



EDEN

and Everything

AFTER

Table of contents

ISELIN GRAYSTON AND KRISTIN ARMSTRONG OMA:
Preface 5

JEAN MARIE CAREY:
Introduction 7

TANJA THORJUSSEN:
Connecting to the Past - Artistic
Research and Intuitive Listening 11

KRISTIN ARMSTRONG OMA:
Eden – Time and Again.
An Essay on Despair and Hope 19

HÅKON REIERSEN:
Encounters with Animals
from Lost Worlds 27

ELNA SIV KRISTOFFERSEN:
Of Honey-Coloured Stone 33

TANJA MÜLLER-JONAK:
The Snake, the Fruit and
an Ancient Truth 39

MIRA SHAH:
The Apes of Eden. Naturecultural
Anthropological Storytelling
and the Turn to Prehistory 41

ELLEN HAGEN:
The Raptor-Human Relationship
in Falconry 47

LAURA HOHLWEIN:
The Falconer 50

SIDDHARTH SAREEN:
Realising Urban Imaginaries
of Eden: Green Transport Access
in Stavanger 53

STEPHANIE LEBAS HUBER:
Rebuilding Paradise Lost.
Dutch Art and Innovation
as Both Ideal and Solution 57

DOLLY JØRGENSEN:
Expanding Eden:
Animal discovery and rethinking
paradise in Jan Brueghel the
Elder's *Garden of Eden* 63

JULIE KIM ROSSITER AND JEAN MARIE CAREY:
Traumatic Imagination in Franz
Marc's Animalisation of Art 67

OLAYA SANFUENTES:
Interpretation of the Fanal
as *Hortus Conclusus* 79

Artworks 83

Prehistoric artefacts 85

Contributors 86

Rebuilding Paradise Lost. Dutch Art and Innovation as Both Ideal and Solution

// Stephanie Lebas Huber //

According to Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), Eden was a philosopher’s paradise. It was the only place in creation that offered the possibility of achieving intellectual perfection. Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden for the sin of responding to their bodily yearnings and tasting from the forbidden fruit. Because of their indiscretion, the imagination became a necessary, but imperfect way to compensate for the loss of universal rational thought. The fallen could only attempt to return to this paradise by inventing manmade rules that merely approximated God’s vision. With its promise to provide structure to the earthly world, human law played the important societal role of regulating passions and appetites. More importantly, it gave mankind the hope of knowing God fully and completely.^[1]

Spinoza’s concept of Eden as the locus for an idealized, pre-moral humanity perhaps found its most fitting artistic corollary in Piet Mondrian’s 1917 essay on Neoplasticism titled “The New Plastic Painting,” and in the painter’s arrival at total abstraction that same year. Rooted in the teachings of Hegel and reborn in the twentieth century Netherlands in the

writings of Dutch philosophers H. J. Schoenmaekers and G. J. P. J. Bolland, Neoplasticism located beneath the guise of natural laws a harmonious dialectic between the subjective and the objective, or rather an intellectualized and fiercely rational beauty.

Guiding Mondrian’s aesthetic was the Calvinist ethos that strove for purity, with the idea of arriving at a singular truth unsullied by human fallibility. At his most iconoclastic, Mondrian (1872–1944) reduced his canvases to primary hues, non-colours and basic geometric forms (Fig. 1).

Such fundamental building blocks encompassed his worldview, and put into visual terms his belief that modern man had become increasingly abstract and simplified, veering toward – but never quite achieving – the Platonic ideal. He intended the resulting aesthetic to be both utopian and productive, writing in 1927: “The application of these laws will abolish the tragic outlook of the home, the street, the city, joy, moral and physical joy, the joy of health, will spread by the oppositions of relation, of measure and color, of matter and space, which are to be emphasized by the relations of

// *Mondrian had also found an artistic solution to resolving the fragmentation caused by the recent World War: a binding and healing balm that could be universally understood by people of all languages and cultures.*

position. With a little good will, it will not be so impossible to create an earthly paradise.”^[2]

Art historians Hans Janssen and Hans Jaffé have compared Mondrian’s aesthetic solutions to the polders in The Netherlands, referring to the low-lying land recovered from the sea.^[3] The land – especially in the areas reclaimed from the Zuiderzee in 1920 – required a drainage system that separated large, flat tracts into parcels, made with sometimes straight geometricizing and unnaturalistic lines. While the resulting landscape bears a superficial resemblance to the gridded canvases of Mondrian, the true correspondence between the two existed on the level of concept.

The landscape was something that could be formed, managed, and maintained on the basis of a strict adherence to natural laws. Mondrian’s quest for such an efficient, rules-based vision, both Janssen and Jaffé argue, ensconced the artist in the Dutch Calvinist tradition. By stripping his painting of everything and anything non-essential and reducing it to plastic expression, Mondrian had also found an artistic solution to resolving the fragmentation caused by the recent World War: a binding and healing balm that could be universally understood by people of all languages and cultures. It was an aesthetic with endless possibilities that also

offered the promise of universal assimilation into a nonhierarchical totality. He thus arrived at the grid as an aesthetic solution with his first Neoplastic painting *Composition in Red, Yellow, and Blue* from 1920. His principles of elementarization and integration, as embodied in his painting, articulated the universalizing and logical system that had always existed behind nature and its phenomena.^[4] But beyond that, they also offered a utopian blueprint for spiritual liberation, which could be achieved through and not in spite of modernization.

In his writings, Mondrian rendered emotion as an aesthetic experience; Neoplasticism provided the frame for expressing pure, internal, spiritual states. Mondrian’s theories gestured to the idea that mankind could both intervene into and influence the trajectory of natural processes. Nature and man existed, he believed, as one single substance – the result of a synthesis between inward consciousness and outward expression.^[5] Despite their shared adherence to certain universal laws, however abstract, the artist’s vision still determined its ultimate form. Therein exists a parallel between the introduction of free will in the Edenic sense (as argued by Spinoza) and the will to form or *Kunstwollen* evident in the productive and totalizing, yet also transcendental potential of Mondrian’s paintings.

His utopia, after all, was based in an aesthetic experience that found beauty in pure plasticity and promised to usher in an era of harmony through total stylistic homogeneity. A similar experience was revisited a century later by the Dutch design duo Lonneke Gordijn and Ralph Nauta, known as Studio Drift, who held their first solo exhibition *Coded Nature* at the Stedelijk Museum in 2018. For this show they staged an expansive installation *Fragile Future*

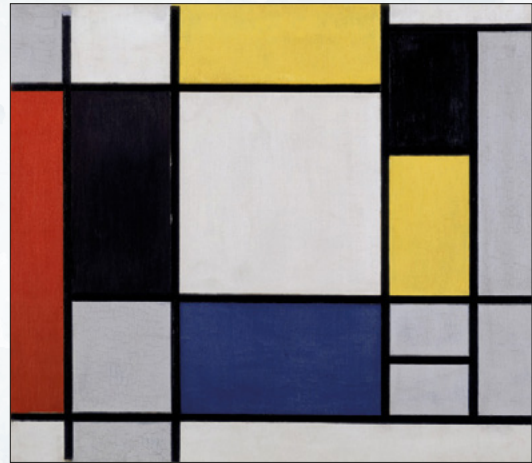
Chandelier 3.5 (2012), featuring electrified dandelion seedheads (Fig. 2). It required the artists to plug individual parachute achenes into a LED, which they then light up using a circuit board, illuminating the dandelion's component parts, while also dissecting them on the basis of their naturally-occurring and elementarized structures. The modular gridded frame that surrounds them – a visual and conceptual nod to Mondrian – can be expanded ad infinitum.

While still utopian in the same spirit as Mondrian, Studio Drift openly embrace technology on principle, viewing it as one component in an evolutionary synthesis between nature, human beings, and the manmade. Gordijn and Nauta successfully integrate these disparate entities by literally fusing them together, rather than formally conceptualizing them as building blocks like their De Stijl predecessor. They demonstrate the proximity with which human systems correspond to their animal analogues by mechanically recreating internalized reflexes.

One of the best such examples can be observed in *Franchise Freedom*, an aerial installation made up of hundreds of drones guided by a biological algorithm, which debuted at Art Basel Miami in 2017. Rather than arguing that mankind can or should transcend above such unreasoned and instinctual tendencies, Gordijn and Nauta use the work to draw parallels to human group behavior.^[6]

Recreating in their installations the natural laws that govern human and animal alike, they show an invisible hand at work. Extending into the world of found (natural) objects and man-made technical creations they have also found a universalizing aesthetic language to bind them: an equilibrium that locates a synthesis between opposites, nature and the manmade.

Their installations remind us that technology – as a manmade substance – is in and of itself a product of nature, one that intervenes into the natural yet exists simultaneously as woven into its fabric.

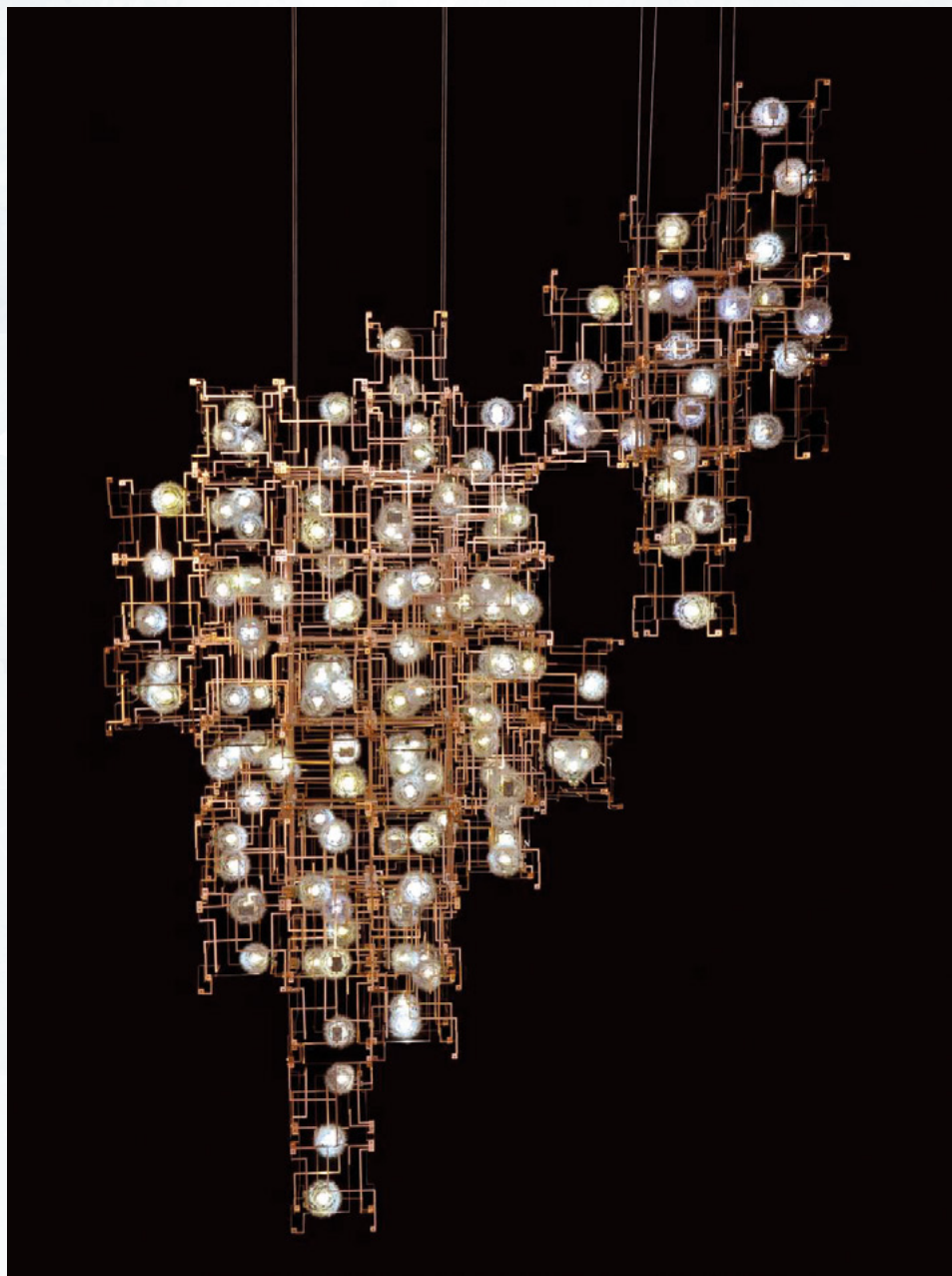


// Figure 1. Piet Mondrian, *Tableau*, 1923. Oil on canvas, 54 cm by 53.5 cm. RKD – Institute for Art History, The Hague, The Netherlands.

It is in this achievement of equilibrium that both Mondrian and Studio Drift can come as close as possible to the aesthetic experience of Eden: an aspirational version of nature, not as it exists in the earthly realm, but as God's ideal. Human law, after all, is impure because it is merely a replica of its “natural” counterpart. The fact that Eden also precedes the creation of human law also presents a seemingly impossible synthesis: how can mankind, fallen from paradise and aware of his earthly urges exist in a paradise that predates rules and imagination? For this – Mondrian and Studio Drift have found a human solution.

As Mondrian wrote in the magazine *De Stijl* in 1920: “If finally the new man re-creates nature in

// Figure 2. Lonneke
Gordijn, Ralph
Nauta, Studio
Drift, Fragile Future
Chandelier 3.5,
2012. Dandelion
seedheads, LED
lights, 12 x 33 x
34 x 0.3 x 3.5cm.
Stedelijk Museum,
Amsterdam, The
Netherlands, Nr.
2015.1.0480(1-56).



terms of what he has become himself — nature and non-nature as a balance of equivalents — then man shall have reconquered — and for you too — paradise on earth!” He went on to say, “Yet what I said is, to a certain extent, quite attainable...don’t think of it as a dream!”^[7]

The above suggestion is the compromise: an evolutionary synthesis whereby man does not simply live in Eden, but rather coexists in symbiosis with it. Studio Drift shares Mondrian’s conceptual worldview — one based in solution-finding through a constant search for poetic parallels that relate man to nature. They ask what it means to recreate Eden while accepting mankind’s fall from paradise and propose ways to best live with what we have. The answer may be in the commitment to live well and in equilibrium in an imperfect world that continues to be depleted and degraded by human activities, while also finding beauty in its plasticity. ◆

Endnotes

- [1] See Baruch Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, Gebhardt Edition, 1925, translated by Samuel Shirley, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998, 49–59. Spinoza discusses the development of the imagination in Ethics.
- [2] Piet Mondrian, “Neoplasticism De Woning — De Straat — De Stad,” *i10*, vol. 1, no. 1 (January 1927), p. 17
- [3] Hans Janssen, L’Évolution de Piet Mondrian,” in *Mondrian Figuratif: Une histoire inconnue*, exh. cat., edited by Marianne Mathieu, Paris: Musée Marmottan Monet, 2019, pp. 25–26 and Hans L. C. Jaffé, *Piet Mondrian*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, inc., 1971, p. 48.
- [4] See Yves Alain Bois, “The De Stijl Idea,” in *Painting as Model*, Cambridge: MIT Books, 1990, pp. 101–121.
- [5] Piet Mondrian, *De Stijl*, “De Nieuwe Beelding in de schilderkunst,” *De Stijl*. vol. 1, no. 9, (July 1918), pp. 102–108. See also Tim Threlfall, *Piet Mondrian: His Life’s Work and Evolution, 1872–1944*, New York: Garland Publications, 1988, pp. 290–291.
- [6] See *Short Documentary DRIFT: Coded Nature*, Amsterdam: Xinix Films, 2018.
- [7] Piet Mondrian, “Natuurlijke en Abstracte Realiteit,” *De Stijl*, vol. 3, no. 9 (July 1920), p. 76.

Bibliography

- Bois, Yves Alain. *Painting as Model*. Cambridge: MIT Books, 1990.
- Jaffé, Hans L. C. *Piet Mondrian*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, inc., 1971.
- Mathieu, Marianne, ed. *Mondrian Figuratif: Une histoire inconnue*. exh. cat. Paris: Musée Marmottan Monet, 2019.
- Mondrian, Piet. “De Nieuwe Beelding in de schilderkunst,” *De Stijl*. vol. 1, no. 9, (July 1918), pp. 102–108.
- Mondrian, Piet. “Neoplasticism De Woning — De Straat — De Stad,” *i10*, vol. 1, no. 1 (January 1927), pp. 12–18.
- Mondrian, Piet. “Natuurlijke en Abstracte Realiteit.” *De Stijl*. vol. 3, no. 9 (July 1920), pp. 73–76.
- Short Documentary DRIFT: Coded Nature*. Amsterdam: Xinix Films, 2018.
- Spinoza, Baruch. *Theological-Political Treatise*. Gebhardt Edition, 1925. Translated by Samuel Shirley. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998.
- Threlfall, Tim. *Piet Mondrian: His Life’s Work and Evolution, 1872–1944*. New York: Garland Publications, 1988.