



## SERENDIPIA

Kosmos – Polykosmos - Pskykokosmos

# The Qualified Stroke of Luck

*Lars Physant*

*Serendipity* and *serendipia* are rarely heard in English and Spanish; and I have yet to hear or read the Danish word *serendipitet*. Nonetheless, the metaphorical content, which created the word, contains a special potential for approaching several, for me crucial, moments in my painting. I chose the Spanish word as the title, because it was through the Spanish language that I became familiar with the term.

The etymology is wonderful. Horace Walpole invented the term *serendipity* on 28 January 1754 in a letter to a friend about a lucky find. He created the word out of the title of a Persian fairy tale, *The Three Princes of Serendip*, which he had read as a child. *Serendip* is an ancient name for Sri Lanka. The three main characters in the fairy tale possessed special powers of detection. On the basis of shrewd observations, by deduction and synthesis they were able to arrive at facts, which were apparently beyond their reach.

The term is often used in the scientific world, when coincidences or even accidents lead to a useful discovery or invention: for example, Alexander Fleming's discovery of penicillin or Newton's apple, which resulted in his theory of the law of gravity.

It was Sir John Eliot Gardiner and Ricard Solé, in particular, who brought the word to life for me and roused my fascination. Gardiner has greatly inspired me with his historical, aesthetic and psychoanalytical study of J.S. Bach's life and work.<sup>1</sup> It is a wonderfully stimulating and complementary vision of Bach's process of creation, in parallel with that of Glenn Gould, which has strongly influenced me in my visual work. For example, in my paintings for *Ferías*, a suite of poems by Federico García Lorca, I employed what I refer to as *Gould's contrapuntal, synthesising method of interpretation* in a translation for the painting<sup>2</sup>. *Serendipity* is also a word, which Gardiner often uses, when talking about his projects and ideas.

Ricard Solé uses the term *serendipia* very often, when describing his research into Physics and Biology, especially studies of complex systems. Innovation in consciousness is unthinkable to him without the awareness of *serendipity*. For him, the term is just as important in his work, for example, on understanding the evolution of a virus, as it is in the crucial moments of an artistic process<sup>3</sup>.

I return to my own use of the term towards the end of the chapter on Cosmos, the Act of Seeing and Eckersberg.

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<sup>1</sup>John Eliot Gardiner: *Music in the Castle of Heaven*. London 2014

<sup>2</sup>Glenn Gould: 'A State of Wonder: The Complete Goldberg Variations 1955 & 1981'. Interview by Tim Page, Disc 3, New York 2002

<sup>3</sup>Ricard Solé: *Redescomplejas. Del genoma a Internet*. Barcelona 2009