Foreword

Nadir Afonso, incomparable artist

There are two different ways of changing the things of this world. One is based on the technique of the prestidigitator or the magician and the other on the technique of the workman or the scientist. One is content with altering appearances, the other demands the transformation of the basics.

Mário Casimiro, 1977

The history of relations between art and mathematics had a more or less definite starting point, but it has never reached the end.

Michel Emmer, 2007

One of the brain’s functions is to give meaning to the world, in the signals it receives. Giving meaning is the same as finding a solution.

Semir Zeki, 2009

In the Arab language the phonetic sonority of the names Nadir and Nazir becomes diluted when pronounced in Portuguese. Nadir, the incomparable, cultured man and Nazir, the geometrical
opposite of Zenith. Nadir Afonso, who is the author of a vast body of theoretical and pictorial works, is the union of the qualities that both names signify. Those who are more accustomed to the discourse of poetical or sentimental rapture over artistic creation are disturbed by Nadir’s ideas and by his paintings, possibly because the intelligibility of his thinking and his *Espacilimité* are enduringly clear. In his books, *La Sensibilité Plastique* (1958) and *Les Mécanismes de la Création Artistique* (1970), as in everything he wrote, he stated the primordial nature of the laws underlying artistic creation. Nadir made a balanced projection of the convergence, unusual in artists, between artistic creation and its theoretical justification. The heuristic value of his contribution is on the same level as that of Kazimir Malevitch, Paul Klee and Rudolf Arnheim.

The *Manifesto* that Nadir Afonso now presents includes the structuring elements of his aesthetic thought. Altogether this text exemplifies the thoroughness revealed as a requirement for the person writing it. This requirement is the result of a refinement in his thinking marked by exhaustive labour, which is characteristic of the workman and
the scientist of the forms. His pictorial world is the world of the possible resonances of forms, spaces and colour in the emotions that Nadir does not neglect. His theory inevitably leads us to the world of the subject and to the need to never stop questioning how human subjectivity is constructed and unfolds. Space, time and causality are elements on which we structure our subjectivity and because they are so strongly interconnected it is almost impossible to speak of them separately.

Sensitive perception evolves in Nadir Afonso. We are precociously situated in the dimensions of space and make for ourselves an individual space in those dimensions from which we interact with what is around us. We are always in possession of the truth, a name, a percept, an idea, and only thus can we understand what we had already understood previously. For this reason this artist’s theoretical architecture on artistic creation appears to us as cosmic and anthropocentric at the same time. It depends on the objects of space but is only unveiled by the mental labour of the subject, who gives meaning to the world, who builds percepts, knowledge, and is moved.
The artist says that mathematics is the essence of art and that only through it can we give meaning to art. Morris Kline (1908-1992), in fact, gives us an account of that idea when he writes in *Mathematics in Western Culture* (1953): “mathematics determined the content and the orientation of a great deal of philosophical thinking, destroyed and reconstituted myths, doctrines and religious interpretations on the organisation of the Universe, gave substance to economic and political theories and body to art and music, architectural styles and to literary styles and supplied some of the best answers we have about the nature of Man and the Universe” (quoted in Emmer, 2007).

There were periods in history when, as with relations between geometry and art in ancient Greece, relations between mathematics and art were more obvious. As Michel Emmer (2009, 493) notes, “projective geometry and non-Euclidean geometries, the geometries in multiple-dimension spaces, abstract spaces, dynamic systems, the chaos theory, each of these great ideas changed our way of looking at the outside world and consequently our way of ‘making art’.”
Nadir Afonso and Rudolf Arnheim consider the world to be a cosmos. We are merely a part of that order. We must urgently understand how the cosmos is presented to us, question its working method, seek harmonies or create harmonies. The artist says: “Brilliant artists think they are expressing their inner world when they are merely expressing by force of intuition the laws of geometric mathematics.” The only way of remaining within it is “inevitably” to attempt to understand that order, in which we tend to focus our intelligence and follow our intuitions. In this way of thinking Nadir dialogues with Arnheim (1983, 161), “optics, physiology and the projective geometry of perception in depth were presented in many of their facets; philosophers wondered whether perspective is discovered, invented or inverted and artists saw that the magic of their pencil strokes deserves experimental scrutiny.”

So, Nadir Afonso’s contribution leads us not only to the theorising of classical world geometries proposed by Greek and other geometers, but also to the preoccupations of psychology and psychophysics in the last quarter of the 19th century.
put forward by Gustav Fechner (1801-1887) in *Vorschule der Aesthetic* (1876), an aesthetics *von unten nach oben* (from the basis), originating in the sensorial experience of individuals, in the perception of forms, colours and sounds, and giving rise to an aesthetic theory based on a set of evidences pertaining to objects.

Fechner’s first quests, in an explicitly experimental attitude, were continued by Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920) and others. Previously, Alexander Baumgarten (1714-1762) and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) differed on fundamental issues of aesthetics and on the judgement of taste. The former claimed that harmony can be found in divine creation, in the physical world, whilst Kant considered that harmony to be a result of the human condition itself, that is, of feeling pleasure in the free interaction of mental faculties, again, “a sort of theoretical secularisation”, as underlined by Holger Höge (2000). This output of ideas contains a constant search for balances, for “psychophysical correspondences” or others, for the laws that make us understand the relations between objects and their elements and that finally are also organized.
in the *expressive power*, which some works of art are an example of.

The philosophers and artists of ancient Greece, the psychophysicists of the 19th century and some 20th century artists found transcendent meaning in the geometry of things. The confirmation of this transcendent meaning, the constant search for harmony engaged in by philosophers, artists and geometers, could be a way forward in understanding man himself. In *Manifesto* by Nadir Afonso, incomparable artist, when enjoying his paintings and understanding his thinking, we cleanse our thoughts.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


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