



# **Abstractions of the Soul**

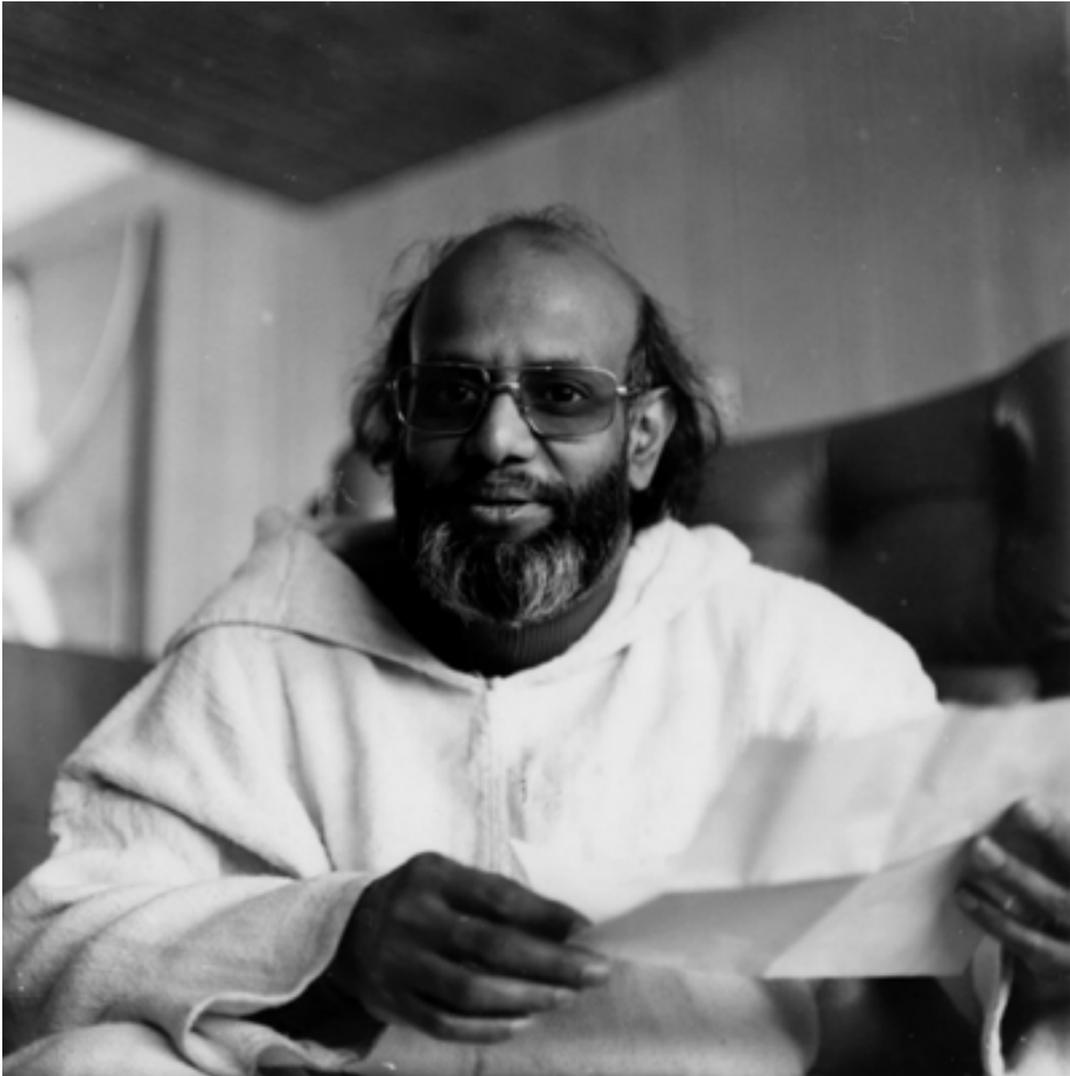
**Artworks by**

**Pareesh Chakraborty**

**and**

**Peter Donebauer**





**Paresh Chakraborty 1975**

**“In the realm of colour and formal composition there is never a trace of surface affectation in Paresh’s painting, where what may pass for geometry in truth reflects far deeper rigour and an altogether more searching, resonant and structural mathematics of colour. Something altogether different to Western abstraction.”**

*Andrew Brewerton, poet, Principal and Chief Executive, Plymouth College of Art, Honorary Professor of Fine Art, Shanghai University*

**“Paresh brought to us the inner meaning of abstractions of the soul”**

*Keith Critchlow, artist, lecturer, author, professor of architecture and co-founder of the Temenos Academy*

**“Paresh’s paintings interpreted Indian philosophical and religious themes transmuted in response to the work of European artists”.**

**“Central to his work was the visual interpretation of the generative power of sound as the source of all creation”**

*Paul Marchant, artist, Director of Education, Prince’s School of Traditional Arts*

**“Chris, there is always a conflict between knowing and being. So, when you paint, IMPROVISE! - that way, being will win over knowing, and that is how knowing grows.”**

*Paresh Chakraborty to his then student, artist Chris Appleby*

# **Abstractions of the Soul**

**Consciousness is universal – and its manifestations are infinite.**

This rare art exhibition showcases the paintings of Paresh Chakraborty alongside some early video works of Peter Donebauer, revealing the mutual inspiration and influence between the two artists across cultures and mediums.

Paresh's paintings belong directly within the western 20th century painting tradition, including the rise of abstraction, yet his paintings were often directly of Indian ragas or influenced by them. Peter Donebauer's pioneering video work in the Seventies combined the performance of abstract colour videos in live performance with contemporary electronically based musicians from the western classical tradition. Paresh and Peter shared a deep connection with sound and music, either behind or within the works, and a conviction of the role of the spiritual domain in life and art. These themes underlie all the works on show, linked by the common use of abstract imagery. Both believe that the power of abstract imagery can act as a direct window to an inner consciousness.

Paresh and Peter met in 1975 via Paul Marchant, and made a mutually inspirational friendship and link that continued until Paresh's death recently in 2014. What is the subtle nature of a mutual artistic connection or influence? Their work was in different mediums and as a result different in form – static painting and moving video seem worlds apart. Yet there was a very strong link that is hard to verbalise - it has qualities that are ineffable. The works on the walls will probably do a better job than words. So we may be left with an enigma for you the viewer to resolve – are the connections between the two obvious in the form or content of the works or deeply hidden?

What did they obviously share? Firstly a belief that East and West have profound riches to offer one another. Then a belief that the material world and materialism is transient and not primary. Next a belief in the power of art as an individual act and journey, and as a social catalyst and connection. Both had a strong belief in the direct power of music to mirror and express the soul. And lastly a belief in the power of abstract visual imagery to challenge that supremacy.

Yet their root influences were very different: Paresh was strongly grounded in the intellectual, artistic and spiritual roots of the East – in Sanskrit, Yoga, Tantra, Meditation, the Ragas etc. Peter was more versed in the scientific method, but also deeply affected by Jungian psychoanalysis, direct insight, Taoism, Zen Buddhism and a wide variety of music.

The form of their works is also of course very different: Paresh's works are static paintings; Peter's are the video records of (usually) live performances between at least two participants. Paresh's are often deeply inspired by music, but are forms fixed in time, other than that allowed by the viewer. The music in Peter's work is integral to the form of the work and the pieces exist within the duration of time and often reflect processes from the natural world. Paresh's often relate strongly to the emotional bases of the classical Indian ragas. Peter's exist alongside a western musical tradition that evolved to include electronic instrumentation.

Paresh's works for this show are a mixture of early and later paintings, with only approximate dates - he rarely titled his paintings. Peter's works are from two periods, firstly three works from "The Creation Cycle" (1973-78) parts 2, 4 and 6h - "Entering", "Circling" and "Dawn Creation". This is the period when Paresh first saw Peter's tapes and the Videokalos colour synthesiser he built in collaboration with Richard Monkhouse. Secondly, four parts of "The Mandala Cycle" from 1990-91, pieces 2, 3 4, and 5.

**Anita Majumdar, Curator for TesserArts Gallery, 2015**

# **Colour, Tone and Improvisation**

## **Peter Donebauer's Musicalisation of Video**

One of the principal protagonists of the British early video scene, Peter Donebauer has forged a unique “intermedial” style that sets his work apart from both the better known American styles and the videographic methods of his British contemporaries. In fact, it is easier to place his earlier work within the lineage of visual music than that of the video art world, despite his appropriation of highly technical modes of articulation. “Intermedial” is a term, coined by the father of Fluxus, Dick Higgins, in the 1960s, used to describe the moment where different media not only combine and converse, but also fuse to create something entirely new; something in which the separate components can no longer be disentangled.

In most forms of early video experimentation, music and sound played a key role. Donebauer's work, with its focus on the combination of music and image, but also on the live performance of the resulting audiovisuality, stands independent from any American or British video school, perhaps connecting more directly with the painted, animated and filmed visual music experimentation that occurred earlier in the century. Although his work does not seek a physically active audience in the same way that many of Nam June Paik's video sculptures do, it does nonetheless demand a strong emotional engagement. Often abstract, his audiovisual works are not created according to the literary narrative time that informs most other moving-image media, but rather conjure forth a new and intermedial audiovisual temporal space that invites the audience-viewer to bring her own experiences into play in order to create meaning that is at once universal and deeply personal.

Like the American video pioneers, Donebauer drew his influences from other disciplines: from music, the improvisations of jazz and Indian classical ragas, and the soundscapes of Varèse, Xenakis and other composers involved in the electronic music scene; from painting, by the light and movement of Turner, the process-oriented work of Jackson Pollock and by the Zen school of painting in which works were created quickly after a protracted period of contemplation and preparation. There have been many attempts to combine arts and disciplines, but video—able to capture both sound and image simultaneously—provided users with a comparatively easy way in which to create palpable forms of intermediality. This promise of immediacy—of an audiovisual technology that could be played like an instrument—was particularly seductive to Donebauer. In early experiments with Cymatics in 1972, he had built a physical transducer able to produce a direct correlation between the audio and visual components of the video Portapak's monochrome video signal. The artist then experimented with this in The Royal College of Art's colour TV studio, using the engineering control area to process and colour images—and to sound them—electronically: in his own words, “The ‘emotional’ impact of colour in the image was suddenly as important an element as the ‘emotional’ impact of the music, and I was precipitated into ‘painterly’ concerns”. From this starting point, the artist developed many different ways in which to allow

music and image to converse, with many of his methods reliant to some degree on gestures relating to the live and the collaborative.

One of Donebauer's earliest, yet most substantial, explorations of the audiovisual intermedial can be found in his 1973-78 group of seven pieces, "The Creation Cycle", a collection of works created live within the Royal College's TV Studio. With creative nods to Zen art and shamanistic practice, these works are based on the idea of process, rather than the traditional idea that art is an aesthetic object, itself static in time. Improvised within a pre-arranged structure to create a live, yet recorded form of audiovisuality, all seven sections, or pieces, explore this recalibration of the artistic process: in particular, their temporal, improvisatory quality engages with the creative sphere of music, rather than just with the static arts. This is particularly apparent in the second piece, "Entering", his colourised eulogy on birth, broadcast in 1974 on BBC2's art programme Second House: the first piece of "video art" commissioned and broadcast on UK national television. At eight minutes long, its three sections move kaleidoscopically around the concept—conceptual as well as physical—of birth, emerging from Eastern ideas about genesis and the birth of man. Although non-representational, the images clearly pertain to the oscillating tensions of order and chaos: creation and nature. This is an allegorical piece about rebirth in many senses, including Donebauer's autobiographical journey towards becoming an artist. Here, the artist colourised his images created live in the TV studio to form a pioneering form of video visual language, in which his pulsating shapes draw the eye continually towards an ever-receding centre, symbolic of the constant flow and cycle of life. "Entering" was an audiovisual collaboration between Donebauer and his long-term musician collaborator Simon Desorgher, a flautist who studied electronic composition under Tristram Cary at the Royal College of Music.

Although recorded live, music and image were created according to the same aesthetic. Many video artists working in the USA, such as Paik, Steina Vasulka and Bill Viola began their lives as musicians, and therefore created single-authored audiovisual work. If music was sourced from elsewhere, as it most often was, it tended to be pre-existent, resulting in a visualisation of music, rather than an audiovisual dialogue. Here we have a genuinely collaborative process. Like the images, the sounds signify specifically, while at the same time occupying the realms of the nonrepresentational and abstract. Although a mixture of electronically-processed instruments and electronics, any trace of the original sound sources have been entirely effaced. The result is a disembodied sound that has one foot in the real, although the sonic elongation renders the source obsolete, similar in nature to the abstractions of *musique concrète*. Disjointed from their external sources, the sounds provide an interpretative space for the audience. This process places sound in the same aesthetic sphere as the images, by merging inner and outer space to represent the idea that consciousness is about much more than reality. We begin inside a pulsating, watery and highly coloured womb-like environment before an electronic explosion signals the act of birth. The continual movement towards a diminishing centre creates an immateriality of edge that takes the eye from the infinite to the specific, while also belying the work's technological frame, something that again sets this work apart from the contemporary video experimentation in the US. Throughout, the audio and visual tracks are tightly synced, with the size of Donebauer's abstract shapes varying to the volume of Desorgher's soundscape. During the birth passage, a clear beat develops, morphing into a longer pulsing back beat that symbolises the violence of parturition, its crescendo coinciding with tunnel-like shapes that eventually blow into visual blackness, although the sound continues. There follows quiet, descending sounds as though heard from far away, a

non-verbal quiescence, as a large blue-red circle tinged with green fills the screen. The piece then again lapses into blackness, this time accompanied by silence as music and image coincide at their resting places

The last piece in The Creation Cycle, “Merging-Emerging” (not showing here) presented an even closer form of intermediality and opened wide the possibilities for collaborative performance. This time, Donebauer also employed his colour synthesiser. Driven by a desire to replicate the live, process-driven creativity he forged with Desorgher but outside of the TV Studio, Donebauer built an image-processing device that incorporated all the necessary decoding, encoding and syncing requirements of a studio in a portable device.



This piece of equipment, or “instrument” as Donebauer prefers to call it, relates in some ways to a long lineage of colour organs, which can be traced from Louis Bertrand Castel’s proposal for an ocular harpsichord in 1725, through Bishop, Rimington, Klein and Wilfred etc from 1870-1920, then to Fischinger’s Lumigraph in 1950 and the the electronic music liquid light shows in the 1960s and ‘70s. By its very nature, almost all early video work was created live, with a natural emphasis on the impermanent, the temporal and the improvisational. Jordan Belson was creating live visual colour music in the San Francisco Planetarium, for instance, although he predominantly made use of pre-recorded film footage combined with live light shows, to create his audiovisual sensorium. The desire to promote and develop the possibilities of live audiovisuality, however, meant that video synthesisers became a popular part of creative life during video’s early years, with Paik, Dan Sandin, Tom Defanti and several West-Coast practitioners amongst others using different forms of the technology to perform video in real time, often in conjunction with the closed-circuit feed that could incorporate the audience into the work. Donebauer’s synthesiser was unique, however, in that it enabled the user to colour and layer each of its five channels; and this could be achieved live. Created in collaboration with Richard Monkhouse, this camera-processing instrument—known as the Videokalos Colour Synthesiser (from the Latin “video: I see”, and from the Greek “kalos: beauty”)—could be used outside of the studio with either monochrome or colour live camera sources and one pre-recorded source. Born from his painterly interest in performative forms of creativity, then, the Videokalos enabled Donebauer to relocate the emphasis of video work from

object to process; from artefact to conceptual audiovisual space—in real and colourised, time. By 1990, Donebauer’s audiovisual process had evolved yet again. *Mandala*, another seven-piece cycle, is the only work in which the artist used a computer to generate some initial simple dot patterns, which, through multiple analogue and digital processing and feedback loops, formed hypnotic and infinitely-morphing shapes described playfully by the artist as representing “a tour of inner consciousness, of the chakras”. Although this time working with a new musician—Mike Ray—Donebauer again favoured an iterative process that relied on live performance at the edit stage to create the intensely collaborative form of audiovisuality. Working first with rhythm, then with live visual processing, followed by analogue and digital processing, the artist and musician shaped the musical elements to fit the image at the final stage. The work opens to dynamic blue shapes that, slippery like oil on water, continually move towards a centre that forever recedes, as though “tunnelling into the psyche” (Donebauer). Eventually, this motion gives way in the second piece to a more meditative and slow-moving green that moves in and out like breath to “take you in deeper” (Donebauer). The audiovisual links are strong: as the images breathe and flex, the slow vocal-derived sounds perform elongated glissandi that pass each as they move between high and low registers, accompanied by computerised sitar and tabla-like instrumentation. Each piece reveals a different feeling and dynamic, with *Mandala 4*, for example, offering a deep quietness, a complex yellow/orange centralised image with an inner stillness that manifests its energies in response to the sun, flowers and life.

In all the pieces discussed here, as well as many other works, we can find innovative intermedial forms of videography that broke new audiovisual ground. While it is possible to locate Donebauer’s work within several different music and image traditions—from colour organs to the visual music of early experimental filmmakers, from nineteenth-century painting to twentieth-century electronic composition, from American performative video to the single-screen experimentation of British video artists—his ability to blend together disparate traditions resulted in a new form of deeply personal sounding images. In particular, performing with his Videokalos Colour Synthesiser allowed music and colourised images to combine in real time and in numerous different environments in ways that enabled British video art to move into the arena of full audiovisual composition.

**Edited for this catalogue from a longer article by Holly Rogers, 2015.**

*Holly was the founding Director of The Research Centre for Audio-Visual Media, at the University of Liverpool, and is now Senior Lecturer in Music and Image at Goldsmiths, University of London.*

# Electronic Abstractions

## The Pioneering Video Works of Peter Donebauer

*“It is very easy to produce interesting graphic effects via the television medium, as it is very easy for most people to learn to draw. But it is the attempt to mould those effects into a meaningful whole that is the challenge.”* (Donebauer, 1975 - Video and Audio-Visual Review)

When Peter Donebauer first began to explore the expressive and aesthetic potential of video in the early 1970's, the notion that it might be possible to create works of art to be displayed on a television screen was a radical and challenging concept. Although it was arguably feasible to create “artistic ‘ imagery with a television camera, there were a number of very considerable barriers to overcome, some simply technical, but more significantly there were cultural challenges too.

Television had been developed initially without any clear social application and had evolved into a one-way entertainment, information and communication channel. Perceived initially as an extension of radio, presenting low-resolution moving pictures to accompany the all-important verbal information, by the early 1970's the television receiver had become a ubiquitous domestic fixture in most households. Television programmes were piped into the home in a continuous flow, perceived in much the same way as the electricity, gas or water supply. This constant stream of packaged entertainment and news was there “on tap” when it was wanted, and even when it wasn't; so how could such a thing have anything to do with “art”? Of course, there were programmes about art, mainly worthy presentations of the “talking head” variety in which various experts and authoritative personalities discussed the merits of painting or sculpture, literature or music, with strategic visual inserts of the art under scrutiny or in question.

Of course the creative fusion of sound and picture did already have an important precedent- cinema had always been welcomed into the artistic cannon, proclaimed by some as the “seventh art” (attributed to Ricciotto Canudo). Television, however, was the poor relation - not perceived to be worthy of similar consideration, it was merely utilitarian, lacking any potential for poetry.

However, Donebauer understood that television, or rather the technical means of production behind it, did present a unique property that could be explored and developed. His fascination with video was linked to the medium's potential to create “live” imagery. Unlike film, which required processing after exposure, and therefore a delay between the act of shooting and the playback of any visual material, television provided a “live” picture; the camera image could be monitored directly on the studio display. Furthermore, video offered the instantaneous playback of any subsequent recording. These two related technical possibilities offered Donebauer the opportunity to develop an innovative approach to working in the television studio environment. In collaboration with the musician and composer Simon Desorgher and at times other live performers, he devised an interactive improvisational approach. Writing about his collaborative working methods for “Entering” (1974), the earliest work to be featured in this exhibition, Donebauer described their approach and theme:

*“We decide on some structure for the piece to be produced, usually in a visualised form. Our last completed piece was around the theme of the experience of a foetus inside a mother's womb. This moves forward by a series of contractions or expansions to the experience of birth, followed by a period of acquiescence dying back to sleep... A basic piece of electronic music was then created...as a starting point for the work. The sound was fed through a physical transducer of my own design and construction to create a visual*

*pattern depending on the frequency and amplitude of the sound. The basic pattern is video taped with a monochrome video camera. So we have a basic sound and a basic pattern."*

This early work was the first of a series Donebauer was later to designate as "The Creation Cycle". Three of these seven related videotapes - "Entering" (1974), "Circling" (1975) and "Dawn Creation" (1976) are featured in this current exhibition, and were developed using similar working methods and approach.

At the time these innovative works were made, there was no ideal method of dissemination or presentation, although broadcast television seemed to offer an opportunity. Although perhaps Donebauer and a small number of other visionary artists had hoped that their work might reach new audiences via television, opportunities to air video work of this kind were extremely unusual. Although "Entering" (1974) was commissioned and broadcast by BBC television, this was to prove a rare and special event and only "Struggling" of the subsequent works in "The Creation Cycle" was ever transmitted. There were a number of important cultural reasons for this, but the typical passive mode of engagement encouraged or expected of TV viewers was certainly a factor. At the time, broadcasters feared that television audiences encountering this type of work would have to be prepared or pre-warned of the challenges to come, and if disturbed by a deviation from the norm, they might be motivated to switch channels or opt out altogether and simply switch off!

Aside from the concerns that innovative programme content might prove too much for the average viewer, Donebauer's videotapes raised deeper issues. "Entering" and the subsequent works in "The Creation Cycle" did not contain representational imagery or present a narrative story line, and composer Simon Desorgher's experimental music tracks were also deeply challenging. "Entering", "Circling" and "Dawn Creation" were abstract works, related more closely to painting or music and there was little or no precedent for this kind of content on television. These complex and sophisticated works prompted, perhaps required, multiple viewings - the shifting colours, fluid layering and the gradual unfolding of sound and image required a different order of attention and concentration, and were technologically much better suited to the present age, with its large flat screen presentation, high picture definition, subtle colour displays and multiple and repeat replay. Back in the early 1970's these innovations were still only available in the fantasy world of science fiction novels - there were only very limited means to create either an immersive experience or a reflective one.

To some extent Donebauer was aware of the challenging nature of his work and its unsuitability to networked broadcasting of the time. Anticipating the need for a more contemplative viewing attitude, he attempted to engage the viewer's attention, prompting them to modify their normal viewing conditions. For example, prior to the screening of "Entering" on "Second House" (BBC Two, 1974), Melvyn Bragg, the programme's presenter, announced on air that: "the artist suggests that the work is best viewed with the room lights dimmed ."

Of course this was just a start, as Donebauer had correctly anticipated the need for specialised screening conditions very different from the average living room of the day, but for the time being, a more sophisticated and finely focused attitude to this pioneering work and its ideal viewing conditions would have to wait....

## **Chris Meigh-Andrews 2015**

**Chris** is an artist, curator and writer who has written extensively on the history and context of artists' video in his book "A History of Video Art" (Bloomsbury, London & Sangensha, Tokyo, 2013). He is Emeritus Professor of Electronic & Digital Art, University of Central Lancashire and Visiting Professor at the Centre of Moving Image research at the University of the West of England.

# **Paresh Chakraborty et Peter Donebauer**

## **Un duel pacifique**

Pour reprendre quelques commentaires autour de l'œuvre de Paresh Chakraborty, et tenter de saisir la portée de son message, laquelle pour l'instant, reste assez confidentielle, une image historique me vient en écho par rapport à l'ampleur de l'engagement du passeur ; du pédagogue à l'artiste. Cette photographie relate la rencontre de deux hommes qui engagèrent en Allemagne, à Caputh en 1930, avant la tragédie de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, une conversation autour de leurs différences d'appréciation du monde et des humains. Ils posent face à l'objectif. Une question, cependant, me taraude : cette photo vient-elle avant la discussion ou après celle-ci. Viennent-ils d'échanger des propos qui feront date dans l'histoire ou bien, s'apprêtent-ils à le faire ?



Tagore and Einstein in Caputh, Germany (July 14, 1930)

Regardons bien la photographie, et apprécions le regard des deux hommes. Einstein, semble avoir le regard perdu, Tagore nous fixe, avec force et détermination songeant à ses idées dont il se sent, sans doute, capable de démontrer. Entre ces deux hommes, voyons-nous une complicité ? Ou mieux, (du moins, je le ressens) n'y a-t-il pas autre chose, que subtilement, le photographe nous montre ? Tout d'abord, ces deux êtres aux regards différents posent en étant pratiquement collés l'un à l'autre, les vêtements se frôlent. En haut de l'image, la moulure du mur semble montrer deux sommets de leur crâne, identifiant deux formes qui supposent deux mentalités à l'opposé. Les cheveux d'Einstein semblent aimantés par une force extérieure à l'image, tandis que ceux de Tagore, sont bien dessinés, modelés suivant le volume de son crâne. La photographie n'est pas neutre, son auteur, d'une grande intelligence nous dévoile un autre cadre, lequel moins connu, est pourtant admirable. Il lie cette fois-ci par une barre noire, située en haut de la photographie, les deux êtres. Un noir, une nuit, une couleur, un univers, changement de dimension.

Je pense, alors à un dessin tardif de Paresh, un dessin bien étrange, qui pourrait, dans un premier temps nous apparaître comme une étude académique. Mais, là aussi, regardons bien la manière qui préside à l'organisation de l'espace de la feuille, car le blanc qui auréole Tagore n'est pas la couleur, mais le blanc de la matière, sa lumière augmentée par le travail du pastel, de la sanguine. Le regard de l'écrivain, de l'artiste se fond dans l'épaisseur du papier. L'homme ne nous fixe plus, il est ailleurs, ses yeux sont proches d'un milieu. Ce portrait n'est plus alors, le portrait de Tagore, moins encore celui de Paresh, il renvoie à un ailleurs, à un hors là, il s'efface, pour laisser la place à la composition que le peintre déclinait tout en se détournant des conventions : le mandala.



J'ai pensé commencer ce texte autour d'une réflexion sur ces personnages charismatiques du début du XXème siècle, pour mieux entrer dans l'exposition construite autour de deux artistes dont le parcours et l'esprit paraissent divergents à tous les niveaux (ceci pour la première lecture). Entre Peter Donebauer, et Paresh Chakraborty, si le premier fait figure de pionnier au regard de la confrontation du son et de l'image, si on perçoit des correspondances avec la révolution électroacoustique et la technologie de la vidéo qui ébranla le monde des arts plastiques et musicaux, le second peut à l'inverse fonder la transmission de son savoir autour de la tradition de plusieurs cultures qu'il malaxe en effleurant l'esprit syncrétique.

L'exercice qui consiste à légitimer les artistes en les faisant se promener sur le même pont est facile et souvent dépourvu d'intérêts. Toutefois, et c'est bien naturel, on peut percevoir des signes, lesquels par leur forme et leur origine sont favorables pour relier des aventures humaines disparates. Les techniques que chacun emploie ne doivent pas masquer l'origine de leur engagement. Car loin de là, elles contribuent à dévoiler à partir de quel endroit de son être, on ouvre pour soi et pour les autres, le tiroir aux images. Les fabriquer est une tâche difficile, elle requiert un savoir faire que l'artiste apprend de ceux qui les ont précédés et de l'univers actuel dans lequel il baigne. L'apprentissage ne doit pas se confondre avec obéissance, confronté à ces démons intérieurs ou à l'actualité galopante, l'artiste surmonte le dilemme du recommencement en décalant ce qu'il a appris. Une œuvre est spirituelle ou rien.

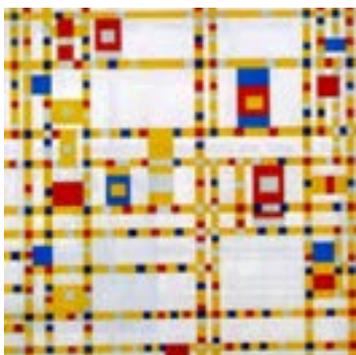
Et la deuxième lecture au sujet de cette confrontation est en somme assez simple. L'un veut faire de la couleur une musique, l'autre de la musique, une couleur. Une constatation évidente, toutefois, celle-ci persiste en mon esprit. Les procédés employés même s'ils proviennent de fondements distincts, confrontés dans le même espace peuvent se nourrir les uns des autres, et contenter l'émotion du spectateur par la mémoire qui engrange les effets rétinien et auditifs. Mais, ce qui peut être, relie Peter et Paresh provient de l'esprit de l'apparente profondeur que l'on

perçoit de leurs ouvrages. Si on essaye de rester un peu de temps devant une œuvre de Paresh, si on examine avec soin le jeu des formes, des lignes et des couleurs, on peut se rendre compte au bout d'un certain temps que cette toile, cet aplat joue sur l'apparition et la disparition. Elle est en action, littéralement en train de se défaire et de se construire devant nous.



Et ce monde délimité par un carré, n'est pas éloigné des formes mouvantes et mouvementées de Peter Donebauer, seulement le peintre garde la musique dans sa tête tout en nous transmettant un silence inquiétant. La musique de la peinture est un silence assourdissant. D'autant que l'auteur a été un musicien.

Paresh a repris le travail de ses prédécesseurs, il l'a repris sous une forme apparentée au labyrinthe. Le jeune homme qui a eu la chance de rencontrer à Nice Henri Matisse était déjà porteur (non pas comme on porte un fardeau), mais en tant que messager de son lieu de naissance, comme un artiste baroque qui dépose la pierre irrégulière à l'intérieur du mécanisme déjà huilé (baroco : perle de forme irrégulière. Le mot est dérivé du latin "verruca" qui peut prendre le sens de "éminence", "verrue", "défaut", ou encore "tâche".) Il tente la mission impossible de saisir à l'intérieur de la pensée occidentale, l'influence qu'a exercée sur eux la culture indienne. Ce travail consiste à comprendre de quelle façon un artiste d'une culture ancestrale autre, repère chez un artiste occidental dont la notion de progrès fait partie des fondements, la façon dont le celui-ci médite sur le sens et l'imaginaire des peintures des autres pays sans jamais les avoir visité, sinon par les reproductions d'images. Car pour reprendre son chemin, il faut s'inquiéter de la manière que ces derniers ouvrent l'armoire aux influences. Accepter, alors, que le miroir soit confectionné par un autre.



Entre Mondrian, Kandinsky, Chakraborty, quelles liaisons trouvons-nous ?

Une abstraction commune ? Une science infinie de la composition ? Ou bien une organisation savante de formes dirigées vers notre propre lieu (nous devenons, en quelque sorte, à l'inverse, le point de fuite du spectacle situé devant nous). Celles ci finissent par nous dévoiler que le champ visuel employé par les peintres renvoie inexorablement à un aplatissement, celui de la toile, que les modernes décidant de quitter la fenêtre de la perspective, assument par la peau de la peinture et par sa nouvelle signification, consistant à jouer sa présence physique dans notre environnement. De même pour l'image en mouvement, le frisson qui nous parcourt lorsque nous sommes statiques et que nos yeux, seuls, bougent, possédés par la puissance de l'image, ce spectacle nous enrobe et nous fait exister.

La quête d'une lumière, la surface, l'image en mouvement ne sont pas éclairées, elles possèdent leur propre lumière. Et le pari du peintre, à l'instar de ses contemporains, réside dans le fait de donner à voir l'invisible tout en montrant le visible de la construction : « l'impact de l'angle aigu d'un triangle sur un cercle est d'un effet aussi impressionnant que le doigt de Dieu touchant celui d'Adam chez Michel-Ange » écrivait Wassily Kandinsky.

Nous voici, maintenant au seuil de la vibration, semblent s'effacer les pouvoirs de la géométrie, apparaissent d'autres règnes, des vapeurs et des ondes, en fait des temporalités. Si, Turner vient se faufiler dans ces trois images, c'est certainement celui qui aujourd'hui, aurait peint la nature avec la caméra au point. Mais nul texte ne peut remplacer la force des diverses « chants » visuels, il suffit, d'être là, de regarder et d'écouter dans le même espace temps.



Et en ce qui concerne le rapprochement entre Peter et Paresh, il pourrait se résumer au long rectangle noir de la photo d'Einstein et Tagore, indéfinissable car poétique.

**Patrice Alexandre Septembre 2015**

*Sculpteur et Professeur à l'école Beaux-Arts de Paris*

# Paresh Chakraborty and Peter Donebauer

## A peaceful duel

To resume my commentary about the works of Paresh Chakraborty, and my attempt to grasp the scope of his message, which until now has been kept “private and confidential”, a historical image springs to mind that echoes his shamanic journey from pedagogue to artist.

The photograph below on the left reveals the meeting of two men in Caputh, Germany, 1930, before the tragedy of the Second World War, engaged in a conversation about their differences in appreciation of the world and human beings - posing for the camera. Nevertheless the question which interests me most is whether this photograph was taken before or after their discussion. Had they just exchanged their ideas, which marked a historical milestone, or were they just about to do it?



Tagore and Einstein in Caputh, Germany (July 14, 1930)

Let's take a good look at the two men again. Einstein seems to have a dreamy lost look, whereas Tagore fills us with the strength and determination of his ideas. Do we sense a complicity between these two men? Or better still, I feel, the photographer is subtly showing us something else.

Firstly, the two men have different looks in their eyes whilst being practically glued to each other, their clothes touching. On the top of the left image, the moulding of the wall appears to show two peaks of their skulls, identifying two forms which assume two opposing views. Einstein's hair seems magnetised by an external force in the image, whilst those of Tagore are well drawn, modelled following the shape of his skull. The photograph is not neutral, its author, of great intelligence, reveals another framework which is less known, but nonetheless admirable. He links this moment with a black bar at the top of the second photograph - a blackness, dark as the night, the sole colour, in one universe, changing dimensions.

Consider now Paresh's late drawing of Rabindranath Tagore. I consider this drawing, with its strange patterns, might at first sight appear to us as an academic study; however, if we look again carefully, we see how well the patterns are spatially arranged on a sheet of paper; the white halo around Tagore's head is not colour but white matter, his aura intensified by the labouring of the pastel. The eye of the writer and the artist blends into the thickness of the paper. The man no longer transfixes us with his gaze - he is elsewhere, his eyes are focused elsewhere. This portrait is no longer that of Tagore, much less that of Paresh, it refers to something else altogether - something out there, which disappears, giving way to a new composition that the painter was wanting to manifest, while turning away from conventions: the mandala.



I thought of beginning my reflections around these two charismatic characters from the early twentieth century in order to better introduce this exhibition, which encompasses two artists whose paths and minds seem divergent at all levels, or at least at first reading - Paresh Chakraborty and Peter Donebauer. The latter is a pioneer in terms of sound and image integration, we can correspond these with the electro-acoustic revolution and video technology that shook the art world both plastic and musical. The former through his paintings, conversely, transmitted his knowledge about the traditions of several cultures and entwined this with a syncretic spirit.

The exercise in grouping artists into schools is easy and often devoid of interest. However, and this is natural, we can perceive signs, that by their form and their origin favourably connect disparate human adventures. The disparate techniques that artists use should not hide the origin of their commitment. Far from that, they help to reveal from what part of his being, in an opening for oneself and for others, images emerge. Manifesting an artwork is a difficult task, it requires a 'savoir faire' that the artist learns from those who preceded them and from the present universe in which he bathes. Learning should not be confused with obedience: confronted with these inner demons or fast moving reality, the artist overcomes the recommencement of the dilemma by building on what he learned. A work is spiritual or it is nothing.

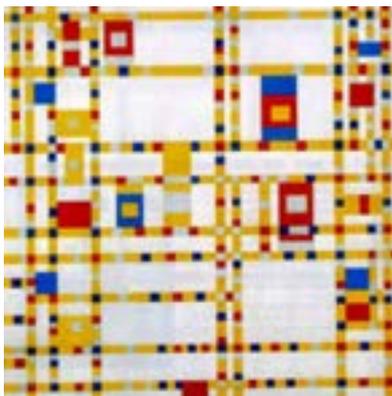
A second reading about this confrontation reveals an interesting link. One artist may want to make music out of colours, and another, make colours out of music. One obvious finding however persists in my mind. The processes used, even if they come from separate foundations, are placed in the same space and can feed each other, and satisfy the emotion of the spectator by

the memory that garners retinal and auditory effects. So what can be, and does, connect Peter and Paresh comes from the spirit of the apparent depth we perceive in their works. If we stay a little longer in front of Paresh's work, if one carefully examines the interplay of shapes, lines and colours, one realises after a while that this canvas, this flatness, plays with appearance and disappearance. It is in action, literally trying to dissolve and rebuild before us.



And this world, bounded by a square, is not far from the moving images and events of Peter's forms, only that the painter keeps the music in his head while providing us with a disturbing silence. The music of the painting is a deafening silence. Especially since the author was also a musician.

Paresh has taken over the work of his predecessors; he has resumed under a related form the labyrinth. The once young man, who had chanced to meet Henri Matisse at Nice, was already bearing (not as one carries a burden, but as a messenger of his birthplace), a mission impossible to capture within Western thought – that influence exerted on him by Indian Culture. This challenge is to understand how an artist of ancient culture metamorphose into a western artist, where the idea of 'progress' is fundamental. How does he reflect on and integrate the meaning of unseen paintings of unvisited countries, except through the reproduced image. In order to continue his journey, there is some uncertainty around the way in which his works may be perceived. Let us accept that the mirror may be crafted by another audience.



Between Mondrian, Kandinsky and Chakraborty, what links do we find?

A common abstraction? A deep knowledge of composition? Or a scholarly organisation of forms directed at our own time and place? (We become, somehow, conversely, the vanishing point of the show in front of us). These will eventually unveil that the visual field used by painters inexorably returns to the flat plane of the canvas - that modernist decision to leave the window of perspective, take the skin of the painting and its new meanings, and play with its physical presence in our environment.

The same for the moving image, the thrill that goes through us when we are static and only our eyes move, possessed by the power of the moving image, the spectacle surrounds us and makes us exist. The quest for light, the surface, in the moving image are not informed by materiality - they have their own light. The challenge for Paresh, like his painter contemporaries, is to reveal the invisible while showing the visible construction. "The impact of the acute angle of a triangle on a circle produces an effect no less powerful than the finger of God touching that of Adam in Michelangelo " wrote Wassily Kandinsky.

We are now at the threshold of vibration, seeming to erase the powers of geometry, manifesting other kingdoms, vapours and waves, in fact temporality itself. If Turner sneaks into these three images below, it is certain that today he would have painted nature with a camera's focus.



But no text of mine can replace the strength of the various visual " songs " on show here; simply to be there - to watch and listen in the same time and space - is the audience's privilege. And so, regarding the reconciliation between Paresh and Peter , it could be summed up in that long black rectangle in the picture of Einstein and Tagore - undefinable, yet poetic.

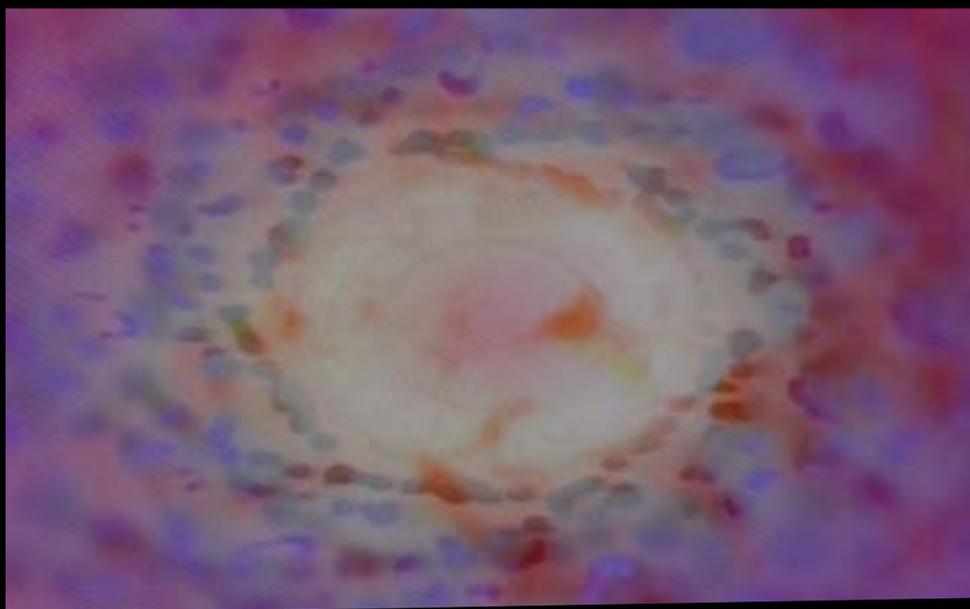
## **Patrice Alexandre September 2015**

*Sculptor and Professor at the Beaux-Arts de Paris*

*Translated by Anita Majumdar*



**Untitled by Chakraborty**



**Mandala 5 by Donebauer**



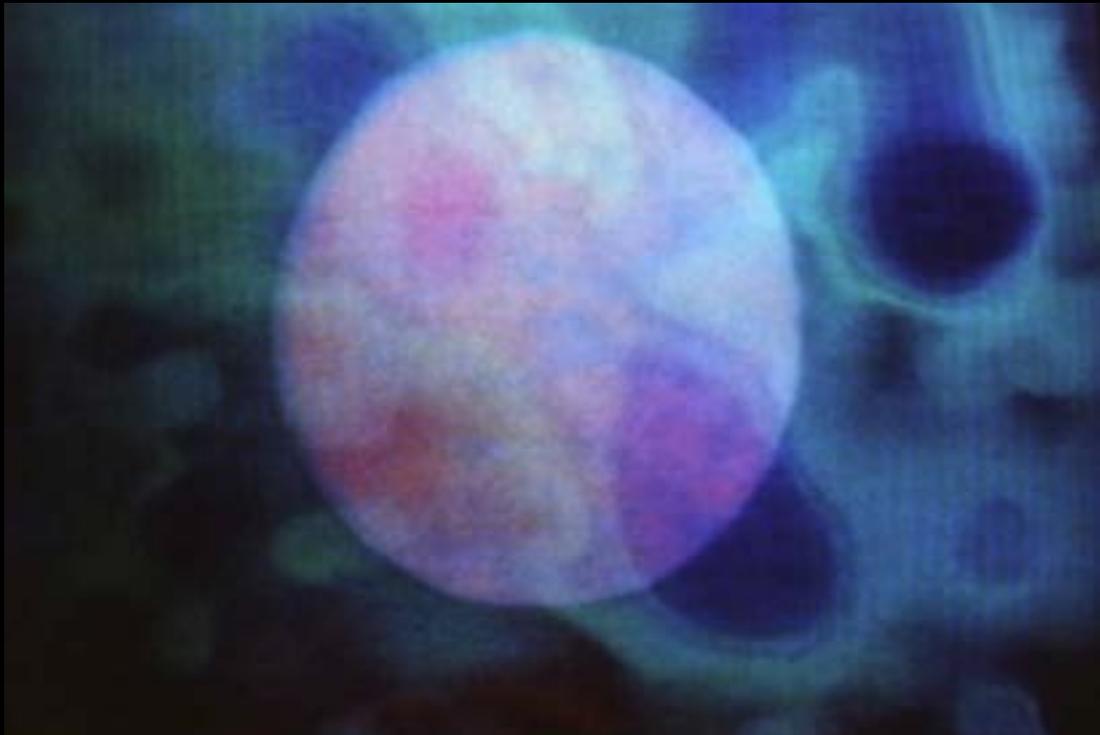
**Raag Deepak by Chakraborty**



**Mandala 3 by Donebauer**



**Opus 3 by Chakraborty**



**Dawn Creation by Donebauer**



**Untitled by Chakraborty**



**Entering by Donebauer**



Opus 10 by Chakraborty



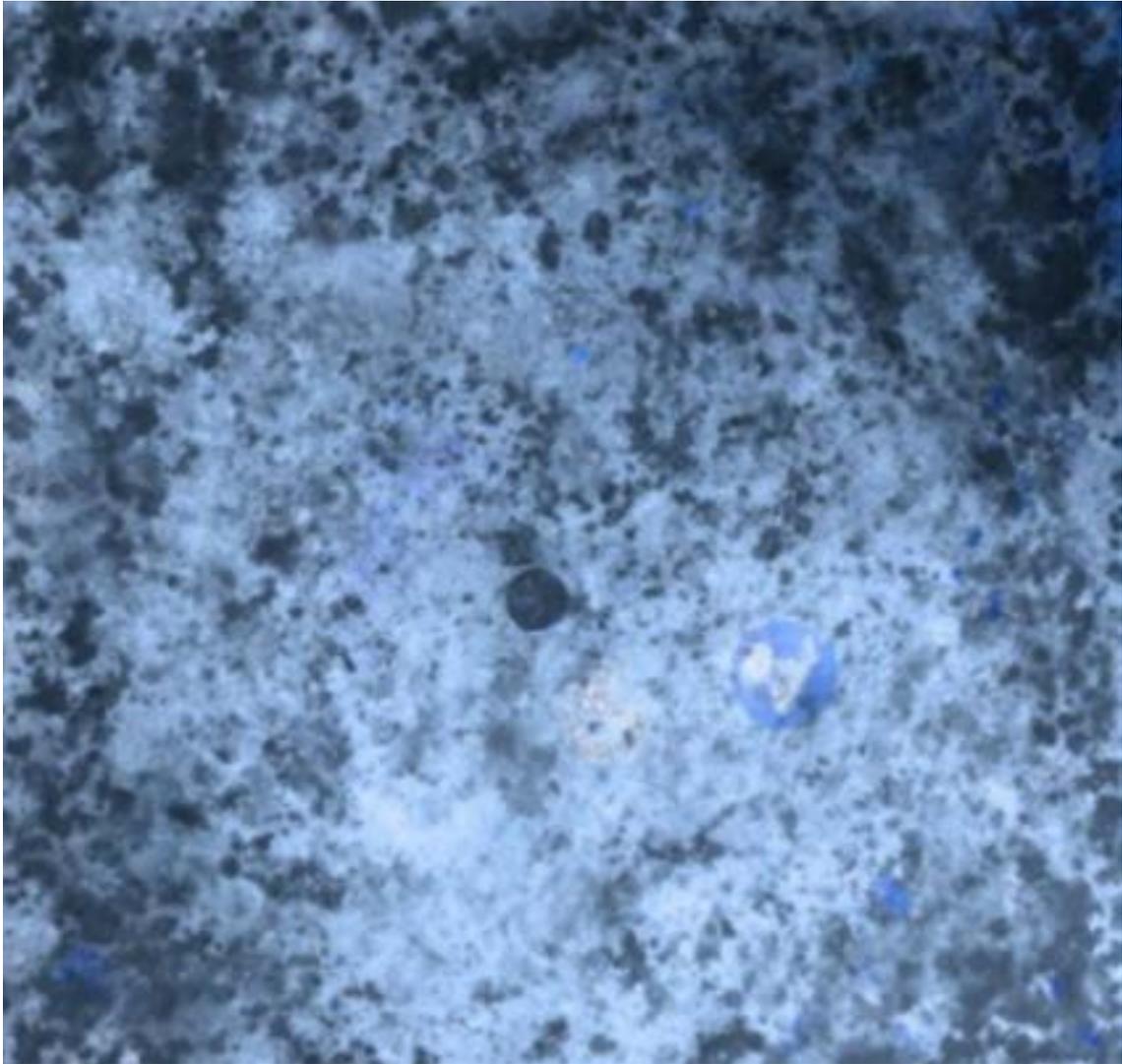
**Mandala 2 by Donebauer**



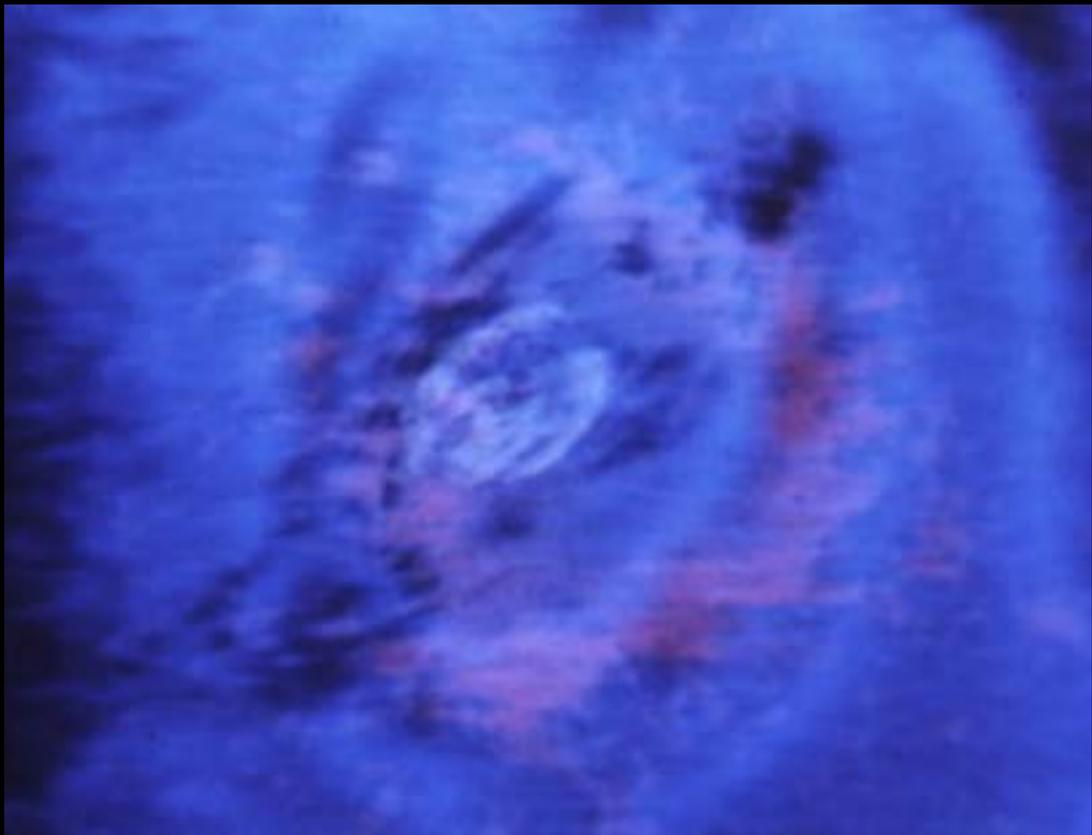
**Opus 4 by Chakraborty**



**Mandala 3 by Donebauer**



**Cosmos by Chakraborty**



**Circling by Donebauer**

## **“A Day in the Life of the Universe”**

Peter Sainsbury - *Head of the British Film Institute Film Board 1975 - on Dawn Creation*

## **“Stained Glass come alive”**

Paresh Chakraborty - *artist - On the Videokalos Colour Synthesiser -*

**“The condition of music is that it is the live production of organised sounds that extend in time and affect our inner selves without the necessity of mediation through verbal or conceptual structures.**

**The condition of video is that it is the live production of organised images that extend in time and affect our inner selves without the necessity of mediation through verbal or conceptual structures.**

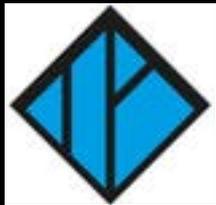
**As one plays a musical instrument the result is an immediate feedback through the ear of what the body and mind has created. As one plays a video instrument the result is an immediate feedback through the eye of what the body and mind has created. Video is the visual equivalent of music.”**

Peter Donebauer, *artist, 1975*



**Peter Donebauer 1974**

Royal College of Art Studio



[www.tesserarts.gallery](http://www.tesserarts.gallery)