

# From Individual Works to Series: Colour and Sign in the Formation of a Pictorial Language

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## Abstract

This article is an attempt to consider several years of painting as a single process. Four series produced between 2024 and 2026 are examined. The article considers the transition from individual works to works connected in series, and the roles played by colour and sign in this transition. It shows that from one series to the next it is not only the palette that changes, but also the roles of colour and sign within the painting. The proposed interpretations do not claim to be definitive and are used to make the description clearer.

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## 1. Introduction

The paintings assembled in the collage at the beginning of this article were created over several years and were not conceived as a single cycle. Each arose from a separate impulse, observation, or desire to try a particular combination of form and colour: the works were under no obligation to continue one another or to form a self-consistent chain of narration.

Yet it cannot be claimed that they have nothing in common. Even in the collage, one can trace a persistent red, black, and yellow palette, with literally isolated inclusions of green and blue. One can also notice a set of recurring signs: a triangle, a cross, a circle, a vertical figure, broken lines. Nevertheless, the earlier works lacked cohesion: a motif could appear twice, two years apart, without developing its first appearance in any way.

The collage-compilation connects these works only after the fact, while allowing what was created sequentially, but not con-

ceived as a sequence, to be seen all at once. Adjacent images do not form a story or illustrate a common idea—they form a field of disparate visual facts, traces of different states, interests, and experiments.

Despite the compilation's evident fragmentation, this should not be understood as a defect or as chaos that *ought to have been overcome*—it is a period of accumulation. Before one can learn to formulate ideas, one first needs material for thought: observed forms, discovered colours, successful and unsuccessful decisions, recurring gestures—a kind of “vocabulary” for future works.

The change became noticeable when the recurrence of a device—colour or sign—ceased to be accidental. Colour ceased to be a property of an individual painting and became an environment within which one work could continue another. Reusing a device is not blind copying but a way of testing it: changing the initial form by placing it in a new combination,



(a) Untitled (work 117)



(b) Untitled (work 118)



(c) Untitled (work 119)

Figure 1: The “Yellow” Series, 2024. Oil on canvas, 60 × 80 cm: (a) *the first appearance of the yellow spot*; (b) *the spot becomes a vertical figure*; (c) *yellow fills the entire plane*.

considering one idea from several sides, and reaching the point beyond which there is nothing left to continue. Thus, series of paintings appear in place of a collection of independent works. The following discussion considers twenty-seven works produced between 2024 and 2026 and belonging to four series: the “Yellow”, “Red”, “Grey”, and “White”.

The series are provisionally named after their dominant colours. The paintings within each series were produced sequentially, with rare exceptions in the form of commissioned works, and did not overlap with other series either conceptually or chronologically.

The article will consider the paths followed by colour and sign, respectively:

event → form → veil → environment → background, (1)

motif → disappearance → message → question → word, (2)

as well as their interaction with one another.

In this movement from the “vocabulary” of the collage to fully formed series-ideas, one can see a distant similarity to the way thought takes shape: first disparate impressions, then connections between them, and only afterwards ideas capable of continuing. The analogy is not literal, but it makes it possible to see how memory and sequence gradually arise between paintings.

## 2. The Series

### 2.1. Yellow: Transition

The first series considered here, the “Yellow”, occupies an intermediate position: it remains connected to the fragmentation of the earlier works, yet at the same time becomes the first sequence in which each painting continues the previous one. This series is first not only chronologically: it marks the beginning of the artist’s very principle of working in series.

At first, yellow appears as a small spot in an almost empty white space (Fig. 1a), an almost accidental trace, a blot. It is not quite an object and not quite a sign, but rather the first event on the plane: a point from which movement *may* begin. In the next work, the spot expands into a blurred vertical figure. It can be seen in its entirety from a certain distance (Fig. 1b), although its outlines remain blurred: the form has already emerged but has not yet separated completely from the surrounding space.



Figure 2: Untitled (work 120). The “Yellow” Series, 2024. Oil on canvas, 60 × 80 cm. *Yellow light between black planes*.

In the third work (Fig. 1c), ochre occupies almost the entire plane, and there is nothing left to look at except the surface itself: the direction of the brushstroke, irregularities, the margins at the edge. The object has grown, the distance has contracted; before this work the viewer “stands” right up against it. As the form increases, so does the colour, and with the colour comes light. First a small patch of light appears, then the light rises vertically, and finally fills the entire visible space. Here yellow

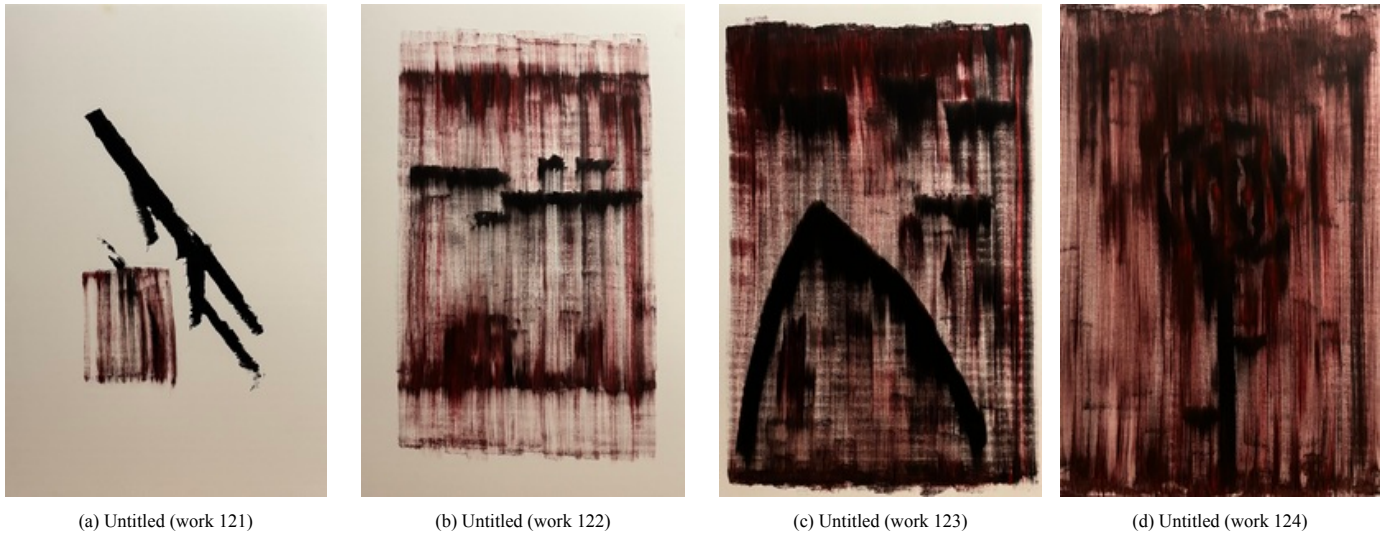


Figure 3: The “Red” Series, 2024. Oil on sandwich panel, 50 × 75 cm: (a) *a crack: the sign is still on the bare panel*; (b) *black clouds above poisoned earth*; (c) *a black mountain beneath black clouds*; (d) *a rose painted over in black and red*.

is not only paint but a source: the sun, morning, that state in which nothing has yet been decided and everything is possible.

The fourth work interrupts the expansion of form-colour (Fig. 2). Yellow is compressed into a narrow vertical column, with dark bands to the right and left, like curtains closing in. The light has not yet gone anywhere, but it is already being shut out. The growth that proceeded from a spot to an entire plane ends in eclipse.

## 2.2. Red

The “Red” Series begins where the “Yellow” ended: the light has already been shut out.

The series was influenced by the general news background of recent years: politics, armed conflicts, catastrophes, destruction, and human casualties. The paintings do not illustrate specific events. Rather, the outside agenda enters them as constant pressure, as the experience of a world in which violence ceases to be exceptional and becomes the background of everyday life. After the transitional “Yellow” Series, the “Red” is the first in which an attempt to reflect on external events becomes clearly visible.

The works are united by a single device: first a black sign is applied to the pale panel, then a vertical stroke of red paint is drawn over it from top to bottom; traces of the brush can be seen almost everywhere. Red always comes last. Mixing with the black of the sign, the red turns a dirty burgundy and becomes neither a background nor an environment, but a *veil* that stands between the sign and the viewer. As though looking at the world through the constant dull pain, suffering, and incomprehension that obscure it. The sign has not disappeared—it can simply no longer be seen in its entirety. Outwardly, all this resembles petroglyphs on a faded wall, but the fading here is fresh and takes place before our eyes.

At the same time, the series contains two attempts to escape this state. From time to time a sign appears in it, promising meaning, salvation, or at least the possibility of something

different—but each time the following work covers it. It is these attempts at escape, rather than an inventory of disasters, that establish the rhythmic pattern of the series.

The first work is not yet a catastrophe but a crack (Fig. 3a). The oblique black figure on the almost bare panel looks like something broken, like a critical structural defect—the fracture from which destruction begins. There is very little red here, only a single rubbed block at the side: the catastrophe has not yet happened, but it has already been scheduled, is already perceptible and inevitable.

In the second work, a landscape appears (Fig. 3b). Heavy black clouds hang above equally black earth, while vertical red streaks pass over the entire image. They may be perceived as bloody or acid rain, as a trace of pollution and technological catastrophe, of something that should never have happened. The earth is damaged, torn up by shells; this is not the earth that feeds, it cries out in pain and begs for help.

The next painting continues the same landscape (Fig. 3c). This time, the mountain becomes the principal sign. A mountain ought to signify stability, to symbolise endurance, reliability, permanence. But here, like the earth in the preceding work, it is broken and damaged, surrounded by heavy black clouds that should not be there. The mountain is the largest and best-preserved sign in the series: the red layer lies over it, but its outline breaks through. Nothing that follows will be as distinct.

In work 124, the natural image becomes still more vulnerable (Fig. 3d)—now it is the image of a beautiful flower, a rose. An image usually associated with beauty is almost entirely obscured by a black and red layer. The rose has to be guessed at; here red does not animate the form but participates in its destruction, while the “acid rain” desecrates and alters this symbol, almost erasing it.

Work 125 disrupts the sequence of catastrophic landscapes (Fig. 4a). The vertical sign combines a spear and an eye and refers to the god Odin. In one myth, Odin sacrifices an eye for wisdom [1]; in another, after piercing himself with a spear, he



hangs on the world tree in order to comprehend the secret of the runes [2]. Here pain and sacrifice acquire a different meaning for the first time: suffering may lead not only to destruction but also to knowledge or, in a more general sense, to the *new*. This is the first attempt at escape—a hope that, unfortunately, must form and survive against a background of suffering. The eye on the spear looks through the same veil through which the viewer looks.

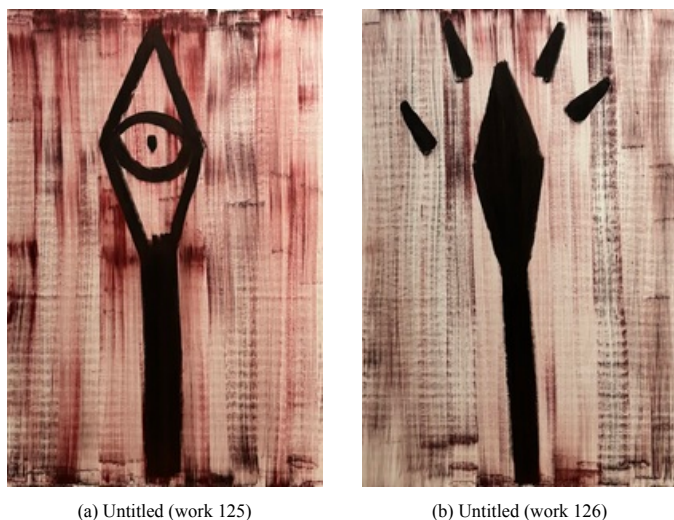


Figure 4: The “Red” Series, 2024. Oil on sandwich panel, 50 × 75 cm: (a) *a spear with an eye: a sacrifice that yields knowledge*; (b) *Gáe Bulg: a sacrifice that yields nothing*.

The next work again contains a spear, but without the eye and with the opposite meaning (Fig. 4b). It is Gáe Bulg, Cú Chulainn’s barbed spear, with which, by tragic accident, he killed his only son Connla, having failed to recognise him when they met [3]. Two consecutive works concern the same thing: a sacrifice that yields knowledge and a sacrifice that yields nothing. The first attempt at escape closes at precisely the point where it opened.

In work 127, one may see haystacks or triangular roofs of houses (Fig. 5a). They stand within a red field and evoke a landscape in which the earth, fields, and human dwellings are burning. No specific place is named: the image becomes a generalised sign of a destroyed native space that people are forced to leave.

The black ring in the following work (Fig. 5b) may be read as the Ouroboros, the serpent devouring its own tail. The earliest known depiction of this sign appears in the *Enigmatic Book of the Netherworld* from the tomb of Tutankhamun, fourteenth century BCE [4]; there it signifies eternal repetition and the world’s return into itself. Within the context of the series, it is an image of a closed cycle: violence reproduces itself, and the end of one destruction becomes the beginning of the next. The escape is not blocked here—it is simply not provided for. The “veil” grows stronger.

In work 129, the ring gives way to a crown (Fig. 6a). The symbol of power appears within the same damaged red space. Here the crown belongs not to a particular ruler but denotes power itself and its desire to continue indefinitely. Endless

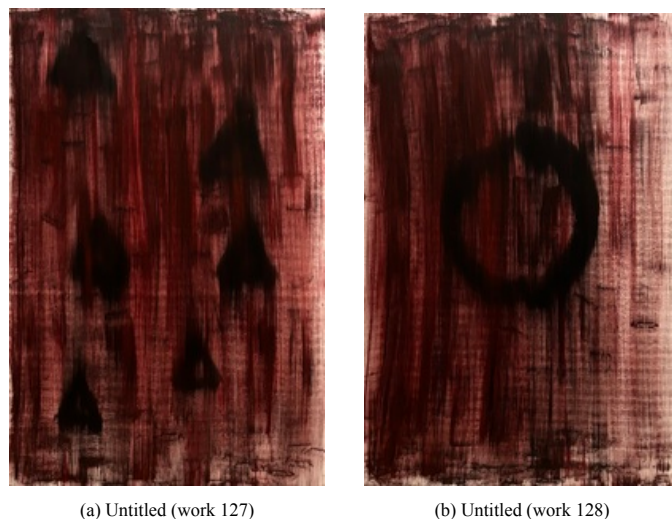


Figure 5: The “Red” Series, 2024. Oil on sandwich panel, 50 × 75 cm: (a) *fields on fire*; (b) *a serpent devouring itself*.

power corrupts endlessly. The cycle of suffering acquires not only a mythological explanation but also, unfortunately, a *human* one.

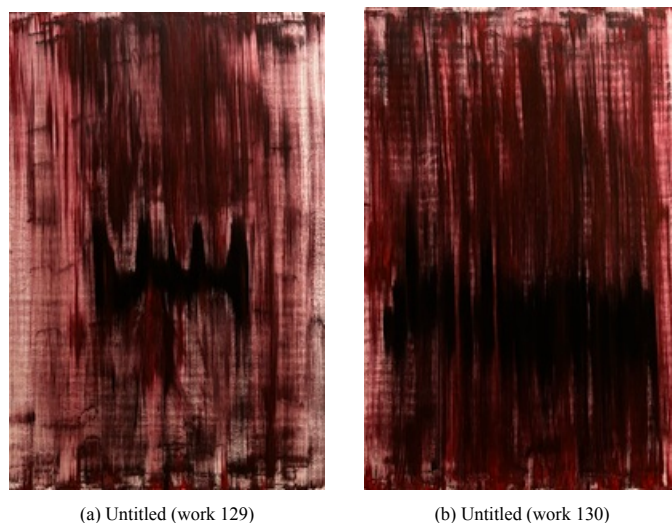


Figure 6: The “Red” Series, 2024. Oil on sandwich panel, 50 × 75 cm: (a) *a crown*; (b) *a dark forest*.

Work 130 appears almost non-representational (Fig. 6b), yet the black band may be seen as a dark forest. The forest traditionally marks the boundary of the familiar world: beyond it monsters live, different rules apply, and legends and frightening stories begin [5]. It is in human nature to fear, to distrust the *other*. But the forest is also the domain of fairy tales and the possibility of miracles. The image therefore remains ambivalent: the unknown inspires fear but cannot be reduced solely to evil. The second attempt at escape: here one must learn to trust what lies beyond the boundary.

The finale is a landscape without a sign (Fig. 7). A red field, a heavy black sky, and not a single sign—there is nothing left to look at except the landscape itself. At the upper left, at the very



Figure 7: Untitled (work 132). The “Red” Series, 2024. Oil on sandwich panel, 50 × 75 cm. *A red field beneath a black sky.*

edge, lies a narrow olive-gold band. A person always hopes to wake tomorrow to a better day. But the strip of light at the very margin has almost disappeared. The time to trust again what is hidden in the dark forest has not yet come; the second attempt to “escape” closes with the absence of a sign: the desolation of scorched earth arrives.

The Red Series contains more signs than any other: a crack, a mountain, a rose, two spears, burning fields, a ring, a crown, a forest. It is here that a new, connected vocabulary accumulates, and here that each word is covered with red immediately after it is uttered. Language emerged at the moment when there was almost nothing left with which to see it.

The attempts at escape weaken: the first is formulated through the myth of a god, the second through the human nature of distrust. The further the series proceeds, the fewer means hope has at its disposal: first an entire myth, then a place, then a strip of paint at the edge. This is why the series stops. After the final work, there remained neither a sign that could be covered nor the strength for another statement in the same register.

### 2.3. Grey

After the “Red” Series comes exhaustion. Here grey is not so much a colour as a space, an environment: everything has already happened, it is too late to shout, all that remains is to look and to live in it. The “Red” Series was structured as a sequence of assertions that were immediately covered—the “Grey” asserts nothing. It asks: “how?”, “why?”, “what next?” It is a series of reflection and melancholy, and it answers none of its own questions.

The series opens with a typical abstract painting (Fig. 8): a yellow band on the left, a pale field, a black triangle with a yellow opening—geometry and colour. The composition is correct, everything is in its proper place, everything is safe, nothing happens, everything is as it *should be*.

Then the town begins (Fig. 9a). Houses, a street—the symbol of a small homeland: a village or small town, the kind of place people leave. Only one window is lit. Where have the others gone? What happened here? There is no answer, but the emptiness is too even to be accidental. The town is dying, and it is dying quietly.

Then comes the moon above the station’s towers and pipes (Fig. 9b). A railway station implies movement: someone ar-



Figure 8: Untitled (work 133). The “Grey” Series, 2025. Oil on canvas, 60 × 80 cm. *Abstraction.*

rives, leaves, someone is met or seen off. But there are neither trains nor people in the painting, only the moon—a silent witness.



(a) Untitled (work 135)



(b) Untitled (work 136)

Figure 9: The “Grey” Series, 2025. Oil on canvas, 60 × 80 cm: (a) *houses with a single lit window*; (b) *the moon above a railway station*.

The next work resists identification (Fig. 10a). What kind of structure or trace is this? Perhaps the windows of a Khrushchev-era apartment block. Or perhaps the imprint of tank tracks that will also pass over *us*. The same form can be read both as housing and as that which destroys housing.

The church (Fig. 10b). What has happened to my church? Is it not supposed to reconcile nations; is religion not about forgiveness and love? The dome glows with the same yellow that burned in the single window, but the church stands in the same grey emptiness as the town around it. Perhaps the church, too, is dying. And the dome gives the same reflected light as the moon, not the warm “inner” light of a *home*.

In the penultimate work, the light loses its identifying features (Fig. 11a). Is it the sun or the moon? It is impossible to tell: there is so much grey around it that one can no longer determine





(a) Untitled (work 137)



(b) Untitled (work 138)

Figure 10: The “Grey” Series, 2025. Oil on canvas, 60 × 80 cm: (a) *a building or a caterpillar-track mark*; (b) *a church with a yellow dome*.

whether it is day or night. A scorched space in which everything has happened and in which nothing matters any longer. There is only emptiness here, and even light loses its meaning.

And finally, even the moon has turned grey (Fig. 11b). Its enchantment has blurred and faded; it no longer stirs the heart as it once did. There is no longer a separate sign in the work—there is no one left to question. What happens next?



(a) Untitled (work 140)



(b) Untitled (work 141)

Figure 11: The “Grey” Series, 2025. Oil on canvas, 60 × 80 cm: (a) *sun or moon*; (b) *the moon turned grey*.

The answer to this question stands at the beginning of the section—in work 133 (Fig. 8). What at first appeared to be the stereotype of an abstract painting can now be read differently: a yellow band, a triangle, an excessively correct composition—a false “answer”, a false new god. In quiet despair, a person grasps at any hope, and the stereotypical quality is not a failure here but the subject of the image: a counterfeit must look exactly as the genuine article is supposed to look if people are to “take the bait”. There is no means of testing it.

Yellow colour—light—passes through three consecutive series. In the “Yellow” it was curtailed off; in the “Red” a veil fell over it; in the “Grey” it burns openly but intervenes in nothing: the single window, the moon above the station, the church

dome—sources that merely remain present. In the finale, it too disappears. At the same time, in the first work of the series the light does not actually burn—it is represented.

#### 2.4. White

The “Grey” Series is followed by an abrupt rupture. There, colour became space and speech gradually fell silent; here there remain a white canvas, a broad black brush, and a single sharp accent of colour. Meditation gives way to a statement addressed outwards. The paintings begin not only to show but also to speak: words appear on the canvas, and the works acquire titles and authorial descriptions. Figuration simultaneously approaches graffiti, the poster, and naïve drawing. Direct speech is accompanied by humour. The reflection of the “Red” and “Grey” Series left the “White” with nothing but an angry, sarcastic reaction. There will be no new attempts to understand the world for now.

The white background was not empty to begin with. The square canvases previously contained more rigorous compositions resembling scientific graphs and diagrams connected with the artist’s scientific work. They were covered in white, and crude drawing, words, and figures appeared above the earlier language. White therefore does not always signify a pure beginning here: it is a layer concealing an earlier attempt to describe the world rationally. The old language has been painted over. In the same way, the “White” Series paints over the impressions and emotions of the preceding, heavy “Red” and “Grey” Series.

The series is also divided by format. The three squares are scenes: myth, dwelling, inhabitant. The two vertical works are individual objects shown at full height, a dandelion and a petrol pump, displayed separately like exhibits from a new world.



Figure 12: *The Digested World* (work 142). The “White” Series, 2026. Oil on canvas, 80 × 80 cm. *Sköll caught the Sun—possibly more than once*.

The series opens with *The Digested World* (Fig. 12). In the *Prose Edda* [1], Sköll pursues the Sun and, at the end of time, during Ragnarök, catches and devours it. Here in the painting he has also caught it and already “released” it. Perhaps he has even done so more than once. The three preceding series are therefore not stages of a single catastrophe but *standard properties of the*

world. A world digested twice, three times, perhaps even more. The inscription on the canvas clarifies little beyond our address in the chronology of the current cycle: *Nous sommes ici*—Sköll has “released” the world again rather than pursuing it.

The next work is the only one in the series without a title or words (Fig. 13a). A black grid: perhaps the façade of an enormous building, a tyre tread, or a battery—things that store, transmit, or accommodate and are equally indifferent to their contents. The diagonals within it form the semblance of a *certain* letter. And so the first series with speech says nothing here. Beneath the white paint on this canvas there used to be a graph, a symbol of science. The language has changed; the grid remains.

In *Deep Dubnian*, cosmic and historical scales give way to deliberately private anger (Fig. 13b). In a car park, someone damaged the artist’s car and bent a windscreen wiper; people constantly shout beneath the windows. Thus a composite inhabitant of Dubna appears: drunk, loud, wild, aggressive. An artist’s revenge in the form of a caricature. Again, as in the preceding painting, the background matters: the figure is painted over a graph. A town proud of its science, rationality, and knowledge has produced an inhabitant who damages cars, writes pseudoscientific papers, and drunkenly yells at night. More to come.

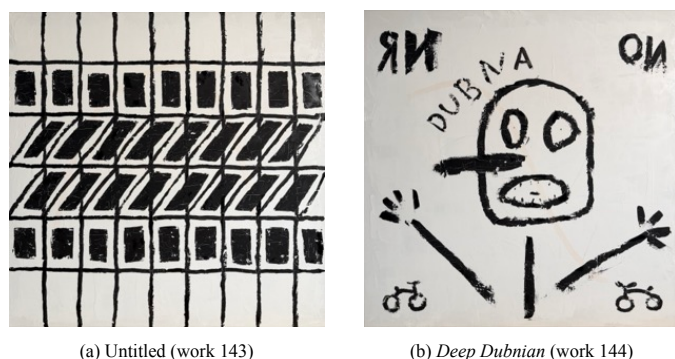
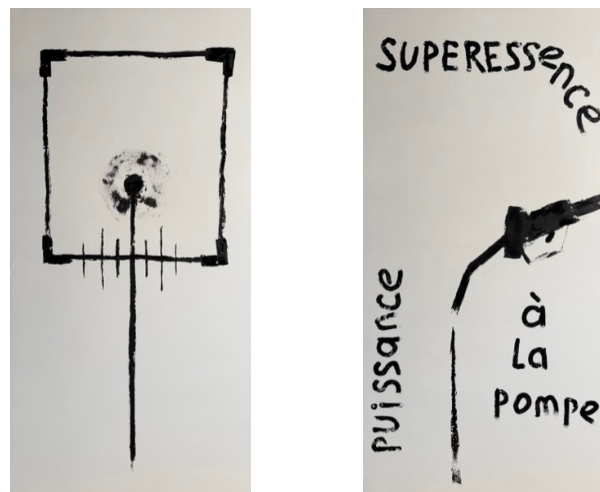


Figure 13: The “White” Series, 2026. Oil on canvas, 80 × 80 cm: (a) a house of the future or the trace of an electric machine; (b) drunk, loud, damages cars, writes pseudoscientific papers, and yells beneath the windows.

*Electrodandelion* once again shifts the gaze towards the future (Fig. 14a). Its thin stem and the construction of its head simultaneously resemble a plant, an electrical circuit, an antenna, and a technical drawing. Perhaps these are the flowers awaiting us in the new electric world (when what should never have begun is over)—alongside solar power stations, electric cars, and the rest of electric nature. The dandelion is a weed, a plant no one sows and one that people instead do everything they can to destroy on their plots. If even this is replaced in the future, then what is being replaced is not a luxury but the last thing that grew and reproduced by itself.

*Superunleaded* (Fig. 14b). Around the fuel nozzle are written: *superessence*, *puissance*, *à la pompe*. *Essence* means both petrol and essence; *puissance* means power, pressure, and might; *à la pompe* means merely “at the pump”. Supreme essence and great power are dispensed by the litre and run out in queues lasting many hours. Two drops fall from the nozzle.



(a) *Electrodandelion* (work 145) (b) *Superunleaded* (work 146)

Figure 14: The “White” Series, 2026. Oil on canvas, 50 × 100 cm: (a) a flower of the future electric nature; (b) petrol, oil, force, and power.

The future in this series is uninhabited and sterile: identical cells, electric flowers, a queue for vanishing fuel. The present is represented by a single person—drunk, loud, and yelling beneath the windows. The series does not decide which is worse.

The “White” Series speaks directly about what is happening now while also attempting to imagine what will come next. Unlike the preceding series, it remains unfinished: the present continues to produce new words, images, and occasions for expression.

### 3. Discussion

Summary characteristics of the series are presented in Table 1; the following analysis draws on them.

#### 3.1. Colour

In the early works, colour forms a persistent red, black, and yellow palette but does not yet connect the individual images; its repetitions become apparent only retrospectively, after the works have been assembled into a collage. The series no longer share such a common palette: the support, the dominant colour, and the relationship with black differ in each case.

- In the “Yellow” Series, colour develops sequentially for the first time: it emerges as a small event, expands into a form, fills the space, and begins to be perceived as light. “Event” → “form”.
- The “Red” Series changes this function. Red is applied over the sign and positioned between the image and the viewer, obstructing visibility. “Form” → “veil”.
- In the “Grey” Series, colour becomes a general environment within which the distinctions between light and darkness, object and trace, assertion and question are weakened. “Veil” → “environment”.

| Series   | Year | <i>n</i> | Support, dimensions, cm      | Sign | Text | Title |
|----------|------|----------|------------------------------|------|------|-------|
| “Yellow” | 2024 | 4        | canvas, 60 × 80              | 0    | 0    | 0     |
| “Red”    | 2024 | 11       | sandwich panel, 50 × 75      | 10   | 0    | 0     |
| “Grey”   | 2025 | 7        | canvas, 60 × 80              | 6    | 0    | 0     |
| “White”  | 2026 | 5        | canvas, 80 × 80 and 50 × 100 | 5    | 3    | 4     |

Table 1: Summary characteristics of the four series. The columns “Sign”, “Text”, and “Title” give the number of works in each series containing, respectively, a separate discernible sign, an inscription on the canvas, and an authorial title.

- In the “White” Series, colour recedes to the background of the painting and to isolated accents. White paint conceals the earlier compositions while creating a surface for black figures, written language, and rare chromatic signs. “Environment” → “background”.

Thus, colour is indeed not a fixed device; it has a different role in each series. It can be stated with confidence that colour moves from a recurring element of the palette to one of the means of organising sequence. It operates as event, a form of light, a veil covering the sign, environment, and background for direct expression—i.e., it follows the path in 1, described in the Introduction.

Along with this, its relationship to the sign changes: at first colour and sign coexist, colour attempts to replace the sign, then colour covers the sign and makes it ambiguous and, finally, creates a background on which the sign turns into a written word.

At the same time, there is progressively less colour: from the continuous fields of the early works to a single chromatic spot across the entire White Series.

This decrease is summarised in Fig. 15.

### 3.2. Sign

In the early works, individual forms recur but do not form a sequence: a triangle, circle, cross, or vertical figure belongs primarily to the painting in which it appeared. Only the collage makes it possible to see them as an initial vocabulary, but each sign lives alone. As a rule, it occupies the centre, is presented at a large scale, remains unobstructed, and constitutes the entire content of the work (“Motif”). Colour supports its recognition rather than hindering it, as it later will in the “Red” Series.

- The sign is absent from all four works of the “Yellow” Series. The spot in 117 is not a sign but a trace; in 118 it develops into a blurred figure but does not become a recognisable image; 119 is a pure field; the column in 120 is an amount of light rather than a representation of an object. This is the only series without signs, and their absence is not accidental: for colour to become the subject of the image, the sign had to be removed. As long as there is something recognisable on the canvas, the viewer looks at what can be recognised rather than at the paint. “Motif” → “disappearance”.
- The “Red” Series accumulates the broadest range of signs: a crack, a mountain, a rose, spears, a ring, a crown, and a forest. A rule emerges: a large black sign, often vertical and usually, once again, one to a work. But now the

sign ceases to be merely a form and acquires an external reference—behind it stand myths the viewer is expected to know: Odin, Cú Chulainn, the Ouroboros, the “dark forest”. Meaning enters from outside the painting for the first time. The signs also begin to respond to one another. In works 125 and 126, one spear stands against another, a meaningful sacrifice against a meaningless one. In 128 and 129, a cycle stands against its presumed cause. The adjacent work is no longer the next work but one that contradicts it. This is the transition from vocabulary to speech. Yet each sign is partially covered by the red layer. It has to be reconstructed from the outlines that remain. The maximum of meaning coincides with the minimum of visibility. “Disappearance” → “message”.

- In the “Grey” Series, signs remain but change their nature: houses, station towers, an unidentified structure, a church, a disc, the moon. There are no more myths; these are ordinary things. The sign ceases to be an emblem on a plane and becomes an object within a space: the church stands in the grey emptiness, the houses line the street. Landscape already appeared in the “Red” Series, but there it served as a background for the sign; in the “Grey” Series it becomes the *site of action*. The principal change is uncertainty. In the “Red” Series the sign was clear but obscured; here it is exposed but cannot decide what it is: the same structure may simultaneously be a building and a caterpillar-track mark, the celestial body both sun and moon. Towards the end, the sign dissolves: in work 141 there is no separate sign, only the grey moon. The return to 133 finally deprives the sign of reliability: it is impeccably correct and, for precisely that reason, false. It acquires the meaning of a false god only after the other paintings in the series have been viewed. “Message” → “question”.
- In the “White” Series, the sign becomes direct speech. The images are supplemented by inscriptions, titles, and authorial descriptions, and part of the semantic burden passes to them. The sign becomes more direct but not less ambiguous: uncertainty moves from the form itself to the relationships between image, inscription, title, and description. The mythological reference does not disappear, but moves into the caption and accompanying text: Sköll is named in words rather than only encoded in a form. One sign system, the scientific graph, is physically covered by another. The only work without a title or words is especially conspicuous against this background: the absence of speech



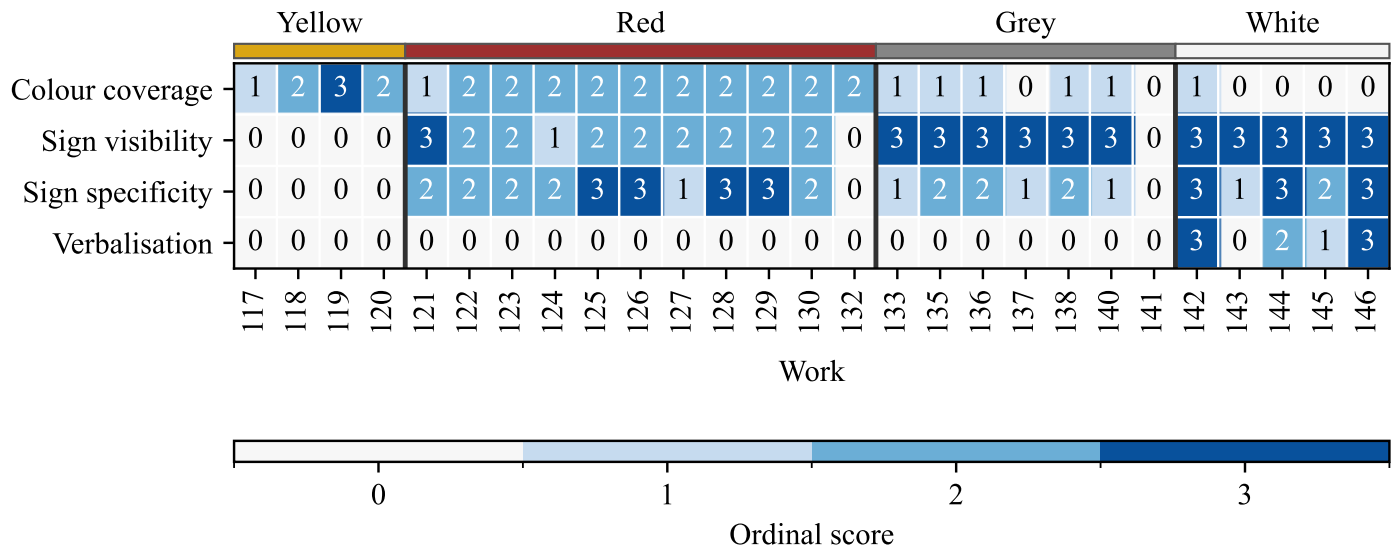


Figure 15: Qualitative coding of the twenty-seven works included in the analysis across four features. The coding was performed by the author and was not blind: the ratings were assigned by the same person who created the works and proposes their interpretation. *Colour coverage*: 0 — colour is absent or almost absent; 1 — a small patch; 2 — occupies a substantial part of the plane; 3 — dominates or almost fills the plane. *Sign visibility*: 0 — there is no separate sign; 1 — almost completely covered; 2 — partially covered but discernible; 3 — presented directly. *Sign specificity*: 0 — there is no stable reading; 1 — permits several substantially different readings; 2 — recognisable as an object or general image; 3 — associated with a particular symbol, myth, or concept. *Verbalisation*: 0 — there is no verbal element; 1 — there is only a title or external description; 2 — there are individual letters or fragments of words on the canvas; 3 — there is an explicit phrase or several words on the canvas.

itself acquires meaning. Silence is its content. A letter is present in it but is not named. “Question” → “word”.

Thus, the sign also follows the path in 2, described in the Introduction: from a recurring motif through a temporary disappearance to an obstructed message, a question, and a written word. At the same time, the role of the viewer changes: first discovering repetitions, then following the transformation of form, reconstructing the covered image, choosing between possible readings, and finally reading the painting as a conjunction of image and text.

### 3.3. Alternative Interpretations

The scheme presented above is not the only possible one, and it has at least two competing explanations.

- **Material explanation.** The boundaries of the series coincide with changes of support (material and dimensions). It may be supposed that a batch of supports was purchased each time, that paintings were made until it ran out, and that a “series” is merely a batch. The trajectory of colour and sign would then be a consequence of supply rather than intention. However, this explanation answers only the question of boundaries, not that of content. It overlooks:

- why one batch contains no signs at all, while the next contains more signs than the entire remaining body of paintings considered here,
- why inscriptions appear only in the final series,
- why a series ends with a work in which its very subject has been exhausted.

The number of series and the exact positions of their boundaries are only partly determined by the shop rather than by the author.

- **Retrospective explanation.** Here the author and interpreter are the same person, which is the least reliable position: “the author knows what they meant, but the intention is not visible on the canvas”. A coherent trajectory can be found in any set of works if one searches for it persistently enough and knows in advance that it is there. The quantitative characteristics in Table 1 work against this explanation because they do not depend on interpretation: the number of works with a sign, an inscription, or a title, as well as the support and dimensions. What is interpretative is not the quantitative characteristics but what they mean.

The readings of individual works and/or their elements—Sköll, the “false god”, the veil—cannot be tested in themselves and depend exclusively on the author’s testimony. They should be read as statements of intention rather than as results. There is only one way to test them: to show the works to viewers without captions and see whether the same trajectories can be read without the text.

### 3.4. Layer

Several layers are superimposed upon one another in the work presented here.

One layer is physical. The square canvases of the “White” Series are painted over earlier works that resembled scientific graphs and diagrams. Painting over is one of the principal gestures. In the “Red” Series, the layer of the vertical stroke covered the sign without cancelling it; in the “White”, the layer of paint covers an entire language for describing the world and replaces it with another. The canvases may, of course, have been

painted over simply because it seemed wasteful to discard them. The practical reason does not, however, cancel the result.

Another layer is narrative. Among other things, *Deep Dubnian* writes pseudoscientific papers—and is painted over a graph.

Another layer is methodological and, at the same time, self-reflexive. This text is typeset as a scientific publication: a journal template, abstract, discussion and conclusion, and references to numbered figures. Almost everywhere, the works are identified by numbers rather than titles. This is not a joke imposed upon the material from outside: three of the four series genuinely consist of untitled works, and a number is the only means of naming them. Form ceases to coincide with content precisely in the “White” Series, where the paintings acquire names and begin to speak for themselves.

Here scientific form serves not only as a wrapper but also as material for the work. The paintings are artistic objects, their descriptions are interpretations, while the coding and comparison of the trajectories of colour and sign form a research layer. Yet the text constructed from these procedures itself becomes an artistic object. To the extent that the proposed categories, observations, and conclusions can be tested, it operates as research. To the extent that the research procedure itself is placed in an artistic context and becomes an object of reflection, it operates as a work of art. These two statuses do not exclude one another; an additional layer arises from their combination. The movement closes: paintings become data, data become argument, and argument becomes a work of art.

And finally, there is the layer-metaphor of the development of thought and growing up, introduced at the beginning. Indeed, the early works, as a chaotic collection of information, form a “vocabulary”, a conceptual apparatus that, with time, is used to formulate new ideas and reflection, a dialogue with *others* and even with *oneself*.

#### 4. Conclusion

The body of work considered here demonstrates a transition from individual paintings to series in which colour and sign begin to perform stable functions. Colour successively operates as event, form, veil, environment, and background for direct expression, while the sign moves from a recurring motif through a temporary disappearance to an obstructed message, a question, and a written word. This sequence can be compared with the formation of thought: the accumulation of experience, the establishment of connections, and the formulation of ideas. The comparison serves as a means of organising the material, not as an exhaustive interpretation of the works.

- Colour and sign move towards one another. Colour moves from the depth of the image towards its surface; the sign moves from a symbol occupying the entire painting to a word written upon it.
- A series closes when its subject is exhausted. In the Yellow Series, the subject was colour: it grew from a spot to an

entire plane, could grow no further, and the final work obstructed it. In the Red and Grey Series, the subject became the sign, and both end with a work in which the sign is no longer present: a landscape and the moon turned grey. In the White Series, direct speech became the subject, and it has not yet been exhausted: the present continues to supply occasions.

- The sign reaches its greatest authority in the “Red” Series, where it invokes gods, heroes, myths, and established symbols. Its authority then declines: in the “Grey” Series, the sign becomes an ordinary or unidentifiable thing; in the “White”, a neighbour drawn in a caricatured, naïve manner. This is not degradation but a condition of direct speech: one can speak aloud only after the sign has ceased to represent an oracle.

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