

PAUL LAFFOLEY (b. 1940, Cambridge, Massachusetts)

***The World Soul of Plotinus*, 2001**

Oil, acrylic, vinyl lettering on canvas
73 ½ x 73 ½ in.

Exhibitions:

Portaling. Kent Gallery, New York, 2001

Literature:

Johnson, Ken. "A Beautiful Mind." *The Boston Globe*, 11 February, 2007.

Subject:

The Source of New-Platonism

Symbol Evocation: Transcendent Evolution

Notes:

Plotinus was born on March 13, 207 AD, at Lycopolis Egypt. In 212 he was weaned at 8 years old. In 231, he had a late start in philosophy, but he then dedicates himself to philosophy as mysticism. In 232, he joins the school of Ammonius Saccas. Plotinus remains with Saccas 11 years. In 243 Plotinus tries to reach Persian and Hindu sages by joining the army of Gordian (who is killed), Plotinus escapes with his life. By 244 Plotinus arrives in Rome. He teaches but writes nothing. He practices astral projection through the Oculus of the Pantheon designed by Hadrian the 14th Emperor of Rome. The geometry of the Pantheon with its implied interior perfect sphere inspires Plotinus to his mystical system. He then begins to write about the system, which is very simple. It is a system of necessary emanation, procession, irradiation accompanied by necessary aspiration or reversion-to-source: all the forms and phases of existence flow from the divinity and all strive to return.

The divinity is a graded triad of hypostases: 1) The One, or first existent. 2) The Divine Mind (nous-logos or the forms) or the first thinker and thought. 3) The All Soul or the first and only principle of life in which the body is described as a system of consciousness and matter and is to be considered distinct from the soul.

The simple teachings and practices were formed in 54 essays between 253 and 269. In 268 Porphyry of Tyre arrives from Athens to become the major disciple of Plotinus. After Plotinus dies Plotinus arranges the 54 essays into 6 groups and 9. This is why they are called the enneads. Porphyry just thought his arrangement was a good idea at the time. In 269 Plotinus becomes ill but he had already moved Campania into a small town called Belmonte, where in 266 he tried to build his dream—a city dedicated to Plato, "Platonopolis," based on Magnesia the ideal city referred to in Plato's last dialogue "the Laws." The whole thing fell through. Plotinus died on November 26, 270 from quinsy. That is all that is known about him except to say that his mystical system is totally unique in history. Many religions from Christianity to Hinduism have tried to claim Plotinus—it is impossible. His interest in religious traditions was from a position of attempting to discover how close these other systems were to his.

A final note: In 1946 Giuseppe Conti, who lived in Belmonte, Italy accidentally discovered the skull of Plotinus while digging a post-hole. The skull was neatly severed as if by a surgeon. Plotinus always said he hated his body and wished only his head buried. In the same year, Conti saw his first flying saucer—Disco Volante).