“The main concern is not to operate for eternity, but in eternity.”

from Wolfgang Paalen’s scrapbook Voyage nord-ouest, Canada/Alaska 1939
More than half a century ago Wolfgang Paalen worked and exhibited for some years together with his wife, Luchita, and their friends Gordon Onslow Ford, Jacqueline Johnson and Lee Mullican in Mill Valley. It was here in 1949 that he published his essay with the strange title *Dynaton*, in which he contemplated space and time, our changing image of the cosmos caused by the new physics, and what it meant for an artist to draw from a universe of the imaginable and no longer merely from the three known dimensions of the visible world. Jacqueline Johnson later wrote, “Paalen’s voice held the flashing presence of mystery where, as in childhood, it is central to all the threads of reality, of an identity to come, the clue of the concealed.”

In this way, *Dynaton* was formed as a small artists’ group. Onslow Ford consequently called him “the man of many possibilities.” For Lee he embodied, “the advent of the Lord of Prismatic Situations.” Jacqueline adored him as a, “man with a spark of nuclear presence.” And Luchita, his wife, called him “the most intriguing spirit possible, but the most impossible man to live with.” Each friend acknowledged his visionary genius. What nobody cared to acknowledge, was his melancholy, his manic depression. Luchita divorced him here in San Francisco to then marry his friend Lee Mullican. Paalen returned to Paris, and later moved on to Mexico, where he died in 1959 by his own hand. *Dynaton* was a short episode in the varied and adventurous life of this cultivated intellectual and simultaneously cheerful and sad artist, who was as unsuitable for everyday life as he was sensitive, who pursued the substance of life through his art. A man without a home or fixed destination, Paalen was born with an obsession with the transcendent and a gift for insight.

The San Francisco Museum of Art (the present-day San Francisco Museum of Modern Art) exhibited Paalen’s work along with the other members of *Dynaton* in a 1950 group show entitled *A New Vision*. Our gallery is honored to re-introduce this important artist to a new generation of American admirers through our Annex here in San Francisco.

Raman Frey and Wendi Norris
May 2007
In 1949 the great art critic Harold Rosenberg observed that the new Abstract Expressionist painters were lately inspired “by something they themselves have not yet seen.” How could legendary artists such as Motherwell, Pollock and Gorky have been inspired by the same premonition or intuition? The concept invoked by Rosenberg – a relationship between the usual indeterminacy facing the painter and the power of forms taking their being from the onlooker’s state of mind, as pictorial language, was in fact the most urgently discussed issue in 1940’s New York. Those millimeters between the visible and invisible turned out to be miles, whole dimensions leading to an entirely new idea of space. This space was supposed to reflect the open, implicit part of matter itself, what Aristotle had called kata tó dynaton (what potentially is). Implicitness and contingency became key terms in the lexicon of post-war painting, and these terms were introduced by one man alone, the painter and theorist Wolfgang Paalen. The agitated Paalen had been restlessly driving to set the stage for this artistic upheaval. He exhibited only two times in New York, in 1940 at the Julien Levy Gallery and in 1945 at Peggy Guggenheim’s Art of this Century, but his art magazine DYN would turn out to be the most influential messenger of ideas before the war had ended.

It was in Paris in January 1938, where we met the Viennese born painter Wolfgang Paalen for the first time, prominently visible in the Surrealist group that gathered around the French poet André Breton. Together with Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray and Salvador Dali he was among those responsible for the design of the International Exhibition of Surrealism in the Palais des Beaux Arts in Paris, where he installed one of the first environments beneath Duchamp’s ceiling of empty sacks of coal (Fig.1). It was composed of limp oak leaves and a water-filled pond with actual water lilies and reeds. The opening began at 10 p.m., and the visitors reached the intimidating grotto-like, mutated exhibition space using only the illumination afforded by flash lights distributed by Man Ray at the entrance. They passed initially through a corridor lined with remodelled shop-window dummies. Around midnight in the crazy gleam of the pale light cones, the visitors witnessed the dancing shimmer of a sparsely dressed girl who suddenly arose from the reeds, jumped on a bed, abruptly lapsed into hysterical shrieks - Dali’s idea -, and disappeared just as quickly. Due to the strange lighting, the exhibition’s topics functioned rather as a distillate of art, focusing predominantly on each work’s reciprocal relationship with the viewer and his own emotional receptivity. And when the excited visitors then started to illuminate themselves with their torches, the transformation was complete and each appeared as a work of art him or herself.

Here art functioned as a medium-like mirror of hallucinations: the doll Paalen decorated and Man Ray documented in photographs (Fig.2), with her silk scarf, the bat above her head, and the eerie leaf dress covered with mushrooms, resembles the scarcely visible, hovering and gliding totemistic fairy creatures of Paalen’s paintings. He exhibited these works, painted with ephemeral traces of candle smoke and oil, in the Surrealist gallery Renou et Colle in May of the same year (Fig.3). Breton and Duchamp eventually perceived and encouraged these paintings as a mysterious darkness, the understated warnings of a Romantic who appeared to refer to his feelings as his only objective. But perhaps they did not expect that this vision would emerge only shortly later as a large-scale project conceived by a highly reflective artist who evidently felt secure enough to give painting and its moral impact a completely new foundation.

In pre-war Paris these fumages brought Paalen a great amount of recognition. He had exhibitions and friendships with the most illustrious personalities of the time. But he was restless, addicted to constant movement, to new beginnings. Success to him was like a mirror of fake images leading nowhere. Truth lay by the wayside, hidden in presumptions. At length the threat of war and his premonitions of it presented a sufficient occasion for him to leave the Surrealist nucleus in Paris. The inclination came quickly and then evolved into plans to go to America. His pictures at the time were nurtured by a child’s incomprehensible feelings and he saw reality as a kind of screen or filter, made to coincide more or less with his inner images; he wanted to experience their value as a world-creating force and to express this process in his art. Paalen would, from that point forward, exist in the context of a world-maker, not as one who absorbs the world or even transforms it.

In May 1939, as the first of the Surrealists in Paris with thoughts of going into exile,
Wolfgang Paalen set course for the New World. Accompanied by his wife Alice and their friend Eva Sulzer, he boarded the ship to New York not long after the opening of his solo show at Peggy Guggenheim’s gallery in London. After encountering several intellectuals, artists and gallerists and paying a visit to the Museum of the American Indian in New York, he again departed, but not as planned to Mexico where he had been invited by the Mexican painter Frida Kahlo. As though drawn by an invisible force, he crossed the Canadian mainland by train and reached Vancouver in June. As Hitler and Stalin shook hands over their non-aggression pact in Europe, and as a consequence numerous American artists and intellectuals such as Mark Rothko and Adolph Gottlieb abandoned the Communist American Artists’ Congress in public protest, Paalen undertook an extensive expedition through the Indian reservations of the north-western coast together with his two companions. During his forays through the “dusk of British Columbia” he was overcome, as he said, by “the feeling of a long march through a seclusion, deeper than that of a forest, allowing us to observe the last rays of a culture with more gleaming strangeness in a nature of unconquerable wilderness,” this in a letter to Breton in Paris. Alaska had its cold lakes in the twilight of dawn, the woods of the north-western coast, dead trees in grey underwood overgrown with moss with crows resting on them. The place was a setting straight from the German Romantic painter Casper David Friedrich, but with Indian reminiscences, natural totem poles cutting through the infinite space like the calls of the buzzards (Fig.4,5,6). All these primal scenes reminded him of those that emerged from his childlike imagination. And beyond the coast, in the slow trains of the Canadian Railway Company he traveled from Winnipeg, Jasper, across the Skeena River to Prince Rupert, and from there across the Alexander Archipelago, the Kwakiutl Islands, up to Ketchikan and Sitka. With a seaplane he flew through the morning, the break of day, up to Juneau and Wrangell, and everywhere realized his own premonitions – He had already painted these scenes. His pictures and these landscapes seemed to him to have existed long before he invented and discovered them for himself. Childhood or the present moment, they were merely projections of a much older primordial landscape – something outside of linear time – dormant in the memory of the human race for millennia before he stumbled across them. Humanity itself seemed a mere knot in the huge weave of time. In his painting Paysage totemique, ancient footprints appear in an endless snowy desert, from whose depths tremendous fairy beings reveal themselves (Fig.7). Shivery lines in the shape of lightning. Standing before the painting we experience them with the eyes of someone who may have walked there an infinite time ago: a moment is paused that may only last a split second, and still opens the floodgates to eternity.

In Wrangell he made, with the help of a local tradesman, one of the most spectacular ethnological discoveries of the time: a larger-than-life mural that had served as the door-façade of the Tlingit Shakes-chief’s house depicting the semi-abstract image of a tremendous standing bear mother, onto whose head and limbs, faces with half human, half animal features were painted, and who fixed a challenge-
arrived in September 1939, shortly after the outbreak of World War II, Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera awaited him at the airport and accompanied him to Coyotla, where he initially settled down in quite symbolic proximity to the houses of Frida Kahlo and the most important authority of academic socialism, Leon Trotsky (Fig.9). In 1940 Paalen opened a large Surrealist exhibition in the new spaces of the Galeria de Arte Mexicano, which he had organized together with the Peruvian poet César Moro and Breton, who remained in Paris for the moment (Fig.10). In August of the same year, Trotsky was killed with an ice pick in a repeated assassination attempt ordered by Stalin. Paalen retreated more and more into his newly built studio in San Angel, where he had installed the monstrously inviting bear on the back wall of the high studio space. In front of it hung a huge stuffed whale penis that he had acquired – eventually concealed from the eyes of the ladies - in Wrangell as well (Fig.11). In this archetypally arranged female-male installation, the bear mother apparently assumed the part of the oracle-sphinx, and seemed to inspire his mind in every sense. Since his early youth, Paalen had taken an interest in maternal religions, and when in 1943 in his great essay Totem Art he attempted to shake Sigmund Freud’s entire construct of totemism, the horror of incest and father-murder, the bear mother was standing behind Paalen’s argumentation as the silent partner in his dialogue. From his workplace, in front of this compellingly alien artwork, he passed his ideas with an adventurous wing from totemism to cubism on to the young painters and sculptors in New York in 1944: “Nothing will ever be more moving than the intimate conversation between man and animal in the totemic dawn, greater than the theocratic solarization of Egypt, (...) more audacious than Greek art, more ardent than the glacial fire of the Byzantine mosaics. (...) And the pure Cubist constel-

_for the moment (Fig.10). Using her paws, she raised herself like a threatening monster, but nonetheless received her visitors with a laughing face, spreading her legs and exposing her open womb. Paalen was impelled to buy this work of intriguing ambivalence. He had it sent to Mexico ahead of himself, where he then

lations will shine always for those who leave for an expanse, whose maps are still to be made, whose depths are still to be sounded: the new space.”

After his first solo show at New York’s Julien Levy Gallery, on which occasion the American artists William Baziotes, Jackson Pollock, Adolphe Gottlieb, Barnett Newman and Robert Motherwell saw Paalen’s fumages painted in Paris for the first time, he retreated more and more into solitude in Mexico. “He writes, he paints without intermission, he reads instead of sleeping and still has the feeling of not achieving anything, he has crisis of terrible misery and melancholy, cruel doubts about what he is doing – and what remains to be done,” wrote his anxious wife Alice to Breton in New York. In the spring of 1942 the amazed and surprised New York art world witnessed the result of this work – the art journal DYV (derived from the Greek Dynaton, meaning that which is possible) (Fig.12). In its first issue Paalen publicly announced to his friend Breton his Farewell to Surrealism. In the second issue he scandalized his former advocate again by publishing a Survey on Dialectical Materialism and an article with the provocative title The Dialectical Gospel. The survey consisted of a set of three questions sent to two dozen outstanding scholars and writers by his editorial department, and the statements of those who answered. In a provocative and straightforward way Paalen enquired after the academic validity of the philosophy of Marx and Engels, about the outcome of their science and the universal applicability of its logical laws. Half of the addressees sent a reply, amongst them Albert Einstein, Clement Greenberg, Pierre Mabille and the English Philosopher Bertrand Russel. The majority answered all of the questions with a decided if sometimes tentatively regretful No. Far from the events in Oxford, only Bertrand Russel dared to express straightforwardly what everyone may have been thinking: “I think the metaphysics of both Hegel and Marx plain nonsense - Marx’s claim to be ‘science’ is no more justified than Mary Baker Eddy’s.” However, the most conspicuous of those who did not answer was, as was to be expected, André Breton.

For a long time now, the table, the tree, the ground under his feet had been to Paalen accumulations of wildly swirling particles allowing him, considered on a microphysical level, to reach deep into and through them. And his paintings reflect a dream world of disintegrating matter with fibrous figures shooting into great heights before the eye and an earth shattering like ice in front of the viewer. Paalen’s great fumages from 1938, like Taches solaires (Cat. #11), demonstrate the shock of a sudden awakening, and they are studies of various kinds of twilight, of a pre-world,
the presumption being that matter consists of light grown heavy and that objects are, in reality, swollen shadows filling the room like liquid gas. They are reflections of the surface of the daydreaming eye, as if the eye itself would look with a powerful macrolens onto solid matter itself, out of which all phenomena appear. These fum- ages evoke a flamy play of smoke-traces, of lines, painted with the back of the brush into the wet blue, green and red amorphic forms, as if painting were nothing more than a resonance of inner apparitions and the light would come from behind them to warn us that all we witness is also concealing the unrealized, the thinkable, the possible.

In spite of all these obvious intentions in his work, he wanted at this point to get to the bottom of the obstinacy inherent in materialist concepts of being, because he knew that new principles of thought would also generate a new form of art, an art that no longer forced the individual into the service of a sublime idea. But this whole debate went decidedly too far for Breton. Breton continued to express faith in Hegel and Marx to whom all possibili- ties were immediately manifest and were therefore in the end nothing more than countable elements of nature, and in the prefence of Breton’s art magazine VVV it was categorically argued: We reject the lie of an open Surrealism, in which anything is possible.\(^9\)

Paalen was an altogether singular char- acter. He seemed predestined to take advantage of the atmosphere of change, of the limitless possibilities in New York, from his remote exile in Mexico. His aim was to initiate nothing less than a tabula rasa, a complete revision of Modernism, to end the searing paralysis controlling artists at the end of the 1930’s. Via his journal published in Mexico between 1942 and 1944 with a total of 5 issues he temporar- ily became the most influential art theorist during the war and in his work as editor had the opportunity to fully develop his intelectual abilities. In seven large essays and countless smaller articles and reviews he discussed in detail all the current hot topics that also concerned the young art- ists in New York, and in response received their full attention. With the exception of Totem Art, all essays were later repub- lished under the title Form and Sense by Robert Motherwell in New York.

This was the first issue of the series of writings titled Problems of Contemporary Art in which the first papers of the later Ab- stract Expressionists were also published, similar to the groundbreaking Possibili- ties, published shortly thereafter (Fig.13). Paalen’s short sojourns in New York and the two solo exhibitions with Julien Levy in 1940 and Peggy Guggenheim in 1945 made him known as a painter in artists’ circles, however his predominant absence from the New York art scene and the wide reception of DYN and Form and Sense fostered his image as a kind of intellectual secret agent primarily exerting indirect influence on events through his intensely discussed ideas. Furthermore, his separa- tion from Breton over the delicate debate on principles concerning Marxism made it easier for the young American artists to avoid acknowledging Paalen. The knowl- edge was dawning to this Ur-American generation, that self-determination, the articulation of ideas accredited to each of them, would be crucial for the develop- ment of each of their independent careers. Robert Motherwell, who spent several months with Paalen in Mexico in 1941 and 1943, and communicated almost weekly with him in letters between 1942 and 1945, ardently publicized his ideas in New York until 1948, very quickly forgetting how much he owed the Austrian during his very successful period in the 1950’s.\(^{11}\) The fact that Paalen’s ideas are accepted today by almost every historian as influential, if not fundamental to the nimbuses of theories dominating the climate in New York dur- ing the 1940’s, merely emphasizes their poignant, resoluteness and clarity, and this late recognition remains in retrospect an impressive document of the vast effect of these ideas on the creative atmosphere of an entire era. But as a person he seems nevertheless a paintre maudit, a willingly forgotten issue. Who was he, what drove him?

In pre-war Paris artists like Paalen, acting together with writers, buyers and sellers of primitive art, advisors and organizers of exhibitions and as amateur philosophers, were especially respected and welcome (Fig.14). And so Breton took a great inter- est in the young Paalen not only because of his aristocratic air, but also because of his unusual and impressive verbal skills with which he could objectify the violent inner convulsions of his crystalline mind. With a predisposition towards manic depression Paalen could be overcome by an exuberant enthusiasm and was able to create a sudden spirit of elation in the circle of his friends just as quickly as he could lapse into bottomless sadness or totally crush his respective opponent with
Paalen was a man from Central Europe, without a home, but with an eccentric pedigree consisting of Jewish parvenu nobility, Viennese and Berlin bohemia and German romanticism. He was burdened with one significant real life issue, art, and dealing with this issue seems to have kept him alive. His father, a successful Jewish tradesman and impresario, was originally amongst the most distinguished men of the declining KK Monarchy and the dazzling but short heyday of Berlin in the Twenties (Fig.15). His father likely suffered impoverishment and escape from the Nazis, and finally mental derangement and suicide. At the age of 16, Wolfgang watched as his younger brother Hans Peter shot himself in the library. Literary traces of the second youngest brother Rainer Gustav are lost, as are those of his family, in Berlin in 1942. Paalen met his brother only one last time before the war and later gives a vivid account of the Kantian precision with which during this encounter he remembers the ghost apparitions of their childhood in the parents’ manor in Silesia. Paalen’s own painting was, from the beginning, a polygot space of apparitions, a search for resonances apt to take the particular forms and appearances of the perceptions of children, and charged by a strange, Romantic-Existentialist hope. He never overcame the loss of his brother, and inwardly he was confined by the guilt of the survivor. His childhood traumas, experiences, joys, fears and visions, remained oppressively present throughout his life. In the 1940’s, he told his assistant Edward Renouf: “My whole life is, to find my brother again”14, and this search meant something like a recovery of that special ability to see, believed to be lost, on which an entire world depended.

Some of his male companions in spiritual affairs might have fulfilled this search for a deep brotherly exchange of ideas, positions and visual experiences better than others. So did, in the beginning, Robert Motherwell. During the loose collaboration with DYN, the philosophy graduate Motherwell lobbied in turn for several American contemporaries, first and foremost for Baziotes, Holtzman and Pollock, whose pictures were published in DYN 6 in 1944 for the first time ever. Up to the mid-forties, Motherwell was primarily associated with the European Surrealists and only established a close relationship with Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman in 1945. The so-called Guggenheim Circle of the Surrealists, devoted to intense discussion of all Surrealist and counter-Surrealist theories, gained an important addition with the young Americans, and Motherwell seemed to have functioned as Paalen’s mouthpiece while Paalen was absent in Mexico. During these discussions, an old schism between Matta and Paalen concerning the concept of space deepened. The Chilean painter Roberto Matta joined Breton as his youngest recruit in 1937 and, right from the start, seemed to compete with Paalen, who had played the part of the favored and most promising Benjamin before Matta’s arrival. In New York these dynamics came up again and would figure into Surrealism’s most interesting new developments, while the art of the other young Surrealists emanated a complacent contentedness, resting close to the older masters’ laurels. Even in exile little new was produced at first, due also to a general change of attitude among the Surrealists. Breton must have been all the more disappointed when Matta increasingly turned to the young Americans, as did Paalen, after the First Papers of Surrealism – an exhibition conceived by Marcel Duchamp in the autumn of 1942, the first collective show bringing together Surrealists and artists such as Baziotes, David Hare and Motherwell. The third issue of Paalen’s DYN had already been published by this time, encouraging the busy and agile Matta in his plans for an art magazine of his own. While these plans came to nothing, Matta did hold a workshop lasting several weeks in which he tried to teach Pollock, Lee Krasner, Motherwell and Baziotes his views on automatism. However, the mere demonstration of Surrealist techniques was already well known – the American artists had all made their own experiments with similar techniques, and when Matta turned to Paalen’s fumage after demonstrating frottage and decalco-
them Baziotes and Pollock, had seen Paalen’s first exhibition with Julian Levy in 1940. To them the change of style must have been a great surprise. Paintings such as Les premiers spaciales (Fig.16) were set entirely in a new pictorial space, because they concentrated on pictorially immanent means: Rhythm, light and colour. They transformed the rhythmical appearance of the fumage imprints into a neo-Cubist rhythm, which Paalen then compared with the fugue and jazz, through a mosaic-like fracture and complementary contrasts. He wanted to create the atmosphere of a deeply moving, gripping encounter with beings that themselves remained silent. There is no action, no metamorphosis in them and nothing happens with them in the space. The picture itself is the being, or a frozen resonance of it. Precisely because of this total silence, every topical expectation put to these pictures is reflected as a question. In a cartoon published by Ad Reinhardt in the forties, Paalen’s suggestion from Form and Sense was repeated: “Paintings no longer represent; it is no longer the task of art to answer naive questions. Today it has become the role of the painting to look at the spectator and ask him: what do you represent?” and thereby conveyed the new direction that painters were expected to follow (Fig.17).

Paalen understood his Cosmogones as a kind of pictorial version of the ancient choros tragicos, the tragic chorus, conceived in Nietzsche’s writing on The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music. It was the deepest existential foundation of reality in which he was interested. The anonymous person imparts through the encounter with the idea of what it means to be. The Cosmogones are supposed to present themselves, they are not meant to narrate or declare anything, but rather appear and disappear like a hallucination in order to align the viewer towards the event that is essential to him, nobody except the self can know. This empathetic impact proved to be interesting to the Americans. They grasped particularly a new matrix of a radical textual implicitness and a strong moral demand on the viewer. Although it became common practice after 1947, until then, nobody had placed so much responsibility on the viewer as Paalen did with his rhetoric and pictorial language.

During these years, Paalen visited New York many times, for instance to install his exhibition at Peggy Guggenheim’s gallery Art of this Century, which opened on April 17, 1945 immediately following Pollock’s second show. Paalen remained with his second wife Luchita as a guest of the Motherwell’s, and hoped to found his own group with his friend. That winter Baziotes, Motherwell and Rothko all had their first solo shows at Guggenheim’s gallery. Rothko’s show with figurative-Surrealistic pictures had closed shortly before, and he was beginning to move conceptually toward a phase in which, according to his biographer, “both self and painting are now fields of possibilities - an effect conveyed (...) by the creation of protein, indeterminate shapes whose multiplicity is let be.”

Paalen’s ideas can today be rediscovered in statements made by the American artists in the first and only issue of the magazine Possibilities, published by Motherwell and Harold Rosenberg in continuative analogy to DYV in the winter of 1947/48 in New York. In the foreword the editors asserted the “greatest trust in pure possibility” and pointed out the necessity to radically widen the concept of art in times of political depression. To Willem de Kooning, the concept of the possible implied “a wonderful uncertain atmosphere”. In the same issue, Rothko wrote in his text The Romantics were prompted: “(...) In the work of art which has inspired him, the artist has caught a glimpse of not yet realized possibilities, he has become aware of the mythological depths only a fraction of whose rich store has been so far revealed, and which he dares to think a keener glance might yet embrace in its totality (...).” This applied especially to Jackson Pollock’s first drip paintings, of which Steven Naifeh said in his Pollock biography: “What seemed static to most people meant a veil of perspectives and possibilities for Jackson’s hyperactive imagination.

Andreas Neufert is an art historian, writer and curator based in Berlin. He published an intellectual biography and catalogue raisonné on Wolfgang Paalen “Im Inneren des Wals, Vienna (Springer) 1999” and runs a semi-public archive with various activities linked to the intellectual legacy of this artist and thinker (www.paalen-archiv.com)
Footnotes


2. Wolfgang Paalen, letter to André Breton, May 1939, Paris Bibliothèque Douzet.

3. In his diaries of 1939 Paalen speaks of an “undefinable object, which I first thought to be a piece of a chock. (...) He (the tradesman) later reveals it as whale penis, what he couldn’t have said to me in presence of the ladies (sic).” Wolfgang Paalen, *Voyage Nord-Ouest*, published in: *Pléne Marge* No.20, Paris, December 1994, p.29


6. Letter from Alice Rahon to André Breton, Mexico 1941, Paris, Bibliothèque Douzet


9. op.cit., p.52


11. In a letter to the author dated October 16, 1986 Robert Motherwell gives the impression that he knew Paalen only briefly, that they had a gentleman’s agreement not to look and talk about their paintings and to destroy the letters they had written to each other during the forties. He reported that his German assistant “had destroyed the letters (of Paalen) without my authorization. Without them my memory of the period is rather dim...” In a letter to Gordon Onslow Ford, dated October 2, 1984 Motherwell expresses his “hope your Paalen file contain no letters by me,” and refers to the same agreement, (letters in Paalen Archive Berlin and Lucid Art Foundation Inverness). Their close collaboration throughout these years is documented in an undated fragmentary letter of Paalen’s, which miraculously survived the mutual “gentleman’s agreement” in Motherwell’s estate (Dedalus Foundation New York) referring to various corrections in Paalen’s book *Form and Sense*, which Motherwell published as the first in the *Problems of Contemporary Art* series.

12. In remembrance of a party in New York in 1940, Ethel Baziotes said in an interview with Amy Winter in 1990, “I will never forget the way he appeared (...) and I feel Paalen and Lawrence are the same kind of men, tremendously unique, with very intense and private visions.” in: Amy Winter, *Wolfgang Paalen, DYN and the American Avantgarde of the 40’s*, p.49f.

13. Wolfgang Paalen, *‘Paysage totémique’* (III), *DYN* 3, 1942, p.27.


16. cit.a. Amy Winter, op.cit., p.579

17. cit.a. Amy Winter, op.cit., p.579

18. cit.a. Steven Naifeh, op.cit., p.534


23. *Mark Rothko, The Romantics were prompted...*, in: *Possibilities I*, New York 1947, p.84, 91

24. Steven Naifeh, op.cit., p.537

Scene from Dostoyevsky’s novel The Brothers Karamazov

This is an early, highly expressive work from Paalen’s Berlin period. The last scene of Dostoyevsky’s famous novel inspired this steady pen and ink drawing. The mystic Staretz Sossima speaks to the family about the guilt of the three brothers in their father Karamazov’s death. Questions about God’s existence, the meaning of sin and the various characters’ dealings with these themes fill almost every page of the novel. Dostoyevsky’s opulent ideas and harsh realism describe the complex emotions and thoughts of his characters, outlined in the present drawing by Paalen. Passages in the book are often described as the first modern example of the pulsating space between text and reader. The reader would forget the author and become absorbed in identifying with the characters, the book successfully invoking the reader’s own contemplative yearnings. If this drawing marks the beginning of our exhibition, then it also hints at the origin of the modern implicit space in Dostoyevsky’s literature, in which Paalen developed great interest in his youth. The drawing falls into a period, when Paalen himself had to fight with questions of guilt after witnessing his brother’s sudden suicide.

Untitled (La offerte II)

Since 1932 Paalen explores a biomorphic, semi-abstract language. The paintings, watercolors and drawings of this period, try to find a new entry point into the debate around the pure, absolute form, predominateing in the purist discourses around Mondrian. They show a hazy world of ambiguous forms inviting the eye to think about their possible meanings. Paalen remained committed to the reality of painting without any symbolisms. Nevertheless, the work of this period evokes outlandish archaic forms that echo a primeval world between what is possible and what is real, a reality in which the beheld is changed, because and in relation to how it is being seen. Paalen also reacted verbally and vehemently against the dogmas of non-figurative painting in the Abstraction-Creation group, which had defined itself under the guidance of Piet Mondrian and Theo van Doesburg in ever sharper antagonism to Surrealism. And the ideas Paalen published in 1935, with an inquiry into the published work of Christian Zervos, resembles similar writings by Willem de Kooning, who derided the comfort of pure forms in a talk given in the Museum of Modern Art in 1952.

black ink on folded paper
25 x 35 cm (9 3/4 x 13 3/4 in)
signed Paalen (lower right)
lower left inscribed: Die unwirkliche Zusammenkunft. Karamassoff beim Staretz Sossima. Illustrationsentwurf zu Dostojewskis “Karamassoff” (The unreal meeting with Staretz Sossima, Draft for an illustration of Dostojewskijs “Karamassoff”)
executed ca. 1922

Provenance:
Charlotte Weiler, Berlin; Private Collection, Germany

Literature:
Andreas Neufert, Wolfgang Paalen, Im Inneren des Wals, Wien/New York (Springer) 1999, reproduced on page 4

This is an early, highly expressive work from Paalen’s Berlin period. The last scene of Dostoyevsky’s famous novel inspired this steady pen and ink drawing. The mystic Staretz Sossima speaks to the family about the guilt of the three brothers in their father Karamazov’s death. Questions about God’s existence, the meaning of sin and the various characters’ dealings with these themes fill almost every page of the novel. Dostoyevsky’s opulent ideas and harsh realism describe the complex emotions and thoughts of his characters, outlined in the present drawing by Paalen. Passages in the book are often described as the first modern example of the pulsating space between text and reader. The reader would forget the author and become absorbed in identifying with the characters, the book successfully invoking the reader’s own contemplative yearnings. If this drawing marks the beginning of our exhibition, then it also hints at the origin of the modern implicit space in Dostoyevsky’s literature, in which Paalen developed great interest in his youth. The drawing falls into a period, when Paalen himself had to fight with questions of guilt after witnessing his brother’s sudden suicide.

oil/tempera on cardboard
18 x 29 cm (7 x 11 1/2 in)
signed (upper right) Paalen, verso
title and dedication à Jean Arp bien amicalement, Paalen 1933
executed in 1933

Provenance:
Hans Arp, Paris; Hans Reichel, Munich; Von König collection, Starnberg; Private Collection, Berlin

Exhibition:
Museum Moderner Kunst - Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna 1993
Museo de Arte Contemporaneo Alvar y Carmen T. Carrillo Gil, Mexico City 1994
Galerie Döbele, Dresden 2001
Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin 2005
Wilhelm Hack Museum, Ludwigshafen am Rhein 2007/2008 (promised loan)

Literature:
Catalogue, Wolfgang Paalen Retrospectiva, Mexico 1994, p. 90 (illustrated in color)
Andreas Neufert, Wolfgang Paalen - Im Inneren des Wals, Vienna/New York (Springer) 1999, p. 58 (illustrated in color), Catalogue Raisonné no. 33.02, illustrated p. 279
Catalogue, Felons, curated by Alan Phelan, Dublin 2005 (illustrated)
Catalogue, Der Surrealismus - ein Traum, Ludwigshafen am Rhein 2008 (not printed yet)

Since 1932 Paalen explores a biomorphic, semi-abstract language. The paintings, watercolors and drawings of this period, try to find a new entry point into the debate around the pure, absolute form, predominating in the purist discourses around Mondrian. They show a hazy world of ambiguous forms inviting the eye to think about their possible meanings. Paalen remained committed to the reality of painting without any symbolisms. Nevertheless, the work of this period evokes outlandish archaic forms that echo a primeval world between what is possible and what is real, a reality in which the beheld is changed, because and in relation to how it is being seen. Paalen also reacted verbally and vehemently against the dogmas of non-figurative painting in the Abstraction-Creation group, which had defined itself under the guidance of Piet Mondrian and Theo van Doesburg in ever sharper antagonism to Surrealism. And the ideas Paalen published in 1935, with an inquiry into the published work of Christian Zervos, resembles similar writings by Willem de Kooning, who derided the comfort of pure forms in a talk given in the Museum of Modern Art in 1952.
Scene from Dostoevsky’s novel The Brothers Karamazov  AN 22.01

Untitled (La offerte II)  AN 33.02
Untitled

watercolor on paper
23 x 31 cm (9 x 12 in.)
signed Paalen (lower right)
executed in 1933

Paalen Archiv No. P33.17

Provenance:
Geo Dupin, Paris; Private Collection, Germany

Exhibition:
Galerie Döbele, Dresden 2001
Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin 2005

Literature:
Catalogue, Felons, cur. by Alan Phelan, Dublin 2005 (illustrated)

In this drawing Paalen dashes off the philosophical quintessence of the visual language that preoccupied him between 1932 and 1934: there is no such a thing as an image without the thinking viewer. In point of fact, the image is only thinkable. The viewer can visualize something highly personal by means of its amorphous structure. The eyes of what appear to be faces can tip over to assume those of fish, fish that are nothing more than open loops, should we care to see faces again. These shapes point at a possible issue within the logic of pictorial language, the idea that thought itself is the repository for all the possibilities of pictorial depictions. The consequence seems simple, but is serious for the aesthetics of the following epoch: The possible does not have to be justified by the known.

1. This drawing was made simultaneously with Paalen’s series called Phantoms (Catalogue Raisonné 33.18 – 20), in which Paalen experiments with cork and clay as plastic pictorial means, expanding his growing vocabulary of shapes into three-dimensional space.

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Untitled

watercolor on paper
23 x 31 cm (9 x 12 in.)
signed Paalen (lower right)
executed in 1933

Paalen Archiv No. 33.22

Provenance:
Geo Dupin, Paris; Private Collection, Germany

Exhibition:
Galerie Döbele, Dresden 2001
Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin 2005

Literature:
Catalogue, Felons, cur. by Alan Phelan, Dublin 2005 (illustrated)

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Untitled

pencil on paper
23 x 31 cm (9 x 12 in.)
signed Paalen (lower right)
executed in 1933

Paalen Archiv No. P33.18

Provenance:
Geo Dupin, Paris; Private Collection, Germany

Exhibition:
Galerie Döbele, Dresden 2001
Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin 2005

Literature:
Catalogue, Felons, cur. by Alan Phelan, Dublin 2005 (illustrated)

In this drawing Paalen dashes off the philosophical quintessence of the visual language that preoccupied him between 1932 and 1934: there is no such a thing as an image without the thinking viewer. In point of fact, the image is only thinkable. The viewer can visualize something highly personal by means of its amorphous structure. The eyes of what appear to be faces can tip over to assume those of fish, fish that are nothing more than open loops, should we care to see faces again. These shapes point at a possible issue within the logic of pictorial language, the idea that thought itself is the repository for all the possibilities of pictorial depictions. The consequence seems simple, but is serious for the aesthetics of the following epoch: The possible does not have to be justified by the known.

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Paysage totémique

Oil on cardboard mounted on a board covered with red textile
27 x 16 cm (picture); 41 x 28 cm (board)
(10 1/2 x 6 1/4 in. (picture); 16 x 3 3/4 in. (board))
executed in 1937
Paalen Archiv No. 37.02

Provenance:
Private Collection, Paris

Literature:
Andreas Neufert, Wolfgang Paalen - Im Inneren des Wals, Vienna/New York (Springer) 1999, Catalogue Raisonné no. 37.02, p. 293 (ill.)

After his return from a voyage to Prague, Bohemia, and Silesia in the summer 1937, Paalen worked on illustrations for the program for Alfred Jarry’s, Ubu Enchaîne in the Théâtre de la Comédie Paris and some drawings for F.X. Fornèret’s, Le Diamant de L’Herbe. In this context, some little oil paintings without fumage were produced, such as the present work Paysage totémique. This small painting shows the genesis of the fairy-like figures of Paalen’s developing “soul-scapes” inspired by his childhood experiences with hallucinations, present also in Les Étrangers (1937).

Vol de moustiques (fumage)

Black and white ink/fumage on paper
28 x 21 cm (10 3/4 x 8 1/2 in.)
signed with initials WP (lower right)
executed in 1938
Paalen Archiv No. 38.17

Provenance:
Isabel Marin de Paalen, Mexico City; Private Collection, Germany

Exhibition:
Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin 2005

Literature:
Catalogue, Felons, cur. by Alan Phelan, Dublin 2005 (illustrated)

Fumages are painted expressions of the artist’s imagination initiated and inspired by candle smoke. These “smoke-marks” also determined Paalen’s most important works of this period in terms of visual language and iconography. How deeply this procedure was connected to his spirit by other Surrealists is demonstrated in Gordon Onslow Ford’s remembrance of his first meeting with Paalen in Café Deux Magots in Paris: “He was very much at ease, and was always in the thick of the conversation, but he appeared to me, in spite of his vitality, to be ethereal as if part of him were winging about elsewhere. To visit Paalen’s studio at that time, I have the memory of passing through long dingy corridors as in a dream. The studio itself seemed misty and the ceiling was far away. On the easel and against the walls were fumages.”

His habitation was like a mirror of his mind: by use of fumage, Paalen confirmed for himself the myths of his Kafkaesque spirit, which longed to navigate the imponderable pathways of thought itself.

Already in 1936, Paalen contributed a work called simply Drawing, done with a candle (Dessin, fait avec un bougie) to the International Exhibition of Surrealism in London’s New Burlington Galleries. Autonomous fumages, either on paper or on canvas with wet oil grounding, stand then next to Paalen’s great oil paintings, in which fumage initiates the complex painted structures until the mid 1940’s. In Paalen’s later work, fumage became more and more a means of its own, employed with skill and intention, like painting with a brush.

Paysage totémique AN 37.02

Vol de moustiques (fumage) AN 37.18
Untitled (fumage-encrage)

In 1938, Paalen experimented with another informal automatist technique, mechanically produced ink drawings called Encrages. Breton wrote about them in 1939: "Paalen allows colored ink to flow on a white paper, exposing it then to quick rotations and other proceedings to disburse the color. Thus for example he blows from different sides onto it. With this technique he spawns gestalts scintillating in all the colors of hummingbirds which are artfully joined with their nests."1

1. Some of these ink drawings appeared under the label Encres automatiques in his one-man show at Galerie Guggenheim-Jeune in London in 1939. Various examples were gifted to important institutions, including one in the Museum of Modern Art, New York. The present work is the only known example combining fumage and encrage. Both techniques are related by the detachment of direct contact between the supporting foundation and the artist’s hand and the fast and unpredictable production of the work with its sudden swaying changes; as distinguished from the gentle ferment-like fumage, the encrage shows dense color structures, melting into tremulous linear shapes, similar to the zoomorphic structures of Paalen’s totemic landscapes.

L’autophage (fulgurites)

Even in such a compact format, by overlapping ephemeral planes of translucent smoke with a quasi-Cubist three dimensional space, an image is manifested. The allusion to the sun or a lunar eclipse and cosmic fog in the title does nothing to obscure that the present work is dominated by the flickering rhythm of the smokes’ marks. These marks continuously drive the eye back to surface of the composition, emphasizing the lack of three dimensional space, which is the hallmark of Analytic Cubism.
Ciel de pieuvre

oil/fumage on canvas
97 x 130 cm (38 1/4 x 51 1/4 in.)
verso signed with initials, dated and
titled WP 38 Ciel de Pieuvre
executed in 1938

Paalen Archiv No. 38.21

Provenance:
Onslow-Ford Collection, Inverness;
Private Collection, Berlin

Exhibition:
Galerie Renou et Colle, Paris 1938
Galerie Guggenheim Jeune, London 1939
Julien Levy Gallery, New York 1940
Museum Moderner Kunst - Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna 1993
Museo de Arte Contemporaneo Alvar y Carmen T. Carrillo Gil, Mexico City 1994
Galerie Döbele, Dresden 2001

Literature:
Catalogue, Paalen, Galerie Renou et Colle, Paris 1938 (no. 17)
Catalogue, Paalen, Galerie Guggenheim Jeune, London 1939 (no. 16)
La Gazeta No. 66, Mexico 1960 (illustrated)
Día Rodriguez Pampolini, El Surrealismo y el Arte Fantástico de México, Mexico (Instituto de Investigaciones Esteticas UNAM) 1969, No. 42 (illustrated)
Süddeutsche Zeitung Nr. 246, München 29./30. Oktober 1993, p. 14 (illustrated)
Kunst und Kultur Wien, 24, September 1993, p. 14 (illustrated)
Catalogue, Wolfgang Paalen Retrospectiva, Mexico 1994, p. 119 (illustrated in color)
Andreas Neufert, Wolfgang Paalen - Im Inneren des Wals, Vienna/New York (Springer) 1999, p. 131 and cover page detail (illustrated in color), Catalogue Raisonnè no. 38.21, illustrated p. 304
Andreas Neufert, Wolfgang Paalen, The painter as Thinker and Visionary, Edition Galerie Doebale, Dresden 2001, p. 58 (illustrated in color)
Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Benjamin Buchloh, Art since 1900, London (Thames & Hudson), p. 292 (illustrated in color)
Elio Graziani (ed.), Arte d'al 1900, Milano (Zanichelli) 2006, p. 7 and 292. (illustrated in color)
A. W. Bateman; P. Fonagy, Psychotherapie der Borderline-Persönlichkeitsstörung.

Bibliothek der Psychoanalyse, Psychosozial-Verlag/Haland & Wirth (Gießen) 2007, cover page (illustrated in color)
Catalogue, Der Surrealismus - ein Traum, Ludwigshafen am Rhein 2008 (not yet printed)

In 1938 as one of the youngest members of the Surrealist group in Paris, Paalen stood at the zenith of his recognition. André Breton wrote the foreword to his one-man show at Renou et Colle’s gallery and the English critic Herbert Read noted: “The paintings of Wolfgang Paalen are pri-mordial: the senses break through the wall which divides the new-born vision from realty... Every great artist invents a new world: but these new worlds reveal the pristine experiences of the human race.”

Not long after, these same paintings would also contribute to Paalen’s fame in New York through his show at Julien Levy’s gallery in 1940. In comparison to his contemporaries, Paalen’s fumages boasted a new and shocking dimension. It was no longer a dream that spoke to or induced the painting’s subject. Paalen’s paintings came entirely from the power arising from the shudder of a sudden awakening in his consciousness. In the blink of an eye, sudden surprise would give way to mute amazement - but what was emanating from Paalen’s great fumages of 1938 was also a melancholic desire to come as near as possible to the ineffable essences of humanities most profound imponderables. An abridged space opened before the eye, the background vanishing into a crepuscular blur, shifting from light green to cerulean blue, as if the painter wanted to suggest his reverie, his apparitions in as close proximity as possible to the eye of the viewer. Light issues from behind the painting and scatters horizontally up to the surface, where it arranges faint glimmers breaking through the shadows of the traces of actual smoke. The fumage atomizes the light falling onto it from behind and, on its way to the eye, envelops the smoke marks with color, forming outward projecting shapes in red, blue, and green. Their interrupted trajectory fades into nothingness, blending them with the same firmament. In his best works, like Taches solaires or Ciel de pieuvre, Paalen is an artist of extraordinary, finely tuned and precise lyrical talent. No painter before him portrayed the awakening state of consciousness as faithfully. All the fumages of 1938 and 39 capture the tension between the stretcher as an expanded, trembling umbrella, and an expanding and expansive sense of light and color.

Analogies to Northwestern coastal Native American art certainly come to mind when viewing these works, but are hard to document by scholarly citations. Still Paalen’s explorations of consciousness seem eerily similar to the totemic art of this part of the world – art he would later seem driven to explore. Paalen’s intention was to find an alluring expression for the creative moment of identification with the totem, this expression playing itself out as a mental drama. There is much indication that Paalen tried to express this with his fumages of 1938 and 39 – that is, the forced trance in an archaic ritual that he hoped would be discovered as a dynamic process on a cognitive level. The fumages seem to mirror mental procedures like electric discharge-patterning, rapidly shifting into flashing mental images. Their painted somatic shapes originated in changing metaphors for the process of creation itself, the weightless moving polyp in Ciel de pieuvre, the fusion-chains of sunspots in Taches solaires, or the symbolic magnetism of lightning in Orages Magnétiques. The paintings evoke metaphors, where form and sense are inextricably aligned.

Paalen began his thirty page long, richly illustrated essay, Totem Art, in DYN 4-5, with romantic words of religious unification, in effect a kind of consecration: “On the Northwest Coast of the American continent, between a tempestuous sea and a virgin forest, there arose an art with the profile of a bird of prey; masks, heraldic columns, torchlight dances, myths of the killer-whale and the thunder-bird tell us of a great savage life in which man and the elements, man and his dream, beast and man mingled in wars and loves without quarter.”

The figurative allusions with their latenly male-female attributes in Ciel de pieuvre, Taches solaires, and Combat des princes Saturniens seem to take up the theme of unification of conflict and love in a religious sense. This theme could be seen as analogous to the history of painting in the forties, where titles so often pointed at the overcoming of the individual’s psychosis through the cosmic balancing of male and female attributes (e.g. Pollock’s Male and Female, 1942).

2. Wolfgang Paalen, Totem Art, in: DYN 4-5, Mexico 1943, p.7

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**Taches solaires**

oil/fumage on canvas  
130 x 99 cm (51 x 39 in.)  
verso signed with initials, dated and titled WP 38 Taches Solaires  
executed in 1938

Paalen Archiv No. 38.05

**Provenance:**  
Onslow-Ford Collection, Inverness;  
Private Collection, Munich

**Exhibition:**  
Galerie Renou et Colle, Paris 1938  
Galerie Guggenheim Jeune, London 1939  
Julien Levy Gallery, New York 1940  
Museum Moderner Kunst - Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna 1993  
Museo de Arte Contemporaneo Alvar y Carmen T. Carrillo Gil, Mexico City 1994  
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid 1999/2000; Musee d’art Moderne et Contemporain, Strasbourg 2000  
Staatsgalerie Stuttgart 2000/20001  
Galerie Döbele, Dresden 2001

**Literature:**  
Catalogue, Paalen, Galerie Renou et Colle, Paris 1938 (no. 16)  
*Minotaure* Paris 1938, no. 11, p. 61 (illustrated)  
Catalogue, Paalen, Galerie Guggenheim Jeune, London 1939 (no. 11)  
Catalogue, Wolfgang Paalen Retrospectiva, Mexico 1994, p. 121 (illustrated in color)  
Andreas Neufert, Wolfgang Paalen - *Im Inneren des Wals*, Vienna/New York (Springer) 1999, p. 132 (illustrated in color), Catalogue Raisonné no. 38.05, illustrated p. 301  
Catalogue, Surrealistas en el exilio y los inicios de la Escuela de Nueva York, Madrid 1999, p. 69 (illustrated in color); Catalogue Strasbourg 2000, p. 68  
Catalogue, Ives Tanguy und der Surrealismus, Stuttgart 2000, p. 201 (illustrated in color)  
Andreas Neufert, Wolfgang Paalen, The painter as Thinker and Visionary, Edition Galerie Doebeler, Dresden 2001, p. 54 (illustrated in color)
**Untitled (fumage)**

oil/fumage on canvas  
46 x 38 cm (18 x 15 in.)  
exeucted in 1938

Paalen Archiv No. 38.14

**Provenance:**  
Onslow Ford Collection, Inverness;  
Private Collection, Germany; Private  
Collection, San Francisco

**Exhibition:**  
Museum Moderner Kunst - Stiftung  
Ludwig, Vienna 1993  
Museo de Arte Contemporaneo Alvar y  
Carmen T. Carrillo Gil, Mexico City 1994

**Literature:**  
Catalogue, *Wolfgang Paalen - Zwischen  
Surrealismus und Abstraktion* - Eine  
Retrospektive, Vienna 1993, p. 129  
(illustrated in colour)  
Catalogue, *Wolfgang Paalen  
Retrospectiva*, Mexico 1994, p. 113  
(illustrated in color)  
*Vuelta*, Revista mensuel No.212, Mexico  
City Julio 1994, (illustrated in color as  
title page)  
Andreas Neufert, *Wolfgang Paalen - Im  
Inneren des Wals*, Vienna/New York  
(Springer) 1999, Catalogue Raisonné no.  
38.06, p. 302 (ill.)
**Untitled (fumage)**

One of two known fumages in which Paalen reflects on the theme of the stagnant storm and how this emotional movement can be transmitted; essentially it is a meditation on how the ephemeral and obscure in nature can catalyze the human imagination. The painter also emphasizes his interest in multiple simultaneous perspectives and the “all-over technique” by covering the margins with dark-brown paint; the space of fumage seems to hover in front of the background.

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**Provenance:**
Geo Dupin, Paris; Private Collection, Paris

**Literature:**
Les cosmogones (stage)

The original and initial study for *Les cosmogones* from 1943, a work Paalen realized as his largest painting to date in the following year. The open structure of the trinity, already hinted at in the fumages of 1938 and returning in *Les premiers spatiales* in the form of a triptych, is asserted here for the first time in one painting in an open and spontaneous way and with a palette reminiscent of Analytical Cubism. (see also Paalen’s *Hamnur Trilogy*).

oil on canvas

65 x 65 cm (25 1/2 x 25 1/2 in.)

signed with initials and dated WP 43

(lower right), verso titled

executed in 1943

Paalen Archiv No. 43.02

Provenance:

Jean Nicole, Paris; Geo Dupin, Paris; Franz von Braun, Germany; Private Collection, San Francisco

Exhibition:

Art of this Century Gallery, New York 1945; Galerie Nierendorf, New York 1946; Galerie du Dragon, Paris 1988

Literature:

Gustav Regler, Wolfgang Paalen, New York (Nierendorf Editions), p. 53 (illustrated)

Catalogue, Paalen, Galerie du Dragon, Paris 1988, p. 5 (illustrated in color)

Andreas Neufert, Wolfgang Paalen - Im Inneren des Wals, Vienna/New York (Springer) 1999, p. 312 (Illustrated), Catalogue Raisonné no. 43.02
Starscape

One of three known Starscapes, this example is quite similar to the small paintings Gyra, L’or de temps, and Nebulase in the Guggenheim Museum, New York, which were exhibited in Galerie Nierendorf in New York in 1946. In his diaries Paalen once wrote, “The most beautiful star images of thinking of thoughts,” and so gives us a hint that a starscape is meant to be an active resonance in our mental landscape. Again he means to draw attention to the precarious line between inner and outer worlds, and therefore places the furthest phenomena observable by the human eye into the hollow of sensory perceptions, the nearest point to individual consciousness. Here and There are one, and vesicles, floating threads and imploding ephemera define the borders where they collapse into one other.

Provenance:
Audrey Wood Collection, Mexico City; Sotheby’s, New York; Private Collection, Germany

Exhibition:
Gallery Art of this Century, New York 1945; Galerie Nierendorf, New York 1946, No. 5; Kunstmuseum Bochum 1997; Kunstverein Gütersloh 1997; S-Galerie Sparkasse Gütersloh 1997; Galerie Döbele, Dresden 2001

Literature:
Catalogue Sotheby’s New York, 23rd Nov. 1993, Lot 201 (ill. col.)
Andreas Neufert, Wolfgang Paalen - Im Inneren des Wals, Vienna/New York (Springer) 1999, p. 164 (ill. col.), Catalogue Raisonné no. 45.09, p. 316
(ill.)
Andreas Neufert, Wolfgang Paalen, The painter as Thinker and Visionary, Edition Galerie Döbele, Dresden 2001, p. 60 (ill. col.)

Paalen Archiv No. 45.09

One of three known Starscapes, this example is quite similar to the small paintings Gyra, L’or de temps, and Nebulase in the Guggenheim Museum, New York, which were exhibited in Galerie Nierendorf in New York in 1946. In his diaries Paalen once wrote, “The most beautiful star images of thinking of thoughts,” and so gives us a hint that a starscape is meant to be an active resonance in our mental landscape. Again he means to draw attention to the precarious line between inner and outer worlds, and therefore places the furthest phenomena observable by the human eye into the hollow of sensory perceptions, the nearest point to individual consciousness. Here and There are one, and vesicles, floating threads and imploding ephemera define the borders where they collapse into one other.

Provenance:
Audrey Wood Collection, Mexico City; Sotheby’s, New York; Private Collection, Germany

Exhibition:
Gallery Art of this Century, New York 1945; Galerie Nierendorf, New York 1946, No. 5; Kunstmuseum Bochum 1997; Kunstverein Gütersloh 1997; S-Galerie Sparkasse Gütersloh 1997; Galerie Döbele, Dresden 2001

Literature:
Catalogue Sotheby’s New York, 23rd Nov. 1993, Lot 201 (ill. col.)
Andreas Neufert, Wolfgang Paalen - Im Inneren des Wals, Vienna/New York (Springer) 1999, p. 164 (ill. col.), Catalogue Raisonné no. 45.09, p. 316
(ill.)
Andreas Neufert, Wolfgang Paalen, The painter as Thinker and Visionary, Edition Galerie Döbele, Dresden 2001, p. 60 (ill. col.)

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Hamnur Trilogy

The painting *Hamnur Trilogy* of 1947 conveys the sublime perspective of the Trinity in communion with the viewer. In broad mosaic brush strokes, the pictured beings float in front of a dark background. The concept of the Trinity acts in all the paintings of the Cosmogones, *Messangers*, and Selam (*Hamnur*) series on various levels, projecting the metaphysical towards the viewer. These levels could be distinguished as cognitive (dialecical) and symbolic-emotional (sacred). On the symbolic level, Paalen may have been focused on (implcit) beings, beings existing in between shared epiphenomena and individually transcendant perceptions, rather than simply as deistic entities. These beings conjoin the divine and the human in practically all belief-systems which use trance or hallucination as a technique of meditation. In the Judaic Kabbala it is the Sephiroth who bestow dynamic encounters with antagonistic pairs, arriving at a balance between polarities. Through the Sephiroth the Kabbala practioner unifies all kinds of experiences, elements, and occurrences with the objective of deepening mind and soul. Paalen’s Trinity beings are also mirrors for a meditation, a practice which counterbalances the dualistic fixations of human mind. Paalen speaks in his essay, *The Dialectical Gospel* in DYN 2, in this sense, referring to the danger in Western civilizations, which tend to gamble away the various models of balancing consciousness, models more “primitive” traditions have passed on for thousands of years through religious praxis.

In the winter of 1946/47, Paalen stayed as a guest, some two weeks, in the house of Robert Motherwell, where there was a group staging of his theatrical play, *The Beam of the Balance*. He had written this drama as a counterpoint and complement to his new pictorial entities. He made use of several figures from the body of archetypal myths to serve as forms of direct experience and incorporated them in the profane action of his play. They were not meant to be characters per se. Paalen wrote in a synopsis of the play, but rather the interplay of prototypes which thus far have provided the major figures in the historical pageant of humanity. Here too, the figures, flowing forms without contours, intangible, constitute possible axes of the causal actions of mortal beings rendered corporeal. That which is humanly possible constitutes the essence of these forms, which were to be imparted to the audience directly, without any barrier of preconceived associations, in order to serve as material for the viewer’s own personal drama. At the high-tension points in the action of the play, the figures prove to be visionary time signatures of cosmic meaning: they are to be understood as the underpinnings of reality because they communicate the idea of what it means to be alive. As in many ancient mythologies, the objects of meditation should blend and blur past and future so that time manifests its oracular tendency. They should represent themselves, not tell anything concrete, but proclaim truth by pointing man towards the essential human event – like the *Choros Tragicos* in ancient Greek tragedy. In Paalen’s drama they are *Cosmogones*, the voices of the great cosmic powers that act like a Greek chorus. So, also *Hamnur Trilogy* shows a mystical matrix reality aimed at integrating 3rd-dimensional perception with multidimensional states of consciousness. The name *Hamnur* has, like Selam (see *Selam Trilogy*, 1947), most probably Indian Vedantic origins.

Provenance:
Geor Dupin, Paris; Private Collection, Germany; Private Collection, San Francisco

Exhibition:
Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City 1967
Galerie Artcurial, Paris 1986
Kunstmuseum Bochum 1993
Kunstmuseum Bochum 1997 (then: Kunstverein Gütersloh 1997; S-Galerie Sparkasse Gütersloh 1997)
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid 1999/2000 (then: Musée d’art Moderne et contemporain, Strasbourg 2000)
Galerie Doebele, Dresden 2001

Literature:
Catalogue, Hommage à Wolfgang Paalen, Museo de Arte Moderno Mexico City 1967, p.50 (illustrated)
Catalogue, L’aventure surréaliste autour d’André Breton, Galerie Artcurial Paris (Edition Filipacchi) 1986 (illustrated)
Catalogue, Surrealismus und Lateinamenka, Kunstmuseum Bochum 1993, No. 432 (illustrated)
Andreas Neufert, Wolfgang Paalen, *Im Inneren des Wals*, Wien New York (Springer) 1999, p. 175 (illustrated in color), Catalogue Raisonné No. 47.02, p. 320 (illustrated)

Provenance:
Wolfgang Paalen Archiv Nr. 47.02

Exhibition:
Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City 1967
Galerie Artcurial, Paris 1986
Kunstmuseum Bochum 1993
Kunstmuseum Bochum 1997 (then: Kunstverein Gütersloh 1997; S-Galerie Sparkasse Gütersloh 1997)
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid 1999/2000 (then: Musée d’art Moderne et contemporain, Strasbourg 2000)
Galerie Doebele, Dresden 2001

Literature:
Catalogue, Hommage à Wolfgang Paalen, Museo de Arte Moderno Mexico City 1967, p.50 (illustrated)
Catalogue, L’aventure surréaliste autour d’André Breton, Galerie Artcurial Paris (Edition Filipacchi) 1986 (illustrated)
Catalogue, Surrealismus und Lateinamenka, Kunstmuseum Bochum 1993, No. 432 (illustrated)
Andreas Neufert, Wolfgang Paalen, *Im Inneren des Wals*, Wien New York (Springer) 1999, p. 175 (illustrated in color), Catalogue Raisonné No. 47.02, p. 320 (illustrated)

Provenance:
Wolfgang Paalen Archiv Nr. 47.02

Exhibition:
Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City 1967
Galerie Artcurial, Paris 1986
Kunstmuseum Bochum 1993
Kunstmuseum Bochum 1997 (then: Kunstverein Gütersloh 1997; S-Galerie Sparkasse Gütersloh 1997)
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid 1999/2000 (then: Musée d’art Moderne et contemporain, Strasbourg 2000)
Galerie Doebele, Dresden 2001

Literature:
Catalogue, Hommage à Wolfgang Paalen, Museo de Arte Moderno Mexico City 1967, p.50 (illustrated)
Catalogue, L’aventure surréaliste autour d’André Breton, Galerie Artcurial Paris (Edition Filipacchi) 1986 (illustrated)
Catalogue, Surrealismus und Lateinamenka, Kunstmuseum Bochum 1993, No. 432 (illustrated)
Andreas Neufert, Wolfgang Paalen, *Im Inneren des Wals*, Wien New York (Springer) 1999, p. 175 (illustrated in color), Catalogue Raisonné No. 47.02, p. 320 (illustrated)
In 1952, Paalen returned to Paris with the desire to reconcile with André Breton. He rented Kurt Seligman’s home (Villa Seurat) and rejoined the Surrealist group for what would be their last look at Paalen’s creative evolution. His Dynaton project, which had aimed to bring together the leading thinkers and artists in San Francisco, had failed mostly due to private conflicts of interest. This failure ironically freed Paalen to create a masterly lyrical abstraction, *L’enclume*, in which all his methods of painting converged in a single canvas. Intimations of landscapes and faces become a self-evident part of his composition in this period, in this rich production all his previously heroic pretenses have vanished, allowing for a new virtuosity. *L’enclume* (the anvil) is a large scale composition with the paint applied directly onto a dark brown canvas without the use of gesso.
Béatrice perdue

Béatrice perdue is a fine example of Paalen's virtuosity with color, employing painterly textures and composition in which the appearing and disappearing personages are his theme. The melancholy implied by the title, a reference to Dante's lost love, somehow contrasts with the rich explosion of vibrant color in this painting, creating a balance of polarities, pointing at the potential for deep joy intrinsic in melancholic moods, a psychological integration which evaded Paalen in his personal life.

Béatrice perdue

oil/fumage on canvas
81 x 60 cm (32 x 23 1/2 in.)
signed and dated with initials WP 53
(lower right), verso titled
executed in 1953

Paalen Archiv No. 53.11

Provenance:
Geo Dupin, Paris; Galerie Galanis-Hentschel, Paris; Agustin Cárdenaz, Paris; Galerie 1900-2000, Paris; Private Collection, San Francisco

Exhibition:

Literature:
Michel Seuphor, Lexikon Abstrakter Malerei, München 1957/1962, p. 251 (illustrated in color)
Andreas Neufert, Wolfgang Paalen - Im Inneren des Wals, Vienna/New York (Springer) 1999, p. 335 (illustrated), Catalogue Raisonné no. 53.23

Béatrice perdue

Provenance:
Geo Dupin, Paris; Galerie Galanis-Hentschel, Paris; Agustin Cárdenaz, Paris; Galerie 1900-2000, Paris; Private Collection, San Francisco

Exhibition:

Literature:
Michel Seuphor, Lexikon Abstrakter Malerei, München 1957/1962, p. 251 (illustrated in color)
Andreas Neufert, Wolfgang Paalen - Im Inneren des Wals, Vienna/New York (Springer) 1999, p. 335 (illustrated), Catalogue Raisonné no. 53.23
Untitled (fumage)

oil/fumage on canvas
72 x 98 cm (28 1/4 x 38 1/2 in.)
signed and dated with initials WP 53
(lower right)
executed in 1953
Paalen Archiv No. 53.23

Provenance:
Geo Dupin, Paris; Ina Salomon, Paris;
Private Collection, San Francisco

Exhibition:
Galerie Villand et Galanis, Paris 1970

Literature:
José Pierre, Wolfgang Paalen, Paris
(Editions Filipacchi) 1980, p. 60
(illustrated in color)
Andreas Neufert, Wolfgang Paalen - Im
Inneren des Wals, Vienna/New York
(Springer) 1999, p. 335 (illustrated),
Catalogue Raisonné no. 53.23
Bureau de longitudes

oil/fumage on canvas
55 x 198 cm (21 3/4 x 78 in.)
signed with initials and dated WP 54
(lower right), verso titled
executed in 1954

Paalen Archiv No. 54.04

Provenance:
Galerie Galanis-Hentschel, Paris;
Geo Dupin, Paris; Private Collection,
Germany

Exhibition:
Galerie Galanis-Hentschel, Paris 1954,
no. 16

Literature:
Andreas Neufert, Wolfgang Paalen - Im
Inneren des Wals, Vienna/New York
(Springer) 1999, p. 339 (illustrated),
Catalogue Raisonné no. 54.04
Untitled

gouache on cardboard
46 x 38 cm (18 x 15 in.)
executed in 1954

Paalen Archiv No. 54.12

Provenance:
Private Collection, Paris
Abridged Biographical Chronology

1905  Wolfgang Robert Paalen is born on July 22nd in Baden, near Vienna, Austria.

1913  Parents move to Rochusburg in Sagan, Silesia.

1919  Family moves to Rome, summers in Sagan.

1921  Studies with Leo von Koenig in Tivoli and Berlin.


1927  Visits Hans Hofmann School in Munich and Cassis. Rents studio in La Cotat (Cassis). Meets circle of German artists (Westphal, Petersen, Becker) and Jean Varda. Visits Braque in Varengeville.


1938  International Surrealist Exhibition in Paris (Palais de Beaux Arts, Galerie Wildenstein). Paalen is responsible for plant and water installations. Under Duchamp’s ceiling he creates an artificial lake with plants. Personal show of his fumages in Galerie Renou et Colle, Paris (Text by André Breton). Illustration for a Surrealist edition of Lautréamonts Les Chants de Maldoror. Meets Frida Kahlo during her visit to Paris who invites him to Mexico. Summers in La Mesangère Varengeville with Breton. Visits Aya in Germany, decides in Munich to leave Europe.


1941  Robert Motherwell studies with Paalen in Mexico for several months. Motivates Motherwell to collaborate on his DYN project. Motherwell translates his essay L’Image Nouvelle and Paalen introduces Motherwell to Breton. Gordon Onslow Ford and Jacqueline Johnson move to Mexico.

1942  The Nazis confiscate St.Rochusburg in Sagan. Order of Deportation for his father Gustaf Rainer Paalen who supposedly flees to Switzerland or commits suicide in Berlin. First issue of DYN is published in Mexico, ending in 1944 a total number of four magazines are printed, one of them double-sized (American Number 1943). First issue contains Paalen’s Farewell au surrealisme which makes his distance from Surrealism official. Participates in the show First Papers of Surrealism in New School for Social Research, New York.

1943  In New York he meets Isamu Noguchi and Luchita Hurtado del Solar.


1945  Publication of Paalen’s essay La crise du sujet dans la peinture moderne in Revue de L’IFAL, Mexico. One man show in Galeria de Arte Mexicano, Mexico City with 19
works from 1939-45. Correspondence with Motherwell about the planned book *Form and Sense* with collected essays of Paalen. After Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock, Peggy Guggenheim shows Paalen's new paintings from Mexico in May of this year. After the end of the war (May 8) Paalen stays through the summer with Motherwell in New York. *Form and Sense* is published as first number of the series *Problems of Contemporary Art* under the direction of Motherwell. Contact with the theologian and novelist Arthur A. Cohen, who was inspired by the life and destiny of Paalen for his famous novel *Acts of Theft*.

**1946**
Paalen and his companion Luchita Hurtado stay three months in Motherwell's house Quonset in East Hampton in Long Island. Private reading of Paalen's play *The Beam of the Balance* with Motherwell and friends. In November one man show in the Nierendorf Gallery, New York. Nierendorf publishes the monograph on Paalen by the German novelist Gustav Regler. The sculptor Louise Nevelson invites them to prolong their stay until January 1947 in her home in Long Island. Intensive contact with New York artists Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko.

**1947**

**1948**
In February Paalen travels to New York and Chicago and plans a *DYNATON* exhibition in San Francisco. Spends November and December in New York with Motherwell in East Hampton to discuss the foundation of a new art show with Rothko and Clifford Still. During a dinner with the Rothkos in Manhattan he receives an invitation to teach in San Francisco, but declines. Rene d'Harnoncourt gives Paalen a one man show in the San Francisco Museum of Art. In Mill Valley he meets Henry Miller, Anais Nin and Jean Varda and works on his essay *Metaplastic*. The Onslow Fords acquire a house in Mill Valley and invite Paalen to stay. They meet Lee Mullican and travel together in Mexico before they decide to work together in Mill Valley in 1949/1950.

**1949**
After traveling to New York, the Paalen move to San Francisco to prepare the *Metaplastic* show at the Stanford Art Gallery, which is accompanied by lectures by Sybil Moholy-Nagy.

**1950**
The new Association *Dynaton* exhibits together at the San Francisco Museum of Art, titled *A New Vision*. With the exhibition the museum publishes the book *DYNATON*. Luchita divorces from Paalen to live with Lee Mullican.

**1951**

**1953**
Summers in Breton's house in Saint Circ la Popie with other Surrealists.

**1954**

**1955**
Buys a small house in Tepoztlan near Mexico City.

**1956**
Exhibition at Galería de Arte Mexicano, Mexico City.

**1957**
Buys a Hacienda near Merida in the Yucatan and dedicates himself more and more to his collection of Pre-Columbian art.

**1959**
Commits suicide after a long depression in Taxco on the night of September 24th.
Wolfgang Paalen, Béatrice perdue
Oil/fumage on canvas, 81 x 60 cm (32 x 23 1/2 in.), 1953