

SAVING THE

NEOSYMBOLIST ART

LIVES OF

AND LEGENDS OF THE FALL

ANGELS



SASHA CHAITOW

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Sasha Chaitow

Sasha Chaitow, PhD, is a British-Greek scholar, author, and artist. She completed her doctoral research on Joséphin Péladan's life and work in 2014 at the University of Essex. She initially trained in figurative art at Vakalo College of Art (Athens, Greece), and she holds two MAs in Western Esotericism (University of Exeter, 2008), and English Literature (University of Indianapolis, 2004).

Now an independent scholar, she is interested in the interdisciplinary study of the intersection between esotericism and art and is currently exploring the symbolism of Greek icons, both artistically and from a scholarly perspective.

She has published a monograph on Péladan (Salonica, 2013), several academic articles on Péladan and other topics in Western Esotericism for international academic journals, and has published internationally on related topics for the general reader. She has delivered numerous academic and public lectures on related subjects, and is currently revising her PhD dissertation for publication in 2017.

Sasha is also a prolific visual artist and runs a gallery specialising in sacred art and heraldry in Corfu, Greece, representing over 35 artists as well as some of her own work. Since 2000 she has exhibited in Greece, the UK, Sweden and Spain, and her artwork has been included in international cultural publications. Her work is found in private collections worldwide.

Who was Josphin Péladan?

In the spring of 1892, the Paris gendarmerie were perplexed at the sight of a flood of crowds and carriages on their way to the Galeries Durand-Ruel, where they were met by a curious bearded man wearing purple velvet robes and answering to the name of a Babylonian Mage. The exhibition catalogue welcomed them with the lines:

Artist, you are a priest: Art is the great mystery and, if your effort results in a masterpiece, a ray of divinity will descend as on an altar. Artist, you are a king: Art is the true empire, if your hand draws a perfect line, the cherubim themselves will descend to revel in their reflection... They may one day close the Church, but [what about] the Museum? If Notre-Dame is profaned, the Louvre will officiate... Humanity, ... will always go to mass, when the priest will be Bach, Beethoven, Palestrina! Brothers in all the arts, I am sounding a battle cry: let us form a holy militia for the salvation of idealism....we will build the Temple of Beauty ...for the artist is a priest, a king, a mage, for art is a mystery, the only true empire, the great miracle...

The author, occultist and visionary who masterminded the *Salons de la Rose + Croix* was Josphin Péladan (1858-1918). He would proceed to organise a further five Salons between 1893 and 1897, under the auspices of his organisation, *The Order of the Rose + Croix of the Temple and the Grail*. His purpose was to expose the general public to a form of Symbolist art that would “rip Love out of the Western soul and replace it with the love of Beauty, the love of the Ideal, the love of Mystery.”

His grand vision was no less than a spiritual revolution with beauty as his supreme weapon and art as the *coup de grace* against the ‘disenchantment of the world’ so prevalent as first the scientific world-view and then the industrial revolution completed their conquest of the Western mind, in an age he regarded as characterized by rampant materialism and futile decadence.

For the organisation of this first, spectacular Salon, he had issued a call to artists some months earlier, with the aim of contravening the academically accepted art of his time, which he despised and frequently railed against in his articles in the French press. The invitation to artists to send their work for consideration for the first *Salon de la Rose+Croix* had the tone of a manifesto:

The Order forbids any contemporary representations, rustic, military, flowers, animals, genres such as history, and portraits or landscapes. But it welcomes all allegories, legends, mysticism and myth, as well as expressive faces if they are noble, or nude studies if they are beautiful. Because you must make BEAUTY to enter the Rose+Croix Salon.

The result was an immense impact on the Parisian art world, and eventually, on the whole Symbolist movement. The first Salon welcomed over fifty thousand visitors, intrigued by a curious poster that had covered the walls of Paris a few weeks earlier, as well as by regular articles, announcements, and controversies printed in *Le Figaro* over the preceding year. The Salons included musical and theatrical performances alongside the exhibitions, giving an unparalleled impetus and unity to the Symbolist movement. Yet, the Salons and their instigator were as notorious as they were intriguing, and following numerous public controversies, within a few short years, both

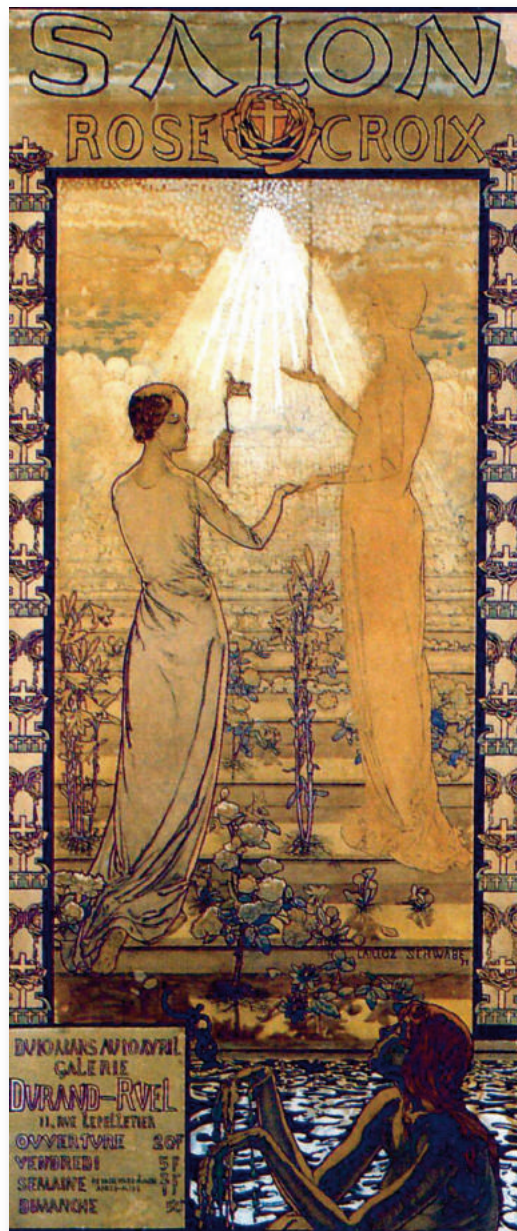
Salons and Mage were forgotten, to be recalled only as a utopian fantasy of an eccentric buffoon.

Who was Péladan?

This curious man who in the 1890s went by the name Sar Merodack and claimed an ancestry of Babylonian royalty, left a spectacular legacy of over 100 books, several thousand articles, and was responsible for inspiring a generation of artists and authors as far afield as Russia and South America. Today his works are all but forgotten, encountered only within treatises on the Decadent movement or in brief references in academic studies of *fin-de-siècle* French Occultism, the majority of which tend to emphasise his eccentricity and peculiarity, telling us little of the man himself.

Trying to read Péladan can be disheartening on account of the florid lyricism of his novels, and the turgidity of his theoretical prose. Yet, if one makes the effort to read him on his own terms, what emerges is a man with a clear and coherent vision, whose life's work was an attempt to “*build the Temple of Beauty*” of which he wrote, and whose every action was tuned to a conscious attempt to disseminate this vision, in the hope that through flooding the world with art created according to the

principles of spiritual beauty that he taught, society might achieve a new Renaissance and emerge from the swamp of decadence he felt



Poster for Péladan's first Salon in 1892

had overcome it.

Péladan's vision

Péladan's worldview was strongly coloured by his belief that the world had been created, not by God, but by the angels, and that primordial man was androgynous and immortal. The only thing this creature lacked was self-awareness. On seeing their "most perfect" creation, the angels were so spellbound by its potential, that they sought to give it the opportunity to commune with the divine mysteries. However, this was impossible because the primordial androgyne belonged to a different order of being, and allowing it access to higher spiritual knowledge through self-awareness contravened natural law.

The story of the snake and the apple from the Tree of Knowledge is thus reinterpreted, not as an encounter with a cunning force of evil, but as an act of mercy and love on the part of the angels. Nonetheless, they were punished along with their creation, since the androgyne had received a small glimpse of the immensity of the macrocosm, and the first stirrings of self-awareness had begun. This is the moment when time began, according to this retelling.

The androgyne was separated into two, unequal beings, male and female each receiving different attributes and qualities, while those angels who, like Prometheus, had dared to try to share the "sacred fire", were sentenced to live out all eternity on earth, mating with humans and, in a twist of divine irony, charged to guide humanity and to help them to evolve spiritually, so that through the generations, they would achieve enough self-awareness and knowledge of the mysteries to be able to reunite into their original, androgynous form, and by extension, to reintegrate with the Divine.

This theory is the motive force for all of Péladan's work, and the metaphysical principles underlying this premise form the entire basis for his aesthetics. His fixation on the arts, and visual representation in particular, de-

rived from his belief that humans were created by angels casting their shadow, and then tracing its silhouette in order to shape the human form:

The beings delegated by Being (Elohim) conceived their creative oeuvre by decreeing that humanity would be manifested (delineated) according to their shadow. The Elohim were spirits, individualised emanations of the essence. Since the shadow is a decreased form of light, the shadow of essence is substance, and the shadow of substance can be nothing other than matter ... The prototype of man, king of the sensible world, is the angel ... One can define beauty by looking at angelic forms ... We know the Greek legend of the origins of the art of Drawing. On the eve of their parting, the daughter of Butades, the potter of Sicyon, delineated the shadow of her lover with charcoal on a white wall. So, for the fervent memory of our angelic origins to remain in our soul, we must maintain our understanding and our sense of the desire to return, some day, to those who gave us perfect love, as they gave us reality and life. Some must do this by creating works of art, others by understanding them.

This collection of artwork by Sasha Chaitow is inspired by the legend of the angelic and human fall from grace, as told by Péladan.

It has been designed in three loosely connected thematic units that are meant to be "read" as excerpts from a narrative. The techniques, colouring, and even the numbering are all significant: the more subtle layering of glazes in the first section gives way to heavier forms and cleaner lines in Part II, associated with life in the material realm. The final trilogy, or triptych reflects a process of becoming from the three perspectives noted by Péladan, himself adapting Plato.

Disclaimer: These images are inspired by the work of Péladan, which Sasha has chosen to illustrate as explained in the accompanying text. They do not necessarily reflect the belief system of the artist.

I. Rewriting Genesis



And on the sixth day



*On the seventh day
was the Fall*



Genesis 3:24



Lost in the Light



Perfect Union

II. Life embedded in matter



Ghost of Plato



Vives unguibus et morsu



Unforgiving Sphinx



Revenge of the tall poppy

III. Theodicy: Three ways to God



Theodicy: Way of Prometheus



*Art: Way of the
children of angels*



Science: Way of Mankind

The Péladan Project: Early concept drawings



Guardians of the threshold



Genesis 3:24 v.I



Exhortation



Kaloprosopia I



Kaloprosopia II



Oannes



Bené-Satan



Temple of the Arts



The Ereckian

A word on Symbolism and esoteric art

Symbolism is one of the most challenging forms of art for an audience. Symbolic meaning is more important to the artist than aesthetic convention, and a symbolic composition is often governed by a visual “grammar” and “vocabulary” that depends on prior knowledge and references that may come from any number of cultural frameworks. The influences can range from ancient civilizations to Renaissance emblematics. Every symbol contains layers of meaning which are multiplied when in composition with other, similarly complex symbols.

A symbolist artist’s purpose is nearly always to invite the viewer into a silent dialogue. Therefore, the most effective way to approach a perplexing symbolist work is not by asking “what does it mean” and expecting a straightforward answer. Rather, it is better to remember that nothing has been left to chance; so every element has something to say, and it acquires meaning in relation to the composition as a whole. The most useful questions to ask oneself are: “Why is that there, what does it make me think of, and what is its relationship to the object/figure next to it?” This applies as much to colour, texture, and even titles, as it does to figures and objects. The process of working out the meanings hidden within the work is the purpose of the work itself.

The mages, androgynes, and sphinxes in Péladan’s writings and in the art of the artists he inspired, are glyphs embodying human spiritual potential. Because of their metaphysical nature, these mysteries could not, he believed, be directly communicated, but needed to be expressed in a manner intelligible to the human intellect, that could withstand the test of time.

Péladan elaborates: *In timeless [antiquity], ideas had not been divided up and individualised as they are today; works of art ... presented a perceptible message to everyone, and a further one [...] imperceptible to the uninitiated.*

Elsewhere he concludes that: *A work of art must be of such a high order that the people will feel it without comprehending it; we must elevate the let-*

ters, the sciences and the arts beyond the reach of fools, so that a new and obvious excellence will appear...

While certainly elitist to the modern sensibility, Péladan’s viewpoint rests on the historical precedent of Renaissance art in particular; simple, well-known symbolic representation was used as a teaching tool for the illiterate, but equally, complex and often obscure symbolism was woven into fine art pieces with a referential framework that could only be deciphered by those well-versed in classical learning. The same tactic was used by esoteric writers throughout history, to encode their teachings so that they could not fall into the hands of the “profane,” but only be comprehended by initiates.

I am not innocent of these techniques; I perceive symbolism in art as a language in its own right, and esoteric symbolism in particular contains numerous fascinating dialects that also deal with profound philosophical questions. I have utilized a referential framework that is as complex as Péladan’s. In Péladan’s narrative as well as in mine, it is meant to lead to an understanding of the creative force as man’s inherent ability to be his own saviour.

Nevertheless, it is my firm belief that this background is not necessary to appreciate, and indeed to develop one’s own, original interpretation of a given image (in fact this would be the ideal). My aim is to invite each viewer into a dialogue, first with the images, then with the stories they hold, and to be less concerned, at least initially, with the “official” meaning.

Despite this, in the pages that follow I have attempted to provide explanations of the images for the curious, accompanied by direct quotes from Péladan to give a sense of how I have visualised his words. From that point on, I hope to have provided enough information to allow the interested viewer to explore further should they wish to do so.

Sasha Chaitow, Corfu, August 2016

And on the sixth day...



Oil on canvas board. Handpainted mount on canvas board. 40 x 50 cm.

“ After Genesis, art began with drawing; the Oelohim projected their shadow to elaborate the human form.

Péladan, L'art idéaliste et mystique, 101-2.



Péladan wrote his own interpretation of the Book of Genesis. In his retelling of the creation story, this was the moment when both mankind and art came into being. According to Péladan, the primordial androgyne was created by the angels at God's behest, and this act of creation signalled the birth of art:

“The beings delegated by Being (the Oelohim) conceived their creative oeuvre by decreeing that humanity would be delineated according to the shadow they cast. The Oelohim were spirits, individualised emanations of the essence.... [Their] shadow cannot be other than matter. [...] The prototype of man, king of the sensible

world, is the angel.”

As creatures of light and ether, the angels could project a shadow, but could only create a being whose substance was denser than their own. So they drew the outline of their own shadows and breathed life into it. This was the first, androgynous human.

The strip at the bottom of the painting depicts the seven days of creation; the creation of light, the separation of the heavens and the waters, the creation of the earth and the planets, to the creation of man. In this version of the story, on the seventh day came the Fall (see next image).

On the seventh day was the Fall



Oil on canvas board. Handpainted mount on canvas board. 40 x 50 cm.



“ Satan and his angels fell because of the mirage of their work; these artists of creation were seduced by their own handiwork.

Péladan, Comment on devient artiste, 22.

The angelic creation was an exquisitely sublime androgynous being, with which the angels promptly fell in love: “these artists of creation were seduced by their own handiwork.” Led by Lucifer, the impassioned angels wanted to share the celestial mysteries and principles with their creation, so that it would attain self-awareness and free will.

In Péladan’s account, this was forbidden not because it would have rivalled God, but because the primordial androgyne was spun from angelic shadows and its substance could not contain free will.

Subordinate to the angels as a statue is subordinate to the sculptor, the androgyne’s material form and place in the hi-

erarchy of being could not accommodate the divine mysteries.

The angels persisted, and the androgyne became curious about its origins—but in its existing form, self-knowledge would have broken natural order and destroyed it in the process.

Thus, the being Péladan designates as the Demiurge, the creator of the material realm “Joah Elohim,” rent the androgyne into the two sexes—Adam and “Aïscha” (Eve)—made them mortal, and gave them free will.

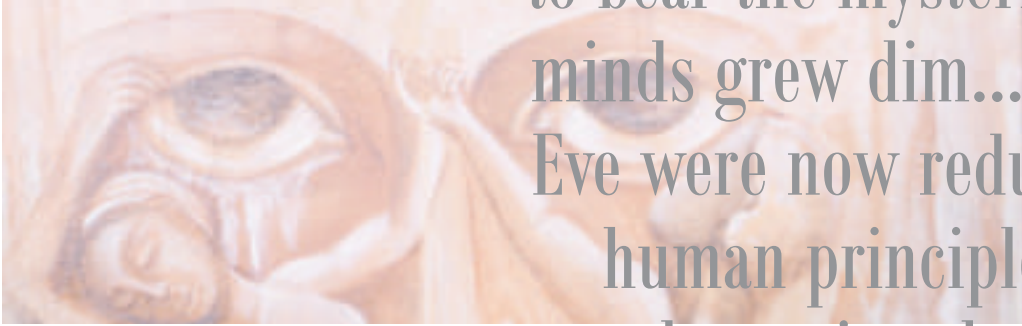
The price was high, as each gender received different characteristics and proportions and neither could ever be complete without the other....

Genesis 3:24



Oil on canvas board. Handpainted mount on canvas board. 40 x 50 cm.

“ They came to know, with lucidity, that they were mutually imperfect and unable to bear the mysteries... Their minds grew dim... Adam and Eve were now reduced to the human principle, into this new becoming through pain.



*Péladan, Comment on devient Fée, 41–2.
Corresponds to Genesis 3:14–24*

The inherent imperfection in their natures as individuals generated “original sin,” since according to Péladan, men received intellect and spirit, and women received volition and instinct. This imbalance caused evil to enter the world:

With Adam and Eve now reduced to the human principle, Joah Elohim interposed the collective entity called Cherubim into an orbit emerging from the primitive, Edenic stasis, into this new becoming through pain. And the collective entity Cherubim was the second cause, the conceiver and fertilizer of mysteries, destined to represent to Adam, through its imperious mirages, in an intellectual atmos-

phere, a Nahash (read the snake of Genesis) of light whose incessant whirling would circumscribe an orb of ideality around perceptible life.

In this painting, Lucifer weeps as he looks on at the moment of the rending of the androgyne, an error committed out of love. Yet all is not lost.

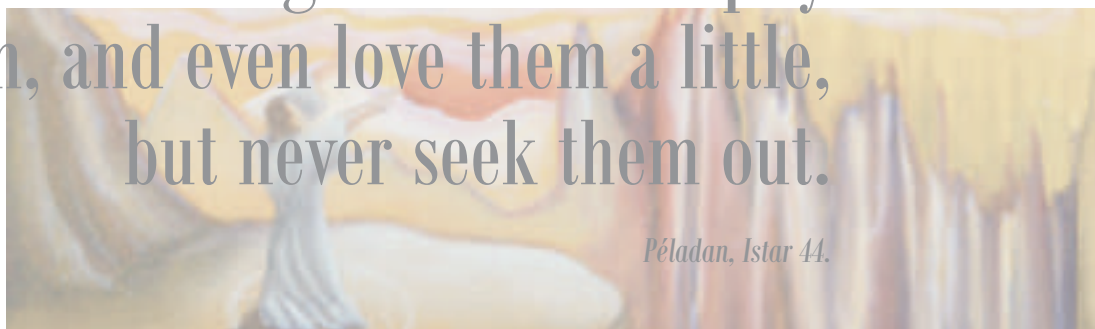
Echoing an old allegorical motif (*Allegory of Hope* by George Frederic Watts, 1886), Adam and Aischa grasp the last chord of the last lyre that sits on the back of Nahash who encircles the earth. If they can remember the harmony without breaking the chord, they can find the way back to each other....

Lost in the light



Oil on canvas board. Handpainted mount on canvas board. 40 x 50 cm.

“ Their crime surpasses our understanding, but it was committed out of love for us, they are lost, but they are in the light. We should pity them, and even love them a little, but never seek them out.



Péladan, Istar 44.

Péladan could fathom neither the concept of original sin as an immutable curse, nor the eternal condemnation of Satan or mankind. This preoccupation is central to his work, resting on his conviction that the true cause of the Fall was misguided love. Addressing Lucifer in one of his texts, Péladan wrote:

I visit you in my thoughts, as it is said in the works of mercy, imprisoned spirit, punished spirit; I try to clean your face of the mud that human wickedness has thrown there... If you are, as I believe, a great sinner, but lucid in your atonement, then receive the consolation of my thought and the refreshment of my charity.... I respect you in your misfortune, as I admire the splendour of your origins.

The Bené-Oelohim were the sons of your will and I would like to believe that I am descended from them, I, the confused élan of the most humble, to the grandest, and to the most unlucky of the same race...

Péladan believed that even God recognised Lucifer's benevolent, if misguided intentions. Hence he was condemned, not to Tartarus or hell, but literally to enact the role of the eternal Light-Bringer of mankind.

This painting is a direct representation of the highlighted quote above. The rebel angel is held within a cage of light. Below an initiate stands in a circle, conjuring the sixth Solomonic seal of the sun that has begun to melt the cage....

Perfect Union



Oil on canvas board. Handpainted mount on canvas board. 40 x 50 cm.

“ All humans are pregnant [...] both in body and soul, and [...] our nature is to desire to give birth. But it is impossible to give birth in ugliness; only in beauty. The union of a man and woman is birth. This is a divine matter, and this pregnancy and gestation instill immortality into a living, mortal, being.

Plato, Symposium 206c.



Platonic thought echoes through much of Péladan's work, and the *Symposium* influenced Péladan's thoughts on the primordial androgyne. Péladan believed that the only way to reunite the broken androgyne and to redeem the Fall, was through Ideal love between a man and woman who had both fully awoken to their divine origins.

Many of his novels tell the story of fallen angels in human form by turns guiding, or themselves falling in love with mortals, to bring them to this point of union. His narratives explore

the redemptive potential of prioritising spiritual union born of this tragic necessity, the metaphysical properties of the androgyne, and the occult pathways hidden within the stories of the first and second angelic fall.

In this image, man and woman have begun to transform into bodies of light, and have aligned with their winged protectors. They are symbolically pregnant, echoing Plato, and the product of this union, barely visible in the red frame, is a perfectly formed androgyne....

Ghost of Plato



Oil on canvas board. Handpainted mount on canvas board. 40 x 50 cm.

“ Deepen [your understanding of] Plato: you will not see a ghost, but your spirit will be enlightened. The word of the genius does not die; Plato’s living thought still floats within the ether and through rites of admiration, the initiate can attract the influence and fertilization of the Spirit whose disciple he has become.

Péladan, Comment on devient Mage, 122, 127, 258–9.



Plato is a powerful influence throughout Péladan’s work, and he repeatedly urges his readers to explore the ancient philosopher’s words.

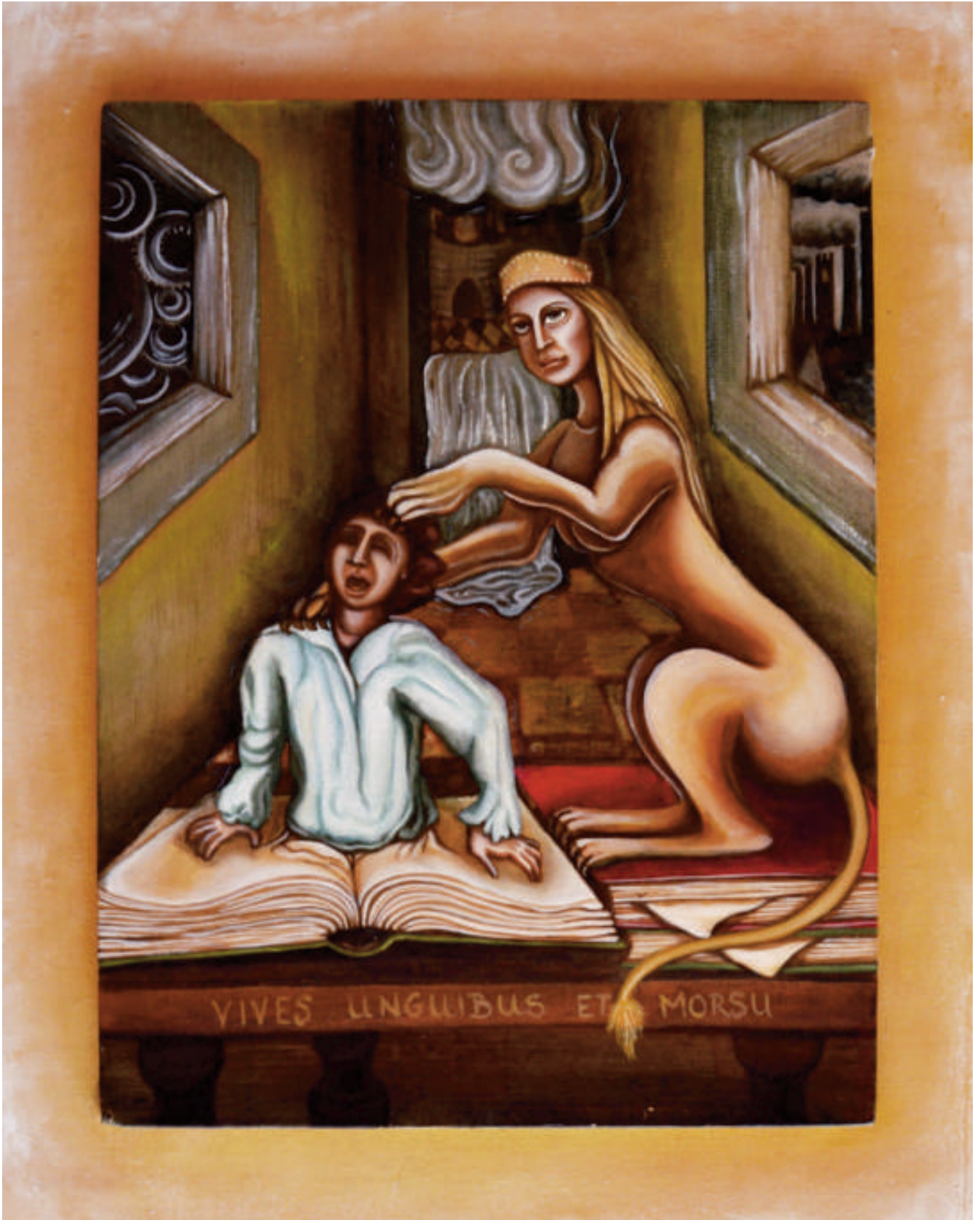
Péladan believed that the great minds of Western civilisation, Plato among them, were descended from the fallen angels, and that by following their teachings, one could, slowly and through careful intellectual and spiritual work, rediscover our forgotten divine origins:

True to the Bereschit [Genesis] and to the sepher [Book] of Enoch, in the genius of a Plato, of a Dante, of a Wagner, I see a daimonic descent.. This is the conflict of angelic nature enclosed within the

human condition. I believe ...that the genius is never a man, but a daimon; an intermediary being between the spiritual and the earthly hierarchy..

This painting captures the moment of the mystical experience, when the seeker has begun to touch the Platonic World of Ideas. The spiral connecting their two minds is the process of anamnesis, or remembering, since Plato taught that all knowledge is always within us, and simply needs to be remembered. The Greek lettering on the initiate’s body is a passage from Plato’s *Meno* (86a-b), and speaks of the immortality of the soul....

Vives Unguibus et Morsu



Oil on canvas board. Handpainted mount on canvas board. 40 x 50 cm.



Before beholding the sphinx of initiation he had thrown himself into his studies, to support his inferiority, to get away from himself. Books ruined his life, his preoccupations shut him off from modernity.



Péladan, Le vice suprême, 158–9

Many of Péladan's narratives mirror his real-world efforts to create an ideal collective of artists and philosophers committed to guiding and supporting individuals in search of spiritual enlightenment. Several aspects are autobiographical, and his real-world actions mirrored his alter ego's fictional efforts.

A recurring theme in the novels is that of individuals attempting to reach for "the ideal" but betrayed by circumstance, or their own character flaws. The most significant for understanding Péladan's thought-processes is his alter ego Mérodack, a recurring character who appears in the role of a mage and mentor to others. Frequently plagued by self-doubt, Mérodack's tribulations reflect Péladan's own experiences.

The highlighted quote that inspired this painting is from Péladan's first novel, *Le*

vice suprême (1884). These words foreshadowed a humbling mystical experience he was to undergo nearly 15 years later, when visiting the Sphinx in Egypt.

In this painting, the seeker has literally sunk into his books, losing touch with reality. As guardian of mysteries, the Sphinx he invokes has come to life in his cell-like room, dragging him out of his fantasy world in a violent initiatory awakening. The view from the windows offer an ironic reflection on modernity, echoing Blake's "dark satanic mills". Péladan used the phrase *Vives unguibus et morsu*: (You shall live by her tooth and claw) as a legend to an emblem frequently found in the frontispieces to his early work. It refers both to the necessity of total submission to the initiatory process - symbolised here by the Sphinx, as well as the struggle for survival in the material world experienced by initiates, as described in many of Péladan's novels.

The Unforgiving Sphinx



Oil on canvas board. Handpainted mount on canvas board. 40 x 50 cm.

“ Like all spirits that soar as eagles, who either produce work worthy of their stature, or fail due to sterile complications, [who] go to the sphinx and tear away strips of mystery.... ‘I am a mage,’ he said to the princess...

Péladan, Le vice suprême, 158–9.



For Péladan, the Sphinx was a symbol of the supreme initiator and mystagogue, whose form encapsulated the mysteries of human nature and gender, as well as humanity's relationship with the divine:

The Sphinx is not just [...] a benevolent monster. [...] Head of a man, breasts of a woman, body of a lion. This can be read as thought, passion, and instinct. The head thinks, the chest creates the desire which gives birth to passion and results in reproduction, and the animal nature rests in the form of man... [the] figurative bear implies a doctrinal concept... Designating it as an Androsphinx is literally false; it should be called an Androgynosphinx. This most ancient monument to form represents the androgyne. [...] The Androgynosphinx represents humanity confident in the resurrection that manifests at every break of day. Esoteri-

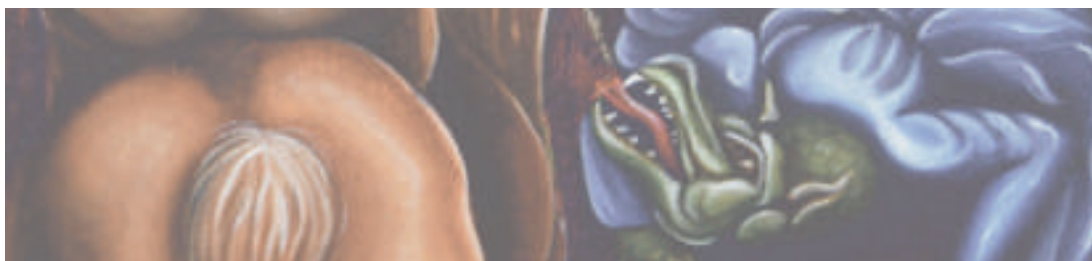
cally, it represents the initial state of man that is identical to his final state. It teaches the principle of evolution and the secret of happiness... The Sphinx incarnates a complete theology with the solution to [the question of] origins... The Sphinx smiles at its limitless future; being both male and female it knows it will one day reconstitute its original unity, because it is both man and god, at the same point of involution and evolution.

Inspired by the highlighted phrase above “go to the Sphinx and tear away strips of mystery,” in this painting the seeker is still scratching at the surface of the Sphinx's nature, while the path he needs to take stretches deep within her. Angelic presences behind the veil of appearances are revealed as sharing hints and signposts to the source, but the seeker has not yet realised that the answers he seeks are already before him...

Revenge of the tall poppy



Oil on canvas board. Handpainted mount on canvas board. 40 x 50 cm.



“ Race and love are impotent within ordinary life. The exceptional is necessarily massacred by the crowd.

Péladan summarising Istar, his fifth novel (1888)

Péladan's characters are invariably archetypal; living, polysemous symbols of the concepts he wanted to convey. He focused on three types of character; initiates, who are sometimes also fallen angels who are conscious or unconscious of their origins. The second are *animiques* who possess a dormant potential for self-realisation and ascension. The third are representatives of the *ochlos*, or mob, a negative force against which his protagonists must strive, into which they are subsumed, or which provokes their transformation. This interplay and its consequences form the main storyline, giving Péladan ample opportunity for social commentary. He wrote reams on the conflict between the potential of the *animiques* and their tribulations in the face of the “mindless masses;” the highlighted quote here is one such example, musing on the fate of Istar, an angel trapped in the form of a beautiful woman, further imprisoned by her brutish husband. The title of this paint-

ing refers to “tall poppy syndrome”; a social phenomenon in which those of higher social, economical, spiritual or intellectual standing are attacked and discredited by “the masses,” in an attempt to reduce them to the lowest common denominator.

Modelled on the traditional depiction of St. George, the Amazon-like warriorress is piercing the venomous tongue of the dragon, whimsically dressed in a Victorian-type dress to reflect “establishment society” of Péladan's time. The double face of the mounted figure reflects the helmets worn by the *cataphracts* - some of the most feared cavalry warriors in history. They wore Janus-headed helmets to confuse and terrify the enemy. St George is thought to have belonged to one such elite corps.

Here the “tall poppy” needs no armor, but proudly avenges herself and her kind using no more than her initiatory knowledge of her human and divine nature.

Theodicy: Way of Prometheus



Oil on canvas board. Handpainted mount on canvas board. 40 x 50 cm.

⚡⚡ Theodicy seeks God through thought.

Péladan, *L'art idéaliste et mystique*, 34.



Péladan held the intellectual approach to knowledge in great esteem and placed the development of a theodicy at the pinnacle of his theory, stating: “all the categories of understanding [are] subdivisions of a unique science: theodicy.” By resolving the problem of evil—and that of free will—in an intellectually satisfactory way that did not rely on faith alone, Péladan believed he could also demonstrate the way back to God within the mortal life span. Not content with rewriting *Genesis*, he also rewrote Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Unbound*, recasting the ancient myth about human origins to fit his purpose:

PROMETHEUS: Go, tell the priests in all the temples: When a man of the spirit should appear, with audacity, genius, goodness, creative or heroic, faithful or cultured, he belongs to Prometheus! I have revealed the beautiful mystery to all but I will teach none but the most exceptional of humans... There is but one mys-

tery ... that of pain! Through it, man and Daemon may ascend higher than Zeus, higher than Fate.... I am the individual, I am motion...

In both versions of the story, Prometheus steals the sacred fire from the heavens in order to bring light and knowledge to mankind. Zeus punishes him for the crime, but Prometheus is eventually liberated.

In this painting, the first of a triptych depicting Péladan’s “three ways to God,” the blood of Prometheus infuses newborn humanity with the sacred flame... on which the Hebrew word *Da’ath* can just be read. The Kabbalistic tree of life has been placed strategically to correspond to the material and divine realms denoted by the dark and light areas of the background. The composition is meant to provoke an intellectual response, first through an exploration of the combination of its visual elements, then through contemplation of their implications.

Art: The Children of Angels



Oil on canvas board. Handpainted mount on canvas board. 40 x 50 cm.

“ Art seeks God through Beauty

Péladan, *L'art idéaliste et mystique*, 34

Péladan perceived three paths to achieve reintegration with the divine, reflected in this triptych of paintings (Theodicy, Art, Science). This painting focuses on the “artist-initiates,” who according to Péladan were descended from the fallen angels who took the role of the guides of humanity.

The enchanters, the egregores of all times, of all lands, mages, saints, artists, poets, aristes, mystagogues, are all the obscured or shining offspring of angelic descent.

Their task was to attain unity with the divine through becoming creators themselves. Their art would inspire the dormant *animiques* (potential initiates) to awaken to their divine nature and thus incrementally transform society. This message is echoed throughout Péladan’s work.

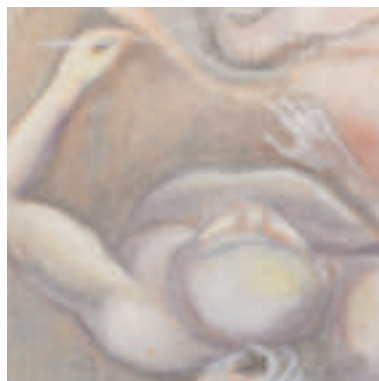
Here, in the words of his Prometheus, the “Ephemerals” are the first mortals created by the Olympian gods, whom

Zeus initially wants to destroy. It was to them that Prometheus delivered the sacred flame as depicted in the previous painting:

I know nothing of men, of their new generations. A thousand years ago, the arts were born. Temples were raised; an army of statues must have appeared, and the lyre vibrated in the hands of the Ephemerals, creators in their own right, similar to the Gods!

In this painting, the artist-initiates are shown in the moment of becoming: they are creating each other right on the canvas before our eyes, while at the same time they are giving form to the angels.

As the mortals become creators in their own right, in a reversal of the first painting of this series, the angelic misdeed is redeemed, and the winged rose blooms in the chalice of promise. This feature is part of the emblem of Péladan’s order, a symbol of hope and fulfilment.



Science: Way of Man



Oil on canvas board. Handpainted mount on canvas board. 40 x 50 cm.



Science seeks God through reality

Péladan, L'art idealiste et mystique, 101-2.



The third way to reach God, according to Péladan, is through “science,” or the observation and comprehension of reality. This is not a reference to the modern scientific method, but to the discovery of “reality” behind the veils of illusion, the reality of our origins and true nature, according to Péladan’s teachings.

Compare to “The Unforgiving Sphinx” earlier in this series; there the initiate attempts to discover reality by dealing with the surface of what he perceives; in this painting, firmly set in the material realm, the individual begins to birth themselves in darkness.

Placed alongside the other two paintings in this triptych, the background of all three together form a pyramid - from fire lighting the darkness, to the birth of colour, and here, to self-birth under ice and the cover of night. The individual is

“writing” itself into being on the canvas, following Péladan’s teaching to become the artist of one’s own existence.

The Kabbalistic Tree of Life, begun in “Theodicy,” is completed here, and its placement in both paintings highlights specific areas of significance - in this case the white circle that corresponds to Binah, or “Understanding,” and that which gives form to reality; order to chaos.

Thus the collection comes full circle; from the creation of mankind by angels (in an imbalanced relationship of creator and servitor), travelling through legends of origins and exploring questions of transgression, punishment, mercy, the quest for knowledge and human failings, and finally, the immanence of the divine in matter and in human existence.

Genesis 3:24



Pencil on paper. Mounted dimensions 39 x 49 cm

“ You will never
know true existence and you will
never be coloured,
except by your
reflection in each
other.

Péladan, Comment on devient Fée, 41–2



This collection of pencil drawings began in 2012 as a series of concept designs for the “Saving the Lives of Angels” series. This one is the draft for “Genesis 3:24” that is now the third image in the collection.

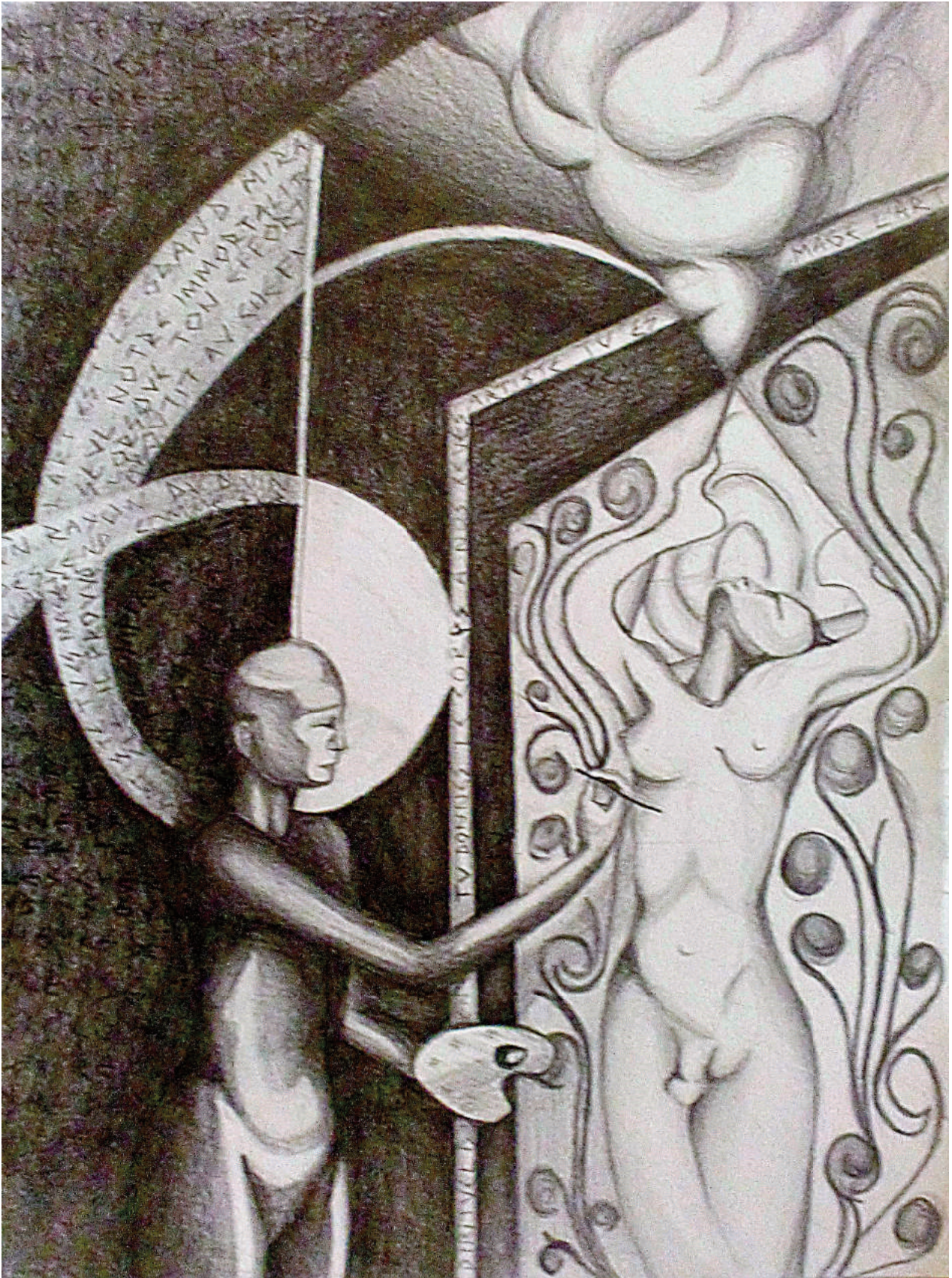
The original pencil series numbered eleven drawings. Some have been sold, therefore only those still available are pictured here.

Three of these drawings were exhibited in Madrid in 2013 at the *1st NeoSymbolist Salon* at the Corrala Cultural Centre, organised in collaboration with the Au-

tonomous University of Madrid. Three further pieces were exhibited and sold in Corfu at the “*Art’s Revolution*” *Cultural Salon* in Corfu, 2014. Two have been on exhibition at ICON Gallery in Corfu since 2015 and their images used on ICON Gallery merchandise for 2015.

Not all of the pencil images have been used in the new series of paintings, as Sasha Chaitow is planning to develop the collection with larger, more complex exhibition pieces for future presentations. Their addition to this catalogue is intended to offer further insight into the many dimensions of Péladan’s work.

Exhortation



Pencil on paper. Mounted dimensions 39 x 49 cm

“ Artist, you are a priest:
Art is the great mystery and,
if your effort results in a
masterpiece, a ray of divinity
will descend as on an altar...
if your hand draws a perfect
line, the cherubim them-
selves will descend to revel
in their reflection.

Péladan, Catalogue du Salon de la Rose+Croix, 1892), 7–112



Temple of the Arts, Pencil on paper, 2013. Sold.

In the spring of 1892, Péladan greeted the visitors of the first *Salon de la Rose+Croix* garbed in long purple robes, sporting an outlandish coiffure and a long beard. The exhibition catalogue welcomed them with a preface entitled *Exhortation*, that has the tone of a manifesto and includes the lines highlighted above.

In the catalogue for the 1893 Salon, his tone is stricter and more religious. He makes oblique references to aspects of his cosmology, while appealing to artists to believe in:

Our mission, for Our strength depends on your trust, as Our subtlety is already the abstraction, the sum total [...] of the brilliant colours of your individualities [...]

Substituting love with beauty, love with the idea, the love of mystery, [...] this is the act that we shall attempt to perform upon the Western soul.

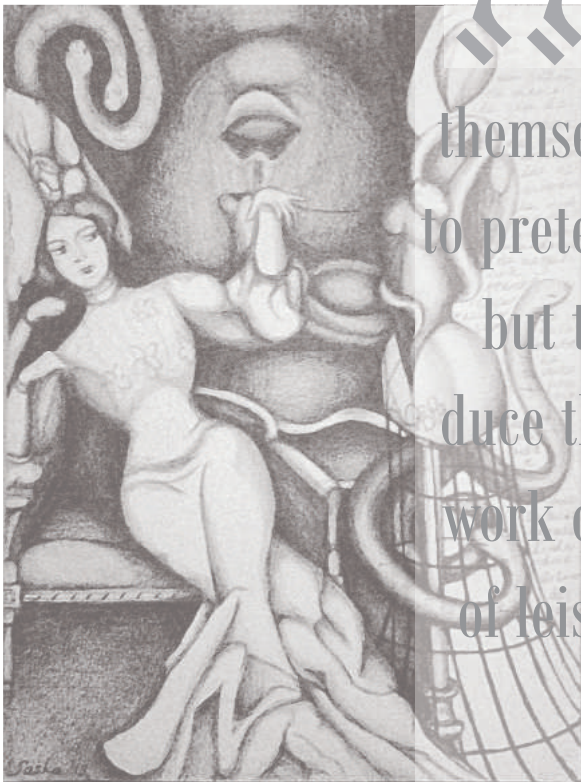
In the 1894 catalogue, he adds: *The reader should never forget [...] that Art is presented here as a religion or [...] as that part of religion that mediates between the physical and the metaphysical.*

This composition attempts to reflect all these aspects of Péladan’s call to artists, focusing on the motif of the artist-as-creator that runs throughout this collection, and depicting an archetypal artist-initiate giving form to the primordial androgyne who is also seen in the collection of paintings.

Kaloprosopia I



Pencil on paper. Mounted dimensions 39 x 49 cm



Kaloprosopia II, Pencil on paper, 2013. Sold.

“If the people of the world knew themselves, they would no longer dare to pretend to celebrate sacerdotal rites, but they would study, so as to reproduce the plastic commandments of the work of art upon themselves. The man of leisure should consider himself the actor of his own personality.”

Péladan, L'art idealiste et mystique, 542.

The essence of Péladan's teachings for the “animique” lay readership is summarised in his doctrine of *kaloprosopia*, (from the Greek *καλός*, meaning beautiful, and *πρόσωπον*, meaning person). This is a neologism referring to an “art of personality.” It rests on his consideration of “*the human being in its three elements of body, soul, and spirit.*”

Péladan defines it thus: *The first of the arts of personality is kaloprosopia, [...] the embellishment of the human aspect, or [...] of the moral character through everyday acts.*

By way of theatrical analogy he describes the role of the actor or musician

as that of an intermediary who manifests thought in matter, and the creative act as one that extends to human self-realisation. Péladan exhorted his readers to amend their behaviours according to the ideal that they were aiming to manifest.

By ensuring that their external interrelationships, demeanour and appearance corresponded precisely to this ideal, their internal perspective would align itself and approach it, readying them for the following steps. As they externalised the ideal “form,” this would gradually reshape their inner perceptions, leading to mindful interactions on all levels. By extension, they would become “initiates” in service of beauty and idealism.

Oannes



Pencil on paper. Mounted dimensions 39 x 49 cm



The Ereckian, Pencil on paper, 2013. Sold.

“Oannes, the amphibian god who emerged from the Red Sea and went to the beach of Babylon to teach mankind, during the day, left them a book...”

Péladan, Antiquité orientale, 171.

According to the Chaldean creation myth, Oannes, a giant man wearing a fish-head, taught mankind to give form to ideas and to create symbols. Péladan perceived his mythical avatar as one of the sublime egregores or daemons, stepping in to assist with the evolution of mankind. Péladan appeared to believe that all the legendary figures found in the myths of origin of various civilizations were in fact the fallen angels, stepping in to aid in the evolution of mankind.

Péladan also believed that these angelic teachers of humanity carved their teachings into stone to preserve them for future generations, using symbols that encoded the divine mysteries and the “true” story of human and angelic origins.

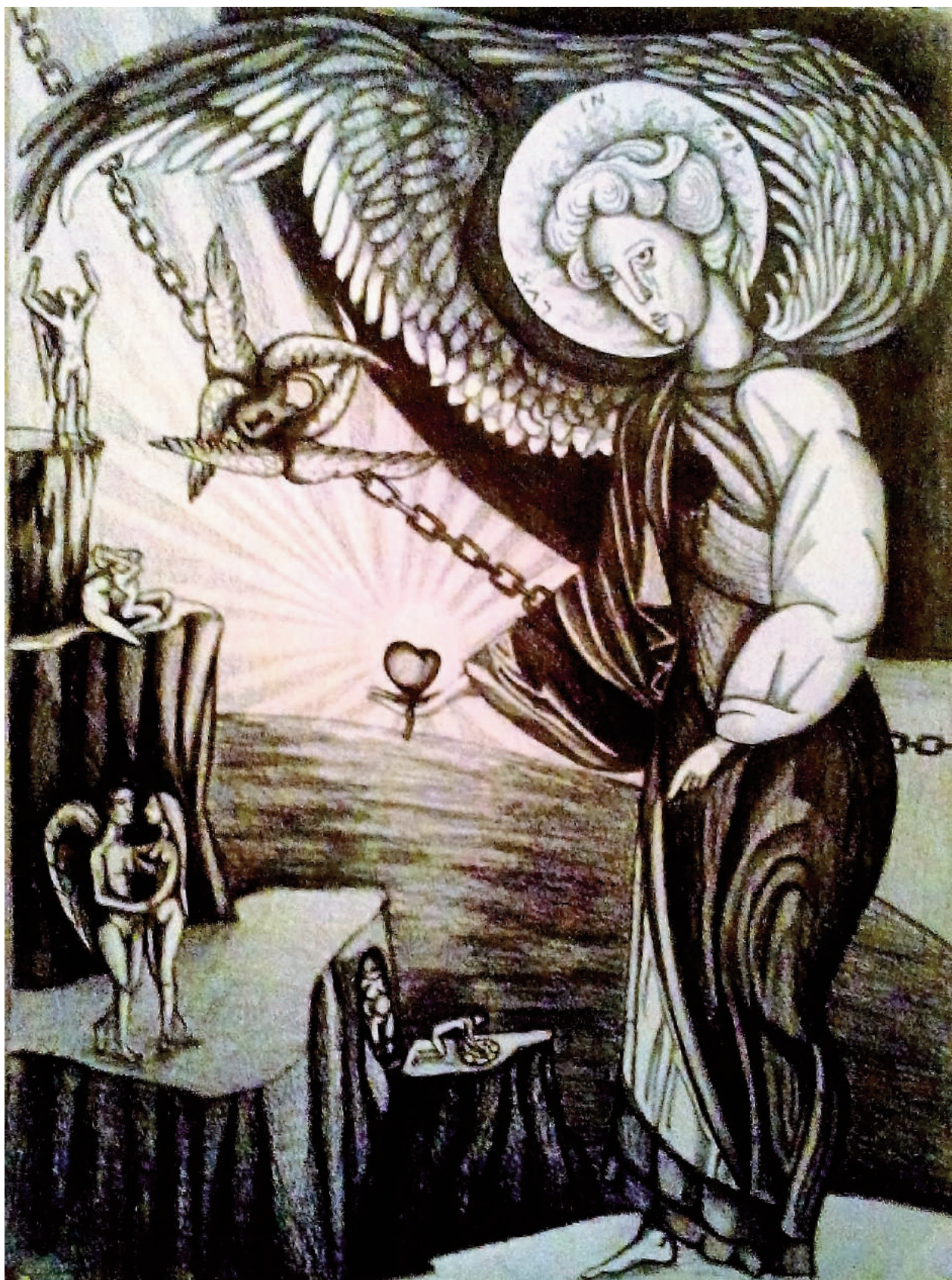
He attributed particular significance to

ancient architecture and sculpture, believing that visual clues to the divine mysteries had been encoded into them in such a way as to be read only by initiates. This was the “book” left by Oannes.

In this illustration, the Tigris and Euphrates rivers spill from the basket carried by Oannes, and between them the primordial couple embrace, signifying their union both before the Fall, and after redemption has been achieved. In the background, temples from various eras record the messages of the Oelohim, while Oannes is pictured as one of the creators of the evolving material world.

This composition in particular attempts to combine Péladan’s myth of origins with several of his other teachings to provide a panorama of his cosmology.

Bené-Satan



Pencil on paper. Mounted dimensions 39 x 49 cm



In the Ether, where the giant stars circle, there was a small world - insubordinate to the Sun - a small, vagrant world. The Ancients of Days and the Watchers know the sin of the planets. The Sun is the heart of Satan who burns... God left him his glory when punishing his crime...



Péladan, *Istar*, 257, 261–262.

Péladan's novel, *Istar* (1888) tells the story of Oelohite siblings Istar and Nergal, children of Bené-Satan, himself the son of Satan, who were given the chance to atone for their father's sins by living out a sequence of mortal lives alongside mankind, so as to instil divine genius among brutish "terrestrials."

Lower your pride... let the women of the earth conceive with your sons. Know that the good God ... wills that through the force of love, the brute will be elevated and that ... genius will penetrate their ignorance.

Satan is disgusted by this decree, but, as pictured here, he can only submit to

lighting the world with his burning heart, while his own children variously fight, or embrace their fate.

The punishment is still more tragic because the Oelohites are fatally attracted to one another, yet incest is the greatest sin of all. Péladan explores the redemptive potential of prioritising spiritual union born of this tragic necessity, the metaphysical properties of the androgyne, and the occult pathways hidden within the stories of the first and second angelic fall.

On the lowest terrace of the cliff in the illustration, the first human artist has begun to create images of gods...

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SAVING THE LIVES OF ANGELS

This collection of artwork by Sasha Chaitow, PhD, is inspired by the legend of the angelic and human fall from grace, as retold by French author, occultist and visionary Joséphin Péladan, a neglected, though influential figure of the French Belle Epoque, whose work inspired a generation of artists and authors across the globe. His single-minded purpose was to expose the general public to a form of Symbolist art that he hoped would spark a spiritual revolution, with art as his supreme weapon.

Dr Sasha Chaitow is a scholar of the history of Western esoteric thought and its influence on art, and Peladan's life and work was the topic of her doctoral research. She is also a trained and prolific artist, and this project represents a fusion of her research with her art. The images form a narrative based on Péladan's theory about the origins of mankind, and are accompanied by extensive quotes and explanations of their symbolic content.

48 COLOUR PAGES | 17 FULL PAGE ANNOTATED IMAGES | ARTICLE ON PELADAN BY THE ARTIST

This art collection was created for exhibition alongside a conference paper presented by Sasha Chaitow at the *Trans-States Conference: The Art of Crossing Over*, University of Northampton, 9-10 September 2016.
Advance viewing and artist lecture: Treadwell's Bookshop, 33 Store Street, London, 6 September 2016

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