

The Object at the End of Time

*The artifice of time in Luigi Pericle's *Matri Dei d.d.d.* series*

Fingertips dancing around the polished surface of a marble. Grasping only loosely as the object is about to be released to fall. With the certainty of gravity, the marble descends towards the ground for it to grind to halt at its lowest energetic state. Things in the universe are not being pushed. They are being pulled. Luigi Pericle's oeuvre is an exposition of the temporal equivalent to gravity, in which objects are not drawn through space, but time. In an instant movement of ever-accelerating speed, it appears as if the artwork's substance is being pulled towards an attractor that exists ahead of us in time¹, rendering each moment eternal.

Exhibited alongside masters such as Pablo Picasso, Karen Appel, Antoni Tàpies and Jean Dubuffet, Luigi Pericle (1916-2001) was a leading figure in the art scene of the second half of the twentieth century. As an accomplished painter, renowned illustrator², and devoted scholar of theosophical and mystic thought, the artist was known for the "pursuit of an absolute beauty"³ that is stylistically conveyed by abstract expression. As his career climaxed in 1965 with an itinerant solo exhibition through several British museums, Pericle chose to retreat into seclusion. Together with his wife Orsolina Klainguti (whom he called 'Nini'), he progressed to move to the bosom of utopian vision: to Monte Verità in Ascona. In something that could be described as 'lust for truth', he strived to understand the ultimate reality.⁴ Devoted to his own research, the artist archived volumes of literature, horoscopes, ufology writings, Egyptian art, notebooks full of Japanese ideograms, astronomical symbols, and homeopathic recipes. This period, pervaded by productivity and research, forged an urge to eradicate physical possessions, which became so compelling as to even let go of his treasured Ferrari. In a hand-written note on an envelope, Pericle wrote: "Every ambition, pride, vanity must disappear. We must not look for a place, a situation, prestige... The love for applause, the desire for glory, the ego's reaction must be abandoned [...]"⁵ The title found on this excerpt is *Panta Rhei*⁶ and can roughly be translated as „all things are in flux“, echoing the artist's modus operandi. While his illustrative *magnus opus* (*Max comic*) was still a bestseller in New York and Japan, in the beginning of the 1980s, Pericle turned towards an in-depth study of the disciplines most dear to him and to writing his book *Bis ans Ende der Zeiten* (Until the End of Time). Especially its subtitle "A new beginning instead of the end of the world" encapsulates Pericle's particular cast of mind. A characteristic theme of his time period was the 'Age of Aquarius', meant to represent the transition into a 'new world' and is marked by the destruction of the old world (as we know it).⁷ Pericle clearly distanced himself from this belief and reinterpreted it as a new beginning. Even though the visionary novel was completed in 1996, only one single chapter with the title *Amduat* (in 1995) should ever be published. After his passing, Pericle's home vanished into oblivion until its rediscovery in 2016: fully furnished with its artistic past, it bears the remains of Pericle's thirst for knowledge, his paintings, and graphic works. Following the artist's chronological path over two decades, his series can be

¹ This idea was proposed by Gaston Bachelard in his work *Intuition of the Instant*, in which he distinguishes between 'time as duration' and 'time as instant'. See Keiko, *Bachelard's theory of time: Missing link between science and art*, 2009.

² As an illustrator he invented the famous groundhog comic "Max" and published it under the name Giovannetti. See Gatti, *Luigi Pericle*, 83.

³ See Gatti, *Luigi Pericle*, 17-36.

⁴ See Gatti, *Luigi Pericle*, 91.

⁵ The envelope is conserved in the Archivio Luigi Pericle, Ascona, Switzerland. See Gatti, *Luigi Pericle*, 91.

⁷ See Peter Clarke, *Encyclopedia of New Religious Movements*, 16-17.

divided into pyramids and clocks (March of Time), stargates (Matri Dei), golems, archangels, and monsters (Wood Demon or Hütter Der Schwelle).⁸ In his paintings, it seems as if Pericle *explores* the nature of reality through the act of its creation and therefore, his works appear as an ‘instant manifestation of duration’.

“*Sea-Born*” (1961) is the initiatory painting in the long *Matri Dei d.d.d.* series, giving way to a cycle of translucent portals announcing a world of ‘higher octaves’ and interdimensional flux. The inscription *Matri Dei d.d.d.* is a common acronym and can loosely be translated as “*dono dedit dedicavit*”, indicating a gift in dedication to the Mother of God.⁹ The intention to make an offering to a spiritual entity bestows the cycle with a sacred sentiment, setting it energetically apart from other works. To grasp the essence of this series, it needs to be contextualized in terms of Pericle’s relationships. The artist was in close contact with Philippe Barbier-Saint-Hilaire, an associate of Mirra Alfassa¹⁰, also known as ‘The Mother’, who was a spiritual way-shower and the woman on the side of Sri Aurobindo.¹¹ Pericle was in correspondence with The Mother sharing his dreams and asking for directions in his spiritual development.¹² Whether or not the *Matri Dei d.d.d.* series is a reference to The Mother, an underlying notion can be assumed. Analyzing the cycle’s character, it becomes interesting to gaze over its titles, which include ‘Creation Penetrating Inertia IV’ (1963/1964), ‘The Veil of Maya III’ (1963), ‘March of Time X’ (1963), ‘Wood Demon II’ (1964), ‘The Transit of the Comet’ (1964), ‘Uranian Golem II’ (1964), ‘Uranic Golem I’ (1965), ‘The Sign of Transformation’ (1964), ‘That’s How the Light Came Up’ (1965), ‘The Guardian of the Threshold’ (1965), ‘Mahakali’ (1965), and ‘Dissolving Darkness’ (1966). What stands out is that many of the titles connected either directly to time or to ‘dynamic processes’ (or studies thereof) such as the process of ‘how light comes up’, which is initially also a duration and therefore connected to time. ‘Mahakali’, for example, is Sanskrit and the feminized version of Mahakala also known as the god who conquers “Maha Kala”, the “Great Time” (which is connected to death). As Hindu Goddess of the “Great Time”, she is considered to be Shiva’s consort, who is the god of consciousness, and the basis of reality and existence.¹³ These names suggest an in-depth study of non-physical dynamics opening up the dialogue between alien worlds across space and time. In an interview with art historian Eugenia Cosentino in 1979, Pericle stated that “The artists of our time have replaced a profound vision of the world with a superficial thinking [...]. Great art is in fact a reflex of the areas of an enlightened soul [...]. Only by virtue of this higher communication can the painter reawaken man’s consciousness, [...]. Art, by its own nature, reflects man’s spiritual inclination and is like an instrument endowed with clairvoyance; art always has the presentment of future events. A universal wisdom interconnected with the mysteries of the cosmos.”¹⁴

In order to truly understand both the artist and his works, they must be understood in reference to each other. In “The Origin of the Work of Art”, Heidegger, another significant figure and contemporary of Pericle, states that neither can be understood apart from the other and neither can

⁸ Andrea & Greta Biasca-Caroni, *Luigi Pericle* (Ascona: Li.Zc.A. sas, 2018), 4.

⁹ Andrea & Greta Biasca-Caroni, *Luigi Pericle*, 75.

¹⁰ Ibid, 21.

¹¹ Sri Aurobindo was an influential spiritual leader and reformer, advocating his visions of human progress and spiritual evolution. He founded the Sri Aurobindo Ashram together with his feminine counterpart Mirra Alfassa (The Mother). See Brian Duignan, *Sri Aurobindo*.

¹² Ibid, 21.

¹³ See Pal, *Time and Space in Tantric Art*, 1980.

¹⁴ Ibid, 67.

be understood apart from 'art,' which, as well, cannot be understood apart from the former two.¹⁵ Applying this concept (which is described as *hermeneutic circle*), the artwork creation becomes important. In 1965, Hans Hess elaborated that "Pericle's pictures differ from most modern paintings in the aims which are expressed in technique; they are not spontaneous outbursts of a personality though painted with speed and intensity. His work is carefully painted with layers of pigment, often as many as forty; the process of completion and growth takes many weeks."¹⁶ The pigments were created and synthesized in Pericle's studio. After their application (on canvas or Masonite) he began to break open the structures by using tools to remove parts of the pigmented material.¹⁷ After piercing through multiple layers of self-applied reality (background colors), the artist laid bare the object 'beyond the visible'. Hess stated that „Each work of art is at one and the same time unique and a link in the chain of the artist's expression. But in Pericle's work self-expression does not dominate: it is the objective statement which matters, expressed necessarily in a subjective form."¹⁸

When looking over Pericle's chronicles of creation, his work seems to loosely be locatable in the post-world war II avant-garde period, transcending concepts of several distinct movements. Most notably, characteristics of *Art Informel* such as the experimental exploration of material and signages that are used as a medium for communication and the closely related *Tachisme* art, known for the absence of premediated structure, connect to Pericle's works. Elements of *Italian Futurism*, emphasizing speed and technology and *Dynamism* seem to be present. Futurists, such as Umberto Boccioni let themselves be led by intuition and aimed at enabling the viewer to see the inner being (essence) of what they had portrayed.¹⁹ The dissolution of form for the purpose of exposing 'the uncertain' is another element characteristic for the undercurrent of the avant-garde: *Arte nucleare*. Responding to the powers unleashed by the atomic war, this style worked with the unpredictable effect of Surrealist automatism.²⁰ In the time of nuclear threats, war, assassinations, the construction of the Berlin Wall, and the space race between the United States and the Soviet Union, the artistic response was to look beyond the limits of the picture. Emphasis was put on the exploration of space and the confrontation with the accelerating speed of technology, which coined the term "space-age aesthetics"²¹, which is a hybrid of mystical representation informed by Cold War aesthetics in response to an age of revolutionary technological advances. Clearly, elements of these subjects can also be found in Pericle's works; however, what sets his art radically apart is a certain kind of "overview effect", a cognitive shift in awareness²², zooming out from the detail and understanding the transcended dynamics and their correspondence within.

Taking up Pericle's notion of 'time', it is important to relate to it across his works by studying its several appearances. One other dimension can be found in *Amduat* (the excerpt from his mostly still unpublished novel "Until the End of Times"). *Amduat* itself is a reference to the ancient Egyptian funerary text with the same title and can be translated as "That Which is in the Afterworld" or as

¹⁵ See Mantzavinos, *Hermeneutics*.

¹⁶ Hess, *Luigi Pericle Exhibition, 1965* (York: Ben Johnson & Co, 1965), 8.

¹⁷ Ibid, 13.

¹⁸ Hess, *Luigi Pericle Exhibition, 1965* (York: Ben Johnson & Co, 1965), 8.

¹⁹ *Pittura scultura Futurista: Dinamismo plastico (Futurist Painting Sculpture: Plastic Dynamism)*

²⁰ See Enacademic.

²¹ See Petersen, *Space-Age Aesthetics: Lucio Fontana, Yves Klein, and the Postwar European Avant-Garde*, 2009.

²² The overview effect is reported by some astronauts while viewing the Earth from outer space and coined by Frank White. See Nasa, *The Overview Effect*, 2019.

“Text of the Hidden Chamber Which is in the Underworld”.²³ ‘Duat’ is the inner (dream) world, which exists parallel to Earth and describes the dimension before life and after death. The *Amduat* (ca. 1426 BCE) describes the nocturnal journey of the Egyptian sun god *Ra* (divided into 12 hours) through the underworld after which he ultimately rises again in the east and lives forever.²⁴ This content, which is referred and equivalated to in Pericle’s *Amduat*, describes the end-time process and its successful transformation by refining one’s soul. A confirmatory evidence of this theory is the symbol on the novel’s cover. The ankh is the Egyptian hieroglyphic symbol representing life itself.²⁵ Another interesting notion can be added when zooming into the storyline itself. The sixth hour is when the most significant event in the underworld occurs. The *ba* (which is one of three aspects of a person’s soul alongside the *ka* and the *akh*), of god *Ra* unites with his body and by doing so initiates the regenerative process of the sun.²⁶ *Ba* is the non-physical, freely moving aspect of the soul and was usually depicted as a bird with a human head.²⁷ The *ka* aspect that is said to be connected to the creative life force, was visually represented as a pair of open arms that are held upwards, symbolizing the transmission of *ka* force.²⁸ Both of these visual representations can be identified in Pericle’s work. Even though they may or may not be references to the Egyptian past, it is worth to consider this possibility when reviewing the *Matri Dei d.d.d.* series, especially in light of the artist’s dedication to his spiritual evolution. Interesting to bear in mind is the purpose of the *Amduat*, which is to name all gods and monsters and give them to the spirit of the dead Pharaoh, so he can either call on them for help or to defeat them.²⁹ Archetypal expressions such as “The Guardian of the Threshold” or the “Uranian Golem” in Pericle’s series may or may not be manifestations of these entities of the ‘world behind the veil’. Andrea Biasca-Caroni, who has purchased Pericle’s home in Ascona and rescued dozens of his paintings and papers wrote that “[...] *Uranian Golem II* was painted by Pericle in 1964, thus giving evidence that archetypes and direct contact with them have neither time nor place.” and added that “Uranian” as an adjective referring to “Golem” indicates a type of Golem belonging to the era of Uranus. How to interpret it? Framing the myth into astrological language.”³⁰

Following his advice, the book “Occult Cosmology” (first published in 1957 by Bruce Lyon) gives clues on how to truly understand the astrological references in Pericle’s work. “[...] Under Uranus, in the Aquarian Age, our work is to awake and awaken. The real brotherhood of the Aquarian Age is not a brotherhood of souls but a brotherhood of spirit.”³¹ It further states that “Uranus frees us from the dominion of Saturn when the time is right. [...] Saturn as lord of time, karma, and cycles rules the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Uranus presides over the Tree of Life. [...] Having drunk from the well of living waters—the presence of God—we are now free to create. When the Seventh Ray temple is built the injunction is given... Sound forth the Word creative and raise the dead to life.”³² In the chapter “The Dweller on the Threshold”, which may or may not be referenced in Pericle’s “The Guardian of the Threshold” (1965), Lyon gives concrete information on how “monadic evolution can be viewed as a triple process in the time and space of a solar system”³³, which is based on the possible

²³ See Wim van den Dungen, *The Book of: The Hidden Chamber*, 2004.

²⁴ See Wim van den Dungen, *The Book of: The Hidden Chamber*, 2004.

²⁵ See Mark, *The Ankh*, 2016.

²⁶ See Wim van den Dungen, *The Book of: The Hidden Chamber*, 2004.

²⁷ See Global Egyptian Museum, *Ba*.

²⁸ See Global Egyptian Museum, *Ka*.

²⁹ See Wim van den Dungen, *The Book of: The Hidden Chamber*, 2004.

³⁰ Ibid, 89.

³¹ Ibid, 62.

³² Ibid, 385.

³³ See Bruce Lyon, *Occult Cosmology*, 271.

combinations of soul, spirit, and matter. Uranus is hereby used as a symbol in its horizontal and vertical expression, which results in a nine-fold manifestation matrix, reaching from “Dweller on the Threshold” on the left to “Angel of the Presence” on the right.³⁴ The glyph of the planet Uranus is generally defined as a visual key „which must be repeatedly turned by the would-be initiate“.³⁵ Pericle’s *Matri Dei d.d.d.* cycle is dominated by these as Uranian defined forms: horizontal lines, in combination with vertical lines and circles, seem to be in a process of perpetual emergence and elapse. Bearing in mind that the Uranian symbols might be meant to represent a movement (a visual key) for the initiate, a new dimension of possible interpretation could open up. Not only would it indicate that his work is pervaded by its symbolism, but it would also turn the observer into an initiate. This hypothesis would be in line with the previously outlined research and would offer a further explanation for the characteristic element of inherent movement within his paintings. Furthermore, the monadic element and the segmentation of reality in being, matter, and form is another notion that seems present in his works. Tracing back to Gottfried Leibniz and his *Discourse on Metaphysics*, *monadology* is defined as a concept, which states that God contains within himself all possibilities, or “a place p at time t will contain all the features of the universe at all times, but with those relating to its own time and place most vividly, and others fading out roughly in accordance with temporal and spatial distance.”³⁶ Meaning, the nature of every substance carries the general expression of the whole universe. Observing Pericle’s works, this inter-monadic dialog appears to radiate from his paintings and furthermore, gives the object ontological appeal.

Initiated in 1961, the beginning of the *Matri Dei d.d.d.* cycle falls shortly before Pericle’s withdrawal from stricter social bonds. Knowing about his in-depth exchange with The Mother, it should not be overlooked that his decision to retreat falls in line with the by Sri Aurobindo proposed framework for an initiate. In “The Foundations of Indian Culture” he gives the student a four-period gradation for his life: the period of the student, the period of the householder, the period of the recluse, and the period of the free super-social man.³⁷ It is the third stage, in which the initiate is meant to retire to the forest (nature) in order to work out the truth of his spirit and to live in freedom of social responsibilities (only receiving inquirer and seeker, he could pass his knowledge on to). It seems natural to assume that The Mother, in Pericle’s inquiry for spiritual guidance, extended this framework to him. Since the *Matri Dei d.d.d.* series falls together with his third period, it needs to be viewed through the frame of spiritual exploration. Time, therefore, not only gains gravity because of historic events such as the space-race or high-speed technologies such as quantum coding but also because of Pericle’s own cycle that is progressing. Many of the paintings in the *Matri Dei d.d.d.* series were painted on wood (Masonite), which gives the cycle iconographic agency by emphasizing their sacral notion and transforming them into “bearers of celestial vision, gates to the supernatural world”.³⁸ Chiara Gatti, curator of the exhibition “Beyond the Visible” describes these paintings as “[...] stargates aimed at lifting our consciousness towards a spiritual horizon” and as “portals, wooden doors of the temples.”³⁹ The materiality in combination with the previously mentioned monadic character and the tripled segmentation of reality into mind, soul, and matter evokes the hylomorphic concept of the conception (creation) of being (ousia) as a compound of matter and form. Developed by Aristotle, Hylomorphism⁴⁰ is formed from the Greek words ὕλη *hyle*, “wood, matter”,

³⁴ See appendix, figure 1 & figure 2.

³⁵ See Bruce Lyon, *Occult Cosmology*, 61.

³⁶ See Robinson, *Substance*, 2018.

³⁷ See Sri Aurobindo, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, 115-116.

³⁸ Ibid, 65.

³⁹ Ibid, 65.

⁴⁰ See Ainsworth, *Form vs. Matter*, 2020.

and μορφή, *morphē*, "form". This is interesting because it captures Pericle's simultaneous happening act of reception and creation of being (reality) by using 'form' (colors, symbols, subjects) on 'wood' (Masonite). Considering the artist's in-depth study of "The end of times" and his clear life-affirming positioning (which was quite unusual for these times) within the transition into the Age of Aquarius, it can be said that Pericle aimed towards deliberately invoking a life-affirming version of "the new earth". Following theories such as Leibnitz's substance theory, in which the nature of every substance carries a general expression of the whole universe, Pericle could have used the 'wooden portals' to call in and stabilize (therefore: manifest) a higher octave frequency needed for the world's transition into the new age. As a consequence, *Matri Dei d.d.d.* might also be interpreted as an offering to mother earth and her positive transition. The previously shared astrological observations, such as the use of Uranian symbols as visual keys for activating higher octaves of the recipient's (as well as the artist's) mind, transform the *Matri Dei d.d.d.* series into a tool for initiation. Another notion of time is being infused in the cycle when looking at the internalized conception of external time. The earliest type of timekeeping device was adjusted on the movement of the sun (also subject in *Amudat*). In the ancient world, time was tied to the motions of the planets and clocks had to keep track of the celestial cycles.⁴¹ The planetary movements and references present in the *Matri Dei d.d.d.* series, therefore, could be understood as keeping track of specific celestial cycles (timelines), exposing the recipient to a new, alien experience of time.

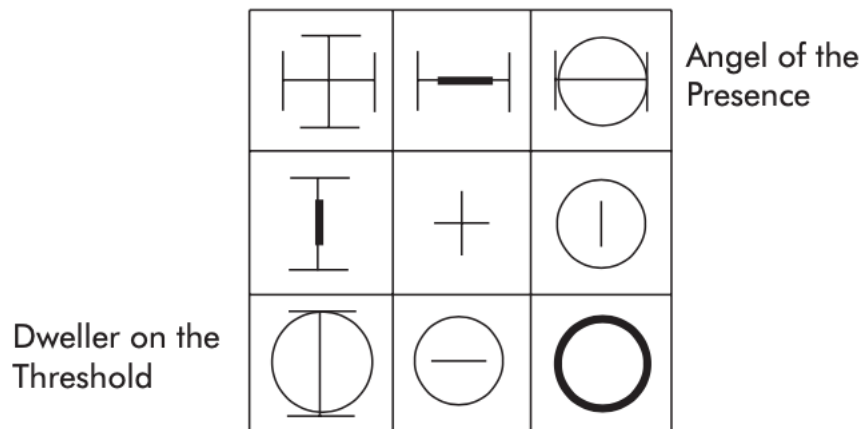
The Blue Marble is an image of Earth taken from space. In a distance from around 29,000 kilometers, "it's tiny, it's shiny, it's beautiful, it's home, and it's fragile."⁴² It appears as if Pericle shares this notion and offers his opus in service to the world and its inhabitants. The *Matri Dei d.d.d.* cycle encapsulates this image by eliciting a simultaneous transpersonal as well as personal experience, something "out there" and yet "here within". By becoming initiates into higher dimensional consciousness, it's not Pericle's art that is drawn through time, but their recipients. With that, the observer is presented with a possibility to ascend towards an attractor, a point of convergence, beyond that which is known as time and space, transcending the shackles of the Aquarian Age.

⁴¹ See Harris, *Do we have astrology to thank for clocks?*.

⁴² See Chang, *For Apollo 11 He Wasn't on the Moon. But His Coffee Was Warm*, 2019.

Appendix

Figure 1. The Nine-fold manifestation of I-O:

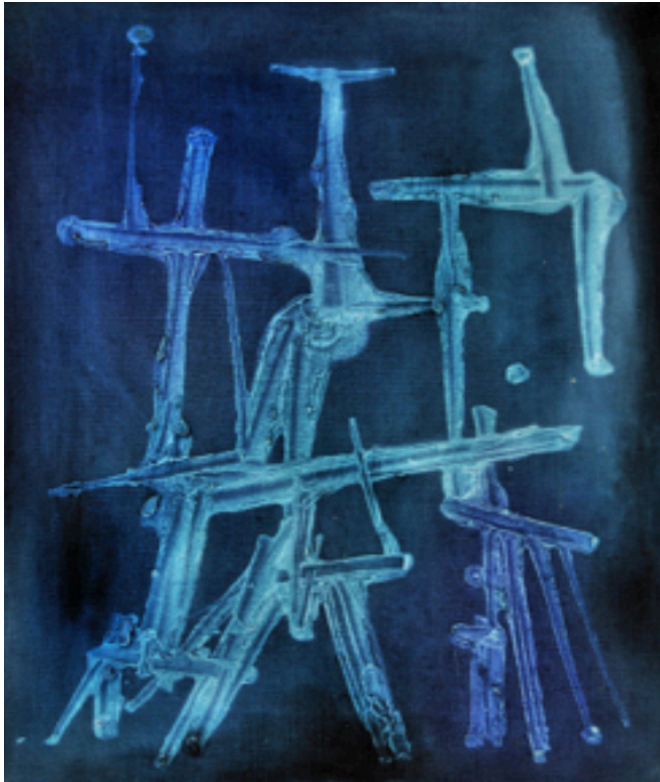


Bruce Lyon, *Occult Cosmology*, 271.

Figure 2. Monadic evolution as triple process in the time and space of a solar system:

	Spirit	Soul	Matter
Spirit	Spirit - Spirit	Spirit - Soul	Spirit - Matter
Soul	Soul - Spirit	Soul - Soul	Soul - Matter
Matter	Matter - Spirit	Matter - Soul	Matter - Matter

Figure 3: “Sea-born”, Matri Dei d.d.d. (1961)



Gatti, Chiara. *Luigi Pericle: Beyond the Visible*, 99.

Figure 4: “The March of Time B”, Matri Dei d.d.d. (1966)



Gatti, Chiara. *Luigi Pericle: Beyond the Visible*, 127.

Figure 5: “The Guardian of the Threshold”, Matri Dei d.d.d. (1965)



Gatti, Chiara. *Luigi Pericle: Beyond the Visible*, 121.

Figure 6: “Uranian Golem II”, Matri Dei d.d.d. (1964)



Gatti, Chiara. *Luigi Pericle: Beyond the Visible*, 117.

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