

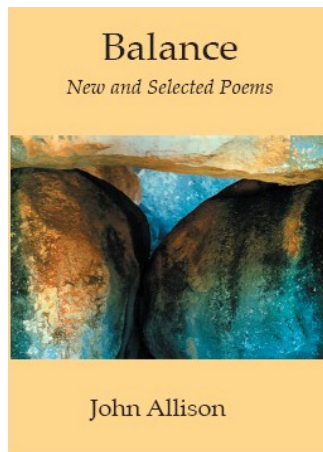
# *Painting Poems*

*by*  
*John Allison*

The advent of the abstract in painting during the period prior to and in the first years of World War One has always fascinated me. These poems are a response to specific paintings from that time: the sequence of trees by Piet Mondrian leading towards his abstract grids; the colour compositions of Robert Delaunay; the minimalist works of Kasimir Malevich.

The *poem-sequence* is a form that parallels the *series* in painting; they each parallel the living thinking that characterises contemplative consciousness.

*Mondrian, The Black Journal of Delaunay, and Kasimir's Canvas* incorporate phrases quoted from the artists' journals, among others purporting to be from those sources. This ambiguity regarding authentic quotation is employed most extremely in the spurious attribution of the epigraph to Delaunay, in which the neologism 'mage' is the present tense for an imagined verb 'to magic', therefore 'I (create, form through) magic the image'. In the Delaunay sequence the (authentic) epigraph by Apollinaire translates as 'I have given all to the sun / all but my shadow' (from *Les Fiançailles*).



## *Mondrian*

*Let us now perform the work of daylight.*  
~ Piet Mondrian

### 1. Red Tree (1909-10)

And darkness shall be prepared  
for the ascent.

Antennae  
tuned towards an opening cosmos,  
through a filigree of branch and twig  
the earth streams upward,  
suppliant,  
stretching  
up from nature towards vision,  
red into blue ...

*The universal towers far above us:*  
substance reaches out towards  
its origin:

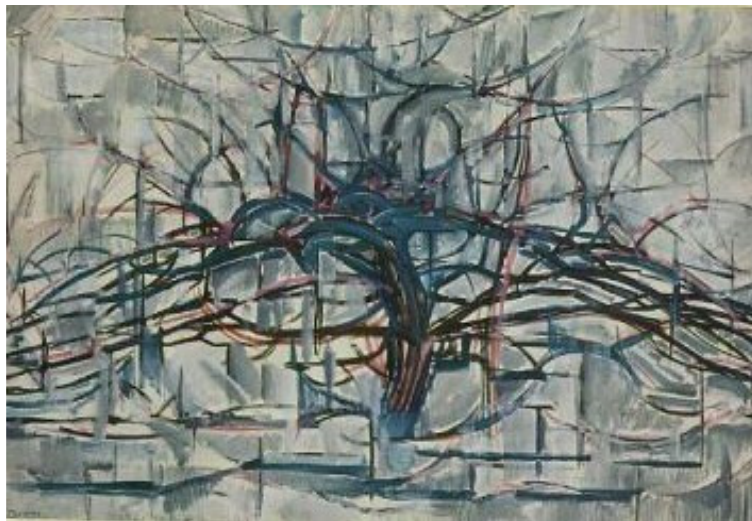
Tree-ness,  
breathing just beyond  
the Fibonacci sequence of  
its fingertips ...



## 2. Horizontal Tree (1911)

Immense quietude: the elm  
encloses all activity  
within its cantilevered arc.  
It weighs the air,  
sensing through the ganglia  
of twigs,  
                    between  
its many branchings,  
intricately-foliated light.

*Winter. Thought: an  
after-image of the universal  
still envisioned  
in this tree's cerebral  
cortex.*



### 3. Grey Tree (1912)

Exuberant  
divisions of space  
these forms become, emergent  
between luminous

scales of the air.  
Intensity of sky has pressed  
branches from another  
dimension, out past

overlapping zones  
of the north light's mosaic.  
Pulsate in its veins,  
idea is heroic.



#### 4. Flowering Apple Tree (1912)

*The tragic will be overcome.*

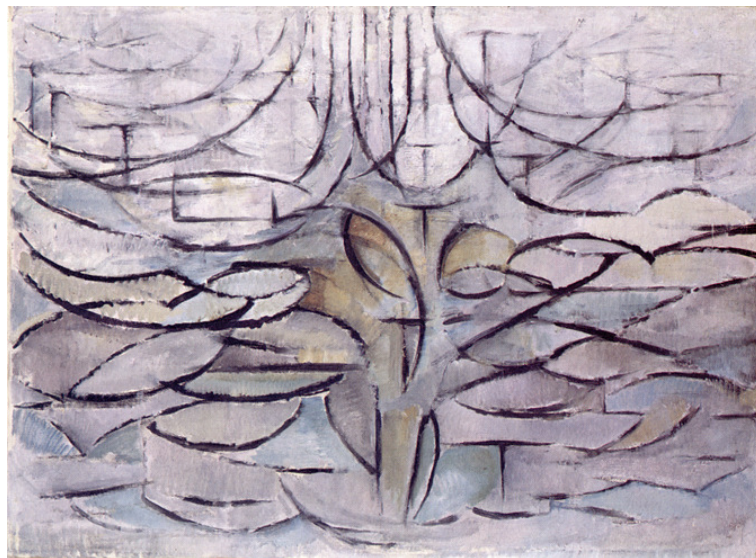
The fragrant cosmos of its blossom  
stuns my senses:  
upwelling of earth  
in a cloudburst of sunlight ...

*The surface of things gives delight;  
their inwardness, life.*

Between two worlds the tree  
refines these elements  
in its alembic:  
the tinted patterns of light,  
a tincture of the earth;  
  
distils original vision:  
the Tree.

Once it stood in Paradise,  
source of our division;  
now it is an icon of return.

*I cannot bear to see it.*



5. Oval Composition - Trees (1913)

a tree  
the not-tree  
leafing / unleafing  
light into scintillating  
forms / here / also not-here  
forever active in the foliage of  
consciousness in me : it is living  
*(this unity in single consciousness)*  
The annihilation of our tragic vision  
occurs when every di/vision is resolved  
in an act of art embodying the universal;  
this tree dissolves towards idea / as I -  
my senses emptied - see the cosmos tugging  
at the pigment \ becoming / more than I am  
: the intersection of a drama / Autumn now  
has come to the process of the paint : the  
forms, subjected to the restless flickering  
of my thought across the open surface of  
this canvas / perceiving leaf / not-leaf  
in the light of our human dis/position  
*(a determinate image of the universal)*  
I can no longer work this way : the  
abstract shall be abstract always  
and now in my future mind I see  
flat planes of primal colour  
delineated by the vertices  
and black the void  
of unthought  
light



## *The Black Journal of Robert Delaunay*

*Je mage l'image*

~ attributed to Robert Delaunay

*J'ai tout donné au soleil*

*tout sauf mon ombre*

~ Guillaume Apollinaire

1.

1912: The poet gives the Orphic word. And the veil is torn asunder, an open Mystery now before us: Light. All is light.

Paris, City of Light. Roof-line and gable are luminous intersections of thought; my mind a mordant, holding the image.

I paint the Windows sequence. Just to see through.



2.

1913: I shall understand the synchromatic movement of light, as it interacts in all its simultaneous contrasts.

The colour-wheel. Radiance, the universal gravity of light; this cosmos opening out before my eyes, inside my eyes.

I paint the Sun and Moon. The image being I-image.



3.

1914: I have lived in light. I have given all except my shadow. Ah, Sonia, what is left for me to paint? The shadows.

I stare out into the Paris night. Colours once spoke to me; but now I hear only the shrill tessitura of their silence.

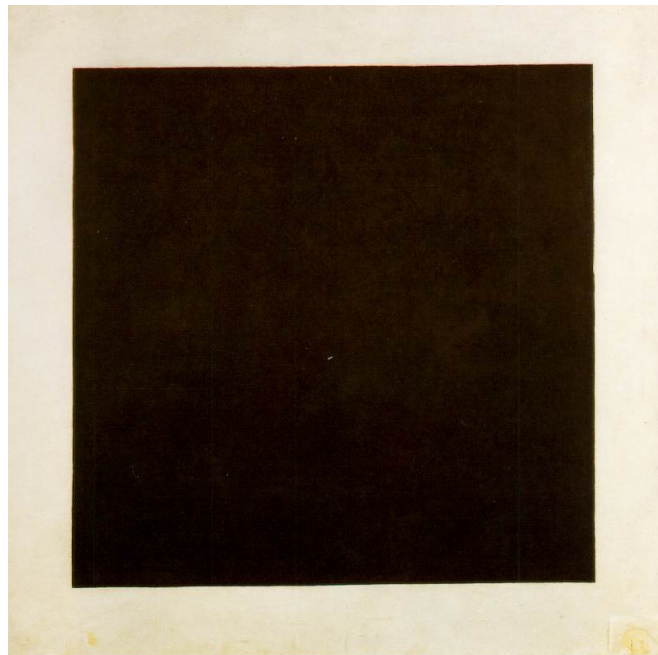
I paint furniture. The light that was in me eclipsed.

## *Kasimir's Canvas*

*A surface lives; it has been born*  
~ Kasimir Malevich

### 1. Black Square (1915)

Transforming myself  
in the zero of form,  
  
this pure sensation  
dark against the white  
  
dissolve of horizons,  
resonant upon that  
  
tabula rasa canvas is,  
a mind can be, is.



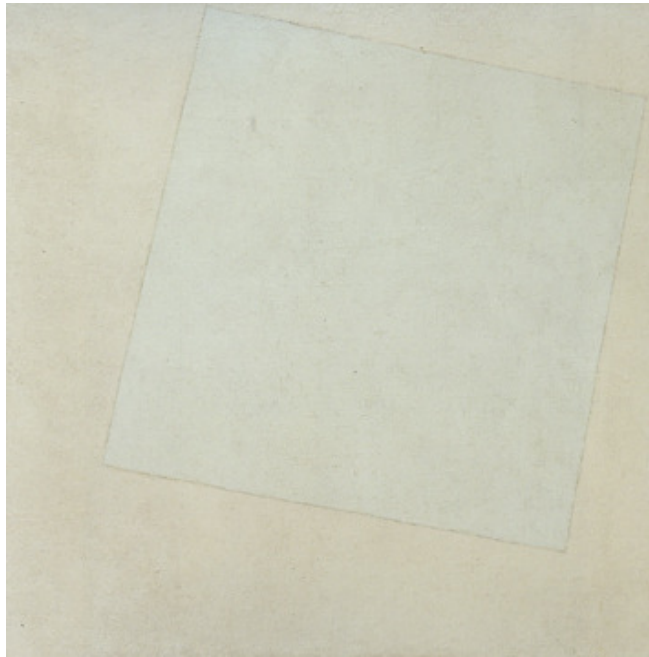
## 2. White on White (1918)

Nothing in itself  
but itself, awakening

sensation in that space  
between the thing

and thought, apotheosis  
of the non-object:

distinction without  
difference.



### 3. Suprematism (1915)

So the new is manifest;  
never have I been so much

the inside, sensing  
through these images

a solitude within  
the surface worked upon:

a single bare and frameless  
icon of our times.

