



# Thinking Art from within Natural History and Biology: A Holistic Approach

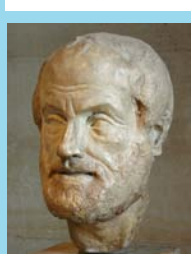
An illustrated talk

Speaker: Alexis Rago FLS

Linnean Society of London  
Burlington House,  
June 16th 2011

*Each one of us is as old as the entire biological kingdom, and our bloodstreams are tributaries of the great sea of its total memory.*

J.G Ballard



Alexis Rago will trace parallel developments between life sciences and the arts through history considering similarities between both disciplines that suggest they are not as far apart as one might first think. He will focus specifically on the ideas of botanist Agnes Arber (1879 - 1960), a former eminent Linnean whose late writings explore a life's work in plant morphology within the wider context of natural philosophy. Her ideas have implications beyond her own immediate field of research, synthesising empirical science with metaphysics and by doing so with other areas of human thought. Her ideas largely emanated from the study of the whole organism which has been significantly superceded by systems theory. Nonetheless, these are a beautiful reservoir of ideas that artist Alexis Rago sees as having a particular relevance to the visual arts today.

Alexis is currently developing a way of working in which the artist is 'embedded' in biological thought resulting in work that arises from within biology rather than merely describing, responding or commenting on it. The illustrated talk will explore Arber's legacy and how it relates to the possible formation of a new art methodology. Alexis will look at the possibilities and limits of such an approach, contemporary ideas and how this has informed his own work. The talk will explore ways for the biologist/natural historian and artist to have a meaningful and productive dialogue.

Amongst areas touched upon he will look at whether poetic metaphor in art and objective rationale in science are interchangeable means of expression, if using technology is the only route for artists to meaningfully engage with science and correspondences between science and art teaching.

*I am enough of an artist to draw freely upon my imagination - Einstein*