheerness to Rotherhithe to be broken up.

A standard reading is that the setting Sun represents the end of the era of sailing ships, and the crescent Moon at the top left represents the rise of the new industrial era (except the Moon, as Turner would have known), would have been setting.

Joseph Turner, 'Shade and Darkness - the Evening of the Deluge' exhibited 1843



- Pair to 'Light and Colour (Goethe's Theory), The Morning after the Deluge - Moses writing the Book of Genesis'.
- In these companion pictures, Turner opposes cool and warm colours, and their contrasting emotional associations, as described by Goethe in his 'Farbenlehre' (Theory of Colours). Turner has chosen the biblical Deluge as the vehicle for these ideas, returning to the Historical [Sublime](#) he had mastered in some of his earliest exhibition pictures. Originally painted and framed as octagons, this pair carries two of Turner's last and most inspired statements of the natural vortex, while the allusion to Goethe adds a gloss of recent science and theory to a lifetime's preoccupation with elemental forces'.
- *Tate Gallery*

Joseph Turner, 'Light and Colour (Goethe's Theory) - the Morning after the Deluge - Moses Writing the Book of Genesis', Exhibited 1843



'Pair to 'Shade and Darkness - The Evening of the Deluge'. This triumphant explosion of light brilliantly exploits the warm side of the spectrum. It celebrates God's Covenant with Man after the Flood. The serpent in the centre represents the brazen serpent raised by Moses in the wilderness as a cure for plague. Here it symbolises Christ's redemption of Man in the New Covenant. Turner's verses rather undermine the optimism of the religious message by emphasising the transience of the natural phenomena engendered by the 'returning sun'.'

Gallery label, November 1992

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

Goethe proposed a different theory of colour does that put forward by Newton in his optics. Goethe considered that Newton's model was too mathematical and, in its quantitative nature, failed to consider the qualitative.

He also disagreed with Newton's contention that white light is a compound containing seven (sometimes five) colour producing rays and considered that colour is produced by the interaction of the polarity of light and dark.

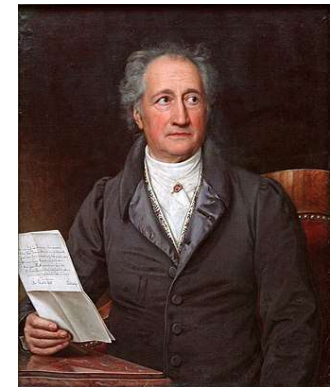
Goethe's work was translated into English by Turner's friend Charles Lock Eastlake: Eastlake, Charles Lock (trans.), *Goethe's Theory of Colours* (London 1840).

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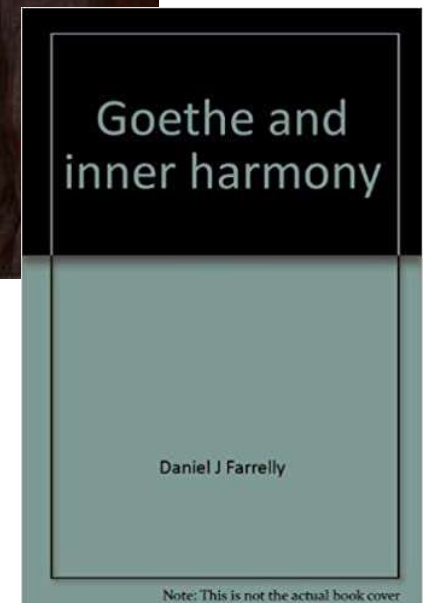
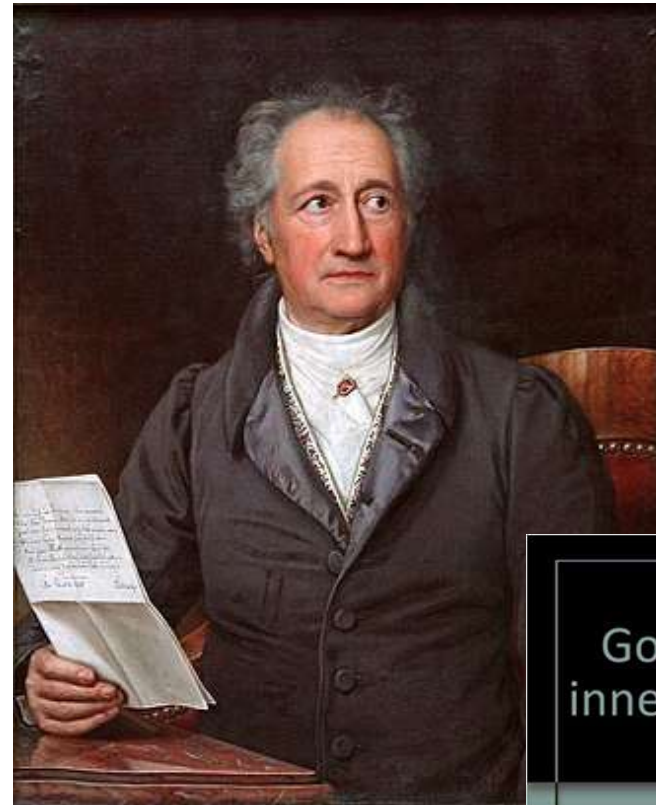
Goethe wrote that he wanted 'to define the effects of colours addressed at once to the eye and mind, with a view to making them more available for the purposes of art'

Cited in Finley, Gerald. "The Deluge Pictures: Reflections on Goethe, J. M. W. Turner and Early Nineteenth-Century Science." *Zeitschrift Für Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 60, no. 4, Deutscher Kunstverlag GmbH Munchen Berlin, 1997, pp. 530–48 (p. 531).

P.532 cites Goethe on the 'primordial phenomena of light and darkness.



- 'To have a positive religion is not necessary. To be in harmony with yourself and the universe is what counts, and this is possible without positive and specific formulation in words.'
- Goethe



Light and Dark

Turner portrayed a transformational, world-changing event, the destruction of the world and its redemption and survival as described in the Biblical flood.

He did so through an examination of how the polarisation of light and dark creates other colours – in these paintings grey, blue and yellow.



Turner's influence

He moved away from figurative art to abstract.

Unlike the 20th century abstract artists he did not see himself revolutionising art

- Phillip Barcio 'How JMW Turner Influenced Abstract Art', Mar 4, 2020, *IDEELART*, <https://www.ideelart.com/magazine/turner-abstract-art> [accessed 26 June 2022].

But like him the 20th century abstract artists were engaged in a quest for deeper truths



Joan Miró 1893-1983



Left – main picture in 1935

Native of Barcelona

1918 first exhibition in Barcelona

1921 first exhibition in Paris

1924 associated with the Surrealist group

Expresses key features of surrealism: respect for the purity of the child's view and opposed to all conformism

Miró: 'Personnage Etoile' (Figure, Star) 1978



His celestial art rejected naturalism in favour of the 'complex entanglement' (my description) of images seen through the inner eye.

André Breton. Author of the Surrealist Manifesto

‘As long as astrologers actually go out there and scrutinise the night sky, let themselves be soaked through by the celestial emanations and then bring this brightness back to the darkness of human existence then yes, all the poetic abilities will play their part’

- Carteret, Jean and Roger Knare, 'An interview with André Breton, April 1954', trans. Morelle Smith in Champion, Nicholas, 'Surrealist Cosmology: André Breton and Astrology', *Culture and Cosmos*, Vol. 6 no 2, Autumn/Winter 2002, pp. 45-56.

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Miró and the Inner World

‘The most axiomatic conclusion reached by [André] Breton in the early pages of *La Surréalisme a la peinture* sounds like a summation of Miró’s art: “The plastic work, in order to answer to the need for an absolute revision of the real values which everyone today is agreed upon, will have reference to a purely interior model. Otherwise *it will not exist.*”

Hubert, Renee Riese. “Miró and Breton.” *Yale French Studies*, no. 31, Yale University Press, 1964, pp. 52–59 (p.52).



Constellations

- A series of 23 paintings on paper
- Produced from January 1940 to September 1941 at the time of massive crisis when it looked as if the Nazis were going to win the war.
- Painted the first six or so at Varengeville-sur-Mer in Normandy, and finished the series in Palma, Majorca.
- <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/29082>
- I 'began a new stage in my work which had its source in music and nature. It was about the time that the war broke out. I felt a deep desire to escape. I closed myself within myself purposely. The night, music, and the stars began to play a major role in suggesting my paintings'.
- Rowell, Margit (ed.), *Jean Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews* (New York: Da Capo, 1992), p. 209.
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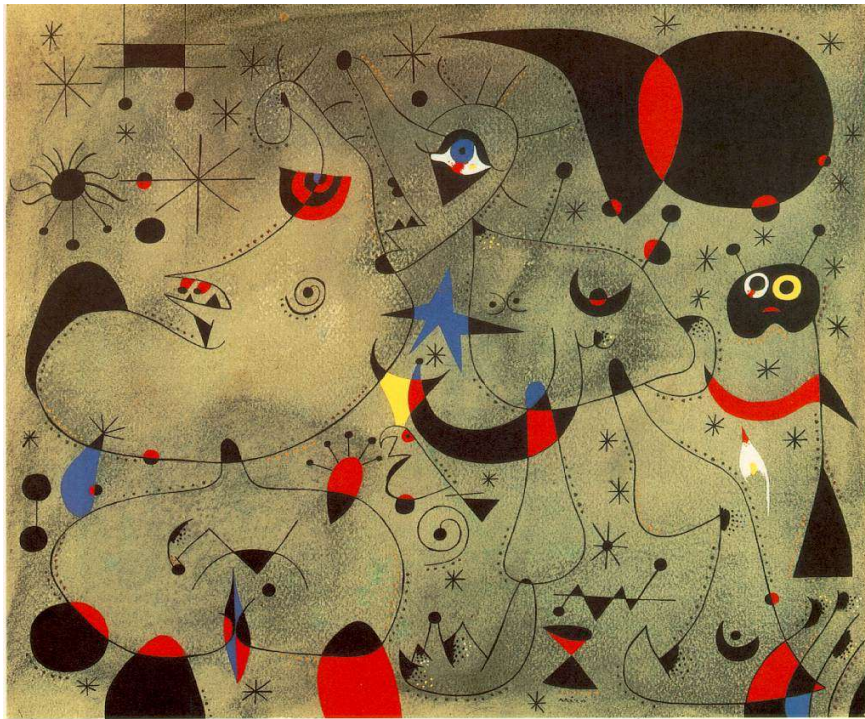


Miró: Le Lever du soleil (Constellations no 1)



- ‘Miró’s sequence begins at sunrise. Had it started somewhat earlier, a virgin sky might have been recaptured, an empty backcloth might have intruded. “Le Lever du soleil” provides us with recognisable creatures who may once have had a foothold on solid ground. They can be counted; they expressed no concerns at the blackness of the suns.’
- Hubert, Renee Riese. “Miró and Breton.” *Yale French Studies*, no. 31, Yale University Press, 1964, pp. 52–59 (p. 53)
- ““Le Lever du soleil” suggests a solitary child’s crossing of the threshold leading into the world of fantasy legend and heraldry’.
- Hubert, Renee Riese. “Miró and Breton.” *Yale French Studies*, no. 31, Yale University Press, 1964, pp. 52–59 (p. 56)

Miró : Nocturne (Constellations no 13)



- ‘In this world of dream and fantasy where destiny is absent, everything becomes possible’.
- Hubert, Renee Riese. “Miró and Breton.” *Yale French Studies*, no. 31, Yale University Press, 1964, pp. 52–59 (pp. 53-4).

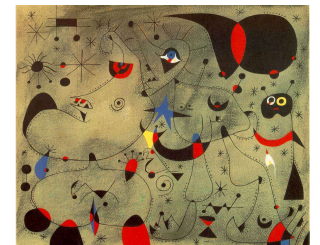
Miró: Vers l'arc en ciel (Towards the Rainbow) (Constellations no 16)



- 'In "'Vers l'arc en ciel"'... the network resembles a fragment of sky seen through a magnifying glass. The star-clustered bouquet grows on fertile nocturnal fields. Blossoms will never tarnish and cut flowers reach for a new bed among the stars...**astronomical or perhaps astrological maps** and contours, erotic shapes and constant metamorphoses as well as the musical transcriptions of so many creatures are finally welded together'.
- Hubert, Renee Riese. "Miró and Breton." *Yale French Studies*, no. 31, Yale University Press, 1964, pp. 52–59 (p. 54).

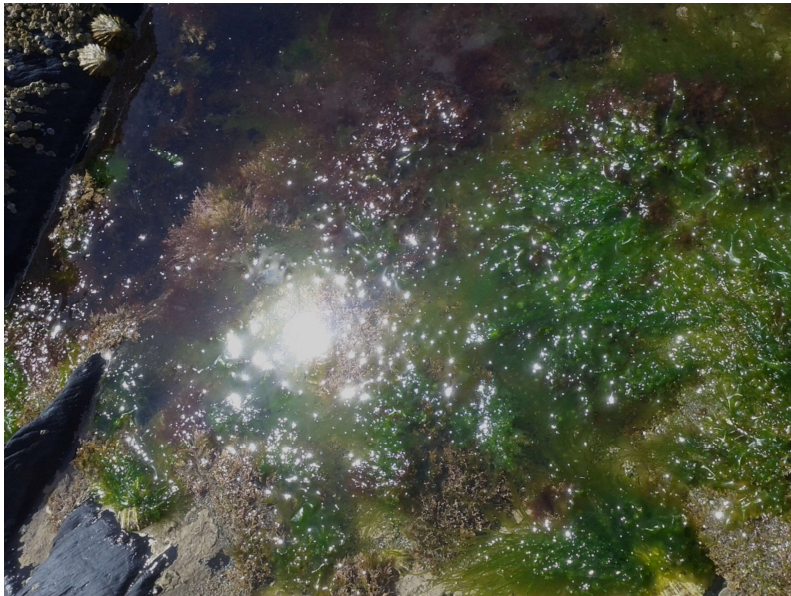
Miró on Constellations

- ‘They were based on reflections in water. Not naturalistically – or objectively – to be sure. But forms suggested by such reflections. In them my main aim was to achieve a compositional balance. It was a very long and extremely arduous work. I would set out with no preconceived idea. A few forms suggested here would go for other forms elsewhere to balance them. These in turn demanded others. It seemed interminable. It took a month at least to produce each watercolour , as I would take it up day after day to paint in order in other tiny spots, stars, washes, infinite decimal dots of colour in order to finally to achieve a full and complex equilibrium’.
- ‘Jean Miró; Comment and interview’, by James Johnson Sweeney. In *Partisan Review* New York, February 1948, in Rowell, Margit (ed.), *Jean Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews* (New York: Da Capo, 1992), pp. 208-211 (p. 210).



Light in Water

- Cristofario, Iaria, 'Harmony and a Phenomenology of Liquid Skies; in Nicholas Campion (ed.), *The Harmony Debates: Exploring a practical philosophy for a sustainable future* (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2020), pp.269-287.



Miró on Constellations

‘As I lived on the outskirts of Palma I used to spend hours looking at the sea. Poetry and music both were now all – important to me in my isolation. After lunch each day I would go to the cathedral to listen to the rehearsal. I would sit there that empty Gothic interior daydreaming, conjuring up forms. The light poured into the gloom through the stained-class windows in an orange flame. The cathedral seemed always empty at those hours. The organ music and the light filtering through the stained-glass windows to the interior gloom suggested forms to me. I saw practically no one all those months. But I was enormously enriched during this period of solitude. I read all the time: Saint John of the Cross, Saint Teresa, and poetry – Mallarmé, Rambaud. It was an ascetic existence: only work.’

- ‘Jean Miró; Comment and interview’, by James Johnson Sweeney. In *Partisan Review* New York, February 1948, in Rowell, Margit (ed.), *Jean Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews* (New York: Da Capo, 1992), pp. 208-211 (p. 210).



. Miró and music

Hammond, Paul, *Constellations of Miró, Breton* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2000).

Miró's signs do double or triple duty; they can "be" all sorts of things, since they've been rendered down to basic and allusive shapes" (p. 42)

Miró had been taken by Kandinsky telling him, while on a visit to Varengeville-sur-Mer, that he painted to music" (p. 44)



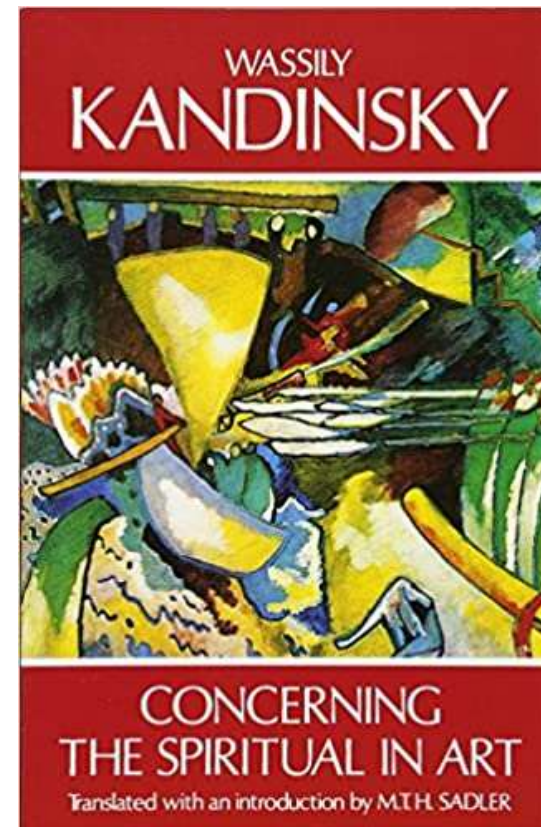
Vassily Kandinsky 1866-1964

Theosophist

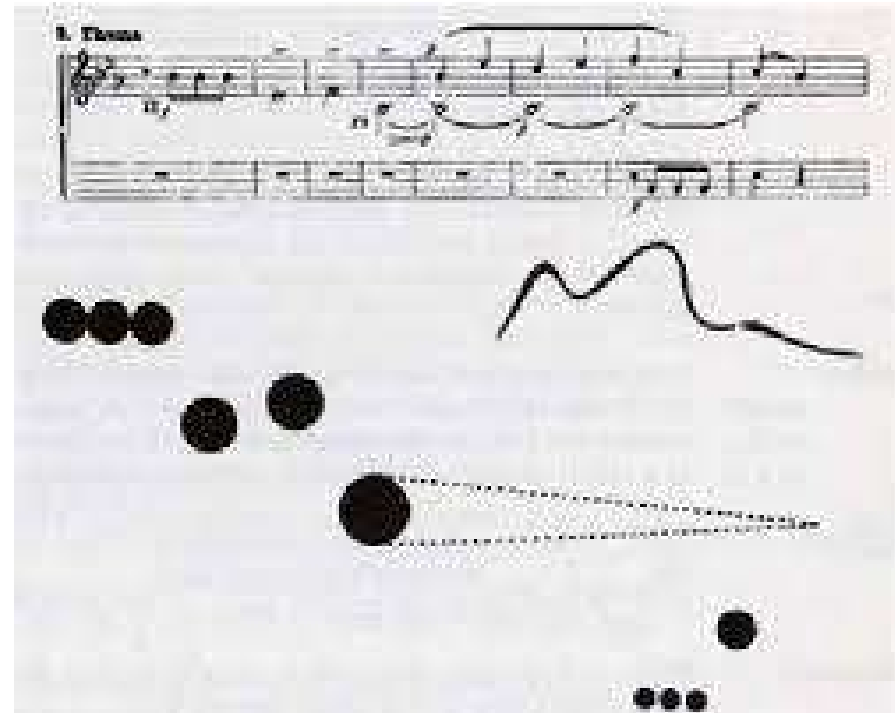
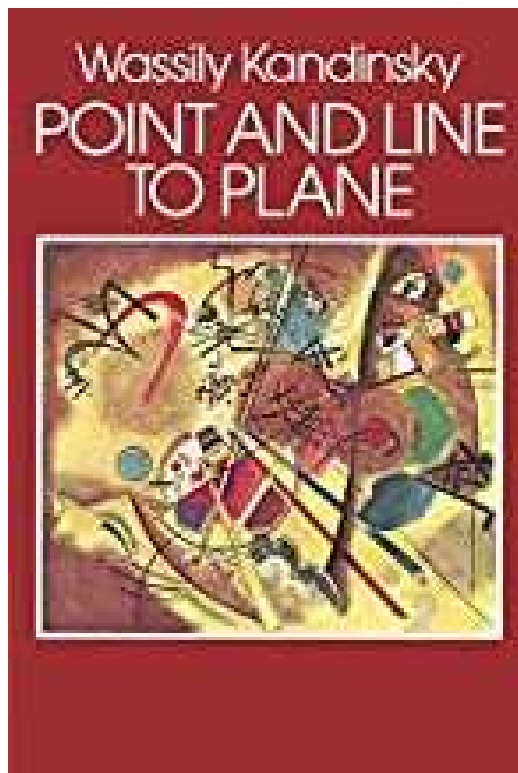
Abstract pioneer

Aimed to reveal the geometrical
structure underlying the universe

Pythagoras and Plato



Kandinsky and Music: converted musical scores into dots (Point and Line p 45)



Harmony and Music

‘Musical Harmony also is not destitute of the gifts of the Stars; for it is a most powerful imaginer of all things, which whilst it follows opportunely the Celestial bodies, doth wonderfully allure the Celestial influence, and doth change the affections, intentions, gestures, motions, actions and dispositions of all the hearers, and doth quietly allure them to its own properties, as to gladness, lamentation, to boldness, or rest, and the like.’

- Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, facsimile of the 1651 translation, (London: Chthonius Books, 1986 [1651]). Book II. chap xxiv



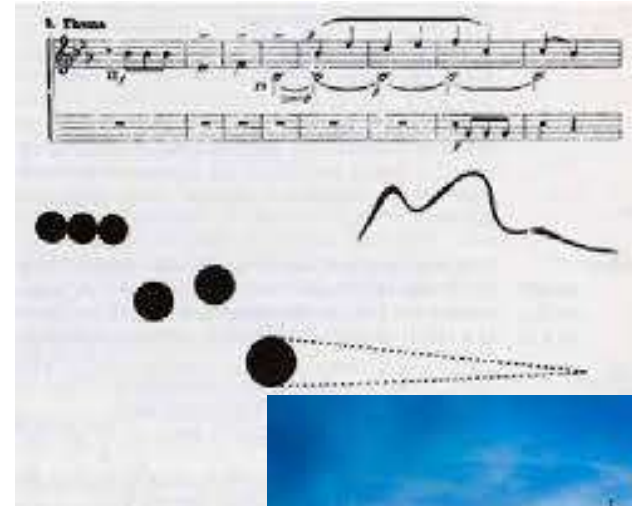
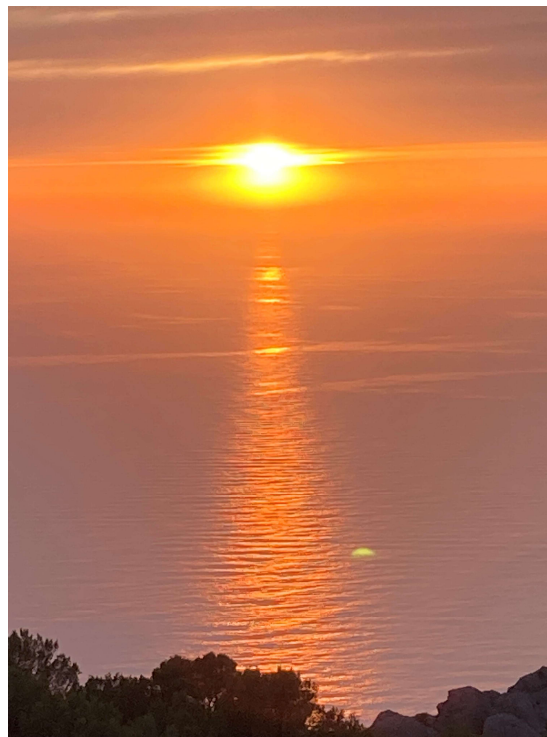
Miro: 'Personages in the Night Sky Guided by the Phosphorescent Tracks of Snails', 1940 (no 3 in the Constellations series)



- 'In the course of the [whole] sequence, which presents the world of visual metamorphoses governed by unsuspected **harmony** of sound and colour, the very background becomes increasingly similar to the vault of heaven, inhabited by stars, animals, insects and women.... The titles which often allude to dawn, day or night, indicate a deliberate hovering **between darkness and light**. Time cannot serve as a means of **orientation**, and the **cardinal points** of other geographical or astronomical conventions are equally useless.'
- Hubert, Renee Riese. "Miró and Breton." *Yale French Studies*, no. 31, Yale University Press, 1964, pp. 52–59 (p. 53).

Are Miró's Constellations reflections of the Music of the Spheres?

Below – a glitter path taken from
Muleta, Majorca, June 2022



Geoff MacEwen

'Born in Edinburgh,

Trained to be an artist at London's Goldsmiths College,.

'McEwan's last major one-man show in Scotland was of paintings based on Dante's *Commedia* at the Talbot Rice Centre, Edinburgh (1986).

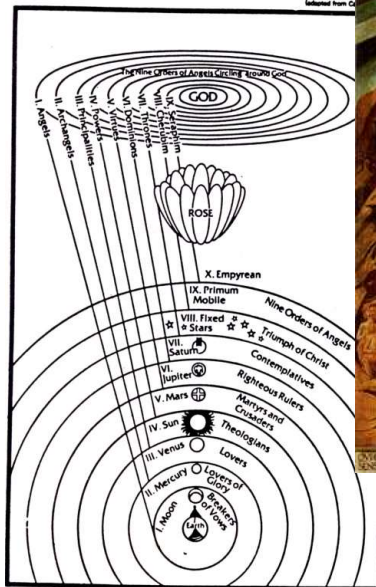
He has lived and worked on Mallorca since 1991.

Awarded a fellowship to work with Juan Miro's printmaker, Juan Barbera at the Miro Foundation, Palma de Mallorca (1995).'

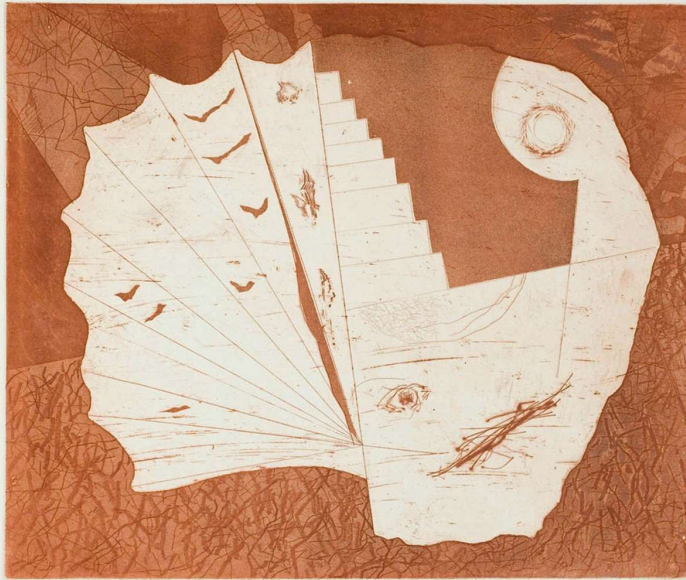
AskART, 'Facts about Geoff MacEwen',
https://www.askart.com/artist/Geoff_Macewan/11307508/Geoff_Macewan.aspx [accessed 19 March 2022]



The Journey to the Stars - Dante



Geoff MacEwen: Dante's celestial journey re-imagined. Paradiso plate 5: Cassella's Song



‘by choosing to work from Dante, I was moving away from any direct social-political critique and was engaged instead with the conflicts within my own psyche. In fact I’d embarked on a spiritual journey.

Geoff MacEwen: Puragatorio plate 7. Angels Chasing the Snake



- *NC: You started with the Inferno. How did you go about it?*
- **GM:** Page by page, just as if I was experiencing the poem as a journey in real time. These were paintings—oil on paper—and I worked quite quickly... I dealt with it in a very sort of straightforward way. I simply read the poem and whenever I felt an image rise I painted. It was programmatic, and I didn't search for anything beyond what the text stimulated or gave rise to an image.
- (p. 58)

Geoff MacEwen: Puragatorio plate 13: The Flames



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NC: I hate labels but that's in the tradition of surrealism, in the sense of allowing the image to arise spontaneously.

GM: I have always tried to avoid interfering with spontaneous images as they emerge during a painting. The biggest influence from my Art School days was Anton Ehrensweig with whom I only exchanged a handful of words. His 1953 book *The Hidden Order of Art* made a great impression on me and other artists of my generation. It taught me to accept confusion as a necessary stage in the process of arriving at an image and its completion. In other words, it taught me not to be fearful.

(pp. 58-9)

Geoff MacEwen: Purgatorio plate 15: The Conclusion



- **GM:** There are obviously collective archetypes, symbols that recur time and again throughout art history. I arrive at my images through the process of painting. They come into being as a result of attempting to resolve the technical problems of composition because, for me, painting is structured dialogue. I am continuously sensitive to what is happening on the canvas; watchful for those footprints which will carry the painting forward. Hunting and tracking are good metaphors for my way of working. As for whether I think of my images as specifically mine: they have come into being as a result of my actions but once they are visible and have been given a context, they belong to the collective of images.
- (p. 59)

Conclusions

- ‘the practice of observing and making sense of celestial phenomena is as much a cultural activity as any other, and consequently it is equally sensitive to the varied processes of culture change.’

- Ruggles, Clive and Nicholas Saunders, ‘The Study of Cultural Astronomy’, in Clive Ruggles and Nicholas Saunders, ed. *Astronomies and Cultures*, Niwot CA: University of Colorado Press, 1993, pp. 1-31 (p. 2).



All these artists look at the sky and

- our experience of it
- through the pure form,
- rejecting naturalism,
- elevating the inner eye,
- dissolving the boundary between the interior and exterior worlds

SKYLIGHTS
*Essays in Cultural Astronomy
& Astrology*



Edited by
Frances Clynes

- *Skylights: Essays in the History and Contemporary Culture of Astrology*, ed Frances Clynes (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2022)
- *Featuring Constellations no 16, 'Towards the Rainbow'*

READING

Finley, Gerald. "The Deluge Pictures: Reflections on Goethe, J. M. W. Turner and Early Nineteenth-Century Science." *Zeitschrift Für Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 60, no. 4, Deutscher Kunstverlag GmbH Munchen Berlin, 1997, pp. 530–48

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Hubert, Renee Riese. "Miró and Breton." *Yale French Studies*, no. 31, Yale University Press, 1964, pp. 52–59,

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Carteret, Jean and Roger Knare, 'An interview with André Breton, April 1954', trans. Morelle Smith in Campion, Nicholas, 'Surrealist Cosmology: André Breton and Astrology', *Culture and Cosmos*, Vol. 6 no 2, Autumn/Winter 2002, pp. 45-56.

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Nicholas Campion, 'Celestial Art: An Interview with Geoff MacEwen', *Culture and Cosmos*, Vol. 18 no. 1, Spring/Summer 2014, pp. 55-70.

2005: 'The Sun is God' in Nicholas Campion (ed.9, *The Inspiration of Astronomical Phenomena*, Proceedings of the Fourth Conference on the Inspiration of Astronomical Phenomena, Magdalen College, Oxford, 3-9 August 2003, (Bristol: Cinnabar Books), pp. 45-56



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