

WEST UNIVERSITY OF TIMIȘOARA

FACULTY OF ARTS AND DESIGN

I.O.S.U.D.

Doctoral Thesis

BLACK –

**AN AESTHETIC DIMENSION IN CONTEMPORARY
PAINTING AND PHOTOGRAPHY**

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INTRODUCTION

Keywords: *black, the semiotics of the colour black, black-and-white photography, low-key photography, painting, abstract art, the dialogue between media, the relationship between the artist and the work of art, black and the sacred, social black, black in psychoanalysis, nonmanifestation, the relationship between the subconscious and artistic expression, physical reality, the rendering of the self, transcendence through art, conceptualism, experiment, metaphysics.*

The principal aim of this doctoral thesis is a rigorous analysis of the aesthetic and perceptual dimension of black in contemporary art, taking as its point of departure the author's personal affinity for this colour. This exploration is not confined to the superficial level of aesthetics but penetrates the psychological and metaphysical complexities that feed this predilection. Pains transform us; they are profoundly unsettling, drawing us towards liberating activities and pushing us to our limits, yet it is they, too, that show us the way to transcend those limits. Since pain is universal and inseparable from well-being, it also places us in relation to others. Pains cut through our network of habits, and even the slightest pain brings about a transformation. Pains are crushing and profoundly unsettling, revealing our limits to us – but also our capacity to surpass those limits, to transcend ourselves.

Therefore, can artistic practices help us to understand pain as an existential phenomenon? Can pain be the vector of a healing? Can we see the world differently through the lens of pain? These are a set of questions that I set out to explore over the course of this research. Within the framework of an autobiographical investigation, the hypothesis formulated suggests the existence of a causal link between the subconscious/conscious and the predominance of black in artistic expression. Thus, the thesis undertakes a transdisciplinary analysis, incorporating scientific and applied research methods in order to reveal the interconnections between colour and the concepts of time, space, the cosmos, birth, drama, death, sacredness, and self-expression. The thesis also sets out to assess the way in which these correlations find resonance in the field of contemporary art, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the role and significance of black in this context.

Given the complexity and depth of the subject under investigation, the research approach proved to be intrinsically trans- and interdisciplinary. Beyond its central objective,

the research focuses on several secondary lines of inquiry, such as: elucidating the various meanings of black and its dominance of value in the artworks analysed; identifying a possible causality between the recurrence of black in works and the author's personality; and a rigorous comparative analysis of the semiotics of black in modern and contemporary art, with particular emphasis on photography and painting. In addition, an applied/experimental framework will be developed, conceived so as to validate or refute the results obtained through the scientific methods employed.

The motivation underlying the present research combines academic and personal factors, amplified by a defining life experience: the diagnosis of, and struggle with, cancer.

Originating in an earlier period of study, during which low-key photography was addressed, this motivation subsequently acquired further layers of complexity owing to a diversified interest in philosophy, sociology, psychology, and aesthetics. The medical experience of cancer served as a point of inflection, adding a profound and personal dimension to the research. This experience also shaped the affinity for the colour black, leading to the formulation of crucial questions about art and its meanings. In this context, the research undertakes a complex exploration combining empirical analyses with theoretical interpretations, aiming to reveal the semantic and aesthetic nuances of black in contemporary art.

The structure of the doctoral thesis comprises eight chapters, over the course of which the theme is analysed gradually, from the following perspectives: theoretical, historical, semiotic, psychosocial, case studies, interviews, and practical inquiry.

Chapter 1, theoretical in character and anchored in the specialist literature, offers a concise descriptive analysis of achievements and knowledge in fields concerning the dispersion and recomposition of light, theories of visual perception, additive/subtractive synthesis, the capacity of surfaces to change the direction of light, the perception of colour, and dark adaptation of the human eye.

Chapter 2 addresses aspects relating to the presence of black in the domain of the natural sciences, given that the aesthetic value of black is at times bound up with cosmogony; it sets out technical elements of the colour black that have a counterpart in the visual arts, as well as its treatment in the specialist literature.

Chapter 3 examines, through observation and subjective interpretation, aesthetic, hermeneutic, phenomenological, contextual, and social aspects, tracing a chronological course of black in the work of art. It emphasizes the importance of certain artistic movements

representative of the (re)definition and orientation of the values of the colour black, and it synthesizes the thematic survey of black in modern and contemporary art, together with the experimental tendencies in contemporary photography. In what follows, in subchapter 3.2, the symbolism of black in various cultures is analysed separately, across the domains of sacred black, social black, and the black belonging to psychoanalysis.

Chapter 4 begins by analysing black, from the point of view of its aesthetic and perceptual value, in black-and-white photography, examining, among other things, the way in which chiaroscuro has been used in photography and the conclusions that may be drawn regarding its distinctive visual language. With regard to contemporary photography in relation to the fine arts, the analysis brought out, through illustration and interpretation, the exclusivity that distinguishes photography from other styles of artistic expression.

Continuing the research, with respect to the evolution of photography in relation to some of the most important artistic movements, the analysis examined their correlation and influence on various genres of photography. The observational study devoted to the rayographs of Man Ray traced the way in which the aesthetic frame of photography is transformed, with emphasis on the relationship of value between white and black, light and darkness, et al. Pursuing the subject further, the analysis examined, comparatively and descriptively, the abstraction resulting from the deliberate use of chiaroscuro by the theorist and artist László Moholy-Nagy, by analogy with certain creative explorations of the twenty-first century.

Since the multiple meanings/dimensions of black had previously been brought out, both from a semiotic point of view and from that of its evolution in art, the foray into nocturnal photography was deemed inherent, the analysis of the works of certain notable figures in the field revealing that darkness can be both a fertile context for negative emotions and one of ease, of liberation.

Chapter 5 – subchapter 5.1 presents two collective case studies: *the Magnum Photos Group* and *Low-Key Photography*. Given that the Magnum group's archive brings together over a million photographs, belonging to the more than 160 members it has had over time, selection was a difficult task; accordingly, for the relevance required by the research theme, the dominance of black across various photographic series or projects was adopted as the basic criterion. The principal mode of analysis rested on a *subjective interpretation*, focused on the materials available and on research into the regional, social, and political context in which the photographs were made. It should be noted that humanist photography,

characteristic of the Magnum group, its trajectory, and the way in which it contributes to an understanding of the human condition were the major reason underlying the choice of this collective case study.

As for the distinctive visual language of low-key photography, the research, in relation to contemporary art, likewise took the form of a collective case study. This was owing to the large number of resources and to the possibility of analysing different types of data in different ways. The results took concrete form in a synthetic table addressing the role of black, the themes treated, the context, et al.

In Section 5.2., the research takes up three individual case studies: Petru Lucaci, Joan Witek, and Touhami Ennadre. Each of these begins with an inventory of the documents analysed and the corresponding stages, and closes with conclusions relevant to the research theme. As for the valences of the colour black in the art of Petru Lucaci, it predominates in the artist's visual discourse, through which he thereby brings his artistic project into relief (valences, perception, concept, interpretation). It is worth noting that here black does not carry negative valences; on the contrary, it plays a liberating, purifying role for one's own self. Moreover, black is endowed with metaphysical convictions: an ancestral black that covers over the flaws of the world, the highlighting of the extremes of the world in which we live together with an impulse to soften them through the use of black, and the bond between humankind and genesis, birth, and so on. The works of the artist Joan Witek convey a sense of mystery, and black, her sole choice, possesses countless tones and meanings. Although it might traditionally be associated with negative space and the absence of light and colour, in Witek's case black functions as the sole indicator of sign and form.

Touhami Ennadre, the third case studied, works exclusively in the domain of low-key photography. The world of shadows in Ennadre's works evokes powerful emotions, but also a dynamic act of remembrance, overflowing with energy and lucidity. The driving force behind Ennadre's work is the ceaselessly reaffirmed desire to dispel the fear of death, an awareness of the human condition. Through his art, the artist immortalizes disappearance, and he does so in order to extract its quintessence and to consecrate its memory, a kind of *memoria temporis*, his world being a realm of myth, the myth of origin and that of the end.

Chapter 6 focuses on the interview as a research method. As for the group interview in Section 6.2., this was facilitated, on request, by the *New Jersey State Council on the Arts* (USA), between 9 and 21 April 2022, and was conducted on the Zoom platform. The aim

pursued was that of the valences of black in the personal creative process of the seven contemporary American artists who took part.

In what follows, to complement the interpretation of the social dimension of black, Section 6.3. drew on the results obtained from a focus group held on 17 March 2022, from 09:30 to 11:00, at the Faculty of Arts and Design of the West University of Timișoara, with sixteen third-year students specializing in fashion and clothing design; also present at the discussions was Senior Lecturer Dr Eugenia Elena Riemschneider.

An analysis of how participants relate to black and of their own mindset regarding it constituted the principal objective of the expert interview (Section 6.4.), conducted at the specialist practice of the psychotherapist Alina Anghel in Timișoara; it was deemed a useful and necessary meeting in the context of the research theme.

In order to interrogate various aspects of the perception and aesthetics of the colour black in the contemporary context, Section 6.5. undertook the design, launch, and analysis of a piece of *mixed-methods research*: the *QuestionPro* platform was used, and the mixed questionnaire that was created contained both quantitative questions, with fixed variables, and questions specific to qualitative research, with dynamic variables. The respondents were recruited through the *Prolific Academic LTD* platform, a company specializing in academic studies.

In both the case studies and the mixed-methods research, and as the research methodology prescribes, tables inventorying the documents consulted, stages of data analysis, comparative syntheses, summary tables, diagrams, and so on were produced. As also follows from the methodology used in the artistic research, in "Clarificări conceptuale privind metodele de cercetare adoptate" – "Metode de cercetare utilizate", it was noted that scientific research does not exclude experimental, applied research; the results of the practical undertaking – the concepts arising from it – may be compared with, and may mutually complement, the conclusions yielded by the methods of scientific research. Recourse was therefore had to an applied, nonempirical undertaking, presented in Chapter 7, the aim being to correlate the results of the scientific research with research "through and for art", realized in the solo exhibition *Dincolo de Negru*, which took place at the *Helios* art gallery of the Union of Visual Artists of Romania – Timișoara branch, in 2021, between 14 and 28 August. Alongside the photographic series, grounded in the universality and metaphysics of black, I experimented with painting and generative art, which I have practised and studied over the past two years. In all the works, I kept the premises of the

doctoral thesis in view. It should be noted that the applied undertaking was not conceived as a professional research project, but rather as a case study.

Chapter 8 focuses on the final conclusions of the research, as well as proposals for future research.

The references in the present work cover, in the main, the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, with occasional excursions into earlier periods, included on account of certain landmark events whose mention was considered useful for as complete an analysis as possible.

The work aims to contribute to the understanding and interpretation of black in contemporary art, in a manner that combines empirical with nonempirical methods. It not only concentrates on consolidating an understanding of the proposed subject, but also aspires to identify new areas of interest for further research. These aspects are developed both within Chapter 6 and after each chapter in the form of summaries. The objective is to provide a robust analytical framework that allows a critical and systematic assessment of the way in which black influences, and is influenced by, multiple factors, including but not limited to the aesthetic, the symbolic, the psychological, and the sociocultural.

Thus, the present doctoral thesis sets out to constitute both a contribution to current knowledge and a catalyst for future academic investigations in the field.

Conceptual Clarifications Concerning the Research Methods Adopted

Speaking of artistic research, Ruxandra Demetrescu, artist and professor at the National University of Arts in Bucharest, emphasizes, among other things, that: "*Against the backdrop of artistic research... our gaze reshapes itself, seeking out and discovering dimensions other than the noble pleasure that springs from the contemplation of the beautiful.*"¹

In the same vein, Anke Haarmann, professor and Director of Practice and Theory of Research in the Visual Arts at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague, states: "*The visual arts may be regarded not merely as a territory of aesthetic contemplation, where the beautiful predominates... They may be understood, or assessed, as instruments for the critical examination of the culture and society in which we find ourselves*"²

With regard to the types of research associated with the field of the visual arts, as defined and classified by Christopher Frayling in his volume "*Royal College of Art Research Papers*",³ methods also applied in the present research undertaking, these are:

a) **research about art** – this concerns the study of a particular theme. In this case, the author's own contribution takes the form of conclusions arrived at through the correct application of the methods of scientific research. In the present doctoral thesis, the following methods of scientific research were applied: **observational research, subjective interpretation, individual case studies, collective case studies, the group interview, the expert interview, and the focus group variant.** Research about art also entails the publication of articles and/or studies in journals recognized in the field, and in collective volumes respectively. A list covering this latter aspect, namely the articles published over the years of study within the Doctoral School of Art, is to be found in the appendix: "Articole publicate".

b) **research through and for art** was carried out, in the present case, **through applied research**, taking material form as the **exhibition "Dincolo de negru"**, held on the walls of the Helios Gallery of the UAPR Timișoara, in August 2021 (Chapter 7). In general, research through and for art may take material form through exhibitions, workshops, or

¹ "ACCESS ART: RUXANDRA DEMETRESCU – Cercetarea artistică", YouTube, produced by the Contrasens Cultural Association, 30 September 2020, available online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nKLuOEs8ZuQ>.

² Idem, apud.

³ Frayling, Sir John Christopher. "Research in Art and Design" in *Royal College of Art Research Papers*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1993/1994, Royal College of Art, Great Britain, 1993, pp. 1–5.

various artistic events which, even if they do not assume the "classic" form of scientific research projects, are nonetheless projects that entail a process similar to the scientific one, involving applied research, including the artist's reflection on the materials with which he works, as well as the experiments and activities that he carries out within the artistic process.

In research for art, the thought process *theme – hypothesis – method – results* is part of the artistic product; its aim is not verbal communication but visual, iconic, or imagistic communication, while the indicators specific to the field – the number of reviews, the critical notices, the number of visitors, the standing of the gallery in which the exhibition takes place, and so on – can offer, among other things, clues as to the quality of the artistic act in question.

As is evident, the present undertaking adopted the types of research mentioned. In what follows, a few aspects relating to the character of the research, to its perspectives, and also to the motivational factors will be briefly analysed, as argued in the specialist literature. It will be borne in mind that artistic research is transdisciplinary, since it requires engagement not only with themes from the sphere of the arts, but also draws on aesthetics, philosophy, sociology, et al.

In "*Artistic Research*" (2004), Henk Slager underscores **the subjective character of artistic research**. Whereas in Modernism the artist was held not to be obliged "to explain", the most interesting artistic achievements of Postmodernism are situated at the border between the cognitive and the sensory – the conceptualization of artistic practice: the Conceptualism of the 1960s combines theoretical inquiry with practical works through a creative conceptual mechanism. In the same vein, as Estelle Barrett notes in "*Practice as Research*" (2010), artistic research is motivated by emotional, personal, and subjective factors, while Janneke Wesseling, in "*See It Again, Say It Again: The Artist as Researcher*" (2011), holds, in turn, that artistic research takes place only through theoretical *and* applied reflection.

The methods of artistic research that were used in the present doctoral thesis are specific to the social and human sciences, and are validated by the specialist literature.⁴ Given the vast character of the research theme, what Victor Ernest Maşek calls *aesthetic structuralism* was kept in view.⁵

This entails an understanding of art as a complex of relations, but also an attention to the art object as such, independently of the cause that generated it, of its own finality, and

⁴ Scârneci, 2006; Şandor, 2014; Baicuş, 2019; Creswell, 2016

⁵ Maşek, Viktor, "*Metode moderne în cercetarea estetică*", Academy of the RSR Publishing House, Bucharest, 1983, p. 38

of its process of becoming. Its epistemological stance avoids any "speculative" interpretation, confining itself strictly to *knowledge, observation, description, and interpretation*. At the same time, it attributes to artistic research both a psychological and a sociological perspective, holding that, in the context of artistic research, both experimental and theoretical practice are necessary, practices that converge and encompass the psychological perspective, given that aesthetic phenomena have value only if they awaken a certain emotional reaction. In the absence of this relation, Mašek is of the opinion that:

*"The aesthetic value of a work comes to the fore only when it awakens a powerful inner echo in the receiving subject, when it elicits in that subject a complex of acts of experience and thought."*⁶

Thus, he concludes, phenomenology, existentialism, psychoanalysis, and semiotics underpin the psychology of artistic creation and reception, a concept which, moreover, Professor Dr Cristian Baicuș sums up by calling it "*mixed methods research*".⁷

In the case of the sociological perspective, that of art "*sets itself the objective of studying the artistic phenomenon...*"⁸ while the methods of general sociology (observation, the survey, the questionnaire, the interview, interpretation) "*round out the treatment of the reciprocal relations between society and art*".⁹

This view is by no means an isolated one; it has also been addressed by established figures such as P. Francastel, R. Escarpit, T. W. Adorno, et al. Moreover, Leo Spitzer, a renowned art critic in the field of twentieth-century stylistics, stressed that: "*between the way one expresses oneself and the way one thinks and feels there exists an immediate connection. Expression is the outward, direct manifestation of the inner life*"¹⁰.

In the first case, artistic creation without contextualization falls outside the domain of conceptual art. The artist is, of course, free to explain the work of art or not. Within the context of a doctorate, however, it is imperative to describe the concept or concepts underlying the artistic creation. In the second case, the artist's training, which may be

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 38

⁷ Cristian Baicuș, "*Cercetarea calitativă*", lecture notes (Doctoral School), 2019, p. 51. Available at: http://www.baicus.ro/MCS/Cercetarea_calitativa.pdf, accessed 5 April 2020, 17:07.

⁸ Mašek, Viktor, op. cit., p. 40

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 41

¹⁰ N. Rată-Dumitru, "Critica stilistică – implicații teoretice", in *Estetica filozofică și științele artei*, Bucharest, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1972, p. 178.

confirmed by their professional activity, is precisely what authorizes them to observe, describe, ascertain, and draw conclusions.

With regard to aesthetic perception, mention should also be made of the semiotic study employed, among other things, in dealing with the chapter on the symbolism of black in various cultures – a modern direction of objective, scientific investigation into art, whose importance derives from its twofold status in relation to the other sciences: semiotics as a discipline in its own right, and its use as a universal instrument of investigation (code, signification, message, connotation, denotation).

In the conception of Charles William Morris: "*an exhaustive analysis of a sign by means of the semiotic method will therefore tend to bring out its relations with other signs, with the actual or potential designatum, and with its interpreter*"¹¹, and that "*the application of the semiotic method to the analysis of art is justified by the identity between art and sign*".¹²

Thus, symbolism has the character both of cognition (the relation between the artistic sign and reality) and of communication (the relation between the artistic sign and its receiver): "*a work of art, as an artistic sign, exists only within a process of interpretation called aesthetic perception.*"¹³

It may thus be concluded that there exists a close and fundamental relationship between the artist and their research project, through which "the new" – the basis of all research, and especially of research projects in the field of the visual arts – constitutes the artist's contribution. In the present case, as has been emphasized, the author's own contribution forms the subject of Chapters 4 to 6, which are grounded in scientific research methods, while Chapter 7 consists of the applied, experimental undertakings, in keeping with the outcome of the scientific research.

As has already been noted, Chapter 8 is devoted to formulating the resulting conclusions, as well as the possible avenues for further research.

¹¹ Charles William Morris, *Ästhetik und Zeichentheorie*, Free Press, München, 1972, p. 92

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 93

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 94

List of publications on the theme of the doctoral thesis:

- GOMBOȘ, Atila (2020), "Ontologia operei de artă în contemporaneitate și contextul său interdisciplinar" in *Caiete de Arte și Design*, Eurostampa, no. 8 (8), pp. 42–45, ISSN 2393-042X;
- GOMBOȘ, Atila (2021). "Niveluri perceptive ale negrului în arta contemporană", in *Tendențele actuale în științele umaniste*, Vol. I, West University of Timișoara Press, Timișoara, 2021, pp. 221–228, ISBN 978-973-125-848-5
- GOMBOȘ, Atila (2021), "Dincolo de Negru", in *4 Foi de Artă*, Issue 33, September 2021, p. 5, p. 7, ISSN 2668-0238, ISSN-L 2668-0238.
- GOMBOȘ, Atila (2021), "Analiză critică a evoluției negrului în artele plastice" in *RevArt*, Eurostampa, vol. 38, no. 3, 2021, ISSN: 1841-1169, pp. 154–164.
- GOMBOȘ, Atila (2022). "Estetica negrului: între percepție și expresie artistică" in *Caiete de Arte și Design*, Eurostampa, no. 9, pp. 164–173, ISSN 2393-042X;
- GOMBOȘ, Atila (2022), "Despre negru în artele vizuale" in *EmART*, Year 3, no. 13, January 2022, pp. 22–25, ISSN: 2734-7923

Chapter 1. General Aspects of Light, Colour, and Its Perception

1.1. The Relationship Between Light and Colour

Light is held to be electromagnetic radiation with a wavelength of approximately 380 to 700 nanometres – the range visible to the human eye. By convention, we shall regard the radiation that lies outside the spectrum perceptible to humans (e.g. ultraviolet or infrared light) as radiant energy. Colour, on the other hand, is strictly a perception: it is the response of our anatomical and physiological systems (the eye, the brain, and the associative-cognitive mechanisms) to stimulation by electromagnetic radiation within the range mentioned, and thus has no real physical existence or significance. The human capacity to explain the meaning of the words that describe a colour (for example red, yellow, white, black, et al.) is limited to ostensive illustration.¹⁴ We may say that blood is red, that gold is yellow, or that snow is white – all of these statements resting on the understanding that colour entails the presence of light.

Black, by contrast, is the result of the absence,¹⁵ or of the complete absorption, of light, being an achromatic *colour*¹⁶ (black is devoid of saturation).¹⁷ The exact sciences, in particular physics, chemistry, and biology, explain the phenomena and processes involved in the formation, processing, and perception of what we call "colour". Although we tend to see the world as coloured, the laws of physics demonstrate that it is in fact "colourless", while biochemistry shows that only a very small proportion of living organisms see it as coloured. Colour, therefore, is not a property of matter but a subjective perception. Light, or the "visible spectrum" – to use the term coined by Isaac Newton (1642–1727), the first researcher to study the phenomenon – is an energy created by the oscillation of the electrically charged particles of which matter is composed, and forms part of the spectrum of electromagnetic waves. Laying the foundations of the corpuscular conception, he holds that light propagates in a straight line and is composed of extremely small particles of matter.

¹⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Bemerkungen über die Farben* (author's own translation: *Remarks on Colour*), University of California Press, California, 1978, p. 68.

¹⁵ Michael Ware; Justin Peatross. *Physics of Light and Optics (Black & White)* (in English). Brigham Young University Press, Provo, UT, USA, 2015, p. 61.

¹⁶ The term "colour" will be used for black, white, and the neutral greys for reasons of grammatical convenience.

¹⁷ Tanya Kelley in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/science/black-color>. Resource accessed 3 September 2020.

The Dutch physicist and astronomer Christiaan Huygens (1629–1695) published, in the year 1690, the theory according to which light propagates in the form of waves – hence the notion of "wavelength", the distance between the crests of two consecutive waves – thereby founding the wave conception. This theory came in for renewed attention in the later nineteenth century, when, in 1864, James Clerk Maxwell (1831–1879) demonstrated that light is an electromagnetic wave, a constituent part of the energy-bearing electromagnetic radiation.

According to Maxwell's theory, the vibration of an electric charge gives rise to a disturbance of the electromagnetic field, producing a variation that travels at a speed of 3×10^8 m/s.^{18,19} The electric field of a plane wave induces oscillating dipoles, and these oscillating dipoles in turn modify the electric field. We use the *refractive index* to describe this effect. Plane waves of different frequencies have different refractive indices, which causes them to travel at different speeds in materials. Thus an arbitrary waveform, composed of multiple sinusoidal waves, invariably changes its shape as it travels through a material (Fig. 1).

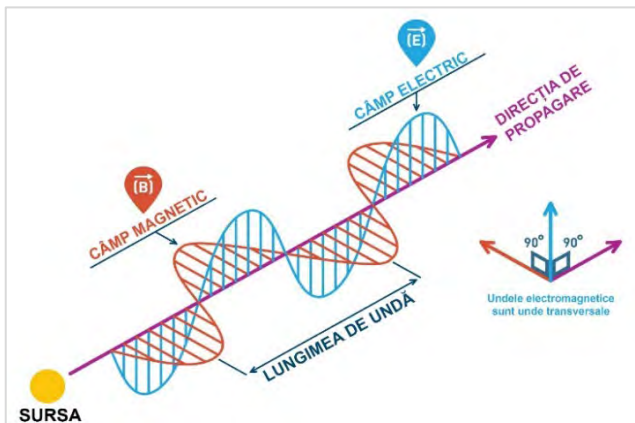


Fig. 1: The oscillation of the magnetic and electric fields perpendicular to the direction of propagation of the light beam. Source: licensed image (Adobe Stock Photos, licence number: 196401231) and recompilation in Adobe Photoshop (1 September 2020).

This phenomenon of *dispersion* is one of the reasons why physicists and engineers choose to work with sinusoidal waves, since every waveform other than the individual sinusoidal wave changes its shape as it travels through a material.²⁰ In transparent media – water, glass, and Plexiglas – the speed v of light is lower than its speed in a vacuum c .²¹ Although it was long believed that

¹⁸ Stelian Acea, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*

¹⁹ The speed of light in a vacuum is usually denoted by the letter C – from the Latin word *celeritas-celeritatis*.

²⁰ Michael Ware; Justin Peatross, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

²¹ The actual value of v depends on the medium. The speed of light in a medium depends on the refractive index n of that medium: the denser the medium, the greater the refractive index, and so the speed of light passing through that medium decreases. The lowest refractive index that exists is the refractive index in a vacuum, and it has a value equal to 1.

photons do not slow down, in 2015 a team of researchers at the University of Glasgow proved the contrary.²²

In the year 1900 the physicist Max Planck (1858–1947) contradicted Maxwell's theory, demonstrating that light is not emitted and transmitted continuously; his mathematics showed that radiation carries energy in the form of photons (quanta of luminous energy). Photons give light a granular character: they are indivisible, minuscule particles, far smaller than an atom, and their size depends on the wavelength of the radiation that produces them. A photon is, moreover, devoid of mass, can exist only in a state of continuous motion, and carries no electric charge, yet it can bear a quantity of energy whose intensity is directly proportional to the electromagnetic frequency and inversely proportional to its wavelength. In 1905 Albert Einstein (1879–1955) likewise characterized photons as particles, carrying his study further into quantum mechanics and the elaboration of the theory of relativity; and in 1924 the French physicist Louis, Duc de Broglie (1892–1987), demonstrated that photons are both particles and waves.²³ Therefore, in the case of light too, it is the electric and magnetic fields that oscillate, and they do so in a plane perpendicular to the direction of travel k .²⁴

The influence of the magnetic field becomes significant (in comparison with the electric field) only for charged particles moving at a speed approaching that of light.²⁵ When the electrons around an atom change their position, drawing closer to the nucleus, they cause the release of photons; we may thus say that light is atomic in origin. Visible light has a wavelength of approximately 400–700 nanometres,²⁶ with violet at the lower limit and red at the upper.²⁷ All the other colours lie between these two values, the parameters for measuring and controlling light being frequency (expressed by the number of oscillations per second of the luminous radiation), wavelength (the distance between the crests of two

²² Daniel Giovannini, Jacqueline Romero et al., *Spatially structured photons that travel in free space slower than the speed of light*. In *Science*, Feb. 2015, vol. 347, no. 6224, pp. 857–860.

²³ Liviu Lăzărescu, *Culoarea în artă*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2009, pp. 15–17.

²⁴ Pupa U.P.A. Gilbert; Willy Haeberli, *Physics in the Arts: Revised Edition*, Elsevier Academic Press, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 2008, pp. 16–18.

²⁵ This usually occurs only with extremely intense lasers ($>10^{18} \text{ W}/[\text{cm}]^2$), where the electric field is strong enough to make the electrons oscillate at speeds close to the speed of light. At any given moment, we can deduce the magnetic field from the electric field by Faraday's law. The illustration in question is used universally, even though it is misleading, because the fields do not in reality look like waves transverse to the direction of travel (k). A wave is composed of large planar layers of uniform field intensity, which makes it very difficult to represent. A plane wave fills all of space and can be thought of as a series of infinite layers, each with a different field intensity, moving in the k direction.

²⁶ One nanometre is one billionth of a metre, or roughly the diameter of a hydrogen atom.

²⁷ These wavelength ranges are not mathematically exact; there are minute, naturally occurring variations on the order of at most 40–50 millimicrons.

neighbouring vibrations), and amplitude (the height of the waves, or the distance they travel along a vertical axis) – Fig. 2.

Between the two ends of the visible spectrum lie radiant energies with longer or shorter wavelengths. Electromagnetic radiation is thus classified according to its wavelength

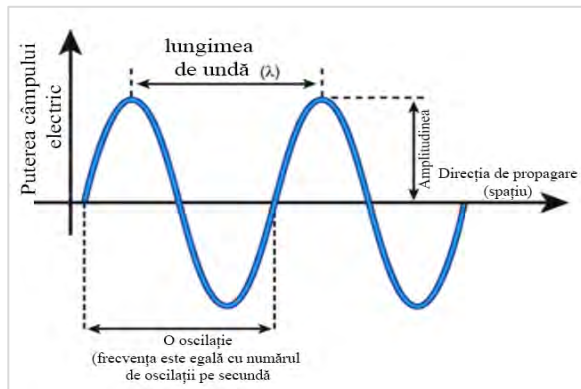


Fig. 2: The amplitude, frequency, and wavelength (λ) of light, Gombos Atila, 2020.

into: cosmic rays, gamma rays, X-rays, ultraviolet radiation, visible-spectrum radiation (visible light), infrared radiation, radar, TV, and ultra-short-wave radiation, radio radiation, and the electrical radiation of the alternating current used in industry.²⁸ Although the electromagnetic spectrum (Fig. 3) is immense, it must be stressed that the radiation of the visible spectrum occupies a minute part of it. The radiation with a wavelength longer than that of the visible spectrum comprises: *infrared rays* (IR, also called *caloric* or *thermal*), detectable by the devices used at night by the military; *TV, radar, and ultra-short-wave radiation, radio radiation* ranging between a few tens and hundreds of metres, and *the electrical radiation of industrial alternating current*.²⁹

²⁸ Electromagnetic radiation can be divided into ionizing and non-ionizing radiation, the difference between the two types being the capacity to ionize molecules or atoms, a capacity determined by the individual energy of the photons. UV, X, and gamma rays fall into the category of ionizing radiation, because the individual energy of the photons at the frequencies characteristic of these types of radiation is high enough to ionize molecules, including breaking the protein bonds of ribonucleic and deoxyribonucleic acid, thereby triggering a specific set of chemical reactions that lead to genetic mutations. The rays of the visible spectrum, the infrared and ultrashort rays, and those used in telecommunications belong to the category of non-ionizing radiation and have no harmful effects on health.

²⁹ Electromagnetic radiation with wavelengths shorter than the visible spectrum comprises: *ultraviolet radiation* (UV), which is in turn divided into UVA and UVB. There is roughly 500 times more UVA in sunlight than UVB. *X-rays*, of use in medicine (radiology, radiotherapy, CT, MRI, PET, etc.); *gamma radiation*, which is emitted by radioactive elements such as uranium, plutonium, et al.; and *cosmic radiation*, which is produced by solar flares, the death or birth of stars, et al. Ideal light (monochromatic, pure) is a perfectly sinusoidal radiation, characterized by its oscillation frequency and the power it carries (f and P , respectively). The colours of the visible spectrum have different wavelengths and are measured in nanometres ($1\text{nm} = 1 \times 10^{-9}\text{m}$). The amplitude can be the same for two waves, whereas the wavelength of blue light is shorter than that of red light.

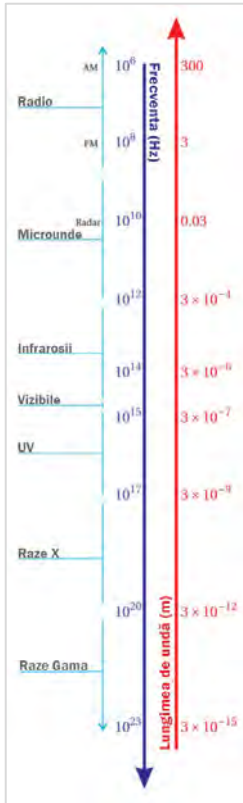


Fig. 3: The electromagnetic spectrum, the author's own work, 2020.

Light sources may be of two kinds: *natural* and *artificial*.

Natural sources of light include the sun, the moon (through the reflection of sunlight), the aurora borealis, the stars, volcanic eruptions, and lightning. There are even some animals and plants that can create their own light, such as fireflies, jellyfish, and fungi. This process is called *bioluminescence*. Artificial light is that produced by humans and includes: fluorescent tubes (which work on the principle of passing electric energy through a fluorescent material) and halogen bulbs (which contain iodine or bromine).

Psychophysical parameters of colour: hue, saturation, and brightness

Spectral, measurable colour differs from perceived, psychological colour. One example of a physical colour is the spectral yellow of sunlight, or the light given off by a sodium lamp. This is a colour composed of a single wavelength, also known as a spectral colour. A psychological colour, or hue, may be a single wavelength or a superposition of different wavelengths.³⁰ A psychological response

to physical stimuli generates the visual sensation, colour being more aptly described through psychophysical parameters: hue, saturation, and brightness. The wavelength of the base colour is called the *dominant wavelength*. The corresponding attribute of the visual sensation is called hue. Brightness is the parameter of a colour according to which an area appears to emit more or less light. The adjectives "bright" and "dark" (or luminous and dark) are therefore antonyms.³¹ Psychologically, pure yellow appears to have low saturation and to be lighter, whereas red, green, and blue appear to have high saturation and to be fuller colours by comparison with the paler yellow; this is owing to the differing sensitivity of the cones.

³⁰ To refer to the aforementioned colour: the colour we see may be a spectral yellow with a dominant wavelength of 570 nm, or the superposition of red and green lights of two different wavelengths; it could even be a broader spectrum that, taken together, appears to have the same colour as spectral yellow. All these variations are called *metamers*: they have different physical origins but produce the same perceived colour for the human eye. The physical parameters of light are not sufficient to describe exactly the colour we see.

³¹ In the literature there is a preference for using the term *luminance* for illuminant sources (light emitters) and *brightness* for illuminated surfaces (which reflect light). Although hue, saturation, and brightness are regarded as psychological parameters, the computer industry took the decision to adopt these three terms (abbreviated HSB, from "hue", "saturation", and "brightness") in order to describe colours quantitatively and reproducibly.

Perceived psychological brightness cannot be measured.³² Brightness depends on the surroundings of the observed object. In sunlight, a black object is perceived as black because, although it does reflect a certain amount of light, everything around it reflects more.

1.2. The Dispersion and Recomposition of Light

In the first century AD, Pliny and later Seneca observed that sunlight is dispersed by means of worked or natural crystals. In 1676, Isaac Newton discovered that if a beam of sunlight passes through a crystal prism and is projected onto a flat, white surface, seven colours are obtained (Fig. 4).

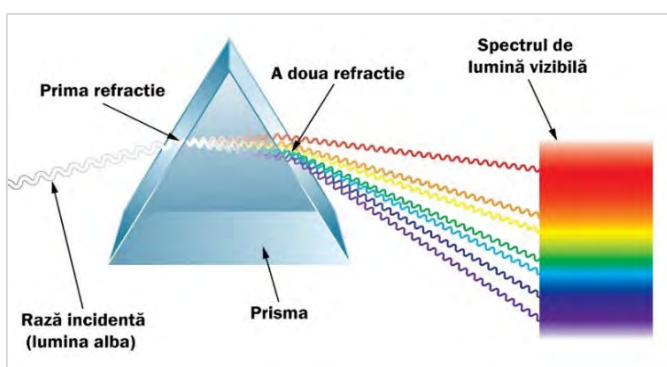


Fig. 4: The dispersion of light. Source: licensed image (Adobe Stock Photos, licence number: 95998951) and recomposed in Adobe Photoshop (3 September 2020).

This band of colours was termed the *visible spectrum*. The infinite array of colours in the real spectrum constitutes what we call the visible spectrum, or the spectral colours. In 1927, it was believed that the human eye could distinguish more than 60,000 colours, with the proviso that "artists can probably distinguish two or three times as many colours".³³ In

2016, the University of Washington had published a study showing that the human eye can distinguish millions of colours,³⁴ while in 2018 Yang and Pidgeon estimated a number between 100,000 and 10 million.³⁵ Light is a mixture of different wavelengths. If a prism is used to separate the light coming from the sun into its components, a sequence of colours ranging from red to violet will be observed. The process requires the beam of light to traverse the prism twice: the first time on entering the prism at a given angle of *incidence*, and the second time on leaving it, at a different angle, the *angle of emergence*, whose value differs

³² It is proportional to the logarithm of intensity, but it varies dramatically from person to person, and even for the same person, depending on the surrounding illumination and on the eye's adaptation to both colour and light intensity. If the eyes are dark-adapted – that is, if they have been in darkness for a time – then when the light is switched on again a faint colour may appear brighter than it would if no prior dark adaptation had taken place. The physical intensity of that colour has remained unchanged under both conditions.

³³ L.G. Pope, "How Many Colors Can You See?" in the journal *Popular Science*, February 1927, p. 20.

³⁴ Pullman, Wash, "How many colors can we see?", Washington State University. Accessed 13 July 2016. (<https://news.wsu.edu/2016/07/14/ask-dr-universe-many-colors-can-see/>)

³⁵ Jason Yang, Charles Pidgeon, *Vision Facts: Questions about the Human Eye*, Universal-Publishers, 2018, p. 29

from the first. The rays produced by the first refraction follow a path at a smaller angle than the rays produced by the second refraction, which is owing to the slightly different refractive index for each wavelength; a *dispersion* occurs.^{36, 37} Within the visible spectrum there are millions of colours, but Newton, by analogy with the seven musical notes,³⁸ divided the spectrum arbitrarily into seven colours.³⁹

Liviu Lăzărescu presents a table containing values with variations in the wavelengths of the colours of the visible spectrum.⁴⁰ To show the variations between measuring instruments, the values of the wavelength intervals are given for twelve colours, as obtained by Itten, Havel, M. Golu – Popescu Neveanu, Ostwald, Abney, Listing, Rood, and Fleury (the correlation of these data is presented in table 1).

	ITTEN	HAVEL	GOLU-NEVEANU	OSTWALD	ABNEY	LISTING	ROOD	FLEURY
Red	800-650	700-693	800-620	615,5	620	723-647	700	750-650
Orange	640-590	597-608	620-520	569	620-592	647-585	597,2	605
Yellow	580-550	581-577	590-575	579	592-578	585-575	580,8	580
Green	530-490	527-530	575-550	506	578-513	575-549	527,1	520
Blue	480-460	473-465	510-480	483,5	500-464	492-455	473,2	470
Indigo	450-440	-	480-450	478,5	464-446	455-424	438,3	-
Violet	430-390	406-408	460-390	-	446	424-397	405,9	400-380

Table 1: The visible spectrum with its approximate wavelength intervals and frequency intervals.

Colours containing a single wavelength are also called *pure colours*, or *spectral colours*. *The synthesis of light* (recomposition) involves the recomposition of white light from the coloured beams (ROYGBIV).⁴¹

1.3. The Trichromatic Theory of Visual Perception

³⁶ Bye, Louise, et al. *Basic Sciences for Ophthalmology*, OUP Oxford, 2013, p. 206

³⁷ Simmons, Joseph, and Kelly S. Potter. *Optical Materials*, Academic Press, 2000, p. 25.

³⁸ Smith, George, Irwin Bernard Cohen (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Newton* (in English), Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 380.

³⁹ Richard Misek (2 February 2010). *Chromatic Cinema: A History of Screen Color*. John Wiley & Sons. p. 28.

⁴⁰ Liviu Lăzărescu, *op. cit.* p. 21, 2009

⁴¹ This process can be demonstrated in at least two ways. The first involves placing a converging lens in front of the beams of coloured light that emerge from a prism. If the resulting beam is projected onto a wall, it will be seen to be white. The second method, demonstrated by Newton in 1662, involves *Newton's disc*.

Vision and the perception of colours are complex processes involving the eyes and the brain. The trichromatic theory of visual perception explains part of this process by focusing on the photoreceptors in the eye, which send signals to the brain. This theory assumes that the visual spectrum is divided into three and that these intervals are observed separately: the sensation of blue appears in the interval 400nm–500nm, the sensation of green in the interval 500nm–600nm, and the sensation of red in the interval 600nm–700nm.

The primary colours (or fundamental colours) are precisely these three colours: red, green, and blue, obtained additively. The trichromatic theory and the Hering theory, also called the yellow–blue opponent-colours theory, explain colour vision. The trichromatic theory rests on the brain's ability to interpret all hues as the result of the quantitative and qualitative mixture of the three fundamental colours (Fig. 5).⁴²

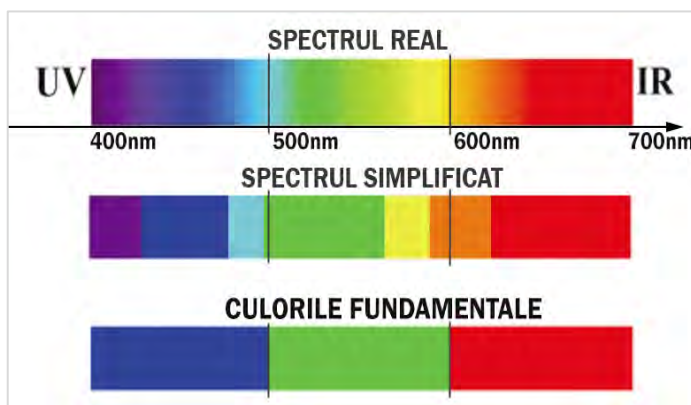


Fig. 5: The visible light spectrum, the simplified spectrum, and the trichromatic theory of visual perception. Source: the author's own

Another major theory of colour vision is known as the *opponent-process theory*. According to this theory, colour is encoded in opponent pairs: black–white, yellow–blue, and green–red. The basic idea is that certain cells of the visual system are excited by one of the opponent colours and inhibited by the other.

The Young–Helmholtz Trichromatic Theory

⁴² An even more pronounced simplification reduces the spectrum to just three colours – red, green, and blue – and is commonly used by computer monitors and televisions. In these cases, the three colours are combined to produce a wide range of colours. It will be noted that many of the colours we know are not present even in the most complete sequence of spectral colours: pink, brown, and beige, for example, and so on.

The trichromatic theory was developed around 1801–1802, when the English physician Thomas Young (1773–1829) carried out a series of experiments, the conclusions appearing in *Lectures* (1802).^{43, 44} Young's hypothesis followed the observations of artists and clothing manufacturers, who had discovered that mixing three different pigments in different proportions yields any colour. His theory was extended fifty years later by Hermann von Helmholtz (1821–1894), who supposed that the human eye senses colour using only three receptors: for red, green, and blue (Fig. 6). The results of the experiments, published in his original work, *Handbuch der Physiologischen Optik* (1924), showed that people with normal vision need three wavelengths in order to create the normal range of colours, as follows:

S(short) – **B**(blue) – between 400nm and 500nm (short wavelengths)

M(edium) – **G**(reen) – between 500nm and 600nm (medium wavelengths)

L(ong) – **R**(ed) – between 600nm and 700nm (long wavelengths)

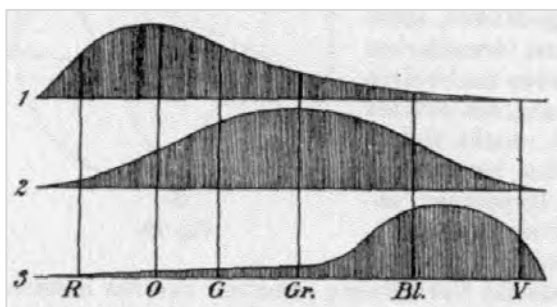


Fig. 6: Spectral sensitivities to light of the cones in the human eye, a drawing by Hermann von Helmholtz. Free licence, CC. 2.0.

The Young–Helmholtz trichromatic theory rests on the following:

- The human eye's ability to perceive all the hues of colours through the mixture, in different combinations, of the three fundamental colours;
- The differing intensity of excitation of the three types of cone, which leads to nerve impulses of differing intensities;

⁴³ Thomas Young, 1802. "Bakerian Lecture: On the Theory of Light and Colours" in *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, 92:12–48.

⁴⁴ Mammals that possess all three types of cone are called *trichromats*.

- The intensity of excitation of each photopigment is processed and interpreted as a perceptual sensation in the brain.⁴⁵

1.3.1. The Hering Theory, or the Opponent-Process Theory

Unlike Helmholtz, who had managed to provide a basis for the physiology of vision with the help of mathematics and physics, Ewald Hering (1834–1918) preferred psychological data, attempting to imagine which neural processes were responsible for sensations; his theory thus rested on an analysis of visual perception. Experience indicates that a conscious subject requires four unique colours in order to characterize perception: blue, yellow, red, and green. As a rule, two of these hues constitute a colour sensation: orange, for example, contains red and yellow, while blue and green are the components of cyan. The central idea in Hering's conception was that red and green are opposed hues, since they are never elicited simultaneously by a single colour stimulus; the same holds for blue and yellow.

As for the colour black, Hering held that it is a sensation, just like white. He therefore inferred that there must be a receptive visual substance capable of undergoing a positive change when white is viewed and a negative change when black is perceived. He further supposed that we perceive greys when these substances are in various states of equilibrium between white and black. In effect, Hering posited that three pairs of substances are present at the level of the retina: some for white and black, others for red and green, and others again for blue and yellow. He also suggested that light acts upon these three photosensitive substances through what he termed assimilation (A) and dissimilation (D), namely: when light acts in a dissimilatory, or decomposing, manner upon the white–black photosensitive substance, the sensation of white is produced, whereas when it acts in an assimilatory, or regenerative, manner, the sensation of black appears.⁴⁶ Thus, according to Hering's theory, the colour pairs white–black, red–green, and blue–yellow were regarded as opposites, since one colour in a pair neutralizes the other in that same pair. The relationships between the

⁴⁵ The Young–Helmholtz trichromatic theory was accepted for almost two centuries by the scientific community, even though – unlike the perception of different colours through the direct processing of the signals generated by cone-type cells – colour perception at the level of the brain rests on the Hering theory, or the opponent-process theory.

⁴⁶ Similarly, red produces a breaking-down effect on the red–green substance, while green has a regenerating effect on the same substance. Blue, he held, acts in a dissimilatory way on the blue–yellow substance, whereas regeneration is caused by the colour yellow; all colours act in a dissimilatory way on the black–white substance, producing the sensation of white together with their respective colours.

pairs of colours were treated by Young–Helmholtz as an additive process and by Hering as a subtractive one: when red and green are mixed at the level of the retina, they neutralize one another, being opposed colours that act antagonistically. Yet their capacity for dissimilation remains, acting upon the white–black substance and producing the sensation of white. The Young–Helmholtz theory, by contrast, postulated the idea that all colours, apart from the primaries, are the result of their mixture.^{47,48.}

There are roughly 6 million cells sensitive to various wavelengths of the visible spectrum in each eye. Each type of cone cell covers a broad range of frequencies but has a particular sensitivity to a certain portion of the spectrum. Thus one type of cone cell is sensitive primarily to bluish-violet light, while two other types are most sensitive to the wavelengths corresponding to the green colour range; one peaks at a bluish green and the other at a yellowish green. Each of the three cone types (I, II, III) contains protein photopigments (-opsins), and the maximum sensitivity, the *peak*, is given separately by each individual type at different wavelengths of the visible spectrum:^{49.} The following inferences emerge:

- Short waves stimulate the S cones, corresponding to the violet-bluish region of the visible spectrum (~420 nm)
- Medium waves stimulate the M cones, corresponding to the bluish-green region of the visible spectrum (~534 nm)
- Long waves stimulate the L cones, corresponding to the yellowish-green region of the visible spectrum (~564 nm)

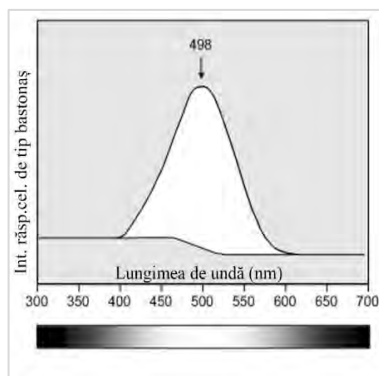
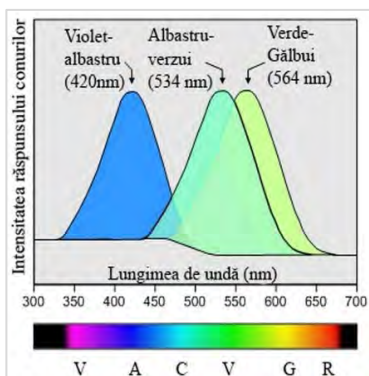


Fig. 7: The sensitivity of the cones to different wavelengths of the electromagnetic spectrum. The author's own work.

Fig. 8: The sensitivity of rod-type cells in the case of nocturnal vision. The author's own work.

⁴⁷ Swan M. Burnett, "Color-Blindness and color-perception" in *Popular Science*, Bonnier Corporation, 1882, vol. 21, p. 90.

⁴⁸ Deane Brewster Judd, *Contributions to Color Science*, University of California, 1979, pp. 585–586.

⁴⁹ Schnapf JL, Kraft TW, Baylor DA. "Spectral sensitivity of human cone photoreceptors" in *Nature.*, 1987 Jan 29-Feb 4;325(6103):439-41. doi: 10.1038/325439a0. PMID: 3808045.

Fig. 7 illustrates the response of the type I, II, and III cones (S, M, L) to the wavelengths of the visible spectrum, while Fig. 8 shows, by comparison, the response of the rod-type cells.

The S-type cones represent roughly 10% of the total number of cones. The bipolar and ganglion cells (GC) transmit the signals from the S cones, and there is evidence that these have a separate signalling pathway through the thalamus to the visual cortex. The L- and M-type cones, on the other hand, represent the remaining 90% of the total number of cones. They are nonetheless difficult to distinguish, since they have the same form, the difference between them being the different number of amino acids that make up the *-opsins* they contain. Mollon and Bowmaker, in 1992,⁵⁰ and subsequently Wässle, in 1999,⁵¹ discovered that the distribution of the L and M cones is random, in a ratio of 1:1.

The opponent-colours theory, an alternative first proposed by the German physiologist and psychologist Karl Ewald Hering, regained attention in the 1970s and was taken up by other researchers as well. There are two ideas underlying the opponent process, namely:

1. The photosensitive cells at the level of the retina contain three different protein substances that change metabolically when photons come to interact with them, producing the following pairs of sensations: white–black, red–green, and yellow–blue; the information that reaches the brain, in the form of coded nerve impulses, is the result of the changes in and the interactions between these photosensitive substances.

2. The sensitivities of the cone cells peak at different frequencies. There is a large degree of overlap in the wavelengths of light to which the three types of cone cell respond, so that our visual systems are designed to detect the differences between the responses of the various cones at the level of the brain. In order for these differences to be perceived, the retina makes use of a large number of ganglion cells (GC)⁵² – each of these cells being capable of comparing the signals generated by a number of different cone cells, and the signals that leave the GC are the ones that supply the brain with information about colour. Thus we perceive the colour yellow when the cones sensitive to the wavelength

⁵⁰ Mollon, J. D.; Bowmaker, J. K., "The spatial arrangement of cones in the primate fovea" in *Nature*, 1992, no. 360 (6405), pp. 677–679.

⁵¹ Wässle, Heinz, "Colour vision: A patchwork of cones". *Nature*, 1999, no. 397 (6719), pp. 473–47.

⁵² Note: Liviu Lăzărescu, in *Culoarea în artă*, on page 32, in describing the theory of opponent colours, characterizes them as a "fourth type of cone, sensitive to variations in brightness," whereas Wagner, Griggs, Schmidt, et al. designate as responsible for variations in brightness the "ganglion cells".

corresponding to the yellowish-green colour are stimulated slightly more than the cones sensitive to the wavelength corresponding to the bluish-green colour, for example; in the same way, we perceive the colour red when the cones sensitive to the wavelength corresponding to the yellowish-green colour are stimulated significantly more than the cones sensitive to the wavelength corresponding to the bluish-green colour. The suggestion that the antagonism between colours might be caused by the excitation and inhibition that takes place at the level of the nerve cells appeared in a work by the Swedish physiologist Gustaf F. Göthlin (1944).⁵³ He carried out research starting from the conclusions of Sherrington, published in 1906 in his work *The Integrative Action of the Nervous System*, who had investigated the process of reciprocal innervation, from which the idea of excitation and inhibition between nerve cells evolved.^{54, 55.}

Göthlin suggests that there is indeed an antagonistic process in the blue–yellow sensation pair as a first stage, and then suggests the involvement of the yellow component of the blue–yellow balance in the antagonistic relationship between red and green. He shows that these antagonistic interactions were due to excitation and inhibition between the photoreceptor cells.

A theory involving a dominator–modulator complex of colour vision was proposed by Granit in 1947. According to his theory, there exists at the level of the retina a group of photoreceptors that respond only to a narrow part of the visible spectrum (modulator photoreceptors) and another group that responds to a broad band of the visible spectrum (dominator photoreceptors).⁵⁶

In 1957, Hurvich and Jameson held that the three types of colour receptor – red, green, and blue – are interconnected in an opponent process at the level of the GC. Thus, long-wavelength electromagnetic radiation excites the "red" cones and the ganglion cells responsible for processing and coding the adjacent red–green luminous flux – $C_1(R)$ – in order to relay the information onward, through the optic nerve, to the visual cortex, where the perception of red is formed. Medium-wavelength light excites the "green" cones and inhibits, by up to a half, the same ganglion cell, reducing its excitation for the colour red and thereby managing to produce the perception of green light – $C_1(G)$. Likewise, short-

⁵³ Gustaf F. Göthlin, "Experimental Determination of the Short-Wave Fundamental Color in Man's Color Sense" in *Journal of the Optical Society of America*, 1944, Vol. 34, No. 3, pp. 147–158

⁵⁴ Breathnach CS. Charles Scott Sherrington's Integrative action: a centenary notice, in *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 2004, 97(1):34-6.

⁵⁵ Finger S. *Minds Behind the Brain*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press; 2000.

⁵⁶ Pickford R. W., Human Colour Vision and Granit's Theory in *Nature*, 1948, no. 162, pp. 414–415.

wavelength light excites the "blue" cones and partially inhibits the Y(yellow)B(blue) ganglion cell – C_3B , leading to a sensation of blue. Light midway between the sensitivities of the "red" and "green" cones (R, G) would stimulate both of them. The rate of impulse transmission in the R(red)G(green) ganglion cell would not change, since the equal stimulation and excitation from the two cones would cancel out. The connections of these cones to the YB ganglion cell, however, lead to its excitation – $C_2(Y)$.⁵⁷ Thus the combined excitation provided by the R and G cones produces the sensation of the colour yellow (Fig. 9)

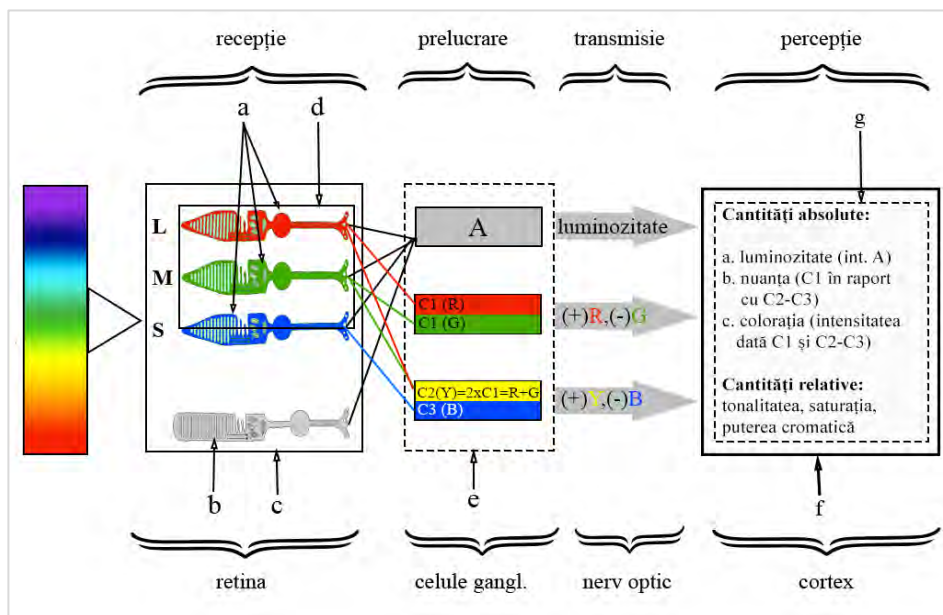


Fig. 9: The model of interconnection of the cone-type cells proposed by Hurvich and Jameson in 1957 for the opponent-process theory. a. – S, M, L cones; b. – rod-type cell; c. – the retina; d. fovea centralis; e. the layer of ganglion cells (GC); f. Cortex

The first studies addressing the isolated responses to monochromatic stimuli of a single photoreceptor were obtained through experiments at the level of the lateral geniculate nucleus (LGN) in monkeys, by Russell DeValois in 1958.⁵⁸ He demonstrated the presence of cells that respond to a narrow band of the visible electromagnetic radiation, corresponding to the modulator cells described by Granit. At the same time, DeValois showed the presence of photoreceptor cells that respond to the visible radiation corresponding to the colour red

⁵⁷ Hurvich, L.M., Jameson, D. "Color theory and abnormal red-green vision." in *Doc Ophthalmol* 16, 409–442 (1962).

⁵⁸ Russell L. De Valois, Karen K. De Valois, "A multi-stage color model" in *Vision Research*, Vol. 33, No. 8, 1993, pp. 1053–1065.

but are not excited by the visible radiation corresponding to the colour green, thereby indicating an antagonistic relationship between red and green (Fig. 10).

Gunnar Svaetichin, in 1956, using glass instead of metal electrodes to record the intracellular activity of the cones, observed a sequence of depolarizing and hyperpolarizing responses, corresponding to neural excitation and inhibition.⁵⁹

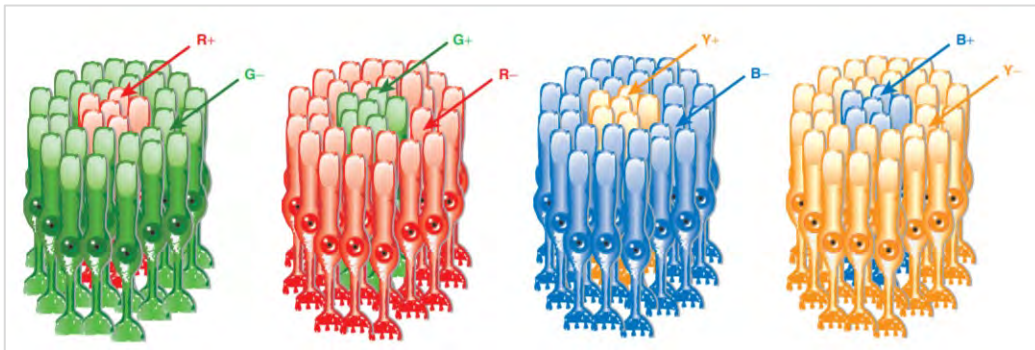


Fig. 10: Groups of opponent cells, some of which are excited by red and inhibited by green (R + G-) and others of which are excited by yellow and inhibited by blue (Y + B-). Russell De Valois and his colleagues (1966) identified two further types of photoreceptor. Adobe licence 2876345646.

Conclusion: All these theories explain *trichromatic* vision and converge, from a scientific standpoint,⁶⁰ explaining the way in which the photosensitive S, M, and L cones are excited and how the nerve impulses are generated towards the brain, the place where the variations in the intensity of the level of excitation mediated by the comparator GC make possible the perception of all the hues – in terms of saturation and intensity – that the mixture of the three fundamental colours can form.

1.3.2. The Process of Vision and the Perception of Colour Sensation

Optical radiation propagates towards and away from the objects around us. Some wavelengths are absorbed and others reflected, the latter giving rise to the sensation of what we call *colour*, or *colour perception*. Colour has no existence and no real physical significance; it is merely an interpretation of a biological nature.⁶¹ The sole exception to this

⁵⁹ Svaetichin, G. and MacNichol, E.F., Jr., "RETINAL MECHANISMS FOR CHROMATIC AND ACHROMATIC VISION", in *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1958, No. 74: 385-404.

⁶⁰ Turner, R. Steven. "Vision Studies in Germany: Helmholtz versus Hering." in *Osiris*, vol. 8, 1993, pp. 80-103.

⁶¹ Gunther, Leon. *The Physics of Music and Color*. Springer Science & Business Media, 2011. p. 327

is *absolute black*, defined as the total absence, or complete absorption, of the radiation of the visible spectrum. According to the natural and exact sciences, what we *perceive* as black is nothing other than a combination of pigments that reflect so little light that it conveys the *impression* of black – a perceptual process grounded in cognitive functions acquired from childhood onwards.

Consequently, *colour has no real existence of its own*, since its so-called *real* aspect is produced by a subjective experience, both individual and collective. The light rays that come to be focused on the surface of the retina (in normal, emmetropic vision) are *refracted* three times: first when they strike the cornea, then at the anterior surface of the lens, and finally at the posterior (inner) surface of the lens. The number of the three subtypes of cone cells is not identical in every individual, and for this reason the perception of colour shades may vary.⁶² The rate at which the nerve impulse is transmitted per unit of time (*S*) depends both on the intensity of the light and on its wavelength.⁶³ Each of the three types of cone (I, II, III, or S, M, L) contains protein photopigments (opsins), and the maximum sensitivity, the *peak*, is given separately by each individual type at different wavelengths of the visible spectrum (Fig. 11).

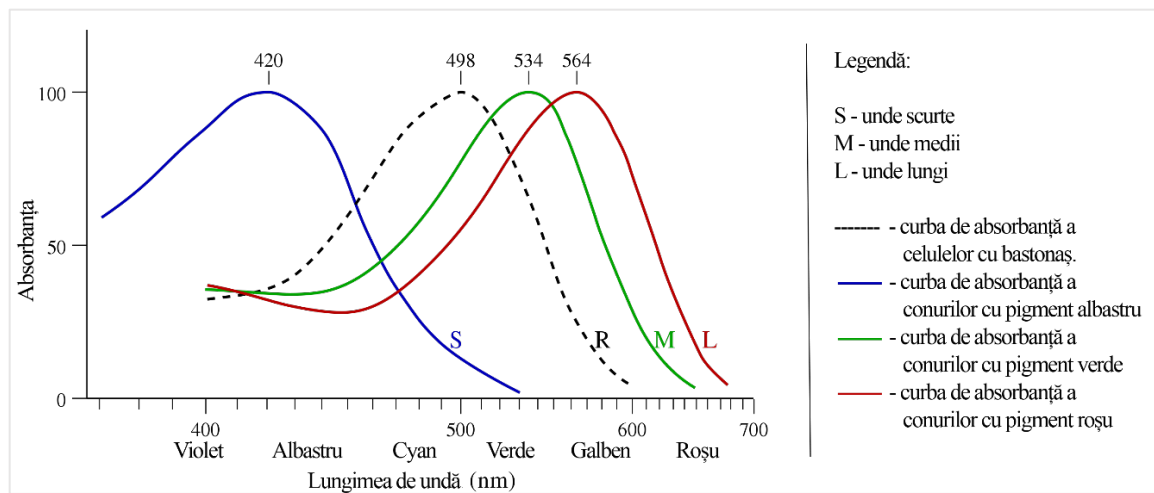


Fig. 11: The curves of spectral absorption as a function of wavelength. (S), (M), and (L) correspond respectively to the curves for blue, green, and red cones, while (R) corresponds to the curve for the rods. The author's own work.

⁶² Robert Kenridge, et al., *Color Perception*. In *The Handbook of Brain Theory and Neural Networks*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2003, p. 230.

⁶³ Sherwood, Lauralee. *Fundamentals of Human Physiology*. Cengage Learning, 2011, p. 157.

Through a network composed of four types of cell, named after their appearance – *bipolar*, *ganglion*, *horizontal*, and *amacrine* cells – the light stimuli are converted into nerve impulses, which are transmitted by the optic nerves to the striate cortex of the occipital lobe (the posterior part of the brain, above the cerebellum), where the information thus received is translated and interpreted, giving rise to visual perception. Spectral sensitivity is determined by the three types of cone and the pigments they contain, each absorbing, and therefore being stimulated by, different wavelengths of visible light.

The combination of the three sensitivity curves captures the way in which the neural response changes in intensity in response to variations in the wavelength of the incoming light, when the intensity of the light is held constant. A different neural response means that a different number of nerve impulses per second is transmitted by the cones in the retina to the neuronal axons in the optic nerve and the visual cortex. The combination and interpretation of these impulses by the brain defines the colour perception and sensitivity of the human eye.

1.3.3. Dark Adaptation of the Human Eye. The Purkinje Phenomena.

The light-sensitive retina of the human eye contains cone cells and rod cells. The rod cells are responsible for peripheral vision, being stimulated even under poor lighting conditions (scotopic vision), whereas the cone cells respond to high light intensities and are responsible for diurnal, photopic vision. Correspondingly, the size of the pupil is inversely proportional to the quantity of light (a process regulated by the autonomic nervous system and therefore involuntary): under strong light the pupil is small, while under weak light the pupil enlarges.⁶⁴ The rod cells are responsible for night vision. Like the cones, they contain rhodopsin, on which they rely more heavily than the cone cells do, each rod being approximately 100 to 1,000 times more sensitive to light than a single cone fully adapted to darkness.

⁶⁴ For example, if the light in a room suddenly drops in intensity, we will at first perceive very little of our surroundings. Once the eyes have adapted to the darkness, we will perceive shapes but will not see their colours, and the pupil will dilate in order to admit a greater quantity of light. The size of the pupil is therefore controlled by the circular muscle of the iris. The iris may be likened to the diaphragm of a camera. In total darkness the human eye is incapable of perceiving shapes, but most cases are ones of partial darkness. Our eyes can adapt and see at low light levels, that is, in partial darkness. The cones adapt within about ten minutes, but they are then outperformed by the rod cells, which may take several hours to become fully dark-adapted and to reach their maximum sensitivity under conditions of weak light.

There are, moreover, far more rods on the retina (100 million) than cones (5 million). Furthermore, several rod cells connect synchronously to the same interneuron. This allows lower levels of light to be detected, at the cost of image clarity. The rod cells collect light over long periods of time, and this slow response means that lower levels of light can be detected at the cost of the perception of rapid changes over time.⁶⁵

In 2018, a team of researchers at Duke University discovered that the retinal circuit changes both during dark adaptation and when attention is focused on a moving object.⁶⁶

The Purkinje Phenomena

Jan Evangelista Purkyně (1787 – 1869) was concerned, among many other things, with the anatomy and physiology of the human eye, drawing inspiration from the *Theory of Colours* (Goethe). The *Purkinje phenomenon*, or the *phenomenon of the adaptation of vision to darkness*, is presented in Purkinje's two research dissertations. He described the effect of light intensity on the perceived brightness of colours. Objects coloured green or blue are seen as brighter than red ones of the same colour intensity under daytime conditions of low light. The Purkinje effect may be formulated thus: as the intensity of the light decreases, the brightness of red objects fades more rapidly than that of green or blue objects, and vice versa. This observation is explained by the fact that the human eye has two detection systems for distinguishing colours, one under conditions of light and the other under conditions of low light intensity. The changes in the apparent brightness of differently coloured objects under different light intensities are now explained by the differing rate at which the human eye adapts to light and darkness. This adaptation is due to the cone cells and the rods.

As the sensitivity of the cones decreases, the sensitivity of the rods increases, and in this way the whole course of the process of dark adaptation is accomplished. As daylight wanes, sensitivity shifts towards shorter wavelengths, so that blue and green objects appear relatively brighter than red ones. The physiological mechanism of the Purkinje phenomenon

⁶⁵ Rosenfield, Mark, and Nicola Logan. *Optometry: Science, Techniques and Clinical Management*. Elsevier Health Sciences, 2009.

⁶⁶ Responsible for these changes are the 30–40 different types of ganglion cells located on the surface of the retina, which together account for roughly 4% of the total number of cells that make up the retina. These cells are sensitive to upward, downward, leftward, and rightward motion. When the light intensity is low, more of these motion-sensitive cell types are activated than under conditions of higher light.

is therefore due to the differential sensitivity of the photoreceptors stimulated by spectral light.⁶⁷

Another phenomenon observed by Purkinje, known as the *Purkinje–Sanson images*, is that, under dark conditions, four reflected images, called P1, P2, P3, and P4 (P for Purkinje), can be observed in the eye of a person looking at a source of light. These images are reflected by the anterior and posterior parts of the ocular optical system. P1, the brightest and simplest of the four images, is created by the reflection of a light source (a catoptric image) by the convex anterior surface of the cornea. P2, P3, and P4 are phenomena of both reflection and refraction (catadioptric images). In the case of P2, the image generated by the light source originates at the posterior surface of the cornea; this was not described by Purkinje or Sanson, probably because it is the weakest in intensity and, from certain angles, overlaps with P1 (25). P3 is formed by the anterior convex surface of the lens and is rather bright, but it is the largest of the four images. P4 is an inverted image, generated by the posterior surface of the lens; it is the smallest and the only real image. P3 and P4 may also be visible as entoptic images, since their refraction reaches the retina.⁶⁸

1.4. Additive and Subtractive Synthesis and the Capacity of Surfaces to Alter the Direction of Light

By placing coloured filters in front of a beam of white light, one observes that, where these intersect, their projections form colours other than any of the three principal colours. The colour that a beam of light transmits onto a white surface has the same colour as the filter. A red filter transmits red light, a green one transmits green light, and so on. Thus, if a red beam is superimposed on a green beam, the colour yellow becomes perceptible; the mixture of a red beam of light with a blue one yields magenta; and a blue beam together with a green one gives rise to cyan. Accordingly, by mixing the primary (fundamental) colours,

⁶⁷ Purkinje also observed that, when one follows objects passing in a given direction in front of a stationary object, after a time, once those objects are no longer moving, the stationary object tends to give the impression that it is itself moving, in the direction opposite to that in which the objects in motion had been travelling. This effect is called the *afterimage effect* or *persistence of vision*.

⁶⁸ The eponymous Purkinje–Sanson images are so named because, although Purkinje was the first to describe the phenomenon, it was explained by Louis Joseph Sanson, who in 1838 offered an anatomical account (the reflection, and respectively the refraction, of a light source by the natural lenses of the human eye). Purkinje also described how the movement of a candle within the visual field allows a person to see the shadow of a tree on the inner surface of the eye. This experiment produces an entoptic perception called the *Purkinje tree*, which is invisible in ordinary circumstances because the shadows of the blood vessels on the retina are stable images.

we obtain the so-called complementary colours (magenta, yellow, and cyan), which are brighter than the pairs of primary colours that formed them. At the simultaneous intersection of the fundamental colours, white results. This procedure also yields the complementary pairs: blue – yellow, green – magenta, and red – cyan. This process is termed the *additive synthesis* of colours (from Lat. *aditio* – "addition"). CCD (charge-coupled devices) and CMOS (complementary metal oxide semiconductor) sensors are designed on the basis of the trichromatic RGB (red, green, blue) theory of additive synthesis.⁶⁹

Subtractive colour mixing is essential for understanding the mixing of pigments in paints or inks and for colour printing. Moreover, by mixing the three pigment colours that constitute the primary colours of subtractive synthesis, the colour black is obtained.⁷⁰ Pigments or dyes that tend to absorb light give the impression of dark colours, even as, at the same time, several pigments are mixed together, for example the CMYK mixture (cyan, magenta, yellow, key – black). Thus, it may be stated that black, which absorbs all the beams of light in the visible spectrum, is formed by combining several colours in suitable quantities. Red pigments absorb the green and blue light of the visible spectrum, green pigments absorb blue and red light, and blue pigments absorb red and green light. In the case of pigments, the primary colours are yellow, magenta, and cyan (these being the secondary colours in the case of light). Yellow absorbs blue radiation and reflects red and green (which, when mixed, give rise to yellow); cyan absorbs red and reflects blue and green (from whose mixture cyan arises); and magenta absorbs green and reflects red and blue (from whose mixture magenta results).

In the case of pigments, the secondary colours are red, green, and blue (it is called *subtractive colour mixing* because we "subtract" colours from the visible spectrum) – the same colours that are primary in the case of light. Thus, by combining yellow pigments with cyan pigments, we obtain green, because blue and red are absorbed. By combining cyan pigments with magenta, red and green are absorbed, resulting in blue; and, finally, by combining yellow with magenta, green and blue are absorbed, the result being red. Additive synthesis and subtractive synthesis, respectively, are illustrated in Fig. 12.

⁶⁹ Stelian Acea, op. cit., p. 19.

⁷⁰ Pigments may be present in paints, inks, and filters, as well as in all manufactured materials. The colour of objects depends on the pigments they contain and on the *reflectance R* of those pigments.

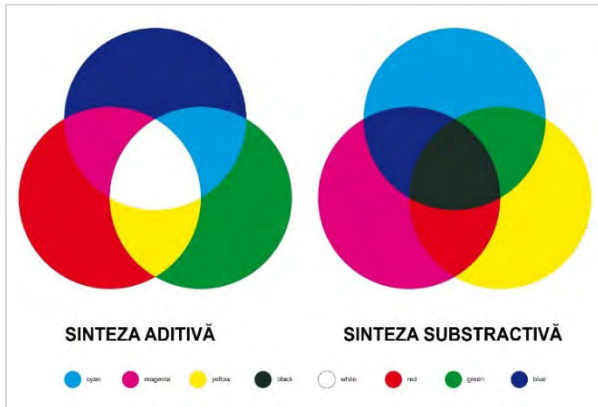


Fig. 12: A representation of additive synthesis (left) and subtractive synthesis (right). Source: licensed image (Adobe Stock Photos, licence number: 37504284).

Pigments therefore remove, or subtract, a portion of the visible spectrum, and what remains is the colour we perceive. When two pigments of different colours are mixed, we effectively remove two portions of the visible spectrum. A colour printer, for example, works by combining different quantities of cyan, magenta, and yellow, resulting in a wide palette of colours. The addition of a black pigment allows for a broader range of

intensities. This combination (CMYK) can produce an almost unlimited number of colours. Thus, subtractive colour mixing finds its application in the use of pigments, whereas additive mixing applies to systems that use light. Accordingly, superimposing, by the same procedure, the complementary colours produced by additive synthesis yields exactly the opposite of additive synthesis⁷¹, and the process is known as *subtractive synthesis*.

Digital art is gaining ever more ground in the present day. Owing to the use of dedicated software for creating, manipulating, and rendering digital content, certain standards have been established and adopted internationally, the role of which, as regards digital colour, is to reproduce it as faithfully as possible across various online media. sRGB is a standard RGB colour space, created jointly by HP and Microsoft in 1996 for use with monitors and printers and in the *encoding* of colours in most programming languages. Reference will be made to the last case, taking as an example the markup language HTML (Hypertext Markup Language). The two 3D graphics interfaces (OpenGL and Direct3D) likewise use the same colour space.⁷² Colour codes are ways of representing the colours we

⁷¹ The rules of additive synthesis apply to colour televisions, mobile phones, computer monitors, projectors, et al. These rules do not apply to the mixing of pigments and paints. On a television or a computer monitor, rather than the three primary colours being superimposed, they are placed side by side, in small zones called pixels. The pixels are small enough that, from a normal viewing distance, the eye perceives the additive mixture of red, green, and blue. Each pixel is composed of three small pieces of phosphor, which emit red, green, or blue light when struck by a beam of electrons.

⁷² The first version of HTML was devised by Tim Berners-Lee in 1993. Since then, there have been several different versions of HTML. The most widely used version throughout the 2000s was HTML 4.01, which became an official standard in December 1999. HTML5.1 is the most recent evolution of the standard that defines HTML, released on the recommendation of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). The term denotes two distinct concepts. On the one hand, it is a new version of the HTML language, with new elements, attributes, and features; on the other hand, it has markedly superior applicability in terms of integrability and adaptability to the wide variety of visual rendering of digital information.

see every day in a format that a computer can interpret and display. The formats used in software and web applications include hexadecimal colour codes, RGB values, HSL (hue, saturation, lightness), and HSLA (alpha – opacity).

It is important to stress that all monitors and screens render colours either by specifying the corresponding hexadecimal values (a base-16 numeral system, useful above all in image-editing programs, where it is necessary to know the code of a particular shade of colour, which in certain cases is denoted with the hexadecimal digits 0–9 and A–F) or by specifying the decimal values (for R, G, B) ranging from 0 to 255, 0 being the minimum (null) value and 255 the maximum. Each pixel is separated into three channels: red, green, and blue. Thus, each of the three channels is 8 bits, and one may say that each pixel has three "subpixels". Each subpixel can represent $(2^8 - 1)$ variants of the same colour, that is, 255 variations.

In the sRGB colour spectrum, a colour is defined as a mixture of pure red, green, and blue lights of differing intensities. Each of the red, green, and blue light levels is encoded as a number in the range 0–255, 0 signifying the total absence of light and 255 signifying its maximum intensity. This makes it possible to render 16,777,216 colours ($3 \times 2^8 = 2^{24}$), that is, a colour depth of 24 bits. Unlike the RGB colour space, the gamma value of the sRGB colour space cannot be expressed as a single numerical value. The overall gamma value is approximately 2.2. Each pixel in an LED monitor displays colours in this way, through a combination of red, green, and blue LEDs (light-emitting diodes).⁷³ The primary colours and their additive combinations are encoded by *inline* specification or by means of a CSS file. The *inline* model used in rendering colours on digital devices is shown in Fig. 13.

In the first column, the value 255, in the first position of the triad, represents red, provided that the other two values are 0. Green requires the decimal value 255 in the intermediate position. Correspondingly, blue is rendered if the decimal value 255 occupies the third position of the triad. In the second column, two maximum decimal values are represented in each case, as follows: yellow corresponds to the mixing of the maxima for red and green; for magenta we have the maximum values of red and blue; and to cyan correspond the decimal maxima of green and blue. In the third and fourth columns, the non-colours are represented, from absolute black (to which the value 0 of the three fundamental colours corresponds, representing, in effect, their total absence), through values for greys of

⁷³ For example, when the red pixel is coded at the value 0 (zero), the LED is off. When the red pixel is coded at its maximum value of 255, the LED shines at maximum intensity. Any value between the two extremes causes a partial emission of light by the LED.

various intensities, up to complete white, which is rendered by the maximum values of the decimals corresponding to the fundamental colours. It is worth noting that the sum of equal values across the three fundamental colours produces various shades of grey.



Fig. 13: The rendering of the primary colours and those resulting from their addition on digital devices.

In Table 2, the colour codes in RGB, hexadecimal, HSL, and CMYK format are presented for the primary colours, for those resulting from their addition, and for white and black.



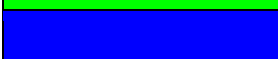





Colour/code	RGB	HEX	HSL	CMYK
	255, 0, 0	FF0000	0°, 100%, 50%	0.00, 1.00, 1.00, 0.00
	0, 255, 0	00FF00	120°, 100%, 50%	1.00, 0.00, 1.00, 0.00
	0, 0, 255	0000FF	240°, 100%, 50%	1.00, 1.00, 0.00, 0.00
	255, 255, 0	FFFF00	60°, 100%, 50%	0.00, 0.00, 1.00, 0.00
	255, 0, 255	FF00FF	300°, 100%, 50%	0.00, 1.00, 0.00, 0.00
	0, 255, 255	00FFFF	180°, 100%, 50%	1.00, 0.00, 0.00, 0.00
	255, 255, 255	FFFFFF	0°, 0%, 100%	0.00, 0.00, 0.00, 0.00
	0, 0, 0	000000	0°, 0%, 0%	0.00, 0.00, 0.00, 1.00

Table 2: The colour codes in RGB, hexadecimal, HSL, and CMYK format for the primary colours, for those resulting from their addition, and for white and black.

Colours in hexadecimal format are represented by pairs of bits, each pair being a hexadecimal code, thus yielding six characters. The first pair of characters corresponds to red, the second to green, and the third to blue, as follows: #**XXXXXX**. The minimum value of a pair of bits is 00, and the maximum is FF. The HSL colour code combines three attributes: hue (values between 0 and 360 degrees; 0 corresponds to red, 120 to green, and 240 to blue), saturation, and lightness (percentage values).

To understand the perception of the colour black, it is necessary to define the reflection and absorption of light beams. *The reflection of light* (Fig. 14, a) may be defined as the return of a beam of light, after striking a surface with reflective properties, into the medium from which it came, the angle of departure being equal to the angle of arrival (the angle of incidence and the angle of reflection, respectively – denoted in physics by the Greek letter *theta* – θ). Thus, the angle of the incident ray (θ_i) is equal to that of the reflected ray: (θ_r): $\theta_i = \theta_r$.

Glossy surfaces (such as a mirror) reflect light infinitely better than dark, porous ones (for example, a black sponge). Moreover, the quality of the reflected light depends on a number of factors, such as: the structure of the surfaces that the incident light reaches, the material of which they are made, the angle of incidence, the colour of the reflecting surface, and whether there is smoke, water droplets, fog, and so forth in the path of the incident light.

The more porous the surface that the luminous flux reaches, the weaker the reflected beam will be, a result caused by the *dispersion of light* brought about by the irregularities of the reflecting surface (Figure 14, b). In optical instruments, an *anti-reflective coating* is applied precisely in order to minimize the reflection of light, thereby facilitating its passage through the series of lenses that make up the optical body of the instrument. If a ray of light passes from one medium to another (for example, from air into water or glass) in a direction perpendicular to the interface between the two media, the ray will travel in a straight line (*normal angle*). If a ray passes from one medium to another at an angle different from the normal (90°), the direction of the ray of light changes in the second medium, the ray being deflected. This deflection of light rays upon meeting the interface between two media is called *refraction* (Figure 14, c).

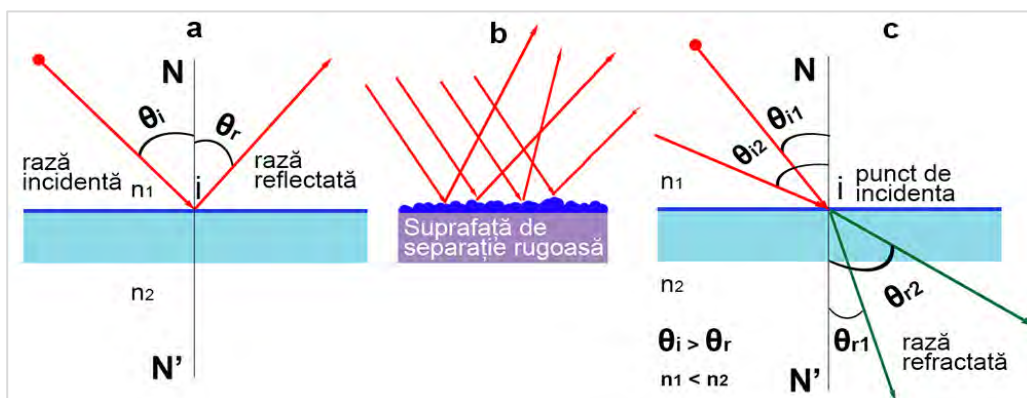


Fig. 14: External reflection on smooth surfaces (a), diffusion (b), and refraction (c). The

To some extent, all materials reflect light, and this holds even for the transparent ones among them, such as glass, owing to the fact that it is very flat and slightly reflective. In the case of a window, for example, because there is more light outside the building than inside, the windows reflect the outside world. The same phenomenon occurs at night, but in the opposite direction. When there is artificial lighting inside and it is dark outside, the interior of a room can be seen from outside through the panes, yet from inside, people cannot see out, owing to the reflection – a reflection that is visible only from the illuminated side. A further observation is that the reflectivity of smooth surfaces is greater when the angle of incidence (as well as the angle of reflection) is close to 90° .⁷⁴

The behaviour of light within a medium depends on the refractive index of the medium, n , which determines the speed of light in that medium and the angle of refraction. The refractive index n is an intrinsic property of each material and depends on its density. In general, the denser the medium, the greater the refractive index. A vacuum, and, approximately, air, have a refractive index of $n = 1$. The refractive index of water is 1,33, and that of glass is 1,52. The refractive index depends on the material, but also on the wavelength of the light. If a beam of light passes from a medium with refractive index $n = 1.0$ (e.g. air) into another, which it enters and which has refractive index $n > 1$ (e.g. water), it will undergo a change in the angle (θ) of entry, approaching the normal. Thus, in the case of refraction, both the speed and the direction of propagation change. If one compares the angle that a ray forms at the point of incidence (θ_i , the angle in air) with the corresponding angle in water (θ_r), the behaviour of the beam of light at the interface between air and water can be described as follows:

1. The angle in air (θ_i) and the angle in the medium lie on opposite sides of the normal.
2. The angle of the light ray in air, measured relative to the normal, is always greater than the angle in the other medium, because air is less dense than any other medium (for example, glass, water, plexiglass, paints, and so on).
3. The values of the angles θ_i and θ_r do not change if the light ray passes from air into the medium or from the medium into air. The light ray is therefore reversible. This is always true.

⁷⁴ Pupa U.P.A. Gilbert; Willy Haerberli, op. cit., pp. 25–26.

Most of the objects around us are not perfectly smooth, and so they are not perfect reflectors. When these objects are illuminated, they do not reflect light in accordance with the law of reflection. Instead, unpolished objects scatter (reflect diffusely) light in all directions. This means that we do not have to be in a particular position or at a particular angle in order to see an illuminated object. Every object that is not smooth and is illuminated can be regarded as a source of beams of light. Illuminated unpolished objects can be represented as light sources, because they scatter light in all directions. This process characterizes what we call the *diffusion of light*. Beyond a certain angle, known as the *critical angle* (θ_c), or, more precisely, the critical angle of total internal reflection, all the light is reflected from the surface of an interface between two media. Light is not refracted unless the light ray passes from a denser medium (higher refractive index) to a less dense medium (lower refractive index) – for example, when a ray passes from water into air. The critical angle for the water/air interface is 49° . For glass/air it is 41° , and for diamond it is 24.4° . This means that if the angle of incidence is greater than the critical angle, that is, $\theta_r > \theta_c$, then the light is not refracted. At the critical angle, the angle of the incident ray (the one in air) θ_i is 90° .⁷⁵

Fig. 15 illustrate reflection, refraction, and total external reflection in the case of an external light source (a), together with reflection, refraction, and total internal reflection (b).

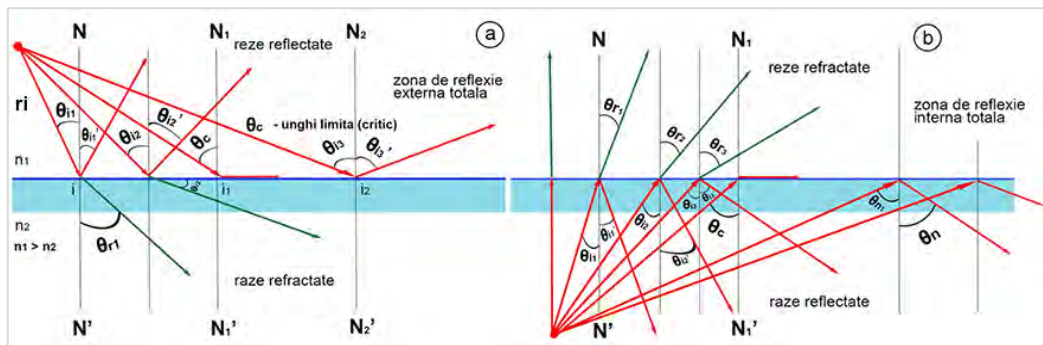


Fig. 15: Reflection, refraction, and total external reflection in the case of an external light source (a), together with reflection, refraction, and total internal reflection (b). The author's own work.

An important aspect, for the context of the theme of the present work, is determining what happens to light when the surface it strikes is transparent, coloured in a particular

⁷⁵ Pupa U.P.A. Gilbert; Willy Haerberli, *op. cit.*, pp. 27–32.

colour, opaque, or transparent. Liviu Lăzărescu (2009) highlights the following situations (Fig. 16):

1. *Zero reflection and absorption*: if incident light falls perpendicularly on a perfectly transparent surface that is colourless and has no reflective properties, reflection and absorption are nil – something possible only in theory, since, in practice, a very small part of the light beam will be lost, for the reasons mentioned above. It follows that all the colours of the visible spectrum will pass through that surface (Figure 16, a).
2. *Zero reflection, selective absorption*: if incident light falls on a transparent body coloured red (plexiglass), the range of luminous radiation corresponding to the wavelength of red will pass through, but the other six colours will be absorbed (Figure 16, b).
3. *Total reflection, zero absorption*: this is the case of an opaque surface coloured white. In this case, all the colours of the visible spectrum are reflected (Figure 16, c).
4. *Selective reflection and absorption*: if, for example, the same red body from the previous example were opaque (a red plywood panel, say), it would absorb all the colours
5. of the ROYGBIV spectrum, with the exception of red, which it would reflect (which is why we perceive that body as having the colour red) (Figure 16, d).
6. *Zero reflection, total absorption*: this is the case that interests us most. Thus, if light of the visible spectrum falls on an opaque, black surface (such as black velvet), none of the colours of the visible spectrum will be reflected, but all will be absorbed, giving the sensation of a black body (Figure 16, e).

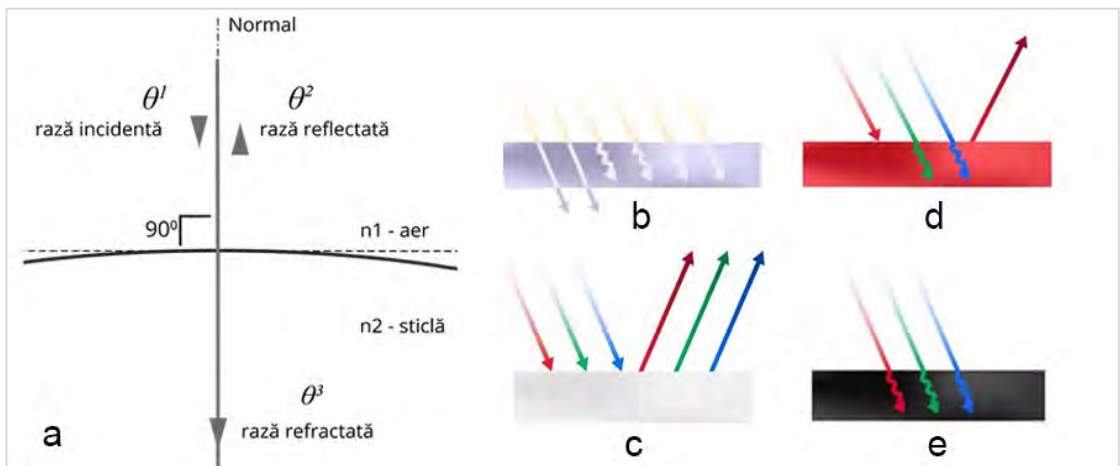


Fig. 16: Zero reflection and absorption (a), zero reflection and selective absorption (b), total reflection and zero absorption (c), selective reflection and absorption (d), and zero reflection and total absorption (e). The author's own work.

Chapter 2. From Cosmogonic Black to Black in the Visual Arts

2.1. Black: Etymology and Controversies

The **etymology** of the word "negru" ("neagră", "negri", "negre" – adj., n., m.), according to the *Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române* (2009), derives from Lat. *niger*, -*gra*, -*grum*; It. *nero*, Prov. *negre*, Fr. *noir*, Sp. and Pg. *negro*, and refers to the characteristic (the colour) of certain objects or colouring materials that are black in colour (black paint, black box, black wine, and so on).

In various expressions (e.g. *a avea inima neagră* [to have a black heart], *a avea gânduri negre* [to have black thoughts], *a vedea totul în negru* [to see everything in black], *a se îmbrăca în negru* [to dress in black], *post negru* [a strict fast], *a face albul negru*, *a ponegri* [to make white black, to malign], and so on), black is most often assigned negative connotations: wickedness, pessimism, severity, the concealment of truth, sadness, melancholy, irritability, unhappiness, something terrible or dreadful, a "grave" illness.

According to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, black (adj.), in physics, is what is perceived by the human eye when light is absent, that is, when all the wavelengths of the visible spectrum are absorbed. Like white, but unlike the colours of the spectrum or most mixtures of them, black has no hue, and so it is regarded as an achromatic colour.

White and black are the most widely used terms relating to colour in all the languages of the world.^{76, 77} Their figurative meanings are associated with the absence of moral or spiritual values.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Douglas Harper, in the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, points out that the English form of the word "black" has a dual origin: the Proto-Germanic "*blakaz*" (utterly dark, burnt, absorbing all light, the colour of soot or charcoal) and the Old English "*blæc*", "*blac*", "*blak*", "*blake*" (denoting the absence of colour, darkness).

⁷⁷ One of the earliest written records of the term dates from the year 890 CE, in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*: "*He hæfde blæc feax*" [English: "He had black hair"]. Harper also draws connections with certain terms and the approximate year of their appearance: black coffee (1796), black drop (referring to opium, 1823), the Black Prince (the son of Edward III, 1560).

⁷⁸ The Latin "*niger*" (gloomy; ill-fated; bad, malign, ill-intentioned). The metaphorical use of the Greek word "*melas*", however, tended to reflect the notion of "*shrouded in darkness, covered*". In English it was the colour of sin and sorrow, at least from the year 1300, while the association with "*dark purposes*" and "*malignant*" appeared in the 1580s. In the same period the word "*necromancy*" became associated with black magic and the black flag, hoisted (especially by pirates, as a signal of "no quarter"). The association between melancholy and the colour black is attested from the year 1826.

Controversies concerning the status of black: colour or non-colour

No other colour has been credited with values so opposed and so absolute. Black marked, above all, the terrifying realms that lay beyond human life, yet over time we have brought it closer to us: we have sought it in our bodies and even in our souls. Gradually, this colour of death, terror, and negation came to be ever more present in our faith, our art, and our social lives. Seen from this perspective, the history of black is in fact a history of our coming to terms with the terrifying.

"*Black is not a colour*", in Leonardo da Vinci's view. Even so, black was an indispensable pigment in his palette, used above all for backgrounds.⁷⁹,⁸⁰ Michel Pastoureau, a historian of colours, asks whether black, in the end, "became" a colour like all the others. Even so, it differs from other colours: we cannot switch on a black light, but we can switch on a red one, or a white one. Wittgenstein said that we cannot have, in a lamp, a grey or brown light, even though they are made of light, whereas black is said to have no light. Black is therefore a contradiction, a paradox. At the same time, nothing is completely black: even the blackest velvet, even when in shadow, reflects photons. In laboratories there is a realm of "metamaterials", of carbon nanotubes smaller than the wavelength of light, which can reflect less than 0.01% of the light; their applications range from solar panels to the camouflage of military aircraft. The light reflected in this case is at such a low level that we cannot make out any detail. This raises the question: what do we see when we see black? And, much like the dilemma of whether black is light or the absence of it, one may also ask: is seeing black a sensation or the absence of sensation? At the same time, we feel that we "see" a black thing, not that we have a "hole" in our vision. Hermann von Helmholtz, a scientist in the field of optics, held that black is a real sensation, even though it is produced by the absence of light, the sensation of black being distinctly different from the absence of all sensations. Thus, in order to establish why and how black will, in what follows, be referred to both as a colour and as a non-colour, the following **considerations** were taken into account:

⁷⁹ Bell, Janis. "Aristotle as a Source for Leonardo's Theory of Colour Perspective after 1500." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 56, 1993, pp. 100–118. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/751367.

⁸⁰ One of his works, *Dama con l'ermellino* (1489–90), is painted in faint, pale colours, with the exception of the bright red sleeve – yet behind it there is only a solid, matte black, and the necklace she wears is likewise black. In *Salvator Mundi*, Leonardo again paints an almost ghostly Christ, who seems to gaze at us from the world of the dead, with the same matte black behind him. Thus, even though black, for the artist, was not "a colour" in the literal sense of the word, it nonetheless constituted the perfect ground against which colour was displayed.

a. **The way in which we define colour:** if we define colour solely in the way that physics describes it, then black is not considered to be a true physical colour. But black is what our eyes "see" in a space that reflects very little light, or no light at all. Yet, merely because physics excludes black as a colour, on the principle that no wavelength of the visible spectrum corresponds to it, we cannot dispense with speaking of black as a colour, and the great majority of people regard it as such. Moreover, if we include, in the definition of colour, all the ways in which human eyes process light and the absence of it, then black is a colour.

b. **Colour as light:** All electrical devices equipped with a display capable of rendering colours can render both white and black. LCD screens use crossed polarizers. Light from one direction of polarization is absorbed by the polarizing plastic film, while the perpendicular direction is transmitted. This light will then be polarized chiefly perpendicular to the second filter and will thus be blocked, so that the pixel appears black.

c. **Colour as pigment (the subtractive theory):** Black can be obtained either by mixing the RGB pigments in equal proportions or, in the printing industry, by mixing CMY and K (key). It follows that it would be illogical to claim – we artists above all – that black is not a colour, given that it can be obtained from the mixing of colours.

d. **The evolution of black in art:** initially, black was regarded as a colour (for the eye of medieval man, white and black were colours in the fullest sense of the word); however, towards the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the seventeenth century it gradually lost its status as a *colour*. In 1665 Isaac Newton proposed a new chromatic scale in which there was no longer any place for white and black, thereby situating them outside any chromatic system. Whereas, until around the beginning of the twentieth century, white and black were perceived in art as *non-colours*, over time artists restored their status as authentic colours.⁸¹ Recognizing black's status as an authentic colour was no simple matter, since even scientists were reluctant to grant it any chromatic property whatsoever. As noted earlier, even Leonardo da Vinci, at the end of the fifteenth century, asserted that "*black is not a colour*". In 1946, at an exhibition at the Galerie Maeght in Paris, the idea was proclaimed that "*black is a colour*", the aim of this undertaking being to express a position aligned with what was taught in the schools of fine arts and in the academic treatises on painting.

⁸¹ Michel Pastoureau, *op. cit.*, pp. 25–28.

e. **A divergence of opinion:** Some authors, such as Petru Lucaci, express the view that black is the only true colour, all the others being "*false*" – a claim supported by the following reasoning: the human brain perceives, ascribes, and interprets "something" as being coloured; and since we are speaking of a perception, we cannot rule out that a colour is an illusion, yet, equally, we cannot ignore the converse of this assertion (at least from a philosophical standpoint). In conclusion, black may be regarded as both a non-colour and a colour. More precisely: a physicist will assert that black is not a colour, whereas an artist will never agree with this. In spite of all the controversies, it is impossible today not to attach to black the status of a colour, if only in keeping with the artists who have associated it with symbolism.

2.2. Cosmogonic Black. Black Holes and Dark Matter

A black hole is a region of space in which the gravitational force is so strong that not even light can travel fast enough to escape its gravity. Black holes have been identified over the past few decades, and their number is estimated to be in the order of millions. The term "*black hole*" was first mentioned in an article written by Ann Ewing in 1964 and presented at a symposium held in Texas in 1963. In 1967 the American physicist John Wheeler popularized the term *collapsed star*, although the concept had been developed by his American colleagues Robert Oppenheimer and Hartland Snyder in 1939.

It was likewise Zwicky who, in 1933, discovered *dark matter*. While studying the Coma cluster, he observed an anomaly. Compared with the velocity measurements of the visible mass, the galaxies in that cluster were moving far too fast to be stable. Zwicky argued that a still unobserved type of mass, which he called *dunkle Materie*, [English: dark matter] could account for the phenomenon, and in the same year he presented his conclusions in the journal of the *Swiss Physical Society*. Even so, three decades were required for the phenomenon to be observed on a wide scale. It was only after Zwicky's death, in 1974, that dark matter was accepted as part of the cosmological canon.

Unlike normal matter, dark matter does not interact with the electromagnetic force. This means that it neither absorbs, reflects, nor emits light, which makes it extremely difficult to observe. In fact, researchers have been able to infer the existence of dark matter only from the gravitational effect it appears to have on visible matter. Dark matter appears

to outweigh visible matter in a ratio of 6:1, accounting for roughly 27% of the known universe (Fig. 17).

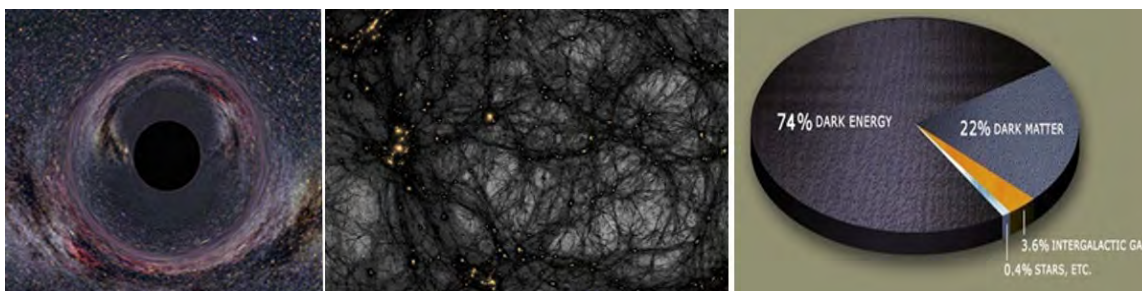


Fig. 17: Black hole, dark matter; the distribution of matter and dark energy in the universe (2008 estimate).

The concept of dark energy is the name given to the force that causes the rate of expansion of our universe to accelerate over time. From the 1990s onwards, dark energy has been the most widely accepted hypothesis for explaining this accelerated expansion, and from 2020 onwards cosmological research has increasingly been directed towards understanding the fundamental nature of dark energy.⁸²

2.3. The Notion of the Ideal (Absolute) Black Body

The darkest known material, as of September 2019, is constructed from vertically aligned carbon nanotubes, their dimensions being in the order of nanometres. It was created at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and was reported to have a light absorption rate of 99.995%,⁸³ surpassing that of the material called "Vantablack", created in 2014 by a British firm (Surrey NanoSystems), which has a light absorption rate, across the visible spectrum, of 99.965%.⁸⁴

In recent decades there has been broad research interest in titanium dioxide (TiO₂) nanomaterials, owing to their applications in photocatalytic hydrogen generation and the elimination of environmental pollution. It has been successfully demonstrated that

⁸² The Universe, then, is everything that physically exists, from the smallest particle to the largest galaxy. It comprises all matter and all energy, gathered together as a whole, as though this totality were an entity in itself. This is an impressive concept, and it is natural that questions should be raised in this regard. Equally natural are the related, interdisciplinary questions bound up with the single attribute of which we are certain when we refer to the *95 per cent of the unknown* of the Universe: black.

⁸³ Jennifer, Chu (September 12, 2019). "MIT engineers develop "blackest black" material to date". MIT News Office. Retrieved August 10, 2020 (<http://news.mit.edu/2019/blackest-black-material-cnt-0913>).

⁸⁴ Vantablack: U.K. Firm Shows Off 'World's Darkest Material'. NBCNews.com. July 15, 2014. Retrieved July 19, 2014.

enhancing the optical absorption properties of TiO₂ nanomaterials improves their photocatalytic activity, particularly in the case of black TiO₂ nanoparticles. In 2011 black titanium dioxide (TiO_{2-x}) was, as reported by the team of researchers led by Xiaobo Chen who study hydrogenation.^{85,86}

A *black body*, a term introduced by the German physicist Gustav Robert Kirchhoff (1860) and also called an *absolute black body*, is an ideal physical body that absorbs all incident electromagnetic radiation, regardless of frequency or angle of incidence. The radiation of a black body is also called thermal radiation, complete radiation, or temperature radiation. Quantum mechanics arose out of the understanding of the photoelectric effects demonstrated by Einstein (1905). Yet, before these discoveries, Planck's law (1900) made a considerable contribution to the understanding of electromagnetic radiation, providing an exact interpretation of *black-body radiation*, for which the dependence on wavelength λ and on absolute temperature T was measured with precision (Fig. 18)

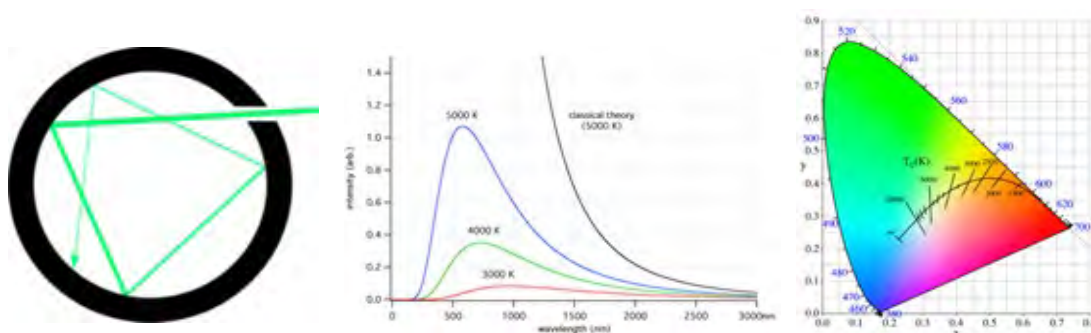


Fig. 18: a. The radiation within a closed, opaque cavity is identical to black-body radiation. b. A diagram of the dependence of black-body radiation on wavelength. c. The colour (chromaticity) of black-body radiation depends on the temperature at which the body is held.

A **black body** in thermal equilibrium has two notable properties:

1. It is an *ideal emitter*: at every frequency, it emits as much, or more, radiative thermal energy as any other body at the same temperature.
2. It is a *diffuse emitter*: measured per unit area perpendicular to the direction, the energy is radiated isotropically, independently of direction.

⁸⁵ TiO_{2-x} powder is obtained by hydrogenation at a pressure of 20 bar, a temperature of 200 °C, over a period of 5 days.

⁸⁶ Chen X., et al., *Increasing solar absorption for photocatalysis with black hydrogenated titanium dioxide nanocrystals*, Science 2011, no. 331, pp. 746–750.

The complete absorption of a ray of light, of any colour, can be demonstrated using a cube whose interior is painted matte black and which is fitted with an aperture on one of its edges.

After at least three reflections, examining the interior of the cube through the aperture by which the beam of light entered, one perceives the colour black, or the sensation of complete darkness.⁸⁷ When the radiation within the enclosure of a black body is in thermal equilibrium, the radiation emitted through the object's aperture will be as intense as the radiation emitted by any other body at that equilibrium temperature. By definition, a black body in thermal equilibrium has an emissivity of $\varepsilon = 1$.

In conclusion, scientific research continues to furnish explanations, each within its own thematic field, with regard to black. However, no further space will be devoted to information of this kind, so as not to stray from the thematic field of the research domain and the subject under consideration – a subject whose aim is to interrogate the metaphysical valences of black rather than the empirical ones.

2.4. Materials, Processes, and Techniques for Producing Black of Use in the Visual Arts

2.4.1. Black in Photographic Art

The term *photography* derives from the Greek φωτός (*phōtos*), φῶς (*phōs*), *light*, and γραφή (*graphē*) *representation by means of lines or to draw, to write*, which together yield "*drawing with light*". As a technique, the imprinting of an image upon a physical support is a process that developed in tandem with a range of adjacent technological discoveries. In a manuscript – the *Mōzī* – the philosopher Mo Di (c. 470–391 BC), who laid the foundations of certain principles of optics, mentions the basic principle by which a camera obscura operates. Aristotle and Euclid, too, described the camera obscura independently.⁸⁸

Revolutionary, throughout this whole process of experimentation, was the observation – later also made by Leonardo da Vinci – that the beams of light entering a box through an aperture, a *pinhole camera*, form an inverted image on the side of the cube opposite the aperture. Albertus Magnus and Georg Fabricius contributed to the discovery of silver nitrate (AgNO_3) and silver chloride (AgCl), substances that would come to be used as

⁸⁷ Stelian Acea, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

⁸⁸ The remarkable importance of the working process of the camera obscura is that it underlay the conception and construction of the camera.

fixatives for photographic images on film or on various photographic plates. Daniele Barbaro described the role of the diaphragm in 1556, and Wilhelm Homberg demonstrated that **light has the property of blackening various chemical substances (a photochemical reaction)**.

Although the camera obscura was the object of research carried out by Leonardo da Vinci in 1504, and although in 1568 Daniel Barbaro described the operating principle of the camera obscura fitted with a lens,⁸⁹ the oldest surviving black-and-white photograph was not made until 1826, by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce (*View from the Window at Le Gras*). The image was produced using a camera obscura, a lens, and a beam of light from his window, projected onto a pewter plate (16.2 cm × 20.2 cm) coated with bitumen of Judea (the heliographic process). After eight hours of exposure, the plate was washed with a mixture of lavender oil and white spirit, which dissolved the portions of bitumen not hardened by the light. The result was a permanent, direct positive photograph rendering an image of the buildings, courtyard, trees, and landscape as seen from that window – an image that can still be viewed today at the University of Texas at Austin.

Working with Louis Daguerre (1787–1851), Niépce developed methods of processing the exposure that produced visually superior results, replacing the bitumen with photosensitive resins, which nevertheless required exposure times of the order of hours. After Niépce's death, Daguerre continued the experiments, eventually employing silver salts (whose photosensitivity had been demonstrated at the beginning of the eighteenth century by Johann Heinrich Schulze).

In England, the physicist Henry Fox Talbot was likewise conducting experiments in fixing an image, achieving his first successes in 1835 (*Frunză de varză în detaliu* [English: A Cabbage Leaf in Detail]). The negative images were printed on paper previously impregnated with solutions based on silver salts, and in the developing process sodium thiosulphate ($\text{Na}_2\text{S}_2\text{O}_3$) was used.

Daguerre's experiments reached their culmination in the process known as the *daguerreotype*. The elements he used were silver-plated copper plates, sensitized by iodine vapour, developed with mercury vapour, and "fixed" with concentrated saline water. The principal concern was to shorten the exposure time, which was thus reduced from hours to minutes. In 1838, Daguerre captured a Paris street from an aerial vantage point: an image

⁸⁹ In the seventeenth century it was observed that, if a mirror is inserted at an angle of 45°, the image projected onto the rear wall of the camera obscura is given a correct orientation.

regarded as the oldest "photograph" in which a living person appears.⁹⁰ In January 1839, the result of the process was made public, and the news aroused interest internationally. In that same year, Robert Cornelius produced the first self-portrait. Given the obstacle posed by the size of the equipment and the fragility of the photosensitive plates, the desire to simplify the process naturally arose. The field of photographic emulsions and their sensitivity to light was studied by Driffield and Hurter between 1875 and 1876.

In 1889, the first negative supported on nitrocellulose was created. As a result, the weight and size of cameras were considerably reduced, allowing them to be operated by an ever-wider public. The KODAK company, based in Rochester, New York, then offered compact cameras for sale at a price of 25 dollars, including 100 exposure frames.

Initially, photographic art was monochrome, since colour films had not yet appeared; this, however, was no obstacle to its development. On the contrary, the fact was regarded not as a technical limitation but rather as a choice of creative expression (see Ansel Adams, Henri Cartier-Bresson, David Bailey, Sebastião Salgado, Albert Watson, Sally Mann, and many others).⁹¹

The Classic Principle for Producing the Photographic Image

Black-and-white film is coated with an emulsion containing a given concentration of silver halide. Once exposed to light, the invisible *latent image* begins to become visible during the developing process. When the film is developed, these crystals are converted into metallic silver. The stronger the degree of illumination (the exposure time), the greater the quantity of crystals that will be converted into metallic silver, yielding the *negative*. This process is subsequently reversed to produce the *positive* image (black and white or colour). Films differ from one another in several characteristics:

Spectral sensitivity: Some films are sensitive only to blue and green light (so-called orthochromatic film), whereas others are also sensitive to red light (so-called panchromatic film). The advantage of orthochromatic film is that it can be developed under a red light, so

⁹⁰ The image itself is that of a busy street, yet, owing to the long exposure time, nothing that was in motion left a luminous imprint. Two people do nonetheless appear at the street corner – a bootblack and his customer – who, by remaining in the same place for the duration of the exposure, succeeded in "impressing" the silvered copper plate, their image remaining fixed upon it.

⁹¹ In photographic art, one of the most popular views is that a rendering in colour is *ipso facto* superior to one in black and white. In reality, neither of these forms of representing the subject is superior; *they are merely different*. A rendering in colour is the best solution if it adds something to the image. On the other hand, achromacy may be held to constitute a creative-interpretative approach to the subject.

that the developing process can be observed. There are even special types of film that are made to be sensitive to infrared or ultraviolet wavelengths. Most black-and-white films are panchromatic.

Contrast is probably the most significant characteristic of an image recorded on film. Contrast is the variation in the density of the film (shades of grey) that actually forms the image. The amount of contrast in an image depends on a number of factors, including the capacity of the film in question to record contrast. Film may be regarded as a contrast converter, one of its functions being to convert differences in exposure (the contrast of the subject) into film contrast (differences in density). The degree of film contrast resulting from a specific difference in exposure can vary considerably. The exposure contrast between two areas may be expressed as a ratio or a percentage difference, as illustrated in Fig. 19.

Film contrast between two areas is expressed as the difference between the density values. The film's capacity to convert exposure contrast into film contrast may be expressed in terms of a contrast factor. The value of the contrast factor is the amount of film contrast resulting from an exposure contrast of 50%. A film's contrast power can be determined by observing the difference in density between two areas that receive a specified difference in exposure. However, since the amount of contrast is affected by the level of exposure, the film must be exposed to a range of exposure values in order to demonstrate its contrast characteristics fully.

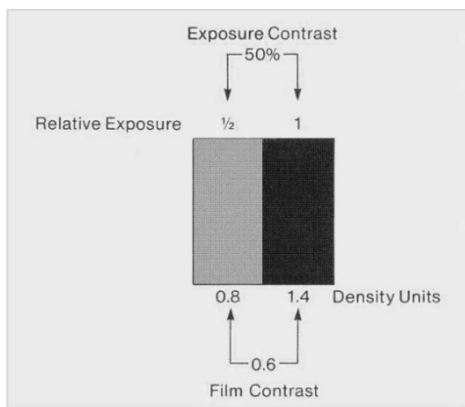


Fig. 19: A film's capacity to produce contrast can be determined by observing the difference in density between two areas that receive different exposure times.

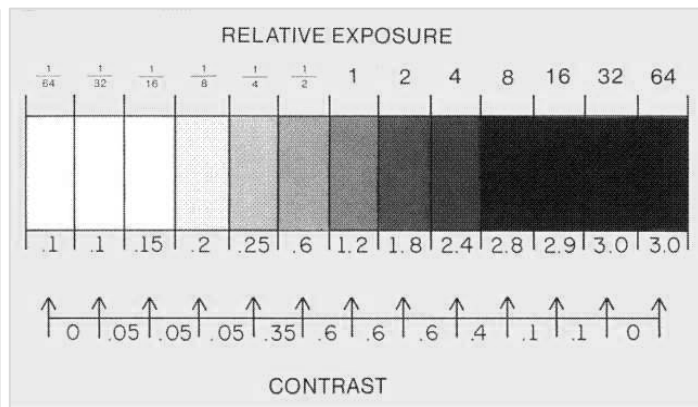


Fig. 20: since the amount of contrast is affected by the level of exposure, the film must be exposed to a range of exposure values in order to demonstrate its contrast characteristics fully.

This type of exposure pattern is usually produced by a sensitometer. Using this method, a strip of film is divided into a number of individual areas, each area being exposed to a different level of radiation. When the contrast characteristics are considered, what is

usually of interest is not the actual exposure of a film, but rather the relative exposure between different areas of the film. In Fig. 20 the exposures of the different areas are given relative to the central area, which has been assigned a relative exposure value of 1. Each interval on the scale represents a 2:1 ratio. This is a characteristic of a logarithmic scale.

When the film is processed, each area will have density values. The amount of contrast between any two adjacent areas is the difference in density. In the illustration proposed here, we can observe one of the very important characteristics of film contrast. It can be seen that the contrast is not the same between every pair of juxtaposed areas across the entire exposure range: there is no contrast between the first two areas, but the contrast increases gradually with exposure, reaches a maximum, and then decreases for the higher levels of exposure; in other words, a specific type of film does not produce the same amount of contrast at every exposure level.

Graininess is determined by the size of the silver halide crystals and by the developing method, which together determine the final size of the silver specks that form the negative image on the film. This size defines the graininess and corresponds to the resolution, or number of megapixels, in digital photographs.

ISO sensitivity: Different types of film require different amounts of light to produce the same amount of darkening on the negative. A film with a higher ISO factor requires a smaller amount of light to expose the negative, whereas a film with a low ISO (e.g. 64 or 100) requires a great deal of light and/or a longer exposure time.⁹²

Doubling the ISO number makes it possible to halve the amount of light needed to obtain the same result. It should nonetheless be noted that films with a higher ISO sensitivity (e.g. 1000) have larger silver halide crystals. Consequently, the more the positive image is enlarged, the grainier it will appear and the lower its resolution will be. High-ISO films also have lower contrast (a lack of intense black) and a narrower tonal range – that is, fewer levels of grey between white and black, and fewer colour tones in colour photography. The usefulness of films with increased ISO sensitivity is notable in poor lighting conditions, especially when the exposure time is not long.⁹³ For this reason – that of exposure time –

⁹² This characteristic of films is measured in ISO (International Standard Organization). Today ISO has been adopted in all countries and has replaced both the A.S.A. (American Standards Association) and the DIN (Deutsche Industrie Norm) units. The ISO value is thus inversely proportional to the amount of light needed to produce a given standard black on the negative image.

⁹³ The classic photosensitive material (photographic film), as has been noted, is coated with an emulsion containing a silver salt (a halide) – the chloride, iodide, or bromide – which, under the action of light, begins a process of chemical decomposition. This process of chemical decomposition is not a complete one, being

another point of view was adopted: allowing the light to act on the silver salts just enough to begin their decomposition (the latent image), so that one may then intervene chemically using developers (the most commonly used solvent for developers is purified water chemically treated with sodium tetraphosphate, sodium hexametaphosphate, the disodium salt of ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid, and so on).

The role of the chemical treatment of the solvent is to form insoluble compounds with the salts dissolved in the water, which can then be removed by filtration). This process is called *development*. Development is made possible by the use of chemical substances with a reducing character, which, in the photographic industry, are called *developers*.⁹⁴

Chemical substances with a reducing character (substances that can be oxidized by other substances, thereby giving up electrons, which in turn are captured by metal ions, leading to the formation of metallic atoms) convert the areas of the photosensitive emulsion into metallic silver. Among the reducing substances, the following aromatic organic compounds may be listed: polyphenols: hydroquinone (para-dihydroxybenzene), pyrocatechol, et al.; polyamines: para-phenylenediamine, ortho-para-phenylenediamine; aminophenols: diaminophenol, para-aminophenol.

The composition of developers differs in terms of the concentration of the chemical compounds present, and these vary according to the desired action.^{95 96} For substances with a reducing character to act, they must be in a basic solution. Alkalinization, with potassium carbonate (K_2CO_3), sodium carbonate (Na_2CO_3), or, more rarely, sodium hydroxide (NaOH), has the advantage of accelerating the development process, but it tends to fog the film and to oxidize very quickly, thereby rendering the developer unusable. The more vigorous the development, the more pronounced the tendency for fog to appear. Fog is due to the fact that the developing agent acts partly on the unexposed halide as well. This phenomenon is prevented with sodium bromide (NaBr) or potassium bromide (KBr), which, in the photographic industry, are called *antifoggant* substances. Moreover, when developing very sensitive emulsions, benzotriazole ($C_6H_5N_3$), an aromatic heterocyclic compound, may also

directly proportional to the length of time the light acts upon the silver chloride (AgCl). The longer the exposure time, the larger, denser, and more opaque the silver crystals will be.

⁹⁴ From a chemical point of view, the simplified development process may be illustrated as follows: $Ag + Revelator = Ag + oxizi$.

⁹⁵ Thus, for a slight contrast one may use: metol 2 g, hydroquinone 7 g, sulphite 36 g, alkali 40 g, bromide 0.3 g; for a medium contrast: metol 1 g, hydroquinone 10 g, sulphite 46 g, alkali 40 g, bromide 0.5 g; and to obtain a pronounced contrast the metol is dispensed with, the concentrations of the other compounds being modified as follows: hydroquinone 14 g, sulphite 60 g, alkali 30 g, bromide 0.7 g (quantity per litre of solvent).

⁹⁶ Frank V. Chambers, *Bulletin of Photography*, Vol. 15, New York Public Library. 1914, pp. 13–21.

be used, at a concentration of 0.15 g/l. During development, there is the so-called *induction period*, which represents the length of time between the moment when the photosensitive emulsion is placed in the developer and the appearance of the first outlines of the image.

Starting from the premise that the exposure time that acted upon the photosensitive emulsion was correct, development proceeds at a speed directly proportional to the intensity of the luminous energy at each point of the image. First, the light areas appear, then those of medium intensity, and then, as time passes, the dark, black areas appear. After a certain time, it is observed that no further visible changes occur, the moment that marks the end of the development process. The next step is the *stop bath*, a process that involves transferring the formed image into a slightly acidic solution (e.g. acetic acid) so as to neutralize the traces of the base, that is, to halt the (slow) continuation of development, which can lead to *overdevelopment*. *Fixing* is another necessary step, since the undeveloped silver halide crystals must be removed. Sodium thiosulfate ($\text{Na}_2\text{S}_2\text{O}_3$) or ammonium thiosulfate is recommended, since with the halide ions they form silver sodium dithiosulfate. These compounds are soluble in water, thereby allowing washing. To the solution are also added, in varying quantities, sodium metabisulfite ($\text{Na}_2\text{S}_2\text{O}_5$), sodium bisulfite (NaHSO_3), sodium sulfite (Na_2SO_3), or sodium acetate ($\text{C}_2\text{H}_3\text{NaO}_2$). These substances, being acidic, offset the alkalinity contributed by the film previously processed in the developer, after which comes the process of *washing*.

The Digital Principle of Producing the Photographic Image

The documentation of the first attempts to record a photograph in the form of digital information places this process in the 1950s. Thus, in 1951, the researcher Charles Ginsburg, the inventor of the videotape recorder, succeeded in saving digital signals onto magnetic tape with the aid of a film camera.⁹⁷ The process involved taking the images captured by film cameras and converting them into electrical impulses, which were subsequently stored on magnetic tape. It is worth noting that the first device capable of recording only sound on a magnetic medium was invented in 1893 by Valdemar Poulsen. He named his invention the "*telegraphone*" and won the Grand Prix at the 1900 Paris Exposition.⁹⁸ The first digital image was produced in 1957 by the pioneer of computers and information technology

⁹⁷ *SMPTE Journal: Publication of the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers*. Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers, Volume 100, Issues 7–12, University of California, 1991, p. 616–620.

⁹⁸ Kybett, Harry. *Video Tape Recorders*. University of Wisconsin, 1974, p. 13.

Russell Kirsch and his team at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) in the U.S.A. They also developed the first programmable computer, the Standard Eastern Automatic Computer (SEAC), and created a rotating drum scanner that made it possible to store images. The first scanned image was that of a 5 cm × 5 cm photograph, in binary form, resulting in a pixelated image.⁹⁹ The technique was the point of departure for satellite imagery, CAT scans, computerized editing, digital photography, and a range of other imaging technologies. The image measured only 176 pixels on a side – far removed from today's digital snapshots of tens of megapixels – yet it became the point of departure for all computer images known to date.^{100,101.}

This first digital photograph contains 30,975 black-and-white pixels. Kirsch assigned the digit 1 to a positive ("on") response and the digit 0 to a negative ("off") response. Thus, **he associated the digit 1 with white and the digit 0 with black.** Kirsch's discovery was to change the course of the photographic industry forever. Moreover, in 1969, by interconnecting several SEAC computers, the first step was taken towards what we today call the Internet (Tim Berners-Lee, CERN, 1989). A digital image sensor is a **photosensitive** integrated circuit whose fundamental characteristic is the detection and transmission of information for the purpose of forming a digital image. The principle underlying this process is the conversion of various wavelengths (arising from reflectance, or as a result of their passage through various media) into electrical signals of differing intensities which, taken together, are processed, yielding a certain quantity of binary information that is subsequently stored on a storage medium. The waves to which a digital sensor can be sensitive are not limited solely to those of the visible spectrum, since their sensitivity can also be adjusted to other electromagnetic radiation (X-rays, UV, IR, etc.).

Image sensors are used in electronic imaging devices, both analogue and digital. The two major types of digital photosensitive sensor are the CCD and the CMOS. A CCD sensor

⁹⁹ Alexander, Simon, et al. *The Daily Book of Photography: 365 Readings That Teach, Inspire & Entertain*. Walter Foster Publishing, 2010, p. 339.

¹⁰⁰ Bell, Adam, and Charles H. Traub. *Vision Anew: The Lens and Screen Arts*. Univ of California Press, 2015, pp. 217–219.

¹⁰¹ Note: The omnipresence of digital images has profoundly altered the professional orientation of all those who use them. Thanks to advances in research and innovation – from the convergence of moving and still images in the most recent DSLR cameras to the rising potential of interactive and online photographic activity – the lens and the screen have become central instruments for many artists. *Vision Anew* brings together a diverse selection of texts by practitioners, critics, and scholars in order to explore the evolving nature of the lens-based arts. Presenting essays on photography and the moving image alongside engaging interviews with artists and filmmakers, *Vision Anew* offers an inspired assessment of the continuing importance of these media in the digital age. The contributors include Ai Weiwei, Gerry Badger, David Company, Lev Manovich, Christian Marclay, László Moholy-Nagy, Walter Murch, Trevor Paglen, Pipilotti Rist, Shelly Silver, Rebecca Solnit, and Alec Soth, among other distinguished names.

has a single amplifier for all the pixels, whereas each pixel in a CMOS (active-pixel) sensor has its own amplifier. Cameras with a small sensor generally use a CMOS sensor (BSI-CMOS). The overall quality of the final image depends more on the image-processing capacity than on the type of sensor. Both the CCD and the CMOS sensor are, in fact, metal-oxide semiconductors (MOS). They accumulate signals in each pixel, the intensity of which is proportional to the luminous intensity to which they have been exposed. After exposure, a CCD sensor transfers the electrical charge of each pixel sequentially to a common output structure, which converts the electrical charge into voltage, and the final signal is then sent to the storage medium. In order to capture colour, the face of the CCD sensor is fitted with a filter (mask or array) that separates the visible light into primary colours.¹⁰²

Usually, these cells are arranged either in a single line (linear CCD sensor) or in a two-dimensional grid (area-array CCD sensor). The application that is to use the sensor will generally dictate the type of CCD used. Scanners, for example, use a linear-array CCD sensor, in which case the CCD sensor must be moved progressively across the object whose image is being captured (or vice versa). Digital cameras normally use area-array CCD sensors, thereby allowing the entire two-dimensional image to be captured during a single exposure.

In the case of a CMOS sensor, the conversion between electrical charge and voltage takes place within each pixel, information that can be read individually. This difference in readout techniques has significant implications for the architecture of the sensors and for their properties and limitations. CMOS sensors, like CCDs, are made up of an array of light-sensitive elements, each element being capable of producing a signal / electrical charge proportional to the incident light. The process by which this is accomplished is, however, very different for each of the two technologies. As explained earlier, a CCD pixel is formed from a *p-n* junction that creates a *well*-type potential in which charges accumulate. Each CMOS pixel, on the other hand, uses a photodiode, a capacitor, and up to three transistors.¹⁰³ In both types of sensor, the end result is a specific binary set of information particular to

¹⁰² CCD sensors can capture only a single colour per pixel, and three pixels create one virtual central pixel. The Bayer mask, the type most commonly used in digital cameras, takes the form of a matrix made up of a grid of red, blue, and green pixels, with the proviso that the ratio of red and blue pixels to green ones is 2:1 (the green pixels accounting for 50% of the total number of pixels). CCD sensors may contain millions of photosensitive cells, capable of producing an electrical charge proportional to the amount of light they receive.

¹⁰³ Before the integration period begins, the capacitor is charged to a certain known voltage. When the integration period begins, the charge on the capacitor is allowed to drain slowly through the photodiode, the rate of drainage being directly proportional to the level of incident light. At the end of the integration period, the charge remaining in the capacitor is read out, digitized, and transmitted to the storage unit.

each photographic frame. The difference between the two types of sensor is set out schematically in Fig. 21.

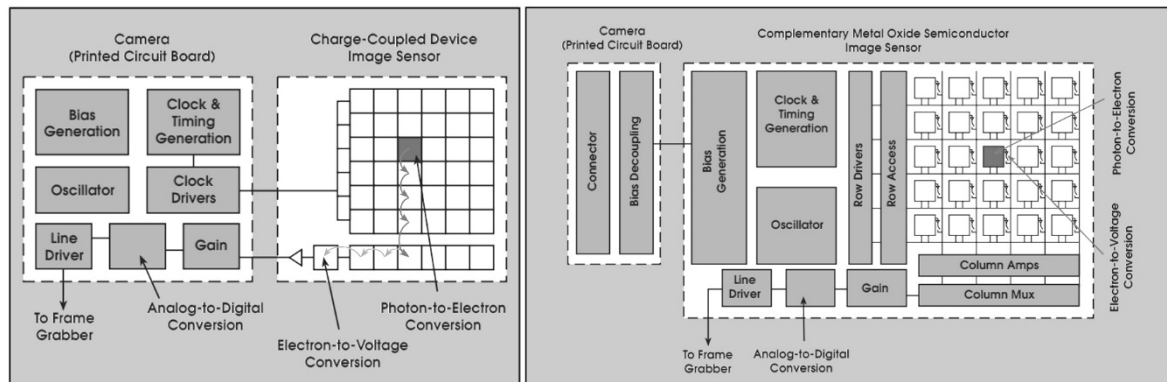


Fig. 21: On a CCD sensor, the photon-to-electron conversion is passed on step by step towards a common output structure, which then performs the electron-to-voltage conversion. Most of the functions take place on the camera's circuit board. On a CMOS sensor, a photon-electron-voltage conversion takes place at the level of each pixel, and most of the functions are integrated into the chip.

This information is stored on the storage media accepted by each digital camera. Filters, whether for correction or for effect, are used in both black-and-white and colour photography. Panchromatic film records colour in black and white, more precisely it converts all the visible colours of light into tones of grey. The only thing that distinguishes these tones is the intensity of the light reflected from the surface of the subject, that is, shadows and highlights. The filters used in black-and-white photography serve to separate the colours more effectively and to improve the contrast at the moment the image is recorded. In black-and-white photography, a coloured filter is used to emphasize its own colour. On the positive print, the colour of the filter used yields a lighter shade of grey for that colour, while the colour complementary to that of the filter is rendered in the positive print as a darker shade of grey than it would be in the filter's absence.

2.4.2. Black Pigments Used in Painting and Graphic Art

Natural black pigments. That black was one of the first colours used in art is attested, among other things, by the animal drawings in the Lascaux Cave in France, drawings some 18,000 to 17,000 years old. The use of black pigments therefore dates back to prehistory, when primitive humans employed naturally available materials: earths rich in iron oxides, charcoal, and the like. Later, fire was used to produce various pigments, namely

to fire the earth colours, a development also bound up with the spread of pottery, an occupation that arose in the Neolithic, around 2000 BCE. The old Russian painters collected the soot from the walls of kilns in which pine, fir, or lime wood was burned, as well as the soot of resin or of the torch. Mineral pigments based on copper, iron, and manganese were known and initially used in Babylon, Egypt, and China. Cobalt, for example, was introduced into Chinese porcelain during the Tang dynasty (618–906 CE), and into Europe from the fifteenth century onwards. In the Middle Ages, the techniques of painting and colouring developed; the artists who painted in the Flemish style combined, in the 1400s, tempera painting with oil painting. In the first half of the fifteenth century, the Van Eyck brothers were the first to develop a method for producing oil colours. From this starting point, new methods for producing them spread and gained momentum in Italy.¹⁰⁴ Returning to the black pigment, painters were slower to accept the idea of incorporating this colour into their works. Today, opting for a black pigment means expressing oneself with a special expressive force that captures attention and makes an impression. Various studies reveal that, in painting, the black pigment ranks second, after red, among the most frequently used colours.

Black pigments **of animal origin** are obtained by calcining products of animal origin; one variant of this pigment is bone black, obtained by calcining the degreased bones of animals. Unlike ivory black, this variant is held to yield a pigment of lower quality; within the category of black pigments, ivory black, *Ivory black*, remains the most highly prized.¹⁰⁵ Rhinoceros black, a pigment with black-grey hues, is rare, being obtained by burning the powdered horn of this animal. Ivory black has a characteristic tone that is warm, velvety, and intense. It is durable, lightfast, has great covering power, and is extremely stable in mixtures. It is more transparent than lampblack and is suitable for use in slow-drying oil and acrylic paints, while in mixtures with white it yields subtle tones of pearly grey. Even though it is not the theoretical reference colour of absolute black, in physical terms it is nonetheless the best that can be obtained using real pigments. It has been identified in prehistoric paintings, in Egyptian, Greek, and Roman art, throughout European medieval and

¹⁰⁴ From the 1600s onwards, easel painting in pure oils was a common practice, employing techniques largely similar to those used today. In the course of time, a number of other materials and processes for producing pigments were discovered; worthy of mention are the advances made in this respect in the sixteenth century, during the Renaissance, and subsequently, as industry and commerce developed.

¹⁰⁵ In use ever since ancient Greece, its invention is attributed to the great painter of Antiquity, Apelles, who lived in the fourth century BC. This natural pigment is expensive, owing to the limited sources of raw material. Initially, its manufacture involved the air-free calcination of ivory waste; today it is obtained by calcining animal bones in a vacuum, with the higher-quality grades also containing ivory waste and stag-horn waste, produced by calcining powdered stag or rhinoceros horn.

Renaissance art, and later in oil and watercolour paintings down to modern times: Rembrandt, Le Corbusier – an important component of his architectural polychromy – Renoir, the Bauhaus and De Stijl artists, and so on.

Black pigments of **vegetable origin** are prepared by burning, under certain conditions, vegetable waste. The various species of wood yield the various variants of wood black:

- vine black, used since antiquity, was obtained by calcining the dried shoots of the vine and was known under the name *nigrum optium* and prized for the intensity of its slightly bluish tone and its lightfastness. It was also used in the manufacture of printing inks. Its modern versions are: *Mark black*, *drop black*, *kernel black*, *blue black*, *et al.*

- grape black, called *Frankfurt black*, is likewise obtained by burning the shoots of the vine, but also by burning grape marc, a material produced when grapes are pressed for wine. Another black pigment was produced by burning wine lees, whose quality determined the colour of the *Frankfurter black* pigment.

- beech black, a black obtained by burning the young branches of the beech and having brownish tones, was used, according to certain documents, in Byzantine painting as well as in the old Egyptian frescoes; cork black, also called *Spanish black*, is obtained by burning cork bark produced when the trunks of the tree are processed, a pigment used more rarely.

- chestnut black, lime black, and oak black are obtained by burning wood waste, the bark of the respective trees; oak black, for example, has a bluish tone, like that obtained by burning the canes of the vine. Among the old names, the following may be mentioned: *atrium carbonarium*, *chestnut black*, oak black, lime black;

- stone black: Fruit-stone black (*Squid black*), *Cherry-stone black* (*Patent black*), of apricots, peaches, sour cherries, and plums, is produced by the incomplete burning of the stones; it is a durable pigment, stable over time, the peach one, for example, being used in the Middle Ages, among other things, for frescoes. Having cool, bluish tonalities, it was prized by Cennino Cennini, a Florentine painter (1370–1440) strongly influenced by the art of Giotto, as being "consummate". At the same time, he seems to have particularly prized the black obtained by calcining almond stones.

- *walnut black* is obtained by extracting and heat-treating a formation, a growth caused by parasites on wood (especially on oak), but also by calcining walnut shells. It is a pigment prized, besides its durability, also for its high tannin content.

Black pigments **of mineral origin** – mineral pigments were known and used a very long time ago,¹⁰⁶ one of these, the pigment *Lampblack* being a mineral pigment with a cooler timbre, suitable for use in oil and acrylic painting.¹⁰⁷ Among the better-known varieties, the following may be mentioned: *lampblack*, *carbon black*, *diamond black*, *acetylene black*, *benzene black*, *gas black*, *flame black*, *candle black*, *oil black*, *pine-soot black*. The carbon content exceeds 98 per cent in all types of furnace and thermal carbon black, and 95 per cent for channel carbon black. The principal characteristics of carbon black are determined chiefly by the average particle size: the more finely divided the carbon black particles are, the less light it will reflect, and so the blacker it will appear. It is produced by industrial processes.¹⁰⁸

In the painters' manuals of icons, carbon black is called: *chinoros*, *mavro*, *resin lampblack*, *blacking*, *resin ink*, *smoke ink*. Its principal characteristics are: low siccativity, intensity, opacity, a tendency to migrate towards the surface of the painted layer, reduced stability, and it does not react chemically with other colours¹⁰⁹ et al. As present-day variants, used in the traditional techniques of engraving, the following may be given as examples: the lithographic ink *Charbonnel*, the engraving ink *Etching Ink Charbonnel*, which incorporates the black pigment in oil, the differences in hue being determined by the amount of linseed oil added. Engraving inks of higher (Black) or lower (Soft Black) viscosity can also be used to modify other shades of black. A shorter drying time is obtained by inks in whose composition the pigments *Carbon Black* and *Ivory Black* are mixed, though these have a

¹⁰⁶ Around 1410, Jan van Eyck was the first to produce a stable drying-oil mixture capable of binding mineral pigments, though not the first artist to use oil colours. Antonello da Messina added lead oxide to this mixture, thereby increasing its drying capacity, while Leonardo da Vinci added beeswax to the mixture, which prevented the colour from darkening. Giorgione, Titian, and Tintoretto introduced further modifications, while Rubens studied this Italian oil-based mixture and added walnut oil, heated together with lead oxide and mastic dissolved in turpentine.

¹⁰⁷ Lampblack is obtained from the soot produced by burning hydrocarbons under conditions of insufficient air: natural gas, certain petroleum products, and also fatty organic oils, mineral oils, products obtained from the distillation of coal, resins, and so forth.

¹⁰⁸ Methane was discovered by the Italian physicist Alessandro Volta in 1778 (marsh gas) in the mud on the shores of Lake Maggiore. Its present name was given to it by the German chemist A. W. von Hoffman, derived from methanol. It is also found in our own country, in the form of natural deposits of high purity (98%–99%) at Sărmășel, Coșșa Mică, Bazna, Nadeș, Șincai, Deleni, et al.

¹⁰⁹ In 1864, in America, a process was developed for producing a black better suited to watercolour, that is, to an aqueous medium – a pigment that was later used on a wide scale. Natural gas was likewise used as the raw material. The resulting powder had a fine granulation, a characteristic that enabled it to disperse better in water, though not only there.

lower viscosity. This increases if, alongside them, *Prussian Blue* is added to the composition, this being the composition of the ink *Very Dense Black*, whose hue is slightly bluish.¹¹⁰

Black pigments **that are artificial** and synthetic have considerably expanded the spectrum of hues and are, for the most part, highly lightfast. Synthetic organic pigments are at present used almost exclusively, by comparison with natural organic pigments, for the following purposes: decorative ones, the protection of surfaces, increasing the resistance of applied films, or special purposes. The pigments, together with the binders and solvents of the paint, form dispersions whose fineness depends on the degree to which the pigment is ground, a fineness that influences the colour of the painting material.¹¹¹ Synthetic **inorganic** pigments are obtained through chemical reactions, usually from metal oxides. They have natural origins, but their synthesis began in the nineteenth century. It should be noted that some of the essential raw materials that led to the invention of synthetic organic pigments are: tar, benzene, naphthalene, and anthracite. At present, synthetic organic pigments are used almost exclusively, by comparison with natural organic pigments.

Mixtures of pigments for producing various shades of black

For demonstrative purposes, various black pigments used in painting were applied to canvas in order to observe the difference between the hues (Fig. 22). On the left-hand side, by mixing the pure paint with white, greys were produced so as to highlight the difference in tones:

warm, cool, darker, or lighter. On the last row, I sought to produce black by mixing colours. Thus, from left to right: violet with yellow and blue (I obtained a slightly bluish, cool black),

¹¹⁰ At present the diversity is considerable, and numerous examples may be given of inks that meet the requirements imposed by engraving techniques, or, for instance, the *Epson* ink formula, a pigment-type black ink of exceptional quality, intended for the printing of various documents and the like.

¹¹¹ Their principal characteristics are as follows: they are insoluble in the binders used in the manufacture of lacquers and paints; fineness of particle size; covering power; colouring power; drying power; the oil index; compatibility – the capacity of the pigment to be mixed with other pigments or binders without alteration of its properties; resistance to light and to weathering; resistance to temperature, to acids, and to alkaline solutions; et al.

then red with yellow and blue (a more saturated black), and finally brown with blue (a warm, earthy black was produced).

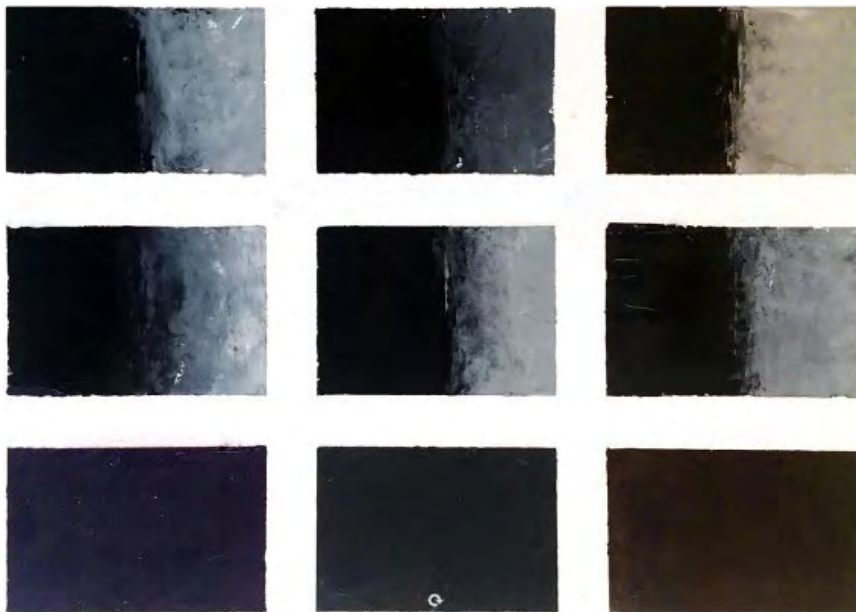


Fig. 22: A personal experiment: variants of black: Top: Ivory Black, Lamp Black, Mars Black; Middle: Lampblack, Ivory Black, Oxide Black; Bottom: mixtures.

In the volume *Schwarz – Black* (Lars Muller Publishers, Sweden, 2015), Katrin Trautwein treats black-coloured pigments, combining ivory black, in various proportions, with other pigments, presenting for consideration 16 black or near-black plates, matt printed samples. Starting from this study, I produced a table that brings together the mixtures studied: Katrin Trautwein, in the volume *Schwarz – Black* (Lars Muller Publishers, Sweden, 2015) treats black-coloured pigments, combining ivory black with various proportions of other pigments, offering 16 black or near-black plates, matt printed samples. Starting from this study, I produced the following summary table that brings together the mixtures studied.

To round out the study, I added for each individual mixture the corresponding codes so that they can be verified on various types of screen currently available on the market (Table 3). In the table below, the first 16 rows correspond to the 8 pairs described by Trautwein. The first column gives the commercial descriptions of each individual pigment/mixture; the second column describes the components with which ivory black was mixed in order to obtain the paints in column 1; the third column gives the numbering of the plates (plates 1–6 were not included, as they do not fall among the shades of black); the fourth column gives the hexadecimal codes of the mixtures.

Paint	Ivory Black and:	Pl.	HEX	RGB decimal	CMYK (%)	Representation
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10.010 Anthracite	Champagne chalk	7	#3e3d40	62,61,64	3%,5%,0%,75%	
43.5 Black	100 parts ivory black	8	#12111B	18,17,27	33%,37%,0%,89%	
12.039 Raw umber black 90	Raw umber	9	#39342D	57,52,45	0%,9%,21%,78%	
12.040 Raw umber black 85	Champagne chalk, raw umber	10	#413a31	56,58,49	0%,11%,25%,75%	
12.041 Burnt umber black 90	Burnt umber	11	#0c0a0b	12,10,11	0%,17%,8%,95%	
12.042 Burnt umber black 85	Champagne chalk, burnt umber	12	#19110c	25,17,12	0%,32%,52%,90%	
12.043 Maroon black 90	Magenta	13	#251424	37,20,36	0%,46%,3%,85%	
12.044 Maroon black 85	Champagne chalk, magenta	14	#3A2732	58,39,50	0%,33%,14%,77%	
12.045 Ultramarine blue black 90	Ultramarine blue	15	#0b0e13	11,14,19	42%,26%,0%,93%	
12.046 Ultramarine blue black 85	Champagne chalk, ultramarine blue	16	#071939	7,25,57	88%,56%,0%,78%	
12.047 Turquoise black 90	Ultramarine blue, ultramarine green	17	#082336	8,35,54	85%,35%,0%,79%	
12.048 Turquoise black 85	Champagne chalk, ultramarine blue, ultramarine green	18	#0A293F	10,41,63	84%,35%,0%,75%	
12.049 Ultramarine green black 90	Ultramarine green	19	#0d141a	13,20,26	50%,23%,0%,90%	
12.050 Ultramarine green black 85	Champagne chalk, ultramarine green	20	#14313E	30,49,62	68%,21%,0%,76%	
12.051 Cobalt green black 90	Dark cobalt green	21	#172420	23,36,32	36%,0%,11%,86%	
12.052 Cobalt green black 85	Champagne chalk, dark cobalt green	22	#233530	35,53,48	34%,0%,9%,79%	

04.003 Prussian blue	-	A	#171D32	23,29,50	54%,42%,0%,80%	
10.003 Payne's grey	-	B	#313841	49,56,65	25%,14%,0%,75%	
11.020 Blue velvet	-	C	#091C3D	9,28,61	85%,54%,0%,76%	
43.16 Raw umber	-	D	#46413E	70,65,62	0%,7%,11%,73%	
Vantablack	-	E	#000100	0,1,0	100%,0%,100%,100%	
Absolute black (reference)	-	F	#000000	0,0,0	0%,0%,0%,100%	

Table 3: kt.COLOR colour mixes and the author's own examples, aimed at producing black.

The data were collected from the official kt.COLOR website (since this is the manufacturer, it was logically assumed that the colour codes are reproduced as faithfully as possible: "*Represented on screens, the colour of the paints will at best match the hue, but it will certainly lack the sensuousness and harmony that characterize all our paints.*"¹¹²) by the following method: one searches for the target pigment or mixture and inspects the CSS code¹¹³ that renders the colour in the browser, thereby establishing the hexadecimal value that was assigned, in this case, to ivory black (Fig. 23):



Fig. 23: An illustration of the method for extracting a colour code from a source code. The author's own

I considered this correlation with digital practice important, because a given shade of black invariably appears differently depending on the screens that deliver the digital

¹¹² *Summary of the kt. COLOR original colours.* <https://www.ktcolor.com/en/colors.aspx>. Accessed 4 Apr. 2021.

¹¹³ The separation of formatting and content also makes it feasible to present the same markup page in different styles for different rendering methods, such as on screen, in print, by voice, and on Braille devices. CSS also has rules for alternative formatting in cases where the content is accessed on any modern mobile device. CSS is designed to allow the separation of the presentation of content, including layout, colours, and the accompanying fonts. This separation can improve the accessibility of content, offers greater flexibility and control over the specification of presentation features, and allows multiple web pages to share formatting by specifying the relevant CSS in a separate .css file, which reduces the complexity and repetition of the structural content, as well as enabling the .css file to be cached in a browser's memory, in order to improve the loading speed of digital content.

information. If, however, we have the exact colour code to hand, we can reproduce that shade precisely.

In conclusion, both forms of synthesis – the additive and the subtractive alike – have been reviewed thus far, in the preceding subchapters. It is worth noting that, although painting is based on the subtractive mixing of pigments, that is, of the paints used, there have been cases in which painters attempted to paint using the principle of additive synthesis. The Post-Impressionists, for example, used a special technique to enhance the luminosity and contrast of colours. This technique was based on the additive mixing of colours. Van Gogh may serve as an example: he applied the technique of solid mixing – *mélange solide*, [English: solid mixture] – instead of mixing his paints subtractively. By using contrasting, emphatic, broad brushstrokes, the human eye, unable to perceive an "average" of two different colours, perceives the strident contrast of very different and very bright colours, exactly as happens in the case of stained glass. When two different colours are rendered in very fine strokes, and if the observer is positioned at a certain distance from the canvas, the light reflected by the two colours is mixed additively by the human eye, creating a resulting third colour, as described, through *optical mixing* – that is, it is "mixed" in the observer's eye. When two paints of different colours are mixed by painters (and therefore subtractively), they lose some of their intensity, whereas when those same two colours are mixed optically, they retain their intensity and may appear brighter.

Seurat too studied the effects of mixing different paints, while at the same time attempting to control their blending by reducing the number of colours on his palette and applying the paints in very small dots. By juxtaposing very small dots of blue and red, he obtained magenta, studying at the same time how the intensity of colours changes when they are placed next to one another. Seurat named his technique *divisionism*, precisely because he had observed these separations and juxtapositions.¹¹⁴ Seurat and his colleagues had begun to feel that they ought to engage more fully with the science behind their technique, with the optical effects that underlie the visual arts. Indeed, they were joined, with his studies, by the American physicist Ogden Rood,¹¹⁵ himself an accomplished painter.

2.4.3. Black Inks, Indian Ink, Paper, and Chinese Calligraphy

¹¹⁴ His theory and practice, together with those of his followers, have been described as Neo-Impressionism and Pointillism; they had at their disposal the colour studies of Helmholtz, whose *Handbuch der physiologischen Optik* had already appeared, and of Bezold (whose texts were published in French in 1876).

¹¹⁵ *Modern Chromatics, with Applications to Art and Industry*, Chicago, 1879.

Known in Chinese culture and civilization as early as the third millennium BC, Chinese ink was at first a lacquer applied to surfaces with the aid of bamboo sticks; later it was obtained from a black powder that was soaked in water before use. Later still, from 260 BC onwards, this ink – Indian ink – came to be manufactured from lampblack, obtained by burning lacquer together with fir charcoal. Following a Korean recipe adopted in the 600s, Chinese ink began to be prepared from lampblack and stag-horn gelatine, yielding an Indian ink of exceptional quality; there was even a manual on the preparation of ink, complete with recipes and samples. For the most part, the composition of these inks included pine ash, linseed oil, plant matter, glue, and other chemicals. The solid ink made by Li-Tchao, in round or rectangular forms, renowned for its durability and brilliance, as well as the famous ink sticks of Tchang-yu, decorated with dragon faces and giving off an aroma of musk, preceded the best-known brand of Chinese ink, "*Hui Ink*", manufactured from the eighteenth century onwards in the old workshop that is still in operation today. Indeed, at the 1915 International Exhibition in San Francisco, the Grand Prize was awarded to the Chinese ink industry for the "Hui" brand.

Preparing the ink, for executing a painting or for calligraphy, involved soaking the stick in a quantity of water determined by the intensity, shades, and contrasts desired. Ink painting is one of the ancient traditional Eastern arts; the ink wash (also found in the Renaissance technique of *chiaroscuro*), likewise known as Chinese ink drawing, dates from the sixth century. Indian ink is still widely used today in the artistic field, in technical drawing, in microbiology, histology, and so on. A good-quality calligraphy ink must have a lustrous black tone (a dark green, violet, or bluish reflection is also acceptable), be smooth, have a fine structure, and, when applied, produce a clear sound. The finest-quality liquid inks are Yi-De-Ge Mo Zhi, Zhong Hua Mo Zhi, and Shu Hua Mo Zhi.

Paper is considered to be another great discovery made in China. There, the oldest Chinese writing, down to 771 BC, was produced on animal bones and tortoise shells; later, using bronze instruments, inscriptions were made on metal or by engraving in stone. In this connection, it may be noted that, as early as 221 BC, the old Chinese script in the Xiaozhuan style was introduced as the standard form of writing, and the celebrated work *Gravura în Piatră de la Tai Shan* was produced. Later, paper made from bamboo, or silk, was used – the first paper material made from woven fabric having been discovered in a tomb in the city of Xian An. In the year 105, the idea arose (*Cai Lun*) of manufacturing paper from tree bark (mulberry), old textile fibres, flax, hemp, and fishing nets. The paper thus obtained proved

to be cheaper and of better quality. The paper-making process in China reached its zenith in the Sui-Tang era, when sandalwood bark, which gave it strength and elasticity, and rice stalk, which gave it fineness, were used, the two materials offering, in addition, a special capacity for absorbing ink. This paper, Xuan Zhi, comes in various categories depending on its use: a thin, light, fine paper for small-scale painting and calligraphy, or a thick, coarse material composed of several layers, suited to large-scale calligraphy and painting. In Chinese culture, the brush (Maobi), the ink (Mo), the paper (Zhi), and the inkstone (Yan) are known as *the Four Treasures of the Study* (Wén Fáng Sì Bǎo).

Chinese writing – with its monosyllabic characters, has at its basis, like many of the phonetic alphabets of the Western languages, the ancient Egyptian pictograms, the hieroglyphs. If, however, over time the phonetic languages of Europe ceased to have anything in common with their pictographic origins, the Chinese language continued the evolution of writing through pictograms, never becoming a phonetic language. Thus one speaks of a calligraphy, the letters of the Chinese language retaining their square construction, each character being composed through various brushstrokes, a variety of forms and presentations. Today, Chinese is the only pictographic language in existence in the world, comprising more than 50,000 distinct characters. Since ancient times, Chinese master calligraphers have used brushes with soft tips, whose chief characteristic is elasticity, so that their tips, after tracing a stroke, immediately return to their original shape. In antiquity, Chinese texts were written vertically, from top to bottom and from right to left, as a direct result of the fact that, for early writing, bamboo slips and laths that could be rolled up were used. Applying the same principle of tracing lines as that used in traditional writing, contemporary calligraphy artists in China experiment with writing the characters using a pen or other hard-tipped instruments.

The types of writing used today in Chinese calligraphy exist because each has its own derivatives (see Fig. 24): standard script (*Kaishū*), dating from AD 25–220, developing some 800 years ago and reaching its artistic zenith in the period 618–907), and running script (*Xingshū*). Alongside these, over time, three other scripts emerged and evolved: *Zhuànshū* (the oldest form, used today only in producing seals for official documents, or as a signature). *Lishū* (also an old form of writing, close in configuration to present-day standard script) and cursive script (*Caoshū*).

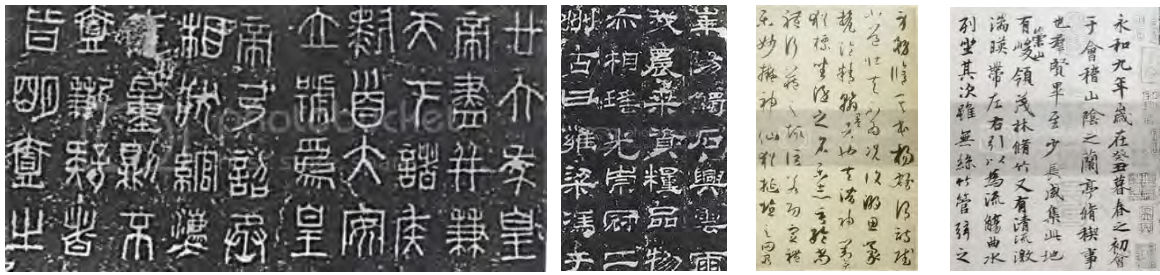


Fig. 24: Zhuànshū script, standard script – Kaishū, running script – Xingshū, cursive script – Caoshū.
Source: Photobucket.com, free licence in the case of thumbnail photographs per TOS.

Among the masterpieces of ancient Chinese calligraphy executed in standard script – a script that had attained maturity over the course of the Tang dynasty – the following may be mentioned:

a. Prefața la poeziile compuse la Pavilionul Orhideelor (Fig. 25) is the most famous work of calligraphy by Wang Xizhi, composed in the year 353 and one of the three masterpieces of calligraphy in standard script. Wang Xizhi (303–361) was a Chinese calligrapher who lived during the Jin dynasty (265–420), regarded as the sage of calligraphy and one of the most esteemed Chinese calligraphers of all time, a master of all forms of Chinese calligraphy, and of standard script in particular. The work describes a gathering of 42 literati at the Orchid Pavilion near the city of Shaoxing, in Zhejiang province, during the Festival of Spring and Brightness, to compose poems and savour wine. Wang wrote a preface for the collection of all the poems created on that occasion. Comprising 324 Chinese characters in 28 lines, the preface records the beauty of the natural scene around the pavilion and the happy time they spent together, and also describes the emotions of life. Emperor Taizong of the Tang dynasty admired the work so greatly that the copy of the original is said to have been buried, together with the emperor, in his mausoleum.

b. In Memory of Confucius in Dream, (Fig. 26) is a representative work by Ouyang Xun (557–641), a Confucian scholar and imperial calligrapher of the early Tang dynasty (618–907). He is regarded as one of the great calligraphers of the early Tang period. The work, measuring 33.6 × 25.5 cm, consists of 78 characters in standard script, arranged in nine columns. It is typical of Ouyang's writings from his final years and is the most remarkable of the four of his works that survive to this day. It is regarded as the finest regular-script calligraphy in China. It closely resembles Wang Xizhi's *Preface to the Poems Composed at the Orchid Pavilion*, which shows that Ouyang learned from the Wang style but also

introduced refinements of his own. It is now on display in the Liaoning Provincial Museum in Shenyang.

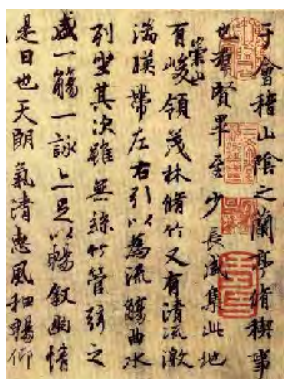


Fig. 25: Wang Xizhi, *Preface to the Poems Composed at the Orchid Pavilion*. Source: <https://en.dpm.org.cn/collections/collections/2015-05-27/3925.html>



Fig. 26: Ouyang Xun, *In Memory of Confucius in Dream*, reproduced from the web page: http://www.china.org.cn/top10/2011-11/11/content_23885318_6.htm

With regard to cursive script, the National Palace Museum in Taipei and the Liaoning Provincial Museum in Shenyang each hold works representative of the calligraphic art of ancient China, among them:

a. *Poezii în scriere cursivă* – one of the works of Zhu Yunming (1460–1527), a scholar and calligrapher of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). Zhu Yunming's agitated cursive script possesses a particular artistic charm, recalling an impassioned musical score. The work, measuring 1147.5 × 36.1 cm, comprises four poems composed by Cao Zhi (192–232), a celebrated poet who lived in the late Han dynasty (25–220) – Fig. 27.

b. *Eseul cu o mie de caractere în scriere cursivă* was written by Zhao Ji (1082–1135), the Emperor Huizong of the Song dynasty (960–1279). He was, rather, an accomplished poet, painter, calligrapher, and musician. This work of cursive-script calligraphy, measuring 1172 × 31.5 cm and composed of 1,000 characters, was a text covering both the natural sciences and social knowledge. Completed in 1112, the essay was written by the emperor on a long scroll bearing background patterns in gold painted by the imperial painters. The writing and the background matched perfectly, creating this refined masterpiece. The unique style the emperor developed – a slender script of gold, resembling twisted golden filaments – exerted

a profound influence on later generations of calligraphers, his works becoming models for study (Fig. 28).

c. *Autobiografia* (National Palace Museum, Taipei) is a representative work by the calligrapher Huai Su (737–799), produced in his final years, during the Tang dynasty (618–907). Huai was a monk as well as a devotee of the art of cursive writing. The work, a transcription of a poem, measures 755 × 28.3 cm and consists of 698 characters in 126 columns. Huai used a fine brush to write fairly large characters. The strokes are rounded and lustrous, like undulating, bent strands of steel. A cursive force radiates from the entire piece, expressing freedom and spirit yet also restraint (Fig. 29).

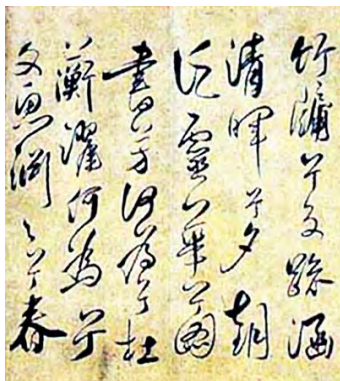


Fig. 27: Zhu Yunming, *Poems in cursive script*, 22–220, source: <http://www.artnet.com/artists/zhu-yunming/poem-in-cursive-script/>

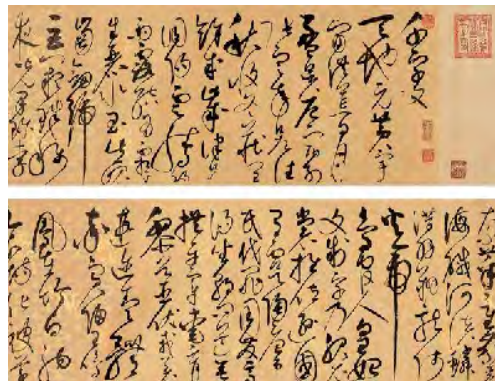


Fig. 28: Zhao Ji, *Thousand-character Essay in Cursive Script*, 1112, source: <https://www.comuseum.com/calligraphy/masters/zhao-ji/thousand-character-classic/>

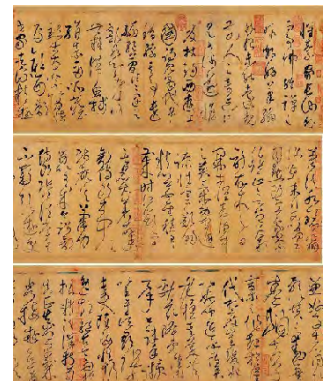


Fig. 29: Huai Su, *Autobiography*, c. 770–779, source: <https://www.comuseum.com/calligraphy/masters/huaisu/autobiography/>

Chinese calligraphy remained central to Chinese art throughout the twentieth century, and it continues to evolve within the world of contemporary art, with many modern artists developing freer styles and techniques that rely less on historical models. Wang's *Prelude to Water Melody*, for instance, may be compared with Jackson Pollock's *Number 16* (1949): Wang's calligraphy shares affinities with Pollock's focus on gesture and visible technique. They nonetheless reach a common destination by antithetical routes. And just as Pollock's gestural paintings rejected form in favour of abstraction, so too Wang's dynamic cursive script breaks free from the legibility of a historical, traditional calligraphic technique.

Wang Dongling is widely recognized as one of the most celebrated calligraphers working in China today. The artist's experimental works in *luanshu* (the writing of chaos) extend the venerable tradition of Chinese calligraphy through a dynamic style that renders the texts almost wholly indecipherable. A modernist calligrapher, he is associated with the

experimental ink movement of the 1990s, which championed gesture over content while nonetheless sharing the concerns of traditional calligraphy, which emphasizes the act of writing as an expression of the relationship between art and the body. *Entangled Script* is the culmination of Wang Dongling's quest for an art that is at once universal and Chinese, oriented towards the future and firmly rooted in the past. Wang Dongling breaks away entirely from the implicit grid of traditional calligraphy, interweaving individual characters and whole columns into an amorphous field. The calligraphic lines take flight in their variations of texture and rhythm, and yet they remain loosely tethered to the text, much as musical performance is bound to notation and metre (Fig. 30).



Fig. 30: Wang Dongling, *Chapter I & II*, 2018. Source: Asia Society, New York, Asia Society, New York, photograph by Bruce M. White, 2019.

Another artist, Xu Bing, uses the strokes of Chinese characters to reproduce texts in English, attempting, in a way, to make sense of the world around us. Thus, in *Zen Poetry No. III*, Xu commemorates the 2001 attack on the Twin Towers in New York. He cites a Buddhist poem in which dust is a metaphor for the illusory nature of human existence, paralleling the dust thrown up by the collapse of the Twin Towers. In the face of a tragedy that shook the world, Xu's work is a meditative and sensitive reflection on shared human experience. The cross-cultural script in which the verse is written makes it a truly international message. The history of Chinese calligraphy may seem boundless; there are countless points of entry into this remarkably creative and expressive world. The collections of international museums reflect as much.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Han Jia 'ao, Rebecca T. Hsieh & Richard Hsieh, "Chinese Calligraphy", Peking University Press, Beijing, 2008, pp. 3–45.

2.5. Black in the Specialist Literature

It must be noted, first of all, that although any study is grounded in an analysis of the specialist literature, a comprehensive coverage of the entire field of research – here, that of the evolution and purpose of the colour black in the *work of art* – cannot be achieved within the confines of a doctoral thesis. The scholarly approach depends, for the most part, on the particularities of the areas of inquiry investigated, on the interdisciplinary character of the theme, and on more besides. The natural sciences approach black empirically; the social sciences study the colour black in terms of society's social and cultural relationship to it¹¹⁷; and the humanities, to which art belongs, alongside philosophy and history, differ in method and content from the natural sciences, intersecting to a greater degree with the social sciences.¹¹⁸

Because art is a kind of conversation that can take various forms (photography, cinematography, painting, performance, theatre, et al.), it is created and perceived *subjectively* by the individuals of society, which lends it a unique status – liberal, interpretative, imaginative, and/or contemplative.¹¹⁹ Beginning as early as the middle of modernism and gaining momentum in postmodernism, owing to the freedom characteristic of that period, matters tend to become ever more sharply defined, in the sense that the rapid development of technology has allowed art to be expressed in the most versatile of forms, drawing on the most varied of media (e.g. André Kertész, Bill Viola, Jeff Koons, Maurizio Cattelan, Marina Abramović, Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Rebecca Horn, André Cadere, Bernhard and Hilla Becher, and many others).

In order to provide a foundation for the information that has shaped the current state of the research theme, it would be worth noting, among other things, a fact that, seemingly, bears no relation to the present day yet may prove useful in the following chapters within the fragmented context of black: a press release issued by the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA) in 1952, drawn up on the occasion of the announcement of one of the exhibitions of the painter Odilon Redon, conveyed, for the most part, the artist's testimony concerning the significance of black in the works that were to be exhibited. According to the release, Redon held that black is a world *invisible, obscure, yet present in our lives* and that

¹¹⁷ Nisbet, Robert A. "Social science". *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., 28 Nov. 2019.

¹¹⁸ The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica. *Humanities*. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., May 2020.

¹¹⁹ VRÂNCEANU, Felicia. "Terminologia Limbajului În Acțiune: Analiza Conversației Între Știință Și Artă." *Philologica Jassyensia*, vol. 16, no. 1, Jan. 2020, pp. 295–300

it is "*the most essential colour*".¹²⁰ A quotation in English from that release will better underscore certain nuances: "*an invisible world moving and palpitating around us, folding us within under pressures still obscure and unexplained,*"¹²¹ [English: a kind of invisible world, present in our lives, obscure and unexplained].

This subsection will set out data that are not contemporary as well, where their importance is deemed significant to the objective in view. To this end, mention should also be made of the publication of a research thesis, "*Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution*", by the University of California Press, USA, in 1969, by two American researchers, Brent Berlin and Paul Kay, in which the question of the correlation between language and colour is raised from a linguistic, cultural, and biological standpoint. According to the study, the colours black and white, including their variations of intensity and tone, are almost always assigned descriptions; after black and white, the study finds, comes the colour red, then yellow, green, and blue. In conclusion, the universality of black and white is more widespread than that of the fundamental colours. The study's argument confirmed what research in the field of neurology also suggests, namely that colour perception is almost identical across human beings, with slight variations between individuals, or within the same individual at different ages.

Moreover, the resulting data obtained by the two researchers support the idea of a biological predisposition in human beings to identify the colours black, white, red, yellow, green, and blue more readily than the other colours. At the same time, the conclusion supports the historical, aesthetic, and anthropological axis of the value ascribed to colours by the various cultures over the centuries (to white, predominantly benign, positive values; to black, negative values; and to red, vital values).¹²² As the subtitle of the book *La Peinture monochrome* (Jacqueline Chambon, Nîmes, 1996) indicates, Denys Riout's¹²³ approach consisted in defining the status of monochrome painting within art history. For the author, monochrome art, as an already constituted aesthetic, has its own rules and codes; and, given

¹²⁰ THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, *ODILON REDON'S DRAWINGS AND LITHOGRAPHS TO BE SHOWN IN LARGE EXHIBITION*, 1952, New York, p. 2.
https://assets.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/1587/releases/MOMA_1952_0009_8.pdf, accessed 17 September 2020, also available on WebArchive.

¹²¹ *Idem*, p. 1.

¹²² The research also attracted criticism, the most notable coming from the anthropologists Barbara Saunders (2000) and Stephen Levinson (2000), who called into question the data-collection methodologies and the cultural assumptions underlying the research of Berlin and Kay.

¹²³ Denys Riout – historian of modern and contemporary art, doctoral thesis *Histoire de la peinture monochrome*, Université Panthéon-Sorbonne, Paris

the nature of the research theme, the principal criterion is that of the predominant role of a single colour, in any medium (photography, painting, et al.).

Necessary though it is, this is nonetheless not sufficient, since Riout holds that there is no definition capable of allowing one to verify whether such a work does indeed belong to the family of the monochrome. It is not enough, because an aesthetic project, a particular genre, must be associated with its recognition by the public. Moreover, the artist and those who support him must become aware that they are precisely in the process of defining it. According to Denys Riout, the creation of the generic concept or, rather, the invention of the monochrome should be attributed to Yves Klein. Other artists before Yves Klein, in particular Rodchenko and Malevich, or Rauschenberg and Ellsworth Kelly, undoubtedly produced monochromes, yet with Yves Klein the concept of the monochrome became a total, extensible aesthetic.¹²⁴ Malevich's radical paintings inaugurated a first path for the monochrome, sustained by the idea of transcendence. With Malevich, the monochrome – painting without objects and objectless painting – becomes the site of access to the absolute, the new icon of the invisible.

The idea that colour alone can eclipse the world of objects, take their place, and become the very being of any painting has had repercussions down to our own time. From Kandinsky to Miró, from Newman to Charlton, limits are imposed whose character is always equally striking. Without seeking to be exhaustive, Denys Riout's book sets out to study the subject through illustration and through cases deemed significant. The author has recourse to the history and archaeology of a genre. The wealth of examples offered, together with the fine analysis of their articulations within the history of art, amounts to an interrogation of the heart of the matter. Each example seems to contest the "definition" of the monochrome illustrated elsewhere. The problem is not that there are, in fact, several monochromes, but rather, as Denys Riout reminds us, that the monochrome eludes every attempt at ontological definition.

In 2012, a simple computational model, the product of artificial intelligence, suggested how a simple negotiation dynamic, driven by a specific, nonlinguistic, weak bias (the frequency-dependent resolving power of the human eye), is sufficient to guarantee the emergence of a hierarchy of colour names. The results of the study demonstrated a possible

¹²⁴ Klein contributed substantially to the spread of the genre, and the desire to seek out its essence was officially recorded with the first thematic exhibition devoted entirely to monochrome painting, on 18 March 1960, at the Städtisches Museum in Leverkusen. Since then there have been countless exhibitions devoted to this theme, all the more so because for many young artists the genre remains relevant – a currency that is bound up with the past of achromatic painting.

route towards the emergence of hierarchical colour categories, confirming that theoretical modelling in this field has reached the maturity needed to make significant contributions to the ongoing debates concerning the linguistic universality of colours suggested by Berlin and Kay.¹²⁵ With regard to the colour black, however, there is a cultural consensus, which most often ascribes to it an immaterial value: the absence of good fortune, disappointment, the paranormal, realms inaccessible to humankind, death, and so on.¹²⁶

In 2013, Eugene Thacker, an American professor, published an essay entitled "*Black on Black*" in "*Mute Magazine*", in which he offers a brief survey of certain artworks dominated by black, linking them through the *metaphysical perspective of the relationship between macrocosm and microcosm*. At the same time, reference is made to the contemporary philosophy of François Laruelle (1937–) "*On the Black Universe/Du noir univers*" (1988), which extends this idea of black as a cosmological principle.¹²⁷ Also in 2013, the book entitled "*Dark Nights of the Universe*" was published, in an edition adapted by Daniel Colucciello Barber, Alexander Galloway, Nicola Masciandaro, and Eugene Thacker. This book gathers four texts that comment on Laruelle's idea of the black universe, and is the outcome of a four-day seminar held in New York, at the Recess Gallery, in the spring of 2012.^{128,129}

In "*The Story of Black*" (2013), John Harvey explores in depth the problematic association of the colour with the African American race and its enslavement, dwelling on this theme; then he turns to the figurative meanings of black. Given the innate austerity and gravity of black, Harvey reveals how it also became the colour of choice for the clothing of merchants, lawyers, and monarchs. Finally, he provides a brief survey of the way artists and designers have used the colour in their works, citing as examples Caravaggio, Rembrandt, and Rothko.

In "*Culorile- pasiune și mister*" (2020), David Scott Kastan, a professor at Yale University, and Stephen Farthing, a British visual artist, treat ten colours in ten separate

¹²⁵ Loreto V, Mukherjeeb A, Tria F (April 16, 2012). "*On the origin of the hierarchy of color names*" (PDF: http://cse.iitkgp.ac.in/~animeshm/hierarchy_evolang.pdf).

¹²⁶ See Rudolf Steiner in *Color* (1992), p. 25. On the cultural associations of the colour black, see Victor Turner. *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (1967), chapter 3; Umberto Eco, "How Culture Conditions the Colors We See", in *On Signs* (1985), pp. 157–175.

¹²⁷ Laruelle, François. *In the Human Foundations of Color*. 1988, pp. 1–7. <http://www.recessart.org/wp-content/uploads/Laruelle-Black-Universe1.pdf>. Accessed 17 September 2020, also available on WebArchive.

¹²⁸ The English-language edition of this essay was first translated and published by Miguel Abreu as "*Of Black Universe in the Human Foundation of Color*" in the catalogue *Hyun Soo Choi*, New York, in 1991, pp. 2–4.

¹²⁹ Thacker, Eugene, et al. *Dark Nights of the Universe* (Novo Pan Klub), 2013, p. 104.

chapters. The two authors analyse the colour black starting from the "*little black dress*" (*little black dress*) worn by Audrey Hepburn in "*Breakfast at Tiffany's*" (1961), tracing a trajectory through time punctuated by Chanel's dresses, black in the literature of Henry James, and the etymology of certain English words containing the word "*black*".

Reference is also made to Malevich and Ansel Adams. In "*Negru – istoria unei culori*", published in France in 2008 and appearing in Romania in 2012, Michel Pastoureau treats the symbolism of black, from the darkness preceding the Genesis to the black of the age of coal and of fashion, devoting a few pages to the fine arts and to the way these conferred upon black the status of a colour. This resource is the only one that correlates the symbolism of black with various historical markers.

In "*Schwarz Black*"¹³⁰ (2015), Katrin Trautwein undertakes a study of black pigments under the aegis of the question of whether a pure black exists. In this study, Trautwein shows us how many shades of grey and how many different pigments can go into creating this special colour, to which countless meanings are attached, both in Western culture and in other parts of the world. Through high-quality screen prints, the publication makes the wide range of blacks tangible to the reader, dispelling the idea that black is the mere absence of light. On the contrary, the various black tones are uniquely suited to bringing out the nuances in light and darkness.

These are the shades that create moods within architecture. A room can be designed without colour, but not without light and shadow – without them, it would have no form. In "*Black Paintings: Robert Rauschenberg, Ad Reinhardt, Mark Rothko, Frank Stella*" (2007), Stephanie Rosenthal pursues the study of the colour black in the monochromatic paintings of the artists named in the volume's title. The paradox that *we see something that does not exist* also intrigues the sculptor of Indian origin *Anish Kapoor*, who, in 2018, used the pigment "*Vantablack*" at an exhibition in Portugal (as an aside, the work, a black circle resembling a black hole, was called "*Descent into Limbo*" and was placed at the entrance to the gallery that also housed his other works).

In response to the restriction on using Kapoor's pigment, the contemporary artist Stuart Semple created, in February 2017, the pigment *Black 2.0*, which Semple says absorbs 96% of visible light, and then, in March 2021, an improved version of it, *Black 3.0*, which is said to absorb 99% of visible light. With both of these two versions of black, as well as Vantablack, having an extremely high degree of absorption of radiant energy, the reflected

¹³⁰ German- and English-language edition.

light is imperceptible, resulting in an extremely matt black. The importance of this phenomenon is relevant when this effect is specifically desired (as in photography). These pigments, *Black 2.0* and *Black 3.0.*, were used in some of the works belonging to the author's own creative project. The paint can be obtained directly from the manufacturer, in the United Kingdom. The effects of juxtaposing the paints, the way in which the most matt black influences oil paints, as well as other aspects, will be reported in the applied/experimental chapter.

Johannes Itten, Josef Albers: Colour Interaction and Colour Contrasts

We perceive the contrast between two adjacent surfaces only if the difference in colour exceeds a certain threshold. This difference is perceived slightly differently by each individual and depends on a number of factors, most of all on the degree of saturation and luminosity of the adjacent colours, but also on the fact that every colour both influences and is influenced reciprocally. Colour contrasts were discussed by Goethe in *Teoria Culorilor*, by Schopenhauer in *Văzul și culorile*, by Michel Eugène Chevreul in *Legea contrastului culorilor*, by Kandinsky, Paul Klee, and others; the most pronounced contribution, however, was made by Johannes Itten, who defined, in *The Art of Color*, the seven colour contrasts: contrast of light and dark, contrast of hue, cold–warm contrast, complementary contrast, simultaneous contrast, contrast of saturation, and contrast of extension.

Itten observed that a clear and well-founded introduction to the practice and exercises needed to explain the particular effects of colour contrasts was lacking, and that his study of these contrasts constitutes an important element of colour theory. The light–dark contrast, which is of particular interest here, is based on the tonal-value relationship between light and dark colours. The more pronounced the value gradation, the more evident the light–dark effect, and the peak of this contrast is the contrast between white and black.¹³¹

Itten showed that a white square on a black background will appear larger than a black square of the same size on a white background. Thus a yellow square on a white ground appears larger, darker, and warmer, whereas on a black ground it is perceived as colder, with a stronger expressive quality. A red square on a white ground appears smaller, darker, and subdued, whereas on a black ground it is perceived as larger, brighter, and warmer. (Fig...) Itten further shows that two or more colours are in harmony if their mixture produces a

¹³¹ Itten, Johannes. *The Elements of Color*. John Wiley & Sons, 1970, p. 33.

neutral grey. At the same time, he makes an observation concerning people with black hair, dark skin, and dark eyes (compared with fair-haired people with light skin and blue eyes), maintaining that in their case "*black plays an important role from the point of view of harmony*".¹³²

Itten also shows that a contrast of hue attains its greatest expressive value when white and black are juxtaposed (Fig. 31).

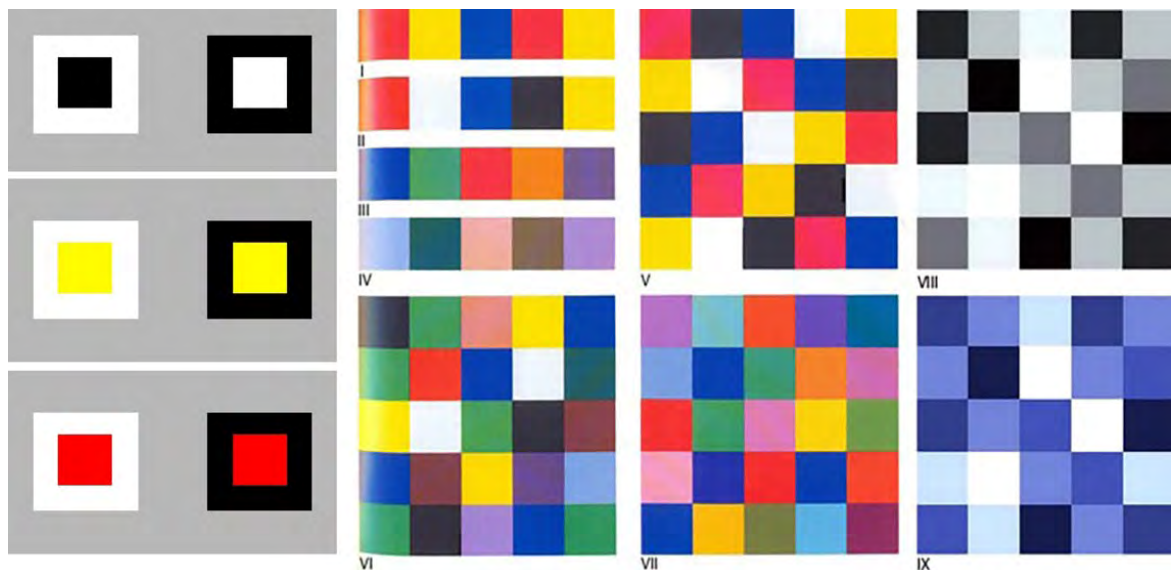


Fig. 31: Johannes Itten, *The Elements of Color*, 1961, reproduced from *The Elements of Color*, p. 87, plates 58–59; p. 35, plates 7, 8, 9, and 10; p. 39, plates 11 and 12.

We observe that the strongest expressivity of the contrasts is represented in fig. 30-I, given by the primary colours. In fig. 31-II, an increase in the contrast of hue is observed through the juxtaposition of white and black. The colours with the greatest luminosity are represented in fig. 31-III, while in fig. 31-IV the same colours are represented in different shades. In fig. 31-V the *strongest expressive effect* **the juxtaposition** of white and black with the primaries is highlighted. In fig. 31-VI the same juxtaposition (white and black) is represented, with colours that are lightened or not. Finally, in fig. 31-VII pure colours are represented, without white and black.

Therefore, through the juxtaposition of black and white, the expressive force of each colour increases by way of the heightening of its own self. The explanation lies in the fact that *black confers luminosity on neighbouring colours, while white, even though it lowers their luminosity, raises their saturation*. Returning to the chiaroscuro contrast, this is the one

¹³² Itten, Johannes. *op. cit.*, p. 24.

that corresponds to the dark and the light. It rests on valuation, that is, on the relationship between dark and light values, between dark colours and luminous ones, whether we are speaking of polychromy or of monochromy.

The contrast between black and white represents the extreme of this contrast, since they constitute the outermost limits of the coloured spectrum. The expressiveness of the chiaroscuro contrast is directly proportional to the distance between two (or more) light/dark elements.¹³³ The chiaroscuro contrast is held to be a fundamental one, since it is present in every visual image, each colour corresponding to a tonal step situated between white and black. It is precisely for this reason that Liviu Lăzărescu stresses the importance, throughout the entire history of the arts, of the chiaroscuro contrast. Achromatic chiaroscuro (fig. 70-VIII) represents the whole range of whites, greys, and blacks; it differs categorically from all other ranges through its neutral and abstract specificity. It is not to be confused with the monochromatic (70-IX). Van Gogh maintained that "*Absolute black, properly speaking, is to be found nowhere. Black, like white, enters into the composition of almost all the other colours and forms the boundless variety of greys, differing in tone and vigour*"¹³⁴. Leon Battista Alberti, referring to the force of black and white, stated: "*they make painted things truly appear to stand out in relief.*"¹³⁵ White enlarges, whereas black seems to diminish a form. Leonardo da Vinci observed that, although "*white is not a colour, it has the gift of receiving any colour*".

White, placed beside a colour, accentuates it chromatically and darkens it, while mixed with a colour it decolourizes and cools it, whereas black, placed beside a colour, lightens it and, in a mixture, decolourizes and cools it.¹³⁶ Lăzărescu underlines that white and black are "*nevertheless non-colours*"¹³⁷, but that when they are interspersed among several colours they retain their character as "achromatic pauses", lending value to the neighbouring colours. Neutral greys result from the mixture, in differing proportions, of white and black (the tonal scale from white to black or the reverse), but they lack "personality" when, in their vicinity, strongly saturated colours are to be found. Certain artists cultivate either white monochromes or those tending towards black. One may recall

¹³³ Liviu Lăzărescu, in *Culoarea în artă* (2009)

¹³⁴ Vincent van Gogh, "*Scrisori*", Meridiane, Vol. I, Bucharest, p. 125.

¹³⁵ Leonardo da Vinci, "*Tratat despre pictură*", Meridiane, Bucharest, 1971.

¹³⁶ Renoir grants black an altogether special status: "*Black is one of the most important colours. (...) Nature, however, cannot bear purity (...). And so we must use black, but mix it, as in nature.*", „*Renoir – zbucium și creație*”, Univers. Bucharest, 1971, p. 137.

¹³⁷ Liviu Lăzărescu, op. cit., p. 113.

the works of the Portuguese painter Vieira da Silva, or those of Nicolae Grigorescu, who, towards the end of his life, passed through a "white period". But probably the most notable figure on this path is Kazimir Malevich, in his desire to create an art of pure emotion, devoid of object, painting "*Compoziție suprematistă. Alb pe alb*" and "*Elemente suprematiste. Două pătrate*", in which two black squares appear against a white ground. The Italian Sebastiano del Piombo, in "*Portretul lui Pietro Aretino*", used six kinds of black to render the ermine, the damask, the velvet, the silk, the cloth, and the beard. Van Gogh had discerned "*at least twenty-seven*"¹³⁸ shades of black in the work of the Dutch painter Frans Hals, and the examples could go on.

Josef Albers (1888–1976) was an abstract painter and theorist, an educator of German origin, one of the most influential teachers of the visual arts in the twentieth century, an artist of manifold orientation: photography, typography, mural painting. He was the first artist to be offered, during his lifetime, a solo exhibition at MoMA, as well as at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. He taught at the Bauhaus and at Black Mountain College and headed the design department of Yale University. In 1963, Albers published *Interaction of Color* (1963), a record of an experimental way of studying and teaching colour: among other things, it contains plates by means of which optical illusions and the effects of colour juxtapositions are demonstrated, his *Homages to the Square* being well known (Ex. Fig. 34, Fig. 33)

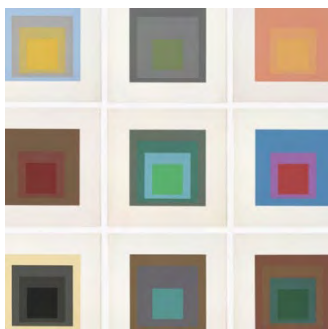


Fig. 34: Josef Albers, *Homage to the Square*, 1962-1970, Source: The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, 2018.



Fig. 33: Josef Albers, *Blatt 5 aus "Hommage au carré"*, 1965, Source: The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, 2018.

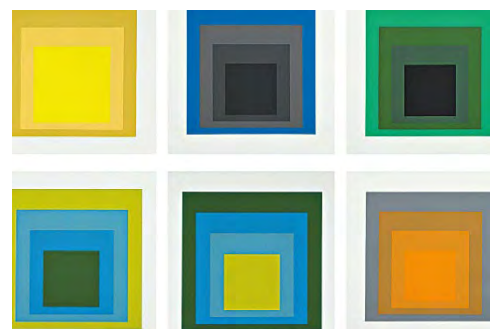


Fig. 32: Josef Albers, *Formulation: Articulation*, 1972, Source: The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, 2018.

¹³⁸ Vincent van Gogh, op. cit., p. 304

Formulation: Articulation (Fig. 32) encompasses his works from the Bauhaus (1930) up to his tenure at Yale. This portfolio contains 127 screen prints of his most emblematic works, published by Harry N. Abrams and printed by Albers's colleagues at Yale, Norman Ives and Sewell Sillman, in 1972, four years before the artist's death. The document is held in the permanent collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, SFMOMA, the British Museum, and the Stedelijk Museum. Albers chose to arrange the prints in chronological order, forming an ensemble centred on colour relationships.

In what follows, the discussion returns to artists who worked with black, whether, for example, the French artist Pierre Soulages, the German painter Hans Hartung, an adherent of the *universal language of abstractionism*, who painted almost wholly black works, or Kline with his gesturalism.

Chapter 3. The Historical Evolution of the Use of Black in the Work of Art

3.1. An Analysis of the Historical Evolution of Black in the Work of Art, with Emphasis on the Research Theme

This section traces a synthetic chronological course of black in the work of art, with emphasis on the significance of certain major artistic movements that have (re)defined, shaped, and oriented the valences of the colour black. After a contextual introduction concerning the origins of the chiaroscuro characteristic of Caravaggio's painting and Rembrandtesque light – cases selected because they are tangential to the research theme – it turns to *Black and the Bauhaus movement*, an essential aspect, given that the Bauhaus movement represented, in large measure, the point of departure towards abstraction in art. The next section reveals a thematic survey of black in modern and contemporary art, with emphasis on painting and photography. The continuation addresses experimental tendencies in contemporary photography, a survey likewise tracing the use of the colour black. At the close of this section, the role and place of black in modern and contemporary Romanian art will be analysed.

3.1.1. The Manner *tenebrosa*, Caravaggio's Chiaroscuro, and Rembrandtesque Light

A treatment of chiaroscuro¹³⁹ in art cannot be explained solely through the influence of Caravaggio (1571–1610), even though, in his works, he expressed at the highest level this tendency characteristic of the period in question.

He made the most of darkness, regarding it as inseparable from light and thereby endowing it with an iconic and psychological character of essential importance. A transdisciplinary analysis is nevertheless required for a clearer understanding: one must take into account the cultures of those times, the attitude of people, their stance towards transcendence, and their knowledge concerning nature and man – an entire phenomenology of its own kind. Medieval art is associated with the metaphysics of light: in the Christian

¹³⁹ Chiaroscuro is a technique of oil painting that, by using the contrast between dark and light, creates three-dimensional forms. This technique is often used to add a dramatic effect to the work of art.

world of the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries, the symbolic significance of light was the focus of theology, cosmology, and philosophy.

Light was held to be the first principle of being, and this idea dominated the entire world, the Earth itself being considered to lie at the centre of concentric spheres of light of ever-increasing luminosity, the site of the cosmic paradise: Paradise was the light emanating from God, while Darkness, for the Scholastics as for the mystics alike, though unknown and mysterious, was not a subject of interest.

In the Quattrocento, under the powerful influence of Neoplatonism,¹⁴⁰ the aesthetics of the medieval metaphysics of light continued, above all in the form of *divine light*. Thus, in the Renaissance, beauty – and likewise the good – was radiance, light, grace, purity, all of them divine attributes; and, as the polymath Leone Battista Alberti affirmed,¹⁴¹ "*it is in our nature to take pleasure in bright things*",¹⁴² while at the same time recommending: "*let us avoid black works*".¹⁴³ It is thus understandable that everything dark in colour, inert, obscure, was automatically rejected. Even so, in the Renaissance an interest in the direct observation of the surrounding world began to take shape, not only for scientists but also in the sphere of art.¹⁴⁴ Although Masaccio's *The Tribute Money* and *The Holy Trinity*, works executed in the fifteenth century, employed this technique, it was primarily the works created during the Baroque and Mannerist periods that were taken into consideration.

The aesthetics propagated by Leonardo da Vinci and manifested in his paintings differs from that introduced, almost a hundred years later, by Caravaggio and by many of his contemporaries; nevertheless, his delicate chiaroscuro, *sfumato* (Fig. 38), may be regarded as a first stage between the medieval *aesthetics of light* and the Baroque aesthetics of *light and darkness*.

A remarkable use of light and shade, of the *chiaroscuro* technique, was, for example, *The Nativity at Night*, painted in 1490 by Geertgen tot Sint Jans (Fig. 35); *The Elevation of*

¹⁴⁰ Neoplatonism is a strand of Platonic philosophy that emerged in the third century AD against the background of Hellenistic philosophy and religion. Neoplatonism exerted a lasting influence on the subsequent history of philosophy. In the Middle Ages, Neoplatonic ideas were studied and discussed by Christian, Jewish, and Muslim thinkers. Neoplatonism also had a powerful influence on the perennial philosophy of the Italian Renaissance thinkers Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola.

¹⁴¹ An Italian Renaissance author, artist, architect, poet, priest, linguist, philosopher, and cryptographer.

¹⁴² Cecil Gould, "Artibus Et Historiae" in *IRSA* (author's own translation: *Institute for Art Historical Research*), Florence, Italy, 1986, Vol. 7, No. 13, p. 97.

¹⁴³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴⁴ Nevertheless, a first "use" of darkness, of a style of "shadow painting", or *skiagraphie*, has been attributed to Apollodorus, an Athenian painter of the fifth century BC. A primitive form of Byzantine art, this technique was reformed in the West during the late Middle Ages. By 1400, it had become a common feature in Gospel paintings and illuminations.

the Cross by Rubens (Fig. 37), *The Matchmaker* by Gerard van Honthorst (Fig. 36), and many others may also still be mentioned. Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), being likewise concerned with optics, developed the science of light and shade on an unprecedented scale.



Fig. 38: Leonardo da Vinci, *Vergine delle Rocce*, 1483–1493, free licence (CC0 type, public domain)



Fig. 35: Geertgen van Haarlem, *Nativity at Night*, c. 1490, source: <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/>



Fig. 37: Peter Paul Rubens, *The Elevation of the Cross*, 1610, source: <http://www.rubensonline.be/showdetail.asp?artworkID=100298>



Fig. 36: Gerrit van Honthorst, *The Procuress*, 1625, source: <https://www.centraalmuseum.nl/nl/collectie/10786-de-koppelaarster-gerard-van-honthorst>

An important turning point was Giovan Paolo Lomazzo's *Trattato dell'arte della pittura* (1584), an extremely important document on the metaphysics of light. Lomazzo divided light into three categories: *divine light* (metaphysical),¹⁴⁵ *natural light* (it is worth noting that Lomazzo separates divine light from natural, solar light), and *artificial light* (fire). In his treatise, Lomazzo states that divine light, in art, "reveals itself", whether diurnal or nocturnal scenes are depicted, but he further notes that this divine light **obeys the laws of optics and, by implication, casts a shadow.**¹⁴⁶

Of essential importance are the works of Caravaggio (1571–1610), who perfected a new kind of image, whence the term *caravaggism* or *caravagesques*. His style, with its profound contrasts, influenced painting, engraving, photography (low-key, chiaroscuro), and film (film noir). Among his numerous works typical of the *chiaroscuro* style, one may recall, besides those in Fig. 39, the following: *Saint Francis of Assisi in Ecstasy* (1595), Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford; *Amor Vincit Omnia* (1601–1602), Gemäldegalerie, Berlin; *The Death of the Virgin* (1601–1606), Louvre, Paris; *Saint Jerome Writing*, 1605–1606, Galleria Borghese, Rome; *The Beheading of Saint John the Baptist* (1608).

¹⁴⁵ "This word, light, has different meanings: first and foremost it signifies the countenance of that divine nature which is the Son of God. Secondly, it is the fire of the Holy Spirit." Barbara Tramelli, "Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo's *Trattato dell'Arte della Pittura*", Brill, Boston, 2017, p. 82. *apud* Gian Paolo Lomazzo, "Trattato dell'Arte della Pittura", p. 214. Author's own translation from English into Romanian.

¹⁴⁶ *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*

Adducing these works was deemed useful, since it offers an introduction to the way in which dark and deep colours were handled in relation to the expressive power of the works themselves.



Fig. 39: Caravaggio, a. *Narcissus at the Source* (1597–1599); b. *The Calling of Saint Matthew* (1599–1600); *The Entombment of Christ* (1602–1603), *Sacred Love Versus Profane Love* (1602–03), free licence (CC0 type, public domain).



Fig. 40: Examples of paintings belonging to the tenebros style. Caravaggio, *Saint John the Baptist in the Wilderness*, 1605; Adam de Coster, *A Man Singing by Candlelight*, 1625–1635; Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith and Her Maidservant*, 1625; Jusepe de Ribera, *The Martyrdom of Saint Andrew*, 1628

In order to bring out the divine light, falling like a radiant beam from an invisible source, most of the religious scenes of the Baroque take place at night, with dense and impenetrable darkness occupying large areas while the light picks out contours, fragments of a torso, or limbs. Thus, from the early 1600s onwards, dark paints came to occupy ever more space, and in the works of Italian and Spanish artists they frequently covered a large part of the surface of the canvas. The strong contrasts between light and shadow, with extensive dark zones, were characteristic of a numerous group of seventeenth-century artists who subscribed to a stylistic tendency: "*pittura tenebrosa*"¹⁴⁷. This did not escape the

¹⁴⁷ Tenebrism is a style of painting that employs striking contrasts between darkness and light. In tenebrism, darkness becomes the dominant feature of the painting. This kind of technique is often used to create drama within an image.

criticism of the time: "...it is overwhelming to hide the subject's eyes, mouth, or limbs in obscurity..."¹⁴⁸. Scannelli commented thus, aiming above all at the work of Caravaggio, whose manner of using chiaroscuro was considered the most radical, including with regard to **tenebrism**, even though this technique had already been used by several earlier artists, among them El Greco, Tintoretto, and Albrecht Dürer, et al. (Fig. 40)

In this respect, two directions from which criticism was levelled may be distinguished. In the first place, one may speak of the representatives of Christendom, initially reluctant to accept religious scenes plunged into black; in the second, criticism came even from certain artists, who held that this "ruined" the representational power of drawing and who accused those who used very dark tones of doing so in order to conceal the defects in their paintings. Given the "sensitivity" with which societies adapt to stylistic avant-gardes, it is hardly surprising that the *tenebroso* style was called into question. Even so, it cannot be denied that the discovery of the value of darkness, bound up with the way light is used, was the most important innovation of this style, for in tenebrism darkness becomes the dominant feature of the painting.

This kind of technique was often used to create drama within an image, with black transforming itself and becoming an *active black*, indispensable both artistically and psychologically. Rendering mystery, ambiguity, drama, and pathos, it lent the light a *dynamic* quality – light which, from the standpoint of visual language, concentrated around or upon the centre of interest, whether the source was invisible, outside the pictorial plane, or visible.

In the first case, the religious character of the works in question is heightened, the most practical interpretation being that the source of light is divine. In the second case, in scenes where the source of light appears – for example, the light of a candle in the darkness – it becomes a symbol of hope; it is the place around which those present gather, "clinging" to life as though fleeing from the path of destruction, of terror (see Gerrit Dou, *The Evening School*, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum).

From an artistic standpoint, these scenes abound in elements characteristic of the symbolism of black: it is not known whether it is day or night, whether the event takes place indoors or outdoors; time and space have thus been eliminated, or, better put, *black has been allowed to display its true value*. By contrast, one may say that the light has indirectly been

¹⁴⁸ Francesco Scannelli da Forlì, *Il Microcosmo della pittura, ouero Trattato diuiso in due Libri*, Per il Neri, Cesena, Italy, 1657, p. 115.

"amputated" of some of its power, remaining at a metaphorical level; in these cases, the mere presence of a tiny patch of light changes the nihilist role of that latent, neutral, inert black into one of sustaining, of support. And one may pose the following question: *what would be the value of a candle in the absence of black?* Therefore, black is vital, indispensable, in such situations, and is consequently ascribed *positive artistic values* – and, evidently, without the suspicion that it might be used to cover up hypothetical mistakes. Moreover, the absence of black would constitute a mistake.

Caravaggio demonstrates how the values of life, the values of death, and the artistic values of black complement one another. In *The Flagellation of Christ*, the dense black shadows occupy three-quarters of the image, alluding to the evil being done. The artist's distinctive realism is also brought out: an exhausted Christ, in contrast to the demonic exertion of the torturer, whose dark jacket – this black in the foreground – leads towards the darkness within the image. Indeed, cruelty, the severed head – a recurrent symbol of the *nigredo* phase and frequently encountered in the history of art – is a recurrent theme of his, but also of painters such as Rembrandt, Tintoretto, and Domenico Fetti.¹⁴⁹

Some works, involving religious or fantastical subjects, use faint night light to create a mysterious atmosphere, or with that light symbolizing hope, guidance, divinity. Whether it is moonlight or the light of artificial sources, the illuminating effect of the reflection of light upon the subjects is manifest. Black and grey shades often symbolize darkness, fear, mystery, superstition, evil, death, secrecy, and sadness. The artist's world is composed of darkness and black, he himself, like a character out of Dostoevsky, being at once the greatest of sinners and a tormented saint.

Caravaggio developed this technique, that of *chiaroscuro*, in the period 1571–1610, and many other painters followed him, among them Georges de La Tour, Hendrick ter Brugghen, Gerrit van Honthorst, Francisco de Zurbarán, and the artist Artemisia Gentileschi, regarded as one of the most progressive and expressive artists of the seventeenth century, who initially worked in Caravaggio's style and was the first woman to become a member of the Accademia di Arte del Disegno in Florence. Gentileschi depicted the female figure with naturalism and employed the *maniera tenebrosa* with particular mastery in order to convey scale, space, and drama.

¹⁴⁹ Ami Ronnberg and Kathleen Martin, *The Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism*, Taschen, Germany, 2010, p. 658.

Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669), another artist from whose palette black was never absent, was a phenomenal artist, a master of the portrait, of historical, religious, and mythological scenes, and of spectacular panoramas. Of great sensibility and exceptionally prolific, he used a wide range of materials and methods, and his approaches to form, colour, and shadow, his incredible use of light, and much else besides, mark him out as one of the most formidable artists in the history of art.

His dramatic self-portraits¹⁵⁰ allude to ascent and downfall (which, indeed, the artist himself experienced). He was a brilliant portraitist, renowned for his capacity to capture the physiognomic features of his subjects as well as their temperamental particularities. Drama characterizes Rembrandt's works above all, most of them executed as though there were a single source of light – whence the term "*Rembrandtesque light*", when one speaks of low-key photography, for example.

This kind of light creates strong, bold contrasts that affect the whole composition. For this reason, it is the type of lighting best suited to low-key photography. Through its appropriate use, the viewer's attention is concentrated on the spot of light, which is usually unidirectional. It also adds a mysterious sensation to the image: one side of the face is strongly illuminated by the main source of light, while on the other side of the face the interplay of shadows and light appears. The dark background is neither sombre nor spiritual; rather, its opacity brings us back to the foreground, compelling us to focus on the figures. The effect is common in Rembrandt, but it can also be seen in other Dutch portraits, for example in those of Jan Lievens.

In fact, between 1627 and 1629, the revolutionary change that took place in Rembrandt's style was brought about by the way in which he used light, concentrating it and exaggerating its diminution in relation to the distance from the source, leaving large areas shrouded in shadow. Moreover, by surrounding the illuminated area with clusters of darker tones – in the foreground, in the background, and towards the corners of the work – the artist also achieved a strong compositional unity, as, for example, in *The Dispute Between Saints Peter and Paul* (1628). In other works, light is assigned a different role: strong effects of local light no longer predominate; rather, the space seems filled with a light that lingers

¹⁵⁰ According to Kenneth Clark, Rembrandt is "*the only painter, with the potential exception of Van Gogh, who made the self-portrait a primary means of creative self-expression, and he is undoubtedly the one who turned the self-portrait into an autobiographical record.*" Anthony M. Amore, Tom Mashberg, *Stealing Rembrandts: The Untold Stories of Notorious Art Heists*, St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2011, p. 155.

around the figures, acting as a mysterious aura, as in *Jacob Blessing the Sons of Joseph*¹⁵¹. Here, the light draws attention to the principal figures while concealing the background: there seems to be a halo around the one being blessed, and the colours lend the painting an atmosphere "at once intimate and sacred, tender and solemn"¹⁵².

3.1.2. Black and the Bauhaus Movement

The Origins of the Bauhaus Movement. The advance of technology in nineteenth-century Europe, with its falling production costs and rising economic efficiency, indirectly brought about historic transformations in art as well. Thus, in 1907 the Werkbund was founded in Germany, an organization that promoted the unity of art, craft, and modern technology. Active until the First World War, the ideas that had given rise to it survived the end of its programme, so that the Werkbund architect Walter Gropius became, in 1919, director of the Grand Ducal Saxon School of Fine Arts in Weimar. He introduced a revolutionary curriculum into the school: the teaching of painting, the crafts, and modern production technologies, achieved by merging the school of fine arts with the local school of crafts into a new institution called *Staatliche Bauhaus Weimar*, that is, the *Bauhaus*, a name that evoked the medieval German term for the guilds, *Bauhütten*. These guilds passed on the knowledge bound up with the traditional crafts, and Gropius's vision reflected a rethinking of cultural values in the wake of the devastation wrought by the war.¹⁵³ Indeed, he held that, for art to flourish, the artist had to possess a thorough command of technical skills.^{154, 155.}

¹⁵¹ "Bertman, Sandra L. *Jacob Blessing the Sons of Joseph* Literature Arts and Medicine Database, NYU School of Medicine, updated June 29, 2006. Retrieved 2012-01-27". Litmed.med.nyu.edu. 1999-05-03. Retrieved 2012-12-04.

¹⁵² "Krén, Emil *Jacob Blessing the Children of Joseph*, Web Gallery of Art. Retrieved 2012-01-27". Wga.hu. Retrieved 2012-12-04.

¹⁵³ Without dwelling on the many facets of their activity, the Bauhaus masters deserve mention. They were: Johannes Itten (1888–1967), Josef Albers (1888–1976), Anni Albers (1899–1994), Hinnerk Scheper, Georg Muche, László Moholy-Nagy (1895–1946), Herbert Bayer, Joost Schmidt, Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer, Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944), Paul Klee (1879–1940), Lyonel Feininger (1871–1956), Gunta Stölzl and Oskar Schlemmer (1888–1943), Carl Buchheister (1890–1964), Sándor Bortnyik (1893–1976), György Kepes (1906–2001) Max Bill (1908–1994), and Gerhard Marcks (German sculptor).

¹⁵⁴ In 1925 the school moved to Dessau, and in 1928 Hannes Meyer took over the post of director, a position he soon relinquished to the architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, the school being moved to Berlin. Ultimately, despite its pleas for political neutrality and its efforts to maintain a harmonious student community, political problems proved inevitable, and the Nazi government brought the activity of the Bauhaus to an end (1933).

¹⁵⁵ To secure the success of the Bauhaus, formidable artists and craftsmen were chosen as teachers, designated the "Masters of Form" (the artists) and the "Workshop Masters" (the craftsmen), in an attempt to return to the medieval notion of masters and apprentices. Among the first Masters of Form were the Swiss Expressionist artist and educator Johannes Itten, Josef Albers, a German artist but also an educator, Kandinsky, and others.

Black and Colour in the Approach of the Bauhaus Artists

Given the orientation towards expressionism of most members of the Bauhaus movement, in light of the symbolism of black, and likewise following the observation of the Austrian prose writer and essayist Hermann Bahr (1863 – 1934), the recurrence of black here is no accident: "*Man is bereft of soul, nature bereft of man. Never has there been an age more convulsed by despair, by the horror of death. Never has a more sepulchral silence reigned over the world. Never was joy more absent and freedom more dead. And behold despair, howling: man cries out, howling, for his soul; a single cry of suffering rises from our body. Even art howls in the darkness, calls for help, invokes the spirit: this is Expressionism.*"¹⁵⁶ Following the tradition of Goethe, the Swiss expressionist artist and educator **Johannes Itten** (1888–1967) developed his own theory of colour, set out above all in his book, *Kunst der Farbe*.



Fig. 41: Johannes Itten, Iarna; Vara; Compoziție, 1962; Compoziție, 1957; Source: <https://arthur.io/art/johannes-itten/>

Drawing on his own experience, but also on his observation of the use of colour in the artworks of various peoples, and exploring, among other things, the laws of contrast and harmony, the book became an important educational resource for art schools throughout the world.¹⁵⁷ It is worth noting that the Bauhaus movement gained momentum under Itten's influence, while at the same time taking on his unique brand of expressionism. Itten's works

¹⁵⁶ Kristian Sotriffer, *Expressionism and Fauvism*, University of Michigan Press (U.S.A.), 1972, p. 6.

¹⁵⁷ With regard to his presence at the Bauhaus, he devised a compulsory preparatory course, the Vorkurs, revolutionary for its time, which was first to teach students the fundamentals of the properties of materials, of composition, and of colour, encouraging them to free themselves from prejudice and academic traditions and to express, and indeed preserve, their inner artistic self: a foundational artistic and experimental approach of considerable impact, expressing Itten's influence on artistic education. Moreover, being an adherent of the Mazdaznan tradition, he even introduced the use of gymnastic exercises in order to relax his pupils and prepare them for the experiences awaiting them in class. Walter Gropius wished to steer the school towards mass production rather than towards the development of individual artistic expression, the latter being the goal pursued by Itten; this, perhaps also bound up with certain consequences of his mystical orientation, led to his replacement by László Moholy-Nagy.

explore the use and composition of colour (Fig. 41), preoccupations that also emerge from the works of the artist Josef Albers and from the expressionist works of Wassily Kandinsky, among others; and the presence of black in the contrasts Itten defined is set out in detail in section 2.4.

Josef Albers (1888–1976) was a German painter, poet, sculptor, and theorist, well known for his iconic series of abstract paintings *Homage to the Square* (Fig. 42). He was also an educator whose work, both in Europe and in the United States, underpinned some of the most important art education programmes of the twentieth century. He was head of the painting department between 1939 and 1949 and taught future figures of the art world such as Cy Twombly and Robert Rauschenberg. Alongside his teaching, he continued to develop his artistic practice, exploring, among other things, the way different colours interact when placed side by side, as well as the effect produced by the use of black in the various chromatic contrasts, in balancing the composition, and so on. His abstract works were a creation of his intense philosophical convictions, grounded in his own personal experiences with art. Devotion to inner beauty was a central theme in his art.¹⁵⁸



Fig. 42: Josef Albers, *Grid-mounted*, 1921, *Variant Adobe*, 1948, *Geometric Art*, 1972; *Color Study for Homage to the Square*, 1976. Source: <http://www.artnet.com/artists/josef-albers/>

On leaving the College to teach at Yale University, Albers devoted himself to the cycles *Homage to the Square* and *Structural Constellation*, presenting two-dimensional renderings of three-dimensional objects and bringing into focus the ambiguity of perception. Black is used by Albers in the various chromatic contrasts, in balancing the composition, and so on.

¹⁵⁸ An adherent of the synthesis of art and craftsmanship, he became a member of the faculty at the Bauhaus and later a professor (1925). The woman who was to become his wife, Anni Fleischmann, followed a similar path. Albers explored various media and techniques: furniture design, glass, metalwork, typography, and photography. After the establishment of the Nazi government, which closed the Bauhaus in 1933, he emigrated to the United States, where both he and his wife were offered posts at the experimental Black Mountain College in North Carolina.

Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944), a Russian lawyer and already a well-known artist when he was recruited in June 1922 as a teacher at the Bauhaus,¹⁵⁹ had revolutionized European art before the War through his involvement in the activity of the expressionist group *Der Blaue Reiter*, of which he was a founding member, also serving as editor of the group's journal.

In 1912 he published the essay *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*, in which he outlined a theoretical foundation for wholly abstract art, developing the idea of *inner necessity* – as the metaphysical point of departure for the artistic endeavour. He also argued for a shift in meaning, in the point of departure of art, from "impression" to "improvisation" to "composition".



Fig. 43: Wassily Kandinsky, *Small-worlds-VII*, 1922, Lenbachhaus, München, Germany; *Small-worlds-VI*, 1922, Lenbachhaus, München, Germany; *On White II*, 1923, Centre Pompidou, Paris; *Points*, 1920, Ohara Museum of Art; *Sur fond noir*, 1940. Source: <https://www.wassilykandinsky.net/>

Kandinsky was an active theorist, publishing a series of books on the theory of art. He developed his own complex and profound theory concerning the capacity of colours and forms to represent sound and to bring out human emotion, the well-known *Punkt und Linie zu Fläche* (1926), a work influenced by the new research on Gestalt psychology then under discussion at the Bauhaus. He was interested in the way certain combinations of colour, line, and tone might have spiritual and psychological effects, themselves in turn linked to particular musical motifs; black is ever-present in his works, lending an added dynamism, forming a ground that exalts colour, creating contrasts, or sustaining chromatic harmonies (Fig. 43).

László Moholy-Nagy (1895–1946), painter and photographer, a teacher at the Bauhaus school and influenced by constructivism, was one of those who championed the

¹⁵⁹ As a Master of Form, he taught a course on the theory of form and colour, but for a time he also directed a mural-painting workshop, enjoying universal esteem not only for his artistic qualities but also for his character and modesty.

integration of technology and industry into the arts.¹⁶⁰ Over time, Moholy-Nagy became an innovator in the fields of photography, typography, sculpture, painting, printing, and industrial design, and his teaching practice encompassed a variety of media: painting, sculpture, photography, photomontage, and metalwork (Fig. 44). In his concerns, the emphasis fell chiefly on photography, since he was convinced that it could create an entirely new way of seeing the external world.

His theory is set out in his book *The New Vision, from Material to Architecture*. He experimented with the photographic process of exposing light-sensitive paper with objects placed upon it, known as the photogram. After leaving the Bauhaus in 1928, he established his own design studio in Berlin.

Black in his works is presented in detail in section 4.1.4.: *Descriptive Research: Chiaroscuro and Abstraction in the Photography of László Moholy-Nagy*.

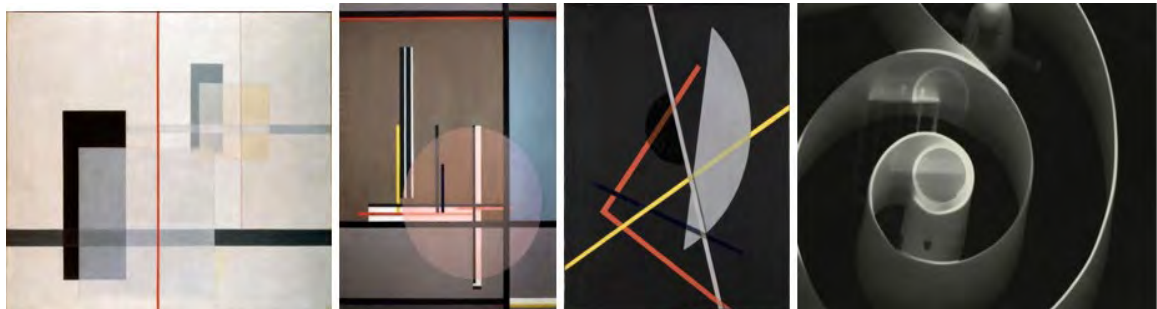


Fig. 44: László Moholy-Nagy, *K VII*, 1922.; *LIS*, 1922, Kunsthau Zürich; *E IV (Konstruktion VIII)*, 1922, Kunsthalle Karlsruhe; *Photogram*, 1943. Source: <https://www.moma.org/artists/4048>

Paul Klee (1879–1940)¹⁶¹ a German-Jewish painter born in Switzerland and regarded as a master of colour theory, began by drawing in **black and white**. Later, the impressions gathered during a journey to Tunisia led him to experiment with the use of colour. He did so in a distinctive style, influenced by expressionism, cubism, surrealism, and orientalism. His writings on form and the theory of design are compared, in their importance for modern art, with those of Leonardo da Vinci for the Renaissance.

¹⁶⁰ Note: He studied law in Budapest and, after being wounded in the war, worked as a journalist during his convalescence. He attended a private art school and, after various other events, arrived in Berlin, where, in 1923, he took over Johannes Itten's role as head of the workshop and of the teaching of the Bauhaus preliminary course, together with Josef Albers. Owing to his convictions, this change marked the end of the school's Expressionist leanings and brought it closer to its original aim, that of a school of design and industrial integration, known for the versatility of its artists.

¹⁶¹ He taught at the German Bauhaus art school, at the Düsseldorf Academy, et al. Identified as Jewish, he was dismissed from the Academy, and a number of his materials and works were confiscated by the Nazis. His drawings from this period are significant; they reflect the political turmoil of the day, treating political violence, demagoguery, emigration, and militarism with irony.



Fig. 45: Paul Klee, *Park of idols*, 1938; *Fish Magic*, 1925; *Red Balloon*, 1937; *Gold Fish*, 1925.
 Source: <https://www.wikiart.org/en/paul-quee>

The artist's illness meant that his works from the final period were dominated by images of death, by angels still attached to their memories: *Death and Fire* (1940) evoked the underworld and, within a red, infernal frame, one of the most dramatic depictions of the face of death. Indeed, black is frequently encountered in Klee's works, evoking certain states of feeling, but also serving as a contrast that sustains the composition or heightens the colours: at times coloured squares, striations, or various patterns or objects coexisting within a black space (Fig. 45). For Paul Klee, the line, developing out of a single point, was an autonomous, spontaneous agent which, through its movement, constituted the development of the plane. This metaphor of the germination of compositional form became a fundamental principle of Bauhaus design philosophy, influencing many of his contemporaries.

Lyonel Charles Feininger (1871–1956) was a German-American painter and an important exponent of expressionism, as well as a pianist and composer.¹⁶² Around 1910, under the influence of the cubists, and of Robert Delaunay in particular, he established his own style, with prismatic planes of colour, partly interpenetrating, overlapping, and intersecting. He adopted the angular fragmentation of form and space found in cubism, suggesting a state of spiritual energy and transcendence (Fig. 46).

¹⁶² He was born and raised in New York, travelling to Germany to study and perfect his art. For a long time he worked as a commercial cartoonist for magazines and newspapers in the USA and Germany. At the age of thirty-six, he began to work as a visual artist. He also took up photography, though without exhibiting. He was likewise engaged in the teaching activity of the Bauhaus, serving as the master artist for the typography workshop.

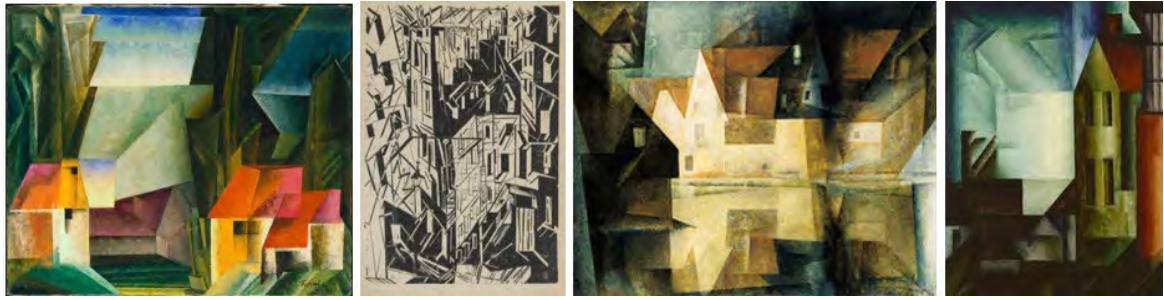


Fig. 46: Lyonel Charles Feininger, *Hopfgarten*, 1920, *Strassse in Paris*, 1918, MoMA; *Gelmeroda Village Pond*, 1922, *Gross Kromsdorf I*, 1915, Minneapolis Institute of Art. Source: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search?q=Lyonel+Charles+Feininger>

This way of working drew the attention of the artists of the avant-garde group *Blaue Reiter*, so that Feininger was invited to exhibit with them in Berlin in 1913. In 1917 he had his first solo exhibition at the Sturm Gallery in Berlin. He was part of the Berliner Sezession and was associated with the expressionist groups *Die Brücke*, *Novembergruppe*, *Gruppe 1919*, the *Blaue Reiter* circle, and *Die Blaue Vier (The Blue Four)*.¹⁶³

Fritz Kuhr (1899–1975), as both a student and a teacher at the Bauhaus between 1924 and 1930, found that the creative spirit of this school shaped his work, fostering, among other things, his passion for experimentation. Here he encountered various masters, among them Paul Klee, László Moholy-Nagy, and Wassily Kandinsky. Alongside painting (Fig. 47), Fritz Kuhr was concerned with experimental photography and took an active part in the life of the Bauhaus school.



Fig. 47: Fritz Kuhr, *Untitled*, 1952; *Abstract Composition*, 1952, *Lurking*, 1951; *Flatterndess*, 1953. Source: <http://www.artnet.com/artists/fritz-friedrich-kuhr/>

He championed independent, free painting, distancing himself from the unity of art and technology propagated by Walter Gropius. He worked as a drawing teacher and, after receiving his Bauhaus diploma, moved to Berlin, where he worked and exhibited as an

¹⁶³ In 1937 the Nazi officials included Feininger's art in the notorious exhibition of degenerate art, which prompted him to return to the United States.

independent painter. The creative spirit of this school influenced the artist's work, stimulating his passion for experimentation.

Whereas his early paintings are an expression of his attraction to colour and to random structures, under the influence of the Bauhaus his work takes on a certain austerity and an orientation towards abstraction.^{164,165.}

Anni Albers (1899–1994) attended the school but subsequently left her own mark upon it through the art of weaving, transforming the conception of "women's" crafts through her innovations. Beyond integrating abstract modernism into woven textiles, Anni Albers also introduced new technologies into the weaving workshop. She developed a set of textiles using various types of synthetic fibre and cellophane in order to create acoustic panels (Fig. 48).¹⁶⁶

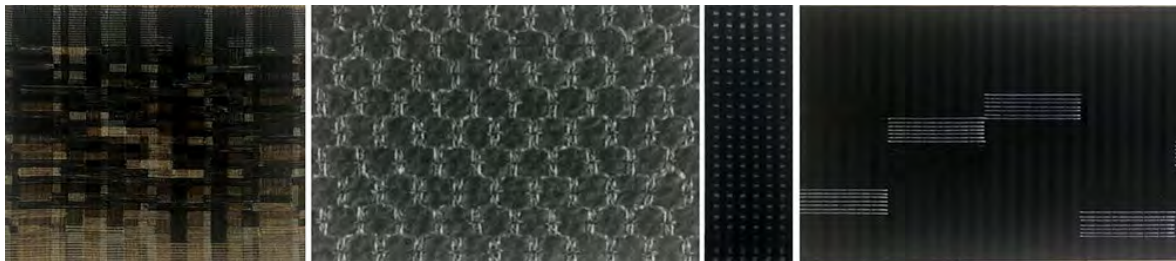


Fig. 48: Anni Albers, *Tapestry*, 1948; *Upholster Material*, 1929; *Free-Hanging Room Divider*, 1949; *Design for Theater Curtain*, 1928, MoMA. Source: <https://www.moma.org/artists/96>

Piet Mondrian (1872–1944), painter and influential art theorist and co-founder of the De Stijl movement,¹⁶⁷ was not an active member of the Bauhaus; yet his commitment to reducing visual language, together with his rigorous compositions, influenced the school's work, so that his essays on art theory, written for the journal *De Stijl*, were also published in the *Bauhausbücher* series. His concept of the "*Nieuw Design*" [English: the New Design] concerned the relationship between painting and architecture, regarding Neoplasticism as the direction that would revolutionize design and architecture. He practised a style of

¹⁶⁴ He took part in a series of major exhibitions, in Germany, across Europe, in the travelling worldwide exhibition "*50 Jahre Bauhaus*" (1968), et al. His works are held in private collections and in major museums such as the Saint Louis Art Museum and the J. Paul Getty Museum (USA), et al.

¹⁶⁵ Like Feininger's art, Kühr's too was deemed "degenerate" by the National Socialist regime, which prompted him to withdraw, working only as a decorative painter.

¹⁶⁶ Her research into these materials influenced the production of similar panels and led to new innovations. She designed fabrics for mass production and experimented with various printing techniques, always continuing her search for an innovative textile design.

¹⁶⁷ The difference between De Stijl and the Bauhaus is that De Stijl uses only straight lines and rectangular forms, in horizontal and diagonal arrangements and, unlike the Bauhaus, photographic elements, circles, and curved forms or lines are absent.

painting composed solely of primary colours, set on a grid of vertical and horizontal black lines against a basic white ground (Fig. 49).

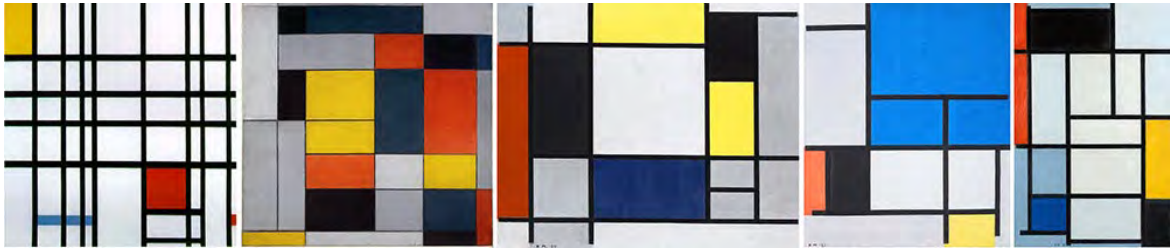


Fig. 49: Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Red, Yellow and Blue*, 1942; *No.VI / Composition No.II*; *Composition with Yellow, Red, Black, Blue and Gray*, 1920; *Composition with Large Blue Plane, Red, Black, Yellow, and Gray*, 1921; *Composition with Red, Black, Yellow, Blue and Grey*, 1921; Source: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/piet-mondrian-1651>

His works, with rectangles in primary colours separated by a grid of vertical and horizontal black lines – dividing lines that forestall any suggestion of depth in the painted rectangles – underscore the idea that, in painting, one "*must first try to see the composition, the colour, and the line, and not the representation as representation*".¹⁶⁸

NOTE. The Bauhaus school constituted a genuine artistic movement, extremely influential, which left its mark on the fine arts as well as on the architecture, design, photography, and other creative fields of the twentieth century. It is for this reason that certain reference points took shape here that are held to have resonated even within contemporary art.

3.1.3. A Thematic Survey: Black in Modern and Contemporary Art, with Emphasis on Painting. Key Reference Points.

Essential to the world of art as a means of arousing emotion, of evoking various psychological states, and also of creating shadow, line, volume, and perspective, black has always captivated the attention of artists through its functionality and its evocative power, whether it symbolizes the infinite, negation, creation, or destruction; and the darkness of the Universe has likewise always been fascinating to scientists across almost every field. Since

¹⁶⁸ Neoplasticism (1917) advocated abstraction, reducing paintings to the absolute essentials of form and colour – the primary colours and black and white, together with squares, rectangles, or straight horizontal and vertical lines. Piet Mondrian developed these principles in his essay *Neo-plasticism in Pictorial Art*.

the doctoral thesis draws upon the square, both in terms of its characteristic visual language and its symbolism, it was deemed necessary to look back in time.

Robert Fludd (1574–1637), an English Paracelsian polymath with both scientific and occult interests, was the *first* scientist **to depict the Universe as black, in the form of a square**.¹⁶⁹ Robert Fludd associated art with the Universe, though in a metaphorical form, as a link between the macrocosm and the microcosm. Thus, in his book, when the subject of the metaphysical iconography of the infinite is treated, the primordial darkness of the universe, in the moment preceding creation, is depicted as a black square with horizontal and vertical hatching, each of its sides bearing the inscription "*Et sic in infinitum*" ("*and so on, to infinity*") – as can be seen in Fig. 51. It is worth noting that Fludd's square is not symmetrical, much like the "*Black Square*" of Kazimir Malevich (Fig. 50); the fact that its sides are unequal is associated with the idea that the Universe is infinite, like a matrix. Malevich's "*Black Square*", painted almost 300 years later, seems a distant echo of Fludd's myth of pictorial creation.

In the works of **Kazimir Malevich** (1879–1935), the founder of Suprematism,¹⁷⁰ black becomes a substance interrogated endlessly, used both for its symbolic and its plastic character. Evacuating narrative and figuration in favour of abstraction, in 1915 he painted the famous *Pătrat Negru – Black Square*, a work presented at the *Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings 0.10*, held in Saint Petersburg in December 1915. The *Black Square* was placed high on the wall, across the corner of the room – the sacred spot where, in a traditional Russian house, the Russian Orthodox icon of a saint would have hung. In this way, Malevich sought to show that the *Black Square* carries a spiritual significance.

¹⁶⁹ Note: Fludd, well known for his compilations of occult philosophy, also had a famous exchange of views with Johannes Kepler concerning the scientific and hermetic approaches to knowledge. He was a prolific writer, producing vast encyclopaedias in which he treated a universal range of subjects, from magical practices such as alchemy, astrology, and the Kabbalah to radical theological thought concerning the interrelation of God, nature, and humanity. His best-known work, *Utriusque cosmi maioris scilicet et minoris Metaphysica, physica atque technica Historia* (1617–21), published in five volumes, examines the microcosm of human life on earth and the macrocosm of the universe, which included the spiritual realm, that of the Divine. In these works, Fludd devised a richly illustrated cosmology based on the chemical theory of Paracelsus, according to which the materials of the universe were separated out of chaos by God.

¹⁷⁰ Suprematism presupposed a restricted range of colours and a focus on simple geometric forms: circles, squares, and so on. As an art theorist, in his book *The World as Non-Objectivity*, Malevich set out his Suprematist theories, the idea of total abstraction and that of reducing painting to its geometric essence.

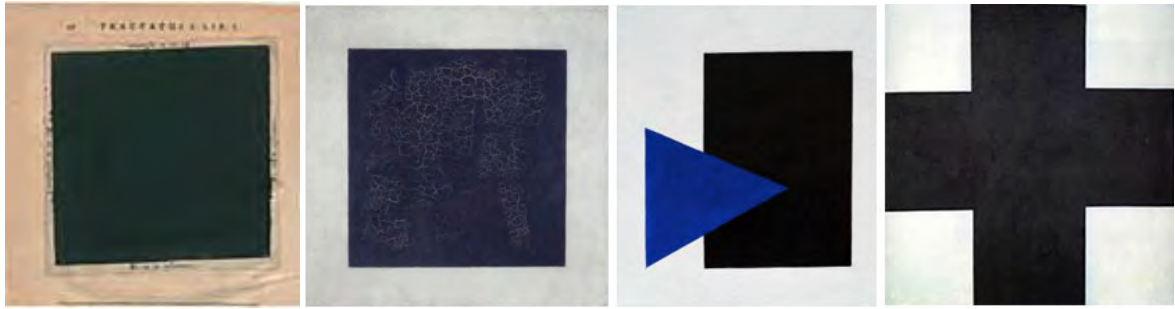


Fig. 51: Robert Fludd, "*Et sic in infinitum*" from "*Utriusque cosmi maioris scilicet et minoris metaphysica, physica atque technica historia*", 1624, p. 26. Source: Harvard University Library <https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/ids:454917>

Fig. 50: Kazimir Malevich, *Black Square on a White Ground*, 1914–15, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow; *Suprematism with Blue Triangle and Black Square*, 1915; *Black Cross*, 1920. Source: <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/malevich-kasimir/>

Indeed, this became a motif, a hallmark of Malevich; for him, *Black Square* was not a mere term but the beginning of a new stage, one that led painting towards a deeper truth, towards a pure sensation, on the premise that painting should contribute to liberating the spirit from the material world so as to allow the being to penetrate infinite space. With white representing for him the infinite, the cosmos, a few years later he painted the white square on a white ground: *White on White*. Among other works that lead to a meaning of spirituality are *Suprematism with Blue Triangle* and *Black Rectangle* (1915), for the Virgin in Western images of the Middle Ages was depicted wearing black and/or blue. Worth noting here is both the affinity and the tension between the simple geometric forms. The Suprematist image of the *Black Square* became iconic, not only for its style but indeed for the art of the twentieth century, setting a precedent for, by way of example, the black geometric paintings of Ad Reinhardt.

Black is also found in some of the works of the Russian abstract painter **Wassily Kandinsky** (1866–1944), who, in the opinion of certain art critics, was a source of inspiration for the abstract expressionist painters of 1950s America. Initially a professor of law, he became in time a prominent art theorist whose books had a profound influence on future artists. For his extraordinary contribution in orienting the world of art towards abstraction, he is regarded as one of those who generated this orientation. As regards the use of black, he holds that it leads towards an existence somewhere far from the life full of

colour. The **abstract value the artist attributes to black** is also found in the works: *Black Forms on White*, 1934; *Black Spot (Schwarzer Fleck)* from the series *Klänge (Sounds)*, 1913; *White – Soft and Hard*, 1932 (Fig. 52).¹⁷¹



Fig. 52: Wassily Kandinsky, *Black Forms on White*, 1934; *Black Spot (Schwarzer Fleck)* from the series *Klänge (Sounds)*, 1913; *White – Soft and Hard*, 1932, MoMA, New York. Source: <https://www.moma.org/artists/2081>

Henri Matisse (1869–1954)¹⁷² found in the use of black a means of expression consonant with a constant search for simplicity and purity, characteristic traits of his work. Black offered the entire range of nuances needed to render a face, a nude, or a still life. The whole universe of this French painter is revealed to the viewer: black on white, white on black. He confessed, moreover, that in his view black is a force, an assertion he went on to document in *Porte-Fenêtre à Collioure* (1914), a painting in which black occupies the greater part of the canvas.

In this case, black is not simply a negation but a *latency* rich in possibilities. Thus Matisse seems to free black from its generally accepted identity as a purely absorbent colour and to establish it as a radiant, luminescent one – a reversal of the Impressionists' approach, with their predominant interest in light (Fig. 53). Throughout his career, his art was influenced by a variety of nineteenth-century movements: Neoclassicism, Realism, Impressionism; nonetheless, he became one of the most inventive masters of the twentieth

¹⁷¹ On black, Kandinsky wrote: "a totally dead silence... the inner harmony of black is a silence with no possibilities. In music it is represented by one of those profound and final pauses, after which any continuation of the melody seems the dawn of another world. Black is burnt out, like the ashes of a funeral pyre, something motionless as a corpse. The silence of black is the silence of death. Black is the colour with the least harmony of all, a kind of neutral background against which the minute nuances of other colours stand out clearly. It also differs from white in this respect, since, against a white background, almost every colour is in discord, or even cancels the others out." Olga Gutierrez de la Roza, *An Eye for Color*, HarperCollins, New York, p. 144.

¹⁷² Famous as a painter and sculptor, Matisse is less well known as a printmaker and draughtsman, having engraved almost 900 prints and illustrated more than 90 books.

century, one of the few painters of the first half of the century who continue to exert a major influence on the art of our own day.¹⁷³



Fig. 53: Henri Matisse, *Porte-Fenêtre à Collioure*, 1914; *Corbeille de bégonias I*, 1938; *La Belle Tahitiennne*, 1934; *Voile de calice noir*, 1950–1952. Source: <https://www.mutualart.com/Artist/Henri->

Through his struggle to transcend the space of visual perception, Matisse advanced a commitment to the pictorial transformation of the world of appearances, creating works charged with metaphysical speculation – works that nonetheless remain laden with the germ of a new spirit and that still serve as a foundation for the new abstraction, and indeed for the new realism, that of the twentieth century.

The mysterious side of black has long attracted artists, and **Paul Klee** (1879–1940) was no exception. A German artist of Swiss origin, with interests in painting, drawing, and watercolour, he was influenced by Expressionism, Cubism, and Surrealism. He experimented with, and explored in depth, the theory of colour, and his lectures *Scrieri despre teoria formei și a designului - Caietele Paul Klee* are well known – writings held to be as important for modern art as Leonardo da Vinci's *Tratatul de pictură* was for the Renaissance. Like his colleague, the Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky, Klee taught at the Bauhaus school of art, design, and architecture in Germany.¹⁷⁴ The first *Blaue Reiter* exhibition took place in December 1911, but Klee took part in the second, "*Schwarz-Weiß*" of 1912, at the Galerie Goltz, where seventeen of his graphic works were shown.¹⁷⁵ His

¹⁷³ In a broader sense, Matisse's career must be seen as paralleling the explorations of non-Parisian artists, in particular Kandinsky and Mondrian, who began to be active at roughly the same moment, in terms of both period and style, but within different national traditions. They moved beyond the materialist realism of the late nineteenth century before Matisse had done so, and went further, into the world of abstract and non-objective painting.

¹⁷⁴ In 1911 he joined the editorial team of the almanac *Der Blaue Reiter*, founded by Franz Marc and Kandinsky, soon becoming one of the most important and independent members of the group.

¹⁷⁵ In 1922 the first series of Bauhaus books was published, with works by Gropius, Paul Klee, Adolf Meyer, Oskar Schlemmer, and Piet Mondrian; Klee valued the existence of several conflicting theories and opinions within the Bauhaus, given the constructive outcome.

works always reflected his personal convictions, his humour, and his musicality; and as for black, recognizing its archaic origins, he affirmed: "*Nu trebuie să înțelegem negrul, este temelul principal*" [English: We need not understand black; it is the principal ground].

The Spanish artist **Pablo Picasso** (1881–1973)¹⁷⁶ does not make the exclusive use of black a defining feature of his art, although black is by no means absent from most of his canvases, where, juxtaposed with other colours, it creates particular harmonies or chromatic contrasts. Yet there exists one work, unique of its kind, "*Guernica*", in which black, white, and a few faintly tinted greys – this very absence of colour, this black ground – intensify the drama (Fig. 54).



Fig. 54: Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*, 1937, Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid. Source: <https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/artwork/guernica>

"*Guernica*" is an allegorical painting that tends towards the idea of reportage, of a photographic record of a kind of Surrealist nightmare – a nightmare heightened by the drastic flatness of its geometry, with textured areas reminiscent of newsprint, as though the artist had chosen to suggest that we forget colour, because something beyond colour is at stake.¹⁷⁷ In essence, the work constitutes a plea against the cruelty and terror of war, against all its devastating tragedies, and against the irrationality of a society that claims to be modern. Is black part of our evolutionary experience? There is no answer, but we know that within our

¹⁷⁶ Pablo Picasso is considered the most brilliant artistic personality of the twentieth century, with a long and prolific artistic career: painting, sculpture, poetry, drawing, graphic art, ceramics – works of inestimable value that opened the way to a new, revolutionary mode of treating forms: Cubism.

¹⁷⁷ Created to form part of the exhibits of the Spanish Pavilion at the 1937 International Exhibition in Paris, the idea was triggered by news of the German bombing of the Basque town of Guernica.

collective consciousness it can evoke a sense of vulnerability, for it is often bound up with situations that refuse to submit to any system of cultural certainties.

Alexander Rodchenko (1891–1956) was a Russian artist, sculptor, designer, and photographer, one of the founders of Russian Constructivism and one of the most versatile artists to emerge after the Russian Revolution. Inspired at first by the Art Nouveau artists, he later became a Futurist; for a time he was interested in the work of Vladimir Tatlin and the Suprematism of Kazimir Malevich, before going on to experiment in Constructivism. He produced purely abstract works of art that separate out the components of each image – line, shape, space, colour, surface, texture, and the physical support of the work – encouraged by the conviction that art ought to keep pace with the revolutionary transformations then taking place in Russian politics and society.



Fig. 55: Aleksandr Rodchenko: *Non-Objective Painting no. 80 (Black on Black)*, 1918; *Line*, 1920; *Non-objective composition No. 88 (66)*. *Density and weight*, 1919; *Construction No. 127 (Two Circles)*, 1920; *Vision*. *Black on Black*, 1918.

Among other things, he produced the series of works *Black on Black* as a direct response to the *White on White* paintings that Kazimir Malevich had made in 1918. With this gesture he directly challenged the fundamental principles of Suprematism: if, for Malevich, the white in his paintings connoted the infinite expanse of the ideal, Rodchenko used black (Fig. 55), in a variety of textures and finishes, in order to liberate painting into its physical properties, concentrating attention on the material quality of its surface. The arcing forms in Rodchenko's canvases suggest movement and dynamism.¹⁷⁸

Mark Rothko (1903–1970) was an abstract painter whose name is associated with American Abstract Expressionism, the new direction in American art of the 1940s, and with the *New York School*. For all the attention he paid to formal elements such as colour, shape, balance, depth, composition, and scale, he stressed the importance of the mysteries of the

¹⁷⁸ He abandoned painting in 1921 and began to collaborate with the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky on a series of actions; he introduced modern design into Russian advertising, unifying modern design, politics, and commerce, an orientation that also resonated beyond the country's borders.

invisible. Without explaining the content of his work, he was convinced that the abstract image could represent the **fundamental nature of the "human drama"** – profound themes such as tragedy, ecstasy, and the sublime.¹⁷⁹ The *Black* series were his last before his tragic suicide, making it possible to establish a direct link between black and his state of mind (Fig. 56).¹⁸⁰

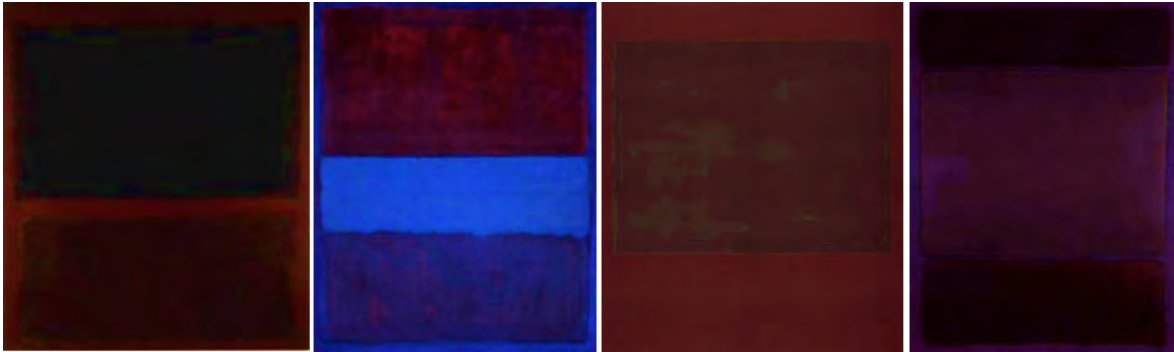


Fig. 56: From left to right, Mark Rothko: Dark Sienna on purple, 1960; No 61 (Rust and Blue), 1953, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; #4 4, 1964; Untitled, 1964. Source: <https://www.markrothko.org/paintings/>

The well-known *Rothko Chapel*, where fourteen of his black paintings are displayed, is a non-denominational chapel in Houston, Texas, founded by John and Dominique de Menil. The interior serves not only as a chapel but also as a major work of modern art. Indeed, in the works installed here, the artist, moving away from the luminosity of the preceding ones, intensified subtlety and diminished the distinction between figure and ground, with an impact on the space and the atmosphere that brings it close to that of a chapel proper. While the early modernists' use of black is occasional, the situation changes towards the middle of the century.

Barnett Newman (1905–1970), an influential Jewish-American artist, was one of those who took up Color Field painting. *The Stations of the Cross* is a series of his black-and-white paintings, made between 1958 and 1966, which explore the theme of religion through abstraction. In 1949 he painted the work *Abraham*, later said to be the first wholly

¹⁷⁹ In response to the Second World War, Rothko's art entered a transitional phase during the 1940s, taking up mythological themes and surrealism in order to express tragedy. Towards the end of the decade, Rothko painted canvases with regions of pure colour, which he abstracted still further into rectangular colour forms, an idiom he employed for the rest of his life. These bear no religious imprint; rather, they seem the record of a renunciation, the true remedy for which ought to be spiritual, even though the hope of any such remedy has died.

¹⁸⁰ The American artist Motherwell regarded Rothko as a profound modernist, whose luminous colours spoke of feelings and emotional possibilities wholly new to painting, yet who expressed in his work a dark, romantic spirit, tormented by conflict and anxiety.

black painting in history. Detaching himself from the compositional order of the pictorial space, Newman regarded abstraction as a language intended to express lofty metaphysical and spiritual themes; this holds for *Abraham* too, a title given in memory of his father, as well as of the Old Testament patriarch.

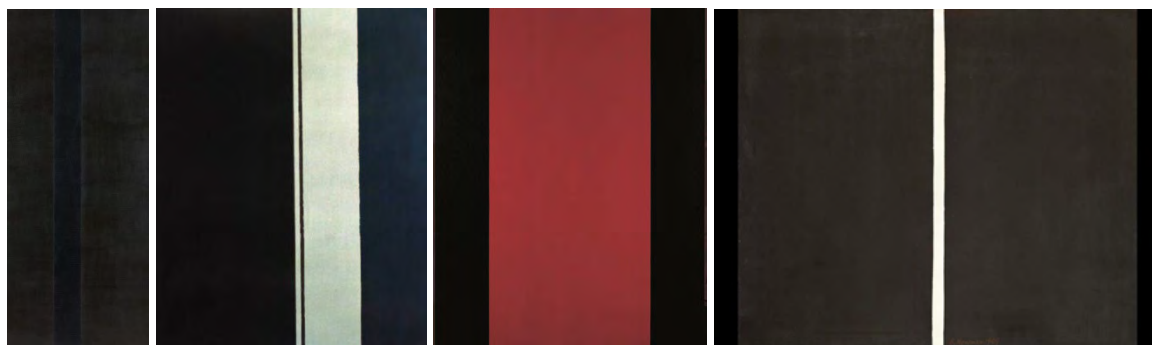


Fig. 57: Barnett Newman, *Abraham*, 1949; *The word II*, 1954; *The Way II*, 1969; *Onement IV*, 1949.
Source: <https://www.clevelandart.org/centennial/centennial-loans/barnett-newman/>

In fact the work *Abraham* is not wholly black: on either side one can make out a black faintly mixed with green. Narrow, solemn, and tall, it suggests a tribute, the artist having been marked by the death of his father, Abraham. The vertical line, ever present in his works, has been held to constitute a means, both formal and metaphysical, of transcending the traditional horizon line of the pictorial space (Fig. 57).¹⁸¹

After the Second World War, when New York was the epicentre of Abstractionism, **Clyfford Still** (1904–1980) developed a new approach to painting and is held to have laid the foundations of American Abstractionism. Still taught at the San Francisco Art Institute between 1946 and 1950 and became associated with two of the galleries that were launching the new American art.¹⁸² He was considered one of the most important Color Field painters, with his non-figurative paintings and their various juxtaposed colours, often together with black, in a wide variety of formations (Fig. 58).

¹⁸¹ Rothko was drawn to abstract expressionism, which was gaining ever more adherents in New York, among them Clyfford Still and Jackson Pollock, while his own works, with their emphasis on simplicity and the sublime, inspired Frank Stella, Donald Judd, et al.

¹⁸² He spent most of the 1950s, the heyday of abstract expressionism, in New York, but over time he grew increasingly critical, severed his collaborative ties with commercial galleries, and in 1961 moved to a farm, withdrawing from the art world.



Fig. 58: Clyfford Still, *1950-E*, MET; *PH-122*, 1947, Clyfford Still Museum, Denver; *PH-234*, 1948, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Source: <https://clyffordstillmuseum.org/art-artist/art-collection/>

Associated with the American Abstract Expressionist movement, the *New York School*, of the 1940s and 1950s – together with Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, John Ferren, Lee Krasner, et al. – **Franz Kline** (1910–1962) was an artist dominated by the force and expressiveness of black (Fig. 59). With a reputation as a remarkable Abstract Expressionist, he concentrated on a visionary visual language and on reducing his palette to black and white. This made his paintings – powerful and assured, grounded in the more or less spontaneous expression and the abstract design of the artist's psychic states – revolutionary, and made the artist – one of the leading figures of Abstract Expressionism. At a certain point Kline understood that explaining his art was not its intended purpose: his paintings were meant to make one feel, not understand. With his spontaneous, dramatic style, without focusing on form, he relied, in executing his works, on extensive compositional studies;¹⁸³ in places, there seem to be references to Asian calligraphy as well (Bokujinkai, Morita Shiryu)¹⁸⁴ on extensive compositional studies.¹⁸⁵ At the same time,



Fig. 59: Franz Kline, *Meryon*, 1960–1. Source: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/kline-meryon-t00926>

¹⁸³ David Anfam, "*Kline, Franz*", Oxford Art Online, Oxford University Press, 2013.

¹⁸⁴ Eugenia Bogdanova-Kummer, "Franz Kline and Japanese Calligraphy" in *AnnMarie Perl (ed.), In Focus: Meryon 1960–1 by Franz Kline*, Tate Research Publication, 2017.

¹⁸⁵ David Anfam, "*Kline, Franz*", Oxford Art Online, Oxford University Press, 2013.

in places, there seem to be references to Asian calligraphy as well (Bokujinkai, Morita Shiryu).¹⁸⁶

American Abstract Expressionism had a prominent representative in the Dutch-born American painter **Willem de Kooning** (1904–1997), in whose work abstraction, figuration, and landscape fused in various ways across the many decades of his career (Fig. 60).

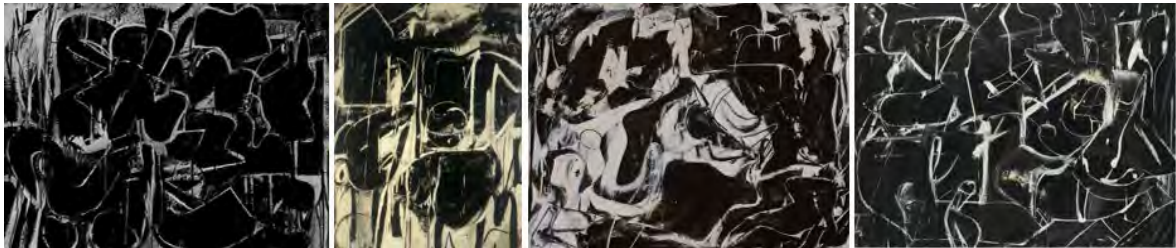


Fig. 60: Willem de Kooning, *Painting*, 1948, MoMA; *Black Friday*, 1976, Princeton University Art Museum; *Untitled*, 1948, Metropolitan Museum of Art; *Untitled*, 1948, The Art Institute of Chicago. Source: <https://www.wikiart.org/en/willem-de-kooning/>

His engagement with popular culture was likewise unique and influenced a great many post-war artists, from the Neo-Dadaism of Robert Rauschenberg to the Pop art of James Rosenquist, while younger painters, such as Cecily Brown, have explored the gestural quality of his later paintings.

From 1946 onwards, de Kooning embarked on a series of black-and-white paintings that he continued until 1949. During this period, at the age of forty-four, he held his first solo exhibition at the Charles Egan Gallery in 1948, consisting largely of compositions painted in black and white – works important to the history of abstract expressionism for their reduced palette, their overlapping surface-and-depth planes, and a composition of singular dynamism.¹⁸⁷ The colour, the forms, and the signs seem to enact a kind of mysterious drama. For a time, Kooning was influenced by Gorky's surrealism and by Picasso, but only until he met Franz Kline, who worked in the manner of American realism and was drawn to the monochrome. From this, among other things, came the appearance of de Kooning's black calligraphic images. In the early 1950s he joined other artists such as

¹⁸⁶ With regard to Kline's approach, Elaine de Kooning recalled, in an interview, that in 1948–49 a "total, instantaneous conversion to abstraction" took place, together with a complete change in his painting style, from figurative or semi-abstract works, executed in a manner that fused cubism and social realism, to complete abstraction.

¹⁸⁷ The appearance of calligraphic strokes in the drawn lines, in the brushstrokes laid down across the surface, is explained by the fact that the abstract expressionists were less interested in symbols and ideographs than, above all, in the way paintings might communicate an emotion or a human experience. Harold Rosenberg termed these paintings a "symbolist abstraction dissociated from sources in nature... the organic forms are bearers of emotional charges, in the same category as numbers, mathematical signs, and the letters of the alphabet".

Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline, et al. in the grouping known as the "New York School", which was in fact the outcome of their attempt to break free from the artistic movements of the moment: cubism and surrealism.

One of the members of that movement was also one of the most important and provocative American artists of the twentieth century, **Jackson Pollock** (1912–1956), renowned for his series of paintings in which one sees dense interweavings of lines projected energetically across the surface of the canvas, black never absent (Fig. 61). The apparent spontaneity of this way of working was in fact controlled, for Jackson Pollock thought carefully before each composition, before launching into the dripping and pouring for which he had become famous: "*Jack The Dripper*" directed his actions with the final image already in mind.



Fig. 61: Jackson Pollock, *Number 1 (Lavender Mist)*, 1950, Source: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/78386>; *26A Black and white*, 1948, reproduced from Omri Moses, "Jackson Pollock's Address to the Nonhuman" in *Oxford Art Journal*, 2004:27-1, DOI 10.1093/oaj/27.1.1.

Convinced that titles distracted attention from the work itself, he decided to give them numbers.¹⁸⁸ Between 1947 and 1951 the artist produced the works that brought him celebrity status, with his gesturalism that resembled a ritual – balanced, complete, and lyrical works that bore, in place of a signature, the imprints of his hands.

Between 1951 and 1953 he produced a group of works called *Black pourings*, a highly influential part of his career, in which he experimented with a new technique of pouring thin black enamel.

With the intention of reinvigorating his practice, Pollock deliberately moved from his defining "dripping" technique to that of "pouring", the black pourings marking a major turning point in his style. Gavin Delahunty, senior curator of contemporary art at the Dallas

¹⁸⁸ For example, the title of his most expensive painting was *Number 5, 1948* (sold for over 150 million dollars).

Museum of Art, appraising their value, observed: "*The power of Pollock's drip paintings from 1947 to 1950 is so dominant that it has arrested the capacity to look at other aspects of the artist's genius*",¹⁸⁹ adding: "*these (the black drippings) are a peak of his control – his balance of chance, gravity, and skill*".¹⁹⁰

Ad Reinhardt (1913–1967), an American artist, was interested both in Christian and Buddhist mysticism and in nihilist transcendence, aspects that would, at a certain point, make themselves felt in his work.¹⁹¹ His influence on minimalism is foreshadowed above all by his series of black abstract works.¹⁹² The series of "black" squares (Fig. 62), offering an experience of contemplation and meditation, *the last paintings that can ever be painted*, were, for the artist: "*timeless paintings, devoid of space, unchanging, aware of nothing but art*".¹⁹³ What at first appears to be a uniform dark field – monochrome paintings, unified zones of colour – reveals itself on closer inspection to be a subtle geometric structuring, based on the form of a cross, demarcated by almost subliminal shifts of colour, time being required to perceive the differences (Fig. 63).¹⁹⁴ The artist regarded the black paintings not only as his own "final paintings" but also as "final paintings" in the sense of the logical end of abstract art itself.

¹⁸⁹ Gavin Delahunty, "*Jackson Pollock, Blind Spots*", Tate Publishing, London, United Kingdom, 2015, p. 130.

¹⁹⁰ *Idem*.

¹⁹¹ His early works are canvases covered with coloured, asymmetrical geometric forms, or collages with layers of printed paper cut and pasted into irregular rectilinear shapes.

¹⁹² Reinhardt was familiar with Newman's work when he began to produce this kind of painting, for he had helped to hang Newman's first exhibition, at the Betty Parsons gallery, in 1950, an exhibition that also included black painting. By removing the oil from the paint with some effort, Reinhardt produced a black darker than Newman's, the resulting surface being matt and fragile.

¹⁹³ Patterson Sims, "*Ad Reinhardt, a Concentration of Works from the Permanent Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art: A 50th Anniversary Exhibition, December 10*", 1980-February 8, 1981, no. 16216, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1980, p. 27.

¹⁹⁴ Reinhardt was familiar with Newman's work when he began to produce this kind of painting, for he had helped to hang Newman's first exhibition, at the Betty Parsons gallery, in 1950, an exhibition that also included black painting. By removing the oil from the paint with some effort, Reinhardt produced a black darker than Newman's, the resulting surface being matt and fragile.



Fig. 62: View of the exhibition *Ad Reinhardt* (1 June 1991 – 2 September 1991), MoMA; photograph by Mali Olatunji. Source: <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/338>



Fig. 63: Ad Reinhardt, *Abstract Painting No. 9*, 1960-1966. Source: wikiart.org/en/ad-reinhardt/

Reinhardt called his black paintings "*squares of time*".¹⁹⁵ The concept of the black paintings is in fact one that criticized a society forever on the move; they were not intended for someone who looks at a work of art in passing. His austere reductionist style was influential for minimalist and conceptual artists. He defined his project in rigorously negative terms:

*"A square, neutral, formless canvas, 150 cm × 150 cm, neither large nor small, without dimensions, without composition, a horizontal form negating a vertical form, without form, without direction, three dark colours, without light, without contrast, without gloss, without texture, nonlinear, without edges. A pure, abstract, nonobjective, timeless, spaceless, unchanging, relationless, disinterested surface — an object that is self-conscious, ideal, transcendent, aware of nothing but art. When all of this is given up, what remains to be seen?...More than the eyes could have seen."*¹⁹⁶

Experimenting with this form of art became a counterpart to the famous declaration of Mircea Eliade:

"The consciousness of a real and meaningful world is intimately bound up with the discovery of the sacred. Through the experience of the sacred, the human

¹⁹⁵ Michael, Corris, *Ad Reinhardt*. Reaktion Books, London, 2008, p. 164.

¹⁹⁶ Smith, Ralph Alexander, and Ronald Berman. *Public Policy and the Aesthetic Interest: Critical Essays on Defining Cultural and Educational Relations*. University of Illinois Press, 1992, pp. 34-35.

*spirit has grasped the difference between what reveals itself as real, powerful, rich, and meaningful and what lacks these qualities, that is, the chaotic and dangerous flux of things, their fortuitous appearances and disappearances, void of meaning. The sacred is an element in the structure of consciousness, and not a stage in the history of that consciousness."*¹⁹⁷

On the other hand, Reinhardt described the continuous attention his black paintings demand as a kind of holiness requiring purifications, rituals, and creeds, imagining a "passage from the visible to the spiritual, the temporal to the eternal, the creature to creation / A reality that does not belong to our world, but to a holy ground."¹⁹⁸ His paintings remain an essential link between abstract expressionism and minimalist art. Robert Motherwell (1915–1991) made collages from 1943, at the urging of Peggy Guggenheim, and from that moment collage became an important aspect of his artistic activity, a means of incorporating elements of the everyday world into art and thus integrating the social and the artistic. From 1948 he explored, exclusively, the expressive black-and-white contrast in hundreds of paintings (e.g. Fig. 64) and drawings.

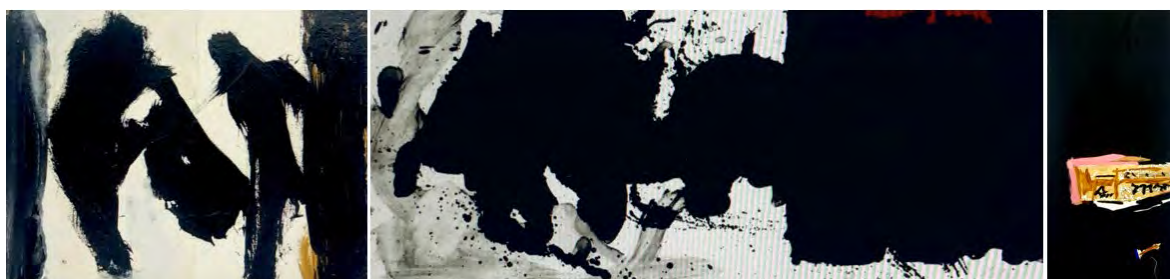


Fig. 64: Robert Motherwell, "Threatening Presence (Elegy to the Spanish Republic CIII)", 1965, Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid; *Black with No Way Out, from El Negro* (B. 285; E. & B. 313; Tyler 434), 1983; *Music Over Music*, 1981; Source: <https://www.wikiart.org/en/robert-motherwell>.

Alberto Burri (1915–1995) is associated with the European polymaterial movement. The work *Nero I* (Black 1) of 1948 marked a turning point in the artist's career and established the predominance of black monochrome, which would be maintained as a closely held identity throughout his career, alongside white and red.

His black works are connected with spatiality, as in the works of other artists of the period. From the late 1950s onwards, with the memory of the disasters of the war still fresh

¹⁹⁷ Mircea Eliade, "La nostalgie des origines. Methodologie et histoire des religions", Paris: Gallimard, 1971.

¹⁹⁸ Rose, Barbara, "Ad Reinhardt, Art as Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt", Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975.

in his mind, the Italian artist began to use untraditional means and materials: fire, with its destructive and transformative power, as well as plastic (Fig. 65).



Fig. 65: Alberto Burri, *Nero Plastica* 1965; *Grande Ferro M 5*, 1958; *Nero Plastica L.A.*, 1950. Source: the Guggenheim Museum (<https://www.guggenheim.org/>).

Later he developed another technique, using a special mixture of kaolin, resins, and pigment, drying the surface with the heat of an oven. The heating process was halted at a certain moment, thus producing the effect of cracked paint: the *Cretti* (Cracks) series.¹⁹⁹ A precursor of some of the solutions sought by movements such as Arte Povera, Neo-Dada, and Nouveau réalisme, opening the way to multiple interpretations, Burri is recognized as an exceptional innovator in the field of art characteristic of the second half of the twentieth century.

Often, the association of an artist's works with black brings to mind, invariably, **Pierre Soulages** (b. 1919). This great master is recognized as one of the major figures of abstraction and the greatest living French painter. In his works (e.g. Fig. 66), Soulages uses black in all its shades and variants. For him, black never exists in absolute terms. Its intensity changes according to the dimensions of the support, its shape, and its texture. One of his best-known concepts is *Outrenoir*, initiated in 1979, when he began to cover the entire surface of his canvases with a thick layer of black paint. Paradoxically, light is decisive, reflecting off the surface of the paintings and making their furrows, reliefs, and planes shine.

¹⁹⁹ Another category of materials with which the artist experimented was an industrial mixture of wood waste and adhesives – Cellotex, a material that, in his earlier works of the early 1950s, he had used as a support for his pieces in acetate and acrylic. Cellotex was the basis for the cyclic series conceived as a polyptych on a dominant geometric structure, through tones produced by thin scratches, or by juxtapositions of smooth and rough sections – *Orsanmichele* (1981), or in black monochrome variations – *Annottarsi* (Up to Nite, 1985).



Fig. 66: Pierre Soulages, *17 juillet 2013*, 2013, Galerie Perrotin/ Dominique Lévy Gallery, New York; 5 Avril 2019, in the exhibition

The optical mix of the luminosity of the reflections and black reveals a palette of an extreme black. After the late 1940s, Pierre Soulages used black almost exclusively. "*Black is never the same, because light alters it. There are several shades of black. I paint with black but I work with light. I work more with light than with paint*",²⁰⁰ said Soulages in an interview given to the editorial section of *The New York Times* in 2019. The artist further added that he is not an abstract expressionist, because those artists sought to express their emotions on the canvas, whereas he does the opposite, inviting the viewer to experience their own inner emotions through his work.²⁰¹

The Italian Tachiste **Emilio Vedova** (1919–2006) was likewise drawn to black. An important Venetian painter and a protagonist of the Italian artistic avant-garde, he worked in a Venice marked by the Biennale and by the presence of figures such as Peggy Guggenheim.²⁰² The artist devoted his artistic life almost entirely to abstraction, applying strokes of black for decades: *Dal ciclo della protesta - n°9*, 1959, *Senza titolo*, 1972–76, *Triptych beyond*, 1992 (Fig. 67), and so on, his painting recalling works by the American Abstract Expressionists and the black-and-white compositions of Franz Kline.

Vedova regarded his art as "a cry for freedom", responding both to the social problems of the day and to his own conscience: "...*these are my structures, my own*

²⁰⁰ Nina Siegal, "Black Is Still the Only Color for Pierre Soulages" in *The New York Times*, 29 Nov. 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/29/arts/design/pierre-soulages-louvre.html>. Accessed 01 March 2021, at 11:41.

²⁰¹ Idem.

²⁰² Immediately after the war, dialogue was encouraged between American abstract expressionism and European art, with the exhibitions of the Venice Biennale calling for the presence of experts of international standing.

conscience..."²⁰³ Robert Rauschenberg, in turn, shares this view: "artists have always been the first to gather around any national or international problem, acting as a conscience".²⁰⁴



Fig. 67: Emilio Vedova, *Triptych beyond*, 1992; *Pagina di diario 95 - 5*, 1995; *Dal ciclo della protesta - n°9*, 1959. Source: <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/artist/emilio-vedova>

In the late 1940s, **Robert Rauschenberg** (1925–2008), together with several other important artists of the New York School – Ad Reinhardt, Mark Rothko, and Frank Stella – began to pay greater attention to black. This led to the appearance of a significant number of almost monochromatic black paintings, which are today prized exhibits in many collections: an abstract series entitled *Glossy Black Painting*.

These paintings were conceived as a series, but were produced sporadically between 1951 and 1953 and executed either in matte paint or in glossy, textured, striped black – blue-black, brown-black, or black-black – on paper or canvas, and sometimes across several panels (Fig. 68).

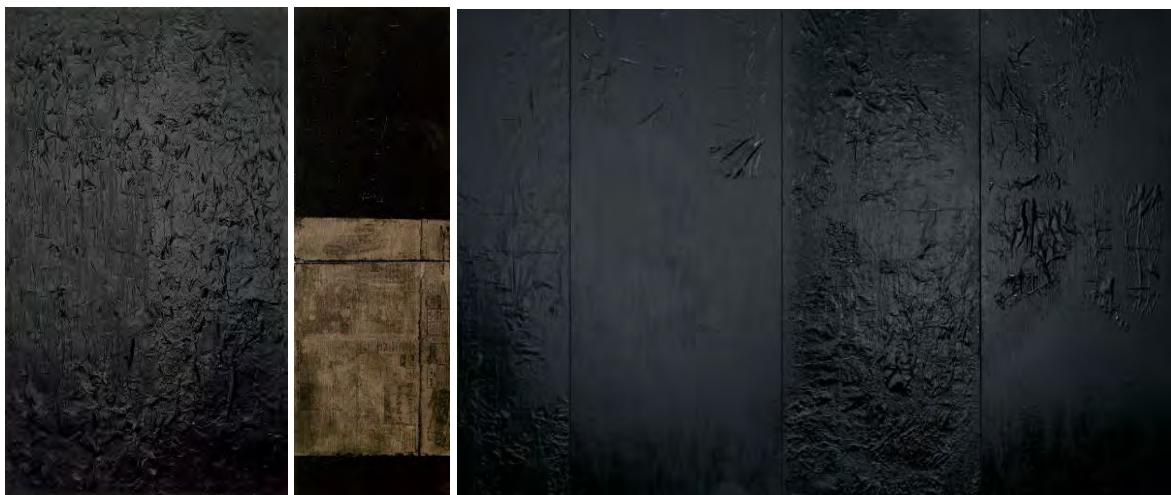


Fig. 68: Robert Rauschenberg: *Untitled (glossy black painting)*, c. 1951; *Untitled (matte black painting with Asheville Citizen)*, c. 1952; "*Untitled [four panel glossy black painting]*", c. 1951. Source: <https://www.rauschenbergfoundation.org/>

²⁰³ Ruhrberg, Karl, et al. *Art of the 20th Century*, Taschen, 2000, p. 240.

²⁰⁴ Joseph, Branden W. *Robert Rauschenberg*. MIT Press, 2002, p. 70.

He even used newspaper surfaces, sometimes visible beneath the transparency of the applied paints, or covered by a thick layer of black.²⁰⁵ An analysis of the approach to, and the meaning of, black in the postwar works reveals that, while for Frank Stella and Robert Rauschenberg it constituted a new mode of plastic expression, for Mark Rothko it represented the void and nothingness upon which it urged reflection, and for Ad Reinhardt it offered negation and invisibility.

Frank Stella (b. 1936) is a well-known Italian-American painter and printmaker, associated with the artistic movement known as *Post-Painterly Abstraction* and influenced by the Abstract Expressionism of Jackson Pollock and Franz Kline.²⁰⁶ In 1960 he began to work on his own black paintings, in which bands of black paint, laid down horizontally, vertically, or diagonally, were separated by stretches of unpainted canvas.

A similar style was practised in the mid 1970s by a French Minimalist painter, Jean Degottex (1918–1988), regarded as a major artist of contemporary art – more precisely, of the abstraction of the second half of the twentieth century. In Stella's parallel black bands there is also a subtle play with the saturation of the paint, which can yield a particular perceptual information (Fig. 69). In 2017, speaking of his paintings, Stella declared: "*...I like chaos. People have always tried to find out what chaos conceals. But all the mysteries of chaos belong to abstract expression.*"²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ As for Rauschenberg, a multidisciplinary artist, whatever the work he produced, he remained consistently faithful to his convictions. After becoming, at the 1964 Venice Biennale, the first American artist to receive the grand prize, the public recognition of his oeuvre, with its ever-new forms of expression, brought him among the most influential artists of the closing decades of the twentieth century.

²⁰⁶ After moving to New York in 1958, drawn by the smooth, flat surfaces of Barnett Newman's paintings, he began to produce works that stressed the image as object rather than the image as representation, asserting that an image is a flat surface with paint on it – nothing more.

²⁰⁷ Elena Cué, "Interview with Frank Stella" in *Art Argos*, Vol. XXI, no. 6, 2017, p. 17.

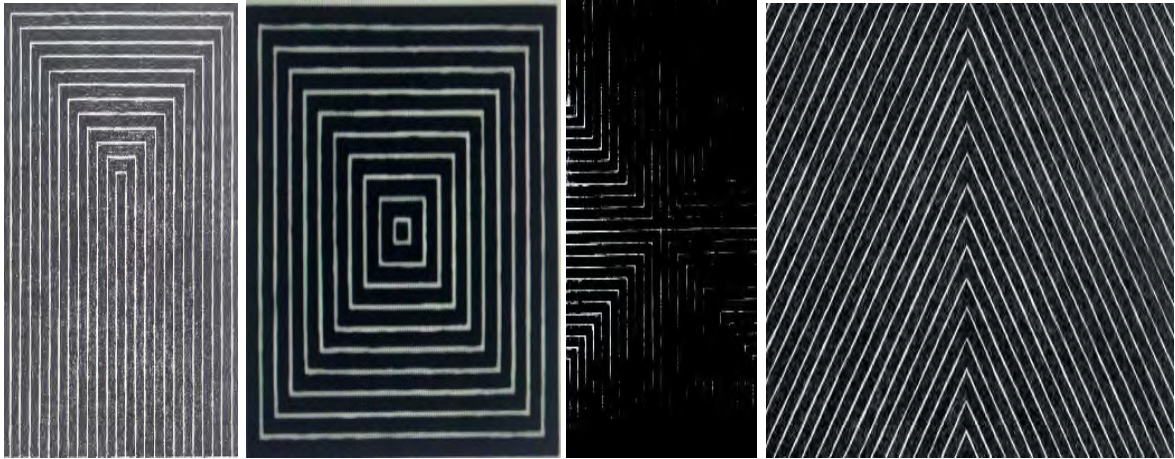


Fig. 69: Frank Stella, "Clinton Plaza, Black Series I", Untitled, 1971, from the series *Black II*, 1967, Swan Engraving V, 1973, Tate, London. Source: <https://www.wikiart.org/en/frank-stella>

For **Richard Serra** (b. 1938), a prominent American Minimalist artist, black is a colour that influences the way space is perceived. Both artificial and natural light are dominated by black, which possesses its own space and always stands in relation to a larger volume whose weight it alters.



Fig. 70: Richard Serra, *Ramble Drawings*, 2016, photograph by Zarko Vijatovic, Gagolian Gallery, Paris. Source: <https://gagolian.com/exhibitions/2016/richard-serra-ramble-drawings/>

According to the artist, "*black is the simplest way to mark a white field, whether you use charcoal or graphite*". In a more abstract sense, it is also the simplest way of avoiding any association of ideas. Serra explains that "*you can cover a surface with black, without fear of mistaken metaphorical interpretations*".²⁰⁸ The exhibition *Monochrome Malerei* (1960, Leverkusen, Germany) [English: Monochrome Painting] opened the way for monochromy and achromy, helping to draw the attention of the public and of artists to this

²⁰⁸ Serra trained as a painter at Yale, where he worked with Josef Albers on his book *The Interaction of Color* (1963). In 1964 and 1965, on a Yale travelling fellowship, Serra travelled to Paris, France, where he followed the reconstruction of Constantin Brâncuși's studio at the Musée National d'Art Moderne.

stylistic genre. After 1960, with **Op art**, black was involved to an almost equal degree with white. Thus, in the works of **Bridget Riley** (b. 1931), (Fig. 72), **Victor Vasarely** (1906–1997), (Fig. 73) and **Richard Anuszkiewicz** (1930–2020), (Fig. 71) the interplay of black and white creates various optical illusions and distortions, visually challenging the viewer in the perception of the work of art. Op art once again confirms the beauty and the boundless possibilities of the black-and-white combination. Vasarely, an artist of Hungarian-French nationality, was one of the founders and the foremost artist of the Op art movement; in this respect, his painting "Zebra" (1937) is considered one of the earliest works. Extended into other fields as well – architecture, design, fashion – Op art proved to be one of the most resonant movements of abstract art.

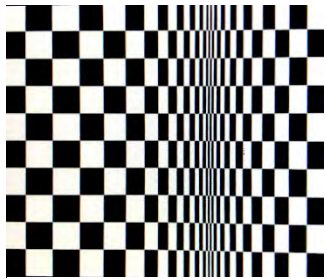


Fig. 72: Bridget Riley, *Movement in squares*, 1961
Untitled (Based on Primitive Blaze), 1962. Source:
<https://www.myartbroker.com/artist-bridget-riley/>

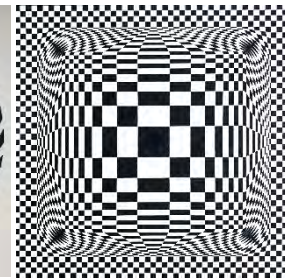


Fig. 73: Victor Vasarely, *Zebra*, 1937. Source:
<https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-5498608>

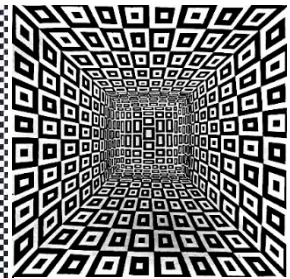


Fig. 71: Richard Anuszkiewicz, *Knowledge and disappearance*, 1961, Source:
''

Brice Marden (1938), an American painter, renowned for his continually evolving abstract practice, influenced by Minimalism, Abstract Expressionism, and calligraphic traditions. The artist was influenced by the work of Goya and Velázquez, by the ancient Chinese civilization of the eighth century, and then by Jasper Johns and by Robert Rauschenberg, with whom he even worked as a studio assistant. His canvases are covered with black or coloured networks of lines that meander at random and intersect hypnotically; he experiments with the gestures of drawing lines (Fig. 74), with the manner of using drawing materials, and so on.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁹ His works, in which black often plays an essential role, have been exhibited, or form part of the collections, of major art galleries and museums. One telling example of the artist's standing: in 2020, his canvas *Complements* (2004–07) fetched 30.9 million dollars.

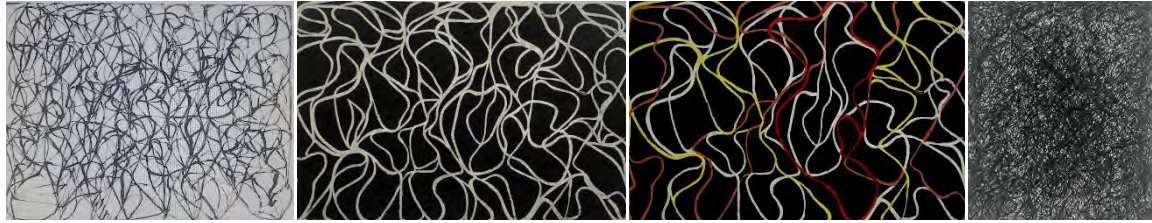


Fig. 74: Brice Marden, *Cold Mountain 6 (Bridge)*, 1989, MoMA; *Line Muses*, 1989, Upsilon Gallery; *Beyond Eagles Mere*, 2001, Upsilon Gallery ; *Etching for Obama*, 2008. Source: <https://gagosian.com/artists/brice-marden/>

In 1981, Marden abandoned his wax-based painting technique, using turpeneol mixed with oil to obtain certain effects. He was continually inspired by the natural environment, whether the grey concrete of the city or the sunlight of the Greek islands he so admired, while his profound knowledge of ancient history, architecture, spirituality, and the religions of the world likewise left its mark on his work.

Alongside important artists of postwar American art, such as Ellsworth Kelly, Frank Stella, and Richard Serra, **Joan Witek** (b. 1943), herself an important protagonist on the New York art scene since the 1970s, distinguished herself through extremely inventive works in which she used, almost exclusively, black (Fig. 75). She held a number of solo exhibitions and took part in major group exhibitions, her works being held in many important public collections. By her own account, for her "*black is quite simply the colour of language*".²¹⁰

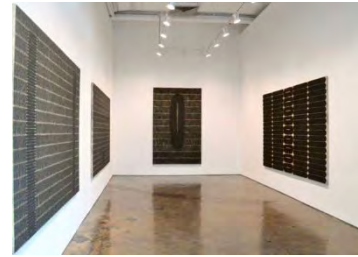


Fig. 75: View of the solo exhibition Joan Witek: *Paintings from the 1980s*, Minus Space Gallery, NY, 2020; Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OYJZye12oR0>

²¹⁰ Matthew Deleget, "JOAN WITEK - Black paintings" in *Art Nexus*, Vol. 38-41, no. 22:41, Columbia University Press, USA, 2001.

In the French context, **Daniel Walravens** (1944) is preoccupied with monochromy. He worked on *Série noire* between 1984 and 1988, a cycle made up of canvases painted in more than twenty different shades of black (Fig. 76). From the end of the nineteenth century to the present day, the history of monochromy has entailed a wide range of possibilities, oscillating from the beautiful to the sublime, to spirituality, to materialism, to humour, to despair, at times disconcerting the viewer, who is frustrated at being unable to interpret the work.



Fig. 76: Daniel Walravens, *Série noire* (1984-1988), *Série 66 monochromes Berlin*, *Martin-Gropius-Bau*, Berlin, 2006; source: <https://art.moderne.utl13.fr>

²¹¹ Daniel Walravens's monograph "*La peinture en général et la couleur en particulier*" [English: *Painting in General and Colour in Particular*] reflects the career of this artist of French art over the recent decades.

Mike Jankulovski (b. 1954),²¹² a Macedonian artist and architect who has explored various disciplines, materials, and techniques, is considered the originator of Minimalism in Macedonia. Jankulovski's creative work reflects, through representation, colour, and texture, his vision of the world as a continually changing reality, perceiving and giving form to a universal order that encompasses constant transformation. Inspired by the studies of Leonardo da Vinci²¹³, he produced, for example, the series *Leonardo's Circles*, (Fig. 77) in which textured circles appear, suggestively superimposed over the black background, a series he presented at the 12th Florence Biennale. He has held more than forty solo exhibitions in prestigious venues and has been awarded numerous important prizes.

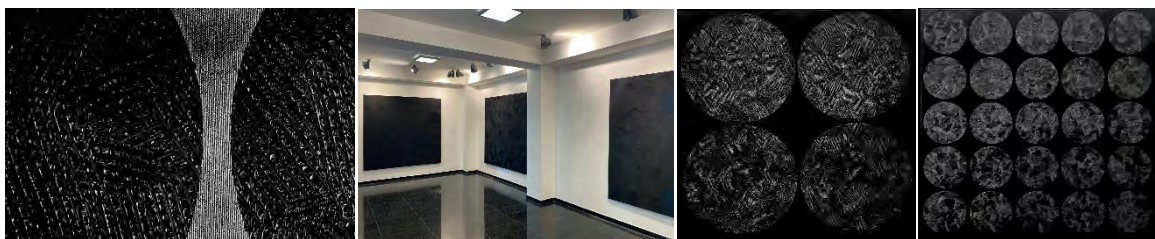


Fig. 77: Mike Jankulovski: details. The exhibition *Leonardo's Circles II, III, IV*, Osten, Museum of Art, 2020.

²¹¹ The artistic work of Daniel Walravens, acclaimed by many critics and art historians, rests on a thorough knowledge of colour production – exercised in particular through the creation of colour diagrams for various industrial manufacturers. In his practice, he seeks to blur the boundaries between industry and the fine arts, an aim that the Bauhaus movement had also pursued in Germany.

²¹² He contributed to the development of the visual arts worldwide, being the founder of the Osten Museum of Drawing and President of the Osten Biennial of Drawing in Macedonia.

²¹³ Leonardo da Vinci's study of flowing water (1510-13) in London, the Royal Collection (RCIN 912660).

François Perrodin (b. 1956) extends abstraction into another area of achromatic Minimalism. The black surface of the works, whether matte or glossy, is a fragmented surface of representation, introducing plays of light and shadow into the object itself and onto the wall of the exhibition space (for example, the series 62,8 - Fig. 78). The pieces, composed in series, explore the perceptual



Fig. 78: François Perrodin, 62.8, 2007, Oniris Gallery, Rennes; source: <https://www.oniris.art/en/artists/55-francois-perrodin/>

faculties and prompt a search for harmony, addressing, in a Minimalist idiom, specific elements relating to proportion, asymmetry, or seriality. The reduction of colours, most often black or grey tones, contributes to highlighting this constructive enterprise, allowing the differentiation of forms, the deciphering of objects, and contributing to a reactivation of the surface.

Julie Mehretu (b. 1970),²¹⁴ an American artist, is known for her abstract paintings of impressive scale: an artist of international renown who lives and works in New York. Combining elements of abstract expressionism with pop art (Fig. 79), her work bears the influence of painters such as Kandinsky, Malevich, and Mondrian. Exploring the palimpsests of history, from geological time to a modern phenomenology of the social, the artist "*involves us in a dynamic visual articulation of contemporary experience, a representation of social behaviour and the psychogeography of space*". She uses black – a mixture of pigment, graphite, and ink – together at times with strong, intersecting lines of colour, topographical plans, geometric renderings, and diagrams that, in a sense, personalize the work: "*...I needed a context for marks and characters. By combining several types of architectural plans and drawings, I sought to create a metaphorical, tectonic vision of structural history. I wanted to bring my drawing into time and place.*"²¹⁵

²¹⁴ She has received numerous distinctions and is involved in many projects and initiatives, including educational ones; she has works in the collections of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, et al.

²¹⁵ Mehretu, Julie, et al. "Julie Mehretu: Drawing Into Painting" Walker Art Center, 2003, p. 8.



Fig. 79: Julie Mehretu, "Algorithms, Apparitions and Translations", 2013; *Invisible Sun*, 2014; *Black ground (deep light)*, 2006; Source: https://whitecube.com/artists/artist/julie_mehretu/

Black is also present in the work of **Adam Pendleton** (b. 1984), a young American artist with a multidisciplinary practice: he employs text, screen-printed images, photographic collages, and videos, and applies spatters, sprays, and collected images as his primary materials. His work is a kind of continuous writing in which language and gestural signs are recorded, transposed, and overwritten. By blurring the boundaries between representation and abstraction, and between painting, drawing, and photography, Pendleton's work emerges as a visual philosophy of incomplete postulates.



Fig. 80: Adam Pendleton, details of works from the exhibition *Who Is Queen?*, MoMA, New York, Sept 2021 – Feb 2022. Source: <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/5225>

He reconsiders avant-garde art, minimalism, conceptualism, and Dada through a monochromatic graphic palette. From 2008 onwards he began to orient his practice around the idea of the visual project *Black Dada*: a continually evolving inquiry into the relationships between blackness, abstraction, and the avant-garde: "*my Black Dada work operates on notions of abstraction, but such abstraction is an active mode of representation, a form of self-liberation*".²¹⁶ Over a career spanning nearly two decades, encompassing paintings, videos, essays, collages, and performances, he has situated within his works the intersections between the history of art, race, and political or cultural belonging.

²¹⁶ Awa Konaté, "In conversation with Adam Pendleton: What is Black Dada?" in *Third Text*, 2020, <http://thirdtext.org/konate-adampendleton>. Accessed 18 Mar. 2022.

His art does not merely exist along this idea; it is the very means, the function, through which his practice and various other modes of expression enter into dialogue. In this sense, the theoretical framework of *Black Dada* may be regarded as an ontological conceptualization of darkness. It is a theoretical fusion, an interweaving of the avant-garde art of Harlem with conceptualist movements of the 1960s and 1970s: "*Black Dada is a way of talking about the future while speaking about the past. It is our present moment.*"²¹⁷

Conclusion: Omnipresent in the phenomena of nature, black has always nourished the imagination of artists, who have sought to transcribe this awakening of the senses into their works. Around us lies a void so vast as to be almost unimaginable. We do not know to what extent this awareness affects our states of mind, even though our taste for black may in some way connect with the finality of death and with the absence – from all of space – of benign powers. We live in a polychrome world, yet, in art, the history of black is far from over. It is true that contemporary art is most often polychrome, to such a degree that one might believe art had turned its back on black. But in 2006, in Paris, the Maeght Foundation mounted an exhibition, "*Le Noir est une couleur*" [English: Black Is a Colour], which was followed in 2007 by the exhibition "*Tablouri negre*" [Black Paintings] at the Haus der Kunst in München. Also in 2007, the exhibition "*Dark Matter*" was held at the White Cube Gallery in London. And in 2008, the Kestner Gesellschaft in Hanover, Germany, presented the exhibition "*Back to Black*", while from January 2020 to January 2021 the exhibition "*Soleils Noirs*" [English: Black Suns] ran at the Louvre-Lens museum in Paris; in 2022 there was an exhibition by Damien Hirst dedicated to black. These exhibitions hosted works by Matisse, Bonnard, Braque, Rouault, Ad Reinhardt, Rothko, Rauschenberg, Stella, Soulages, and Courbet, as well as by an international generation of younger artists eager to work in black.

Observation: This brief thematic survey, addressing the presence of black in works of modern and contemporary art (with emphasis on painting), is far from having exhausted the presentation of all the artists who have used it – to express a particular state of mind, a message, or a context, for its effect, in chromatic contrasts or harmonies. On the other hand, there are further references that supplement this discussion, including in the section devoted to the research.

²¹⁷ Pendleton, Adam. *Adam Pendleton: EL T D K*. Haunch of Venison, 2009, p. 26.

3.1.4. A Thematic Survey: Black in Modern and Contemporary Art, with Emphasis on Photography. Reference Points – Opinions.

In 1997, at the launch of his volume "*MAGNUM: Fifty Years at the Front Line of History*", produced in collaboration with MoMA and the International Center of Photography in New York, the journalist Russell Miller noted, in the context of his attendance at the annual meeting of Magnum members, where the year's most significant works were reviewed:²¹⁸ "*What was projected was above all black-and-white images, which is the medium preferred by those who consider themselves serious about photography,*"²¹⁹ This association is purely subjective and reflects the author's opinion, although it is well known that the majority of the photographs produced by members of the Magnum group are in black and white. To take a brief historical detour: when Nicéphore Niépce, in 1827, looked at the ground glass of his camera, he saw a moving image, in colour, and yet it was only at the beginning of the twentieth century that colour photography began to become accessible. In the meantime, images were monochrome, although, to satisfy the desires of the emerging bourgeoisie, portraits were retouched with a brush so as to highlight – in colour – the sitter's jewellery, ornaments, and attire. In the second half of the nineteenth century, colour processes became the subject of research and experiment, but they were far from being put into practice. In 1907, the Lumière brothers launched the *Autochrome* plate, but these glass positives did not lend themselves to commercial use by the general public, and their colours were still surpassed by the reality of the world. We may also cite the "*carboprint*" process, used by photographers such as Paul Outerbridge, but above all it was the invention of Kodachrome from the mid-1930s, and the commercialization of chromogenic development processes, that made possible images with the colours of a "real" world.

Black and white thus emerged as a medium of expression in its own right, and its practice was widely esteemed, to the detriment of colour. Nevertheless, in 1976 the first solo exhibition of William Eggleston, organized by John Szarkowski at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, would establish recognition of the artistic value of colour

²¹⁸ The members of the Magnum group hold annual meetings, an event that has become a tradition of the group.

²¹⁹ Russell Miller, op. cit., p. 4.

photography. Artists then proclaimed that the world is coloured, but we may ask: what is this world?

Even so, black-and-white photography would continue to reign supreme for several decades, relegating colour to a disparaged category by comparison with "elitist" black and white. Colour was held to be reserved for commercial and advertising uses and for popular practices; its images, whether on screen or printed on paper, were thought to bear no relation to the quality of those produced in black and white. In 1916, Paul Strand wrote, in *Camera Work*: "*colour and photography have nothing in common*".²²⁰ A few years later, Walker Evans would declare:

*"Colour spoils photography, and absolute colour spoils it absolutely. Four words are enough to settle the question, words that must be uttered in a low voice: colour photography is vulgar. When a photograph treats a vulgar subject [...] then colour photography is essential."*²²¹

For his part, László Moholy-Nagy held that: "*mastery of light intensities, transposition into black and white, and the gradations of chiaroscuro constitute the basis of the photographic process*".²²² This writing by means of "light", which is the very essence of photography, produces a metamorphosis of black-and-white space and thereby expresses its creative power. But the manner of these choices entails a special relationship with time, a waiting, whether during the shooting or during the intervention in the darkroom.²²³

Dieter Appelt, a contemporary German artist, holds that achromia allows him to give substance to time. He adds that his images are not for "people in a hurry".²²⁴ Closely bound up with waiting, the reading of black-and-white images takes time, for their presence leaves room for the imagination and offers a power of *revelation*, a mystery in which not everything is given.

²²⁰ Paul Strand, "Photo-Seccession" in *Camera Work*, Number XLIX, Nr. L, Giugno, 1917, p. 40.

²²¹ Walker Evans cit. in G. Mora, *La Soif du regard*, Paris, Seuil, 1993, p. 336.

²²² Moholy-Nagy, László. "From Pigment to Light," in *Photography in Print*, ed. Vicki Goldberg (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981) p. 339.

²²³ "*For me, the photographic act proceeds from the same ritual as the tea ceremony in Japan or the peace pipe among the Indians. I photograph people in their space, in their natural light, that is, in the place where they have committed themselves to existing. The photographic medium allows the exposure time to be prolonged, so that everything lasts, in an apparent stillness, longer than is necessary. Then the light traverses the invariable duration and defines the encounter*"

²²⁴ Dieter Appelt et al., Dieter Appelt: The Art Institute of Chicago, The Art Institute of Chicago, USA, 1994.

"*But what of the loss of information?*" asks Jocelyne Alloucherie. Those who renounce colour in favour of monochrome do not seem troubled at "sacrificing" the minute details, or the index, of an image. On the contrary, the image gains by it, operating more upon the imaginary. Thus black-and-white photography would have a greater power to bring us into the presence of the world. "*We see in colour, but we think in black and white*",²²⁵ wrote Bruce Jackson in 1987, adding that a photographer thinks differently when photographing in colour than when photographing in black and white. He justifies the claim thus: "*black and white brings out differences between planes and forms, whereas colour sees differences within fields of colour.*"²²⁶

If technical processes contributed in large measure to validating an aesthetics of black-and-white photography, photographers have chosen, and still choose, in full freedom, to express themselves in this way, opening their eyes to another mode of contemplating the world.

While for some the black-and-white vision is bound to the past, for others true photography is black-and-white photography. We naturally see in colour, but, paradoxically, we perceive the "colour" of a photograph in terms of black and white, which leads us to believe that black-and-white photography interprets reality at a higher level. If, throughout the first half of the twentieth century and well beyond, some of the "great masters" of photography expressed themselves in black and white, it was in order to free themselves from the strict reproduction of reality and to assert their own interpretation.

For Jean Gaumy, black and white is a way of deconstructing the world and re-embodiment it. For Jocelyne Alloucherie, black and white operates at a necessary distance, acting as an immediate filter that attenuates the all-too-evident effects of reality. There are numerous remarks comparable to those initiated in the 1920s by Moholy-Nagy, who held that we have more to gain from the artistic function of expression than from the reproductive function of representation; much as in *Pascal's Pensées*, colour would be one of the forms of distraction, whereas black and white would go to the essential, offering us a mental image that opens us to reflection.

Moreover, some will go so far as to claim that black and white is more real than colour (see Petru Lucaci). In 1953, the art critic Nancy Newhall, in her essays on Edward Weston, held the view that seeing colour and, at the same time, seeing it as form, line,

²²⁵ Bruce Jackson, *Fieldwork*, University of Illinois Press, USA, 1987, p. 206.

²²⁶ *Idem.*

shadow, and depth is not easy, drawing a comparison between black-and-white photography and colour photography.

Research in the field of neuroaesthetics, carried out by the scientists V.S. Ramachandran and William Hirstein in "*The Science of Art*", on the way the brain responds to art and aesthetics, has shown that objects or scenes that are distorted, exaggerated, or more abstract are considered more aesthetic in the case of black-and-white photographs.

For photographic artists, achromy or polychromy is a matter of personal choice, and the decision to use colour or to forgo it neither requires nor needs to be explained. Colour photography, as artists and art critics emphasize, is preferable when it is used for certain sciences (in medicine or biology, for example), in fashion photography, and in advertising; in other words, in cases where the image, or its quality, is enhanced by colour relative to what the same image would be if it were achromatic. We cannot, for instance, imagine fashion photography – where the subject is the outcome of clothing design – in black and white; likewise, in product and advertising photography, colour is a necessity because it conveys essential information about the photographed product, and the examples could be multiplied.

Setting the information from the specialist literature side by side, the following reasons emerged for why, it may be supposed, achromatic photography is preferred by a significant number of artists:

1. It offers greater freedom of interpretation, more scope for the imagination (Paul Strand)
2. It leaves room for the imagination, through a heightened power of metaphysical revelation (Dieter Appelt)
3. Heightened aesthetic value, through authenticity, breaking away from the purely reproductive and realistic manner of the image. In other words, a hyperrealistic and more abstract description of objective reality is universally appreciated as being more aesthetic. (V.S. Ramachandran and William Hirstein)
4. The photographic language is different: form, line, shadow, and depth are perceived differently in black-and-white photography compared with colour photography (Nancy Newhall)
5. A heightened creative power, the essence of photographic art, and also the artistic function of expression (László Moholy-Nagy)
6. Whereas colour distracts the eye, black and white redirect it (Blaise Pascal)

7. By forgoing colour, we are left with images represented through geometry, form, and their tonal values. This places far greater emphasis on the essential ingredients of an image, eliminating distractions and helping to hold the viewer's attention on what the photographer wishes to communicate through the image (Rick Ohnsman)
8. Black-and-white contrast reveals the lines of force and the real volumes that structure reality, the latent geometry of the world, which is organized into flat zones (Sylvie Aubenas, Héloïse Conesa, et al.)
9. Some photographers take up light alone, as their sole subject, intensifying it to the point of abstraction (László Moholy-Nagy)
10. Black-and-white photography excels in the case of the possibilities offered by the contrast between light and darkness. "*Colours are only symbols; reality is to be found in contrasts alone*"²²⁷ (Pablo Picasso).
11. Black-and-white representation offers a heightened conceptuality, and through the fact (black on white) that it has an extremely powerful impact (something demonstrated by Itten), it triggers stronger emotions. In the view of the abstract expressionist painter Mark Rothko: "*there is no art about nothing; an image that is merely beautiful is not art.*"²²⁸
12. The timeless character of the photographic image (Dieter Appelt)
13. It amplifies the way negative space is used within an image and helps to focus attention on the composition (David Geffin)
14. Black-and-white images often have a more dramatic appearance (Rick Ohnsman)

All these arguments are brought forward in order to "decipher" the role of black in photographic art. Of course, no attempt is made to undermine the artistic character of colour photography; yet, for the avowed purpose of scientific research, it was essential to take these considerations into account.

In conclusion, the following may be inferred: black-and-white images leave room for the imagination, offering an exceptional power of revelation, a mystery in which not everything is given. From the standpoint of the loss of information (colour), the image gains, operating more upon the imaginary, a different way of contemplating the world. The fact that some of the great masters of photography expressed themselves exclusively in black and white was also a means of freeing themselves from the strict reproduction of reality and

²²⁷ *Anthropology News*, Volume 47, Issue 1, Wiley Online Library (Online service), American Anthropological Association, 2006.

²²⁸ Edward Strickland, *Minimalism - origini*, Indiana University Press, USA, 2000, p. 46.

of reclaiming it for interpretation. We have more to gain from the artistic function of expression than from the purely reproductive function of representation.

Moreover, a black-and-white image eliminates the superfluous, and if it loses one piece of information, it does so in order to gain another. Colour might be regarded by some as one of the forms of distraction, whereas black and white moves towards the essential, offering us a mental image that leads us towards reflection.

3.1.5. The Role and Place of Black in Romanian Art

It may be said that, to a certain extent, the way in which the use of black manifested itself in modern Romanian painting was determined, among other things, by the influence of the neoclassical perspective and of Rembrandtesque chiaroscuro. Thus, to begin with, a number of portraits acquired added expressiveness owing to the dark tones of the background. But the presence of black also came from the extensive use of pencil, gouache, Indian ink, and charcoal, which were far more convenient for the direct and spontaneous treatment of the motif required by the multitude of sketches that Nicolae Grigorescu (1838–1907), for example, made in his capacity as a war reporter. Black appeared, too, in his interior scenes: a sombre and mysterious atmosphere, with figures barely visible in the faint light entering from outside. Ion Andreescu (1850–1882) likewise made use of chiaroscuro, of the contrasts between light and shadow, to render spatiality and the plastic expression of form: black, but also a wide range of greys.



Fig. 81: A group of paintings. Gheorghe Petrașcu, *Canal la Chioggia*, 1934; Nicolae Grigorescu, *In pădurea de la Fontainebleau*, 1866; Ion Andreescu, *Woods in winter*, 1881; Nicolae Tonitza, *Coadă la pâine*, 1920; Ștefan Luchian, *Anemone*, 1907; Jean Al Steriadi, *Portrait of Osman, the Porter*, 1929; Ion Țuculescu, *Păunii privirilor*, 1960; Francisc Șirato, *Popas în timpul refugiului*, 1916; Corneliu Baba, *Peisaj din Veneția* 1966; Iosif Isser, *Cadâne la cafea*, 1942. Sources: Vasile Florea, "Arta românească de la origini până în prezent", Litera, Bucharest, 2019; "Gheorghe Petrașcu, *Canal la Chioggia*". Cotidianul RO, 2 Nov. 2017, <https://www.cotidianul.ro/capodopere-ale-maestrilor-artei-romanesti-la-licitatie/gheorghe-petrascu-canal-la-chioggia/>; Cătălina Macovei, "Grigorescu" Parkstone Press, 1999, p. 10; Mirela Pete. Blog. <https://mirelapete.dexign.ro/2011/03/ion-tuculescu-sau-ochii-magici-ai-culorilor/>. Accessed 7 Sept. 2021, and public domain CC 2.0.

A predilection for dark tones, chiaroscuro, and tonal modelling is also to be found in Theodor Aman (1831–1891), in Nicolae Vermont (1866–1932), and in Ștefan Luchian (1868–1916) as well, in certain landscapes – those of the outskirts, for instance – from which a dramatic atmosphere emanates. In Gheorghe Petrașcu (1872–1949), however, black holds a special importance; it is regarded as a colour like any other and, moreover, it heightens the expressiveness of the other colours, defining the forms and lending them stability.

Nicolae Tonitza (1886–1940) considered black to be one of the most solid and precious colours, for the quality of the greys it yields, while also using it for drawing, in his hundreds of studies of committed graphic art. Francisc Șirato (1877–1953), for his part, likewise produced numerous drawings for the newspapers of the day, and in his still lifes there appear strong contrasts that bring to the fore luminous areas which make the *"night-black of the background even denser"*²²⁹. Like Theodor Pallady (1871–1956) and Camil Ressu (1880–1962), he attached particular importance to drawing, using black chiefly for **tonal modelling**.

Iosif Iser's (1881–1958) interest in black can be seen in his watercolours, but also in the drawings he made in Dobruja, where he was mobilized during the First World War. The black in his charcoal or pencil drawings, his engravings, and his paintings underscores the dramatic, tragic atmosphere and the aridity of the Dobrujan landscape, or adds heightened expressiveness to the oriental physiognomies of the locals. The use of black also lends remarkable expressive force to the graphic works of Jean Al. Steriadi (1880–1956), who employed it in his chiaroscuro painting during the period preceding his turn towards Impressionism.

Ion Țuculescu (1910–1962), more than other artists, drew value from black, assigning it a decisive role. In some of his works it symbolizes sorrow, night, or non-being, whereas in others black *"had the constitutive function of harmony, rhythm, and decorativeness, through its predominance and through its balancing with other colours ... black, dense and powerful, as a colour rather than as a void of colours ..."*²³⁰

Corneliu Baba (1906–1997) is regarded as one of the most powerful personalities of contemporary painting, on account of his profoundly humanist art. His painting, with a certain austerity and a vigorous artistic expression, with chiaroscuro effects and dramatic

²²⁹ Dan Grigorescu, *F. Șirato*, Meridiane, Bucharest, 1967, p. 9.

²³⁰ Petru Comarnescu, *Ion Țuculescu*, Meridiane, Bucharest, 1974, p. 10.

contrasts, comprises a restricted palette, few tones yet harmoniously combined, and at times cool colours that interweave in dense textures of greys, ochre, black, and blue-green. In the group of images in Fig. 81 only a few of the works by the Romanian painters presented above are exemplified.

Black and dark colours also dominate the works of artists such as Maxy (Max Hermann, 1895–1971), Marcel Iancu (1895–1984), and Corneliu Mihăilescu (1898–1965), in the last of whom, moreover, Cubist and **Expressionist influences take shape**. With a distinctive plastic language and a clear orientation towards Surrealism, Victor Brauner (1903–1966) had recourse to black for its power of suggestion regarding the states specific to that universe: anxieties, nightmares, unease, and so on; relevant in this respect is also his collaboration with the avant-garde magazine "*Unu*". The black of Hans Mattis-Teutsch (1884–1960) too is used as a colour like any other, playing a special role in his chromatic harmonies, which, as has been observed, recall Kandinsky.

Black is also present in certain works by Geta Brătescu (1926–2018). A complete artist, who employed both traditional and new media as means of expression, she produced – moving from conceptual rigour to the utmost inventiveness – works of graphic art, engraving, drawing, and textile collage, as well as tapestry, object art, photography, photo-installation, and film. One may likewise note the presence of black in the numerous drawings and in certain installations of Paul Neagu (1938–2004): a visual artist, painter, draughtsman, graphic artist, important sculptor, and Romanian poet who settled in London after 1970. Ana Lupaş (b. 1940) likewise developed, from the 1960s onward, a series of methods of artistic intervention, of conceptual art, going beyond the classical understanding of the structure of the work of art. She creates tapestry, textile objects, and installations. She has works in which black makes symbolic reference to mourning, penitence, or to memories bound up with the communist era, such as the "flying carpet" steeped in intensely black tar, evoking a funereal atmosphere and the tragedies of the 1989 revolution. For examples of such works, see Fig. 82.



Fig. 82: Mattis-Teutsch, *Compoziție*, 1919, Max Hermann – Maxy – *Compoziție*, 1968, Victor Brauner, *Courteous passivity*, 1935, Marcel Iancu, *Construcție abstractă*, 1930, Ana Lupaș, *Humid installation*, 1966, Paul Neagu, *Nine catalytic Stations*, 1986, Geta Brătescu, *The working desk*, 1971. Sources: "Courteous Passivity, 1929 – 1935 – Victor Brauner – WikiArt.org". Accessed 7 Sept. 2021; "Geta Brătescu. *The Working Desk (The Artist's Desk) (Masa de Lucru [Masa Atelierului]). 1971*". The Museum of Modern Art, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/167207>. Accessed 7 Sept. 2022.

Cristian Paraschiv (b. 1953), one of the painters particularly preoccupied with black, opens up new directions of inquiry through painting, collage, photography, installation, and performance, reinvestigating the basic principles of the artistic language and reinventing a discourse that also touches upon the socio-political sphere. One of his actions, in which black plays the decisive role, is the performance staged in Poland (1999), involving a ritual burial in coal – coal here standing for the fossilized matter that holds the ancestral memory of life – followed by the extraction of the body from the mass of coal, that is, by resurrection and rebirth. Through this performance, the artist speaks of "the solitude of death and within death", of "the solitude of life", and so on. He creates a language that transcends the familiar traditional limits.

In a period when many aspects remained obscured by political ideologies, as well as by the cultural obsessions of the age, it is worth noting that new modes of expression nonetheless emerged. In this respect, one may mention the first experimental group in Romania, the **Group III** (1966–69), of Timișoara, later to become *Sigma* (1969–1976), made up of the artists Roman Cotoșman (1935–2006), Constantin Flondor (b. 1936), and Ștefan Bertalan (1930–2014), and, after Cotoșman's departure in 1969, of Diet Sayler (b. 1939) and Doru Tulcan (b. 1943). They exhibited together works of abstract, constructivist art and, later, works of op art, displaying a marked interest in new media and materials. Their activity also encompassed theoretical studies and even translations of texts relating to, or

drawn from, Victor Vasarely, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Nicolas Schöffer, and Yaacov Agam.

Constantin Flondor (b. 1936) is one of the most important contemporary artists, with a wide-ranging experience in interdisciplinary research within visual experimentation. Over the years he has made installations, film, photography, and performance; he has written, practised mail art, drawn, painted in oils, and worked in pastel, charcoal, Indian ink, pencil, and collage, among other media. His art took shape as a profound experience, through knowledge and through the artist's capacity to reach the essence of things. As for the turn towards black, it was used by Flondor and Bertalan alike, as by the others, in their drawings and works in pencil, gouache, or charcoal, and also as the ground employed for the networks of threads in their three-dimensional structures.

Roman Cotoșman (1935–2006), driven by the desire to change his means of expression by taking up **monochrome monotypes** and constructivist collages, made predominant use of black in some of his works (Fig. 83), being preoccupied with the relationship between order and chaos, with the void, the absolute, and the nothingness that undergoes transformation: "*The object of my art is to penetrate into the unknown [...]; a kind of visual echo or aura of the capacity of colours to act directly upon the senses of the viewer.*"²³¹



Fig. 83: Roman Cotoșman, *Collage*, 1993; *Untitled Relief*, 1987; *Rhythmic void*, 1991; reproduced from Livius Ciocârlie, Diet Sayler, Mihai Oroveanu, and Simona Vilău, "*Roman Cotosman - Diet Sayler. An Artist Friendship*", Interbrand, Bucharest, 2015, pp. 123, 124, and 127.

Moreover, referring to his black "void", the artist stated:

"The relationship between order and chaos has preoccupied me since '63. At that time I was experimenting, trying to combine them into an ordered disorder, in

²³¹ Roman Cotoșman in "*Roman Cotosman*", Museum of Art, Timișoara, 1995, pp. 20.

*series of monochrome works through which I sought to break apart the visual sign. I had come to the conviction – confirmed in the 1980s as well by the new theories in mathematics and nuclear physics – that order, at its depths, conceals a kind of chaos, and vice versa: within chaos there dwells a kind of order. So, a sort of correlation that continues to preoccupy me. Since the distinction between ground and form no longer applies to abstract art, the notion of the abstract also encompasses the sense of the concrete; the vehicle of transcendence is the visual language itself."*²³²

Influenced by Paul Klee, by the principles of constructivism, and by the model of the Bauhaus school, alongside his fellow group members, **Ștefan Bertalan** (1930–2014) is one of the first adherents and promoters of the innovative neo-avant-garde artistic movements in the Banat region and in Romania, and was also the founder of the school of design and experimental art in Timișoara. His output is made up of objects, multimedia installations, photographs, and actions, with an emphasis on drawing, through which all these stages are connected. His structures are well known: networks of threads, of fine white lines, which produced upon the **black card**, in sharp contrast, the impression of optical vibration, of virtual kineticism. To a certain extent, perhaps influenced by the work of the German artist Joseph Beuys, Bertalan too displays a particular interest in nature, in the organic world – a world on which he never ceases to meditate and which reveals to him, in a sense, the relationship between the fragility of the human being and the immovability of stone, of the durable, in fact between order and chaos. For examples of such works, see Fig. 84.

²³² Livius Ciocârlie, Diet Sayler, Mihai Oroveanu, Simona Vilău, "Roman Cotosman - Diet Sayler. An Artist Friendship", Interbrand, Bucharest, 2015, p. 123.

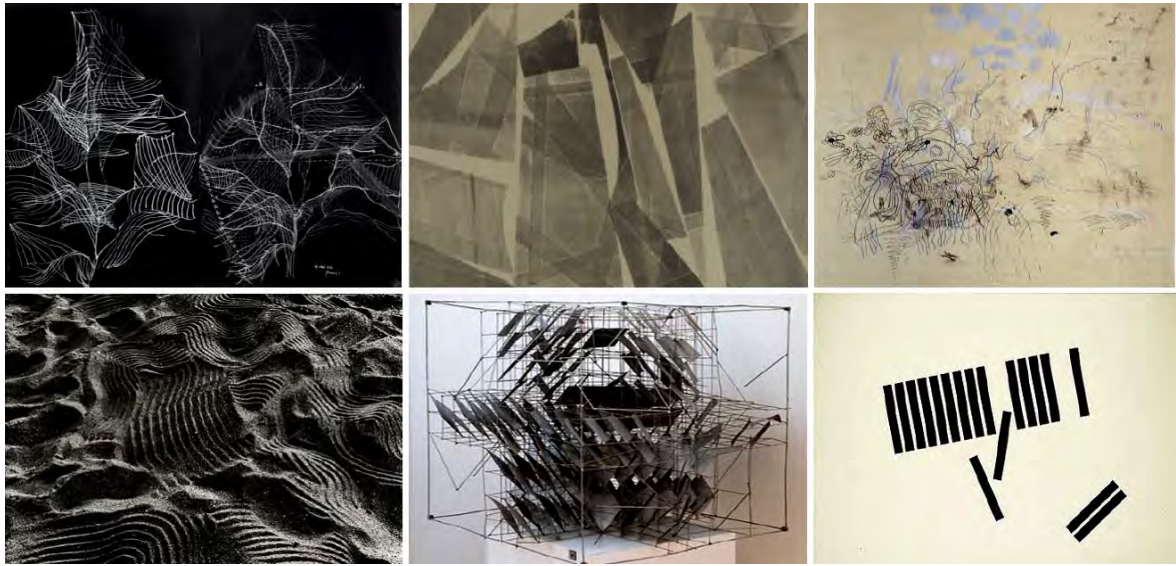


Fig. 84: Ștefan Bertalan, from the *Caisul* series, 1977; Roman Cotoșman, "*Spargerea semnului plastic - Interferențe plastice*", 1964, Constantin Flondor, "*Drawing-for-capturing-the-air*", 1982; Doru Tulcan, *Mundus-subjective-topometries*, 1983; Doru Tulcan, *Structură spațială*, 1974, Diet Sayler, *Coincidență*, 1968. Reproduced from: Ileana Pintilie, "*Ștefan Bertalan Drumuri de Răscruce*", Triade Foundation, Timișoara, 2010, pp. 78–79; Livius Ciocârlie et al., "*Roman Cotosman - Diet Sayler. An Artist Friendship*", Interbrand, Bucharest, 2015, pp. 35, 37; <https://www.wikiart.org/en/constantin-flondor/drawing-for-capturing-the-air-1982>; <https://arthur.io/art/doru-tulcan/mundus-subjective-topometries>, <https://arhitectura1tm.wordpress.com/doru-tulcan-structura-spatiala-1974/>.

The emergence of the *subREAL Group* within the contemporary cultural scene speaks once again of the diversification of Romanian art after 1989 – a diversification that does not exclude the use of black, but on the contrary (Fig. 85). Since, after 1989, there was a felt need to establish a different kind of communication with the public and a broader connection to the international art scene, a veritable explosion of artistic events using experimental media took place – a direction less tolerated by the totalitarian regime, which had been incapable of controlling subjectivity and linguistic innovation. It was in this context that the subREAL Group took shape, founded in 1990 by the artist and art historian **Călin Dan** (b. 1955) and the artist **Dan Mihălțianu** (b. 1954), who were later joined by the architect and photographer **Iosif Király** (b. 1957). The group's members set out to establish a dialogue with Western art, taking part in a series of biennials and other major international events: the Istanbul, Berlin, and Venice Biennials, as well as exhibitions in Rotterdam, Vienna, and elsewhere.

An influential group with an internationally recognized body of work, it operates in the fields of media experimentation and interactive multimedia projects, photography, video, installation, and performance, calling into question traumas, myths, recent history, political,

social, and cultural reality, and the decades of communist oppression, **the use of black heightening the terrifying atmosphere of these pages of dark history.**

Among the group's other projects, the installation *Castelul din Carpați* (Fig. 85/c) lays emphasis on a few symbols specific to Romania: the House of the People, *Carpați* cigarettes, and Dracula / Vlad Țepeș, identifying the throne, by means of a suspended chair, with a bloody regime. The works evoke a diversity of possibilities for reconstructing the historical context, on the premise that the communist past naturally ceases to hold a monopoly over present-day perception. *Serving Art I (1997-1999)* is a photographic installation made up of more than 700 black-and-white photographs. The artists used negatives found in the archive of the former magazine *Arta*, the official art publication in Romania between 1953 and 1989. These include the very setting in which the works were photographed, such as props, spotlights, and figures holding a backdrop cloth, and so on – details that were to be eliminated from the final, printed image. Yet it was precisely this secondary world that aroused the group's interest, for it brought to light a new perspective: that of the passage from object to context, from the description of the work to an understanding of the process behind it, laying bare the relationships established between the artwork depicted, its context (seen as a testimony to the period in question), and the present-day viewer, with their expectations and their level of knowledge and understanding. The project thus highlights a reality deeply marked by political constraints, as well as an entire world of manipulation and propaganda. The photographic installation was exhibited in 2014 in Cluj-Napoca, at the Spațiu Intact Gallery,²³³ and then in Timișoara in 2019, under the title *Serving Art Again*, at the Jecza Gallery (Fig. 85/a).²³⁴

An art critic and a promoter of the first media-art events in Romania, Călin Dan achieved international recognition through his films in the *Arhitectura Emoțională* series, which examine the relationship between people and their habitat within the urban fabric. He has taken part in major visual-arts events and experimental film festivals.

Dan Mihălțianu, co-founder of the artist group subREAL (which he left in 1993), currently lives in Bucharest, Berlin, and Bergen.

With regard to the condition of the artist before 1989, his texts, published in various periodicals, are worth noting. Speaking of the art of the communist years, the artist maintains

²³³ See the exhibition poster, "*subREAL Serving Art I (1997-1999)*". http://spatiuintact.ro/wp/wp-content/uploads/Sub-REAL-Afis_TIPAR1.pdf. Accessed 7 Sept. 2022.

²³⁴ "*subREAL Exhibition – Serving Art Again*", <https://timisoara2023.eu/en/events/connections/light-over-borders/encounters/subreal-exhibition-serving-art-again/>. Accessed 7 Sept. 2022.

that one cannot necessarily speak of an underground movement, and he observes that artistic life thrives under every social system. In Mihălțianu's work one may register **the presence of black, with the significations mentioned above**, particularly in the photographic series *Coridor (despre natura luminii)* (Fig. 85/d)

Alongside his other works, which recall *arte povera*, black – with reference to the horrors that took place during the early stages of work on the Danube–Black Sea Canal, where hundreds of political prisoners were exterminated through exhaustion and inhuman treatment – appears in the work *Canal grande* (Fig. 85/b).

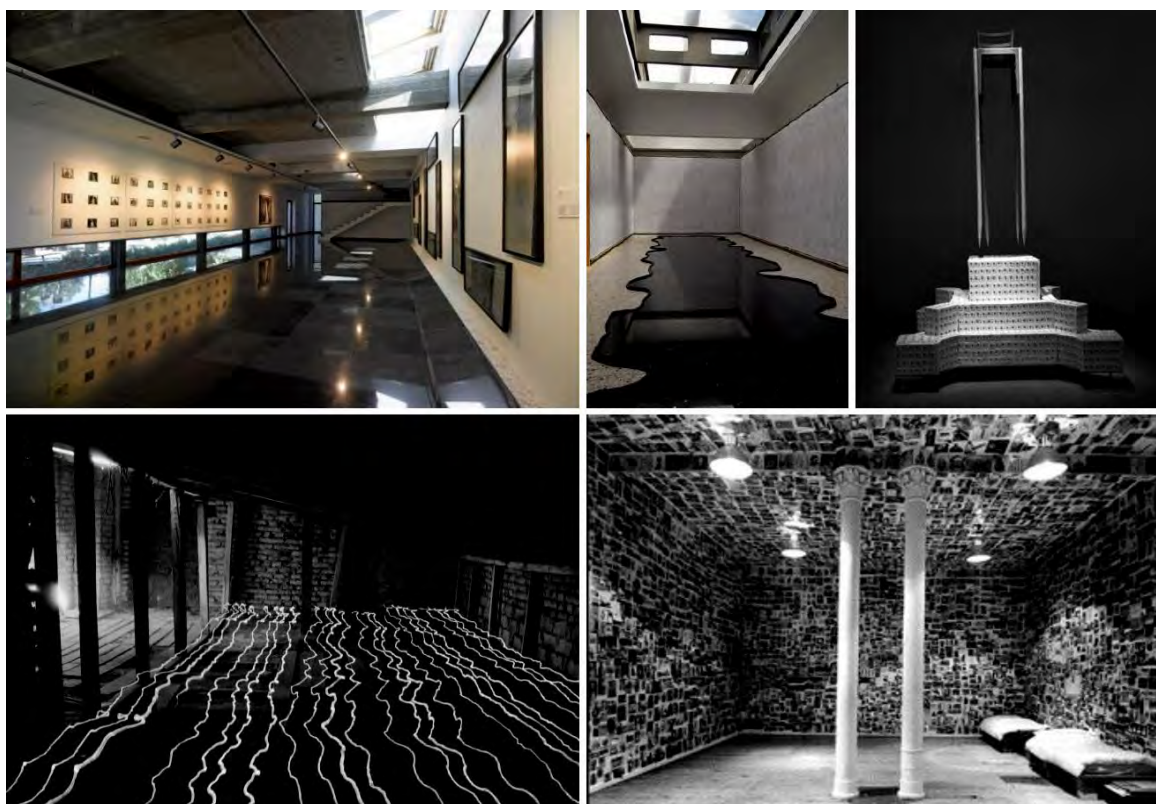


Fig. 85: a. *Serving Art Again*, Jecza Gallery, Timișoara; b. Dan Mihălțianu, *Canal Grande (Corridor)*, Bucharest, 1984; c. subREAL – *Castelul din Carpați* 1994, d. Dan Mihălțianu – *Coridor (despre natura luminii)*, 1982; e. subREAL, *Dataroom*, 1995, installation, MNAC, Bucharest. Reproduced from "subREAL Exhibition – *Serving Art Again*", timisoara2023.eu/en/events/connections/light-over-borders/encounters/subreal-exhibition-serving-art-again/; "Unfinished Conversations on the Weight of Absence" <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/252064/unfinished-conversations-on-the-weight-of-absence/>; Guta, Adrian. "Arta românească după 1989 (IV)". *Observator Cultural*, 19 June 2019; "subREAL Retrospect." <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/34004/subreal-retrospect/>.

Iosif Király, an artist with a prodigious body of work,²³⁵ whose preferred domains are photography, installation, and performance, trained as an architect and holds a doctorate

²³⁵ He has exhibited, among other venues, at: The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (1995), Manifesta 1, Rotterdam (1996); "Biennale di Venezia" (1993, 1997, 1999), Berlin Biennale (1998); Moderna Museet,

in the visual arts. He teaches at the University of Art in Bucharest and is one of the founders of the Department of Photography, Video, and Computer Image Processing. With an extensive artistic practice both as an individual and within the *subREAL group*, he is concerned with, and investigates, the relationship between perception, time, and memory. *Fotografia: De la melancolie la traumă, de la document la monument, Reconstrucții, Open Sky*, Király's projects range from questions bound up with historical discontinuities and ideological ruptures, with the shaping of collective memory, power, and ideology, to matters concerning the management and reclaiming of public space, as well as the role of the image as a repository of memory and as a vehicle for collective traumas.

Observation: Many further references could still be made to the presence of black in Romanian art, in its various forms of expression; the material above, however, constitutes only a fragment of a study, concerned with the purposes for which different artists have made use of black in their art, and less with its metaphorical senses or its symbolism, since these aspects have been treated in the preceding chapters and studies.

Stockholm (1999); Académie de France, Villa Medici, Rome; Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, Paris; Stichting De Appel, Amsterdam (all in 2000); Neue Galerie Graz am Landesmuseum Joanneum (2002); The Netherlands Architecture Institute (NAi), Rotterdam (2004); Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon (2005); Prague Biennale 3 (2007), Camera Austria, Graz, Austria (2010), Castrum Peregrini, Amsterdam, the Netherlands (2012); the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Bucharest (2012), etc.

3.2. An Analysis of the Symbolism of Black in Various Cultures

Black is associated with darkness and primordial undifferentiation, being, as an absolute value, a colour situated at the pole opposite to white and at the same time its equal. Archetypally and physiologically, black forms a structuring yet ambiguous element in the representation of the sacred; it is at once the colour of all beginnings, of the infinite, of the timeless, and also of death and ignorance. In the eighteenth century, the philosophy of the Enlightenment, in its struggle for the triumph of Reason and the end of obscurantism, paradoxically gave rise to a renewed interest in the strange, in madness, and also in magic, which contributed to the emergence of a black Romanticism over the course of the following century. The widow's veil, the judge's robe, the black vestments of the cleric who renounces the pleasures of material life, the garments of elegance – all are black. The symbolism of black is by far *the richest* compared with that of any other colour. Moreover, night and darkness are closely bound up with the significations of black, whether it be the primordial black from which life arises or the black that characterizes the darkness of night. In both cases, the sole common element that contains them is time, lending these concepts a universal cyclicity. Thus, a separate analysis is called for of the symbolism of sacred black, social black, and the black belonging to psychoanalysis. Without proposing an exhaustive survey of the artists who have documented these aspects, examples will be given of the deliberate use of black, with reference to its symbolism.

3.2.1. Black and the Sacred

According to the Christian religion, the black of Genesis – the primordial darkness, or *the First Night*²³⁶ – is present before God creates light. The black of Creation (*the Genesis*) is an abyssal black, from which all that exists came into being. After God made heaven and earth, the Bible states that "*Darkness was upon the face of the deep*", the earth being void. Then God created light: "*Let there be light!*", which He saw as being "*good*", thus dividing the light from the darkness. It is subsequently stated that "*God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night*". The symbolism of night, likewise present in the Bible, carries significations such as sin, the absence of God's presence, or death: "*The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the*

²³⁶ Andrew Marvell, seventeenth century.

armour of light!"²³⁷ Once again, night is a symbol of darkness, which is perceived as something negative and often undesirable: "*But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.*"²³⁸

Greek mythology refers to night as represented by a deity with black wings, Nyx,²³⁹ daughter of Chaos and mother of the Sky (Uranus) and the Earth (Gaia). Together with Erebus (Darkness) she gives birth to Eros.²⁴⁰ She also created fate, sleep, death, dreams, terror, and cunning.

Night is somewhat personified, as if it possessed an identity of its own; thus it roams the sky enveloped in a black cloak, riding in a chariot drawn by four black horses, accompanied by her daughters, the Moirai (the Fates). *The black ewe* was the offering made to this chthonic divinity. Walter Otto observes: "*Knowledge flares up, or descends like a shooting star – precious, indeed magical, knowledge*".²⁴¹ For the Maya, this same divinity signified death and the centre of the Earth.

In the Corycian Cave on Mount Parnassus, a large number of black-figure *lekythoi*²⁴² were discovered – Haimon-group lekythoi, cult vessels, works in ceramic; many such objects have, moreover, been found in graves. One such object, a *Terracotta lekythos* (c. 500 BC – Fig. 86), is attributed to the Sappho Painter.



Fig. 86: *Terracotta lekythos*, Sappho Painter, oil on ceramic vessel, MoMA, free licence. Fig...Attic white ground *lekythos*, c. 490 BC, *Achilles dragging the body of Hector*. Free licence.

²³⁷ Romans 13:12.

²³⁸ Thessalonians 5:4,5.

²³⁹ John Harvey (2013) refers to Nyx as a bird, whereas Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant do not make this association.

²⁴⁰ John Harvey, in "*The Story of Black*", notes that Eros is born from a golden egg, whereas Kerényi Karl, in "*The Gods of the Greeks*", notes that the egg is of silver and the wings of Eros of gold.

²⁴¹ Otto, Walter Friedrich. *The Homeric Gods: The Spiritual Significance of Greek Religion*, London, 1979.

²⁴² *Lekythoi* (singular: *lekythos*) are ancient Greek vessels used to store olive oil, shaped like a jug with a narrow body and a handle attached to the neck of the vessel, decorated with designs and often associated, in particular, with funerary rites.

The work depicts Helios (the Sun) rising in his quadriga (the four-horse chariot). Above, Nyx (Night) drives towards the left and Eos (the goddess of the dawn) towards the right; Heracles makes an offering at the altar.²⁴³ In Celtic culture, night is the beginning of the day, and the twenty-four hours, symbolically speaking, correspond to cyclicity, a part of eternity. According to Caesar, in *De Bello Gallico*, the Gauls reckoned time by the number of nights. Exploring the close relationship between black and the sacred – an axis represented by the antagonism between *good* and *evil*, white and black – one may observe that black envelops and engulfs; it is cave and abyss, boundless space and the depths of the earth, birth and death. Mourning sinks into black and rests in sorrow. Black is, however, dual, for unclean black may be the soil itself, the fertile mantle of the earth from which life is born. In Ancient Egypt it evoked death but also life, for, with the black silt of its floods, the Nile brought fertility; the resurrected god, Osiris, was sometimes depicted with black skin. Black encompasses the terrors and the beauties of the world, healing and initiation. Black deities are ambiguous, chthonic, and fateful. The dark earth of Kali the Black absorbs the blood of sacrifice and, in return, nourishes the seeds of nature. The Black Madonna, Isis, Persephone, Artemis, and Hecate possess black wombs, in the darkness ruled by the full moon (a symbol of femininity).

If chthonic white is represented by, and associated with, the East–West axis, black occupies the North–South axis, an axis of absolute transcendence. Depending on the representations of the underworld among various peoples, the north is black in Aztec,²⁴⁴ Chinese, and Algonquian culture, whereas in Maya culture and among the Pueblo Indians the south is black, representing the nadir, the lower part of the world axis. Christian culture, too, associates black with hell, a world of eternal torment destined for sinners, a world that lies "below" and not "above" or "on high", where light, Paradise, and Heaven are positioned. In Luke 10.15 it is said: "*And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell*". Or, in Samuel 28.13–15, the spirit of Samuel is seen "*ascending out of the earth*", while in Ephesians 4.9 it is held that Jesus, before reaching heaven, "*had descended into the lower parts of the earth*", and in Revelation 20.10–15 the earth is spoken of as that

²⁴³ The four lekythoi grouped together in the illustration are attributed to the same painter and are said to have been found together in a tomb in Attica. Three of them are decorated with subjects that would have seemed especially fitting for funerary offerings, since they depict figures moving beyond the limits of the known world. This vase shows a scene of Herakles travelling westward, beyond the ring of ocean that encircled the earth. Voyaging in the bowl of the sun, he reached an otherworldly place where he had to slay the monster Geryon, a creature akin to Hades, god of the underworld.

²⁴⁴ In Aztec culture, black represented war, since obsidian glass was used as the cutting edge of battle swords.

which will be the "lake of fire". Christianity therefore places eternal torment, death, and everlasting darkness beneath supreme bliss, eternal life free from care, and eternal light. Black is situated in *the lowest* part of the world; whether we speak of a physical or a mythical world, it symbolizes, in this case, an absolute passivity, irreversible death, interweaving endlessly with its equal yet antagonist, white. Hence too the idea of mourning, which may be overwhelmingly black or, in a messianic sense, white. If black mourning symbolizes a path of no return, the signification of white mourning denotes a temporary lack, a provisional absence. It is interesting that even the sacred, according to which we are all equal before the *Absolute Force*, makes this differentiation, this hierarchization: white mourning was reserved for kings and gods who were to be reborn, as was the custom at the French royal court – whence the cry "*The King is dead! Long live the King!*" (a reference to the death of Charles VI in 1422).

As early as the Neolithic, black stones, statuettes, and other black objects were associated with funerary rites. This custom persisted into the historical periods, in pharaonic Egypt and the ancient Near East. Yet this chthonic black carries no negative connotation; on the contrary, its dimension is bound up with the fecundity of the earth, and hence with the sign of rebirth in one form or another. Thus Anubis, the Egyptian deity whose flesh is black, accompanies the deceased to the tomb. In a similar fashion, the relatives of a pharaoh, kings and queens, are depicted as having black skin. One may conclude that, in Egyptian culture, black was not a pejorative colour; the colour of evil and destruction was in fact red, attributed to the god of destruction and the slayer of Osiris, Set.

Christianity, however, from its very beginnings, describes hell as black and red (darkness, pitch, eternal flames), colours that have remained those of Hell and the Devil to the present day. In the case of other religions and mythologies, hell appears to be more monochrome, predominantly black. The explanation is simple, in the view of Michel Pastoreau: "*fire is absent, since it is a divine and sacred element, and the wicked must endure the lack of fire and so suffer from cold and darkness. In these subterranean worlds, everything is black and frozen*" (Pastoreau 2012:41).

The Greek hell of the Hellenistic period is situated in the depths of the earth, in the vicinity of the kingdom of Night. Rivers of black water separate the realm of the living from that of the dead (the Acheron). At the centre of hell stands the castle of Hades, the god of the underworld and the brother of Zeus. The Furies and Death in person were – in the Greek understanding of the Universe – the dark place to which the dead, or their souls, go: the

"Underworld", Hell, or the Inferno. The gates to this realm were black, and the place itself was dark, like the night. Hades is merciless but just. He may be called "the dark one" or "the black one".

Works of art abound in this theme. For example, certain graphic works (mezzotints) by John Martin (1789–1854) take up themes tangential to the symbolism of sacred black: *The Bridge over Chaos*, 1827; *Pandemonium*, 1841; *Satan Presiding at the Infernal Council*, c.1823–1827 (Fig. 87).



Fig. 87: a. John Martin, *The Bridge over Chaos*, 1827; b. *Pandemonium*, 1841; c. *Satan Presiding at the Infernal Council*, c.1823–1827. Source: <https://www.illustrationhistory.org/artists/john-martin>

His throne of Hell is sometimes of gold, sometimes of black ebony wood. He is accompanied by Death, and when he rides out, his chariot is drawn by black horses; and when mortals make offerings to him, they sacrifice black animals, especially black sheep or black oxen. He sends nightmares to disturb the sleep of men. He has a daughter, Melinoe, whose limbs are partly black – from her father – and partly white, from her mother, Persephone.

The sombre Hell of the Greeks, though it is pitch darkness, has a radiant queen. She is the embodiment of spring, and each year she rises from the winter of death to clothe the earth with flowers and fruit. She is radiant in the painting by Jan Brueghel (1568–1625) that depicts Orpheus playing the harp to her (*Orpheus in the Underworld*, 1594 – Fig. 88). The domain of Hades, however, is black, and clearly shows the connection between the underworld of the Greeks (e.g. *Aeneas and a Sibyl in the Underworld* – by the same painter), the Romans, and the future Christians.

Nor does the Romans' Inferno differ greatly from that of the Hellenes, black remaining the colour of death. The river Phlegethon gives off black flames, says Statius, and Black Death sits upon an eminence (in the sense of a part of a structure raised above the ground). The Romans had several words for black, and a distinction is often drawn between the attractive, lustrous black (*niger*) and the matt, repellent black (*ater*); but in the description

of the *Inferno* the two words seem interchangeable. The black river is *niger* and its black flames *ater*, while Death is *atra* (the feminine form of *ater*, since *mors*, "death", is feminine in gender). Valerius Flaccus refers to a realm of black night and black fear (*niger*), where the Black One (*Celaeneus*) stands clad in black (*ater*). In Ovid (Publius Ovidius Naso), the black Styx has black breath (*halitus niger*). The Roman goddess of death, Proserpina (their Persephone), is called "*Stygiana Juno*". In a lightless cavern, Hercules confronts Cacus, who hurls black fire (*atri ignes*). And when Dido accuses Aeneas of having deceived and abandoned her, she promises that she will pursue him with black fires (*atris ignibus*), and that when the death of ice takes her, her ghost will surround him, wherever he may be.²⁴⁵ Here, then, we find this place of perdition, characterized by darkness, ice, and death – but without flames.



Fig. 88: Jan Brueghel: a. *Orpheus in the Underworld*, 1594 2. *Aeneas and a Sibyl in the Underworld*, c. 1600. Free licence.

In the second century BC, black began to be worn by participants in funerals. It was then, too, that the practice of mourning dress arose, which had both a sacred dimension and, above all, a social one. During the period of the Roman Empire, the relatives of the deceased wore black (or dark-coloured) clothing for a certain length of time, after which the end of mourning was marked by a banquet at which the colour of the garments was to be white. In many parts of the world, black is traditionally the colour of death, mourning, and funerary detail. In the West, dark colours have been associated with death and loss at least since the period of the Roman Empire, where custom required the wearing of black, unadorned garments, the *toga pulla*, of cloth woven from wool dyed black. The colour black returns, adding a gravity – even a fatality – to the transformations that make up Ovid's

²⁴⁵ See Statius, *Thebaid*, IV:520, VIII:21; Flaccus, *Argonautica*, III:380; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, V:354 and *Fasti*, IV:417, Cacus, *Aeneid*, VIII:11, Dido, *Aeneid* VI:384

Metamorphoses. Ovid's black can be epic in its impact and its quantity. In a primordial conflict, near the beginning of time, the sun god, Phoebus, fights the monstrous serpent Python, whose body covers the mountains. When the serpent dies, venom gushes from its black wounds (*vulnera nigra*), the poison destroying it. In the same writings, it is recounted that, when Iris is sent to wake the god of sleep, at the lightless end of the world, surrounded by mist, in a "crepuscular" light, she enters the mouth of a cave, where he lies stretched out on a bed of ebony, covered with a black mantle (*atricolor*).

Ovid is also attentive to black creatures, the black horses that draw the chariot of Pluto (the Roman Hades) – the Black God (*nigri dei*). In the *Metamorphoses*, Aroe is transformed into a creature with black legs and wings (their blackness underlined in Latin by alliteration and internal rhyme: *nigra pedes, nigris*). The hounds of Actaeon, which kill him when he is turned into a stag, include *Melampus* (tr. "black foot"), *Villis Asbolus atris* (tr. "black as soot"), *Harpalos* (tr. "black head"), and *Melaneus* (tr. "black"). At the kill, *Melanchaetes* (tr. "the one with black fur") attacks his back. It may be that, because Actaeon was Greek, Ovid uses Latin words for the pack that are based on the Greek *melas*. In his wildest and most cruel tales, the emphasis on black is never absent. The irony is that this courageous poet should die in exile among the Scythians, beside the Black Sea, a sea whose waters are far from black but which, even in antiquity, was held to be "*Pontos Axeinos*" ("*the Inhospitable Sea*").²⁴⁶ In various regions of Russia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Greece, Albania, Mexico, Portugal, and Spain, some widows wear black for the rest of their lives, and the close relatives of the deceased for a long period.

In Western cultures, black clothing was worn as a social symbol, so that others might know that a person was in mourning. This became an elaborate ritual when Queen Victoria mourned the death of her husband, Prince Albert, for forty years, which in turn inspired other Victorian widows to wear black veils for between one and two years after the death of their husbands. It was also considered fitting for a Victorian widow, when she went out in public, to wear a mourning bonnet and a black veil over her face during the first six months. Men were expected to mourn their wives for between three and six months, after which they could resume their lives, wearing everyday dress, usually of a dark colour. Black jewellery was particularly popular in the form of mourning brooches and rings, sometimes incorporating into their composition the hair of the deceased, intricately knotted or woven, as a sentimental and tangible way of remembering the departed loved one. By the nineteenth century, in

²⁴⁶ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VI:549

England, mourning had become a complex set of rules, especially among the upper classes. For women, for example, the wearing of heavy black clothing and the use of black veils was required, an ensemble known as "widow's weeds".

In Indigenous Australian culture, widows traditionally wore white mourning bonnets, or "kopis". At the end of the mourning period, the kopi was to be placed on the grave of the deceased husband. In East Asia, as in Chinese culture, mourning clothes are white, symbolizing purity and rebirth; and in Japan, the mourning garment is the black kimono. In Thailand, people wear this colour when they attend a funeral. In Cambodia, where the official religion is Buddhism, a faith centred on the idea of reincarnation, the family of someone who dies wears white during the mourning process, in the hope that the loved one will be reborn anew. The colour of the deepest mourning, worn by medieval European queens, was white. In 1393, in Paris, the entire funeral of Leo V, King of Armenia, was conducted in white, a royal tradition that persisted until the end of the fifteenth century.

Subsequently, white mourning, also known by the French term *deuil blanc*, spread once again during the sixteenth century, when white was worn by mourning children and by unmarried women. Having become customary for the queens of France, Mary, Queen of Scots (1542–87) followed their example after losing several members of her family within a short span of time.²⁴⁷ In 1934, Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands reintroduced white mourning after the death of her husband, Prince Henry, and this became a tradition for the Dutch royal family: in 2004, the four daughters of Queen Juliana of the Netherlands dressed in white at their mother's funeral. In 1993, Queen Fabiola introduced white at the funeral of her husband, King Baudouin of Belgium.

In Egyptian culture, gold and black vestments were associated with eternal life and with the all-powerful god Ra, whose flesh was believed to be made of this precious, imperishable, and indestructible metal; in ancient Egypt, black was the colour of royal mourning. As the treasures discovered in ancient Egyptian burial chambers have revealed, kings were prepared for their journey into the afterlife, with vast quantities of gold placed in their tombs. It was believed that, after their death on earth, they would assume the status of deities, a belief reflected in the famous gold funerary mask of the young king Tutankhamun.

In Hindu culture, death is both an "end" and a "beginning", for the cycle of life is believed to be seemingly endless, the indestructible "atman" – the soul – passing through

²⁴⁷ Before Queen Victoria died, in 1901, she left highly detailed instructions on how white was to be used at her funeral. Not only was the white bridal veil placed over her face and a white pall laid over the coffin, but she further directed that white horses be used.

countless bodies of animals and human beings. Hinduism therefore forbids excessive mourning, or wailing at a death, since this may impede the passage of the soul that has departed on its journey. On the day on which the death occurs, the family does not cook; consequently, close family and friends will usually provide food for the bereaved household. White clothing (the colour of purity) is the colour of mourning. On the morning of the thirteenth day, a Śrāddha ceremony takes place.²⁴⁸

In Islamic culture, examples of mourning practices occur annually, during the month of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar. This mourning takes place in commemoration of the Imam Al-Husayn ibn Ali, who was martyred, together with his seventy-two companions, by Yazid bin Muawiyah. Shia Muslims wear black garments and form processions in the street to mourn the tragedy of Karbala. Shia Muslims also lament the death of Fatima (the only daughter of Muhammad) and of the Shia imams.²⁴⁹ In the eastern corner of the ancient granite shrine in Mecca – the *Kaaba* – lies the *Black Stone*, still set where Abraham placed it. It was white when it fell from Paradise, in the time of Adam, but long ago it was blackened by the sins of mankind. It was an object of pilgrimage even before Islam. To this day it remains an object of veneration: the crowds who make their way each year to the Great Mosque in Mecca kiss the Black Stone. Just as the armies of Mecca, like those of Rome, once used to follow an eagle, so too Mecca has its own "*lapis niger*".

Black holds various religious values in Islamic culture. In the Quran, when Allah tells his angels that he will create man, he says that he will create a mortal "from black mud". And in later Islamic mysticism, as in Christian mysticism, the blackest depths of the night were believed to conceal and to represent the *Light of the Absolute*, and hence *the colour of the absolute*.

Amerindian tribes regard black as sinister, yet, because it confers invisibility, they also see it as a protector.²⁵⁰ The anthropologist Gladys Reichard holds the view that black comes from the north, but also from the east. In some parts of Africa, black is traditionally

²⁴⁸ The ceremony involves a fire sacrifice in which offerings are made to the ancestors and the gods to secure a peaceful afterlife for the deceased. The Pind Sannelan ritual is performed to ensure the meeting of the departed soul with that of God. Usually, after the ceremony, the family cleans and washes all the idols in the family shrine; and the gods are offered flowers, fruit, water, and food. The family is then ready to bring the period of mourning to a close and to return to everyday life.

²⁴⁹ Mourning in Islamic culture requires the avoidance of decorative clothing and jewellery. Loved ones and relatives are to observe a mourning period of three days. Widows mourn for an extended period (Iddah) of four months and ten days, in accordance with Qur'an 2:234. During this time they are not to remarry, move from their home, or wear decorative clothing or jewellery.

²⁵⁰ Reichard, Gladys, A. *Naoaho Religion: A Study of Symbolism*. NY, 1963, p. 194.

the colour of the north, but here it signifies the direction from which the dark clouds of the rainy season come.²⁵¹

In some cultures (the Nordic countries, Asia), black symbolizes bodily death and transcendence. The night of Brahma in Hinduism signifies an "*interval of nonmanifestation*", following the cataclysmic end of a cycle. While Vishnu sleeps upon the cosmic ocean, in this all-encompassing darkness of the night the primordial integrity and beauty of the universe are transformed and reincarnated.²⁵² At the macrocosmic level, *nigredo* is associated with dark and sombre colours. In Christian alchemy, it consists in the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, whose Body is destroyed and whose Blood is scattered; "Golgotha", which means literally "the place of the skull", became a recurrent image for describing the alchemical nigredo (the skull and the raven are essential symbols of this phase). The poet Rumi calls black a "*consummation of all colours*", granting it the status of a happiness without equal, of inner peace, of a path that has been completed and has reached the *final stage of self-knowledge*, a place to which very few attain and in which *the divine reveals itself*, and thus: transcendence.

3.2.2. The Social Dimension of Black

The transition from sacred black to social black took place gradually. This shift did not occur in Christendom alone; on the contrary, the change in society's colour took place first in the world of another faith: Islam. The killing of Ali, in the disputes that followed the death of Muhammad, initiated the great schism within Islam, and Shia Muslims have dressed in black ever since. Other divisions of Islam have also used black, sometimes to display their alliance with the Shia. In a sixteenth-century Turkish miniature, Muhammad, whose face is once again veiled, wears black vestments and a turban, as do the first four caliphs.

We most often associate the classical world of Greece and Rome with white and with light, with high-quality limestone, marble, and the radiance of Phoebus and of Apollo, the gods of sunlight and of civilization. Yet here too black artefacts became common in daily use, the colour black became a colour reserved for art, and death and the terrible found their full acknowledgement as part of life. This does not mean that the classical world possessed an abstract, unitary sense of darkness, but the principal words for black (*melas* in Greek,

²⁵¹ Fortmann, Adolf, et al. *Color Symbolism: Six Excerpts from the Eranos Yearbook*, 1972, p.63.

²⁵² Zimmer, Heinrich Robert and Joseph Campbell. "*Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*", Princeton, NJ, 1972.

niger and *ater* in Latin) carried a broad symbolism. In the prehistory of Greece, around 7500 BC, in the early Mesolithic period, the island of Melos was a source of obsidian, a black volcanic glass that cannot be carved but only chipped, like flint. Other black stones, such as steatite and serpentinite, were used to create tools. In the Neolithic period, between 6000 and 4000 BC, the Greeks' craft of shaping pottery was perfected. The vessels were coloured black and then smoothed and polished to a shine. The Cycladic period, between 3000 and 1000 BC, produced flat vessels with handles, likewise polished black. They were used as mirrors, when a little water was poured into them, just enough to cover the blackened surface. In Minoan civilization (Crete), black steatite and haematite were cut and polished to produce jewellery, small vases, and ornaments. Lampblack was used to decorate vessels, and in large spaces with columns (for example Knossos) lampblack was used, mixed with the wall plaster, as a base coat, in order to bring out the ochre, the white, and the strong blue of the murals. These paintings depicted banquets, galleys at sea, and athletic young men taking part in various games. When Minoan civilization collapsed, elements of the Minoan style were continued by the Mycenaeans. A recurrent motif was the octopus, whose black, sinuous tentacles were painted on vessels.

As we approach the period of the great city-states – Athens, Sparta, Thebes, Argos – the black patterns on pottery take on human forms. In the seventh century BC the black-figure style developed: against a yellow-ochre ground, people, rendered as black silhouettes, set off to war or occupy their leisure. The drawings had clarity, perfectly balancing the fine black figures and the luminous space around them. Then, around 500 BC, black and white are reversed, and the figures appear rendered in red: against a brilliant black ground, people of a vivid red fight, dance, or simply stand. A fine network of lines suggests supple musculature, or delineates the lithe limbs of animals. Behind these figures, the black ground is absolute. Vincent J. Bruno offers an apt description: "*in red-figure vases, the uncompromising flatness of the black glaze around the figures, its absolute insistence upon a void, seems to heighten both the sense of life and the formal force of these figures*".²⁵³

Perhaps the reference to "a void" carries an existential resonance that belongs more to our own perspective than to that of ancient Greece. Yet it is true that black played a dual role in Greek society, and far from jewellery, murals, and pottery vessels, black was the colour of despair, defeat, shame, and death. In the legend of the Minotaur, retold by Plutarch, the ship that brought Crete's tribute, for the "feeding" of the monster, had black sails, for

²⁵³ Vincent J. Bruno, "*Formă și Culoare în Pictura Grecească*", London, 1977, p.85.

they were heading towards "a certain destruction". Yet ancient ships were for the most part black, their exteriors coated with pitch: Homer's Iliad often refers to the "black ships" of the Greeks. In poems describing tragedies, the references to black are either literal or metaphorical, and Greek tragedy reveals the conviction that death, darkness, and malign events are inevitable in human life.

As with the Greeks, in Roman dwellings too there were black objects with a decorative purpose: figures carved in black marble or ebony, while jewellery, beads, bracelets, and hairpins, usually created from black onyx, served a more functional purpose, Roman garments being fastened more often by brooches than by stitching. Women from wealthier families wore black pendants, and men wore at least one ring set with onyx, which was carved with the family seal. Less wealthy men who worked in the household also wore rings, usually of iron, ornamented with a cheaper black stone, such as steatite. Some Roman buildings were faced with black marble, and some were provided with columns of black granite. Parents would take their children to the so-called Lapis Niger, the Black Stone, an ancient altar believed to mark the tomb of Romulus, the founder of Rome. In ancient Rome black was worn not only for mourning, but was also the colour assigned to the vestments of the sages of the age. Black wool was prized for its softness and beauty, yet the colour that would most have impressed the Romans was, it seems, not black but violet (a black-violet). A Roman man of the Senate had a toga with a purple stripe, as did those of his sons, but only the Emperor could wear a toga entirely violet, on ceremonial occasions. At the end of the Roman Empire, the use of violet began to be controlled, the privilege of wearing it more frequently being, at times, granted to influential groups. Benefactors could wear violet throughout their lives, and officials of the athletic contests could wear violet mantles. In this respect, Roman violet had something of the status that the finest black velvet held in the sixteenth century and, indeed, its colour may not even have been so very different. The dark purple pigment was obtained from the crushed black and violet shells of the sea snails of the *Murex* family, and commanded a high price. According to the Roman architect Vitruvius, the purple harvested in Pontus and Gaul came closest to black (*atrum*), and the Emperor Augustus said of the luxurious Tyrian purple – the "royal purple", sold exclusively to him alone – that it was so dark that it had to be placed in the sun, so that people could see that it was not, in fact, black.

That black was not merely the colour of mourning is also attested by the appearance of certain statues: the *Statue of Matidia*, sister-in-law of the Emperor Hadrian, in which the

black marble robe she wears is clearly not a mourning garment; in the Hall of Statues at the Museum of Archaeology in Antalya, Turkey, there stands a statue of a dancer whose beautiful, flowing dress is, like her hair, of black marble. The poet Ovid, when advising Roman women on what they ought to wear, said that a dress of a dark colour best suits a fair complexion. So too does myrtle. He further noted that Briseis of Troy, in mourning for her family slain by Achilles, was especially attractive in her black garments, which led Achilles to fall in love with her. In her article on the colours of Roman textiles, Judith Lynn Sebesta observes that this was a dark green, the leaves of the myrtle tree being of a deep green, and notes too that Ovid also uses the term *myrtle nigra* – black myrtle, the colour of myrtle appearing to have lain between dark green and black. The Romans could dye cloth black, she adds, using iron salts mixed with tannic acid, some fibres being described as *niger*, or even *coracinus* (raven black).²⁵⁴ The clothing of hermits and monks had been black since as early as the sixth century, and priests and bishops wore the *cappa nigra*, the black hooded cassock, for services and processions as well as in everyday dress. The black cassock was bound up with activities that included education, medical and social care, and a broad range of administrative duties and offices.²⁵⁵

Between 1346 and 1353, during the bubonic plague (the Black Death), the physicians themselves resembled grotesque, carrion-eating birds: broad hats, long coats, and masks shaped like a beak – all black. These features are mirrored in a series of works of art: Pieter Bruegel, *Triumf asupra morții*, 1562, Museo del Prado, Madrid; Paul Fürst of Nuremberg, *Doctor Schnabel von Rom*, 1656, British Museum, London; Arnold Böcklin, *Plague*, 1898, Kunstmuseum Basel, et al.

In 1233 the *Black Friars*, the Dominicans, were founded. Their mission was to go out into the world, evangelizing and educating – becoming the principal order of the Inquisition and reaching the height of their power in the fifteenth century, when a Dominican priest, Girolamo Savonarola, established a theocratic republic in Florence, which he

²⁵⁴ As recorded by Dio Cassius (155–229), the *Black Banquet* staged by the emperor Domitian to warn off his enemies involved the preparation of an entirely black chamber, in which couches of the same colour were set out, where he invited his guests at night, alone, without their attendants. Young men with no clothing, painted black, then entered like ghosts, moving about among the guests; dishes based on animal meat, offered through sacrifice, usually to the spirits of the dead, were served on black platters. The emperor alone spoke, addressing only subjects connected with death and slaughter. It was a feast, the first *black supper* (in its social connotation) known to history.

²⁵⁵ Throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries the Church provided the bureaucracy for the developing nation states, since it held a monopoly on literacy, education, and intellectual expertise. In the twelfth century the wealthy began to found academies of their own and to employ priests to teach in them. By such means the universities began, in time gaining formal recognition (e.g. Oxford in 1167, Cambridge in 1209).

governed with passionate severity. During that period, between 1494 and 1498, games were banned, books and paintings were burned, and dark or black clothing was made compulsory. While black had been associated with the idea of penance and humility, from the sixteenth century onwards it asserted itself in aristocratic fashion throughout Europe – dyeing in black being a luxury, a fact also attested by the works of many artists in the service of the royal courts of those times. The use of the colour black in art expanded and diversified up to the beginning of the seventeenth century, as may be observed in certain works by Rembrandt and Rubens (Fig. 89).²⁵⁶



Fig. 89: Rembrandt, *Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1632); Rubens: *Self-portrait* (1623), *Portrait of a Young Scholar* (1597), *Portrait of King Philip IV of Spain* (c. 1628–29), *Portrait of Elisabeth of France* (1628). Free licence (CC0 type, public domain).

Black clothing became a symbol of authority, establishing a certain etiquette that has been preserved to the present day. In *The Eustace Diamonds* (1871), Anthony Trollope notes that lawyers and the clergy wear black almost all the time, whereas doctors, professors, bankers, and engineers do so only on particular occasions. Another artist whose works document (Fig. 90) the social dimension of black was Honoré Daumier (1808–1879).



Fig. 90: Honoré Daumier: a. *Le Ventre législatif*, 1834, engraving; b. *Two Lawyers Conversing*, 1808, oil on canvas; 3. *The Painter at His Easel*, 1870. Free licence (CC0 type, public domain).

²⁵⁶ *Portrait of King Wladyslaw IV of Poland*, 1620 – Wawel Royal Castle National Art Collection; *Portrait of George Villiers, First Duke of Buckingham*, c. 1617–1628 – Pollok House; *Portrait of Ambrogio Spinola*, c. 1627 – National Gallery in Prague; *Portrait of Queen Anne of Austria*, c. 1622–1625; et al.), and many others, several of which appear in the group shown here.

Le Ventre législatif, from 1834, depicts a courtroom whose figures wear black garments: coats, waistcoats, lapels, and hats of cloth, silk, or velvet, while the eyes and shadows reveal other gradations of black: irony, perplexity, contemplation. By the end of the nineteenth century, the development of engraving had made possible a technique by which a drawing in Indian ink could be reproduced on paper. In his painting, too, chiaroscuro and shadows are omnipresent: in *Doi avocați discutând* (1808) the figures appear dressed in black. In *Pictorul și șevaletul* (1870) the only source of light seems to come from a small window, thus producing only contours that explore the graphic function of light.

The finest garments were of black cashmere, though cheaper black woollen clothing was also to be had. The poet Thomas Hardy observed that farm labourers went out into the fields dressed in black. Across all social strata, black had a lustre when worn with white – above all with a white shirt, together with the white gloves that a gentleman would keep in his pocket of an evening. As with any widely used colour, black acquired different and even opposing values, which coexisted without confusion because everyone understood them. Black could signify wealth, a particular competence, or a distinct gentility.

Black was worn with pride by an aristocrat, or by anyone who commanded solid respect; equally, black could be ecclesiastical or moralistic. The wearing by men of modest yet assertive, serious, Christian garments of black served to reinforce a stern masculine authoritarianism. At that time black was not as widespread in women's dress, for other, stronger colours were available to them – deep red and blue – though these were often worn with a black item: a lace shawl, a velvet mantle, a black fur jacket. The finest dress a woman owned was often black, of black velvet, silk, or satin. As for jewellery, men had black studs on their cuffs, while women wore black jewellery, especially in the 1860s, '70s, and '80s, when it was in fashion.

The black pearl was especially prized, Routledge's manual of etiquette remarking: "*a natural rarity, such as a black pearl, is a more distinguished possession than anything else*". Another symbol of luxury, then, was furniture of black ebony. In *Hints on Household Taste* (1869), Charles Eastlake stated that unpolished mahogany takes on a fine colour with age, but that it looked very well when stained black.

Art documents black mourning, and the use of the colour black was inseparable from reflections on death, suffering, and drama. Hippolyte Flandrin (1809–1864), for instance, in *La Pietà* (1842) renders through a subtle chiaroscuro a faceless mother whose silhouette

barely emerges from the dark ground of the canvas. Through both depersonification and colour, the theme alludes to the universality of mourning and of grief (an association may be drawn with the faceless figures in the low-key photographs of the artist Misha Gordin). By contrast, through the use of a pronounced chiaroscuro, drama, sorrow, and contemplation are represented in *Madame Hippolyte Flandrin* (1846) and *Self-portrait* (1840): the only luminous areas being those belonging to the material world, immateriality being suggested through the use of black (Fig. 91).

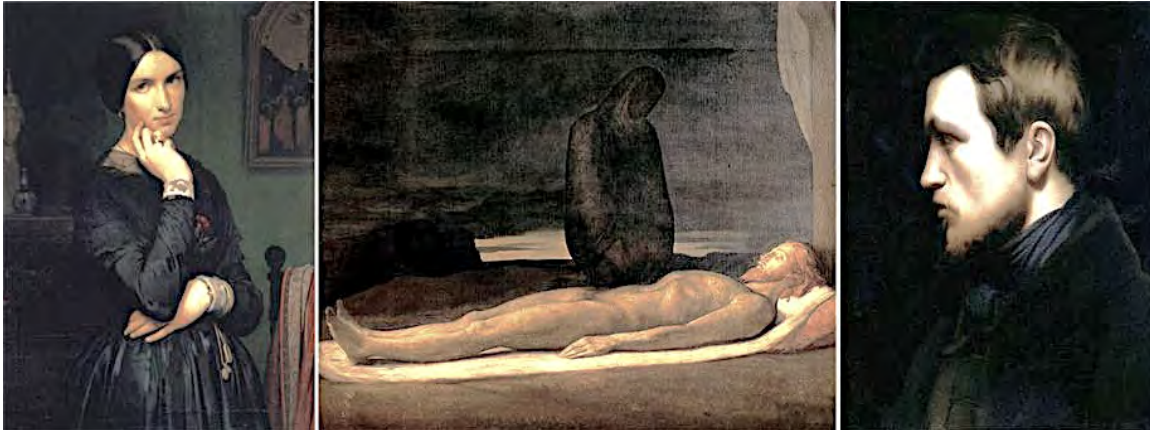


Fig. 91: Hippolyte Flandrin: a. *Madame Hippolyte Flandrin*, 1846; b. *La Pietà*, 1842; c. *Self-portrait*, 1840. Free licence (CC0 type, public domain).

The end of the nineteenth century saw the development of an imagination that associated black with Satanism, sensuality, sin, and death (Rops, Doré). Yet the infernal and malefic black is also doubled by a beneficent and venerable aspect, this duality of the colour appearing as a poetic means of guarding oneself against black with black. While the profound political changes of the nineteenth century affected the most vulnerable social classes, the "black of the street" was chosen by artists to depict the cruellest aspects of modern societies, namely the life of the most disadvantaged social classes.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, under the imprint of fashion designers such as Jeanne Lanvin and Yohji Yamamoto, the black of garments confirmed titles of nobility before spreading widely and becoming the symbol of elegance and modernity. The black of velvets, satins, and laces, represented by artists such as Édouard Manet, or sublimated through textile creations, was a special tribute paid to the brilliance of this colour. Black becomes a substance of modernity, a vector of division; it seems to free itself from its initial dialectic, to the point of becoming a reinvented aesthetic category. In the general view, darkness and light matter almost equally to us, and stylistic tendencies, whether towards darkness or towards light, may carry a neutral or equivalent value simply as a shared

movement. The long-standing connection of black with finance, associated with the importance of money and the need for trust, meant that almost everyone who worked in the financial sector, as well as those who dispensed justice or made laws, wore black.

Black was also popular in fascist movements: it was worn to calculated and terrifying effect by Himmler's SS troops in Germany and, on a smaller scale, by the British Union of Fascists. In Italy, the black shirt was the style of the elite guard that protected Mussolini, of the Italian Fascist movement in general, and of Mussolini himself. By the middle of the last century, men began to wear black less often, except for evening dress; yet the importance of white must not be overlooked, for black with white seems, to this day, to be the supreme colour contrast. Games of chess or the keys of a piano, the pages of a book – will they ever exchange the black-and-white combination for, say, red and green? Probably not.

In the final decades of the twentieth century, black returned to men's clothing, including the suits of leading designers – a general fashion movement that was nonetheless surpassed by black in women's dress. In 1926 Coco Chanel created a black dress with long sleeves but a skirt reaching to the knee. Even now its simplicity is striking, and its slim black arms still have an impact – for by exposing the calves while concealing the forearm, Chanel vigorously challenged a tendency two centuries old, becoming an archetype of women's fashion.

Among the most important designers of the century to have accorded black a special place, for Cristóbal Balenciaga it „has an impact like no other colour” (Harper's Bazaar, 1938), while Christian Dior remarked that he could write a whole book about black. The style was revived by Yves Saint Laurent in the 1970s, by Vivienne Westwood in the 1980s, and so on, nourished too by the long-standing tradition of Japanese black: in 1983 Rei Kawakubo announced that she was working in three shades of black, while Yohji Yamamoto launched his evening line, „Noir”. Instantly, the black dress left its mark on the performing arts. Edith Piaf and Juliette Gréco sang in black, and Martha Graham danced in a black dress – a dress that, on screen, was worn by Marlene Dietrich, with a cape of black feathers, in *Shanghai Express* (1932); by Rita Hayworth, with a slit up to the leg, in *Gilda* (1946); and by Ava Gardner in *The Killers* (also 1946). The best known is probably Audrey Hepburn, in the opening scenes of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), standing before the jeweller's window in a tall, long, slender dress with bare arms, designed by Hubert de Givenchy and paired with long black gloves. Far from the catwalk, the screen, and the microphone, black is worn

at parties and in the street, at work, at home, or when presenting in the boardroom. There is an „intelligent” black, but also a playful black and a „casual” one.

Black has been worn by the Church, by officials who passed into government, by merchants, and by Jewish communities, and, with its gravity, discretion, and resolve, it offers an advantage to a group seeking to revise a governing elite; worn by women, it signals independence, importance, courage, and a stepping out of the shadows. Erotic black refers to the danger-loving side of sexuality – perhaps, ultimately, to the dream bound up with the desire to dominate: *la femme fatale*, dressed in black, sensual, able to conquer any man, and of whom it might be said that she bears a likeness to the old witch in black. The seductive, mysterious, seemingly inaccessible woman dressed in black is, for a man bent on conquest, a fitting „prize”. In this context, the black of mourning and suffering vanishes altogether. The theme is present and esteemed, above all in the cinema: thus, in 2013, the *Coven* season of *American Horror Story* (directed by Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuk) takes a coven of witches as its subject. The most powerful of them, the Supreme, Fiona Goode (Jessica Lange), urges the others to wear „something black”, declaring that „*there is not a door in this world it cannot open*”. In the second half of the twentieth century, the return to black on the part of both men and women occurred not only in haute couture but also in the street. The rockers of the 1960s wore black leather. The Goths favoured a vampiric look, with white faces and entirely black attire. Colour flourishes in our world, yet black, with its ambiguous inflexions, is king – as it is, once again, in most fields of commercial design.

The influence it exerts is, nonetheless, an unconscious one. This colour communicates, and it does so with an impact beyond compare. In the martial arts, the black belt denotes the highest attainable rank; the Taoist Yin-Yang symbol, an embodiment of opposing forces, evokes interconnection and interdependence in the natural world. In recent years, interior designers' advice may include such remarks as: „*the furniture is entirely black*”, „*there is a wall that is wholly black*”, and „*black floors are a very pretty touch*”. High-technology goods often come in black, from televisions to laptops and telephones. And here it cannot be said that black has anything in common with the dark side, or that it alludes to death, mourning, and the like. One might say, rather, that black has become – more than ever – the signature colour of intelligence and style.

In the Romanian cultural heritage, the *ie* (traditional blouse) is inseparable from indigenous culture. The black *ie*, descendant of the old blouses of the Gorj region, embroidered with black thread, is cut from the four widths required for the sleeves and the

bodice. In the Apuseni Mountains the colour scheme of the ie is usually monochrome: bright red for unmarried young women and black for married ones. In Dobrogea, the palette draws above all on red and black. In the case of men, black predominates to a greater degree. A symbol frequently used on the Romanian ie is the spiral (a symbol of continuity and fertility, though it may also be a dual sign: male–female, darkness–light) and the cross, which represents the human being's faith in God – even its cut taking the form of the cross.

3.2.3. Black in Indigenous Mythical Motifs

As for the treatment of the various mythical motifs and structures, the distinctiveness of Romanian mythology lies not only in the fact that archaic indigenous mythical structures have survived, in folklorized forms, within popular mythology, but also in the way exogenous mythical scenarios and motifs were assimilated. Thus, elements of Roman, Judaeo-Christian, and Slavic mythology, together with mythical elements of certain migratory Asian peoples, came to be superimposed upon the indigenous mythical structures and scenarios. We may speak of a phenomenon of adoption and adaptation, on account of which an „imported” mythical motif or scenario nonetheless remains defining for the *Romanian mythical mentality* as well, and not only for the one that engendered it; for the originality of a people, as Lucian Blaga put it, manifests itself not only in the creations belonging to it exclusively but also in the way it assimilates motifs of wide circulation. One may speak of a certain mythical mentality, of a structure composed of numerous models of archetypal thought that generate numerous mythical-ritual manifestations, such as, for example: cosmogonic legends, the magical practices for driving off plagues or storms, the mytho-symbolic valorization of plants and animals, beliefs relating to the world „beyond”, and the ritual beliefs and practices connected with birth, marriage, death, and with particular days or seasons of the year. Taking, for instance, the coordinates of an archetypal model of thought concerning Cosmos and Chaos, in archaic and traditional societies the human being does not behave as a passive spectator of this „cosmic spectacle” but intervenes actively, by mythical-ritual means, in the regeneration and the restoration of the cosmic order, temporarily or cyclically disturbed.

For the mytho-poetic mentality, sleep (especially the lethargic kind) is the brother of death, both being most often valorized negatively. In Greek mythology, for example, the god of death, Thanatos, and the god of sleep, Hypnos, are brothers, begotten by the same pair of primordial deities: Nyx (Night) and Erebus (primordial darkness), the latter two born of

Chaos. At first glance, sleep is a „temporary death”, and death an eternal sleep (the „everlasting sleep”). The two states do not seem to differ; only the spans of time over which they act differ. Theomachy, as a mythical theme, with origins in the Vedic myths (the demon Vritra, who conceals the celestial waters) and the Sumero-Akkadian ones (the conflict between Zu, god of the underworld, and the god Bel-Marduk), we encounter in fairy tales („*Greunceanu*”, „*Prâslea-cel-Voinic și merele de aur*”, „*Mintă-Creață, Busuioc și Sucnă-Murgă*”) and ballads (the ballad „*Milea*”). The carol „*Furarea Astrelor*” originates in the apocryphal Hebrew legend of the fall and chaining of the angels. Here, the sleep of Saint Peter is classed as „*a malefic sleep*”. A further example is the myth of Gilgamesh, who, after crossing the „waters of death” in search of immortality, is subjected by *the merciless one* to a sleep of six days and six nights. In the Romanian fairy tale „*Harap Alb*”, the hero's task was to enter the „*garden beyond*”, but he manages to do so only after Saint Friday lulls the bear guarding the gate to sleep with a narcotic brew made from the „*slumberous*” herb.²⁵⁷

Mircea Eliade holds that this theme of *sleep as a trial* signifies a transmutation of the human condition, the trial being one of a spiritual order, since it transcends biological barriers; thus not everyone can „withstand” the temptation to fall asleep.²⁵⁸ The spiritual nature of this sleep, whatever the characters who fall prey to it or overcome it, derives precisely from the fact that, in reality, no one can hold out without sleep. Therefore, the conscious (white) state needs the unconscious (black) state or, to put it simply, *the unconscious state is an absolute necessity of the conscious state*.

The idea of *regression into Chaos* (e.g. the Iranian myth in which the omniscient and omnipotent Ormazd and the demon Ahriman do battle) recurs in certain indigenous New Year ceremonies. A further example of this is the covenant between the god and the „chosen man” (Noah, Manu, Ziusudra, Deucalion). The principle of Chaos opposes any creation, including microcosmic creations (house, temple, ark), while the god or the demiurgic hero recreates order. At the beginning of the last century, in various regions of the country, from Bucovina to Oltenia, the biblical legend of Noah's ark was adapted thus: the Devil, in order to learn what plans Noah had, lures Noah's wife so as to find out. Unwilling to let anyone else escape the flood (total *regression* into Chaos being a natural desire of the Devil's), he destroys the ark; thereafter God instructs Noah on how to rebuild it, namely to make a little

²⁵⁷ Note: a reiteration of Aeneas, who, in order to enter the underworld, soothes Cerberus with a poppy-based brew.

²⁵⁸ Mircea Eliade, „*Istoria credințelor și ideilor religioase*”, vol. I, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, Bucharest, 1981.

mallet-board from the first tree used in the construction (the maple) and to knock at its root. In the event of the demiurge's wounding, in the place where the blood was spilt upon the earth, various plants and shrubs spring up. Here too it is a matter of a „destruction” necessary to the process of creation.

Mircea Eliade, in several works,^{259,260} notes that for the traditional mentality the *beginning* is bound to an *ending* that precedes it, that this ending is the equivalent of the primordial black, of ancestral chaos, so that the ending is indispensable to any new beginning. What is at issue is a *cyclicity*, somewhat akin to the cyclicity of day and night, or of waking and sleep, but on a macroscopic, universal scale.

The restoration of the cosmic order is also present in certain carols. For example, in a carol collected by George Breazul, within a Cosmos plunged into Chaos, Saint Elijah re-establishes the order of the World, year after year, „*C-aşa-i data Raiului / Şi datina iadului.*” [English: For such is the way of Heaven / And the custom of Hell.]²⁶¹ Often, the restoration of the cosmic order is followed by the enthronement of the hero (after he has passed the trials of valour), coinciding with the slaying of the old sovereign – a motif present in Romanian ballads as well (see „*Paltinul consacrat*”). The legend tells that Aegeus awaited on the cliffs the ship from Crete that was to bring him his victorious son, or news of his death in the Labyrinth. As Theseus had supposedly forgotten to replace, on the mast, the black sail (the token of failure) with the white one (the token of triumph), Aegeus, in despair, is said to have thrown himself from the cliffs into the sea, so that the son took the place of the old king. Thus, once again, death and life are inseparable.

The fear of demons or dragons is another widely diffused theme, present in indigenous mythology as well (for example the ballad “*Gruia lui Novac*”), and it too is bound up with the creation of the world: in Assyro-Babylonian culture, the creation of the world involves the confrontation between the dragon Tiamat and Bel-Marduk (the other deities being too terrified to take part in this duel). In the Assyrian version of the *Myth of the Demon Zu*, who steals Destiny, Enlil, counsellor of the gods, summons the gods to see who will confront the demon. Here too, the absence of Destiny would lead to the destruction of the world and, by implication, a return to the black that precedes creation. The same topos appears in the Greek myth of the gigantomachy: the confrontation between Zeus and the

²⁵⁹ Mircea Eliade, "Le mythe de l'éternel retour. Archétypes et répétition", Gallimard, Paris, 1969.

²⁶⁰ Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, New York, 1974.

²⁶¹ George Breazul, "Culegere de colinde", Fundația Culturală Română, Bucharest, 1938, pp. 117–118.

dragon Typhon. Mircea Eliade holds that “*a characteristic feature common to all these myths is fear, or an initial defeat of the warrior.*”²⁶²

It is not only with the *morbus of fear* that things unfold in this way but, as has been shown, with that of *lethargy* as well. The morbus of sleep contaminates both the pseudo-hero and the authentic one, the latter nevertheless being capable (in the end) of overcoming it. The disorder instituted by the *Demon*, Chaos, primordial black, infects not only the Cosmos but also the psychic structure of the gods and heroes. The fear, terror, and anxiety from which they suffer are clear signs of an imbalance at the microcosmic level.²⁶³

Andrei Oișteanu, writing on Order and Chaos, states: “*One such “polyhedral symbol” is, beyond question, the Labyrinth, which corresponds to an entire constellation of archetypes rather than to any single archetype*”,²⁶⁴ then continuing: “*Labyrinth means Order*”²⁶⁵ citing Norbert Miller. At the same time he paraphrases the idea: “*Labyrinth means Chaos*”.²⁶⁶ Further on, the author invites a philosophical perspective, arguing that Chaos may be regarded as a kind of Order.²⁶⁷ This may be a *paradoxical Order* (the presence of a single law, that of the absence of any law) or a *higher Order* (in the sense of inaccessibility, or in the sense of a state free of constraints, a state of total freedom). The two notions or states “*are complementary, even tangent; each contains the germ of the other, they are therefore reversible, yet unmistakable and irreconcilable, standing in a relation of inverse proportionality.*”²⁶⁸ Andrei Oișteanu, forging a direct link between Chaos, Order (Cosmos), the Labyrinth, and also the “black hole” that calls to be woven, writes: “*If we regard the Labyrinth as an “island of Chaos” in the midst of the Cosmos, then Theseus’s act of unwinding the ball of thread along the twisting paths of the Labyrinth may be seen as an attempt to “weave” the rupture (the “black hole”) in the “fabric of the World”; in other words to restore order within a chaotic microspace.*”²⁶⁹

The conflicts between human beings and divinity are likewise a constituent part of certain Romanian cosmogonic myths. The sin committed by man is the “work” of the Devil, of the *Black Man*, of the Dark One. Because of these sins, God turns his back on mortals. In

²⁶² Mircea Eliade, “*Istoria credințelor și ideilor religioase*”, vol. I, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, Bucharest, 1981, p. 216.

²⁶³ Andrei Oișteanu, “*Motive și semnificații mito-simbolice în cultura tradițională românească*”, Minerva, Bucharest, 1989.

²⁶⁴ Andrei Oișteanu, op. cit., p. 260

²⁶⁵ Norbert Miller, *Editorial*, in “*Daidalos – Berlin Architectural Journal*”, no. 3, March 1982, p. 9, Berlin.

²⁶⁶ Andrei Oișteanu, op. cit., loc. cit.

²⁶⁷ Note: Pythagoras ascribes to Chaos and Cosmos the meaning of “ordered universe”.

²⁶⁸ Andrei Oișteanu, op. cit., p. 261.

²⁶⁹ Idem, op. cit., p. 267.

a legend from the Muscel region, God removes the sky from human beings on account of their greed. In another legend, this time from the Bucovina region, God, angered with human beings, not only “raises the sky” but also turns his back on them. Calamities, whether social or natural, are in Romanian folk beliefs motivated by this same indifference of the divinity. In the Suceava region the presence of a black animal in the yard is a good omen, since it brings good fortune, while in the Gorj region such animals are even preferred, for “sickness does not cling to them”, in keeping with the notion that the blackness of living creatures offers better protection against the maleficent action of evil spirits, which are themselves likewise black.²⁷⁰

The colour black, identified with the earth, which is the “graveyard” as well as the place with the power to bring life to rebirth. This motif, like the universal black–death motif, is found in the ballad “*Miorița*”, where the “*mioara laie*”, that is, the black ewe, warns the shepherd that his death is being plotted. In certain funerary songs the “great” maple²⁷¹ is invoked: “*With its crests upon the skies / With its hem upon the seas, / With its rounded shade, / With its tiny leaves*”, around which the whole *World* is organized, and at which the traveller’s status as a “wanderer” comes to an end, in fact his lack of belonging: neither living nor dead, neither in the “*white world*“, nor in the “*black world*“.

3.2.4. Black in Psychoanalysis: Nonmanifestation, the Subconscious, Melancholy

“Night” is one of the most important words of Indo-European origin, one that spread rapidly: *nakti* in Sanskrit, *nyx* in Greek, *nox* in Latin, *nacht* in German, *nicht* in Scots, *night* in English, *nuit* in French, *notte* in Italian, *noche* in Spanish, and so on. In all the myths of the world, fear is closely bound up with the darkness of night, an anguish that vanishes at sunrise. The fear of the unknown that accompanied night and darkness dates, in all likelihood, from the earliest nomads, who had not yet discovered fire. This fear is felt even today, the pitch dark giving a pronounced sense of insecurity. There is, therefore, a cyclicity between darkness and light and our perception of it.

In art, the night of nineteenth-century painting was used to convey a complex of diverse meanings. A mystical, religious, and sublime reverence for nature is seen in Caspar David Friedrich, Thomas Cole, Frederic Church, Albert Bierstadt, Albert Pinkham Ryder,

²⁷⁰ Romulus Antonescu, “*Dicționar de Simboluri și Credințe Tradiționale Românești*”, Ed. Digitală, 2016, pp. 455–56

²⁷¹ Note: as a rule, the semantron is made of sycamore-maple wood.

and others, while the powerful, dramatic Romanticism of Francisco Goya, Théodore Géricault, and Eugène Delacroix served as visual reportage of the events of the day. Gustave Courbet, who together with Honoré Daumier, Jules Breton, Jean-François Millet, and others founded the Realist School, portrayed ordinary people at work, travelling, or absorbed in their everyday lives, by night and by day. The Impressionists and Post-Impressionists of the late nineteenth century used the theme of night to express a multitude of emotional and aesthetic perspectives, seen most dramatically in the paintings of Edgar Degas, Paul Cézanne, Vincent van Gogh, and others. Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, in the *Dicționarul de Simboluri* (2009, Polirom), hold that gestation, germination, and the conspiracies that will come to light by day are symbols of the night, of darkness. Likewise, the darkness of night harbours the virtualities of existence, and entry into the night represents a return to *indeterminacy*, to a world in which nightmares and monsters mingle, giving rise to the so-called *black thoughts*.

Night, from the standpoint of mystical theology, symbolizes the absence of analytical, expressible knowledge and the purification of the intellect. Sleep and dream, in this context, correspond to a triumph over the rule of time. The Navajo tribe ascribes to night an astonishing, imminent potency, a world in which human beings, animals, and the divinity are united. The sovereignty of night is conferred both by the day that has just ended and by what the next will bring. For many, however, the approach of the dark portion of a day is experienced under the dominion of a sinister feeling, enveloped in everything that is threatening, terrifying, and unpredictable. Although night transforms the world into a peculiar semblance, the onset of darkness can intensify a sense of otherness: night as the predator's friend, betrayal, thieves, and nightmares, the revenant that threatens to appear, and so on. Or, as a mirror of the abyss, night can evoke the solitude of the void, on whose edges the earth and its inhabitants seem small and insignificant.

In one of the works of **Rembrandt**, his close friend, the melancholy poet Jeremias de Decker, is depicted (*Portretul poetului Jeremias de Decker*, 1666). The painting is strange because it is so black that we make out only in part the edges of the hat and the coat against the black ground. Light touches only a third of Decker's face, with its sombre, sorrowful, and benevolent expression. Decker was dying and died before the work was completed. Black here is death-bearing, yet death seen in a motionless grief. The question has been raised whether Rembrandt was a melancholic and showed this through his works. It is not known whether Rembrandt was melancholic or not, but Decker was known for his

melancholy, in his life and in his verse. In any case, one arrives at what is “black within us”, since the word *melancholy* arose from the Greek *melan choly*. From a psychological point of view, night can evoke the *unconscious* in both its positive and its more threatening aspects. Like the Egyptian goddess Nut, who devours the sun in order to let night come forth, the unconscious swallows the conscious ego during intervals of sleep. The state of *unknowing*, of an absence of meaning, characterizes the “*dark night of the soul*”.

Trauma, melancholy, depression, and anguish are associated with dread and fear. Enclosed spaces such as caves, grottoes, caverns, et al., have housed, from the Palaeolithic to the historical era, places of metamorphosis and of birth, places that attract energies, thus constituting humanity’s most ancient cult sites, where magical or religious ceremonies took place. Thus, in mythologies and religions, the connotation of these spaces has remained a negative one: they are inhabited by monsters, they conceal dangers, or prisoners are bound within them. One of the most important texts underlying Western culture is the Myth of the Cave, from Plato’s *Republica*. Plato imagines a dark place where a spectacle of shadows (the deceptive world of appearances) is the only Reality the prisoners of the cave know. When one of the prisoners manages to reach the surface and sees that Reality (the world of Ideas) is not what they had believed it to be, he returns to the cave to recount to the others what he had seen. They, however, do not believe him and kill the one who has succeeded in attaining the Truth.

Within the epistemological branch, Plato adopts a rationalist approach (as distinct from the dialectical approach of Socrates), setting out his vision of how the eternal and immutable exist within a world in perpetual change. He thus comes to draw a distinction between the world of Ideas (which contains the ideal form of all things) and the world of Forms. There is, therefore, a spiritual world and a material one. On his understanding, all the things in this illusory world in which we live are imperfect copies, shadows, of the ideal Forms in the world of Ideas. Plato supports this line of thought by holding that the world in which we live is an illusory world, since it is perceived through our senses, which can be deceptive. Thus, although after birth we are handed down concepts from the sphere of collective knowledge, these are no more than imperfect copies of the Ideal (the perfect form).

From the Heian period of Japan (800–1100 CE) derives the idea that black is expressed as a “*sublimation and purification of all earthly emotions*” achieved by the individual who has sounded the depths of the “*sorrow of human existence*” (Fortmann, 1972: 172). Black is primordial to many forms of transformation, the imaginary hue of *individual*

metanoia, a turning point or a turning inward, or even a “*dark night of the soul*” followed by the light of self-understanding.

Magnum Opus, signifies the absence of the familiar, of identity, and of meaning. *Nigredo* is a state of disorientation, exhaustion, self-doubt, depression, inertia, confusion, and disjunction. The alchemists described it as a “*black blacker than black*”, a *caput corvis* (raven's head). Even so, the alchemists found that *nigredo* is the cause not of dismay but of joy, for to pass beyond this phase expresses a conjunction with the unlimited and abundant potential of the psyche, within which the golden embryo of the self might be conceived. In analytical psychology, the term has become a metaphor for the “*dark night of the soul, when an individual confronts the shadow within*”.²⁷²

For Carl Jung, the rediscovery of the principles of alchemy came to form an important part of his work. Drawn to alchemy, he compared the alchemists' “black work” (*nigredo*) with the often intensely critical engagement experienced by the ego, until it accepts the new equilibrium created by self-knowledge. Jung's followers interpreted *nigredo* in two principal psychological senses: (a) the first sense denoted the subject's initial state of undifferentiated unconsciousness; this first *nigredo*, *unio naturalis*, is an objective state, visible only from without, an unconscious condition of nondifferentiation between self and object, conscious and unconscious. Here the subject is not aware of the unconscious; that is, of the bond with the instincts. (b) In the second sense, *nigredo* is part of the process of individuation, a subjectively experienced process driven by the subject's painful and growing awareness of the traumas that haunt the psyche. It might be described as a moment of utter despair, yet it is a precondition for personal development.

Colours play a major role in the psychology developed by Sigmund Freud, who assigned them to specific emotional states. Professor Max Lüscher likewise drew on fundamental psychological structures in his colour test, first published in 1947, which the founder of analytical psychology, Carl G. Jung, in turn took into account in the treatment of his patients. Carl Jung identified four principal archetypes: the *persona*, the *shadow*, the *anima* or *animus*, and the *self*. These are the *product of collective, shared ancestral memories, which may find expression through art, literature, and religion*. Such recurrent themes help us to understand the *Jungian archetypes* and represent the link between the unconscious and the conscious sides of the mind. The psychological make-up of any person may thus be defined through:

²⁷² Robert H. Hopcke, “A Guided Tour of the Collected Works of C. G. Jung”, Boston, 1989, p. 165

Persona. This defines the various masks we wear in a social context. Our character takes on different forms according to culture, upbringing, and environment. We are, for instance, different in relation to our family from who we are in a professional setting. Social media offer a further example. Originating in the masks of the theatre, the persona reflects the way we adapt to our surroundings, whether in order to fit in or to protect ourselves.

Shadow. Jung held that human beings have a light side (in the sense of good) and a dark side (that which we repress, consciously or unconsciously). The latter is our shadow. There are aspects of our personality that we do not value, or of whose very existence we are not even aware. They reside in the "unconscious mind" defined by Sigmund Freud – the greater part of the psyche, a place of repressed memories and automatic responses. Thus our own convictions issue from our shadow.

Animus and Anima. Our culture, upbringing, and experiences shape our perception of the world. Jung held that these perceptions make room for the ideal man or woman within us. The anima (the woman) and the animus (the man) are a reflection of the opposite sex – of its ideal. Hence, according to Jung, we are drawn to our own construct. Society, however, often compels us to suppress these constructs.

The Self. The ego merges with the conscious and unconscious states to give rise to the self. The self is "the whole", representing Jungian individuality: every person is unique, and no two personalities are alike. The unique experiences over the course of a person's life lead to individuation.

The colour black has been identified with frightening things beyond our power – the darkness of night, the Devil, evil. Yet, from the earliest times, there has also been a powerful will to find darkness not only outside ourselves but within us as well. Sin may be called a stain, which somehow makes it sound external. But the stain is on our soul, not on our body: in other words, it is within. Besides sin, for many hundreds of years another black substance was found within us (black bile). The Greeks called it *melan choly*, the Romans *atra bilis*. For two thousand years, physicians and scholars believed that *melan choly* not only exists but can govern our well-being. Their ideas were not merely theoretical. They carried out dissections, more often of animals than of humans, and probed the appearance, the smell, and even the taste of the things they found. We still use the old Greek name when we speak of melancholy. This is now another name for clinical depression, a darkness lodged within us.

While blood and other bodily fluids were linked to particular dispositions and illnesses, black bile was held to have a catastrophic effect on one's mood, character, and destiny. It possessed an intrinsic morbidity, and its pathology was thought to encompass stammering, ulcers, epilepsy, hallucinations, and depression. An excess of melancholy was believed to bring on madness and self-destructive behaviour. The madness of the melancholic might be a raging madness – or it might be a moral madness. The question of madness was a complicated one, however, for the "black within us" was thought capable of causing madness, yet this black was also the black of genius.

In *The Anatomy of Melancholy* of 1621, Robert Burton, under the pseudonym Democritus Junior, made a meticulous study of this condition, including a psychological theory of depression. He held that the body secretes black bile in response to emotional wounds, ranging from the death of a loved one to disappointment in love. Both idleness and solitary, sedentary occupations were dangerous, as was life in a monastery. He said that contemplation "dries up the brain".

De Motu Cordis by William Harvey, published in 1628 in Frankfurt, alters the black substance held to cause melancholy. Harvey wrote of coagulated, black blood. In this way the notion that black bile was the cause of these emotional disorders would disappear. The term "melancholy" survived nonetheless; as did melancholy itself, the condition we call depression. In art, as in life, melancholy was to persist for whole centuries, with recurrent reference to the colour black. In *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1987), the psychologist Julia Kristeva speaks of the psyche, within which a suffering, or its sources, is enclosed in a kind of "black hole" and does not vanish but remains in the memory of those who have passed through trauma. Expressions containing the word black help to bring out its qualities of **melancholy** and darkening: "to have black thoughts", "to be tormented by black thoughts". It takes on a negative value when it intervenes as a degradation or deterioration of the primordial state. It is the expression of an involitional transformation.

This relationship between psychic, involitional degradation, "black thoughts", and artistic expression may be exemplified by the *black paintings* of **Francisco Goya** (1746–1828), one of the major figures of European art and the most prominent Spanish painter, a representative of Romanticism. From portraits of the royal courts (Charles IV and Ferdinand VII) to bizarre, grotesque illustrations, his artistic legacy attests to a tormented yet sincere genius. His works are considered some of the most controversial, but also the

most compelling, ever produced. His story, reflected in his art, is the story of a Spain passing through one of the most tumultuous periods of its history (the Peninsular War).

In order to assess his art correctly, art critics have always taken into account his enigmatic personality, the illnesses from which he suffered, and the traumas of the Spanish people, all as a single, unified whole. All these extrinsic and intrinsic factors visibly shaped his artistic expression. I chose Goya precisely for this reason, even though he is a very well-known artist. In his case, I consider the outcome of this cause-and-effect relationship to be especially striking and of particular importance, since it explains how *artistic expression can be, and is, shaped by inner experience*.

Initially a painter devoted to the royal courts, Goya later turned his attention to scenes from the everyday life of ordinary people. In the winter of 1792–1793, the artist suffered a mysterious illness (the nature of which remains unknown to this day) that led to the loss of his hearing. Thereafter, his works took up increasingly negative, sombre, and macabre themes, their subjects being witches, ghosts, and monsters. The artist rendered these themes using thick brushstrokes and powerful, bold contrasts of dark colour, with black predominating. Renouncing the representation of "the beautiful", the artist, through colour, technique, and chosen themes, left a testimony that draws its lifeblood from his own consciousness. And genuine art, as is well known, is not commissioned art, but an extension of feeling (Croce, Collingwood, and others). Even so, it took more than a century for art to become truly free, the turning point being marked by the shift from Impressionism to Expressionism.

Scholarly studies such as those undertaken by Guy Tal (2020)²⁷³ and Gabriele Cipriani, Luca Cipriani, et al. (2018),²⁷⁴ and Roberta M. Alford (1960),²⁷⁵ have taken this cause-and-effect relationship as their object, analysing the course of the artist's life in parallel with the themes he addressed and his artistic expression. All these studies examine his abrupt isolation against the backdrop of a fragile psyche, all of this correlated with the hypothesis of the causal relationship described above. The studies cited above do not rule out illnesses of a psychiatric nature either. In this regard, the archives of the period have shown that there

²⁷³ Guy Tal, "The gestural language in Francisco Goya's Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters", in *Word & Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry*, 2020, **26**:2,115-127

²⁷⁴ Gabriele Cipriani, Luca Cipriani et al., "Art is long, life is short. Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes (1746–1828), the suffering artist", Elsevier, 2018

²⁷⁵ Roberta M. Alford, "Francisco Goya and the Intentions of the Artist" in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Wiley, Vol. 18, No. 4, June 1960, pp. 482-493.

were problems of a psychological nature in Goya's family history.²⁷⁶ Another study (2002)²⁷⁷ has suggested the existence of severe depressive episodes in Goya's life between 1777 and 1784, as well as bipolar disorder.

Goya, in a letter to Zapater of 23 April 1794, refers to his condition: "*My health has not improved. Often I cannot bear myself. Then I grow calm again, as I am now, while I write to you*".²⁷⁸ The increasing severity of his illness is thought to have induced feelings of melancholy and isolation, and a search for refuge in fantasy. This severe handicap must have had a marked effect on the artist's psychology, since his relations with other people became increasingly difficult, all culminating in his almost complete isolation.²⁷⁹ Goya was an artist of contraries. Alongside the bizarre, he painted the comic; and alongside darkness, dazzling light. His biographers have divided Goya's oeuvre into two periods, before and after his illness.

The first was characterized by joy and light, the second by terror and darkness. One may argue that Goya's illness enriched his art and that his art transformed the illness: it created new experiences, while his art built for him a new world, a world of his own. Both trajectories were governed by his personality. The artistic expression that followed his illness, intensified by the exclusion of acoustic stimuli, reached its highest pitch: withdrawn and introspective, his entire vitality was directed towards his painting. After 1793, a change becomes visible in Goya's painting, as his subjects move beyond reality, which grows increasingly dramatic, expressing his harsh, often pitiless yet truthful, vision of a dark and terrifying universe.

For example, "*Curtea nebunilor*" (1793–94) depicts the mentally disturbed, in the guise of tormented souls flogged by sadistic guards. Goya demonstrates a remarkable ability to reflect the solitude and suffering of the protagonists of his works, and to transfer his own traumas onto the canvas.

In 1799, the first edition of a set of eighty etching and aquatint prints, *Los Caprichos*, was published in book form. A series of bizarre, captivating, and at times disturbing subjects appears. Through these prints, Goya interprets his own *Self*. Probably the best known work in the series is *Capricho 43, El sueño de la razón produce monstruos (The Sleep of Reason*

²⁷⁶ Fernández and Seva, "A discovery throwing light on the illness of F. de Goya y Lucientes" in *Art and Psychiatry*, 1994; 5:97-102.

²⁷⁷ Olga Martín Díaz, "Goya. Pinturas negras." in *Trama y Fondo*, 2002, 13:83-93.

²⁷⁸ Stokes, Hugh. *Francisco Goya: A Study of the Work and Personality of the Eighteenth-Century Spanish Painter and Satirist*. Creative Media Partners, LLC, Wyoming, USA, 2018, p. 132.

²⁷⁹ Felisati, Dino and Giorgio Sperati. "Francisco Goya and his illness." in *Acta Otorhinolaryngologica Italica*, 2010, 30:264 - 270.

Produces Monsters), in which we observe a figure, presumed to be the artist himself, seated at a table with his legs crossed and his face hidden in his arms, as though seeking to flee the phantasmagoria of birds and bats that surround him.

Goya's late period culminates in the celebrated series of the *pinturas negras* (1819–1823). Isolated, outside Madrid, in a farmhouse he had turned into a studio: *La Quinta del Sordo* (the House of the Deaf Man). Between 1819 and 1823, when Goya was over seventy, he withdrew completely, outside Madrid, into a farmhouse that he had transformed into a studio: *La Quinta del Sordo* (the House of the Deaf Man). Here the artist was able to escape into his own fictional world, a world of the grotesque, a world of his own, a world that probably brought him greater solace because he could be himself there, paradoxical as the claim may seem.

He painted directly onto the plaster of the studio walls the fourteen works that make up the cycle of his *black paintings*, as it was later named. Goya gave no titles to these paintings; most of the names used for them were assigned by art historians. The works were neither commissioned nor sold, were never intended for the public, and, during Goya's lifetime, no visitor reported having seen them.

Goya's black paintings reveal a world without hope. Cannibalism (*Saturno devorando a su hijo*), devil worship (*Aquelarre*), and death by drowning (*El Perro*) recur as themes. The faces of the subjects, figures whose features bear the imprint of madness (*Dos viejos comiendo sopa*), are horrifying. Metaphorically, they are masks of monstrosity. Each face is painted as though the artist had been intimately familiar with the macabre, with demonic derangement.



Fig. 92: A collage of eight of the fourteen black paintings by Francisco Goya. Free licence. 1.*Saturno devorando a su hijo*; 2.*Un viejo y un fraile*, 3.*Hombres leyendo*, 4.*Judith y Holofernes*, 5.*Mujeres riendo*, 6.*Dos viejos comiendo sopa*, 7.*Peregrinación a la fuente de San Isidro*, 8.*Aquelarre*. Free licence (CC0, public domain).

The paintings were catalogued in 1828, after the artist's death, by his friend the painter Antonio Brugada. The series comprises: *Átropos*, *Un viejo y un fraile* (An Old Man and a Friar), *Dos viejos comiendo sopa* (Two Old Men Eating Soup), *Duelo* (the Duel), *Aquelarre* (Witches' Sabbath), *Hombres leyendo* (Men Reading), *Judith y Holofernes* (Judith and Holofernes), *La romería de San Isidro* (The Pilgrimage of San Isidro), *Dos mujeres riéndose de un hombre* (Two Women Laughing at a Man), *Peregrinación a la fuente de San Isidro* (Pilgrimage to the Spring of San Isidro), *El Perro* (The Dog), *Saturno devorando a su hijo* (Saturn Devouring His Son), *La Leocadia* (Leocadia), and *Asmodea* (Witches' Sabbath) (Fig. 92). All fourteen works are on display at the Prado Museum in Madrid.

Why did Goya paint these nightmarish images on the walls of the house he had come to live in? This deceptively simple question has two interlocking answers, in the view of Robert Havard, a university professor specializing in Spanish art: his steadily deteriorating mental health and his anxiety for the state of Spain.²⁸⁰

The darkness of the Black Paintings also reflects Goya's shattered hopes for a more liberal government following the end of the Napoleonic occupation of Spain. Old age and infirmity have been suggested as a direct link to this series: confronting illness, age, and death, Goya confronts his own monsters; he did not wage an inner struggle but rather freed himself, at least in part, through art. With regard to the black of mourning and, metaphorically, of melancholy, Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, holds that these are similar yet distinct responses – "*Trauer und Melancholie*" [English: Mourning and Melancholia] (1918), namely: in mourning, a person faces the grief of losing someone dear, and this process takes place in the conscious mind, whereas in melancholy a person grieves over a loss they cannot fully comprehend, so that the process takes place in the unconscious mind and is regarded as pathological.

Essential to Freud, his concept of the unconscious rested on the theory of repression. He elaborated a postulate concerning repressed ideas, which remain in the mind, removed from consciousness yet operative, and which may resurface into consciousness under certain circumstances. He based this on the investigation of cases of hysteria, which had revealed behaviours determined by ideas, or thoughts, of which the patients were unaware, but which analysis showed to be bound up with repression.

²⁸⁰ Robert Havard, "Goya's House Revisited: Why a Deaf Man Painted His Walls Black?" in *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 2005, Vol. 82, 5:620.

As for dreams (in relation to black, to the oneiric), in Freud's view these are secondary processes subordinate to unconscious thought, which is itself governed by the pleasure principle, by the satisfaction of desire. Owing to the disturbing nature of these and other repressed thoughts or desires, the dream operates as a *censorship function* , disguising them through distortion, displacement, and condensation.

Moreover, Freud postulated that the human psyche could be divided into three parts: the *id* , the *ego* , and the *superego* . In his 1920 essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* , he developed an alternative to his earlier scheme of the conscious, the unconscious, and the preconscious; the id being the wholly unconscious, impulsive portion of the psyche that operates on the "pleasure principle", is the source of the basic drives, seeking immediate pleasure and gratification, and which he called " *the dark, inaccessible part of our personality* ".^{281, 282.}

Bringing together Freud's view of the dream and of personality, one arrives at the **oneiric black**: in the dream, black often symbolizes the unknown, danger, the unconscious, darkness, mystery, hatred, malice, death, or mourning. It can be a summons to self-knowledge and to a deeper exploration of the subconscious, of dreams, often proving revelatory of the hidden dimension of being or of the disquiet that this mystery suggests.

Black points to the obligation to seek, to go beyond appearances, to confront the fear of the unknown. As a positive representation, black might express possibilities and as yet unrealized potential; and if the sensation within the dream is one of joy, then it might imply a hypothetical hidden spirituality and divine qualities. Otherwise, one returns to the dream's censorship function mentioned above. The dream sequence conceived by Dalí for Hitchcock's film *Spellbound* (1945) shows us a deformed, impossible reality that nonetheless exists at the unconscious level.

An artist for whom the dream constituted the foundation of his work was **Odilon Redon** (1840–1916), a French Symbolist painter, etcher, and lithographer, regarded as one of the leaders of the art world of the early twentieth century, who would declare: " *Black is*

²⁸¹ Sigmund Freud (1933), *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* . pp. 105–6.

²⁸² Following the influence of the surrounding environment (family, rules, society, etc.), part of the primordial id is transformed into the Ego, which acts according to the reality principle; it seeks to mediate between the id and reality. It is the organized part of the personality structure, encompassing defensive, perceptual, intellectual-cognitive, and executive functions: it is what the conscious person perceives when thinking about the self, but also what that person tries to project towards others. The Superego (or Super Ego) is part of the unconscious, the voice of conscience (doing what is right) and the source of self-criticism, reflecting the moral values of society, controlling the impulses of the id and its aggression by persuading the ego to turn towards moralistic goals and to strive for perfection.

the most essential colour,"²⁸³ he also noting that he was an advocate of the *infinite forms* that black can generate. Thus the recurrent theme of the boundless, of the infinite, resurfaces. For the greater part of his output, black predominated.

Although he belonged, chronologically, to the generation of the Impressionists, his path in art was an entirely different one. Preoccupied with what lies beyond the visible, his work represents an exploration of feeling and of the human psyche; and although he lived in a period in which the figurative and the real were dominant, his works – chiaroscuros with an oneiric or fantastical character – devote an almost exclusive place to mystery and to the subconscious, a space situated on the boundary between the real and the imaginary (Fig. 93).

Devoted to lithography, he published albums, the first entitled "*Dans le rêve*" [English: In the Dream] (*In the Dream*), then others inspired by the writings of Edgar A. Poe, the painter Goya, or the poet Baudelaire, in which, through his "*noirs*", he explores fantastical, macabre themes, a world of winged demons born of his own imagination, grotesque dichotomies, prefiguring, in a sense, Surrealism and Dadaism. Attentive to what is most subtle and most singular in nature: "*I then feel a mental effervescence coming on; I then feel the need to create, to let myself be carried away by the representation of the imaginary. Nature, thus measured out and infused, becomes the source, the ferment*".²⁸⁴



Fig. 93: Odilon Redon: a. *L'Araignée souriante*, 1881, Musée d'Orsay, Paris; b. *Œil-ballon*, 1878, MoMA, New York; c. *Le Polype difforme flottait sur les rivages*, 1883, Rosenwald Collection; d. *La Mort: Mon ironie dépasse toutes les autres!*, 1889. Free licence (CC0, public domain).

Following a symbolism likewise akin to that of the dream, the series "*Les Origines*" reflects both the evolution and the degeneration of species, giving rise to hybrid, grotesque beings, a combination of objects and human figures, oscillating between the immense and

²⁸³ Hauptman, Jodi. *Beyond the Visible: The Art of Odilon Redon*. The Museum of Modern Art, 2005, p. 8.

²⁸⁴ Berger, Klaus. *Odilon Redon: Fantasy and Colour*. McGraw-Hill, 1965, p. 117

the microscopic, fragmenting bodies, creating strange forms that seem to populate the everyday universe, and so on.

Associated with the Symbolist painters and a close friend of the Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé, the artist describes his charcoal drawings and lithographs as ambiguous and indefinable in his journal-volume „*À Soi-même*” (*For Myself*), revealing that the solitude, melancholy, and abandonment – and perhaps too the rigid discipline imposed upon him – that he felt in childhood are, in part, the sources of his shadows and his blacks: „*Mes ombres*” [English: My shadows], „*Mes noirs*” [English: My blacks]. Through their novelty and originality, his prints were admired not only by a number of leading figures of the age and by art collectors but also by the specialist critics, in the Netherlands and Belgium especially, sustaining a series of exhibitions and even the publication, in Brussels, of the *Œuvre lithographique – Odilon Redon*.²⁸⁵.

In 2011, at the Grand Palais in Paris, the exhibition „*Odilon Redon, Prince du rêve*” was held, in which pastels, drawings, and prints formed an itinerary that reflected the artist's stylistic and thematic evolution, from shadow to light, his mythological subjects preserving a certain musicality, a magic, a certain symbolism of sleep, of forgetting, of metamorphosis.

Black, moreover, draws its force from its depth and its character, both of them unfathomable traits, like the tunnel whose end cannot be seen, the well whose depth cannot be gauged, being itself. Thus, everything that is subterranean, inward, at the centre, may be interpreted as proceeding from black.

On the other hand, because it absorbs, black frightens; in the West it is the colour of mourning, yet not as a symbol of grief or sorrow but of **nonmanifestation** (sleep, fairy tales, legends). The obscurity it generates allies it with the nocturnal and occult forces (we oppose, after all, white, positive magic to black, negative magic). It represents the latent state of the dream, the cessation of activity during the night, the rest of the body and the awakening of the spirit; it governs the realm of the imaginary and of phantasms. It is not consciousness but the *unconscious*. For this reason, in numerous cultures the soul is held to "possess" this colour as it leaves the body.

Black implies everything that is not known yet nonetheless exists, and if it frightens, this is because it discloses and intensifies an unknown dimension of being.

²⁸⁵ Note: Among other things, he also produced large decorative schemes – at the Abbey of Fontfroide, for example – as well as various murals, and likewise tapestry cartoons for the Gobelins Manufactory; he also illustrated the books of Émile Verhaeren, and so on.

Chapter 4. The Method of Observational Research and Subjective Interpretation

4.1. Preliminary Theoretical Considerations on the Method of Observational Research and Subjective Interpretation

This research method was used in Chapter 4. Qualitative research requires an interpretation of what is observed; knowledge is never manifest and is never fully accessible. Likewise, subjective interpretation (observational research), as an essential component of qualitative research, is always shaped by the researcher's preexisting ideas and experience, and indeed by their qualifications in the field under investigation.²⁸⁶

It follows that qualitative research can be neither complete nor objective in the way that quantitative research is. Indeed, the validity of the research derives precisely from its *subjective character*²⁸⁷, reflecting the points of view of the researcher, who contributes to knowledge that is, by definition, unique in character.

In this regard, in "*Îndrumarul de cercetare calitativă în științele socio-umane*" (2006), Florentina Scârnci states that "*observation is a scientific method of collecting data by means of the senses.*"^{288,289}. At the same time, Denzin and Lincoln term the *interpretive style* a scientific research method.²⁹⁰ With reference to this, Florentina Scârnci stresses that the researcher „*introduces his personal interpretations regarding what he is studying; experience and meanings are filtered through the eyes of the researcher, not those of the subject*”²⁹¹. In „*Metodologia cercetării – note de curs*” (2016), Marian Popa, referring to photographs, comic strips, and paintings, classifies them as „*extremely useful*” tools in qualitative research, a view in accord with that of Suzanne C. Ouellette (2003).

Among the criteria taken into account as the basis of subjective interpretation, the following may be mentioned:

²⁸⁶ as Robert Reisz (2019) maintains, citing the German sociologist Philipp Mayring.

²⁸⁷ cf. Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Hermann Schmitz.

²⁸⁸ Florentina Scârnci, *Îndrumarul de cercetare calitativă în științele socio-umane*, Editura Universității Transilvania, Brașov, 2006, p. 49.

²⁸⁹ a view shared by other authors as well, such as Agabrian (2004), Ackroyd and Hughes (1992), Chelcea (2001), Iluț (1997), Mucchielli (2002), Peretz (2002), Adler and Adler (1998), and Flick (1998).

²⁹⁰ Denzin, Norman K., and Yvonna S. Lincoln. *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry*. SAGE Publications, 1998, p. 337.

²⁹¹ *Idem*, op. cit., loc. cit., p. 49.

1. Colour contrasts (described by Itten in „*Kunst der Farbe*”), namely the chiaroscuro contrast, also called the light–dark contrast (a contrast of value), and the quantitative contrast (the dominance of black, of shadow, of darkness)
2. The Gestalt principles (Max Wertheimer)²⁹², of which the following were taken into account:
 - a. The principle of closure: when we see a complex arrangement of elements, we tend to look for a single, readily recognizable pattern.
 - b. The figure/ground principle: elements are perceived either as figure (the element in focus) or as ground (the background on which the figure is set).
 - c. The principle of prior experience: elements tend to be perceived according to the observer's prior experience.

4.2. A Phenomenological Analysis: The Aesthetic and Perceptual Dimension of Black in Art

Applying phenomenological analysis, this section examined black in terms of its aesthetic and perceptual value in black-and-white photography. The reason underlying the decision to investigate this subject through different methods was a wish to explore how chiaroscuro has been used in photography and what conclusions may be reached regarding its distinctive visual language. In subsection 4.2.1, on contemporary photography in relation to the fine arts, the analysis brought out, through example and interpretation, the exclusiveness that sets photography apart from other styles of artistic expression.

The evolution of photography in relation to some of the most important artistic movements, presented in subsection 4.2.2, was analysed by considering the means through which these movements shaped or influenced the various genres of photography. In the observational study devoted to Man Ray's rayographs – subsection 4.3 – I examined how the aesthetic frame of the photograph is transformed, with emphasis on the tonal relationship between white and black, light and darkness, the theme of the shadow, and the African mask. I analysed the relationship between composition and form through an analogy of the role of the dark zones in both abstract and figurative works. Whereas in the first case the role of black is to constitute a pictorial ground, in the second this is no longer predominantly the

²⁹² ELLIS, D. Willis, *A Source Book Of Gestalt Psychology*, Routledge, Oxford, London, 2013, p. 71

case. Through the use of shadow, of directed illumination, of a deliberately exaggerated outline, and so on, black can appear not only as ground but also as form. Moreover, when form and ground intersect, a tendency emerges to pass from the figurative to the non-figurative, in which case materiality begins a journey towards the immaterial, making room for the imagination and hence for interpretation through one's own system of values – which is what confers essence and therefore freedom upon a work of art. Was it not precisely by relinquishing its purely reproductive character that photography acquired its well-deserved status as art?

Pursuing the subject further, subsection 4.4 investigated, comparatively and descriptively, the abstraction resulting from the deliberate use of chiaroscuro by the theorist and artist László Moholy-Nagy, one of the most distinguished members of the renowned Bauhaus art school. The discussion showed how, through various exploratory and manipulative means, the artist can redefine reality and transform it, accentuating the relationship between expression and perception, two of the major elements through which art operates. It also drew an analogy with certain creative explorations of the twenty-first century that carry further the undertakings initiated by Man Ray and László Moholy-Nagy.

Given that Chapter 3 brought out the multiple meanings and dimensions that black possesses, both from a semiotic point of view and from the point of view of its evolution in art, I considered an excursion into nocturnal photography to be absolutely necessary. Following the time–space itinerary, subsection 4.5 set out the elements that define this type of photography, which reveals itself only beneath the curtain of night, of darkness. At the same time, through an analysis of the works of certain notable figures in this field – Félix Nadar, Alfred Stieglitz, Robert Doisneau, Brassai, Bill Brandt, Michael Kenna, et al. – it was observed that darkness can be both a fertile context for negative emotions and one of ease and release.

4.2.1. Aspects of Contemporary Photography in Relation to the Fine Arts

The twentieth century, often regarded as a moment of convergence and dialogue among the arts, confirmed this credo. Throughout these years, the arts of the world – photography, cinema, and video – offered a field of enquiry fertile in encounters between image, sound, light, and interaction, one that led to a fundamental evolution of artistic expression. The place of photography among the other arts was, in general, long a contested

subject. The philosopher Walter Benjamin, addressing this very point, observed that photography had revolutionized the general character of artistic creation, and that the notion of its being an art easier than the others is wholly mistaken. The photographer constructs a world, a universe, often premeditated, in which every intervention is meticulously calculated; and the capacity to prefigure the image mentally, before fixing it on film, allows for an artistic interpretation of reality and, among other things, lends photography its intellectual character.

Addressing the interconnection of the arts, Baudelaire voices his view in the poem *Correspondances: Les couleurs, les parfums et les sons se répondent* [English: Colours, scents, and sounds answer one another].²⁹³, ²⁹⁴. In recent decades, the practice of photography has drawn ever closer to the means of the fine arts, becoming a field in which the complex question of its relationship to the present-day world is addressed. Contemporary photography is distinguished from the classical kind by several features highlighted by Roland Barthes²⁹⁵ in an article of 1977: photography oscillates – at times sublimating the subspecies of art photography, at others laying claim to the species of reportage... drawing its prestige from the subject captured, photography was of interest for the qualities that presupposed the photographer's ingenuity or, in the second case, his daring.

²⁹³ Baudelaire, Charles, "Correspondances" in *Les fleurs du mal* (ed. Antoine Adam), Garnier Frères, Paris, 1857/1961, p. 13

²⁹⁴ In this respect, the exhibition "*Sons & Lumières – Une histoire du son dans l'art du XXe siècle*" is a significant example. It is precisely this paradoxical association that is presented there, the idea of "photographing sound": from the 1920s onwards, cinema, with the invention of the soundtrack, set about "photographing sound". Photoelectric cells and oscilloscopes form part of these experimental assemblages, performing a direct electrical "translation" between sounds and images.

²⁹⁵ Roland Barthes (1915–1980) was a French literary critic, essayist, philosopher, and semiotician who explored a wide range of fields of culture and influenced the development of many schools of theory, among them structuralism, anthropology, literary theory, and others.



Fig. 94: Bernd and Hilla Becher: *Winding Tower: Fosse Grenay No. 1*, 2005; *2. Coal Bunkers*, 1965–1998, *Goole, Yorkshire, GB*, 1997. Source: <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2022/becher>

From the late 1970s, photography began at times to be conceived as a conceptual instrument, as in the case of Bernd (1931–2007) and Hilla Becher (1934–2015), German photographers attached to the idea of conceptual art. Bernd and Hilla Becher documented the industrial structures of the Western world, emphasizing the formal qualities of their subject and suggesting that industrial forms merit examination beyond photography, foregrounding content rather than light, perspective, or other artistic elements. They photographed various edifices serving the same function, the conceptual dimension arising from the degree of resemblance between utility and form. The photographs are in fact the result of juxtaposing a set of smaller photographs bound to one another by the functionality of the inorganic subjects photographed: water towers, factories and their façades, cooling towers, gas tanks, and so on (Fig. 94).

By photographing industrial constructions with a traditional technique, placing the emphasis on the preservation of the built environment and on a reconsideration of how images are presented, they bring the aesthetic close to the documentary character, influencing a number of artists, among them Thomas Ruff and Andreas Gursky (1955), whose photographic works, processed by digital means, explore the limits of realism (Fig. 95). A graduate of the renowned Düsseldorf school, Andreas Gursky helped establish a new standard, a new art of photographing, in contrast to the minimalism of the 1970s, drawing on the present-day, extremely technologically advanced technique of photography. He is considered one of the most influential image-makers working today.

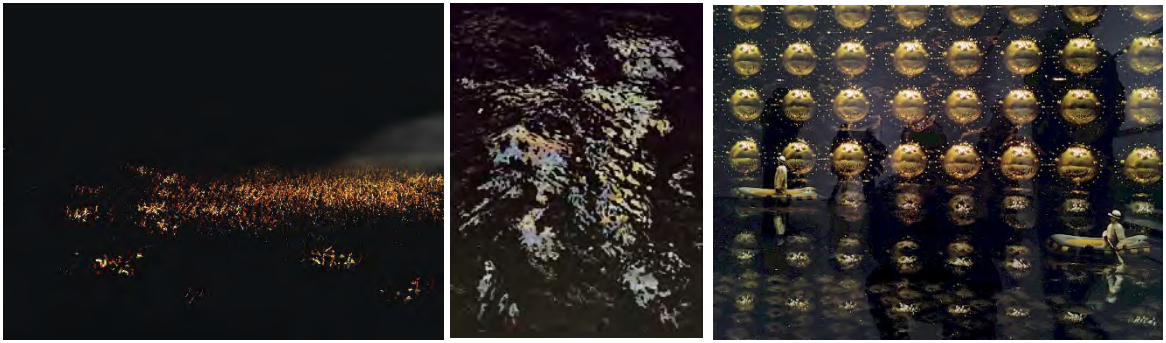


Fig. 95: Andreas Gursky: a. *May Day II*, 1998; 2. *Bangkok II*, 2011; 3. *Kamiokande*, 2007.

As for Cindy Sherman, she investigates, through the effects of multiplying images, the interpretation of the real and of behaviours. Some artists detach themselves from technique and photographic mastery: Sophie Calle, for her part, disregards the subtleties of technical manipulation, photography representing for her no more than the visual element of her own project. Others, such as Nan Goldin, draw on the model of the family album, multiplying snapshots in order to unfold a narrative, often intimate and autobiographical. Yet photography may also be used for its purely formal qualities, the components of the image being deployed in a manner analogous to the elements of the visual language of a painterly work. In the very way that painters make use of colour to produce a picture, photographers do the same with their own means. For his part, Jean-Marc Bustamante – a French conceptual artist, painter, and sculptor – seeks to make photography acquire the value of a picture, setting out to offer representations rather than reproductions; and, as a creator of installations, he incorporates ornamental design and architectural space into his works. Among the major orientations that mark the practice of contemporary photography one may mention: the documentary, which sublimates reality; the narrative, close to cinema; and that of the painterly tradition, which brings perception close to that of a painting.

Suzanne Lafont, for example, notes that photography is practised not in order to catalogue the world but rather to establish a relationship with it. One of those who anticipated a number of the directions of contemporary photography – the vogue for theatrical staging and existentialist self-portraits – is the often controversial photographer Jan Saudek (1935), a Czech artist, photographer, and painter. Some of his works have depicted the same composition, with the same subjects, over many years, tracing the evolution from child to adult, while other themes address religious motifs, et al.

In 1972, Saudek discovered “*The Wall*”, the peeling wall that served as his backdrop, so that most of his scenes take place in an empty or sparsely furnished room; a window seems to be the eye that opens onto the world, while at other times a clouded sky is projected directly onto the wall. Before the window stand the bodies of adolescent girls, opulent women, couples, and so on. Nudity gives way to temporality, as the passing of time that leaves its traces upon the body, which may be read as pure survival but also as a manifestation of truth; indeed, the singular gift of photography lies in its power to halt time, suggesting even those instants lying outside the *decisive moment*.

4.2.2. Movements in Contemporary Art, with Emphasis on Photography

Constructivist Art

Constructivism is an artistic movement that emerged in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century. Convinced that the earlier notions of art and design no longer reflected that new era of industrialization, the artists of the time sought ways of developing new, abstract forms of expression that might help to fulfil their utopian desire to make the world a better place. Constructivism arose in parallel with another movement, Suprematism, whose manifestation began in 1920 through the brothers Antoine Pevsner (1886–1962)²⁹⁶ and Gabo (1890–1977)²⁹⁷. Naum Gabo, born Naum Neemia Pevsner, was a sculptor and theorist of Russian origin and an important artistic figure in the sculpture of the twentieth century. After a veritable European odyssey, he finally settled in the United States, coming into contact with avant-garde movements including Cubism, Futurism, Constructivism, the Bauhaus, *de Stijl*, and the *Abstraction-Création* group. He was preoccupied with representing negative space, “freed from any enclosed volume”, and with kinetic art – his work *Kinetic Sculpture* (1920) being regarded as the first work of kinetic art. The two brothers' first exhibition took place in 1922 at the Van Diemen gallery in Berlin, under the name “*Erste russische Kunstausstellung*”.

²⁹⁶ In 1923 Pevsner visited Berlin, then travelled to Paris, where he settled permanently, together with Naum Gabo, his brother, who had likewise left Russia; they were leaders among the Constructivist members of Abstraction-Création, a group that embraced a variety of abstract styles.

²⁹⁷ Hammer, Martin and Naum Gabo, Christina Lodder. *Constructing Modernity: The Art & Career of Naum Gabo*, Yale University Press, 2000.; Chipp, Herschel B. *Theories of Modern Art*, Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968, p. 312.

Besides those mentioned, other members were Vladimir Tatlin (1885–1953), Vladimir Shukhov (1853–1939),²⁹⁸ Alexander Rodchenko (1891–1956), and Lazar Markovich Lissitzky (1890–1941). This movement, Constructivism,²⁹⁹ inspired the theories of the Bauhaus school in Germany (1919–1933).

One of the founders of Russian Constructivism, Alexander Mikhailovich Rodchenko, was an artist who engaged with painting as well as with photography, sculpture, and design, his activity as a photographer exerting a great influence among artists with similar concerns. Faithful to the spirit of Constructivism, Rodchenko initially created his photomontages from various photographs, but from 1924 onward he experimented with the formal potential of photographic expression proper, distinguishing himself through his intelligent handling of light and the originality of his poses, framing, and viewpoints. Lazar Markovich Lissitzky (1890–1941) was a Russian-Jewish avant-garde artist and polymath who had a profound impact on the world of art and design through his revolutionary and radical ideas about visual concepts.³⁰⁰

Surrealist Art

The term *Surréalisme* came into being in 1917, when the poet Guillaume Apollinaire, before having it printed, changed the subtitle of the play "*Les Mamelles de Tirésias*" from a supernaturalist drama to a surrealist drama. The writer André Breton took up this term and used it in an article entitled "*Pour Dada*" (1920), before publishing, in 1922, the "*Manifeste du surréalisme*".

Indeed, the Surrealist photographs of Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, André Breton, Brassai, Salvador Dalí, Philippe Halsman, André Kertész, and Hans Bellmer – original and refined creations – advanced the cultural movement of the early 1920s, demonstrating that visual art has no limits in its treatment of themes such as the world of

²⁹⁸ Vladimir Grigoryevich Shukhov (1853–1939) was a Soviet polymath engineer whose analysis of his new structural and architectural methods led to breakthroughs in the industrial design of the world's first hyperboloid structures, among much else, and who is renowned in particular for his hyperboloid tower designs, such as the Shukhov Tower.

²⁹⁹ Proclaiming a geometric conception of space, preceding Cubo-Futurism, Constructivism could also be approached from the standpoint of architecture and design, photography, and so on. The emphasis was consistently placed on the machine element, the industrial object, and the shift from composition to construction.

³⁰⁰ In 1919 Lissitzky was invited by the Russian-French artist Marc Chagall to join the faculty of the art school in Vitebsk, and there he met Kazimir Malevich, then a teacher. Lissitzky's encounter with Malevich kindled his interest in Suprematism, an abstract form of art developed by Malevich, who held that abstraction was the window onto the spiritual.

dreams and of the unconscious. Later, Surrealism would attract artists who practised other arts: painting, photography, sculpture, and so on. The perception of the world changes; it becomes "blue as an orange", as Paul Éluard put it.

In the Kretzulescu Halls of the National Museum of Art of Romania (MNAR), the exhibition *Fidelitatea imaginilor. René Magritte și fotografia*, was held in 2009, bringing together 59 photographs charged with an atmosphere that was at times theatrical, or mysterious and enigmatic – works by the Surrealist Magritte.³⁰¹ For Jeff Wall (1946),³⁰² if photography is a means of creating images of our modern world, he regards it at the same time as an extension of the classical problems of painting, so that he draws inspiration from works of classical art, which he reinterprets through the prism of photography; these often refer to celebrated canvases by Manet, Delacroix, Géricault, and Watteau, or take their inspiration from novels or films.³⁰³

Jeff Wall's photography presents a way of being "the painter of modern life", as he himself, paraphrasing Baudelaire, defines his role, which is to alter the mode of interpretation and to provoke the viewer into deciphering the message. By contrast, the technique of Pierre Boucher, a Surrealist photographer belonging to the "New Vision/Objectivity" current, is that of investigating various aspects of avant-garde photography: photograms, photocollages, and so on – all of which may become occasions for exploration. Yet it has its own importance: the representation of the real left uncosmeticized, of a cold and cynical vision of a corrupt society, art serving as a weapon, which is what characterizes the "*Neue Sachlichkeit*", an artistic movement that emerged in Germany in the 1920s, succeeding Expressionism and counting many artists who came from the Dada movement.³⁰⁴

³⁰¹The Belgian René François Ghislain Magritte (1898–1967), a leading representative of Surrealism in the painting of the wider world. Between 1920 and 1967 he painted roughly a thousand canvases, which became a source of inspiration for subsequent generations. His art, the reflection of a mysterious cast of thought, rests on the unexpected encounter between the unreal and the everyday. In this respect, Magritte resembles De Chirico and the Dadaist artists, with whom he shares the same Surrealist irony. (Cronica Română, 1 May 2009)

³⁰² A graduate of Columbia's School of the Arts, professor of art in Vancouver, Canada, with a doctoral thesis on the Dada movement, committed to conceptual art.

³⁰³ His celebrated photograph *Camera distrusă*, inspired by Delacroix's *Moartea lui Sardanapal*, has an extremely elaborate mise en scène, evoking the idea of cinematic photography. Thus, in the room of ruined furniture, with garments and ornaments strewn across the floor, the sofa slashed, the walls damaged, only a small statuette remains intact, its shadow cast upon the walls.

³⁰⁴ The movement takes on a powerful social dimension and rejects Pictorialism (Albert Renger-Patzsch, Blossfeldt, August Sander, et al.). In painting, the same preoccupations turn the works into pieces verging on caricature, the artists being deemed "degenerate": George Grosz, Otto Dix, Max Beckmann, Conrad Felixmüller, Curt Querner, Franz Radziwill, Heinrich Maria Davringhausen, Otto Griebel, Rudolf Schlichter, Karl Hubbuch. Many of them went into exile with Hitler's rise to power, the movement dying out in 1933.

Fine-Art Photography

Art photography is not a simple reproduction of the real; it becomes an ensemble, encompassing the taking of views, eliminations, that "mise en scène", digital retouching, the use of collage, and so on. The image is constructed starting from an artistic project, from a concept, beginning with its realization through to the manner of its display. "Fine-art photographers" pursue two directions of approach in their art: those whose practice is bound up with contemporary creation, and those who integrate photography into their practice. These transformations of the status of photography are due to technological revolutions, to the rise of digital practice, and to the evolution of the market. Otto Muehl, Hermann Nitsch, and Günter Brus are among the first artists to include it in performances, while nonetheless drawing a distinction between the action images made for photography, which they consider a work of art, and the photography taken during public actions.

In the 1970s, Gina Pane and Michel Journiac, who termed the performance "*action photographique*" [English: photographic action], pursued the same approach. They captured the traces of their happenings through photography. The painter Nato (1944), a Belgian performer, is perhaps one of the most representative figures of this movement in France. Many of his actions are staged for photographers and video operators. Yet he draws a clear distinction between his happenings and the traces of them that may be taken up, as has been noted, by other artists. Orlan (1947) alters her body, reshaping it through multiple transformations and using it as her sole material, the photographic prints being the only representations she delivers. Thus she manipulates digital photography and distances herself from any reference to a real body.

The visual artists Christian Boltanski and Roman Opalka make use of photography as a complement to memory. From 1969 onward, Boltanski employed photographic snapshots as a neutral medium of a collective memory, endlessly interchangeable. Opalka, for his part, photographed his own face after each day's work, from 1961 onward, always under the same conditions of lighting and posture and in the same garments. In this way he inscribed his life within an existential inquiry whose snapshots measure the passage of time. As early as the 1980s, the photography of the visual artist established itself as a form of art. Thomas Ruff modifies the original notion of the authenticity of the snapshot, processing the images on a computer, making multiple superimpositions, or compiling various pieces of information.

Photographers ask themselves about their role, and about their involvement, through photography, in contemporary social and cultural life. Photography also becomes an intimate diary: Nan Goldin chronicles her everyday life, using portraits of those close to her as well as self-portraits, presenting them in the form of a slideshow. Since the year 2000, an increasing number of artists, such as Sophie Calle, Olga Kisseleva, and Roman Opalka, have positioned themselves not so much as photographers but rather as artists who see in photography a medium as acceptable as painting on canvas. Their approaches are manifold, and one proof of their value is the recognition of photography as a form of art.

Pictorialist Photography

Pictorialism subscribes to the idea that photographic art can simulate painting through intervention upon the photograph, a manual intervention that, by technical and chemical means, would lend it added artistic value.

One of the most important promotions of Pictorialism was that of Alfred Stieglitz: *Camera Work* (1903–1917). The majority of the photographs published there were by members of the "*Photo Secession*" group, a group that promoted photography as art. Later, many abandoned Pictorialism in order to form a new group, "*Group f/64*", the photograph no longer being manipulated through the artist's intervention. The American portraitist Sally Mann (1951) revived Pictorialism³⁰⁵ in 2003, with her work "*What Remains*": a series of photographs addressing various aspects of death and decay. Without compromise, Sally Mann reflects on her own feelings towards death, while continuing to probe the limits of contemporary photography.

4.3. Self-Reflexive Aesthetics and the Rayographs of Man Ray

The possibility of "capturing moments" opened up a new horizon for the language of expression, one that fascinated scientists and artists in equal measure. A first step – and Alfred Stieglitz was among those who campaigned in favour of this transition – was

³⁰⁵ One of the most important photographers in the world, Sally Mann creates works of art that challenge the moral values and attitudes of their viewers. Described by Time magazine as "America's greatest photographer", she first gained international prominence in 1992 with "*Immediate Family*", a series of complex and enigmatic photographs of her own children.

Pictorialism³⁰⁶, soon surpassed, however, since photography was not to hold a status apart but rather to express something through itself. In 1869 the English photographer Henry Peach Robinson published the book *Pictorial Effect in Photography: Being Hints On Composition And Chiaroscuro For Photographers*, marking the first time that the term *pictorial* referred to photography within a stylistic context – *chiaroscuro* – a term used originally by the Italian painters to refer to the use of dramatic light and shadow in order to bring out an *emotional state*.

Man Ray invented the photogram, naming it the "*rayograph*", shortly after he had emigrated from New York to Paris (1921). Although the practice had existed since the very beginnings of photography, in his hands the photogram was not a mechanical copy but a painterly, artistic, and unpredictable adventure.³⁰⁷ Hovering between the abstract and the representational, the rayographs of Man Ray, produced between 1921 and 1930, brought to light a new mode of artistic expression that delighted the Dadaists and influenced the Surrealist painters who followed.³⁰⁸

In some photograms it can be observed that Man Ray exposed the paper to light two, three, or more times. On each occasion, a different set of objects acted as a stencil: pairs of hands, heads kissing, combs, scissors, string, scraps of cloth, and other everyday objects. With each exposure, the paper darkened under the action of the light wherever it was not "masked". It is impossible to say which planes of the image are to be read as lying nearer the surface or deeper in space (Fig. 96).

The image is a visual invention: an image without a real model against which we might compare it. A Surrealist might have said, on the contrary, that it discloses a precious reality precisely through its unpredictability. In a 1929 interview with Jean Vidal, on the occasion of a solo exhibition at the *Galerie des Quatre Chemins*, where Man Ray was also presenting recent oil paintings alongside his photograms, he declared that, in his view, "*painting is dead*".³⁰⁹ Nonetheless, Man Ray had not abandoned painting, and he continued to regard himself as a painter long after he had become famous as a photographer. The

³⁰⁶ Pictorialism is an approach to photography that emphasizes the beauty of the subject, tonality, and composition rather than the documentation of reality. Many photographers, seduced by the "beauty" of Impressionism, approached photography in the same manner, attempting to portray the Beautiful and thereby drawing the attention of painters.

³⁰⁷ Photograms are photographic prints produced by placing objects and other elements on light-sensitive paper and exposing it to light, without using a camera.

³⁰⁸ Susan Sontag, *op. cit.*, pp. 37–38.

³⁰⁹ Jean Vidal, "Man Ray," in *L'Intransigeant* (April 1, 1930), reprinted in Emmanuelle de l'Écotais, *Man Ray: rayographies* (Paris: Editions Léo Scheer, 2002), pp. 187–88.

Surrealists saw the rayographs as a new foundation for their painting, asserted as such (see *Le Surréalisme et la peinture* [English: Surrealism and Painting] by Breton).

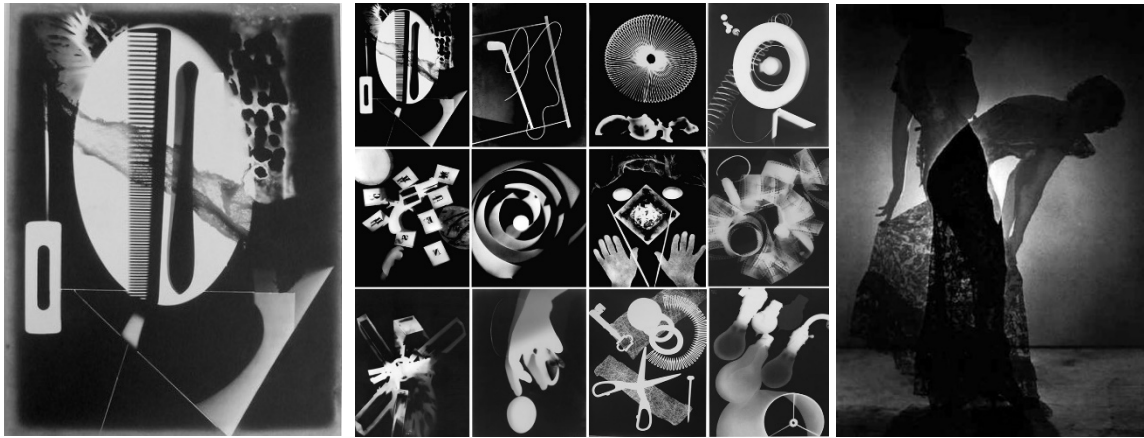


Fig. 96: A grouping of rayographs, Man Ray. Source: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/265487>

Man Ray was of the view that, through his experiments, he had wished to paint "*but with light and chemicals, instead of pigment, and without the optical aid of the camera.*"³¹⁰ It is no surprise that the Surrealists and those who embraced the Dada movement prized the rayographs, all the more so since the First World War had created a "rupture" in the art world, leading to the transition towards Expressionism.

Analysing them stylistically – whether the results were in part deliberate or a matter of chance – they brought out, through their aesthetic, precisely the ideas underlying the two artistic movements. It is worth noting that the rayographs of Man Ray are a direct outgrowth of his experiments with painting. After all, the myth of a painterly origin is not impossible to sustain theoretically, for the rayographs do indeed circumvent two widely accepted features of photography. In the first place, the rayographs, being produced by placing objects directly on the photosensitive paper, are unique images, made without the technological mediation of the camera lens. They thereby exempt themselves from the discourse of the time, which criticized photography as a mechanical means of (re)production.

The elimination of the negative (the mediator) means that the rayographs are unique, eligible to retain the aura of traditional works of art, while the absence of the camera ensures that the author's hand is to the fore in the production of the image. In the second place, although at the beginning of the twentieth century photography was regarded with a critical eye, the rayographs seem to have evaded this criticism precisely in that they did not represent

³¹⁰ Man Ray, *Self Portrait* (1963; repr., Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1988), p. 109.

the world as it was, operating instead through the *removal of the limits of physical reality*. That is to say, elements within the pictorial frame underwent a kind of transformation and internal interference: a reversal of value and a morphic distortion (although the composition of forms is strictly confined to the *mise-en-scène*).

One may therefore assert that the rayographs are abstract rather than descriptive, and so engage a *self-reflexive aesthetic*, the very aesthetic on which art in fact rests. For these reasons, the rayographs and conceptual photography move away from illustration, from description and pure identification. The grammar of the visual language robs the image of its "claim" to comprehensibility, so that these photograms generate an expectation of credibility through partial clarity and a mode of lighting that heightens the illusion of dimensionality, even as the volumes become irrational. A negation of coherence, of any logical connection, is created: the forms mingle and separate, a process of the loss of harmony takes place, and the objects, even when recognizable, appear to defy physical logic or to dissolve into distortions.

The rayographs adopt no rational perspective; rather, they offer a view from below, a kind of perspective onto the unseen, a record of the space in which the two-dimensionality of the photosensitive material meets the plastic substance of the objects laid upon it – a view inaccessible even to the artist, except at the moment when the rayograph reveals itself as such.

The sense of this anti-retinal mode of perception is especially pronounced in those images where recognizable objects are intermingled with indecipherable forms, where the viewer is invited neither into the ideal optical field of abstract forms nor into the illusion of a fully present "realism", but where instead an appeal is made to the subconscious, called upon to furnish explanations. There is a marked tension between figuration and abstraction, which dramatizes the promise of descriptive truth – the truth that documentary photography offers – demonstrating instead a refusal of any faithful reproduction of nature. Despite their palpable materiality, the meaning is elusive, obscure rather than manifest, as though a grasp of the logic of the space were always just within reach. Thus, this *chiaroscuro* that characterizes the rayographs of Man Ray oscillates between obscurity and identification, drawing the viewer into a scene of partial recognition, thereby inviting a subjective interpretation while at the same time appealing to what already lies in the depths of the subconscious.

One may thus speak of a tense articulation between *self* and *other*, offering no stability, nor any mastery of the identity sought by the viewer in the work of art. This "appeal" to the subconscious may be perceived as a lofty form of transcendence that chiaroscuro can afford. Man Ray is known not only for his rayographs and photographs. He was a sculptor³¹¹, engraver, filmmaker, and poet – though he always described himself as a painter above all else³¹², declaring that he photographed what could not be painted and that he painted what he did not wish to photograph.³¹³

The shadow, with its allusion to the oldest form of representation of the soul (Egyptian culture), is another subject addressed by Man Ray, through the photographic series *Kiki de Montparnasse* (1926) and *Lee Miller* (1930) – Fig. 97 a/b, while in 1929 he experimented with solarization, e.g. *Jacqueline Goddard* (c. 1930) – Fig. 97 c.



Fig. 97: Man Ray, a. *Kiki de Montparnasse* (1926), 2. *Lee Miller* (1930), c. – *Jacqueline Goddard* (c. 1930)

By way of analogy, the theme of the shadow, as part of the chiaroscuro contrast, is one that has persisted over time, regardless of the media of artistic expression. For example, the photograph *From the Back Window at 291* (1915) is dominated by the geometric lines of the New York urban landscape, using the rich range of dark tones that the camera affords in order to depict the drama of the city at night.

³¹¹ see *Restored Venus*, 1936–1971.

³¹² see *Lovers*, 1914; *Imaginary portrait of D.A.F. de Sade*, 1938 et al.

³¹³ Man Ray is renowned for his avant-garde approach to fashion photography; for twenty years of his career, between 1920 and 1940, he earned his living almost entirely through his collaborations with *Vanity Fair*, *Vogue*, and *Harper's Bazaar*. The resulting photographs had a lasting impact on fashion photography as a medium, owing to Man Ray's refusal to deviate from his artistic ambitions, whatever form these might take.

The overall darkness is broken up by headlights and other sources of artificial light. Although the photograph was taken many years after Stieglitz had turned his back on the rich tonality of pictorialist photography, it can be read almost as a transitional piece: the dramatic effects of light recall his early work, while the geometric forms of the rooftops in the foreground recall his more recent concerns.

A good example of deeply dark tones is the photograph *Paula, Berlin* by Alfred Stieglitz, which recalls Jan Vermeer's painting *Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window* (1657–1659), in which a woman, lit by a bright window to the left, is shown in her own intimacy, lost in thought. In Vermeer's case the young woman is reading a letter, whereas in the photograph *Paula, Berlin* the young woman is writing one, while the shadows around her deepen into black.

Stieglitz's photograph, however, uses light and shadow in a way no painter would. The slats of the Venetian blinds cast streaks of shadow across the interior. This element of abstract pattern complements other patterns, such as the finer meshes of the back of the wicker chair and the birdcage, and the cluster of photographs and paper hearts pinned to the wall.³¹⁴



Fig. 98: Johannes Vermeer, *Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window* (1657–1659); Alfred Stieglitz, *Paula, Berlin* (1889); Federico Fellini, *La Dolce Vita* (1960).; Alexander Rodchenko, *Grid*, 1918. Free licence (CC0 type, public domain).

It was not shadow alone, however, but also the **African mask** that interested Man Ray. The mask is often associated with earth rites, with funerary and initiatory rites, and is also held to be a physical mechanism for setting transformation in motion, whereby the

³¹⁴ This effect was often used later in film, most obviously in the works of Orson Welles, or in the scene from Fellini's *La dolce vita* (1960) in which the character played by Mastroianni briefly encounters a young girl in a tavern on the coast. He, she, and the whole interior are lightly crossed by thin lines of shadow falling from the sides and the thatched roof.

wearer takes on a new entity; it is bound up with the world of spirits.³¹⁵ From works such as *Black and White* (1926) (Fig. 99 a), the artist's preoccupation with this subject can be inferred. Kiki de Montparnasse, beside a ceremonial African mask, bears a title that refers both to the black-and-white photographic process and to the colour of the skin and of the mask alike. It was created at a time when African art and culture were in vogue. The oval faces look almost identical in their serene expressions, yet one notes the contrast between the soft, pale face and the rigid, glossy black mask.

He simplifies the conflict through aesthetics: one oval beside another, the one lying on its side contrasting with the second, set vertically; one lit from above and the other from the side. Another example is *Elizabeth Arden Electrotherapy Facial Mask* (1932), in which the lines of a few dozen fingers converge towards a black mask, lending it a characteristic centrality. (Fig. 99 b).

In this case the material world, its overabundance, its longing for transcendence, conveys the sense of an appropriation of the immaterial, illustrated once again by the mask – this time a mask closer to the figurative, and likewise black.

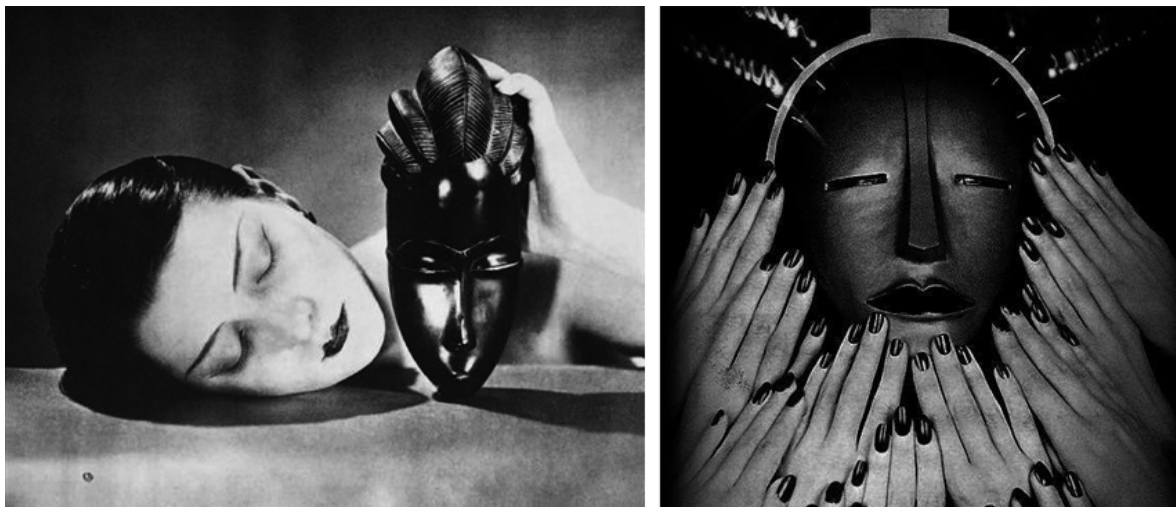


Fig. 99: Man Ray: a. *Black and White* (1926), b. *Elizabeth Arden Electrotherapy Facial Mask* (1932).
Source: <https://www.moma.org/artists/3716>

The *black mask* is not without vicissitudes for its wearer, for mask and wearer reverse their roles, each mask covering the other – in a continuous vertigo – while the force of the mask, the dependence upon it, may take hold of the very person who has, in fact,

³¹⁵ African culture was not concerned with Western themes such as fidelity to nature or ideal beauty, yet these masks possessed precisely what Western art had lost long before: simplicity, clarity of structure, and, above all, symbol.

placed himself under its protection. In both cases the mask alludes, in its hermeneutic significance, to the oneiric, to an alter ego.

4.4. Chiaroscuro and Abstraction in the Photography of László Moholy-Nagy

The theoretical and practical work of László Moholy-Nagy (1895–1946) is indispensable to any discussion of black, for he influenced not only generations of photographic artists concerned with abstraction but also painters, sculptors, and filmmakers. In his book *Pictură, Fotografie, Film* (Bauhaus, 1925–27), he speaks of the major importance that photography opens up within the visual arts, clarifying the significance of technology in the genesis of the new artistic expression, as well as the close relationship between photography and painting.

In *Noua Viziune* (1927) he insists on the close relationship between photography and painting, but also on the specific language proper to photography. He stresses the profound involvement of science in the creative process. Moholy-Nagy foresaw the importance of the "man–machine" link, thereby advancing the idea that the new artist, besides a creative sense, must be firmly grounded in the sciences that help to put the artistic concept into practice.³¹⁶

The artist was influenced by Constructivism, being a staunch advocate of integrating technology into the arts, and to that end he collaborated with other artists such as Lucia Moholy, Walter Gropius, and Marcel Breuer. Indeed, Moholy-Nagy assigned optics a major role in his work, defining photography as a relationship between perception, mechanical devices, form, light, and space: "*Since we can create composition with the help of light, it must be treated as a new creative medium, just like colour in painting and sound in music. I call this mode of composition, achieved with the help of light, the photogram.*"³¹⁷ – Moholy-Nagy maintained, in the journal *Bauhausbücher*.

³¹⁶ Kaplan, Louis. *Laszlo Moholy-Nagy: Biographical Writings*. Duke University Press, 1995, p. 84.

³¹⁷ László Moholy-Nagy, "*Malerei, Fotografie, Film*", originally published in volume VIII of the *Bauhausbücher* series in 1925, p. 35.

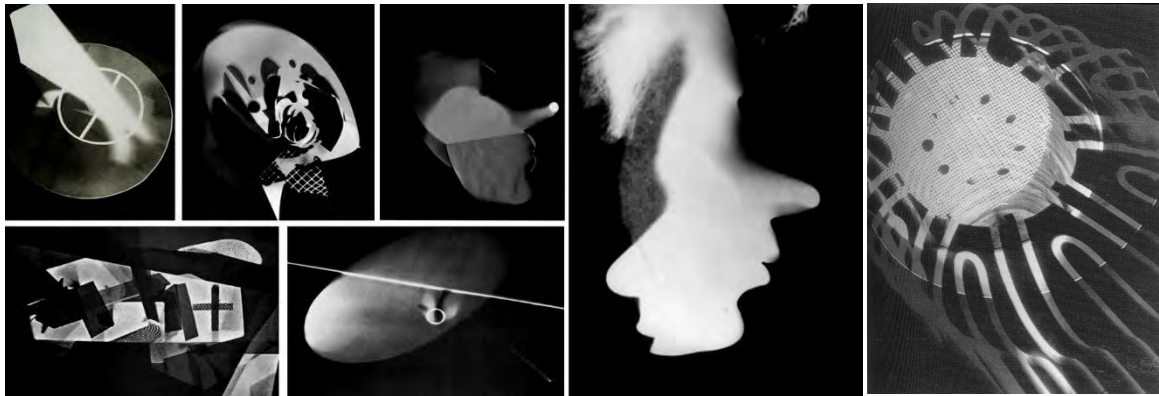


Fig. 100: László Moholy-Nagy, photogram collage. Reproductions from László Moholy-Nagy, *Pictură, Fotografie, Film în Bauhaus*, 1925:25, pp. 60, 62, 67, 69, 73, 74, and 79.

As Man Ray had done, he too experimented with the photogram, using everyday objects as his subject and making multiple exposures in order to create abstract compositions (Fig. 100). In 1929 Moholy-Nagy helped to organize the celebrated exhibition *Film und Foto* (FiFo), including the photogram process as a prominent example of his modernist agenda, *Neues Sehen* or *Noua Viziune*.

At the same time, Moholy-Nagy declared himself dissatisfied that, although photography had existed for more than a hundred years, artists used it for the most part to reproduce reality. He said that "*the total result of photography to date represents little more than a visual encyclopaedic achievement*"³¹⁸, and that most photographs are merely a "*captured moment of movement*".³¹⁹

He held that the creative artist must keep abreast of technology and the power with which it might be brought to bear on the artistic process. Early observations of the effects of medieval stained-glass windows served as his inspiration for similar displays, with continuous light or projections onto the wall, which formed moving chiaroscuro patterns. In all his experiments he championed abstraction through and with the help of technology, being no adherent of faithful representation.

In *Malerei, Fotografie, Film*, alongside theoretical explanations, he illustrates the power of chiaroscuro through images. He regarded everyday images as "romantic", having nothing in common with art. Instead, he explored and proposed abstract light-and-shadow compositions, repetition, macrophotography (likewise in the service of abstraction), and experiments with X-rays, submitting himself to these for some self-portraits. Many of the

³¹⁸ Idem, op. cit., p. 135.

³¹⁹ Idem, op. cit., loc. cit.

photographs created by László Moholy-Nagy appear distorted, manipulated, or deliberately abstracted. Yet he did not define them by those properties; rather, he saw the camera as an instrument through which a universal reality could be expressed.

In order to express this heightened reality, he held that the camera must be used in accordance with its own rules and its own character, defining the distinctive character of photography as something simultaneously objective and abstract. Photography captures reality, but it does not always limit its subject to the reality it captures. Instead, the subject turns upon the chiaroscuro contrast, the mystery of perspective, and the power to prolong time.

Through his work, Moholy-Nagy demonstrated that abstract photographs are not necessarily distortions but rather, in the hands of a visionary artist, can be an invitation to reconsider the way we see. Moreover, through juxtapositions, shadows, and cropping, Moholy-Nagy transfigures reality, the objects losing their form: a world without shadows or recognizable objects, a world of obscurity and of absolute light.

Drawing an **analogy** between the rayographs of Man Ray or the photograms of Moholy-Nagy and the experimental media used in the twenty-first century, one might also mention the Canadian artist **Tenesh Webber**, who explores rayography (Fig. 101). She studied alongside the Canadian artists Ian Wallace and Eldon Garnet, who were among the first innovators in experimental photography in the 1970s (the period when Vera Molnar was experimenting with generative art), introducing large-scale, sequential imagery into their photographic practice.

She was inspired by these artists to develop her own approach to working with the medium and to alternative photographic explorations. Her photography is likewise influenced and inspired by the work of a long history of photographers, painters, and sculptors who engage with the abstract.



Fig. 101: Tenesh Webber, from left to right: *Mid-Point* (2015), *Fall* (2014), *Loops I* (2015). Source: <https://www.artland.com/artists/tenesh-webber>

Among them are the bold drawings of Richard Serra, the geometric arrangements of Barry Le Va, and the delicate minimal process of Agnes Martin. Webber uses the simplicity of the process to create abstract, layered compositions.³²⁰

4.5. The Nocturne in Photography

Throughout the history of humankind, night has often been associated with solitude, drama, danger, mystery, and the unknown, transforming the notion of the world from one of certainty into one of a mysterious and unknown character. Night holds secrets – secrets that arouse our curiosity, shelter us, or frighten us.

The motif of night was established in Western art long before the advent of photography. From the Flemish painter Hieronymus Bosch, who addressed the instinctive fear of darkness and night in his 1503 masterpiece *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, through to contemporary photographers, artists have been preoccupied with what the unseen reveals. Albrecht Dürer and Lucas van Leyden repeatedly introduced night scenes into their works. Aert van der Neer, a seventeenth-century Dutch painter, produced a series of nocturnal landscapes by moonlight. Rembrandt worked with dark tones and deep shadows in order to evoke powerful emotions. Some of van Gogh's most famous paintings are night scenes. Captivated by the night, van Gogh wrote in a letter to his brother: "*I often think that the night is far more alive and far more richly coloured than the day.*"³²¹ James McNeill Whistler painted a series of night and twilight scenes entitled *Nocturne*, and, of course, Edward Hopper's *Nighthawks* series conveys a sense of urban isolation and loneliness. Although painters set down on canvas everything they see with the mind's eye, the photographer's camera records only what lies before the lens. In night photography, exposure time is just as important as light. In the 1850s, Thomas Easterly was the first to capture lightning by daguerreotype. A further challenge was photographing in low-light conditions using artificial light sources, beginning in 1860.

³²⁰ She developed an approach of her own to working with the photographic medium, leading to explorations of scale and to alternative photographic processes, including her current work with photograms. She begins by laying thread on a two-dimensional, transparent surface, sometimes stretching it taut and sometimes letting it fall into an organic state. She creates several surfaces or plates, ultimately superimposing them to produce a layered black-and-white photogram that fuses a universe of organic and geometric propositions (fig. Z).

³²¹ Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo # 533, September 8, 1888.

The French photographer **Félix Nadar** photographed the catacombs and sewers beneath Paris, producing roughly 100 plates between 1861 and 1862. Nadar used both magnesium lamps and battery-powered electric lights.³²² It was only when Alfred Stieglitz and William Fraser in New York, and Paul Martin in London, photographed at night, however, that a significant body of such work emerged. Moonlight undoubtedly made an important contribution, given that street lighting was limited at the end of the nineteenth century.

Alfred Stieglitz is one of the most important figures in the history of photography, both for his images and for his promotion of photography as an art form. He was perhaps the first person to succeed in capturing recognizable figures in a night photograph, and he used exposures of roughly one minute to photograph the street scenes of New York in 1897. Wet pavement, rain, snow, and fog tend to add drama, mystery, and atmosphere to nocturnal photographs, the wet surfaces reflecting the city lights.

Stieglitz's 1898 photograph *Icy Night* (along with others, e.g. Fig. 102) is a perfect example of how bad weather can yield spectacular results. As Stieglitz recounted: "*One night it snowed very heavily. I looked out of the window, wanting to go out and photograph. I armed myself with a tripod, my camera, and 4 × 5 inch plates. The trees in the park were coated with ice. Nothing comparable had ever been photographed before under such conditions.*"³²³ Other photographers certainly also experimented with night photography, but the images of Stieglitz and his colleagues survive today as a testament to these early efforts.



Fig. 102: a. Alfred Stieglitz, *Icy Night* 1898; b. William Fraser, *A Wet Night, Columbus Circle*, c. 1897–1898; c. Paul Martin, *Trafalgar Square on a Very Wet Night* c. 1896.

Edward Steichen likewise made a significant contribution to night photography, in the series "*The Flatiron*" and "*Three Views of Balzac*" (Rodin), using only moonlight.

³²² *Quarterly Journal of Science*, (January 1864), pp. 352–353.

³²³ Dorothy Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz, An American Seer*, New York: Aperture, (1960), pp. 43–45.

Although the photographic record seemed to suggest that night photography was confined to Europe and North America, the historian Peter Yenne championed the remarkable photographs of the Vargas brothers of Arequipa, Peru: Carlos and Miguel Vargas, who created striking nocturnal images in the 1920s using moonlight, lanterns, campfires, and street lamps.

The Hungarian artist **André Kertész** also took up nocturnal photography around 1914 in Budapest. He then moved to Paris, where, in 1925, he continued to take night photographs, and where he met his compatriot Gyula Halász³²⁴, who was already living there and to whom he showed his photographs. A leading figure in photography, Kertész is known for the visual lyricism and humanism that characterized his work. Only in 1964 did his work gain recognition in the United States, when he was also invited to exhibit at MoMA.

Gyula Halász, who later changed his name to **Brassaï**, would become the most influential night photographer of his generation, and perhaps of all time. The Paris of the 1930s was a magnet for artists and writers, and Brassai lived and worked among many of the most important artists of the twentieth century, being a friend of Picasso, Dalí, Giacometti, Matisse, and the writer Henry Miller. Miller gave him the nickname "the Eye of Paris". Brassai's photographs are a remarkable record of the night life of the Paris of that time. He created numerous nocturnal photographs, capturing street scenes and images of brothels, bars, theatres, and cabarets (e.g. Fig. 103). A large part of this work was published in 1932 in *Paris de Nuit*, which was the first significant series of nocturnal photographs ever published. The standards of decency of the time did not permit those depicting scenes of nudity and sexuality to be published until 1976, when some of them appeared in *Le Paris Secret des Années Trente*.



Fig. 103: Brassai, *Shadows in the street*, 1930; *Winter night*; *Passage de Clichy*, 1930; *Lamplighter*, 1932. Source: <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/brassai/>

³²⁴ (a French photographic artist, painter, sculptor, filmmaker, and publicist of Hungarian, Transylvanian origin.

Brassaï was fascinated by the life of nocturnal Paris, by the banks of the Seine and by the ageless alleyways of the old quarters, often in rain or fog – an atmosphere found, for instance, in his memorable photograph *Statue of Marshal Ney in the Fog* (1931). "Night does not show things, it suggests them", Brassaï once said. "It disturbs and surprises us with its strangeness. It releases the forces within us which, during the day, are dominated by reason." He captured some of the most emblematic images of Paris, being among the first artists to apply classical artistic techniques and theories to photography, and specifically among those who photographed, in particular, at night. He explained his fascination with darkness through that peculiar mystery in which things are not disclosed but merely suggested.³²⁵ At the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris there are still negatives, prints, and other materials, testimony to all that this brilliant artist meant for the art of photography.

Of a profound humanism, **Robert Doisneau** (1912–1994)³²⁶ was one of the most popular French photographers, identified with the cobbled streets and old bars of Paris, roaming the poor quarters to capture unique moments: the iconic *Baiser de l'Hotel de Ville*, children caught up in timeless games, and the couple of *La Dernière Valse du 14 juillet, Paris 1949*, who seem to illuminate a deserted street at night with a magical presence (illustrated in Fig. 104). A broad range of people and events, often juxtaposing, with a refined sense of humour, conformist and nonconformist elements in memorable images – an affectionate homage to ordinary people, to life in the suburbs, and beyond.



Fig. 104: Robert Doisneau, a. *Reflét a la raquette*, 1958, b. *Baiser de l'Hotel de Ville*, c. *La Dernière Valse du 14 juillet, Paris*; d. *Tableau de Wagner dans la vitrine de la Galerie Romi, rue de Seine, Paris*, 1949. Source: <https://www.robert-doisneau.com/en/portfolios/>

³²⁵ Brassaï departed from conventional methods and managed to establish an entirely new subgenre of night photography. One may also recall his portraits, now classics, of Dalí, Picasso, Matisse, Alberto Giacometti, et al. In recognition of his merit he was honoured with the titles of Chevalier de l'ordre des Arts et des Lettres (1974), Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur (1976), and Grand Prix national de la photographie (1978).

³²⁶ A pioneer of photojournalism, Doisneau, alongside Cartier-Bresson, holder of a Kodak Prize (1947), the Niépce Prize (1956), and Knight of the Order of the Legion of Honour (1984), was the subject of major retrospectives held at the National Library in Paris, the Art Institute of Chicago, the George Eastman House in Rochester, New York, the Witkin Gallery in New York, et al.

The English photographer **Bill Brandt** met Brassäi in Paris. During that period *Paris de Nuit* was published, and the profound influence that Brassäi had on Brandt's work is understandable. If Brassäi's photographs revealed Parisian night life, Brandt's, through his surrealist vision, transformed the ordinary into something mysterious and uncertain. Brandt was also influenced by the great surrealist photographer Man Ray, which likewise shaped his artistic vision. In 1938 his album *A Night in London* (1938) appeared; although it contains photographs inspired by Brassäi's work, the style and working methods were clearly his own. Brassäi's subjects were people he encountered on his nocturnal walks, but Brandt adopted a novel approach, calling upon friends and family as models in order to create his night scenes, and he had no hesitation in using any available technique to meet his expressive demands. In 1939, Bill Brandt returned to London, photographing the people sheltering in the London Underground: "*In 1939, at the start of the war, I was returning to London and photographing the darkened city, lit only by moonlight, which looked more beautiful than ever before*".³²⁷



Fig. 105: Bill Brandt: 1. *Fire Guards patrol the roof of the Houses of Parliament*, 1942, 2. *St. Paul's Cathedral in the moonlight*, 1942; 3. *Blackout in London, Crescent Moon and Street Lamp, The Adelphi*, 1939
Source: <https://www.billbrandt.com/brandt-sheds-light-through-dark-photos>

The bombing raids of the Second World War left much of Europe's nights without the means of illumination between 1939 and 1942. The darkened skylines of the cities created opportunities for night photography. The bombardments usually took place at night, when the German aircraft could fly over enemy territory under cover of darkness. Bill Brandt faced a very different situation: the city with its lights extinguished and its inhabitants hidden in the underground tunnels of the Tube. The moon provided him with illumination for photographs and, equally, enough light for... the German bombers. Brandt found the streets of London silent and utterly deserted as he photographed the darkness of the city (Fig. 105).

³²⁷ Paul Delany, *Bill Brandt: A Life*, Stanford University Press, 2004, p. 208.

The art critic Paul Delany suggests that Brandt's photographs have a deeply subjective character, comparing them with de Chirico's surrealist vision of the city.³²⁸

Two Englishmen, contemporaries of Bill Brandt who were themselves inspired by the work of Brassai, were **Harold Burdekin and John Morrison**. Though almost unknown today, Burdekin and Morrison produced a series of spectacular nocturnal photographs of London, which were published in the album *London Night* in 1934, a little over a year after the appearance of Brassai's book. The quiet alleys and dark corners of London depicted in these photographs are entirely unpeopled, and were captured for the most part on foggy nights. The capricious atmosphere and timeless stillness of these images make them among the most memorable of the genre. In 1951, **Alfonso Sánchez García** was commissioned to photograph Madrid in order to promote it as a safe city. At that time, Spain was seeking to repair its image, tarnished by the Civil War. Alfonso's night photographs, most of them captured in the old quarter of Madrid, were published in the book *Rincones del Viejo Madrid: Nocturnos*. According to the historian Gerardo Kurtz, the project was unusual on account of the generous nature of the publication at a moment when Spain was still reeling from the Civil War and was in economic isolation after Franco had seized power. There are surprisingly few nocturnal photographic records from the 1960s, but a notable exception is the work of **William Gedney**, who photographed exclusively at night throughout his career, namely from the late 1950s to the mid-1980s. His major projects included documenting communities in Kentucky, Brooklyn, India, and San Francisco.

One of the most prolific night photographers of the second half of the twentieth century is **Michael Kenna**. In the mid-1980s, Kenna retraced the steps of his compatriot Bill Brandt, who had documented the industrial cities of northern England in the 1930s. Although most of Brandt's works in this series had been created during the daytime, they had turned dark and high in contrast, so that many of the images looked almost as if they had been made at night. This prompted Kenna to photograph some of the same places at night, fifty years later. In 1991, the photographer **Tim Baskerville** organized a group exhibition comprising nocturnal photographs alone, at the Galleria Sanchez in San Francisco, entitled *The Nocturnes*, which eventually became the basis of the organization of the same name. In 2003, the Williams College Museum of Art presented an exhibition of contemporary night photographs called *Wait Until Dark*.

³²⁸ Ibid., p. 166.

Chapter 5. The Case Study Method

5.1. The Collective Case Study Method

5.1.1. Preliminary Theoretical Considerations

Unlike the individual case study method, the collective case study involves devising a *multiple-case study design*.³²⁹ The major advantage of this method is that it permits the simultaneous analysis of several cases (a group), leading to comparative syntheses. The working stages comprised:

1. Identifying causal links between the *research theme* and *real-life contexts*.
2. Selecting the relevant cases, on condition that they intersect through a *common denominator* and possess a variable set of *secondary common denominators*
3. Collecting the data for each individual case, data drawn from: written documents (interviews, books, scholarly articles) and/or unwritten ones (photographs, documentaries, television programmes, and so on).³³⁰
4. The observational, descriptive evaluation of the data, a corroboration between the information furnished by the written documents and the subjective interpretation of the unwritten documents.
5. Establishing, on the basis of the observational evaluation, the following groups:
 - A *critical group*, the principal one (carrying the maximum of information)³³¹
 - A *secondary group* serving to validate and/or to contribute new information bearing on the research theme (optional).
6. The analysis of the data, carried out through: *pattern matching*, explanations, chronological analysis, logical cause-and-effect models, and comparative synthesis.

To this end, Yin, as well as Miles and Huberman (1994), recommend an analytical approach that may include: content analysis, the creation of category matrices, diagrams, and summary tables (the relationship between the variables being kept in view), the chronological ordering of the data, or the use of some other temporal scheme.³³²

³²⁹ Robert K. Yin, *Studiul de caz – Designul, analiza și colectarea datelor*, Polirom, Bucharest, 2005, p. 59.

³³⁰ See subchapter 4.1.1/C.

³³¹ Yin associates the term *literal replication* with the critical group because it predicts at least one *pattern* for the construct of the secondary group, a process he calls *theoretical replication*.

³³² *Idem*, op. cit., p. 173.

7. The reporting of the case study draws on specific instruments, namely: chronological and comparative structures which, according to the specialist literature,³³³ take the form of diagrams and/or tables.

5.1.2. The Magnum Photos Group

Given that the Magnum group's archive brings together over a million photographs belonging to the more than 160 members it has had over time, and given too that the bibliography concerning the output of the Magnum group is exceedingly extensive, even if not complete, the selection, the restriction to only a small number of examples, was an extremely difficult task. For the relevance required by the research theme, I took the dominance of black in various photographic series or projects as the basic criterion for analysing the role and place that black has held within the visual or conceptual context of the various series or photographic projects belonging to the various Magnum members.

Through this research, I sought to address this aspect as fully as possible, employing as a mode of analysis *subjective interpretation*³³⁴ focused on the materials available, on the investigation of the regional, social, and political context in which the photographs were made. The impossibility, in this case, of conducting interviews, which would have represented direct points of view, was offset by applying this method to other cases presented in the thesis.

A documentation of humanity more extensive than that achieved through the eyes, through the images captured by some of the world's most remarkable photographers – a documentation of the human being's intrinsic values and their outward expression – is almost impossible to conceive. The Magnum group, through the effort, courage, and perseverance of its members, excelled at both challenges, and did so exclusively through photographic language.

5.1.2.1. The Rationale for Selecting This Case Study Combines the Following Arguments:

³³³ Robert K. Yin, *Studiul de caz – Designul, analiza și colectarea datelor*, Polirom, Bucharest, 2005, pp. 40–49.

³³⁴ see Reisz, 2019.

1. Series of works by certain artists have, among other things, the chromatic dominance of black as a defining characteristic.
2. A history spanning over seventy years, such that I had at my disposal the possibility of following the works over a period of time sufficient to identify those cases in which black was used deliberately;
3. *Magnum Photos* is the most representative movement in the entire history of photography, and many of the photographers who make up its collective, despite being able to photograph in colour, have remained with black and white.
4. Owing to the evolution of photographic language, the founding idea on which the group was based (that the photograph should not be dictated by how it **ought** to look according to those who commissioned it: editors, politicians, celebrities, et al.). For this reason, the photographs of the photographers analysed are their own visions, conceptually and stylistically. This leads to the artistic accuracy of the messages conveyed through their photographs.
5. The Magnum group's more than a million photographs document numerous *faces of humanity* through subjects such as family life, drugs, religion, war, poverty, famine, crime, and so forth, as well as *universal expressions of life* such as: fear, sadness, joy, courage, anguish, love, various moments of reflection, solitude, death, and everything in between – themes most often associated with black.
6. The global (not merely regional) coverage of the social, cultural, political, and economic sphere and its rendering through the image, which constitutes a *testimony* documented across the entire globe. Hence, a high degree of geographical coverage.
7. The character of the photographs is symbolic rather than purely descriptive, which, as Erich Hartmann stressed, ought to suggest to the viewer an inner side of life rather than an outer one.

Given the great quantity and vast diversity of the existing documents relating to the Magnum group (books, articles in specialist journals, interviews, biographies, feature films, documentaries, and so on), I shall not draw up an inventory of them, but shall refer instead to those that bear a clear relation to the research theme in the text. The written documents provide sufficient information for creating the theoretical framework needed to contextualize the analysis of the unwritten, visual documents, that is, the relevant photographs. What is

interesting in the case of this case study is that it can be analysed both as an individual phenomenon (the group in itself) and as a collective one. The advantage conferred by the collective character of the study is that it „offers the possibility of constructing categories or descriptive structural models by comparing the cases” (Reisz, 2019).

In 1945, Robert Capa joined the *American Society of Magazine Photographers* and became an active participant in its meetings, championing the rights of photographers. He already had the concept of Magnum in mind at that point. First and foremost, he wanted to cover the stories that interested him, not necessarily those that interested the magazine editors.

The *Magnum Photos* group was founded in 1947 by Robert Capa, Henri Cartier-Bresson, David Seymour, and George Rodger³³⁵ – „four men of differing nationalities, habits, and working styles, united only by their shared passion for photography.”³³⁶ All four photographers had been photojournalists in the Second World War and were profoundly affected by what they had seen. The agency was established to give photographers the freedom to choose their commissioned partnerships, to retain copyright over their photographs, and not to be obliged by magazines or newspapers to take photographs that might have compromised the photographer's integrity. In a world that had so recently experienced the horrors of totalitarianism, during the period of postwar reconstruction the group's founding idea was (and has remained) that the most important task of a photojournalist is to record the human condition faithfully. Today, the organization is the most respected in the world and has approximately 65 international photographers.³³⁷

Between 1950 and 1960, Magnum also became known as a group of humanist photographers whose photographs reflect their social concerns. This idea gained sudden momentum after the death of Robert Capa, who stepped on a landmine while photographing the war in Indochina in May 1954. The Magnum group's photographs focus on ordinary people, the events of their lives, and the universal human condition, creating an intimate bond between the work of art and the viewer.

This humanist, yet non-identitarian, aspect of the *Magnum Photos* photographs is of particular importance, at least as a parallel, to the central theme of the research, since it

³³⁵ Robert Capa, *Slightly out of focus*, first published 1947, reprint, The Random House Publishing Group, New York, 2001, preface, p. VIII.

³³⁶ Nadya Bair, *The Decisive Network: Magnum Photos and the Postwar Image*, University of California Press, California, 2020, p. 11.

³³⁷ Russell Miller, *Magnum: The Story of the Legendary Photo Agency*, Grove Press, New York, 1997, pp. 49–50.

automatically entails artistic subjectivity and conceptuality. Without these aspects, centred on the *human*, artistic research would lose an elementary characteristic, namely that of seeking to know and to represent, through various means of artistic expression, the human spirit. The aesthetics of modern art likewise places particular emphasis on the bond between feeling and the work of art. John Sloan, in his book *Esența artei*, holds that: „*Art is the result of a creative impulse derived from a consciousness of life*”.³³⁸ In the same book Sloan adds that „*Art is the response to life of the living. It is therefore the testimony that civilization leaves behind it*”³³⁹

5.1.2.2. Humanist Photography as the Hallmark of the Magnum Photos Group

Since any research requires the object of inquiry to be defined as clearly as possible, and since the generalization of its results must be justified and argued step by step (Reisz, 2019), it is necessary to define *humanist photography*, the genre characteristic of the Magnum group, to trace its trajectory, and to show how it contributes to *knowledge*. Humanist photography is an international movement that brings together photographers concerned with the human being in everyday life. It emerged in the 1930s and underwent a remarkable surge between 1945 and 1950.

The marginalized, the disadvantaged, the excluded, and the undesirable, together with the themes of old age and of memory, lie at the centre of social photography's concerns. The founders of this movement are Henri Cartier-Bresson, Robert Doisneau, and Willy Ronis. The first photographer to be regarded as a social photographer in his own right is Jacob Riis (1849–1914), who resolved to use photography to expose the dire social conditions of late nineteenth-century New York.

Another artist whose work carries a powerful message, and whose oeuvre has been crowned with dozens of international awards, among them the distinction of Magnum Photos, is Sebastião Salgado (b. 1944). Over the years he has been involved in numerous social campaigns, foregrounding through his work the pain, the suffering, the human failings, and all the other demons of the late twentieth century.

Other creators of social photography may also be named: Lewis Wickes Hine (1874–1940), August Sander (1876–1964), Dorothea Lange (1895–1965), Eugene Smith (1918–

³³⁸ Andreas Feininger, *op. cit. apud* John Sloan, *Gist of Art: Principles and Practice Expounded in the Classroom and Studio* (Dover Books on Art Instruction), Dover Pubns; 3rd edition, New York, 1977, p. 19

³³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 21.

1978); Yves Jeanmougin (b. 1944), Jane Evelyn Atwood (b. 1947), and Jean-Louis Courtinat (b. 1954). The postwar world in which the Magnum group was founded was hardly a peaceful one. The wave of wars of decolonization that began in the 1940s, together with the rise of the Cold War, prompted many to set out with their cameras towards the new confrontations.

Two of Magnum's founders died while covering postwar conflicts, in Indochina (Capa, d. 1954) and at Suez (Seymour, d. 1956). War photography, already established through the efforts of such photographers, became important to the Magnum brand. And yet it represented only a small part of what Magnum documented on a regular basis.

Between 1940 and 1960, the agency broadened the aesthetics of photography by using images as a means of promoting humanitarian aid, images centred on the universal human condition and thus capable of arousing empathy.

Thus arose *humanist photographs*: images that focus on ordinary people and the events of their lives. The hope of the Magnum members was that, by emphasizing the interconnection between the photographic image and the feeling it can trigger, such photographs might help to avert further global conflicts. Some of the best-known humanist images gained their reputation not through their aesthetics but through their power to speak of universal realities. Beyond physical places or objects, humanist photography was to reflect, in as raw and unaltered a manner as possible, *human experience*.

One example is the emblematic photographs taken by Ernst Haas in 1947 at Vienna's Südbahnhof, moving images of the return of the first 600 Austrian prisoners of war from Eastern Europe (Fig. 106). The images capture the hope and the grief of those searching for their lost relatives among the survivors.



Fig. 106: Ernst Haas, soldiers returning to Vienna from the Second World War. Source: <https://rarehistoricalphotos.com/mother-picture-son-prisoner-war-1947/>

Equally telling are the photographs taken in 1948 by the humanist photographer David Seymour (1911–1956),³⁴⁰ in Warsaw, in a school for "psychologically disturbed children", as Chim describes it in one of his accounts. Among these, *Tereska Drawing Her Home*,³⁴¹ was published by *LIFE* magazine (Fig. 107), and the text of the article notes: "Children's wounds are not all external. The traumas created and lodged in the mind by years of suffering will take years to heal." The photograph was later selected by Edward Steichen for his legendary exhibition *The Family of Man* (24 January – 8 May 1955, MoMA, Department of Photography), the most representative exhibition of *humanist photography*, within which 503 photographs from 68 countries were displayed, the works of some 273 photographers. Steichen declared that the aim of the exhibition was to draw visual attention to the *universality of human experience* and to the role of photography in documenting it.³⁴²

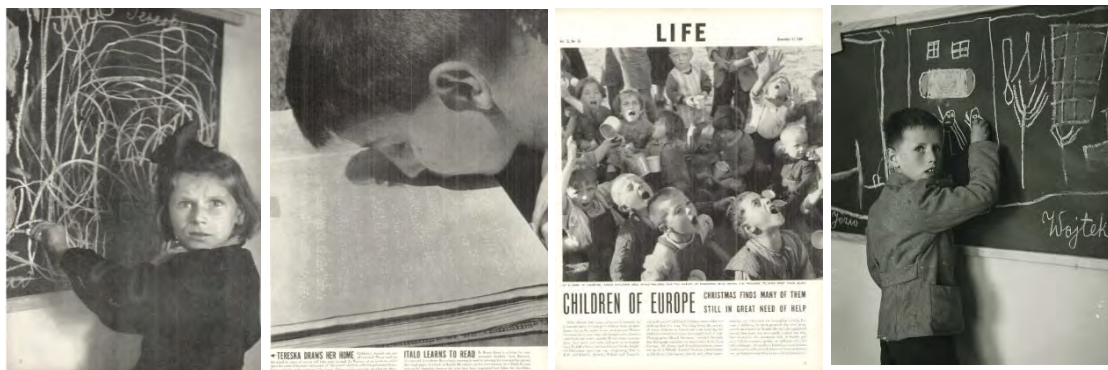


Fig. 107: Photographs by David "Chim" Seymour, published in *LIFE* magazine, 27 December 1948, Vol. 25, No. 26, pp. 13, 16, and 17. On the left, the photograph "Tereska Drawing Her Home".

In 1958, Steichen wrote in the *Wisconsin Magazine of History*: "photography communicates equally with everyone the world over. It is the one universal language we have, the only one that requires no translation."³⁴³ The exhibition suggested an almost universal acceptance of this particular articulation of humanism and a confirmation of the belief in photography as a unique medium, capable of communicating across cultures and

³⁴⁰ His postwar series of photographs of the physically and spiritually maimed, entitled *Children of Europe*, drew worldwide attention, was published in a book by UNESCO, and became part of the posthumous exhibition *Chim's Children*. Chim was killed at Suez while photographing for *Newsweek*, shot by an Egyptian machine-gunner in 1956, four days after the signing of the armistice.

³⁴¹ Tereska, then seven or eight years old, stands in front of a blackboard. In his notebook Chim recorded the theme the teacher had set the pupils: "To jest dom" ("This is home"). That is what the children were meant to draw, but Tereska could do no more than trace a tangle of frantic lines in chalk.

³⁴² Jay, Bill, "The Family of Man A Reappraisal of The Greatest Exhibition of All Time" in *Insight* magazine, Bristol Workshops in Photography, Rhode Island, USA, no. 1, 1989.

³⁴³ Edward Steichen, "Photography: Witness and Recorder of History" in *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, vol. 41, no. 3 (1958), p. 160.

through time.³⁴⁴ Alsberg and Wright (1955) offered comments on this assessment, criticizing above all the notion that, through such a collective effort, the photographers would surrender their individuality; but Roland Barthes's essay in the volume *Mythologies* (1957), on the Paris version of the exhibition, set out the terms in which the exhibition has consistently been assessed ever since.³⁴⁵ For him, it is history that gives meaning to human existence, not nature, even though it was precisely an aesthetics centred on the common man and on human feeling that proved the perfect vehicle for an American ideology oriented towards domestic social conservatism and the cultural hegemony of the Cold War. At the same time, criticizing the concept of the humanist exhibition "The Family of Man",³⁴⁶ he poses a rhetorical yet pertinent question: "Why not ask the parents of Emmett Till, the young Black man murdered by Whites, what they think of *The Great Family of Man*?"^{347,348} deeming the exhibition's concept contradictory in the specific social context of the United States at that time (Fig. 108).



Fig. 108: The first and last pages of the exhibition catalogue. The Family of Man, depicting the Universe and Genesis, set in antithesis against images from the catalogue "THE FAMILY OF MAN REVISITED: Photography in a Global Age", Tauris, London, United Kingdom, 2018, pp. 24–25.

Max Horkheimer, a former founder of the Frankfurt School and one of the principal exponents of critical theory, alongside Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and Herbert Marcuse, brings a different perspective in "*The Family of Man – Wir Alle*" [English: The Family of Man – We All],³⁴⁹ an essay published a year after the opening of *The Family of*

³⁴⁴ Gerd Hurm et al., "THE FAMILY OF MAN REVISITED: Photography in a Global Age", Tauris, London, United Kingdom, 2018.

³⁴⁵ Barthes, Roland. "The Great Family of Man" in *Mythologies*, 100–2. New York: Hill and Wang, 1972.

³⁴⁶ Barthes refers to Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old African American youth who was killed in Mississippi in 1955 after being accused of having insulted a white woman in his family's grocery store. The brutality of the crime and the fact that his killers were acquitted drew attention to the long history of violent persecution of African Americans in the United States. Till became, posthumously, an icon of the civil rights movement.

³⁴⁷ James Guimond, *American Photography and the American Dream*, UNC Press Books, USA, 1991, p. 198. *apud.* Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, 1957.

³⁴⁸ Louis Menand, *The Free World: Art and Thought in the Cold War*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, USA, 2021, *apud.* Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, 1957.

³⁴⁹ It is worth noting that Horkinger adds "Wir Alle", that is, "We All", to the title of the exhibition.

Man exhibition in Frankfurt in October 1958. Horkheimer accepts the exhibition as "a symbol of the bonds common to all human beings",³⁵⁰ but interprets it through the lens of the Kantian philosophical tradition and its affinities with American philosophy, arguing that the exhibition explores, rather, "the identity of human beings in their nonidentity".³⁵¹

Horkheimer's views on photography are clearly influenced by the thought of Siegfried Kracauer, who, in *Theory of Film* (1960), demonstrates, through an analysis of the triad formed by the photographic image, reality, and reason, photography's power to interrogate *physical reality* (the reality proper to each individual), which invariably leads to knowledge.³⁵²

If we take Horkheimer's interpretation to be less a celebration of the present than a challenge to forge a different and better future, his understanding of the universality of the human condition, we may reflect on the utopian impulse of the concept of *The Family of Man* exhibition, at least in the form of a problematic *status quo*. By extension, what is at issue is the *ontology of the nonidentity between reality and representation*. This dual character of the image, humanist or otherwise, reaffirms that each of us interprets, or creates, an image according to our own set of values, that is, through *physical* and *phenomenological reality*.

5.1.2.3. The Role of Black in the Magnum Photographic Visual Idiom

Ansel Adams (a Magnum corresponding member from 1956) was influenced by the work of Paul Strand, who, in the early 1920s, demonstrated a more modernist than pictorialist approach to photography. As a result, in the early 1930s, Adams, together with six other emerging American photographers, formed the contemporary photographic group called "*Group f/64*", taking its name from the aperture setting that yields the greatest depth of field and sharpness – a movement against the soft focus, impressionist style of photography of the time.

Committed to a more aesthetic vision of *straight photography*, this group set out to portray America as a land of hope and beauty. Using large-format cameras, a high degree of

³⁵⁰ Gerd Hurm et al., op. cit., p. 57.

³⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

³⁵² Physical reality is a reflection of the individual's own state, of the state of our consciousness, of each of us. Physical reality lies within us, within our consciousness. This explains why each of us perceives reality differently and ascribes different values to it, according to what our consciousness validates as reality (see Kant, Thomas Kuhn, Peter L. Berger, et al.).

technical skill, and an eye for the natural landscape, these photographers set out to produce sharp photographs – landscapes of the American West.

Adams would object to being described specifically as a landscape photographer. Like all good artists, he distrusts categories, and it is true that he made many splendid photographs of other kinds of subjects. Yet the best of his photographs evoke the memory of what it was *to be alone in an untouched world*, as he himself put it with reference to his photographs. Adams skilfully adjusted the plane of focus so as to control the depth of field, the size of objects, and the relationships between those in the foreground and those in the background of the frame. Using this technique, he was able to alter the perspective within the image.

Adams is also credited with the notion of the *zone system*. In each of his images, Adams sought to differentiate the range of tones from the richest black to the "whitest white" in order to achieve the finest photographic clarity. One of the most representative unwritten documents analysed is the album *Portofoliile lui Ansel Adams (1977)*,³⁵³ which contains 97 reproductions of some of the artist's most emblematic works. The photographs, all in black and white, are grouped into series. The album comprises seven portfolios, each containing between 10 and 15 images, photographs taken between 1948 and 1976 in the great national parks of Alaska, Hawaii, Arizona, California, et al.

Adams used his work to promote the conservation of nature. Through the raw beauty of his photographic images, he campaigned to preserve these areas unspoilt from desecration, and as a result the American government agreed to expand the National Park system. The American president, Jimmy Carter, said of his work: "*So much of America has been saved for future Americans.*"

Black in the visual context of Adams's photographs serves primarily to lend a dramatic effect, the transition from white to black being most often direct, clearly delineating the constituent elements of the image. Moreover, through the use of a red filter, the sky appears dark, creating a strong contrast with the white clouds.

One of Ansel's landscape photographs is *Forest of Aspen (1958)*, which is an excellent example of chiaroscuro. The centre of interest of the photograph is the tree on the left, which stands in the foreground of the frame and is lit by the sun (the last rays of a sunset). The rest of the photograph contains a variety of greys (the tree trunks), but black

³⁵³ John Szarkowski, *The portfolios of Ansel Adams*, Little, Brown and Company, USA, 1977.

predominates as the ground, representing the foliage and the depth of the forest (Fig. 109 a). Another well-known photograph is *Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico* (1941).

Black predominates, occupying almost two thirds of the photograph, with only the mountain peaks, the clouds above them, and the crosses of a cemetery lit by the last rays of the setting sun, these being the lightest areas of the photograph. The buildings and the vegetation fall within the range of greys.

The chiaroscuro contrast brings out the succession of dark–light–dark–light–dark (Fig. 109 b), while the quantitative contrast between black and white brings out the subject underlying the image: the small white crosses set against the large quantity of black and the drama of the moon create a conceptual triad alluding to the ephemerality of being in relation to the eternity of time and space.

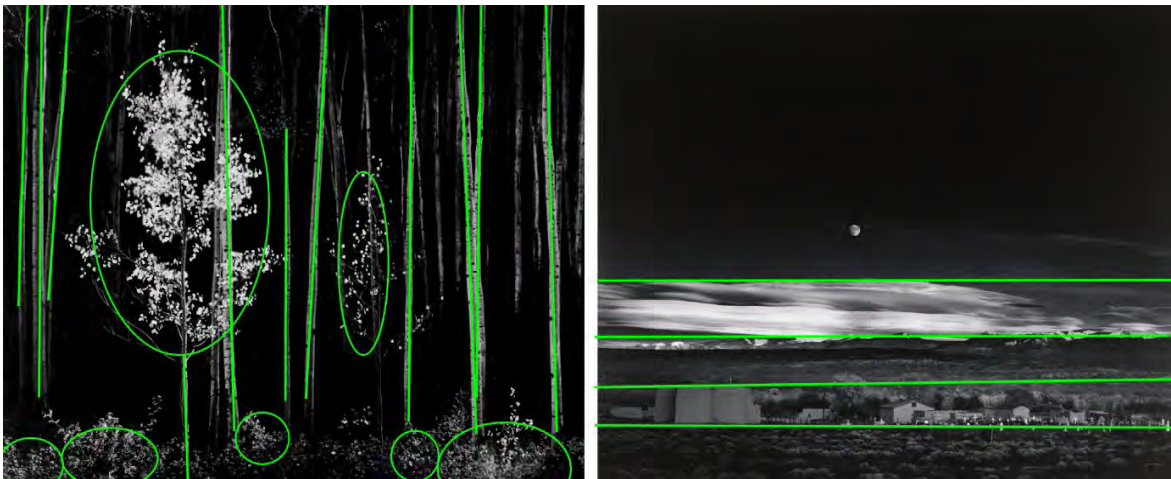


Fig. 109: Ansel Adams, a. *Forest of Aspen* (1958), b. *Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico* (1941).

In the grouping in illustration Fig. 110, black plays the role both of ground (2, 3, 5) and of form (4), or of both at once (1, 6), alternating between static and dynamic, being very clearly delineated from the greys, so that a graphic, minimalist, dramatic, or mystical effect is achieved. Anticipating the final result, together with the zone system, allowed the artist to use tonal control between white and black to obtain the desired effect. Ansel Adams's photographs are unified by light that describes a coherent space, in which the individual elements play only secondary roles.



Fig. 110: Ansel Adams: 1. *MOUNT MCKINLEY, ALASKA*, 1948; 2. *Forest, early morning, Mount Rainier National Park, Washington*, 1949; 3. *SEQUOIA ROOTS*, 1963; 4. *Dead tree. Sunset Crater National Monument, Arizona*, 1947; 5. *GRASS AND POOL*, 1960; 6. *MONOLITH, THE FACE OF HALF DOME*, 1960. Source: <https://www.anseladams.com/>

Robert Capa – in December 1938, the prestigious British magazine *Picture Post* published eight pages of images of the Spanish Civil War taken by **Robert Capa**, then twenty-five years old, and proclaimed him "*The Greatest War Photographer in the World*". Forty years after his death, many people consider that Capa's extraordinarily powerful and moving coverage of five wars entitles him to retain this title. But Capa cannot be classified simply as a war photographer, for, as this book shows, many of his images capture, with warmth and spirit, the joys of people in peacetime. Some of his photographs display a lyricism as tender as that in the work of his friend André Kertész, while others are of moments as rich in significance as those captured by Henri Cartier-Bresson. Capa's complex photojournalistic documentation can be characterized by sensitivity, emotional power, and visual impact.

Nevertheless, war photographs remain at the heart of his work. In addition to documenting the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), Capa spent six months in China in 1938 photographing the Japanese invasion, and later covered the Second World War (1941–45), the Israeli War of Independence (1948), and the French War in Indochina (1954). While photographing the French manoeuvres in the Red River delta, Capa stepped on an antipersonnel mine and was killed on 25 May 1954. He was forty years old.

Capa hated war for its devastating effects on those caught up in it – in which he too was caught. Although he adapted well to the rigours of military life in the field, he was essentially a pacifist and often used to say that he looked forward to being unable to find work as a war photographer. However much he detested conflict, Capa felt that, if war had to be the reality of the moment, it was essential that justice should prevail. And so, in order to win political support for the Spanish government, he made photographs that brought out not only the courage and determination of the Spanish soldiers but also their fortitude in wretched conditions. By photographing Spaniards shivering in foxholes and eating soup in the rain, he emphasized that these heroes were ordinary people and thus led those who saw his photographs to identify with them. By focusing on the faces and gestures of his subjects, Capa allowed those who would see the images to experience a sense of involvement, as if they themselves were suddenly present in the midst of the war.

One of Capa's most famous photographs shows a Spanish government militiaman falling just after being shot. When it was first published, in September 1936, no one had ever seen such a picture. Earlier photographs of war had been almost invariably rather static and taken at a distance from the scene of the action.

Capa's photographs have a powerful emotional impact not only because of the close-range shots from the scene of the action on the battlefield, but also because they show the suffering of innocent civilians, especially children. Capa was present when bombs were dropped on residential districts of Madrid, Hankou, and London. But he rarely photographed the dead or the gravely wounded; instead, he more often focused on the survivors who carried on with their lives despite enormous losses. Whether his photographs depict soldiers or civilians, the images are characterized by intimacy, compassion, and empathy. Capa was able to render these qualities in his photographs with ease, because he himself lived in parallel with what he photographed. Capa was a political exile from Hungary and had fled Germany to escape Nazi antisemitism.

By the time he was documenting the Israeli War of Independence, he knew that many of his relatives had been killed at Auschwitz. He could readily empathize with the subjects of his photographs. The appalling characteristic of war is *dehumanization*. Soldiers use weapons of mass destruction only because they have been trained to conceptualize their victims not as individuals but as a category – the enemy. Capa's strategy was to *repersonalize* war, to emphasize that those who suffer its effects are individuals with whom the viewer of the photographs cannot help but identify.

His sympathy is clear, for example, in his photographs of the very young German soldiers who were taken prisoner by the Americans in Italy; the images and their captions emphasize that these naive and often apolitical young men were taken from their families and thrown into battle without adequate training or equipment. Many of their comrades had already been slaughtered. Although these young soldiers were "the enemy", they were, for Capa, individual human beings, victims of war.

Similarly, Capa's celebrated photograph of 1944 of the young woman from Chartres whose head was shaved as punishment for having had a child whose father was a German soldier transforms her into a Madonna tormented by demons. The photograph may be regarded as an echo of the *Massacre of the Innocents* (Rubens, 1618). The resemblance, though unconscious, seems perfectly in keeping with Capa's intentions, for his attention seems to be directed towards the victim and her child (Fig. 111 a).

The conflict is also transposed into visual language. In the photograph of the young woman in Chartres, the crowd, its heads turned towards the subject, presses forward. Another example is a photograph taken in Vietnam in 1954: in the left half of the frame a

woman moves against the direction of travel of the convoy, which occupies the right half of the frame (Fig. 111 b).



Fig. 111: a. A woman of French origin who had borne a child by a German soldier is led home after being punished by having her head shaved, Chartres, France, 18 August 1944. b. Motorcyclists and a woman travelling along the road from Nam Dinh to Thai Binh, Vietnam, May 1954.

The achromatic chiaroscuro brings out the drama of war, the pain, the mourning, and the death, all associated with the colour black. Even if, in Capa's photographs, one cannot necessarily speak of a tonal predominance of black, the strong contrasts between dark and light describe and trigger emotions such as fear, terror, humiliation, injustice, drama, et al. Although his photographs remain the definitive visual records of major events such as the siege of Madrid, the Japanese bombing of Hankou, and the Allied landings on D-Day, many of Capa's images possess a timeless, universal quality that transcends their historical specificity.

Josef Koudelka – Koudelka's photographs reflect, with great sensitivity, among other things, the plight of a disadvantaged group, that of the gypsies, the chaos of the Soviet invasion of the city of Prague,³⁵⁴ and the metaphorical significances of the wall built by the Israelis in the West Bank, et al. These have also served projects aimed at documentary films, a category which, with regard to renowned photographers, gained momentum during a certain period. Koudelka³⁵⁵ belongs to a generation of photographers who firmly believe

³⁵⁴ The photographs were published under the initials P. P. (Prague Photographer) for fear of reprisals against him and his family.

³⁵⁵ Born in Czechoslovakia and later settled in France for political reasons, Josef Koudelka was one of the important representatives of the humanism that dominated European photography of the second half of the twentieth century. Although trained as an aeronautical engineer, he devoted himself to photography, becoming one of the distinguished members of Magnum Photos, with important awards such as the Robert Capa Gold Medal (1969), the Prix Nadar (1978), the Grand Prix National de la Photographie (1989), the Grand Prix Cartier-Bresson (1991), and the Hasselblad Foundation International Award in Photography

that, by showing what is actually happening in the world, people will understand and will be moved to demand or bring about change – which is, in fact, the very purpose of social documentary photography.

Between 1962 and 1971, Koudelka was drawn to the nomadic way of life, the rituals, and the customs of the Roma he encountered while travelling through the rural areas of Romania, Hungary, France, and Spain. Despite portraying the simplicity of gypsy life, the photographs do not present their situation as a social problem to be somehow solved. Instead, they show the Roma as placeless people, strangers, and their lives as a blend of joy and wonder, sadness and mystery.

The war in his photographs is not war itself but the wounds it leaves behind: walls built pre-emptively, crushing lives on both sides of them: "*One wall. Two prisons.*" In Koudelka, metaphorically speaking, the wall appears as a fissure produced by human hands in the natural landscape. The tension between man and nature, and responsibility towards the environment, is also brought to the fore in his project *Triunghiul Negru*, made at the foot of the Ore Mountains (1990), in the region of Bohemia – a territory of the European continent, among the most devastated, extending as far as Saxony and Poland. A witness to vanishing worlds, his photography is both protest and warning. The images contained in the project *Triunghiul Negru* document major works carried out by man, from factories to quarries and vast mining complexes and abandoned zones. They carry the viewer into inaccessible and little-known areas, between the sublime and disorder, to witness the imposing reality of industry.

Black, in these instances, plays a justified role: coal mines, coal-processing factories, the black smoke of the furnaces that gathers and forms a black cloud seem to "press down" upon the "unpolluted" area, creating a visual tension. While at the base of the photograph the terrain is rendered as a black band with the furnaces at its centre, in the upper part of the photograph we find the black, irregular cloud that seems to "threaten" or "hang ready to fall" upon that which produced it. The connotation of black is an unequivocally negative one. In other instances, the contre-jour and/or the reflection allow black to suggest geometric figures, lines, abstract shapes, and graphic forms.

(1992); and in 2012 he was named Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Ministry of Culture and Communication. In 1975 he published his first book, *Gypsies*, and in 1988 *Exiles*. From 1986 he worked with a panoramic camera and published a compilation of these photographs in his book *Chaos* in 1999. There followed *Invasion Prague 68* (2008) and, his most recent publication, *La Fabrique d'Exils* (2017).



Fig. 112: Josef Koudelka: (left) a. *Region of the Black Triangle* (Ore Mountains). 1991; b. FRANCE. Nord-Pas de Calais. Dunkerque. 1987. Sollac. Coal piles; c. *Abandoned oil field*. Baku, Azerbaijan. 1999. d. *Canons' Square*. Beirut, Lebanon. 1991; e. *City centre*. Beirut, Lebanon. 1991, (right) f. *City centre*. Beirut, Lebanon. 1991. Source: <https://www.magnumphotos.com/arts-culture/koudelka/>

The apartment blocks appear as mere structures, yet the impression they convey is one of invisibility, of a man without eyes, as though we were looking at a skull with empty sockets. Likewise, the black of an awning (Fig. 112 f, foreground) seems to allude to the night sky – a "sky" destroyed by human hands, which seems to "tear" as it tends to cover and swallow the human imprint (middle ground). If we draw a parallel between the Palestinian wall and the collapsed walls of the old city, we observe the construction of deconstruction, while the latter reveals the opposite: a deconstruction of construction. The black in Koudelka's photographs interrogates the extreme conscience of responsibility, while at the same time bringing into relief the void, the invisible, destruction, disappearance, drama, et al.

Sebastião Salgado – working with large formats and only in black and white, Salgado³⁵⁶ plunges into the sphere of social documentary photography, much like Koudelka; yet, unlike the latter, there are at least two elements characteristic of this artist. The first is his emphasis on foregrounding the living conditions in various disadvantaged countries (the so-called *Third World*³⁵⁷). Susan Edwards, in 1991, gives an extensive account of this phenomenon in a scholarly article (*Photography and the Representation of the Other: A Discussion Inspired by the Work of Sebastião Salgado* – University of Art, Michigan). To this end, I cite Trinh T. Minh-ha: "*in every First World there is a Third World and vice versa*" [English: in every First World there is a Third World and vice versa], because it sums up Salgado's work very well.³⁵⁸

The documentary film *Le sel de la terre* (2014), produced by Dacia Films, Amazonas Images, and Fondazione Solares delle Arti, directed by Wim Wenders and Juliano Ribeiro Salgado, is, as is indeed stated in its introduction, a film about the life of a photographer – Sebastião Salgado (Fig. 113). The documentary opens with the series *Otras Americas*:

*"The Serra Pelada gold mine in Brazil lies before me. When I reached the edge of that immense pit, every hair on my body stood on end. I had never seen anything like it. Here I felt the history of humanity unfolding before me in a few fractions of a second – the history of the building of the pyramids, of the Tower of Babel, of King Solomon's mines. Not a single sound of a machine could be heard there."*³⁵⁹ Salgado recalls, continuing: "*I climbed up to the top several times a day,*

³⁵⁶ Sebastião Salgado was born in 1944 in Aimorés, Minas Gerais, Brazil. He holds a degree in economics and began his career as a photographer in France, where he has lived since 1969. Since 1979 he has been a member of the Magnum group. He has received major awards, among them the Oskar Barnack Award (1992), the Centenary Medal of the Royal Photographic Society (1993), the Grand Prix National of the French Ministry of Culture (1994), and the Praemium Imperiale, Japan (2021). His publications include *An Uncertain Grace* (2004), *Workers: an archaeology of the industrial age* (1993), *The Children: Refugees and Migrants* (2000), *Sahel: The End of the Road* (2004), *Genesis* (2013), *Gold* (2019), and *Amazonia* (2021). Filmography: *Le sel de la terre* (2014).

³⁵⁷ The term "Third World" emerged during the Cold War to designate the countries that remained aligned with neither NATO nor the Warsaw Pact. The United States, Canada, Japan, South Korea, the nations of Western Europe, and their allies constituted the "First World", while the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, Vietnam, and their allies constituted the "Second World". This terminology offered a way of classifying the world's nations into three groups based on political and economic divisions. Since the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the term has been used less and less. Nonetheless, where I cite particular authors, I shall retain the phrasing they themselves employed.

³⁵⁸ I deliberately did not translate the quotation into Romanian, since it loses its meaning.

³⁵⁹ *Le sel de la terre*

*but it never crossed my mind that I might fall, because no one had ever fallen. You were there to carry sacks, not to fall. And, in my case, to take photographs."*³⁶⁰

It is worth noting that the opening of the second part of the *Qatsi* Trilogy (*Powaqqatsi* – 1988) presents the same gold mine. After several sequences of slow-motion shots focused on the activity taking place there, another shot appears, in which several men carry a man who has been struck by a falling stone³⁶¹ along the lines of workers transporting sacks of earth and stones. The following shots likewise consist of photographs from the same series. The images are juxtaposed with the artist's face. The photographs are accompanied by a dramatic soundtrack, interspersed with what can be identified as the sound of the 50,000 people working in that mine.

A photograph is then presented of a blind Tuareg woman, in whose vacant gaze one could read both the drama and the acceptance of it. In its composition, lighting, and dramatic intensity, the portrait recalls those of Rembrandt. Wim Wenders speaks of Salgado's love for people, for, after all, people are the salt of the earth.

Salgado travels to various regions of the world, goes on treks with the inhabitants of various tribes, and integrates himself for varying periods of time into these communities. One such example is the Yali people of Indonesia, 2011. The camera follows Salgado as he photographs the tribe's customs, showing its members the photographs, even though verbal communication is not possible. This once again highlights the universal and unique capacity of photography to communicate without recourse to words.

In August 1969, Salgado, together with his wife, Lélia, left for France because of the political dictatorship that had been established in Brazil. Although Salgado was an economist and made various trips to Africa for professional purposes, he gave up his career and invested all his savings in photographic equipment.

His first photographs were taken in Niger (Tahoua) in 1973. They capture mothers with children queuing to receive food. The first photographic project Salgado undertook together with his wife is *Otras Americas* (1977–1984). For this project, Salgado was to travel throughout South America. His sense of place prompted him to travel to Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia against the background of the social movements taking place in Latin America at the time (Liberation Theology). On his expeditions in the Andes, he photographed simple

³⁶⁰ Idem.

³⁶¹ Statement appearing in *Impact of Progress* (DVD/Blu-ray).

families and the traditions of these places, never failing to provide context for his subjects – the arid terrain, the simplicity of the buildings, et al. – portraying them as placeless people, which is in fact precisely what they were.

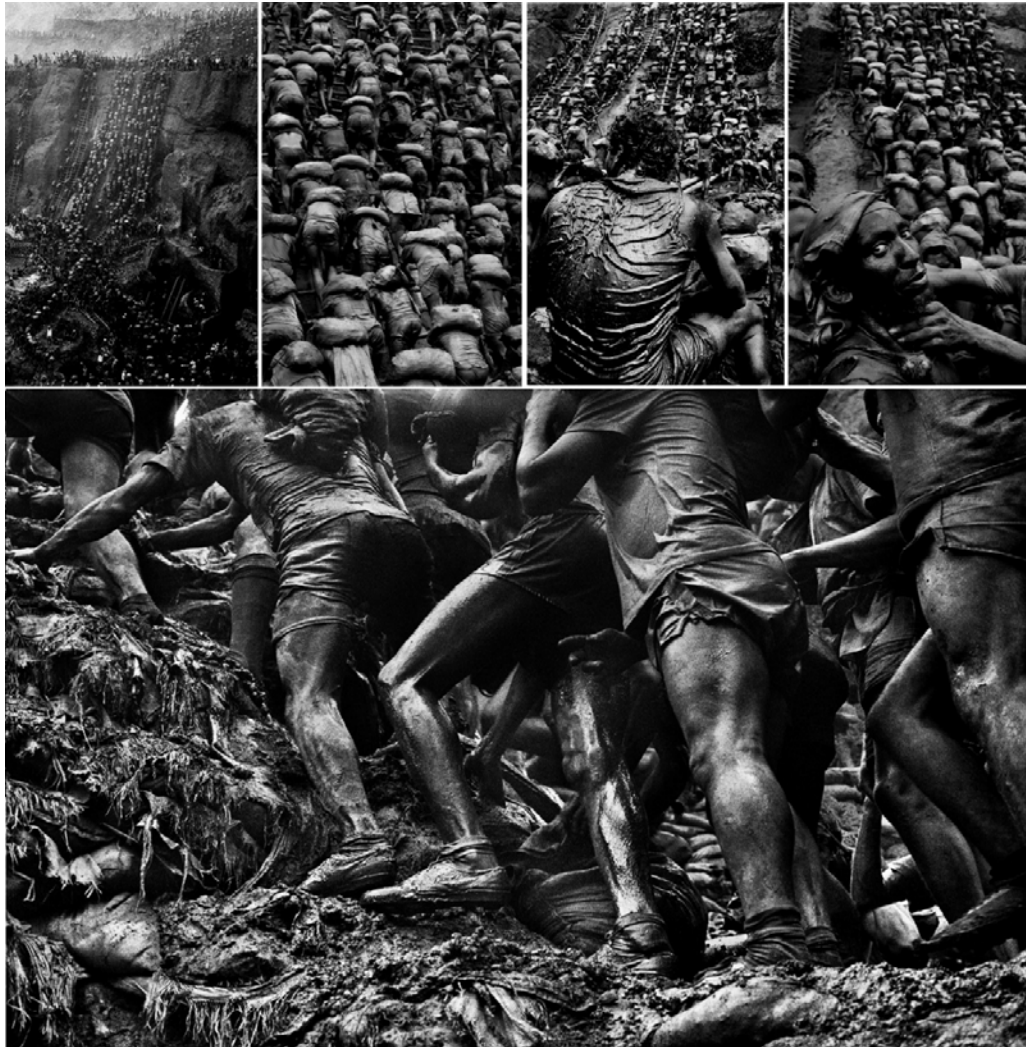


Fig. 113: Sebastião Salgado, stills from the documentary film *Le sel de la terre* (2014).

In southern Ecuador, he photographed the Saraguro Indian tribe, of whom he relates that they bore a certain fatalism imprinted on their faces. What is notable is that, wherever he travels, Salgado makes friends, whether with a priest, a shepherd, a doctor, or a peasant. They recount to him their own history and that of the place, so that Salgado almost identifies with them. Through them he learns the customs of these places – a context that helps him to render in the photographic image the life of the inhabitants as faithfully as possible.

In Oaxaca, Mexico, he meets a group of *mixe* farmers who work the land with tools that Salgado calls "*medieval*", such as the yoke and the plough. Salgado further observes that music lies at the very core of this group of farmers' existence. Every member who could play

an instrument was exempted from working the land. It is remarkable how Salgado sets the gruelling labour of the fields in antithesis to a form of art, both pursuits coexisting within that small community, which is otherwise isolated from the rest of the world.

The way in which Salgado narrates is at times melancholy, at times tragic, qualities discernible both in his tone of voice and in his facial expression. From a psychoanalytic standpoint, all of this attests to the artist's profound engagement with those he photographs. Salgado then takes us to northern Mexico, to the Tarahumara, whom he characterizes as "*runners*" (in the sense that they almost run as they move about) and who delight in handling various musical instruments.

He also examines the faces of these people and speaks, in a metaphorical manner, of the imprint of time. He never does so in a negative way, but rather recounts that they granted him the privilege of being part of their lives, even if only for a short time, thereby giving him the opportunity to come to know them. All of this informs the way in which Salgado chooses to represent people's lives through photography. From his point of view, a portrait is a means of understanding the life of the person photographed, even if it captures only a fragment of it. He refers to the eyes, which he says have a voice of their own, just like facial expression. Salgado holds that when you make a portrait, you are not the only one taking the photograph; rather, the photographed subject offers you the photograph. He further considers that a photograph is far more faithful when the photographer becomes involved in the lives of the subjects photographed, which is why Salgado is forever travelling and (re)integrating himself.

It is worth noting that the documentary film is composed almost entirely of photographs taken by Salgado, the static shots being interrupted only very rarely by sequences in which Salgado is filmed as he looks at those photographs on a screen and recounts what he felt when he made them.

After the fall of the dictatorship, Salgado, together with his family, travels to his native Brazil, which he scarcely recognizes any longer, and decides to go to the north-east of the country, a region the artist says he did not know. Thus the project *Brazilia* (1981–1983) came into being. In this photographic project, Salgado surveys the rites of passage: birth, marriage, everyday life, and death. On this occasion too Salgado involves himself in these processes, stating that he himself followed groups of people making their way to various funerals. He emphasizes that in this region of Latin America death is not regarded as something fatal, since people are accustomed to the idea that death is part of life. In the

photographs from this series, he depicts places where people could hire coffins. In those same places, articles of clothing, fruit, vegetables, ice cream, and other goods were also sold, creating a sublime contrast that somehow softened the boundary between everyday life and death.

Then, between 1984 and 1986, he undertook a journey through North Africa (the Sahel), capturing humankind in suffering – *L'Homme en detresse* [English: Man in Distress]. For this project, Salgado joined the association Médecins Sans Frontières and made his first incursion into Ethiopia in 1984. Salgado stated that in the years he spent in the Sahel he wished to offer the world *the image of famine*. He thus photographs refugee camps, in particular children stricken by famine. Salgado captures, in grandiose fashion, the gazes of these people, vacant gazes, devoid of hope.

Death is a leitmotif in Salgado's oeuvre, for he in no way spares the truth. He photographs deceased children or parents, killed by famine, cold, or cholera, photographs of powerful emotional impact. "*To die here is truly a continuation of life; people grow accustomed to death*", Salgado confesses. The artist travels, together with the migrants from the Tigray region of Ethiopia, the road as far as Sudan, documenting step by step what happens over the course of this journey.

In 1985 Salgado travelled to Mali, a country likewise severely affected by drought. Salgado observes, with regard to the migrants, that although their conditions of existence were all but impossible, they were extremely determined in what they were doing, and he illustrates this through photographs that he describes *using terms bound up with the symbolism of black*: hopelessness, death, despair, madness, and so on. The photographs he made during this period formed the subject of an exhibition through which Salgado sought to show the world what was happening in other geographical regions to people not as fortunate as those who were viewing the images.

There followed the project *La Main de L'Homme* (1986–1991), on which occasion the artist travelled to thirty different countries. Salgado states that through this project he wished to pay homage to the people who built this world, to render an archaeology of the industrial era, placing the emphasis on manual labour. Once again, the artist's empathy towards people is clear, as his son underscores. In 1991, at the end of the first Gulf War, when Saddam Hussein set thousands of oil wells ablaze, Salgado undertook to document this catastrophe. He thus photographs the flames spreading across a vast expanse, firefighters

covered in crude oil battling to extinguish the blazes, throwing into relief what the hand of man was capable of.

After Europe closed its borders in the face of the wave of migrants, Salgado decided to photograph those who had been excluded, giving rise to the project *Exodus* (1993–1999), which included journeys to “*forgotten*” regions, such as India, Vietnam, the Philippines, Palestine, Iraq, and others. The artist also returns to Africa, the continent to which he is most attached, as he himself maintains. Working on the project concerned with the displacement of the *Tutsi* population from Rwanda, who were fleeing, on account of reprisals, towards Congo or Uganda, Salgado made the journey in the opposite direction, towards Rwanda. He confesses that he was simply shocked by the atrocities he witnessed and which, of course, he also photographed: people sleeping at the roadside, people killed by the Rwandan forces, and others. The artist recounts that only then did he grasp the magnitude of the catastrophe to which he was a witness: genocide. Salgado refers to the images he captured using the term “*inferno*”, “*darkness*”, and so forth. Even within this *inferno*, Salgado traces the relationships among people.

Then, in the former Yugoslavia, between 1994 and 1995, he captures the violence, brutality, and hatred that he describes as being not at all peculiar to the countries he had visited until then, and as being present closer to us as well, namely in Europe.³⁶² In 1994, in Congo, against the backdrop of the defeat of the *Hutu* army, the region of Goma was sheltering over two million people. The photographs taken there once again capture the tragedy of humanity: heaps of the dead, struck down by cholera or famine.³⁶³ Salgado's photographs are distinguished by the way in which the artist shows how “insignificant” the human being is in comparison with the vast stretches of terrain and the wide frames in which people appear almost as specks, revealing both the magnitude of the catastrophes wrought by the hand of man and the victims of those catastrophes, who are likewise people.

In 1997, Salgado returns to Congo, where he captures over 250,000 people who had taken refuge in the forests of Congo for fear of reprisals. At the end of the journey towards

³⁶² In this way his photographs capture the thousands of young men killed by the Serbs, together with their families (women, the elderly, and children), in a funereal, apocalyptic posture. Salgado explained: “*We are terrifying animals, we humans. Whether here in Europe, or in Africa, or in Latin America, or anywhere else, we are extremely violent. Our history is a history of wars, a history without end, a history of madmen.*”

³⁶³ Since not all the bodies could be buried, excavators were brought in that effectively moved the bodies into mass graves, as though they were refuse. The photographs, extremely dramatic in compositional terms, set up an antithesis between what industrialization signifies and human violence, generating visual antagonisms through the superimposition of frames. Salgado holds that everyone ought to see these images, to see how dreadful the human species is and to become aware of what the hand of man is capable of. He states, moreover, that when he left that place his “*soul was sick*”.

Rwanda, only some 40,000 arrived. Once again, Salgado spends time with these refugees, capturing photographs before which any person ought to be left speechless, for these photographs communicate everything and require no further commentary, thereby probing the human conscience. Even so, Salgado holds that his photographs, although they render some of the *darkest* moments in the history of the close of the twentieth century, will not change things. This was Salgado's last journey to Rwanda. He states: “*When I left there, I no longer believed in anything; I no longer believed there was any salvation for the human species. You cannot survive such a thing. It is no longer worth living; no one deserves to live.*” “*The heart of darkness*” – as Salgado calls it – cast doubt upon his work as a social photographer and upon his role as a witness to the human condition.

Subsequently, the Salgado family visits the artist's birthplace in Brazil, which had become a vast, dust-laden expanse. The Salgado couple then began a process of replanting the forests that had vanished (600 ha), a project that met with unexpected success. The couple named the project *Instituto Terra*. This project was followed by “*a homage paid to the Earth*” – *Genesis* (2004–2013) – Fig. 114. Salgado travelled to the Galápagos Islands, the place where Darwin developed *On the Origin of Species*, to the Amazon, the tropical forests, and as far as Antarctica, in an attempt to illustrate the unsullied face of the Earth, untouched by the hand of man.



Fig. 114: Sebastião Salgado, photographs from the *Genesis* cycle. Source: <https://www.icp.org/exhibitions/sebastiao-salgado-genesis>

Salgado's photographs appear conceived to overwhelm the "privileged" viewer, not merely by the fact that this viewer is able to see the photograph, but also from the standpoint

that such a viewer must be willing to undergo the sensation of being "swallowed" by socio-historical reality, these viewers being "invited" to feel how dreadful these social realities are alongside an urban existence regarded as bourgeois. Salgado is a photographer who brings other worlds into our world and who shows us that they are part of our own world. Through documentation and storytelling, he portrays a world of differences within the context of human singularity. Salgado never forgets his own presence in the lives of his subjects, thereby making us aware of our own presence in their lives, as well as of their presence in our lives, however physically remote from us they may be. Thus the artist invites us on a journey concerning "*the others and us*" – as he himself avows – not forgetting to pose the legitimate question that bears on the injustice of these differences.

Kathryn Livingston holds that Salgado is a photographer who tests the boundaries of the social genre by photographing the so-called underdeveloped countries. She further argues that the artist pursued the universality of this world from both without and within, seeking to restore faith in the "*Great Family of Man*".³⁶⁴ Edward Miller (1991) holds that Salgado, like many other photojournalists of the Magnum group, sets himself apart through his choice to spend time within the communities he photographed or in the regions to which he travelled, distinguishing himself from those photojournalists who "*go to the scene, take a few photographs, and then leave*"³⁶⁵. Salgado, as he himself states in the documentary film under analysis, in fact seeks to move those who come into contact with his photographs. To this end, he allowed himself to become vulnerable and to be represented by those he photographs, the people of the so-called "*Third World*", living among them and thereby giving himself the opportunity to bring their drama, through photographic art, before the "*First World*".

Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908–2004), with undoubted contributions to the development of modern photojournalism, was a French artist and one of the founders of the Magnum Photos agency who took up various photographic genres; his itinerant nature carried him to some of the most important events and places of modern history, from the liberation of Paris from Nazi occupation, for instance, to the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi (1948). One of Bresson's iconic images is the one in which Jawaharlal Nehru announces Gandhi's death.

³⁶⁴ Kathryn Livingston, "South of the Border, (Review of Other Americas)" in *American Photographer*, May 1987, Vol. 18, pp. 41–42.

³⁶⁵ Susan E. Edwards, "Photography and the representation of the other: A discussion inspired by the work of Sebastiao Salgado", in *Third Text*, University of Michigan, 5:16–17, pp. 157–172.

His earlier training and his inclination towards painting, which he abandoned in favour of photography and to which he returned only late in life, influenced him, disciplined his eye, brought him close to the avant-garde painters of his time and, by his own account, led to a photographic style that suggested a certain kind of bond between painting and photography. Drawn to some of the major themes of the Surrealists, such as deformed or fragmented bodies and the bizarre juxtapositions of unrelated objects, Cartier-Bresson's Surrealist photographs are surprising visual games, designed to provoke the subconscious towards disquieting connections, sure symbols of black.



Fig. 115: Henri Cartier-Bresson: Natcho Aguirre, Santa Clara, Mexico, 1934; Children playing in ruins. Seville, Spain, 1933–1933; Nehru Announces Gandhi's Death, Birla House, Delhi, India, Jan. 30, 1948. Source: <https://www.magnumphotos.com/photographer/henri-cartier-bresson/>

In this respect, revealing is, for instance, "*Natcho Aguirre, Santa Clara, Mexique*", a photograph of a male torso set beside a commonplace shoe rack, made during a journey to Mexico in 1934. Another example of his orientation towards Surrealism, in which visual puzzles were a major feature, is the photograph of a group of children playing cheerfully and uninhibitedly in an ambiguous space, amid rubble, in Seville, Spain – an image to which a complex psychological dimension is added. His sincere, candid photographs – made almost

exclusively in black and white – together with his extraordinary talent for capturing the "decisive moment", served to blur the boundary between artistic expression and documentary record, while at the same time producing countless iconic images (Fig. 115).

Yet the artist did not remain confined exclusively to the realm of Surrealism. From his art teacher, Lhote, who was a Cubist painter, derives Bresson's commitment to a sense of geometry and order, and Hyères, France – the Côte d'Azur – is an example in this regard. The rail of the staircase leads the viewer's eye, descending in a spiral towards the street, where the cyclist is captured (that "decisive moment") precisely in the gap between the building and the staircase balustrade. The combination of architectural elements and the blurred image of the cyclist emphasizes movement through spirals, curves, and a slight distortion.

Paradoxically, Bresson could wait for hours on end, patiently, for the perfect instant, yet he was always ready to make the rapid decisions needed to seize a fraction of a second. The spontaneity of the photograph captured in the lively urban space of the Place de l'Europe, outside the crowded Paris Saint-Lazare station, is one of Cartier-Bresson's best-known images. The snapshot of a man leaping over a flooded area in Paris captures the moment just before his heel strikes the water. The moment is charged with dynamic anticipation, and the leaper's rigid stride stands in visual contradiction to the graceful leap of the ballerina, a finely drawn image on a nearby poster.

Bresson also became involved, however, in the socio-political sphere; thus, for instance, at the time when *Juvisy* was created, a photograph that has since become iconic, Cartier-Bresson had been sent on assignment by the left-wing Paris newspaper *Ce Soir* to document the workers' movement. A photograph (*Alberto Giacometti*, 1961) that reveals Cartier-Bresson's spirited side and his fine humour is the portrait of his friend, the Swiss painter and sculptor Alberto Giacometti, taken at the Galerie Maeght, in which the artist unconsciously mimics the subjects of his own work. Giacometti's tilted posture reflects the tilted poses of his most famous statues. The photograph succeeds in conveying the nervousness characteristic of the artist; at the same time, the figures move in tandem, and there seems to be a kind of partnership born of the resemblance between the artist and his works.

Bresson and Giacometti had been friends since the mid-1930s and enjoyed a particularly close relationship, which included an inexhaustible shared curiosity about the human condition. Of powerful impact, a visual historical document, the photograph *Birla*

House, India, is evidence both of an awareness of the historical importance of the event and of the particular moment it captures: India's independence from British colonial rule and the tragedy of Gandhi's death. Having travelled there, in fact, only for the purpose of an interview, Bresson ended up documenting Gandhi's funeral and was one of the last people to speak with him before he was shot and killed.

In 1948–49, sent by *Life* magazine to China to document the civil war and the upheavals that accompanied the political transition from the Chinese Nationalist Party to communist rule, Cartier-Bresson captured the chaos of those turbulent years of transition in Shanghai. The photograph in question encompasses only a small segment of the population, desperate at the bleak prospect of total impoverishment: in fact, millions of Chinese were crushing one another, jostling to sell their gold.

As a photographer in the realist tradition, he blends the image, social commentary, and his own humanist sensibility. In addition to still photography, Cartier-Bresson was an accomplished director, whose filmography includes nearly ten films, and he is moreover regarded as an influential figure in the development of *cinéma vérité*. He was also fascinated by the new technology of live television broadcasting.

Weegee – a legendary figure of photojournalism, the American photographer Arthur Fellig (1899–1968), nicknamed Weegee, left his mark on the history of photography in general, not only on reportage. Having become famous for his black-and-white photographs depicting the nightlife of New York, his native city, and having grown up in the squalid neighbourhoods of the Lower East Side, he sensed disasters before they happened and was one of the few who dared to leap into his car in order to be the first on the scene – often ahead of other reporters, or even of the police – at the victim of a gang, of an accident, or at the site of a fire. He had a talent for being "in the right place at the right time".

Although his photographs may startle through their rawness, they nonetheless convey all manner of emotions: surprise, disgust, pity, and even amusement. Worthy of note, however, is also the aesthetic of the photograph itself, the mystery it exudes, the atmosphere of interwar New York. He began working as a freelance photojournalist for the New York tabloids in 1935. He shows America a violence that frightens and fascinates at once, for, above and beyond the suffering of the victims, the crowd of onlookers approaches the crime as it would a spectacle.

Authorized to tune his car radio to the police frequency, he no longer left his Chevrolet, which became at once his home, his hideout, and his laboratory. *Weegee the*

Famous made his name and built his myth, which his two books *Naked City* (1945) and *Weegee's People* (1946) amply sustained; he is considered to have been one of the precursors of sensational tabloid photography, and for his work he officially received artistic recognition from the official institutions, namely that of the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1943). But crimes were not his only subject of interest.

He roamed the poor neighbourhoods of New York. Capturing, for instance, the image of a group of children diving from a fire hydrant on a hot day, or sleeping huddled together in the open air, he photographed poor people, but equally musicians, stars, bar scenes, and circus scenes; and whatever the theme, the artist's photographs, whether they reflect the tragic or bring out the comic, do so with a distinctive virtuosity and with a certain kind of humour. Having become famous for the documentary images of New York that he made before 1945, less well known was his "art", what he called his "distortions", his "creative photography", an art to which he devoted the last twenty years of his life, also publishing two books: *Weegee's Creative Camera* in 1959 and *Weegee's Creative Photography* in 1964. In 1945, Weegee had ceased his activity as a photojournalist.

In 1947 he moved to Hollywood, where he produced his first distortions, experimenting with placing a textured or curved sheet of glass, or some other translucent material, between the enlarging lens and the photographic paper. This effect would alter the negative's image to varying degrees, depending on the density, pattern, or texture of the material used. He also attempted to manipulate or mutilate the copy negatives by placing them in boiling water or melting them with an open flame.

He made multiple exposures from the same or several negatives, shifting the same piece of photographic paper after each exposure. He devised a system whereby he would fix a kaleidoscope to the end of the camera lens, or use it to replace the camera lens, allowing the refraction patterns to multiply what the camera would ordinarily have recorded as a single image. Weegee had an extraordinary command of darkroom printing and often combined one or more of these techniques to create his distortions.



Fig. 116: Weegee, distortions: Andy Warhol, Judy Garland, Mao Tse Tung (1960).
 Source: <https://matthewmarks.com/exhibitions/weegee-distortions-06-2000>

5.1.3. Low-Key Photography

To investigate **the visual language specific to low-key photography in relation to contemporary art**, I drew on the **collective case study**. This type of research was chosen for the following reasons: a) the large number of resources; b) the accuracy of the research model; c) the possibility of analysing several types of data in different ways. The *multiple-case study design*³⁶⁶ was adapted and is illustrated below in the form of a summary table with a linear-analytic structure:

CONCEPT OF THE COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY – LOW-KEY PHOTOGRAPHY			
No. item	Stage	Description	Summary of values

³⁶⁶ Robert K. Yin, *Studiul de caz – Designul, analiza și colectarea datelor*, Polirom, Bucharest, 2005, p. 59.

I	Identification	The visual language specific to low-key photography in relation to contemporary art.		The semiotics of black outlines a conceptual framework firmly anchored in contemporary art. Themes such as the oneiric, psychoanalysis, the universality of life and death, fear, drama, terror, night, solitude, and so on, can be represented through artistic expression more articulately by means of low-key photography.		
		Context		1. Social 2. Spiritual 3. Geo-political 4. Temporal		
II	Selection of artists (cases) according to:	Main common denominators (principal frame)		1. Low-key photography 2. Conceptual art		
		Secondary common denominators (themes) Note: As it is not the ARTIST as such that interests us, we turn to the themes that the artist addresses in low-key photography, these becoming potential common denominators.		The rendering of one's own experiences, dramatism, dehumanization, genesis, death, the inferno, chaos, the cosmos, psychic disorders, phobias, disasters, protests, the exploration of loss, separation, repressed traumas, human exploitation, political ideologies, humanitarian emergencies, the precarious human condition, illusions, loneliness, captivity, the hidden, the mystical, mystery, the abuse of power.		
III	Collection of data	Written	Public		newspapers, magazines, books, posters	
		Unwritten	Visual	Material or spiritual	Photograph albums in physical or digital format, photographic archives belonging to museums and art galleries, photographs on the artists' web pages.	
					Symbols	
					Audio-visual	Films
						Television programmes
						Documentaries
				Interviews		
IV	Processing of data	Objective		Personal	The artist's concept of his own work	
				Impersonal	The concept of an art critic, or of public opinion, regarding an artist's work.	
		Subjective		Observation – description + interpretation (according to one's own value judgement)		
V	Sampling	Group	Critical (literal replication)	1. Alex Majoli 2. Misha Gordin 3. Juha Arvid Helminen		

			Non-critical (theoretical replication)	1. Bill Hansen 2. Lee Jeffries 3. Jürgen Klauke 4. Thomas Ruff 5. Touhami Ennadre 6. Shirin Neshat 7. Joseph Dadoune
VI	Analysis of the data	The principal group (for which we have the most data)		Pattern matching, explanation, chronological analysis, logical cause-and-effect models, comparative synthesis, category matrices, diagrams, summary tables.
		The secondary group (for which we have less data but more representatives)		
		Note:		
VII	Reporting	Interwoven and structured		Chronological, comparison => theory building.

Table 4: Concept of the collective case study – low-key photography

As described earlier, in the subchapter concerning the evolution of the use of black in art, the origins of the visual language afforded by low-key photography lie in an extended trajectory that encompasses varied artistic movements, diverse styles of artistic expression, and series of works in which the value of black is clearly defined. This, together with the semiotics of black, outlines a conceptual framework firmly anchored in contemporary art.

Black – with the mysticism that characterizes it – has a symbolism closely bound up with the religions and divinities of the world, and hence with transcendence as well, with works of art representing, beyond their aesthetic character, "icons" of the imaginary, whether they render a fictional or a real reality. In this latter case, the "real" is the artist's real,³⁶⁷ his imprint, the way in which he perceives the inner or outer world. Moreover, from the standpoint of visual language, low-key photography is preferred in addressing themes such as the dream, psychoanalysis, the universal themes of life and death, fear, drama, terror, night, solitude, and so forth, precisely on account of the rich symbolism of black. All these themes, rendered through photography (though not only), constitute social, political, religious, and other **contexts** that are found in present-day society and are often rendered through art.

³⁶⁷ The aesthetics of the work of art is closely bound up with philosophy, as is developed at length in most treatises on the aesthetics of art.

Alex Majoli – a member of Magnum Photos since 2001 and its former president (2011–2014), was born in Ravenna, Italy (1971). As a student at the Art Institute of Ravenna, he joined the Grazia Neri agency, in which context he travelled and documented conflict zones such as Yugoslavia, Kosovo, and Albania, out of a desire to explore human nature. Later, he produced a monograph on the closure of an asylum for the mentally ill on the island of Leros, Greece, a project that became the subject of his first book: *Leros* (λέρος – filthy), 2002. Inmates were brought there, selected from among the most severe psychiatric cases, and housed in a former military base that had previously been used as a prison for political prisoners. As Majoli was to discover, within the asylum it was not a matter of living but of **surviving**, and he compared what took place there to *Heart of Darkness* (*Inima întunericului*, a novel by Joseph Conrad, published in 1899, which exposed the horrors of Western colonialism, describing it as a **phenomenon that dehumanizes the peoples it exploits**. For another project, *Requiem in Samba*, Majoli travelled, for several months, to South America (1995). He lived in the poor neighbourhoods of Brazil, where he discovered a different perspective on life: on the one hand, one captured in the sounds of samba, which formed a constant backdrop, and on the other, a beautiful but violent culture, living **under the constant spectre of death**.³⁶⁸



Fig. 117: Alex Majoli: Leros- 1994, Leros- Nichita play with Marina 1994, *Requiem in samba*, 1995, Brazil, Scene 3074, Congo, *Soldiers, and civilians hitching a ride inside the containers that are transported from Brazzaville to Pointe Noire*, 2013, Greece, Lesbos. 2015 - *Refugees and migrants from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Somalia arrive on the northern shores of Lesbos Island.*, France - Calais, Scene 0957- *The 'Calais Jungle' refugee camp* - 2016. Source: <https://www.magnumphotos.com/photographer/alex-majoli/>

³⁶⁸ ALEX MAJOLI. <http://www.alexmajoli.com/>. Accessed 17 Feb. 2022.

Asked about the sense and meaning of his images, in which people seem to emerge from the darkness, the artist replied that there is an aesthetic aspect to those photographs, grounded in his origins in the Byzantine milieu, and that he was also **inspired by the paintings of Caravaggio**, Giovanni Baglione, and films such as *La Jetée* or those of Michelangelo Antonioni, adding that there is also a **conceptual side that derives from literature** (Pirandello, Artaud, et al.). His photographs bring into play an aesthetic influenced, as he himself states, by Caravaggio, and his lighting techniques foreground the interplay between **fiction and reality**, with the blurred boundary between them and characters travelling back and forth (examples in Fig. 117).

Hotel Marinum, another documentary, concerned life in port cities around the world, the aim being to create a multimedia theatre spectacle. Ports, conceived as **places of transition**, with life flowing through them, the dwelling place of people who live facing the sea, ready to depart, to escape. *Hotel Marinum* is, in fact, a metaphor, a passage, a place of encounters and crossings; it is a port, always the same and identical to all the other ports of the world. It has no name and no precise location, except, perhaps, that of being before the sea. There followed a series of short films and documentaries; Majoli documented the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, two years later the invasion of Iraq, and then various conflicts around the world: for Newsweek, The New York Times, Magazine, Granta, and National Geographic.

After holding a successful exhibition in New York in 2004, in collaboration with Thomas Dworzak, Paolo Pellegrin, and Ilkka Uimonen – an exhibition that toured France and Germany – he became involved in a project on the social transformation of the city of Marseille. His project, *Libera Me*, is a **reflection on the human condition: a personal exploration of loss, separation, heaven, and hell**.

Constantly influenced by literature, here inspired by Dante's *Divina Commedia*,³⁶⁹ but also by Pirandello, Majoli develops the idea that we are all actors in life. Divided into three chapters – *Persona*, *Libera Me*, and *Lacrimosa* – this book focuses chiefly on the first chapter, *Persona* (the work remained unfinished owing to the death of the editor and friend Gigi Giannuzzi).³⁷⁰ In the twenty-seven black-and-white photographic portraits, only the face is visible, beneath a light that always shines from above, like a divine light. The

³⁶⁹ Note: Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) was the first great poet of the Italian language and an Italian philosopher, a Florentine statesman, and the greatest European writer of the Middle Ages. He is the author of the "Divina Commedia", a masterpiece of world literature.

³⁷⁰ CollIDocumentary. Alex Majoli/ Libera Me. YouTube, 15 Aug. 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDrknb3SwqU>. Accessed 11 January 2022.

dramatism of the images leads to the question of what awaits us after we die, as well as to the idea that we shall all be judged on the day of our death.

The series of photographs that Alex Majoli took in Spain, in absolute black and white – his photographic style, his use of artificial light to cast shadows, sculpting the silhouettes and faces – presents scenes that fuse reality and fiction. His images go beyond mere news images; they convey a mysterious sense of timelessness, taking up the same "suspension of time" that occurs on a stage. The photographs, taken in Congo, Egypt, Greece, Germany, India, China, and Brazil between 2010 and 2016, document the thin line between reality and theatre, **exploring the human condition** and calling into question darker elements of society: over eight years, across continents, depicting **political ideologies, humanitarian emergencies**, and a few quieter moments of everyday life, all bound together by an intense **visual drama** and a striking use of light. The title of the exhibition, the concept *SKĒNĒ*, so named after the backdrop of an ancient Greek theatre (the structure separating preparation from performance, behind which the actors changed their masks and costumes), was influenced by the philosophy of the Sicilian dramatist Pirandello,³⁷¹ who maintained that the blurred line between theatre and reality is erased more often than we would care to admit.



Fig. 118: Alex Majoli: *Scene 0525*, Pointe Noire, Congo - *Funeral of a 13-year-old girl*- 2013, *Scene 9546*- Point Noire, Republic of Congo - *Squatters in an abandoned building*, 2013, *Scene 9928*, Republic of Congo, Brazzaville Stadium, with *Red Davis Supporter*, 2013, *Scene 8040*, Sao Paulo, Brazil- *Police*, 2014; *Scene 0308*, Lesbos, Greece- *Refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Somalia*- 2015, *Scene 640*, Cairo, Egypt, 2017. Source: <https://www.magnumphotos.com/photographer/alex-majoli/>

³⁷¹ Campany, David, and Corinne Rondeau. *Alex Majoli: Scene*. Mack, 2019.

For this project, Majoli set aside documentary photography, with its unaltered reality, in order to turn to the artificial. In his Scene productions, his experiences in photographing people in various countries and circumstances – drama, pathos, struggles or, conversely, moments of reflection – led him to explore the idea that his subjects are **actors in their own lives**, while he himself never saw himself as a mere observer of human life, but rather as an active participant in his own subjective documentation of it (Fig. 118).

For him, the photography of the human condition never sprang from a desire to "be a missionary of truth". Instead, his aim is to ask questions. "*It is all about perception*", he says, "*The more I documented and lived the lives of others, the more I came to realize this: what is genuinely real, what is genuinely true. What is the right way of seeing reality? And I do not believe that any one way is better than another. You know, the ancient Greek philosophers had no word for "truth"; it did not exist. They replaced that word with the word "dialogue" – which to me is very interesting, and to which we ought to return now, more than ever: truth as dialogue.*"³⁷²

Misha Gordin (1946–2020) moved in an entirely different direction, doggedly seeking a way to express his personal feelings and thoughts through photography. "*Do I turn my camera outward, towards the existing world, or do I turn it towards my own soul? Do I take photographs of existing reality, or do I create my own world, so real yet nonexistent?*"³⁷³ – a turn towards a plane of reflection, where personal experience intersects with the universal themes of life and death: **in a symbolist manner, his work distils impulses bound up with hope, doubt, fear, and the struggle for individuality and freedom**. At a certain point he abandoned portrait and documentary work for conceptual photography; he had no patience to wait for the "perfect moment", nor to make, endlessly, images over which he had no control. He wanted to capture the essence, to distil its complexity into a single image.

³⁷² "Alex Majoli on Mentoring and the Power of Dialogue". *Magnum Photos*, 10 Dec. 2021,

³⁷³ Interview with Misha Gordin. <http://bsimple.com/interview.htm>. Accessed 17 Feb. 2022.



Fig. 119: Misha Gordin: *Autobiography*, 1972; *Confession*, 1972; *Propaganda* 1976; *Saturation* 1977. Source: <https://bsimple.com/home.htm>

His work reflects his personality: it leaves no room for chance, only for contemplation and provocation. True photography is an art that demands intuition, skill, and the ability to conceptualize, and for him it begins with a concept, which usually derives from the imagination or from a dream: "*If dreams are an illusion of reality, then photographs are their illusory, perfect expression*".³⁷⁴ Focused on finding something new and different in photography, he went through a period of searching, and these searches found their resolution in **the conceptual approach**, that higher form of artistic expression comparable to painting, poetry, music, and sculpture; thus, in 1972 he created "*Confession*", the first and most important work in this vein. Being so different from the official art of the communist state, it seemed that some photographers sought, in a way, to ignore it, sensing the unfamiliar style as a threat – which, however, mattered nothing to the artist, who trusted his own intuition (Fig. 119).

As regards the relationship between the conventional and the conceptual, in his view, by translating personal concepts into the language of photography one reflects the possible answers to **the great questions of being**: birth, death, and life, with the creation of an idea and its transformation into reality being an essential process. He held that the most important ingredient of a powerful image is the concept: the talent to create one and the ability to materialize it, these being the major components of crafting a convincing conceptual photograph, in which an altered reality is presented as existing and is expected to be perceived as such. By concentrating on motifs such as the nocturnal sky and the depths of darkness, heads bowed in contemplation, Gordin lends his works uniformity and simplicity,

³⁷⁴ Idem.

while at the same time achieving a versatility and a whole range of expressions – for instance, in the thematic sequences entitled "*Doubt*" (*Îndoială*) [English: Doubt] "*Crowd*" (*Mulțime*) [English: Crowd], allegories of our hopes, fears, and anxieties (Fig. 120 b.). Here we find the human figure multiplied, grouped, gathered like a choir or a swarm of heads: **form and rhythm, a dynamic visual language that dramatically reflects the notions of faith, oppression, and individuality.**

Gordin's photography, far from the banal and from explicit rendering, synthesizes influences and impressions, interweaving the world of dreams with reality. With the capacity to "tell" a story, his works draw upon **a range of other disciplines**, from film to dance to sculpture. The images in the "*Doubt*" series recall Doré's engravings (Fig. 120 a.)³⁷⁵ for Dante, as well as the figures of witches and Butoh dancers, while *Crowd* evokes the dramatic mises en scène of Bergman or Dreyer, but also recalls Rodin's monumental sculpture³⁷⁶ (*The Gates of Hell*). Gordin's figure, despite his plight and frailty, retains a noble, towering stature, radiating a powerful **sense of survival that prevails over that of imprisonment and sacrifice.**

Naked and bound with ropes and chains, his head bowed towards the cracked earth, he stands like an outcast – more a nomad in a no man's land than a self-abased martyr, burdened and hindered on his journey towards enlightenment by the weight of mortal burdens and tenebrous thought. While the sombre landscape mirrors his condition in existential terms, the calm dome of the sky above protects him, and the horizon glows with the promise of dawn. Gordin is a master at capturing dichotomies: light and darkness, tension and release; his work unfolds in layers of meaning, evoked by a play of opposites.

³⁷⁵ Note: Paul Gustave Louis Christophe Doré (1832–1883) was a French artist: painter, illustrator, engraver, caricaturist, comic-strip author, lithographer, graphic artist, and sculptor.

³⁷⁶ Note: Auguste Rodin (1840–1917), a French graphic artist and painter who revolutionized the language of sculpture and is regarded by many critics as the greatest sculptor since Michelangelo. *The Gates of Hell*, begun around 1877, is a vast composition inspired by the writings of Dante; it is a synthesis of his work, in which he attempts to capture the moral decline of the times through an exceptional visual analogy.



Fig. 120: a. Auguste Rodin, *The Gates of Hell*, ca. 1877, Engravings signed Gustave Doré for Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy: Inferno* – 1861, *La danse du Sabbat*, 1870, *Inferno canto 21*. Source: <https://www.musee-rodin.fr/en>.

Bottom: b. Misha Gordin – *Crowd 1* – 1987, *New Crowd*, *Crowd 4*, *Crowd 8* – 1990, *Crowd 40* – 2020. Source: <http://bsimple.com/home.htm>

As for physical isolation, it can set the imagination free, as the only means of preserving mental health. Dostoevsky, whom Gordin acknowledges as an influence, explored this relationship between confinement and imagination, as did Solzhenitsyn, both imprisoned in labour or concentration camps. Each, in his own way, maintained that although people cannot control what happens to them, they can control their reaction to the given circumstances. In other words, like **his characters, they used their imagination to attain existential freedom**. From the images there emerges a profoundly solemn disposition of stoicism and human endurance: his characters can bear the toll of unhappiness, yet remain inwardly unvanquished, through faith.

In "*Crowd 51*", amid a multitude of heads, one face comes to the fore, a solitary man who utters a cry of suffering, perhaps of pain or revolt: he expresses a longing for freedom and self-affirmation. "*Doubt*", like "*Crowd*", also has an impact through its timelessness and universality: the expressive gestures of the human being – body, solitude, and community, the cycles and patterns of the world (Fig. 121).

He creates a deeply felt photography that seeks both to reflect and **to transcend a fragmented world**, one full of fears and doubts, but also of hope. Like Magritte, he constructs scenes and characters that look like external reality, and he strives to make his

conceptual images as realistic as possible; although he photographs an imaginary reality, Misha's repetitive images build a world of conscription, incarceration, and imprisonment, yet he has the intuition to create, beneath the **semblance of similitude, the immutable reality of the single truth.**



Fig. 121: a. Gustave Doré – *Inferno, Canto 21, Nimrod, the Giant*, 1903; *The seventh seal*, 1957. Open licence (CC0 type, public domain).
 b. Misha Gordin, *Fallen*, 2005–2009, *Doubt 3*, 1994, *Mask 1*, 2018. Source: <http://bsimple.com/home.htm>

As regards image-manipulation techniques, convinced that it is only a matter of time before digital technology supplants the analogue and the conceptual approach is granted its well-deserved place in the canon of photographic art, he continues to prefer the laborious process, always the same, that begins with an idea, then a drawing, the assembly of the components, the shooting and study of the material, followed by meticulous work in the darkroom.

Juha Arvid Helminen – born in 1977 in Helsinki, Finland, Helminen graduated in 2010 from the Lahti University of Applied Sciences as a photographer. His works have been featured in various magazines or are exhibited in museums, galleries, and art festivals around the world. They argue for a dialogue intended to preserve hard-won rights, but also to guarantee them to those who do not yet have them, addressing, among other things, the **misuse of power** as well as the **herd mentality**, the way in which we seek protection within

a group, surrendering our individuality in order to feel safe. The clothes we wear, dictated by religion, profession, and tradition, communicate belonging and the way we see the world; sometimes they represent authority, and often this conceals our true self, **creating walls between us** and the people we meet, people who are the prisoners of these traditions, of those walls that we have built for ourselves.

The colourless attire in his photographs signifies that individuals often plunge into the sea of conformity, freedom meaning, for many, being the same as everyone else. His subjects are carefully dressed in black outfits, masks, and bandages, so that no skin is shown. So that they reveal nothing of their individuality. As regards the series of photographs in "*Invisible Empire*" (2014—Fig. 122), declaring himself fascinated by the capacity to identify and to imagine personalities for **figures whose features are concealed**, the artist nonetheless notes that, from behind the uniforms and hoods, some have anonymously committed reprehensible acts, and that justice grows reluctant when faced with punishing those in uniform.

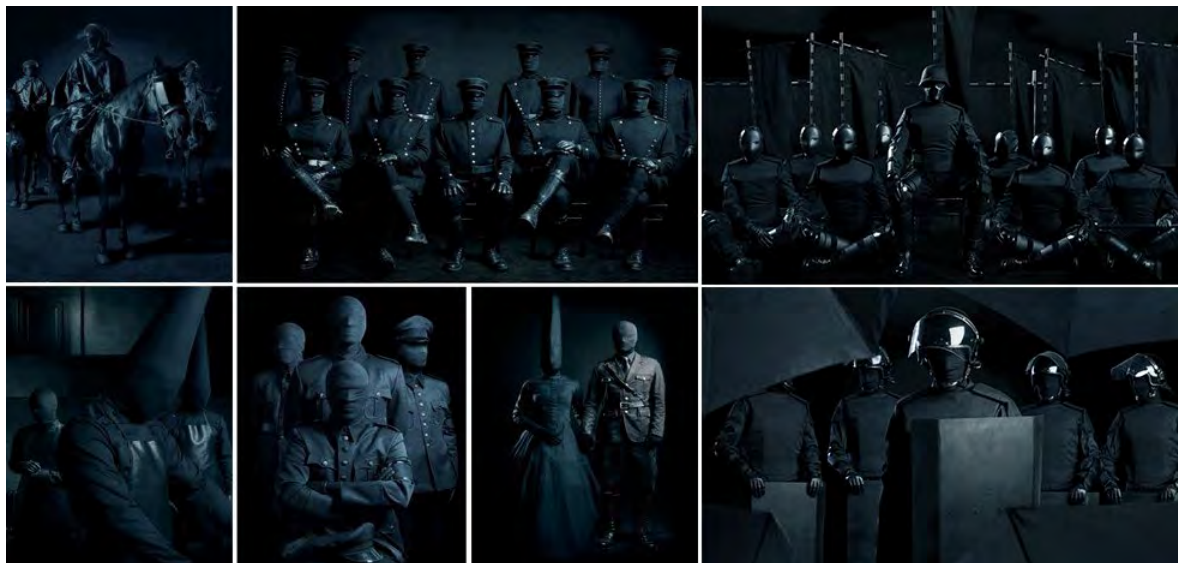


Fig. 122: Photographs from the series *Invisible Empire*, 2014. Source: <http://www.juhaarvidhelminen.com/The-Invisible-Empire>

Within a dark, impersonal setting, he depicts stateless soldiers, like a police force enforcing the order of an invisible hierarchy. Clad in uniforms that **evoke the collective memory of Nazism**, they appear to serve a tyrannical order. This is, in fact, a collective introspection, presenting itself as a mirror for the viewer, a mirror that reflects what we

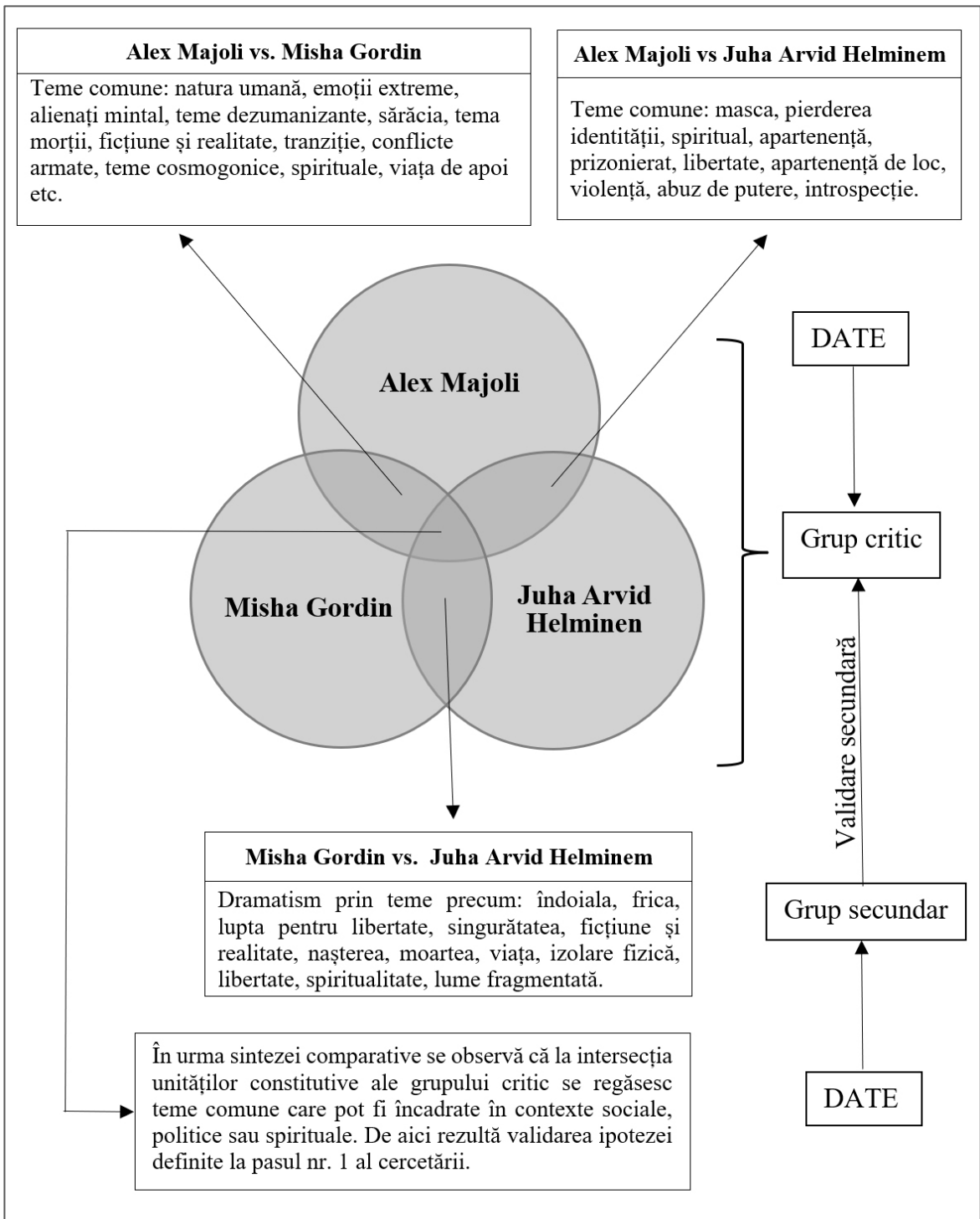
refuse to admit within ourselves. The artist explains that it is a means of prompting people to begin rethinking certain harmful patterns of behaviour.

From the desire for wealth to political power, and on to **religious violence**, the common denominator of our excesses comes into view: **the abuse of power**. These soldiers are the allegory of this violence: they cover the whole of their skin with a black fabric so that the public can identify with them, regardless of ethnicity. In an interview given to the magazine MutualArt in 2008, Helnwein said of *The Invisible Empire*:

*"Many of my works are narrative in nature, but I do not wish to fetter the viewer by disclosing everything. The stories should unfold in the minds of the viewers, just as photographs take shape in my mind. In my photographs, the model is not himself or herself but plays a role. The public is something additional, something that enters the images later. For me, to create is absolute freedom. To give the viewer something that is in my mind. When I have an idea, I cannot rest until it has been created and made material. Sometimes this can take years, as happened with the project *The Invisible Empire*, since the tailoring of the figures' costumes took a long time to complete. I look at and speak about my work as though someone else had made it; I criticize and/or praise it without the slightest inhibition. We photographers are the most narcissistic people there are."³⁷⁷*

Scheme 1 presents the manner in which the data obtained are processed (the critical case). This scheme will be set out in tabular form (Table 5: Summary table of low-key photography), following the description of the secondary cases that comes next.

³⁷⁷ Baxter, Sarah. "Juha Arvid Helminen: The Invisible Empire" in *MutualArt News*, 1 Dec. 2008,



Scheme 1: A comparative synthesis – *pattern matching* and the research workflow adopted. The author's own

Jürgen Klauke (b. 1943) draws on the black-and-white contrast in producing series of photographs that allude to aggression, fear, silence, erotic tension, and solitude. In the large-format frames (the *Gesichtsfeldeinengungen* series, 1993, Fig. 124), austere and sober, he introduces lighting that induces states of anxiety and unease. The artist thus incites reflection, criticizes social decline, interrogates psychological problems, and reacts against

the conventional norms that characterize commercial photography. Himself a protagonist in some of his works, he portrays the drama of human conflicts.³⁷⁸

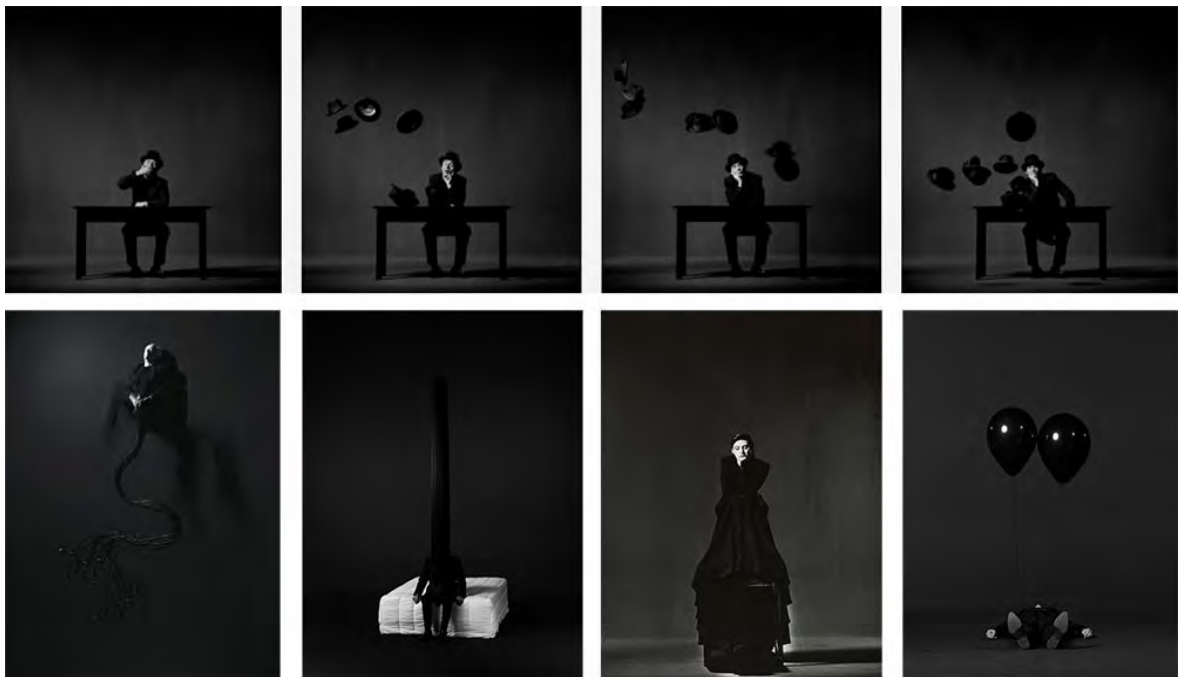


Fig. 124: Jürgen Klauke. Four photographs from the series *Gesichtsfeldeinengungen* (1993); *Experimentelle Neurose* (2004); *Attraktiver Attraktor* (2004); *Cochem* (2014), *Paranoia* (2010). Source: <https://www.guidowbaudach.com/index.php/artists/jurgen-klauke>

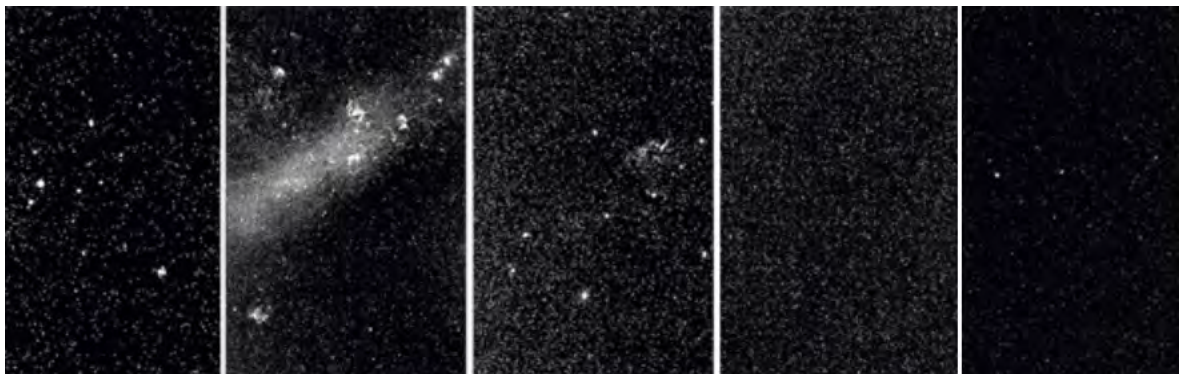


Fig. 123: Thomas Ruff: the *Sterne* series (1989–1992). Source: <https://publicdelivery.org/thomas-ruff-stars/>

An approach that interrogates *the black of the Universe* is found in the photographs of **Thomas Ruff** (b. 1958). The series of works *Sterne* (Stars), produced between 1989 and 1992, consists of large-format prints based on computer-processed photographs (Fig. 123). Moreover, the series *The Íngheṭ* captures political and military events, though the approach is an abstract one.

³⁷⁸ *ARTnews*, Vol. 101, No. 1–6, p. 109, ARTnews Associates, 2002.

Recurring themes such as death, memory, identity, destitution, and violence also appear in the works of the Moroccan-born artist **Touhami Ennadre** (b. 1953), who uses black in abundance. "*Black light*" is the term used by the writer François Aubral (in a volume devoted to the artist) to describe the artist's visual language. The author Tilman Spengler analyses the artist's works and holds that they "*present images that appear and disappear at one and the same time. Often insistent to the point of obsession, these works imitate Genesis in a unique way, creating a relationship between light and shadow, a relationship that becomes form and figure in an aesthetic dialogue*".³⁷⁹ Ennadre is not interested in reproduction or in the representation of so-called reality; rather, through the low-key style, he himself creates a reality that takes on meaning only through this form of expression. Stripped of secondary narrative elements, his art concentrates on the essence of black, an essence metamorphosed into the "mourning garb" of contemporary society. One of the artist's most recent exhibitions, *Trilogia Marroqui*, was hosted at the *Reina Sofía* Museum in Madrid in March 2021 (some of these photographs are illustrated in Fig. 125 a).



Fig. 125: a. Touhami Ennadre: *Big and Small Hands*, 1985; *Cultural Ghettoization*, 2021, *Mains du monde*, 2021; *Something we Africans got*, 2019. b. Shirin Neshat: *Stories of Martyrdom – (From Women of Allah)*, 1994; *Untitled*, 1996; *Seeking Martyrdom*, 1994; *Simin*, from 'Land of Dreams' series, 2019; *Speechless*, 1996. Source: <http://www.artnet.com/artists/shirin-neshat/>

³⁷⁹ Laurie Firstenberg, *Touhami Ennadre: If You See Something Say Something*, Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2004, p. 83, apud Tilman Spengler.

Shirin Neshat (b. 1957) is an Iranian visual artist known for her photography, video art, and film (e.g. *Rapture*, 1999, or *Turbulent*, 1998, which won the international prize at the Venice Biennale in 1999). She explores the condition of women in Muslim society under the aegis of the religious value systems of Islam. Whereas her early photographs had a political character, her later narratives tend to be more abstract, concentrating on themes of gender, identity, and society.

In the series *Unveiling* (1993) and *Women of Allah* (1993–97), she explores the condition of women in relation to Islamic fundamentalism and totalitarianism, both in her country of origin and in Western culture (Fig. 125 b). The artist's works also address the psychological dimension through the lens of women's experience in contemporary Islamic societies. Although Neshat criticizes the stereotypes of Islam through her works, her artistic aims are not explicitly polemical. Rather, the stakes of her works lie in the identity of Muslim women throughout the world. Drawing on Persian poetry and calligraphy, she addresses concepts such as the space of exile and the unequal rights particular to Muslim culture. Moreover, she often underscores this theme by creating powerful visual contrasts between light and darkness, white and black, masculine and feminine.

The theme of the identity of place is also found in the works of the Israeli-born artist **Joseph Dadoune** (b. 1975), which centre on the relationship between the real and the imaginary while resonating at the same time with questions of colonialism, gender, and identity. The artist chooses to explore this theme by relying almost entirely on low-key photographic art as his medium of expression. One of the most representative examples is the photographic project *An Arab Spring*, made up of 233 photographs and 17 videos, which in 2017 entered the permanent collections of the Pompidou Centre. In the same year, he was awarded the title of Chevalier des Arts by the French Minister of Culture. In October 2017, the artist was invited to the large-scale event *Nuit de la Création* (Versailles), where he presented a substantial selection of black photographs and sculptures under the title *Sillons*.³⁸⁰

In the photographic series *An Arab Spring*, Dadoune photographs *pitta*, the traditional bread, burnt, against a black background, alongside the volume *Un Printemps Arabe* by the author Jacques Benoist-Méchin, which is the fruit of a journey through seven Middle Eastern countries (Fig. 126 a). As an allusion to the increasingly grave situation in

³⁸⁰ Ville de Versailles, *Interview with Joseph Dadoune by Raphael Zagury-Orly*, YouTube, 13 September 2017: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4TRu96RG_Q. Accessed 17 February 2022.

that geographical region, in the photographs of the series he adds more and more of those charred traditional loaves. This same series, together with another from the same conceptual sphere (*Fayçal, roi d'Arabie*, 2005), would form the theme of a video-art/installation project. The frames are presented as series of 32 photographs, running in a loop of one to three minutes for each file. From time to time, the photographs run so fast that the screen remains pure black. In the series *Pair I, II, III, IV* of 2013, again in the register of black, he photographs reels of film and juxtaposes miniature images captured in 1965, on the occasion of Pope Paul VI's visit to New York to address the United Nations, calling for peace amid the conflict between India and Pakistan (Fig. 126 b). The smiles in the photographs juxtaposed over the black film reels and the black background somehow suggest the futility of these political endeavours.³⁸¹

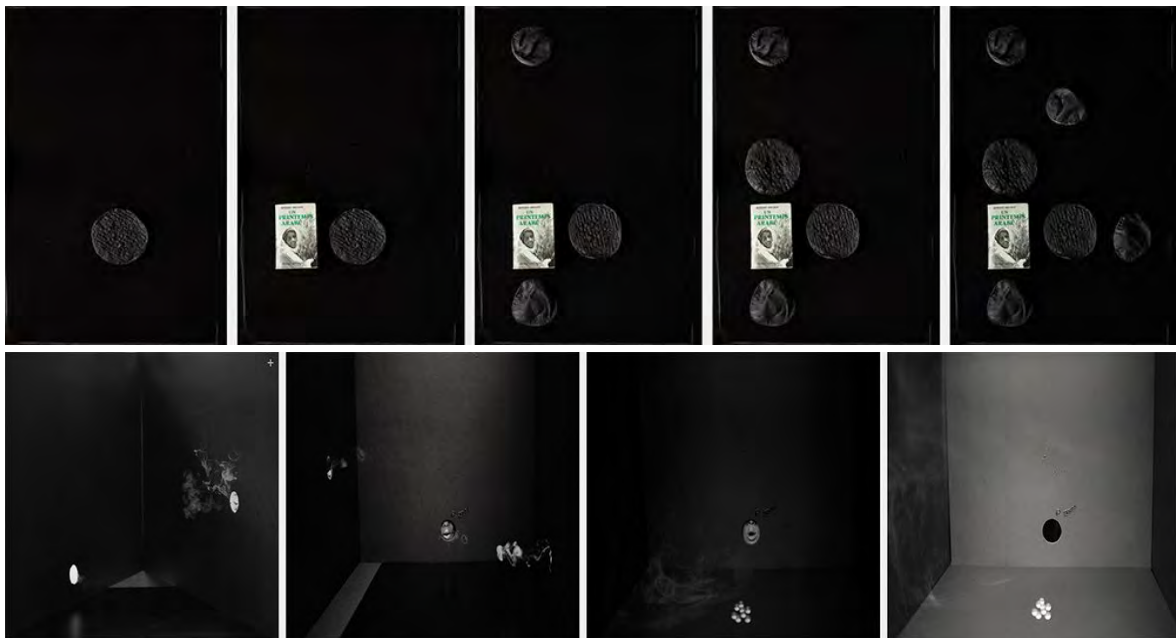


Fig. 126: Joseph Dadoune, a. part of the series *An Arab Spring*, 2017; b. *Inside Cube I, II, III and IV*, 2011. Source: <https://www.josephdadoune.net/an-arab-spring-1975>

In another wholly black photographic series (over which he pastes compost), entitled *Black Tunnel* (2013), he alludes to the wall separating Gaza from Egypt and to the underground tunnels dug by the inhabitants, through which they transferred food, building materials, and weapons. The concept underlying these photographs is the search for freedom at the other end of the tunnel, with an allusion both to the theme of hope and to that of death. In the case of the *Inside Cube* series of 2011, he photographs the interior of a cube created

³⁸¹ *Ida Bat Sheva*, catalogue. *Alchemy of Words: Abraham Abulafia, Dada, Lettrism*, pp. 11, 132. Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv, 2016.

from wholly black photographs, into which he cuts openings through which the subjects blow smoke, alluding to the *Kaaba*, the sanctuary at Mecca, which is built in the form of a cube and which the Islamic religion regards as the first and holiest place of worship. The photographs are also an allusion to the censorship of the *Black Cube* of **Gregor Schneider** (b. 1969), presented in the German pavilion at the 2005 Venice Biennale, but whose assembly in Berlin was not permitted by the authorities, because it was thought to allude to the gas chambers of the Nazi period.

For the British photographer **Lee Jeffries** (b. 1971), the homeless become the principal subjects. The photographer holds conversations with the subjects he is about to photograph, thereby forging bonds that can be felt specifically in their gaze. The artist says of his photographs that they have always been the end point of long emotional journeys and that they constitute an antidote to his acute sense of loneliness: "...my own loneliness continues to motivate my art."³⁸² In order to document the photographic project made up of thousands of images, *Lost Angels* (begun in 2007), Jeffries travelled around the world, wishing to sound the alarm about the harsh living conditions of these isolated people, forgotten and cut off from life. Alexander Chekmenev, John Simpson, David Tovey, Andres Serrano, et al. are other photographers who render the plight of the homeless in the same aesthetic manner.



Fig. 127: Lee Jeffries, photographs from the project *Lost Angels*. Source: <https://lee-jeffries.co.uk/lost-angels>.

The Australian-born photographer **Bill Henson** (b. 1955) explores corporeality and the themes of dream and ephemerality, all of them interconnected. Through the intense

³⁸² Sanja Bahun, *Thinking Home: Interdisciplinary Dialogues*, Routledge, Great Britain, 2020, p. 47.

chromatic chiaroscuro, the crepuscular light, and the open compositions of his photographs, he maps oneiric, enigmatic states that elude the constraints of the rational. He uses darkness to isolate his subjects, his work having rested on a narrative from his earliest days as an artist. In his photographic album *Lux et Nox* (Thames & Hudson, 2011), his subjects – nudes, usually of an androgynous, ambiguous appearance – are adrift, in continuous suspension. To portray this fragmentation of reality, in most cases black, darkness, occupies more than 70% of the surface of the works, and in order to heighten the sense of psychic rupture and isolation his subjects often float above nocturnal landscapes on the periphery of the city. Among his many series, one that is especially telling in this regard is *Untitled* (1998–2003), which combines nocturnal landscapes and suspended, sometimes arched human bodies, evoking a no man's land where meanings, morals, and behaviours shift (Fig. 128).

The theme of the depersonalized, arched body recurs in the work of other renowned artists as well, such as **Louise Bourgeois** (e.g. *Arch of Hysteria*, 1993), **Pipilotti Rist** (e.g. *Selfless In The Bath of Lava*, 1994), **Salvador Dalí** (*Invisible Lion, Horse, Sleeping Woman*, 1930), or **André Breton** (*Le Cinquantenaire de l'Hystérie*, 1928), all of whom took as their point of departure Freud's psychoanalysis and his notes on hysteria (one of the symptoms mentioned being the uncontrollable arching of the body).

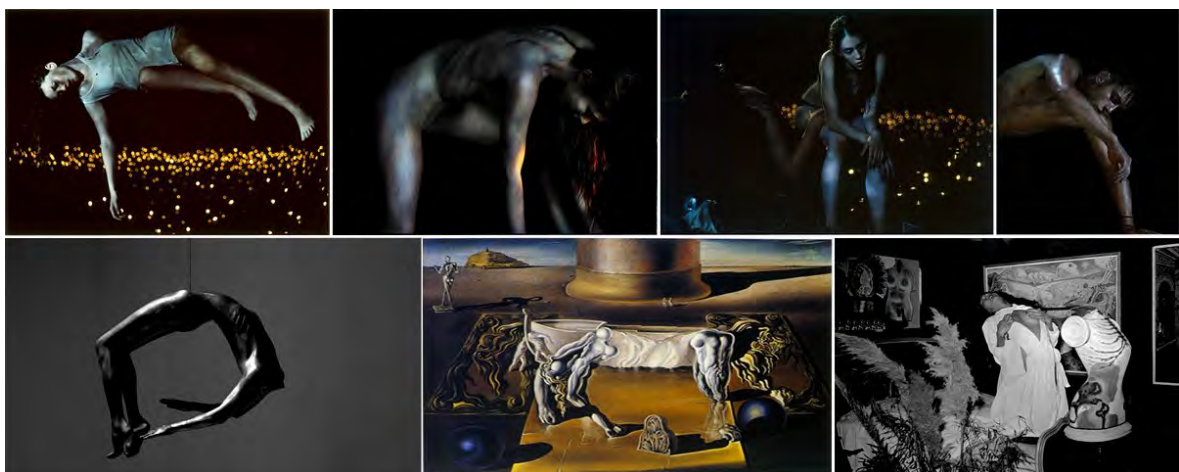


Fig. 128: Top row, from left to right: Bill Henson, *Untitled #20*, *Untitled #115*, *Untitled #121*, *Untitled #135*, 2000–03; *Untitled #227*, 2016; Bottom row: Louise Bourgeois, *Arch of Hysteria*, 1993; Salvador Dalí, *Invisible Lion, Horse, Sleeping Woman.*, 1930; Hélène Vanel, *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* (performance) 1938. Source: <https://www.artsy.net/artist/bill-henson> and <https://www.wikiart.org/en/louise-bourgeois>

At the same time, the "quiet", "floating" drama of Henson's photographs suggests a certain kind of transcendence, realized in the form of a contemporary reinterpretation of the

Sublime. This concept, in which the grandeur of nature provokes conflicting sensations, was a central theme of late nineteenth-century Romanticism.

SUMMARY TABLE OF LOW-KEY PHOTOGRAPHY						
Artist	Subjects photographed	The role of black, accents	Themes/ Subjective interpretation	Context	Type of art	Movements and/or genres
Alex Majoli	people with psychological disorders, in transition	ground, form, achromatic accents	horror, death, the human condition, drama, transcendence	social, spiritual	figurative	conceptual art, minimalism
Misha Gordin	figures placed in elaborate scenes staged by the artist	dramatic effect, foregrounds the concept through symbolism	doubt, fear, the struggle for individuality and freedom	spiritual, psychic, social, oneiric, space-time	figurative	conceptualism, minimalism, brutalism
Juha A. Helminen	figures placed in elaborate scenes staged by the artist	depersonalizes, lends mystery, conceals, form and ground	the human condition, the excess of power in society, drama	social identity, individual identity	figurative	conceptual art
Bill Henson	nudes, night scenes	ground, supports the theme, chromatic accent	the oneiric, space-time, beginning-end, ephemerality,	psychosocial, intrinsic, metaphorical notes	figurative	conceptual photography
Lee Jeffries	homeless people, portraits	form and ground, achromatism	the condition of marginalized people, drama, solitude	social	figurative	conceptual art, minimalism
Jürgen Klauke	portraits, staging, superimpositions	form and ground, defragmentation, individualization, achromatic accent	death, night, the imaginary, depersonalization	psychological, social, religious	figurative and abstract	conceptual art, serialist photography
Thomas Ruff	portraits, nude, night scenes, the cosmos	ground, chromatic accent in the portraits and achromatic in the abstract works	the infinite, order, chaos, genesis	social	abstract and figurative	conceptual art, neo-noir

Touhami Ennadre	the human body, social events	form and ground, achromatic accent	the human condition, genesis, death, identity of place	social, religious, documentary	figurative and abstract	conceptual art
Shirin Neshat	portraits and self-portraits	form, graphic quality, chromatic accent	identity of place, of gender	social, religious	figurative	feminist art, conceptual art
Joseph Dadoune	still life, geometric forms	form and ground, graphic quality, chromatic accent	Identity of place	social, religious, space-time, protest	figurative and abstract	neo-minimalism

Table 5: Summary table of low-key photography

5.2. The Individual Case Study Method

5.2.1. Preliminary Theoretical Considerations

Within the qualitative research, individual case studies were chosen (ch. 5.3.), studies that lend themselves to artistic research, whatever its theoretical or practical nature, leading to "the gathering of complex, in-depth data capable of generating theories".³⁸³ Both the individual case study method and the collective/multiple case study method were applied, the latter also affording the possibility of comparing the cases under consideration, the basic premise of the method being that "*individual cases are studied in detail in order to arrive at conclusions that are as complete and accurate as possible*".³⁸⁴ The first stage of the work was establishing the theme and objectives of the research. The theme being *The aesthetic and perceptual dimension of black* in the art of the selected artists, the objectives concerned, in particular:

1. Testing the hypothesis that there is a connection between the subconscious/conscious and artistic expression.
2. Probing one's own *Self* in relation to the proposed theme.
3. Establishing the valences of the colour black and of tonal dominance in the artworks analysed, and their correlation with the theme pursued.
4. An analysis of a hypothetical causality between the use of black and the artist's inner experiences.

³⁸³ Petru Iluț, *Abordarea calitativă a sociumanului: concepte și metode*, Polirom, 1997, p. 63.

³⁸⁴ Robert D. Reisz, *Modele stochastice pentru științele sociale (Stochastic models for the social sciences)*, West University Press, Timișoara, 2002.

5. An analysis of the historical evolution of the use of black in photography, installation, painting, et al..
6. A comparative analysis of the semiotics of black across time and space (including in Romanian art).
7. Determining the role of black through the tools specific to visual language.

To be valid and representative (Yin, R., 1989), case studies require a **delimitation** that corresponds to the research context. The following delimitation criteria were therefore established: the subject or subjects should hold the status of a recognized artist, demonstrated through their professional activity; the artworks produced (catalogues, archives, etc.) should make clear that they operate (or have operated) predominantly with black; the period of engagement with this colour should be greater than 5 years; and the number of artworks in which black predominates should be significant. Where a movement is to be analysed, the delimitation is valid by virtue of its very defining characteristics. The specific protocol for the **collection and inventorying of the data** required to carry out the case studies addressed:

- written numerical and non-numerical documents: CVs, studies, articles and/or authored books, critical texts, specialist journals, etc.
- unwritten documents: visual (artworks, catalogues) and audiovisual (art films, documentary films, television programmes)
- participant and non-participant observation (art exhibitions)
- interviews (wherever this method was necessary, but above all possible)
- national and international conferences and scholarly symposia

Following the **analysis of documents**, a technique validated in qualitative research whose aim is to **transform documents into data**, the basic requirement of this analysis was also borne in mind, namely that "*there must be as clear a relationship as possible between the documents and the research questions*".³⁸⁵

The following **data-processing techniques** were used in the study:

³⁸⁵ Reisz, 2019.

- observational (global) analysis / interpretation of documents
- thematic, selective coding, taking the context into account. In practice, keywords (codes) describing similar data were highlighted, their frequency was taken into account, and these codes were then grouped into more general concepts.

The methods adopted for the **interpretation** of the qualitative data were:

- observational-interpretive analysis, or "*story telling*", which involves the observation and interpretation of a document from a subjective standpoint.^{386,387}
- "*grounded theory*" (also called *teoria întemeiată* or *the empirical theory method*) rests on comparing the concepts obtained through coding, the possibility of proposing hypotheses and testing them by comparing them with the existing data.³⁸⁸ This method is preferred when one is working with relatively large quantities of information, for the analysis of documents once these have been inventoried.

The following stages were used:

1. Focused coding – Words or short phrases are chosen that analytically describe the fragment of text or the interview. The recurring codes, or those important to the research theme, are selected.

2. Stop and Memo – In the course of the coding stage, theoretical sketches are produced, serving as explanatory hypotheses about the processes studied, the relationships between categories, etc. Process or relational diagrams – schemes that represent the memos visually – are very useful.

3. Theoretical sampling and saturation – Following coding and the writing of memos, it may emerge that interviewing new subjects is necessary in order to bring in additional information. This entails organizing and articulating the theoretical categories resulting from the data, using situational maps and diagrams.

³⁸⁶ Denzin, N. K., and Lincoln, Y. S., *The landscape of qualitative research: Theories and issue*, Sage Publications, London, p. 377.

³⁸⁷ McKenzie, George W., Jackie Powell, and Robin Usher, *Understanding social research: perspectives on methodology and practice*, No. 16. Psychology Press, 1997, pp. 29–35.

³⁸⁸ Principal proponents: Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, University of California, San Francisco (1965, 1968, 1970); other authors: Erving Goffman, Michael Burawoy, Howard Becker.

4. Sorting and the construction of conclusions – This provides for a generalization of the empirical results, thereby creating a generic explanation of the phenomenon, freed from the constraints of space and time. The results may be: the motivation of a behaviour, the explanation of a process, or the description of a phenomenon, process, or behaviour.

Interpretation is always determined by **the researcher's preexisting ideas and experience**, as Professor Reisz observes.³⁸⁹ The theoretical and methodological ideas, or the outcomes of one's own value system, must be made as clear as possible. Moreover, the same author holds that qualitative research must be **subjective, the researcher's introspection being necessary because it clarifies the way in which they shape the research**. Introspection must be expressed and limited as well as possible, in accordance with its usefulness.

Formulating conclusions relevant to the research carried out – At this stage, conclusions were formulated in response to the objectives established so that, on their basis, broader conclusions could be reached. In the case of collective case studies, the similarities and differences between the results obtained are not to be lost sight of. Diagram 2 represents the case study method as it was adopted for the present research project.

³⁸⁹ Reisz (2019).

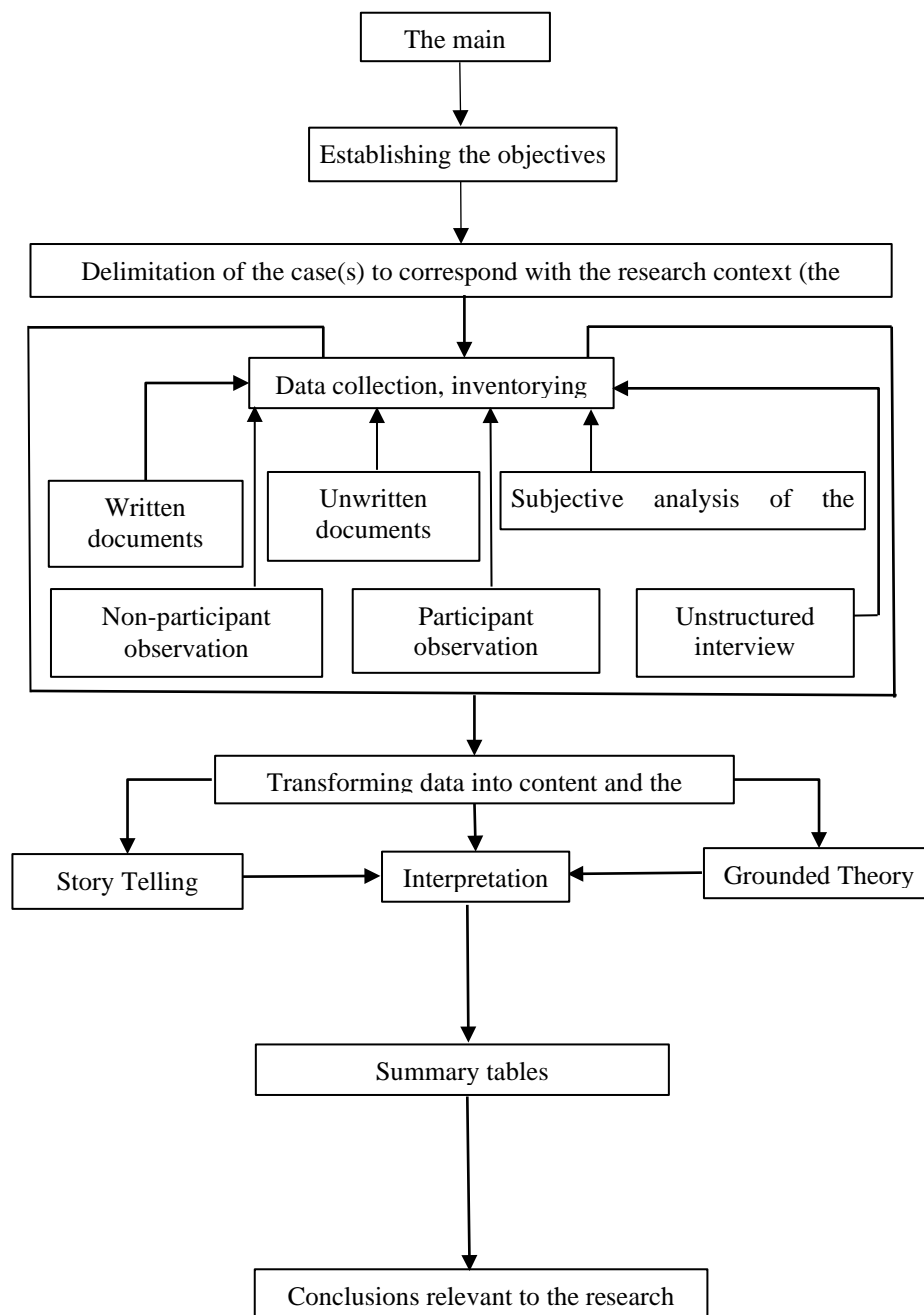


Diagram 2. The case study method as it was adopted for the present research project.

5.2.2. Black and the Dialogue Between Media: Petru Lucaci

“I have always been fascinated by black. Black has always struck me as the most important colour in the history of painting. Everyone says that black is not a colour, which, even in physical terms, is false. Black is the only real colour, the only colour

*absorbed by matter; all the other colours are reflected by matter, and so they are false.*³⁹⁰ – Petru Lucaci

The rationale for selecting this *critical* case study rests on the following considerations:

A. The case is *representative* (or *typical*) and *longitudinal*, for the following reasons:

1. From the year 2000 onwards, beginning with the series “*Noctumbre*”, Petru Lucaci's concerns shifted away from a colourful abstract expressionism towards a “*perilous and fascinating descent into the inferno*”³⁹¹ (author's note: towards black);
2. Consideration was given to the rich palette of artistic genres he practises: painting, photography, graphic art, graphic design, installation, object, and multimedia;
3. Account was taken of his authored books, in which he addresses and investigates the colour black *in extenso*, and of the albums published in the wake of his exhibitions, albums illustrating works that may, for a researcher, have a documentary character.

B. His design is *holistic*, since it operates with a single unit of analysis.

C. These features confer a high degree of validity and relevance (Yin, 2003:61).

The first step in conducting the case study was the gathering of data, specifically social documents, after which the process of data processing was undertaken, using the methods and techniques specified. In *Principiile de bază ale cercetării calitative* (2019) and in *Modele stochastice pentru științele sociale* (2002), Robert D. Reisz states clearly that the analysis of documents in the construction of any valid case study must address certain basic features: the type of documents, their inventory, and their source. A summary table was drawn up (Table 6) in order to inventory the documents, as is in fact recommended by Professor Septimiu Chelcea (2001:469), as follows:

Written	Numerical	Public	A. CV: [1] CV_Petru_Lucaci.pdf (from the UVT archive)
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³⁹⁰ Senso TV. (2016, June 24). Petru Lucaci la MNAC - prezentare artist [Video]. Vimeo. URL: <https://player.vimeo.com/video/131767216>

³⁹¹ Magda Cârneli, "Lucaci Petru" in *ArtIndex*, 16 May 2012.

	Non-numerical	Public	<p>A. Authored books [1] Petru Lucaci, "<i>Despre Negru</i>", UNARTE, Bucharest, 2008. [2] Petru Lucaci, "<i>Clarobscur</i>", UNARTE, Bucharest, 2007. [3] Petru Lucaci, "<i>Corpul supravegheat</i>", UNARTE, Bucharest, 2010, pp. 96–99 [4] Petru Lucaci, "<i>Black-based COCKTAIL</i>", UNARTE, Bucharest, 2013.</p> <p>B. Critical texts [1] Magda Cârnelci on Petru Lucaci, "<i>Clarobscur</i>", UNARTE, Bucharest, 2007. [2] Magda Cârnelci on Petru Lucaci, "<i>Black-based COCKTAIL</i>", UNARTE, Bucharest, 2013. [3] Nasui, Cosmin. "<i>Finisaj Petru Lucaci / Cafeneaua Critică Cu Bogdan Lefter @ Victoria Art Center, București.</i>" <i>Modernism.Ro</i>.</p> <p>C. Specialist journals [1] Mălina Ionescu, "Petru Lucaci - Diptych Clarobscur/ Material Scapes" in <i>Revista Arta</i>. [2] Cârnelci, Magda. "Petru Lucaci. O afirmare a materialității picturale" in <i>Revista Arta</i>. [3] Petru Lucaci, "Reconversia ca demers artistic" in <i>IRREGULAR</i>. [4] Zeltil, Yigru, "Dressing the Body" in <i>Revista Arta</i>.</p>
Unwritten	Visual	Belonging to material culture	<p>A. Works of art (exhibition images): [1] Munten, Lucian. "PETRU LUCACI: DIPTYCH – CLAROBSCUR @ LEILEI GALLERY." <i>Modernism Punct Ro</i> [2] Images from the online environment.</p> <p>B. Images from the artist's own albums: [1] Petru Lucaci, "<i>Clarobscur</i>", UNARTE, Bucharest, 2007. [2] Petru Lucaci, "<i>Black-based COCKTAIL</i>", UNARTE, Bucharest, 2013.</p>
	Audio-visual	Video recordings	<p>A. Documentaries, interviews, TV programmes [1] Galeria Galateca. (2021, April 25). #contactless noile ritualuri: Petru Lucaci, Lucian Hrisav și Alexandru Zaharia [Video]. [2] MNAC Bucharest. (2021, January 19). Aruncă un ochi în expoziția Material-Scapes alături de artistul Petru Lucaci [Video]. [3] Muzeul Național al Literaturii Române. (2021, September 5). Arta contemporană în direct #4, Expoziția "După doisprezece ani", MNAC Magda Cârnelci și Petru Lucaci [Video]. [4] Senso TV. (2016, June 24). Petru Lucaci la MNAC - prezentare artist [Video].</p>

Table 6: An inventory of the documents – Petru Lucaci case study.

Petru Lucaci (b. 1956) is one of the best-known contemporary Romanian artists, his fields of activity comprising higher art education (UNARTE), various cultural and educational activities, scientific research, and artistic creation. The broad palette of plastic

expression he commands – painting, photography, installation, graphic art, multimedia, and so on – attests to a strongly intra- and interdisciplinary character, the artist himself holding that:

*“it is imperative that [author's note: artists] should explore other languages within the visual sphere as well, in order to shape a complex professional profile.”*³⁹²

Given the works of art produced entirely through the use of the colour black, as well as those in which this colour predominates, an exhaustive study of them, within the context of my own doctoral research theme, was deemed imperative. As already noted, from the early 2000s Petru Lucaci changes the register of his artistic expression, a metamorphosis that the art critic Magda Cârneli characterizes as a *“plunge into the abysses of a single colour: total black, profound black, abyssal black”*³⁹³ and also as *“a tipping of the earlier chromatic overabundance into its nihilistic opposite.”*³⁹⁴.

She describes this transcendence as a *“calcination of the colours, to the point of their complete negation (yet one that contains them all)”*³⁹⁵ and draws a parallel with other artists of the past half-century (Pierre Soulages, Clyfford Still, Barnett Newman, Brice Marden) likewise seduced by this chromatic void, drawing attention to the liberating, purifying effect of the mysticism of the colour black.

An analysis of the artist's exhibition activity reveals his preoccupation with the colour black, both through his works and through the very titles of certain exhibitions of the last two decades, which are telling in the sense indicated: *Diptych – Clarobscur* (2020), *Black-based cocktail* (2013), *Clarobscur II* (2008), *Clarobscur I* (2007), *Noctumbres II* (2006), *Night shadows* (2003), *Alb/Negru* (2002), *Noctumbre* (2001), *Noctumbres I*, (2000), and others. The theme of Genesis (1989–1990) is likewise to be found in the artist's works, with reference to primordial black. The body of documents to be discussed will be analysed in chronological order, so as to respect the longitudinal character of the case study.

The result of an authored **photographic research project**, *“Clarobscur”* (2007), accompanied by critical texts (Magda Cârneli, Petru Lucaci), presents itself, as the author himself describes it, as *“a journal in which light and darkness, hope and despair, the radiant*

³⁹² Petru Lucaci, "MATERIAL-SCAPES | MICROVERNISAJ: IOANA STANCA", National Museum of Contemporary Art of Romania.

³⁹³ Op. cit., loc. cit.

³⁹⁴ Op. cit., loc. cit.

³⁹⁵ Op. cit., loc. cit.

zone of our being and its anxieties and shadows are marked out in white and black."³⁹⁶ A certainty on the author's part, a conceptual stance that flanks the purely artistic expression, takes shape in the form of a somewhat rhetorical question inviting reflection: "A world without 'lines' of contour, a world solely of contrasts... Is this not, after all, the world we live in?"³⁹⁷

The author characterizes the chiaroscuro of the twenty-first century as a genuine instrument for the artist, constituting "a way of taking part in public discourse, of being present, of taking a stand, of protesting, of rebelling, and not merely of demonstrating artistic pretensions and skills."³⁹⁸ Magda Cârnelci draws a connection that is anything but incidental, setting the semiotics of the images alongside an emotional release on the author's part. At the same time, she interprets this kind of visual language as a "recognition of one's own shadows and psychic fractures... an attempt to exorcize our inner and outer darkness."³⁹⁹

It is interesting that this "journal" conveys a personal feeling, the images being familiar even though they are subjected to a process of defragmentation and refragmentation, tending towards abstract, raw, unpolished photography. Common elements of everyday life appear, often superimposed and fragmented yet still recognizable, yielding a characteristic immanence. A direct association with the human subconscious, as "an actor in the social space", seems inevitable.

Thus, this "journal" both is and, at the same time, is not a personal one, for in it one finds the human being, the person of the everyday. The graphic and pictorial language, grounded entirely in the tonal contrast between the "clear" and the "obscure", creates a mystical play that turns on the gradual or abrupt dissolution of the boundary between light and darkness, bringing "to light" the mysteries of darkness. At other times the spatial composition acts as a veil that covers the imperfections of the world, in which case the colour black takes on a positive, calming character, a bringer of order to the chaos that light reveals.

Analysing the roughly 40 images contained in the album from the standpoint of visual language, with emphasis on the value of black, the following common features emerged:

³⁹⁶ Petru Lucaci, "Clarobscur", UNARTE, Bucharest, 2007, p. 5.

³⁹⁷ Op. cit., loc. cit.

³⁹⁸ Ibidem, p. 7.

³⁹⁹ Ibidem, p. 28.

1. The images are composed of several quadrilateral planes of various sizes, most often distinct and non-overlapping. Thus, the result of juxtaposing several component forms leads to a “whole” that differs from the form of the components (the fundamental Gestalt principle, the *principle of grouping*).
2. From the standpoint of the *Gestalt figure/ground principle*, black predominates both as ground and as figure. When it predominates as ground, its share is 75–90%.
3. Black predominates in the lower half of the images, constituting their centre of gravity. In only two cases does black predominate in the left half of the image.
4. While black, as ground, is well defined, the forms it contains are entropic: they consist of abstract elements, irregular contours, and lines with a dynamic character.
5. Black, as figure, is sometimes represented either in the form of abstract structures or in the form of lines sharing the same orientation (the *principle of parallelism*). Signs, letters, calligraphic writing, and hemispherical or ellipsoidal fragments also appear, along with elements from the plant or animal world. At other times the value of black is used to outline various objects, to bound and delimit them, and so on. Likewise, the *principle of continuity* is illustrated in the form of rows of black spots that are perceived as interconnected.
6. The human body is omnipresent in the works analysed, yet it does not constitute their centre of interest. Moreover, no work depicts the human body in its entirety, and the human face is wholly absent. Instead, the human body is fragmented, with only isolated parts of it appearing: shoulder, thigh, abdomen, and limbs. In some cases semi-profiles (of the body) also appear, onto which symbols are projected. At other times black is used as an “imprint” it leaves upon the human body, either throwing certain areas into relief or in the form of a (self-)flagellation.
7. The centre of balance, in all the works, is “dictated” by black, whether we are speaking of the value of black as figure or as ground.
8. The value of black is also used to “mask” a possible direction of the visual vector, the image taking on a pronounced character of a “signal” that demands to be deciphered and interpreted.
9. Perspective, too, is absent, except in the planes where the human body appears. Three-dimensionality is present only in the planes that contain the “organic”, planes that are always positioned in the upper left extremity of the image.

10. Owing to the fact that all the images are printed on a transparent material, they give the viewer the sensation of looking at a radiographic plate, or at the negative of a light-sensitive film.

In the set of images in Fig. 129, some of them were intervened upon and the results of the analysis carried out (visual language) were highlighted, in accordance with observations 1–10.



Fig. 129: Images from Petru Lucaci, “Clarobscur”, UNARTE, Bucharest, 2007, pp. 21, 65, 73, 117, 137, 139.

The volume “*Clarobscur*” also contains a “narrative” divided into three parts, a kind of testament, itself fragmented (like the images) into short phrases that accompany each

plate. After the title “*Povestea Claroscurului (cu, pentru și despre Clarobscur)*” there follows a “textual stage design”, with strong accents of light and dark. Thus the darkness of night covers over the flaws of the world, (re)bestowing perfection upon it.

Various parallels can be drawn: the universal perfection of black in the works of Malevich; Chanel, with her “little black dress”, of which she declared: “*Women think of all colors except the absence of color. I have said that black has it all. ... Its beauty is absolute. It is perfection*”,⁴⁰⁰ the desire for perfection out of which the Black Swan is “born”⁴⁰¹; and so on. Petru Lucaci himself makes a similar reference: “*The world was perfect in its darkness. Nothing to add, nothing to take away. Each and every thing in its place in the*

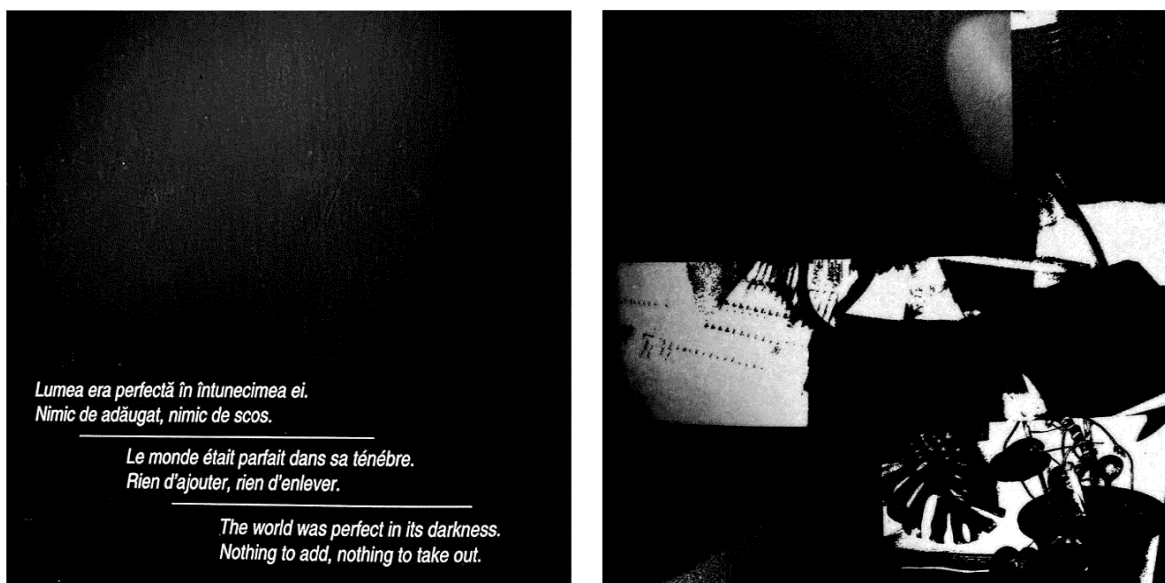


Fig. 130: Reproduced images, Petru Lucaci, “Clarobscur”, UNARTE, Bucharest, 2007, pp. 64, 49.

dark.”⁴⁰² - Fig. 130

In the second part of the narrative... “*Suddenly it became day/light*”⁴⁰³ once again, we can draw parallels with Genesis, with the day–night cycle, and also with the relationship between light and dark. The story continues, stressing that, in the presence of light, the flaws of the world were seen “*too starkly*”; and Petru Lucaci, in an attempt to heighten their meaning, counts them off: “*One flaw, two flaws, three flaws... still more flaws, flaws upon flaws*”⁴⁰⁴, concluding thereafter that the illuminated world is a trap, in which one runs the

⁴⁰⁰ Young, Caroline. *Living with Coco Chanel: The Homes and Landscapes That Shaped the Designer*. Frances Lincoln, 2019, p. 72.

⁴⁰¹ Note: this refers to the 2010 film “Black Swan”, directed by Darren Aronofsky.

⁴⁰² Petru Lucaci, op. cit., p. 64, p. 68.

⁴⁰³ Ibidem, p. 72.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibidem, p. 84.

risk of becoming lost in the details.⁴⁰⁵ At the same time the “solution” is set out: “*The darkness had to be lit (switch off the light)/And the light had to be darkened (switch on the darkness)*”⁴⁰⁶.

Finally, in the third part, the author concludes that this “struggle” between darkness and light, black and white, gave rise to chiaroscuro – a stalemate, an ambiguity, a “*neither one thing nor the other*”.⁴⁰⁷ This ambiguity is transposed and associated with other words (sunrise, sex, life, artist, work of art, and so on), returning, through the cyclical character of the text and the images, to the implied perfection of the ancestral dark.

Worth noting is the conceptual quality of the work, in the context described: black is perceived almost as a necessity, as though we found ourselves under a pronounced lighting that does nothing other than “announce” the healing power of black. At the same time, the dual, cyclical character of black is brought out with force and with mastery.

Petru Lucaci’s preoccupation with the colour black continues, through a broad and descriptive approach, in the volume “*Despre Negru*” (2008), where he undertakes a kind of “*historicist*” endeavour,⁴⁰⁸ arguing:

*“Black has a history. It has a remarkable past, a substantial present and, assuredly, a future. The twentieth century represented a period of maximum affirmation for black, of maturation, of a subtle synthesis of all the experiences accumulated until then. Surveying the chromatic choices of contemporary artists, I have observed a major interest in black, in almost all the current directions of research.”*⁴⁰⁹

The artist states that it is “*an endeavour springing from a personal fascination with the expressive power of this colour*”⁴¹⁰ and considers this survey necessary, as a theoretical grounding, for his own preoccupations. The plunge he undertakes covers an extended period, from the art of the primitive era almost to the end of the last century, grouping the artists around the movements that took shape along the way. The selection of artists “*for whom*

⁴⁰⁵ It is interesting to correlate this with the antithetical sense suggested by the Myth of the Cave, where darkness is a trap.

⁴⁰⁶ Petru Lucaci, op. cit., p. 92.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibidem, p. 120.

⁴⁰⁸ Note: the expression is used by the author.

⁴⁰⁹ Petru Lucaci, “*Despre Negru*”, UNARTE, Bucharest, 2008, p. 4.

⁴¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 3.

*black played an essential role throughout their entire output, or was present, episodically, in certain phases of their work*⁴¹¹ was made using the criterion of self-identification, but also from an avowedly subjective perspective, taking into account artists who “*worked not only with black, but with black in a creative way that led to the enrichment of black’s universe of expression.*”⁴¹²

“*Despre Negru*” abounds in explanations and examples (more than 500 figures), and contains, at the end of the volume, representations from the author’s personal projects. In closing, Petru Lucaci leaves open the research into “his black”, as he calls it in “*Black-based COCKTAIL*” (referring, of course, to the sense of his attachment to this colour):

*“At the end of this journey among blacks, the predominant feeling I have is that I am, in fact, only at the beginning of the road. Far from having exhausted its expressive potential, black has a long and rich history, from which it has emerged, every time, victorious. It still has, assuredly, much to say in contemporary art.”*⁴¹³

In the catalogue “*Corpul supravegheat*” (2010), Petru Lucaci reiterates the meanings he attributes to black, as a visual expression springing from the human subconscious, a connection continuous through time, thereby becoming a kind of “statement” by the artist. This intimacy with black continues, too, in the album of the “*Black-based COCKTAIL*” project,⁴¹⁴ in which the works are presented in the form of a “thematic cocktail” – that is, they are to be understood as a thematic mix of styles of artistic expression – of which the author states:

“The dialogue between these media – the transfer onto canvas of the graphic idiom through the use of line and of techniques of representation drawn from

⁴¹¹ Ibidem, p. 4.

⁴¹² Ibidem.

⁴¹³ Ibidem, p. 229.

⁴¹⁴ The author's note: “*BLACK – a term that stands at the origin of the universe, if we are to invoke the myth of Genesis or the theory of black holes, but also at the origin of painting in the absolute black of the caves, encompasses countless mythological, religious, political, psychological, economic, and social meanings. The black sun, the black holes of the universe, the blacklist, undeclared (off-the-books) work, black magic, the camera obscura, black tie and the little black dress, the black race, black as light (night, obscurity) or black as matter (objects that wholly absorb the rays of light)... Black, the colour of mourning, of loss, but also of consummate elegance, a symbol of primordial fecundity or of eroticism, a sign of nobility yet also a signifier of magic, black points towards violence, power, authority, solemnity, panic, anguish, suffering, prestige, or self-control. How could such a panoply of connotations and meanings fail to inspire you, fail to incite you?*” – Petru Lucaci, “Black-based COCKTAIL”, UNARTE, Bucharest, 2013, p. 3.

*printmaking, or the reverse, through the insertion of painterly elements into photography – enhances the force and the visual refinement that black affords.”*⁴¹⁵

This tendency of the artist to express himself through a multitude of means of artistic expression is no accident, for the valences of black would be greatly diminished were a single visual idiom alone to be used. I say this precisely because of the wealth of meanings that orbit this colour, a wealth that would diminish significantly were one to confine oneself to a single artistic genre.

This cocktail based on the colour black includes the artist’s avowed interest in photography, video art, and digital art, yet it does not exclude the classical fine-art techniques. Out of this blend results a “*neo-pop hyperrealism, promoted and encouraged by the artist himself in his role as teacher*”⁴¹⁶, as Magda Cârneli observes in the critical text accompanying the album.

In an article published on Modernism.ro, the art critic Vasile Radu makes several remarks concerning the exhibition “*Black-Based Cocktail*”, held at the Cluj-Napoca Art Museum in 2013. Under the “*ample and courageous*” canopy of stylistic positionings, he vehemently denies any possible allusion either to Manichaeism – arguing that Petru Lucaci “*drives the pillars of an architectural framework into the lattice of two oppositional dimensions, a boundless canvas of an artistic expressivity*” – or to Suprematism: “*this oppositional redundancy was no longer practised as a coincidentia oppositorum*”, being understood instead as the “*sum*” of a whole. The whole without... a subject!”⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁵ Petru Lucaci, "Black-based COCKTAIL", UNARTE, Bucharest, 2013, p. 3.

⁴¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 5.

⁴¹⁷ Radu, Vasile. "Petru Lucaci, 'Black-Based Cocktail' @ Muzeul de Artă Cluj." Modernism.Ro, 3 June 2013, www.modernism.ro/2013/06/03/petru-lucaci-black-based-cocktail-muzeul-de-arta-cluj.



Fig. 131: Petru Lucaci, “*Black-based COCKTAIL*”, UNARTE, Bucharest, 2013, pp. 18, 23.

At the same time, Vasile Radu sets Petru Lucaci apart (in the sense that “*no one here, in art, has ever claimed such exclusivities*”⁴¹⁸) from the white period of Grigorescu or the black period of Gheorghe Petrașcu. In the same context he draws a comparison with the folk costume of the Sebeș Valley, which he characterizes as a “*cryptic geometry of black*”. What is interesting is that the term around which he describes Petru Lucaci’s works is the *universality* of black; in fact, a recomposition of it.

The colour black, with a dominance of over 80–90%,⁴¹⁹ which characterizes the works gathered in “*Black-based COCKTAIL*” is associated with the “*therapeutic, purifying*” role of black,⁴²⁰ with Petru Lucaci “*opening himself to the photo-pictorial temptation as a radical way of recovering the raw truth of the person and of the surrounding world, and of displaying it as such*”.⁴²¹

The author’s catalogue “*Black-based COCKTAIL*” comprises photography, painting, graphic art, charcoal glued onto canvas, and works from several series: “*Clarobscur*” (Fig. 130), “*Night Shadows*”, “*Black Therapy*”. The “*Night Shadows*” series continues to preserve the composite character of the image, but an element used in another series, “*Noctumbre*”

⁴¹⁸ Idem.

⁴¹⁹ Note: when I refer to the percentage share of a colour within a work – black, in my case – I draw on the Gestalt figure/ground principle (Max Wertheimer).

⁴²⁰ Petru Lucaci, op. cit., p. 3.

⁴²¹ Ibidem, p. 5.

(2000), now appears: the direct gluing of the broad charcoal, once used, onto the working surface, a fact that “*inspired him as an object, as an entity*”.⁴²²

In 2015, in a televised programme, Petru Lucaci stated: “*This project, connected with charcoal, generated a greater interest [author’s note: in black] and I tried to extend the area of research; I realized that it could be an important focus of inquiry...*”⁴²³.

The pieces of charcoal, most often rectangular, placed one beside another, thus create new structures that resemble nuclei, around which other compositional elements are constructed using different fine-art methods, such as: strokes of black paint, graphic elements (fig...), et al.

By comparison with the author’s catalogue “*Clarobscur*”, in “*Black-based COCKTAIL*” one observes an interleaving of the composite works with photographic works: the images from the series “*Black Therapy I*” and “*Black Therapy II*” (2011), which round out the “cocktail”. The female nude appears in a (photo)realistic guise, the face still absent (in effect, individuality); yet whereas in the “*Clarobscur*” series the human body is present in a relatively small proportion in relation to the other compositional elements, being shadowed and in places imprinted, in this series a radical change takes place: the black mud (healing – hence “therapy through black”) or the black paint partly covers fragments of the body, allowing the natural colour of the skin to show through (Fig. 132). The female body, caught in passive postures and coloured with black, thus serves both as form and as ground.

⁴²² Senso TV. (24 June 2015). Petru Lucaci la MNAC - prezentare artist [Video]. Vimeo. <https://player.vimeo.com/video/131767216>

⁴²³ Idem.



Fig. 132: Petru Lucaci, Photographs from the *Black therapy* series, reproduced after Petru Lucaci, the catalogue "Black-based COCKTAIL", UNARTE, Bucharest, 2013, pp. 21, 57, 56.

Moreover, in some photographs the body leaves traces, imprints, on the artist's working canvas, an action that recalls Yves Klein or the Viennese Actionists.

The images from the "*Black Therapy*" series go on to feature in other exhibitions as well, such as "*Dressing the body*" (2015, 2016), which also includes works from the series "Black Cocktail", "*Clarobscur*", "*Striped*" and "*Layers*".

"*Dressing the body*" brings the mud to the fore as a subject, "clothing" the human body and thereby reclaiming... its healing role. The photographs contain columnar forms which, set side by side, lend a rhythmic unity. What the exhibition "*Dressing the body*" introduces as new are works from the series "*Striped*" and "*Layers*" (oil on canvas), series through which a return to colour takes place.⁴²⁴

The next documents analysed were: the article "Reconversia ca demers artistic" in the journal *IRREGULAR* (Petru Lucaci, 2016) and the two articles in *Revista Arta* (Magda Cârneci, 2020; Mălina Ionescu, 2021).

Whereas the interpretation and analysis of the data had so far relied on the "storytelling" method, in this case the relatively large quantity of text offered the opportunity to apply the "*grounded theory*" method (Glaser and Strauss, 1965, 1968, 1970; Charmaz,

⁴²⁴ The works are composed of two canvases set side by side, which together form the female body. In some of these pairings only the upper one contains colour, with black still predominating in the lower work, whereas in others colour is present in both. What is preserved throughout is the absence of a face, as a form of the absence of identity.

2006), with the aim of supplementing and verifying the information already obtained, by working through the following stages (Reisz, 2019):

1. **Focused coding** – the use of recurrent keywords, salient to the research theme, which describe the textual fragments analytically. Focused coding provides an overview of the connection between the text under analysis and the research theme (a connection already established during the delimitation process).

2. **Stop and Memo** – a *relational diagram* (Reisz, 2019) is devised in order to make a certain sense of the collected data, building structures of direct connection between the *primary codes* and the *secondary ones*, which help to create a broader concept. The relationship just mentioned emerges from the diagram produced through this process (represented below). The figure entered after each primary code represents its frequency in the text. The use of the diagram (Figure 3), within the "Stop and Memo" step, is essential, as it is, moreover, in any research undertaking concerned with an individual case study. It is held to be the "*raw material for the construction of theory*" (Reisz, 2019; Charmaz, 2006), and this is also because it offers a visual representation of the phenomenon under study.

3. **Sorting and classifying the information on the basis of the codes**, the third stage of the method, entails organizing the results obtained from the "Stop and Memo" step. The diagram adds further information compared with what was obtained through the observational (descriptive) "storytelling" method. With a view to sorting the information, in the upper part of the diagram I grouped the key codes (which were determined on the basis of the focused coding) into categories, following the descending order of their frequency in the texts analysed. I then traced the reciprocal connections between the categories. In the lower part I grouped the secondary codes which, although they do not appear in the text as often as the primary ones, are extremely important because they converge and provide a decisive, phenomenological "foundation" for the results derived from the congruence of the key codes. It is worth noting that processual relationships can also be established among the secondary codes.

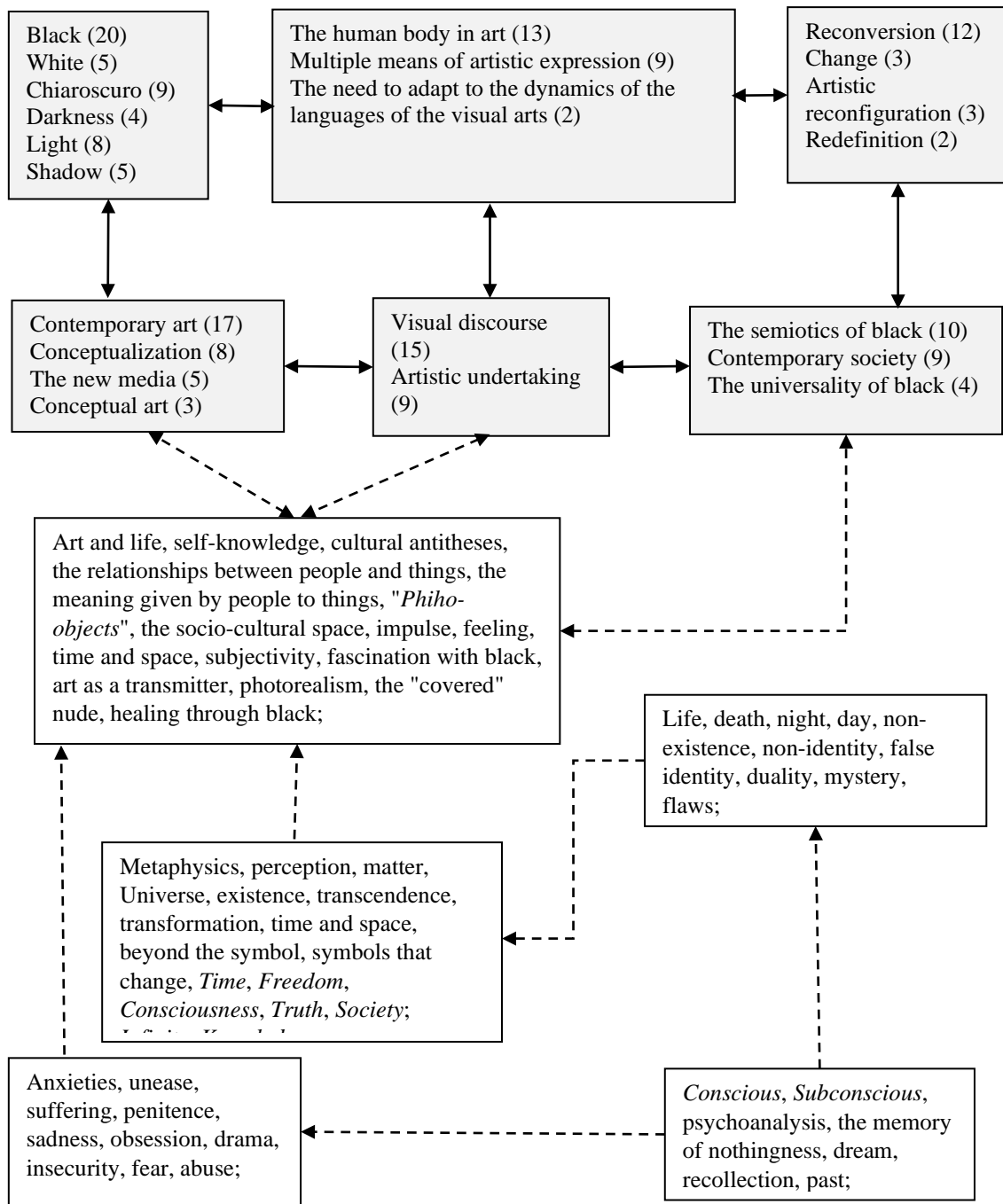


Figure 3: The "Stop and Memo" stage, illustrating the manner and the steps followed (textual analysis) using the qualitative research method "Grounded Theory".

This stage also includes a relationship between the *key terms*: black, conceptual art, the new media, the human body, the artist, the use of several means of artistic expression, reconversion, visual discourse, adaptation to contemporary society, universality, semiotics, et al., which thus confirms what has been obtained from the observational research so far. The correlations between the secondary concepts, by contrast, create a context; in fact they

bring to light the "*fascination with black*" (Lucaci, 2008). At the base of the diagram we have keywords such as: the subconscious, dream, recollection, past, memory – terms from the field of psychology. This box is connected to another, likewise from the field of psychology, in which I grouped codes that are mentioned as such whenever the texts refer to the valences of black.

The sphere of the "*depths of consciousness*" (Lucaci, 2016) is connected with the artist's preoccupations with concepts such as existence, life, death, a flawed world, non-identity (as the author himself observed in "*Black Based Cocktail*"). Following these complex connections, we arrive at the artist's philosophical preoccupations: perception, matter, time, space, existence, *Truth, Freedom, Consciousness, Infinity, Knowledge*, and so on. Bringing these together, the "wellspring" of the creative undertakings takes concrete shape: the relationship between art and life, the meaning that contemporary man gives to things and how these meanings change over time, cultural antitheses, the impulse outlined by the terms mentioned above, the metaphysics of the healing and liberating power of black, and so forth.

An interesting fact in the context of the *sampling of the case study* (Marshall, 1996) is a reference to the "*Phiho-objects*" of Jean-Pierre Raynaud. He transforms everyday objects into symbols of human experiences such as solitude, illness, death, nationalism, faith, war, disaster, et al. In his first exhibition, "*Psycho-objects*" (1964–1968), he displayed photographs of patients with mental disorders, hospital objects, and flowerpots filled with cement.

4. Validation of the case study objectives

Both research methods employed confirm the premises from which the study set out. Thus, the resulting conclusions demonstrate that there is a close connection between the subconscious and artistic expression. Anxieties, unease, suffering, sadness, obsession, drama, insecurity, fear, abuse, and so on, are transposed into the work of art. With regard to the valences of the colour black in the art of Petru Lucaci, two distinct directions can be distinguished:

a) black predominates in the artist's visual discourse because, through black, he is able to bring out his artistic undertakings (valences, perception, concept, interpretation);

b) black in the artist's work does not have negative valences but, on the contrary, a liberating, purifying role for his own self.

Moreover, metaphysical convictions are attributed to black: the ancestral black that covers over the flaws of the world, the foregrounding of the extremes of the world in which we live and an impulse to soften them through the use of black, the connection of the identityless human being with genesis and birth, extending as far as his suffering (the fragmented body, connections with events from everyday life, the "dressing" (*dressing the body*) of that body with "healing black". The blending of types of artistic expression in its turn plays a delimiting role between night and day, darkness and light, the subconscious and the conscious, dream and reality; more than that, it foregrounds fragmentation through the absence of subtle transitions from black to white, in order to exploit the delimiting power of black. The universality of black is another important aspect, with a direct bearing on my own research project.

5. Conclusions

Black is, in his view, the most important colour, used from the 2000s onwards and found in the majority of his artworks, across the many types of artistic expression: photography, painting, sculpture, collage. It is the artist's mode of liberation, of escape, of coming to terms with his own anxieties, his own shadows. At the same time, black is the colour that mediates the transposition of the "*depths of the conscious mind*" into his artworks, a mediation that proves, once again, the universal character of art, that of being a transmitter.

In the wake of the case study, a common denominator can be discerned: the conceptual art of Petru Lucaci has its roots in the relationship between the *subconscious and artistic expression*, which is not a novel element in artistic practice in general, yet it exceeds that practice precisely in that black is the colour chosen to externalize his own anxieties and inner experiences. The "*raw truth*", although it is hard for the "fragile" person of everyday life to accept, is in fact the face of the world, the hallmark of a sick, fragmented society.

Perhaps it is for this very reason that, in Petru Lucaci's "black art", beauty, harmony, or symmetry are not represented. The sensation is that the artist snatches you out of a dream and places you before reality; a reality expressed in the form of a cry of despair, which urges towards a protest, a manifesto that boldly offers the truth. This "exhortation" of the artist,

expressed in his works, can be interpreted as an act of courage, and it shares features with those that brought about the great changes on the cultural stage, in particular from Modernism onwards.

Analysing Petru Lucaci's artworks *in* and *with black*, a parallel takes shape with *art brut* (Jean Dubuffet, Adolf Wölfli, Noah Borger, Salomé Perignan, Ezekiel Messou, Rosemarie Koczy, et al.), characterized by the absence of norms and of restraint, the unpolished expression of certain visions or emotions, fragile mental states. For its part, architectural *Brutalism* (e.g. *Unité d'Habitation*, Le Corbusier) shocks through the incorporation of ostentatious irregularities, abstract forms without any apparent function. In the 1920s, the principal concern with colour in modern architecture drew its impulses from painting, especially from the De Stijl movement, in which only the primary colours and black were used.

Perfect faces, "perfect" bodies, perfect lives, perfect relationships, perfectly functioning societies, and so on, are nothing other than altered representations of imperfection, of the normal, of the everyday. What is weighed in the balance is the "masking" of reality, its packaging in "beauty", against reality itself, raw and unjust. In order to decipher the meaning of black in Petru Lucaci's works, one must take on his "courage", that of showing another world, a world that is not his alone: those anxieties and inner experiences are universal characteristics. In the end, art, as a transmitter, has the freedom to submit to critical reflection a comfortable zone, before which we look on passively, and a less comfortable zone which, once acknowledged, demands an active intervention, at least in moral terms. Whatever position is adopted, the final result of the artist's activity is reflected, clearly, through visual and artistic expression.

5.2.3. The Repetition of Black: Joan Witek

*"Black is usually regarded as the absence of colour: it is severe, rigorous, associated with death, with depression and repression; yet this is only one aspect of its many qualities. One of the reasons I am drawn to black is its dichotomy. It is sophisticated and primitive, emotional and intellectual; it is a colour to which everyone responds strongly, in one way or another."*⁴²⁵

Joan Witek (1943) is an American artist of Spanish descent who lives and works in New York, an artist for whom black has always been the principal element of her art. Throughout, she has used no other colour in her drawings, paintings, or prints... *in her works, black is at once ascetic and alluring, Apollonian and Dionysian, meditative and expressive, impeccable and flawed, ferocious and modest, a distinct, unequivocal yet subtle, elusive presence* (Lily Wei, art critic). For a period, Witek was a museum curator, which probably influenced her choice of art as her sole vocation. She worked at the Jewish Museum in New York and then in the field of primitive art at the Brooklyn Museum.

In 1969, after a year of travels in Europe, she enrolled at the *Art Students League* in New York, while also working at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where she was assistant curator of primitive art. In her final year of study, she switched to a specialization in the fine arts. After a series of solo and group exhibitions at renowned galleries around the world, in 1973 she established her own studio in Lower Manhattan, and in 1978 she ceased working at the museum, devoting herself to painting and drawing. During her years of study at the Art Students League she had produced a series of portraits of people seated on chairs; gradually these figures came to be removed, so that in the final series she painted a simple chair, which was a first step towards pure abstraction.

In this case study too, the first step was to take an inventory of the documents (Table 7: Inventory of the documents – Joan Witek case study).

⁴²⁵ Joan Witek "About Joan Witek —", <https://www.joanwitek.org/about>. Accessed 21 Feb. 2022.

Written	Numerical	Public	<p>A. CV: [1] CV Joan Witek (source: https://www.joanwitek.org/s/Witek_CV_JAEditsdoc.pdf)</p>
	Non-numerical	Public	<p>A. Authored books [1] Joan Witek, "<i>PAINTINGS FROM THE 1980'S</i>", published by Artist Estate Studio for MINUS SPACE, Brooklyn, NY, 2020, ISBN: 978-0-578-76802-1. [2] Joan Witek, "<i>Joan Witek: Paintings and Drawings 1970s-1990s: Miami-Dade Community College Kendall Campus Art Gallery</i>". The College, Miami, FL, 1993.</p> <p>B. Authored articles published in internationally indexed journals [1] WITEK, JOAN. "Ashanti Gold Weights: Distinguished Representatives of the Gods." in <i>The Brooklyn Museum Annual</i>, vol. 8, 1966, pp. 149–58.</p> <p>C. Critical texts [1] John Caldwell, published in conjunction with the exhibition Joan Witek: <i>Paintings, 1980-1983 and Drawings, 1976-1984</i>, at the Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, 3 March – 29 April 1984. [2] Lilly Wei published, on the occasion of a private exhibition in New York City, <i>Joan Witek: New Paintings</i>, 1 February – 24 February 2000. [3] Andrew, Jason. "<i>Exhibition News: Witek at Museum Wilhelm Morgner, Germany</i>". [4] Andrew, Jason, "<i>Excerpt of essay written by curator Jason Andrew</i>".</p> <p>D. Specialist magazines [1] Larkin, Daniel. "Getting Buzzed on the Color Black", in <i>Hyperallergic</i>, 14 Oct. 2020. [2] Stephanie Buhmann, "HERMINE FORD AND JOAN WITEK" in <i>ArtPulse</i>, no. 18, vol. 5, 2014, p. 71. [3] Michael Andre, "Joan Witek: Ames Gallery, New York, NY, January 1-25." in <i>ArtNews</i>, 1975, pp. 116-117. [4] Jan Dibbets, "Joan Witek: Black Translations," CDS Gallery, New York, NY, January 5-February 20.</p>
Unwritten	Visual	Belonging to material culture	<p>A. Works of art (online images from exhibitions, 2000-2021): [1] 2021 - "<i>Joan Witek</i>" Museum Wilhelm Morgner, Soest, Germany, April 25-July 18. [2] 2020 - "<i>Joan Witek: Paintings from the 1980s</i>" Minus Space, Brooklyn, NY. [3] 2015 - "<i>Joan Witek: Paintings</i>," Jason McCoy Gallery, New York, NY. [4] 2014 - "<i>Joan Witek: New Paintings</i>," Outlet Fine Art, Brooklyn, NY. [5] 2006 - "<i>Rice Paper Drawings</i>," Atea Ring Gallery, Westport, NY. [6] 2005 - "<i>Joan Witek: Black and Silver Unfinished Drawings</i>," Pentimenti, Philadelphia. [7] 2003 - "<i>Joan Wite</i>," Kouros Gallery, New York, NY. [8] 2002 - "<i>Joan Witek</i>" Atea Ring Gallery, Westport, NY. [9] 2001 - "<i>Joan Witek: Black Translations</i>" CDS Gallery, New York, NY, January 5 – February 20. [10] 2000 - "<i>Joan Witek: Black to Black</i>" Niklas von Bartha Gallery, London. February 1- 24.</p> <p>B. Images from authored albums: [1] "<i>PAINTINGS FROM THE 1980'S</i>", published by Artist Estate Studio for MINUS SPACE, Brooklyn, NY, 2020, ISBN: 978-0-578-76802-1.</p>

	Audio-visual	Video recordings	A. Documentaries, interviews, TV programmes [1] Online Talk, Thursday, 8 July 2021 7 PM UK / 8 PM CET / 2 PM NYC [Zoom]. [2] James Kalm, <i>BROOKLYN ART WALK OCTOBER 17, 2020</i> . [3] Space, Minus. Joan Witek: Paintings from the 1980s. Youtube, 22 July 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OYJZye12oR0 . [4] Wilhelm Morgner, <i>Stiftung Konzeptuelle Kunst. Onlineführung durch die Ausstellung JOAN WITEK</i> . Youtube, 10 June 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hiDKIxRf80Q .
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Table 7: Inventory of the documents – Joan Witek case study

Whereas, at first, her abstractions appeared to be influenced by Joan Miró, she later adopted a style that calls Mark Rothko to mind, with precisely outlined forms, squares, or areas divided into geometric zones, often black squares, or by constructing forms from rows of parallel lines. After moving to a studio where she had her own working space, in an area inhabited chiefly by artists, she grew more confident in her own abilities; and without adopting the style of her neighbour **Richard Serra**, with his large, wholly black paintings in oil paint mixed with graphite, applied to canvas, she took up certain details from his manner of using the canvas.

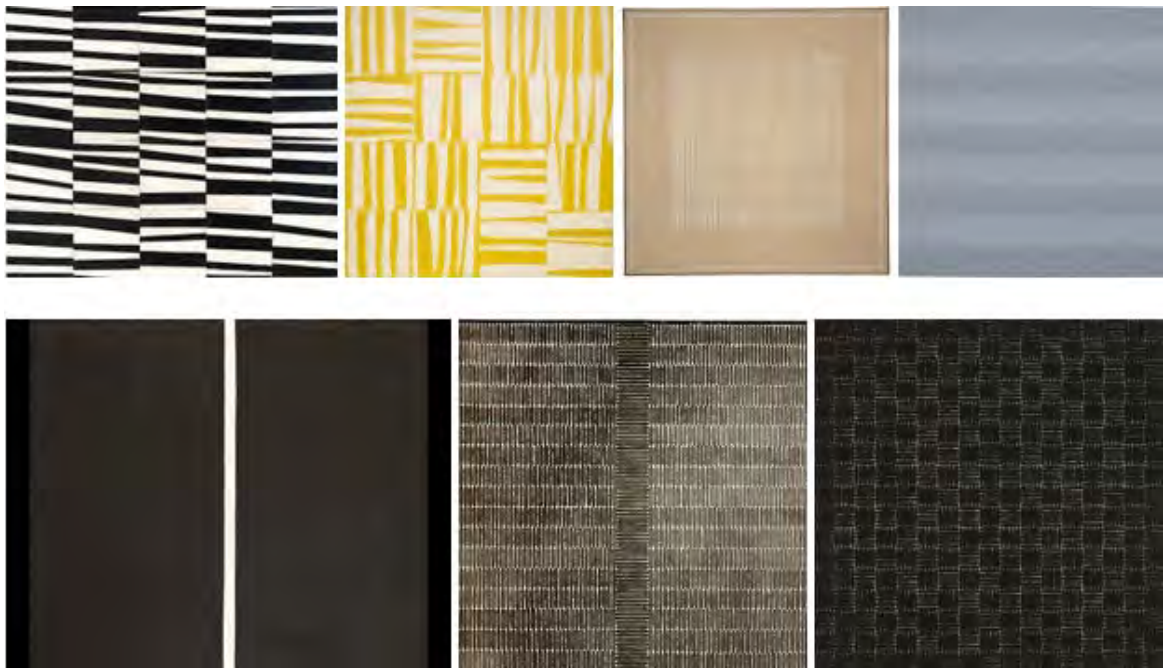


Fig. 133: a. Ellsworth Kelly: *Cite*, 1951, Ellsworth Kelly: *Gironde* - 1951; b. Agnes Martin: *The Islands*, 1961, Agnes Martin: *Untitled 1*- 1985; c. Barnett Newman: *Onement IV*- 1949, Allen Memorial Art Museum; d. Joan Witek: *Split*- 1980, Joan Witek: *Nostalgia Stretched* – 1980. Sources: <https://www.wikiart.org/en/ellsworth-kelly>, <https://www.wikiart.org/en/agnes-martin>, <https://www.joanwitek.org/work-library/>.

Witek experimented with various approaches: paintings composed of several canvases, collages with black paper as studies for paintings, or large pictures composed of many smaller canvases, with wall space between them, somewhat in the manner of **Ellsworth Kelly** (Fig. 133 a.).^{426, 427.} She had works composed of a large number of canvases, so as to form a series rather than a unified composition; she attached them so that they would be perceived as large formats, in the shape of rectangles, squares, and so on. Moreover, unlike Kelly, she chose to use only black. Although she was interested in Miró, Rothko, Serra, and Kelly, she had forged her own identity as an artist, and she retains her own way of working, with a particular compositional structure, her formats assembled from black canvases, painted first across the whole surface and then with a very narrow border, sometimes adding graphite powder over the still-wet paint to reduce its sheen, but also to obtain textural effects.

The apparent resemblance to the works of the artist **Agnes Martin**,⁴²⁸ with their orderly grids or networks of calm lines (Fig. 133 b.), as compared with Witek's, characterized by the **repetition and regularity** of their compositional elements, does not hold up: the complex treatment of the pictorial surface in Witek's works clearly sets her apart from the sphere of minimalism, her oeuvre possessing an incontestable originality.

In her drawings, the numerous pencil strokes are, in their own way, an extreme expression, as are the wholly black paintings. The seemingly obsessive repetition of the lines and their tremulous ductus on paper creates the suggestion of a pronounced **anxiety**, over

⁴²⁶ Ellsworth Kelly (1923–2015) was an American painter, sculptor, and printmaker associated with *hard-edge* painting, *Color Field* painting, and minimalism. During the period in which he lived in Paris (1948–54), inspired by Surrealist practice, he decided to experiment with the idea of chance in his work, cutting his drawings into squares which he then rearranged into collages. Using this composition as a model, he painted and assembled the new panels. Through the involvement of chance, the abstract works thus created, with their emphasis on form and on the relationship between the components, generated a certain visual tension.

⁴²⁷ The term *hard edge* – painting with hard edges – was coined by the Californian critic Jules Langster in 1959, a geometric abstraction found in Piet Mondrian, **Josef Albers**, et al. It may be regarded as a subdivision of post-painterly painting, which in turn derives from Color Field. In post-painterly abstraction the effect no longer falls on the patch-like effects characteristic of Abstract Expressionism, but on drawing and contour. This cool abstraction has its origins in the painterliness of Analytic Cubism (Léger, Delaunay, Kandinsky), but also within the parameters of Synthetic Cubism (firm contours, flat silhouettes: Mondrian, Miró, Bauhaus). It should be noted that Garcia Felguera (*The Cooling*) regards Abstract Expressionism as the heir of Surrealism, of **psychic automatism, of the subconscious, of psychoanalysis**, and of chance.

⁴²⁸ Agnès Bernice Martin (1912–2004) was a Canadian-born American artist: a painter, draughtswoman, and printmaker belonging to Abstract Expressionism (on account of the spiritual dimension of her work) and to contemporary minimalism. Influenced by Zen Buddhism and by transcendentalism, she produced a body of work in which she uses ordered grids and networks of calm lines, transcending the traditional conventions of the painterly avant-garde and producing an original and serene form of art, her material experiences tempered by meditation and by her adherence to Buddhist and transcendentalist teachings.

which is superimposed a structure that is decisive for all her subsequent works. After 1978 she began to transform the method applied in drawing into a technique for painting.

By comparison, in these the state of anxiety disappears, the forms created appearing as patterns of light and shadow, the black-and-white contrast lending luminosity to the surface, which leads Witek to call it *black impressionism*.

In *Split* (1980 - Fig. 133 d.), the artist introduced a vertical band dividing the image in two, in a manner reminiscent of the canvases of **Barnett Newman** (Fig. 133 c.). Even so, the surface covered with numerous brushstrokes is wholly different from the uniformly painted surfaces of Newman. *Nostalgia Stretched* (1980) is composed entirely of brushstrokes, forming small squares and alternating in direction, the vertical ones being precisely formed and smooth, in contrast to the horizontal ones. This was to be the working manner that Witek intended to continue using thereafter.

Visul lui Edward Teller (Edward Teller's Dream – 1982) is a work in which the artist employs **the association of black with death** (Fig. 134)

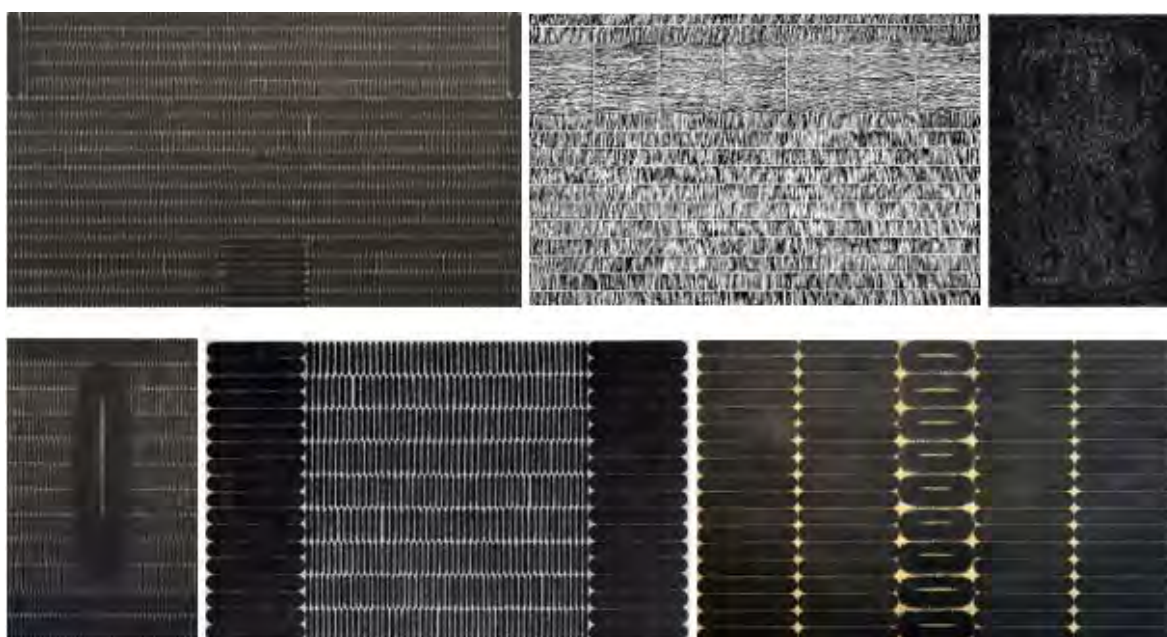


Fig. 134: Joan Witek: *Visul lui Edward Teller (Edward Teller's Dream)* – 1982, Joan Witek: *Memories of Underdevelopment* - 1982, Joan Witek: *The Trickster*- 1999, Joan Witek: *Introductory Glyph*- 1982 Joan Witek: *Echivalent*- 1983, Joan Witek: *That He Be Known and Loved and Imitated*-198. Source: joanwitek.org/work-library/.

The genesis of the idea for this canvas arose from her impressions of a documentary on Teller, *A is for Atom, B is for Bomb*,⁴²⁹ and the title chosen for the work was a quotation; the destruction prefigured in the presentation led the artist to comment: "*His true dreams will kill us, just as the soldiers die in his poem about dreams.*" At the bottom of this picture, executed in oil and graphite on canvas (174 × 304 cm), her signs cluster together, calling to mind Egyptian funerary tombs, whose architecture she studied throughout her career. *Introductory Glyph* (1982) reflects her passion for pre-Columbian Maya hieroglyphs.

The tension arising between the multiplicity of elements in Witek's canvases and the simplicity and force of the design creates a certain ambiguity; under these conditions, the titles assigned to the works lend an added resonance, as in *Memories of Underdevelopment: ...the title encompasses multiple references, both to historical events and to personal ones, and the painting as a whole carries complex burdens of meaning that are inseparably bound to its form. Memories of Underdevelopment combines moral authority with lyrical grace, artistic assurance with human vulnerability* (John Caldwell, essay published in conjunction with the exhibition *Joan Witek: Paintings, 1980-1983 and Drawings, 1976-1984* – Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, 1984).

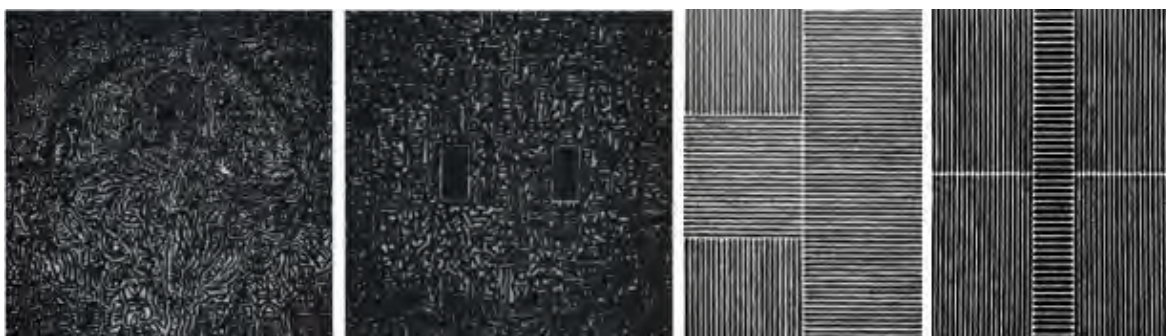


Fig. 135: Joan Witek: *Autorretrato* - 1999, Joan Witek: *Tiger, Tiger* - 1999, Joan Witek: *Untitled* - 2007, Joan Witek: *P-151 (B. Newman)*, 2009. Source: joanwitek.org/work-library/.

Witek called some of her works self-portraits; in fact, they are portraits in several senses. In the sense of size or proportion, all the large paintings were roughly equal in height to her own, with a width equal to the span of her outstretched arm, while the size of the features, of the brushstrokes, was the length of her index finger, and later the length of her hand.

⁴²⁹ Edward Teller (1908–2003) was an American theoretical physicist of Hungarian-Jewish origin, a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, nicknamed "the father of the hydrogen bomb". A controversial figure, his attachment to the hydrogen bomb became so absolute that he opposed, in essence, almost every effort to seek reconciliation and to accept the idea of slowing the arms race.

In another sense, the paintings are self-portraits of the artist, in so far as they communicate something specific: each image has an origin grounded uniquely in my own emotions, or is bound up with the place from which it comes. My themes are my **perceptions** of the world, or renderings of my inner self.

Conclusions:

Witek's paintings carry **emotional significance** and even spiritual meaning, and, much like Stella's early works, they convey a sense of **mystery**, while **black** of course possesses countless tones and meanings. "*The contrast between the great number of individual elements in the images and their simple formal organization is probably Witek's most significant innovation*", in the view of the critic John Caldwell. As in the art of Ellsworth Kelly and Richard Serra and the early works of Frank Stella, the radical simplicity of the design, combined with the enormous presence and authority of the work itself, produces a kind of suspension of analysis and, ultimately, self-reflection.

The varying proportions of the glyphs have become charged with specific meanings that recur in other paintings as well. The expanse of the central glyph, surrounded as it is by twelve registers of regular lines (the largest on the two bottom rows), creates a decidedly negative space – a black hole within the composition – that literally forces the dramatic space towards the centre. To counterbalance this effect and to achieve a visual electricity comparable to that of the diamond-shaped interstices between the lower and upper parts of the rows of glyphs, Witek places a jagged edge at the centre of the large glyph.

Rendered exclusively in black and white, Witek's compositions reflect upon the interplay of proportional masses and forms in their purest form. Movement is articulated either vertically or horizontally here, using the grid as an overall structural backbone. This creates a distinctive aesthetic that harks back to twentieth-century abstraction and to the works of Franz Kline, Agnes Martin, and Sol LeWitt, among others. Black might traditionally be associated with negative space and the absence of light and colour, but in Witek's case it functions as the sole indicator of sign and form.

One tends to read these works graphically, yet Witek allows ample room for nuance and for hand-wrought imperfections. The more one observes her compositions, the more they exhibit the freedom associated with handwriting. In her work, subtle expression resides

in the contour of the forms, the edges, and the curves. These compositions not only reflect a sense of movement but seem to embody it, like the continuous flow of night and day.

The repetitiveness and regularity of Witek's works would seem to link her to Agnes Martin. Witek's approach, however – gathering, sorting, assembling, associating, shaping, and initiating actions and procedures – makes the value of black in this case decidedly a constructive one.

Since 2000, Witek has continued to actively pursue subjects with personal references. Settling into a technique of building her compositions on white gesso grounds, a process she continues to this day, she establishes a dense overall scheme of mark-making that ranges from the sinuous and calligraphic to the measured and geometric. Although a nonobjective formality may be ascribed to Witek's ongoing practice, the paintings from the start of the 2000s mark a return to what the artist called the "portrait". These works are composed in a square format. From there, the architectural configurations that layered line and form would become the artist's sustained focus. The works on paper take up restrained yet bold configurations, with the introduction of silverpoint and the expansion of the works into ink wash. The use of vellum and rice paper enhances the process.

5.2.4. Black, Trauma, and Artistic Expression: Touhami Ennadre

"Works of art are born when the artist confronts danger, when he reaches the limit of an experience, the point beyond which a person cannot go. The further he ventures, the more distinctive, more personal, more unique his art becomes." - Rainer Maria Rilke

ARTIST: **Touhami Ennadre** - French photographer, b. 1953, Casablanca, Morocco;

FORM OF VISUAL EXPRESSION: **photography**;

NOTE: This individual case study is the result of **direct collaboration** with the photographer Touhami Ennadre. The artist's input was essential in the attempt to decipher the conceptual underpinnings of his works. Moreover, the case is a critical one in the context of the theme investigated in the present doctoral thesis, the artist's subject matter being, **exclusively**, low-key photography.

THEMES addressed by the artist – a selection:

THE ORIGIN OF LIFE -1991 – *Paleontological Traces*;

BIRTH - *Birth*, 1990 – *Lascaux*; 1985 – *Slaughterhouse*;

THE BODY - 1978 - *82 Hands, back, feet*; 1982;

POVERTY - 1991 – *Notre-Dame de Paris*; 1992 – *The Man in the Ice* (South Tyrol, Austria); 1995 – *L'Alhambra* (Islam); 1996 – *Ay! mi Toro!* (Aries, France)

DEATH - 1976 - *Funeral, cemetery, first Hands*, 1989 – *Gravestones and Paving - Stones from the Medina in Fez*, 1992 – *Auschwitz*, 1993-95 – *Trance*;

MEMORY and DEATH- 1985-90 – *Herculaneum*;

VIOLENCE and DEATH - 1992-93 – *Squid and Fish*

SUICIDE and MURDER - 1987 – *Print of the Hanged Man*

The working method that underpins a valid individual case study, here that of the artist Touhami Ennadre, entails, as noted earlier, among other things, the inventorying and analysis of documents and the specification of their provenance – their source, and so on. These data are synthesized in Table 8:

Written	Non-numerical	Public	<p>A. Authored books</p> <p>[1] „<i>If You See Something, Say Something</i>”, photographs by Touhami Ennadre, text by Nancy Spector, Hatje Cantz, 2004.</p> <p>[2] „<i>Der Regenburger Dom</i>”, photographs by Touhami Ennadre, text by Bertram Stubenrauch and Eva Karcher, Verlag Schnell & Steiner, Regensburg, 2000.</p> <p>[3] „<i>Notre Dame de Paris</i>”, photographs by Touhami Ennadre, text by Alain Jouffroy, Caisse des monuments historiques et des sites, 1992. Black Light, photographs by Touhami Ennadre, text by Francois Aubral, Prestel Verlag, München / New York, 1996.</p>
Unwritten	Visual	Belonging to material culture	<p>A. Works of art:</p> <p>Solo exhibitions – a selection:</p> <p>2022 - <i>Qasida Noire</i> - Musée d’art moderne et contemporain Mohammed VI, Rabat; 2006 - „<i>Black and White: Between East and West</i>”, Galway Arts Centre, Galway, IRELAND; „<i>De ida y vuelta. África</i>”, La Casa Encendida, Madrid, SPAIN; 2000 Touhami Ennadre „<i>The Spirit in Stone. Images of Life in a Cathedral</i>”, Cathedral Monastery, Regensburg, GERMANY; 1999 Touhami Ennadre „<i>Lumière Noire</i>”, Maison Européenne de la Photographie, Paris ; Touhami Ennadre, MATERIA PRIMA „<i>Of One and of All</i>”, Obermünster Diocesan Museum, Regensburg; 1994 Touhami Ennadre, Exit Art Gallery, New York; 1992-Institut du Monde Arabe</p> <p>Biennials – a selection:</p> <p>2004 - the „<i>Techniques of the Visible</i>” Biennial, Shanghai, CHINA; 2000- Biennale d'Art Contemporain, „<i>Partage d'exotisme</i>”, Lyon, FRANCE; 1998- „<i>Africus</i>”, 2nd Johannesburg Biennial, South Africa; 1997 - Sexta Bienal de la Habana, „<i>El individuo y su memoria</i>”, CUBA; 1993 „<i>Mediterrania</i>”, 5th International Biennial of Photography, Carlo Biscaretti di Ruffia Museum, Turin, Italy</p> <p>Group exhibitions – a selection</p> <p>1996 - „<i>In/sight: African Photographers 1940 to the Present</i>”, New York, Guggenheim Museum, USA</p> <p>2002 - Documenta 11, Platform 5, Kassel, Museum Villa Stuck, München „<i>New York, September 11</i>”, GERMANY; .Artists Space, New York, „<i>Human Face</i>”, USA; 2001- „<i>The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa</i>” MoMA, New York; 1998 - „<i>Transatlantico</i>”-MAC, Las Palmas, SPAIN; 1995- Tate Gallery, „<i>Vital: Three Contemporary Africa Artists</i>” Liverpool, UNITED KINGDOM;</p>

	Audio-video	Public	INTERVIEWS – a selection Le Musée Mohammed VI d'art moderne et contemporain accueille le photographe Touhami Ennadre [English: The Mohammed VI Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art welcomes the photographer Touhami Ennadre] - 21 June 2022, MATIN TV, Rabat; Touhami Ennadre, NewYork 911, Télé Maroc, 11 September 2021; Touhami Ennadre, artiste photographe mondialement connu [English: Touhami Ennadre, world-renowned art photographer]. Casablanca, Morocco, 31 May 2019 ; Touhami Ennadre, ou l'art de la photographie en noir et blanc [English: Touhami Ennadre, or the art of black-and-white photography] - MEDI 1 TV- 3 August 2017; Touhami Ennadre and Mahi Binebine - the „Contemporary Morocco” exhibition - 2015 - l'Institut du monde arabe (IMA), Paris:
Account (30 pages)	By the author	Private	Place: online Date: 2 March 2022

Table 8: Inventory of documents – Touhami Ennadre case study

Touhami Ennadre's work is an expression of origins and of death, of motherhood and of life, of the body and of expression. In his photographs the artist seeks to bring out the Essential, as he puts it, and the Beauty that he tries to convey. In general, he seeks to go beyond the subject and not merely to reproduce it as it appears. *"What interests me is that things should not be identified... and so this black, so present, is not funereal; it illuminates and brings relief"*.⁴³⁰ His works are powerfully charged with the symbolic resonance of life and death; they evoke strong feelings: *"you will not remain indifferent, detached, calm. Either you will turn away from it, refusing self-reflection and the world we live in, or you will feel rooted to the spot, paralysed, yet compelled to react because you are confronting the tragic side of human existence."*⁴³¹

The shock has no negative valence; it is not born of suffering but is, in a certain way, liberating and purifying. He starts, he says, from the principle that *"you must give, you must be true. It may be heartbreaking, but it is either that or nothing"*.⁴³² The aesthetic of Ennadre's photographs is at times reminiscent of the way Caravaggio used black in painting, and of Murnau or Dreyer in cinema.

The faint, subtle light creates contour, surfaces that belong to the imaginary, a play of masks. When the artist speaks of his work, he calls it a "craft", living it as a physical and spiritual activity, the only one he has truly retained throughout his life.

⁴³⁰ Francois Aubral, Touhami Ennadre, "Touhami Ennadre: Black Light / Lumiere Noire / Schwarzes Licht", Prestel Publishing, München, Germany, 1996, p. 12.

⁴³¹ Idem, p. 14.

⁴³² Idem, p. 14.

As often happens when artists attempt to sum up the conceptual basis of their art, Ennadre's remarks are somewhat startling and contradictory. To unravel some of the "threads" that underlie Ennadre's photographs – threads woven from the artist's dreams and desires – we must bear in mind that every work of art, at each stage of its development... does it not, after all, seek to recover the "primordial things", to restore the image of a buried past that demands to manifest itself in the present? "*Into what universe did Ennadre first open his eyes? Where did he first see the light?*"⁴³³ asks the art critic Francois Aubral, in the volume „*Black Light*“, dedicated to the artist.

He was born in Casablanca, Morocco, in 1953, in an old-fashioned working-class district where his mother made carpets: not a Moroccan villa with an immense courtyard, fountains, and flowers, but a tiny house – a few cramped rooms with no windows.



Fig. 136: Touhami Ennadre, Bertram Stubenrauch, "*Geist in Stein: Der Regensburger Dom Fotografiert*", Schnell & Steiner, Berlin, 2000, pp. 17, 22, 31.

Darkness everywhere, sometimes the light of a candle, and, as the sole source of natural light, the daylight that came in through the roof. His first encounter with light, and at the same time with art, was a carpet: the woollen threads interlacing in the hands and before the eyes of his mother, who, pressed for time, often had to carry on with her work by starlight and by the light of a candle.

The archetype of Ennadre's visual imagination was a maternal image,⁴³⁴ shaped by the only rays of light that could penetrate the darkness of the house. He never forgot that primal image, and he sought to revive it in all his photographs. Anyone familiar with the vitality of the craft tradition as it still exists in Morocco will understand that, although, as Ennadre puts it, he never attended "*art school, let alone a school of photography*",⁴³⁵ his sensibility was shaped by a very ancient culture. When, as a child, he wished to leave the

⁴³³ Idem, p. 17.

⁴³⁴ See the archetypes and the drives, cf. Carl Jung.

⁴³⁵ Idem, p. 17.

safety of home, the street opened before him as the only possibility. Small, bustling streets, improbable routes, never signposted, where you risk losing your way. There you must adapt to changing circumstances and, if you want to get somewhere or achieve something, you must draw up a plan of action centred on that goal, take aim, concentrate, set aside what is unimportant and, with a precise and rapid movement, act.

To analyse an artist's work as a manifestation that includes his biography is important: the past contributes to the genesis and development of the creative force. The moment Ennadre first held a camera in his hands was in Paris, in the year 1975. He was only seven years old when his family emigrated to France, eventually becoming a resident of Paris and, from 1986, a French citizen. His father had taken a job at a foundry in the suburbs of Paris (where, later, he would lose his sight), while his mother was showing the first symptoms of the illness that would prove fatal to her. She bought her son a camera to keep him occupied, away from her suffering. And it was precisely this act that would set in motion the entire creative universe of the future artist Touhami Ennadre.

"Is there a desire to pass life on, within someone who knows they are going to die?",⁴³⁶ Ennadre wondered. It is worth noting that he used this camera to photograph his mother, and that the experience of her passing "shattered him", "plunged him into solitude", became his twin sister ... in a way, an accomplice in the birth of his photography. He recalls this every time he approaches a camera, a negative, or a sheet of photographic paper:

*"I have always been escorted by my past, by my solitude, and by what I have lived through. It may seem absurd, but I can never speak about my work without also speaking about my mother, because I come from someone. My work is quite simply a kind of witness to the experience of my life. People want to grasp the concept immediately, which is impossible ... it took me years to do so myself."*⁴³⁷

Learning only from practice, without teachers, Ennadre developed a personal approach closely bound up with his traumas. He produced his first low-key photographic series in Casablanca, where he had gone to bury his mother. He wanted to photograph the agony of parting, the boundless grief he felt as he watched his aunt embracing one of his

⁴³⁶ Idem, p. 24.

⁴³⁷ Idem, p. 24.

sisters. Yet Ennadre did not photograph his relatives' faces: he photographed his aunt's hands, from very close range, hands that embodied all the weight of the family's grief.



Fig. 137: Touhami Ennadre, *Black moods*, 2008, *Casablanca*, 1976, *Hands of the World*, 2008, *Black Moods II*, 2008. Source: powerstationofart.com/whats-on/programs/shanghai-biennale-2004/artist-and-artwork/Touhami%20Ennadre

Studio portraiture, social photography, landscapes, all forms of photojournalism, fashion photography, and photomontage held no attraction for him, because, as the artist himself states, he seeks to photograph what "cannot be photographed" – more precisely, pain, though not just any kind of pain, but the kind that is impossible to describe in words. Indeed, the epicentre of all his artistic endeavours is closely tied to a philosophy that combines, by chance or otherwise, elements of psychoanalysis (the death drive) and a unique, deliberately assumed approach to the aesthetics of black.

The artist's works seem to detach themselves from reality because, as he himself notes, they lack light. They are a kind of virtual image, like the black paintings of Ad Reinhardt, which reveal themselves only upon closer inspection. "*I am a painter in the dark*",⁴³⁸ says Ennadre, in whose palette black is the only colour used to define the subject and compose the photograph. Black is at once the *Self* and the *Other*, the place of the artist and that of the viewer. There is nothing funereal in this; on the contrary, black provides relief and contour, the desired depth, all thanks to a counterpoint: light.

Themes would be more fitting – not in a learned sense, but in a metaphysical, timeless, and mythic one, as when Picasso confided to André Malraux that he did not believe in subjects but believed in themes – provided that one expresses them through symbols. In fact, art operates exclusively through symbols. What he called themes were "*birth, pregnancy, suffering, murder, couples, death, rebellion, perhaps the kiss ... which are far older than civilization*".⁴³⁹

⁴³⁸ Idem.

⁴³⁹ Suzanne Preston Blier, *Picasso's Demoiselles - The Untold Origins of a Modern Masterpiece*, Duke University Press, 2019, p. 264.



Fig. 138: Touhami Ennadre, *9/11*, 2011, *Trace I*, 2008, *Trace II*, 2008, *Hands*, 2008. Source: <https://www.facebook.com/touhami.ennadre>

Whatever subject he addresses, Ennadre invariably relates it to death, the principal theme of his work. Conceptually, this "death" does not mean abolition, void, or end, nor does it allude to the crepuscular, the morbid, the macabre, or the infernal; rather, its conceptual content is closely bound up with the *Beyond*, with what lies after death.

At the same time, there is no place for the infinite in Ennadre's photographs, nor for the uncanny, because the space with which he is concerned is that of the tragic, which, in his photographs, is defined by life. All that matters is the duality between these two facets of a single reality that the artist probes. It is worth noting that he regards death not as a parting but as a liberation, a death "that gives birth to life". One may speak of a soothing sense of affinity with death, a sense of complicity such as the one evoked by Mozart in a letter to his father^{440, 441}.

Observing that the West rejects birth and death, Ennadre draws a parallel with the view of Roland Barthes in *La Chambre claire. Notes sur la photographie* (2008):

"All those photographers, determined to capture the present, do not know that, in fact, they are trying to immortalize death ... in my view, one should avoid relocating the status of photography within various social and economic contexts. Instead, what ought to concern us is the anthropology of death and of the image. For death must exist somewhere in society; if its place is no longer so firmly anchored in religion, it

⁴⁴⁰ "...I have made it a habit to be prepared for the worst. Since death, if we consider it closely, is the true goal of our existence, I have over recent years formed such close ties with this best and truest friend of mankind that its image is not only no longer frightening to me, but is indeed very comforting...."

⁴⁴¹ Karol Berger, "Bach's Cycle, Mozart's Arrow: An Essay on the Origins of Musical Modernity", University of California Press, 2007, p. 190.

must have found its place elsewhere, perhaps in the photograph that evokes death while trying to preserve what we call life" 442, 443.

Even at the time of his mother's burial, Ennadre's first photographs had nothing sombre about them: no tears, no coffin, only the persistence of grief in the skin and bones of hands tensed by suffering. An affirmation of life, in the immanence of its tragic condition. This crucial experience of death would extend far in space and time: one example is the long journey through Asia for the series *Hands, back, feet*. Hands reaching out from the darkness, hands intertwining, fingerprints, wrinkled faces.

Light creates only spaces, points, and lines, being a pure product of the artist's will, a self-reflection. The logic is not one of reproduction or representation, nor even one of aesthetics, but belongs to the imagination. Where, then, is the photograph? One might say that it has ceased to exist.

Conclusions:

- The world of shadows in Ennadre's works evokes a powerful aesthetic emotion, a shock, but above all a dynamic remembrance, overflowing with energy and lucidity. The driving force behind Ennadre's work is the ceaselessly reaffirmed desire to banish the fear of death by "befriending" it, becoming familiar with it, since fear, in the artist's conception, is an unwarranted vulnerability. By placing death at the centre of his artistic creation, Ennadre evokes an entire body of literature stretching from Montaigne to Bataille. In this process he clearly defines the overall picture: an awareness of the human condition, of death in particular. But which death? Beginning with hands isolated from the rest of the body, as a way of expressing pain and the weight of time, all of Ennadre's photographs take as their subject life ... *the life that shows itself before disappearance*.
- What fascinates Ennadre is the *passage*, the extreme point, the *moment of truth* in which death is already there and life ceases, at that very instant, to exist. Through his art, the artist immortalizes disappearance, and he does so in order to extract its quintessence, to consecrate its memory, a kind of *memoria temporis*.

⁴⁴² *In contemporary society, photography answers to the intrusion of a-symbolic death, outside religion, outside ritual, in the form of a sincere plunge. The Life-Death paradigm is reduced to a mere release (of the camera shutter), the one that stops time in its tracks*

⁴⁴³ Carolyn Bailey Gill, "Time and the Image", Manchester University Press, 2000, p. 143, apud Roland Barthes, "*La Chambre claire. Notes sur la photographie*".

- Ennadre's photographs contain no artifice, only darkness and light. His world is a realm of myth, the myth of origin and of end, but also of rebirth. The cosmic order demonstrates the inseparability of life and death, which only a poetic vision can disclose.
- His use of black allows Touhami Ennadre to map the dialectic between the living and the dead, a relationship closely bound to the artist's consciousness. His imposing, black images communicate through contemporary symbols, probing the tragic dimension of human existence. They are a silent testimony to the ravages of time that exhaust the ageing body, to bodily rupture, to the deliberate acts of savagery that exhaust entire populations.
- Ennadre's penetrating vision betrays a collective cultural "guilt"; it quietly reveals the brutality that underlies all forms of life. His works, however, are not moralistic in any conventional sense. Birth and death, for example, are presented as equivalents; the same black luminescence pervades and defines images of both themes.
- The immense scale of Ennadre's photographs lends each of his subjects a comparable sense of gravity and depth. The luminous black tonality of the entire body of work confers an elegance even upon the most sombre image. Ennadre's aesthetic strategy is not, however, one of reduction. Rather, he adopts a consistent conceptual approach in order to underscore the subtle relationship between life and death which, as has been noted, lies at the epicentre of his work.
- There is a meticulous typology at work in Ennadre's oeuvre. He photographs exclusively in series classified by subject or by concept. This approach reveals his need to record, methodically, the variations of a single theme.
- Viewed collectively, Ennadre's photographs map out ontological territories: birth, age, time, memory, suffering, and death. Even a partial list of his various series conveys the depth and breadth of his enquiry. In 1982, for example, he photographed births in a maternity ward of the Hôtel-Dieu hospital in Paris, capturing the moment of birth as a beginning that incontestably marks the onset of ageing⁴⁴⁴.
- Another series was devoted to documenting the slaughterhouses of Stockholm, München, and Marrakech, from 1983 to 1985. These are not architectural photographs but harrowing images depicting the carcasses of animals destined for consumption. The clusters of

⁴⁴⁴ For example: *Moïra*, visually, appears to be the symbol of an uncertain future. The crudely exposed body seems vulnerable. The foetus seems doomed to death, and yet, behind this body lies a hidden opening towards which Ennadre seeks to lead us. *Moïra* is a sign of hope, life, and renewal. It appears in the world, placing itself within the continuity of existence and of becoming. Ennadre shows us the essential, the beauty in his series *La Naissance*. <https://hecatombea.wixsite.com/exposition/touhamiennadre-frac>, accessed: 22 March 2022.

truncated animal parts and the flayed cross-sections of animal flesh appear almost abstract, like sculptural studies in black and white.

- The imprint of the past, as a sign of what occurred earlier, a record of bygone things, reverberates throughout Ennadre's entire oeuvre. In many respects, the theoretical implications of the "trace" constitute the very core of his photographic project. As a form of visual signification, photography can be understood in semiotic terms as part of a broader practice through which meaning is generated and transmitted. By virtue of its mimetic capacities – its capacity to render an apparent likeness of the perceived world – photography operates in an iconic mode. In other words, the photograph reproduces its subject and thus conceptually (re)presents that subject... in the absence of the subject. In this respect, the medium differs little from figurative painting and sculpture, which seek to simulate reality. Yet, owing to its unique technology, photography also functions as a signifier. For the American positivist philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, the signifier is bound, through an explicit and continuous connection, to the empirical world. A signifier is thus the physical mark or trace of a particular entity or event, which in turn becomes the sign for that entity or event. The photograph is therefore an imprint of an empirical object or event, one that concentrates attention upon what once was but is no longer.
- The notion of the signifier, as a sign that represents a world which can be rendered only in the past tense, is ever present in Ennadre's art. His photographs, which are by their very nature messages, in fact offer instances of his relationship with the past, with loss, and with memory.
- As early as 1978, critics compared the striking works of Touhami Ennadre with the pathos of Van Gogh, while others identified affinities with Caravaggio and the poetry of Rimbaud.
- The author Tilman Spengler observes that "Ennadre presents images that appear and disappear at one and the same time. Often insistent to the point of obsession, these works imitate Creation in a singular way, posing the question of how light and shadow become form and figure in a relation of equality."
- By focusing the gaze solely upon the subjects depicted, immersed in a background of deep black, Ennadre omits all superfluous additional narrative elements. He maintains that he "is not a photographer",⁴⁴⁵ and the unusual methods he employs resemble those of an artist

⁴⁴⁵ I am not a professional photographer. I am an artist who uses photography – that of its origins, black and white – to work with light, just as others use painting or sculpture to the same end.
<https://www.facebook.com/touhami.ennadre/posts/2742276505829040>, accessed: 22 March 2022.

more than those of a conventional photographer. They are profoundly disquieting and cannot but have a powerful impact upon the viewer, drawing them aside, into the shadow of our civilization, and bringing them closer to the subject of birth and death – the extremes of human experience.

Chapter 6. The Interview Method

6.1. Preliminary Theoretical Considerations

The interview method is a complementary research method that aims to obtain data through discussion. The importance of the method was emphasized by Mariana Cosumov,⁴⁴⁶ within praxeological approaches to artistic research, while Sorin Dan Șandor⁴⁴⁷ regards, as an advantage of the group interview, the fact that it affords the possibility of correlating data. The methodological process takes the form of discussions and debates, without being given any official character. The interview guide underpins the entire process, sustaining the fluidity and unity of the result; the interview may be structured or semi-structured.

In the present doctoral thesis, the semi-structured and informal type of interview was chosen, given its characteristics: the presentation of the theme and simple questions that do not steer the answers in any particular direction. The fidelity of the data obtained requires the following: ensuring the naturalness of the conversation; a flexible conduct, through free and candid discussion; the spontaneity of applying the method; and the absence of any factor that might distort the opinions of the subjects involved. The interviewer must listen, stimulate, and direct the discussion.^{448,449.}

Following the analysis and interpretation of the results, aspects emerged that complemented the conclusions of the types of research used previously. At the same time, the results contributed to completing the picture that bears directly upon the theme under investigation, thereby providing an additional contribution from the point of view of *methodological triangulation*.

6.2. A Group Interview: Black in the Artworks of Certain Contemporary American Artists

The present group interview was facilitated, on request, by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts (USA) between 9 and 21 April 2022, and was conducted on the Zoom

⁴⁴⁶ Mariana Cosumov – "Teoria și metodologia cercetărilor științifice în educația artistică" (Alec Russo State University Press, Bălți, Republic of Moldova, 2020)

⁴⁴⁷ Sorin Dan Șandor, "Metode și tehnici de cercetare în științele sociale" (Babeș-Bolyai University Press, Cluj-Napoca, 2019)

⁴⁴⁸ Mariana Cosumov, op. cit., pp. 59–60.

⁴⁴⁹ Sorin Dan Șandor, "Metode și tehnici de cercetare în științele sociale", Babeș-Bolyai University Press, Cluj-Napoca, 2019, pp. 131–134.

platform. The idea pursued was that of the valences of black in the personal process of creation. Seven contemporary American artists, from different areas of visual-arts expression – graphic art, painting, and photography – responded to this initiative: Ted Stanuga (Chicago), Andrew Conklin (New York), Sandra Flood (Philadelphia), Debra Riffe (Washington), Doug McGoldrick (Minneapolis), Darrell Roberts (Chicago), and Kevin Sloan (Chicago).

Ted Stanuga

"At the moment, most of my work is in black and white. Initially, it began with an idea drawn from Duke Ellington and his compositions, Black and Tan Fantasy... but I have the impression that it is constraining me. My works have become a reflection, or a meditation, on our culture, but they are also bound up with the idea of disappearance, of death. My own (the funeral) drawing ever nearer, and a failed American democracy that one can experience every evening, watching our liberties evaporate on the news. Well, that is where it all began anyway and, although all of this is still a work in progress at a certain level... it seems that I have moved beyond those initial ideas, and now I am able to speak of personal complexities.

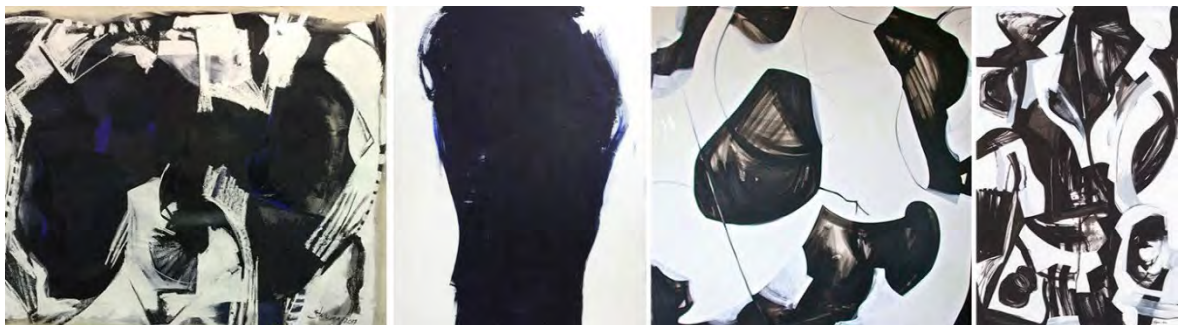


Fig. 139: Ted Stanuga: *Cutting an Edge*, 2018; *Head*, 2018; *Untitled*, 2018; *Untitled II*, 2018. Credit: Ted Stanuga.

First of all, I make a drawing, either on paper or on canvas, without knowing where to go... this is a departure from years of preparing the work carefully in advance – as a result, I have become an adherent of the experimental. Once the drawing is done, I begin to work with charcoal, erasing the painted lines, and I go through a general process of simplification... something I also try to do in my life, all the time. Once that layer is finished, I sand it down and begin to redraw in different shades of black (oil paint), and I continue

this process, leaving aspects of the previous layers visible, until the piece no longer allows me to do anything to it. I do this over and over again as a meditation that will help me find a balance between what I know and what I ultimately want to express."

Andrew Conklin

"I was born in Chicago, IL, and my first art school was the American Academy of Art. At that time, I was also working in a graphic design office and was contemplating a career in that field. Painting classes changed this, as I became fascinated by the formal problems of painting and moved to New York to continue my study of painting. I enrolled at the National Academy of Design and, later, at the New York Academy of Art. I paint in oil on canvas, but also on smooth panels, since I find the smoothness of these rigid supports ideal for small-scale works. The supports are sealed with layers of natural gesso (not acrylic), in order to reduce the absorbency of the panel.



Fig. 140: Andrew Conklin: *Small Motion Capture Studio*; *Black and White Venetian Ball*, 2001, *At the Carnival*, 1999. Source: Andrew Conklin.

I work in layers. For the first layer, the composition and the essential forms are developed using a limited palette, chiefly earth colours and lead white (Raw Sienna, Mars Violet, Raw Umber, Mars Black, and Flake White). I choose these colours for their rapid drying time, since each layer must be thoroughly dry before a new layer can be applied. The second layer uses an expanded palette, which allows the rendering of subtle changes of form and texture in the objects depicted. I find inspiration in Aert de Gelder (the last great pupil of Rembrandt), who created astonishing illusions of texture by scratching the surface of the paint (the Art Institute of Chicago and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston hold good examples of his paintings). For the final layer, I use a thin glaze of pigments in local areas, heightening the luminosity and intensity of the colour. When I darken large areas, I forgo

black, since it is opaque; instead, I obtain a transparent "black" using three colours (Ultramarine Blue, Crimson Lake, and Indian Yellow) and apply it across the entire surface in order to lower the overall tonal value of the image. While the use of a layered technique is not spontaneous, it affords me more time to reflect on the making of images than a single-layer, alla prima technique. In this way, decisions regarding colour saturation and the range of values can be taken gradually as I develop the image. But black plays an essential role. I believe this approach is useful in rendering complex detail and lends a certain degree of sobriety."

Sandra Flood

"I have always wanted to be an artist, ever since I was a small child. There was a period, when I was about eleven years old, when I thought I would become a great neurosurgeon, but that phase passed quite quickly. I began to attend an art school. I never really cared about the structure and the limitations of the school. After that experience, I began to study artists whom I truly admired. I was, and am, fortunate enough to live an hour away from New York and Philadelphia, so studying great artists in equally great museums was never a problem. My mentors ranged widely, from the much-disputed Andrew Wyeth to the much-praised Degas, Whistler, Schiele, and Francis Bacon. Lucian Freud and Antonio López García are two of my absolute realists. I have also drawn inspiration from, and studied, the great Abstract Expressionists.

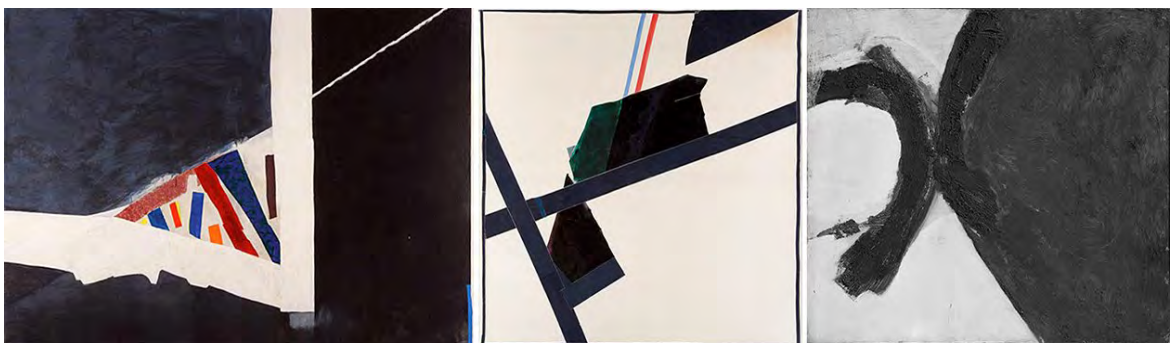


Fig. 141: Sandra Flood: *Brilliant Corner II*, 1993; *Clodgy*, 1996, *Painting*, 1990. Credit: Sandra Flood.

The work of Robert Motherwell and Franz Kline – his black paintings in particular – has always made a strong impression on me. I was drawn to them because of the Asian symbolism that emerges from their art. Asian art, woodcuts, and paintings, both ancient and

contemporary, are things I have felt connected to since I was a child. It really is a very straightforward process: if something or someone sparks my interest, I will run with it. I work from photographs and/or from life. I usually paint the canvas in dark colours and start from there. I have about seventy-two different tubes of paint, yet I use only three to five of them: black, white, and a few greys. I cannot imagine painting a single thing for the rest of my life. It would become a chore if I did not explore different subjects, or the same subject in a different light (and I do not mean that literally). I work in cycles. I made a great deal of abstract work years ago, and I felt that black was liberating and highly intuitive. The abstract is what defines me."

Debra Riffe

"I hold a degree in Fine Arts from Howard University, College of Fine Arts, Washington, DC, where I specialized in printmaking. My thought and working process is relatively simple: I create what I know. I am drawn to the work of Charles White, Jacob Lawrence, Elizabeth Catlett, John Biggers, Aaron Douglas, Palmer Hayden, William H. Johnson, Horace Pippin, James L. Wells, Benny Andrews, Lynd Ward, Clare Leighton, Barry Moser, Kreg Yingst, Amos Kennedy, Stephen Alcorn, José Orozco, Diego Rivera, David Siqueiros, and a great many German Expressionists. Each of these artists, along with others, past and present, inspires and influences my work.



Fig. 142: Debra Riffe: *Jeunesse*, 1992; *Wonder*, 1996., *Black cat*, 1990, *Black utopia*, 1992, *Black and White*, 1990.

I have always had an eye for detail, and my observations of Southern art have shaped my compositions. I create what I know: African American images of the rural South. My compositions are, exclusively, images of African Americans set in rural Southern

surroundings, performing routine tasks in solitary, timeless moments of reflection. These tasks speak of social status and identity, of intimacy and a sense of place. I value the ordinary, and I try to render details that I hope will stir emotion in the viewer. I own two Conrad etching presses, and I sometimes finish my works by hand. The richness of Daniel Smith Traditional Relief Black #79 oil-based ink pressed onto white BFK Rives printing paper is magical. The contrast of opaque black marks combined with sharp modulating lines gives the works an infinite range of tonal variation and texture. When I first began showing my work at various art fairs, I was intimidated by all the colourful artworks surrounding my booth. Colour! Colour! Everywhere! There is too much colour. But I learned that my black-and-white images were a welcome addition to the circuit, a fresh approach. Black is a colour!"

Doug McGoldrick

"I grew up in the suburbs of Minneapolis and became involved in art at an early age; my father was a keen amateur photographer. My early work involved drawing and painting. In fact, I hold a master's degree in painting from the University of Wisconsin–Madison. After finishing school, I began working as a photographer's assistant, and that is what truly led me towards art photography. Throughout my photographic career I have always been influenced, in particular by photographic artists such as Lorna Simpson, Luis González Palma, Richard Avedon, Keith Carter, Carrie Mae Weems, the Starn brothers, and Sally Mann. I remember visiting the Walker Art Center and falling in love with the early Pop art of Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, and Jim Dine in particular.



Fig. 143: Doug McGoldrick: *Chicago I*, 2002; *Chicago II*, 2002., *Wedding*, 2015.

My wife grew up in Wisconsin and we have a cabin there. I grew up in a family that never went fishing or camping or anything like that, so the area around our cabin was a new

world for me to explore. All the surrounding towns are deserted at night and the lighting is dim, almost like film sets. I have always loved night photography.

I love how night takes something so ordinary and turns it into a place with a kind of dark story, with the feeling that something is about to happen and probably not something good. I love the stillness and the mystery. It is funny that I am so fond of black-and-white photography, and that is all I work in. I have black-and-white works mostly in medium and large format. When I began the series of interior images, it was really the first time I had played with colour in my personal work, and for the most part those early images were almost entirely blue. From there, it was only a step to black and white."

Darrell Roberts

"I spent most of my early life at school. After six years, I completed a bachelor's degree in art history at the University of Northern Iowa, where I also took painting and drawing courses, and I moved to Chicago immediately afterwards. I did not even attend the graduation ceremony. After finishing my BFA, I still did not have a defined style. I needed



Fig. 144: Darrell Roberts: *Abstract Fantasy*, 2019; *Night*, 2019; *Night Sky*, 2019; *Untitled*, 2019.

to develop it further, and I began the post-baccalaureate programme at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

It was an intensive programme and I loved it, perhaps even more than my university courses. My experience with art was quite good. I took a great many art theory courses at the start, but also courses in the humanities and reading: Nietzsche, Sartre, Dante, Kierkegaard, and so on. I never read Lyotard or Deleuze. I prefer somewhat more accessible reading. I have always been a little crazy, though I have enjoyed my life experience. For me,

abstract painting, dark colours, the form of the line, and the problems these involve have always influenced my work.

The one thing I know is that I adore black, and I believe it took twelve years of studying art history, painting, drawing, and visiting museums and art galleries to get there. I have many favourite artists: at present I like Amy Sillman and Pia Fries, but among the established figures I might mention Willem de Kooning, Joan Mitchell, and Jackson Pollock in his drip period. My works contain two interwoven strands. One is painting on large-scale canvases, and the other comprises drawings that are mixed-media black-and-white works on paper. Both display the density and the layered mark-making that point to my artistic process and content. I do not prefer one over the other, and I find that the work balances out. For this reason, I need to work with both drawing and painting.

Black-and-white drawings are often more graphic and allow the viewer to see differences in value clearly. The oil works are more complex, with value and intensities varying to create an open composition. And, of course, there is also the interaction of the shades of colour. This complexity is what I find to be true life. At present I am working with mystery and the imaginary.

Dark colours and textures point to an inner or primordial sense of place, and the passages of the times of day that mark our existence and help to create this connection. The retreat from the concept of the "heroic" landscape in terms of scale (referring to Bierstadt, Moran, Cole), while at the same time moving away from that cultural aspect, informs these works, which incorporate large expanses of marks and colour.

The tactile sense (how we first experience the world – Foucault) and the chaotic energy of colour and marks play an important role in building up layers that work to create and encompass the enveloping field and the experienced space."

Kevin Sloan

"I have been a practising artist for fifteen years. I am self-taught, in the sense that I did not attend art school, but I did take various courses in drawing, painting, and screenprinting. I began to take photography more seriously in 1995. I had just moved to the city (Chicago) and, with plenty of free time, I started to explore my new home, the city, by bicycle, by train, or simply by walking through different neighbourhoods – taking photographs: street scenes, at night. After I found a steady job, I made art mostly at night

and at weekends. Since 2006, I have worked at the Cornelia Arts Building in Roscoe Village. At present I share a studio with the painters Eric Weinstein and Jeff Bryner. I would have loved to have a studio at home so that I could work whenever I wished, but it did not take me long to adapt to this new studio. It is wonderful to have that dedicated creative space without other distractions. It has also been an inspiration for me to be in a building with other artists. Since 2001, I have exhibited my work in many venues in Chicago: galleries, alternative spaces, museums, auctions, and even a hospital. For me, photography, painting, drawing, screenprinting, and digital media are connected and feed one another. My medium – whether I use paint, a camera, or a computer – is strongly influenced by the sights, sounds, and colours of the night. I consider painting to be my principal support. I love to experiment, and painting above all allows me to experiment. I paint a variety of subjects. I work to create a harmony and a balance between the forms and colours within the composition. I love to mix the colours and to build up the layers of a picture over time. Black predominates in almost all my works. Drawing is the one artistic thing I have done consistently throughout my life. I do not really make elaborate drawings – I mostly use drawing to work out ideas and to sketch compositions for paintings. I then transfer the smaller sketches onto canvas to use as the basis for a painting.



Fig. 145: Kevin Sloan: *Hubris and Nemesis*, 2015; *Time*, 2020; *Money*, 2020;

As a photographer, I love the spontaneity and freedom that photography offers – the city creates limitless opportunities for taking pictures. I used to shoot on film, but now I mostly use digital cameras. I like to photograph a variety of subjects, but usually I photograph mainly urban landscapes, at night. Photography fuels my creativity and provides a great deal of inspiration and ideas for my art. My two favourite artists of all time are Picasso and Van Gogh. I learned a great deal from studying their work at the Art Institute when I began to paint, and from reading books about their painterly style and

artistic process. Over the past few years, I have been inspired by David Hockney, Philip Guston, and Richard Diebenkorn, as well as by the contemporary painters Amy Sillman and Dana Schutz. I love street photography, so Henri Cartier-Bresson, Harry Callahan, and Richard Nickel are always at the top of my list of favourite photographers. Vivian Maier, too, is very compelling. All of these photographers have an experimental quality in their work, which is what draws me to them."

SUMMARY TABLE: GROUP INTERVIEW				
Artist	Form of expression	Examples of works	Valences attributed to black in the artist's own work	Influences
Ted Stanuga	Graphic art and painting	<i>Cutting an Edge</i> , 2018; <i>Head</i> , 2018; <i>Untitled</i> , 2018; <i>Untitled II</i> , 2018.	the idea of disappearance, that of death;	Duke Ellington
Andrew Conklin	Painting	<i>Small Motion Capture Studio</i> , oil on canvas, 15 x 21 in.; <i>Black and White Venetian Ball</i> , 2001, oil on canvas, 38 x 56 in., <i>At the Carnival</i> , 1999, oil on canvas, 18 x 14 in.	an "essential" role, sobriety;	Aert de Gelder (the last great pupil of Rembrandt)
Sandra Flood	Interventions on photography	<i>Brilliant Corner II</i> , 1993, Acrylic and collage on canvas 203 x 305cm; <i>Clodgy</i> , 1996, oil on linen, 38 x 38 in., <i>Painting</i> , 1990, oil on canvas, 56 x 51 in.	Liberating, intuitive;	Robert Motherwell, Franz Kline, Andrew Wyeth, Edgar Degas, Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud.
Debra Riffe	Graphic art	<i>Jeunesse</i> , 1992; <i>Wonder</i> , 1996., <i>Black cat</i> , 1990, <i>Black utopia</i> , 1992, <i>Black and White</i> , 1990.	social status, identity, intimacy;	Charles White, John Biggers, Horace Pippin, Lynn Ward, José Orozco, Diego Rivera.
Doug McGoldrick	Night photography – exclusively black-and-white photography.	<i>Chicago I</i> , 2002, <i>Chicago II</i> , 2002, <i>Wedding</i> , 2015.	Stillness, mystery;	Lorna Simpson, Louis Gonzales Palma, Richard Avedon, Keith Carter, Carrie Mae Weems, Sally Mann. From pop art: Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, and Jim Dine.

Darrell Roberts	Painting	<i>"Abstract Fantasy,"</i> Oil on canvas, 2019, 8 x 6 in.; <i>Night</i> , 2019, oil on canvas 6 x 4 in.; <i>Night Sky</i> , 2019; <i>Untitled</i> , 2019, oil on canvas, 6 x 4 in.	Mystery, the imaginary;	Willem de Kooning, Joan Mitchell, and Jackson Pollock.
Kevin Sloan	Photography (nocturnal urban landscapes), painting, graphic art, and digital media.	<i>Hubris and Nemesis</i> , 2015; <i>Time</i> , 2020; <i>Money</i> , 2020;	Darkness, the passage of time, the liberating role.;	Henri Cartier-Bresson, Harry Callahan, Richard Nickel, David Hockney, Philip Guston, Richard Diebenkorn, Amy Sillman, Dana Schutz.

Table 9: Summary table, group interview

6.3. A Focus Group: The Social Dimension of Black

Criteria used:

1. A clear definition of the theme
2. Intervention occurred only to balance the discussion
3. Between 12 and 18 persons took part.
4. The participants were familiarized with the concept under discussion

Objective: The method was used to complement the thematic survey addressing the social dimension of black, with the aim of correlating the data.

Description. The research had the objective of corroborating and completing the subchapter concerning the social dimension of black, and was conducted on 17 March 2022, between 09:30 and 11:00, at the Faculty of Arts and Design of the West University of Timișoara, with a group of 16 third-year students specializing in fashion and clothing design. Senior Lecturer Dr Riemschneider Eugenia Elena was present throughout the discussion. I guided the conduct of the process, my intervention being minimal and serving only to balance the discussion.

Conclusions. The discussion gave rise to the following findings (the items marked in italics are terms drawn from the discussion):

- The value of black in dress was considered "*crucial*", since, being a neutral colour, it can be combined with any other colour. Black "*attracts*", "*denotes elegance, formality, simplicity*", but also "*sensuality and sexuality*", in the opinion of the majority.
- The group emphasized that, in Romania, black is worn on a wider scale than in other countries they had visited. When asked about the hypothetical causes of this phenomenon, "*decorum*", "*custom*", "*the fear of being judged by society*", and "*religious affiliation*" were the most frequent answers. The participants in the discussion emphasized that this phenomenon predominates above all among elderly people in rural areas.
- Another opinion that emerged was that the fear of being judged by society is sometimes the explanation for why some of the participants in the discussion wear black themselves. The following motivations belonged to the same register: "*I do not want to stand out*" and "*it is a personal choice*". Correlating these causes, one may infer that the opinion of society matters more than personal opinion, since there is a negative correlation within the triad formed by "*personal choice*", "*the fear of being judged by society*", and "*I do not want to stand out*". A personal choice implies an independent option and not one conditioned by the fear of society's opinion.
- Terms such as "*pain*", "*disappointment*", "*trauma*", "*depression*", and "*protest against society*" were invoked as intrinsic motives that prompt one to "*dress in black*". One member of the discussion group associated vivid colours with "*fantasy*" and the colour black with "*reality*", reasoning that black belongs to "*the real world*".
- The value of black was also appreciated for its "*minimalism*", on the grounds that it "*brings out or accentuates*" both people's features and other colours.

6.4. An Expert Interview

Objective: an analysis of my relationship to black and of my own mindset concerning it.

The rationale for selecting the interlocutor: owing to earlier meetings, the psychotherapist was already familiar with certain aspects of my life, and I considered it useful and necessary to elucidate these, including on the basis of psychological criteria

The venue of the interview: a specialist practice: psychotherapist Alina Anghel

Excerpts:

Alina A. ... in reading about black, I came across materials in which the drawings of Jung's patients are analysed: they are drawings containing information that comes from the unconscious, drawings on a free theme, not an imposed one. Many of them are, in fact, amenable to psychological analysis. Mandalas, forms, colours – ultimately, it is an analysis of their meanings. It was mentioned somewhere that black is the symbol of the beginning, of something that has not yet been separated.

Atila G... If we are to speak of meanings, what does black not symbolize? For me, black interrupts a cycle; it is a pause between worlds, a pause between two phases. Black is essential...

Alina A. Yes, that is true. Jung said that death, darkness, the shadow, this "malign" side of life, is associated with black; but I found the meaning of black as a beginning interesting... let us dwell on that, since you said that for you it interrupts a cycle...

Atila G. Yes, given the vastness of the subject, the wealth of associations that black enjoys... and I do not mean only in art... as I advanced in my study, as I tried to decipher it, the field of knowledge became more and more ramified, more and more vast. At first glance, I think that, whoever you ask, they will say that black is death, sadness; but, in their depths, things are not quite so. Black is everywhere...

Alina A. An interesting book is "*Expresia psihopatologică în pictură*", written by Aurel Romilă. It contains paintings by patients with psychiatric disorders, with diagnoses...

Atila G. I have not ventured into that area. I have seen drawings made by patients with various disorders, but the point is that, in studying black, at a certain moment you get the impression that the subject is inexhaustible. From one theme you arrive at another, that one branches off, and you can scarcely discern what to choose, because all things, taken in isolation, have their own importance, and the "whole", I think, takes shape as you come to know more.

Alina A. Look, I have been waiting to ask you... what is your objective in today's meeting?

Atila G. One of the premises from which I set out, as a hypothesis, if you like, for the doctoral thesis, was that what an artist produces – and how – is not a matter of chance; rather, artistic expression, I mean sincere, uncommissioned expression, is the result of the artist's past, an extension of it, a representation that transcends the barrier of words. Goya, for instance, profoundly marked by his past, withdrew in his final years to a place outside Madrid and produced a series of works that are illuminating, at least from the perspective of

the symbolism of black: witches, demons, disfigured faces, terror, fear, and so on. I have interpreted this phenomenon as a direct cause-and-effect connection... I do not believe it is mere chance. To be clear with myself, I cannot analyse myself – that is, I can, but I would be subjective and would perhaps distort the truth... it would have no particular validity; perhaps it would be merely a confession of what I feel. That is why I told myself that, if we meet, we might manage to answer some questions, or you might help me to answer my own questions. For me it is a kind of exercise, a test, in the attempt to decipher myself. In practical terms, it concerns the conceptual basis of my artistic project. My ideas have been formed ever since I conceived the whole project, but I believe there is always room for improvement, and who else could make me reflect on what I am, if not a psychotherapist who knows, to a certain extent, my psychic structure? Do you think there is a connection between my past and the way in which I act... or react, by whatever means?

Alina A. Yes, definitely, I am convinced of it. I am convinced of the power of the unconscious, which is... the repository of the experiences we have, sensory and sometimes extrasensory... The extrasensory comes, in any case, from this part of the unconscious, but within the unconscious there also exist certain conceptual units of information called archetypes, which are general, common to all people: the archetype of the heroine, of the mother, of death, of birth. There are many concepts which, in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, are called archetypes, even if the linguistic label differs.

Atila G. These archetypes, in terms of intensity, I assume differ from one person to another?

Alina A. Imagine the concept of the mother. For us, the archetype of the mother – the universal mother, say – carries a certain meaning, and for someone in Japan, for example, it carries another meaning, yet one with many points in common. Jung calls this repository of the archetypes the collective unconscious. They are instinctual, and so they form the underlying substrate. Jung produced an extensive body of writing; he is the one who conceptualized the shadow, and, you know, this idea of the persona, the mask, the seen part of a person and the unseen part of them.

Atila G. At one point I had written about personal identity versus social identity. Do you think a parallel can be drawn – namely, that social identity, at least at times, may be a shadow of personal identity?

Alina A. Yes, certainly. Jung says that the shadow presupposes the existence of a light, the light representing something that is seen, and that is the persona, that is, what people see, what we ourselves know about ourselves; and behind it lies the shadow, what people do not

see, what we do not know about ourselves. The moment you come to know the shadow, you shift the source of light – that is, your knowledge – and a shadow forms elsewhere. We will always have a shadow. It can mean anything: for instance, people who feel one way and behave in another; in effect, if you behave one way while the shadow says something else. In an analysis, in a course of therapy, you can see this discontinuity between what is and what is seen. Does what I am saying make sense?

Atila G. Yes, absolutely, I understand perfectly. But does this mean that we can have several shadows at once?

Alina A. In a sense, yes; but what is meant here is the shadow as a projection of the unconscious, which is unknown to us and which, the moment it becomes known, provokes a feeling of shame and discomfort. The point is that if something that suits me enters consciousness as something positive, it is not necessarily a shadow; the shadow is only something that causes me discomfort, displeasure, doubt, shame, guilt. Now, if, by resorting to the defence mechanisms, I repress those feelings, they will never pass into consciousness; instead they appear perhaps in the form of a dream, or in the form of expression through art. Words – indeed, language itself – are a faculty of cognition; they have nothing to do with emotion, with the unconscious, because the moment you express information or emotion through words, it has already become conscious. The unconscious manifests itself through symbols, rather. For this reason, the most effective forms for analysing the contents of the unconscious are the non-verbal forms of expression: painting, photography, dance, colour. The experiences from the unconscious, the energy in fact – the unconscious is organized in the form of energies and drives, rather than informationally.

Atila G. Does the unconscious differ from the subconscious?

Alina A. Yes. Imagine a pyramid: the apex of the pyramid is the conscious part, then comes a thin layer that is the subconscious, and the whole lower part is the unconscious, which contains within it the collective unconscious. The conscious is, strictly, what comes into contact with our sense organs, at the level of the field of attention: what you see, what you hear. The subconscious is the drawer of acquired skills and automatisms – for example, eating, writing, driving; they are all automatisms whose place is in the subconscious. There is a permanent dynamic between the conscious and the unconscious, by way of the subconscious. But we have one further layer, between the subconscious and the unconscious: the defence mechanisms. Information reaches the unconscious automatically, whether we want it to or not; everything that happens to us reaches the unconscious, everything our brain

processes. Some information is useless – for example, how many times we stop at traffic lights – but there are two drives, as they are called in psychoanalysis, which are the most important: those of death and of sex, *eros* and *thanatos*. So, in the unconscious, everything connected with death and with sex will acquire energy. The rest is not stored for long; it even drops out of the field of the unconscious. If a piece of information has energy, and thus has impact, it can be reactualized in the form of the dream, because the dream is a metamorphosis created by the defence mechanisms. Jung holds that dreams are messages from the unconscious, that parts of dreams are parts of the self – that is, parts of the self that have been repressed, pushed into the unconscious, and have reached consciousness in an acceptable form.

Atila G. So the unconscious is the past?

Alina A. Take hypnosis, for example: it is a state close to sleep, through which one can theoretically reach the unconscious. You know those films in which someone is hypnotized and says and does all sorts of things. In reality it does not work like that, but many of the images that arise from this state of relaxation are images from the unconscious. So our entire past, or the greater part of the past, is in the unconscious; and, more than that, the unconscious has a capacity not only to manifest itself in the present, but also to manifest itself in the future. That is why it is no coincidence that, sometimes, shortly afterwards, something happens that can be correlated with the dream. The unconscious is like a processor that analyses everything and, somehow, also knows what is to come.

Atila G. Could one then say that the unconscious is more powerful than the conscious and the subconscious combined? That is, that the unconscious governs?

Alina A. Absolutely. Yes. Since we were speaking of hypnosis, there are two types of hypnosis: regressive, which is connected with the past, and projective. Many years ago, during my training years, I also practised projective hypnosis. For instance, we were asked to describe what our consulting room would look like, and I jotted down in a little notebook various objects, their colour, their position in the room. Not long ago I came across that notebook, which I had forgotten, and almost everything I had noted there is currently to be found in my consulting room. So, through the unconscious, we can project certain events. But what does black signify for you, setting aside all the information and the theories you draw on, at an emotional, inner level?

Atila G. I feel that it represents me, that it represents my past, the disappointments I have lived through, the dreams that have crumbled, the loss of faith in people, the fact that I

experienced being abandoned by someone close to me, in the hardest of moments. I lived in a world full of light, but the succession of lived experiences has partly darkened that world, and now light seems to me a miracle. Black, physically, absorbs everything, reflects nothing.

Alina A. And in that same vein, you do not so much absorb everything as take on a large part of everything that comes towards you. Reflect a little on this side of things – I mean, on not taking everything upon yourself.

Atila G. But do you think I can control what I take upon myself?

Alina A. Let me ask you differently: is it a hypothesis that you chose black, and chose to study it, as an unconscious form of protection?

Atila G. It gives me pleasure; I feel that I am freeing myself; they are, in a way, my own thoughts, but not in a negative form. For me, black is something universal, something that evokes transcendence; it tells me where I come from and where I am heading, and the fact that I translate this through art makes me feel that I am conveying a message – a truth, in fact. Everything seems to me so ephemeral – I mean, including our own existence, within the vastness of the universe and of time – that, through black, I express my view on anything at all. And I do not regard black as the colour of negation; on the contrary, it is the colour that can contain everything. It is a beautiful metaphor, that of Reinhardt: "*the last paintings that can be painted*" – in the sense that you can see so much in black, in nothing, if you look long enough, that there is scarcely anything else to represent; in black, that something is already contained. And, more interesting still, no other colour possesses this capacity.

Alina A. Could black also represent a beginning?

Atila G. Categorically, black can represent anything; but, in the beginning, there was black!

Alina A. I asked this because I have read that black can also represent the beginning of initiation – for example, in Islamic and Eastern cultures, those organized in stages, the final stage is usually black.

Atila G. Yes, from this point of view black, in the specialist literature, is seen as the final stage that human consciousness can attain, but in a positive sense.

Alina A. I should tell you that I noted this down; I think it makes sense. Because in your case, especially in this sphere of life and death, I could not ignore the fact that I knew you had gone through that episode, very close to the edge of the abyss. Somehow, when the bullet whistles past your ear, as the saying goes, I think you afterwards have a different perspective on all things and on their meanings. You experienced contact with black, and so, I think, you reached this level of evolved consciousness, and that translates into the absence of fear.

Atila G. There is a truth here. Once you experience a certain thing, it is impossible ever to relate to it again in the same way.

Alina A. Sometimes it is beneficial to give someone else access to what you are going through. Sometimes simply sharing what you feel helps you: to bring out something you have perhaps not brought out, and you will see whether you still perceive those feelings in the same way, on the same scale. Of course, some things will remain the same, because they are part of who you are, but others can change.

6.5. Mixed-Methods Research: The Perception and Aesthetics of the Colour Black in the Contemporary Context

In order to interrogate various aspects relating to the perception of the colour black in the contemporary context, I devised, launched, and analysed a piece of *mixed-methods research* (quantitative and qualitative). The *QuestionPro*⁴⁵⁰ platform was used to create a mixed questionnaire that contained both quantitative questions, with fixed variables, and two questions specific to qualitative research, with dynamic variables (a text box in which respondents could express their opinion in their own words). Respondents were recruited through the *Prolific Academic LTD* platform, a company specializing in academic studies, which provides paid access to its own database of respondents from around the world (132,793, as of 25 March 2022).

Criteria used for the multi-strata sampling (Fig. 146):

1. A 1:1 gender distribution (nominal balancing).
2. A uniform geographical distribution.
3. Age: over 18.
4. Studies in the field of the arts and/or design.
5. Subjects of interest: philosophy, psychology, sociology.⁴⁵¹
6. Command of English: advanced level.⁴⁵²
7. A response approval rate of no less than 98%

NOTE 1: Since the objective concerns an overall view of the subject, a sample with a global territorial distribution (six continents) was chosen, given the variety in the way black is perceived according to the specific cultural, historical, and social context, among others.

NOTE 2: The order of the variables was set to be random.

⁴⁵⁰ Questionnaire ID: 9716816; researcher ID: 3219606; organization ID: 3266063; licence type: University Enterprise Sub-Account; licence validity: Nov 22, 2021 – Nov 21, 2022; general administrator: Anton Licz (director of the information system of the West University of Timișoara); licence holder: West University of Timișoara.

⁴⁵¹ This criterion was necessary because the aim was for respondents to be familiar with the concepts of the questionnaire, thereby reducing the margin of error that might have arisen from a misunderstanding of the terms used. It did not, however, constitute a risk of what statistics calls "underrepresentation".


⁴⁵² The questionnaire was drafted in English. This criterion thus ensured that all respondents understood the questions and could express their opinions on the two open-ended questions.


Recruit participants


How many participants are you looking to recruit?

Location

Where should your participants be located?

 All countries available


 USA

 UK


More

Study distribution

How do you want to distribute your sample?


Representative sample (UK or USA) 

Study is distributed based on national census data

Balanced sample 

Study is distributed according to the participants' sex

✓ Selected

Participants available 

Study is distributed to the first participants available

BALANCE CRITERIA

Sex

Male = 50.0%
200 participants

Female = 50.0%
200 participants

Prescreen participants

YOUR CRITERIA

<p>Age</p> <p>Minimum Age: 18, Maximum Age: 100</p>	<p>Edit Remove</p>
<p>Fluent languages</p> <p>English</p>	<p>Edit Remove</p>
<p>Subject</p> <p>Art and/or design</p>	<p>Edit Remove</p>
<p>Hobbies - Categories</p> <p>Philosophy, Psychology, Sociology</p>	<p>Edit Remove</p>
<p>Approval Rate</p> <p>Minimum Approval Rate: 98, Maximum Approval Rate: 100</p>	<p>Edit Remove</p>

[+ Add screener](#)

We've found **429** matching participants who have been active in the past 90 days

Fig. 146: Criteria used for the multi-strata sampling – mixed-methods research

QUANTITATIVE DETAILS OF THE RESEARCH					
Research period		25–28 March 2022			
Total number of available respondents		132793			
Number of respondents after applying the sampling criteria		429 (0,32%)			
Total number of respondents selected		400 (93,24%)			
Standard probability interval		95%			
Margin of error		± 5%			
Completion rate		381 (95,25%)		Refusal	7 (1,75%)
				Drop-out	12 (3%)
PRELIMINARY DATA					
Q1. Distribution by sex	Female	190 (49,87%)			
	Male	191 (50,12%)			
Q2. Distribution by age range		18-30	30-40	40-50	50-60
		218 (57,22%)	83 (21,78%)	42 (11,02)	28 7,35%
Q3. Geographical distribution	Africa	47 (12,34%)			
	North America	66 (17,32%)			
	South America	13 (3,41%)			
	Asia	10 (2,62%)			
	Australia	39 (10,24%)			
	Europe	206 (54,07%)			
EDUCATION AND INTERESTS					
Q4. Distribution by level of education	Secondary school	134 (35,17%)			
	Bachelor's	159 (41,73%)			
	Master's	59 (15,49%)			
	Doctorate	9 (2,63)			
	Postdoctoral studies	2 (0,52%)			
	Prefer not to answer	18 (4,72%)			
Q5. Distribution by the interest accorded to the following subjects, on a scale from 1 (total disinterest) to 5 (total interest)		Art	Psychology	Philosophy	Sociology
		4,32	3,73	3,15	2,42

Table 10: Quantitative details of the mixed-methods research.

PROJECTIVE ASSESSMENT: THE LÜSCHER TEST ⁴⁵³								
	Black	Blue	Green	Violet	Grey	Red	Yellow	Brown
Q6. Distribution by primary colour selection.	2	1	4	6	7	3	5	8
Q7. Distribution by secondary colour selection (scale from 0 to 100).	1 79,5	2 65,32	3 53,71	6 42,36	4 52,73	5 50,73	7 37,22	8 35,99

Table 11: The Lüscher colour test

The Lüscher colour test was introduced without respondents being aware that it was a test, and its purpose was to determine, at a general level, a median psychological profile of the sample. The test comprises two stages:

STAGE 1: Respondents are asked to select, in order of preference, the eight colours that the test entails (those found in the table above). Once a colour is selected, it disappears. The second colour is then selected, and it too disappears, and so on. According to the median, the selection was made in the following order: blue, black, red, green, yellow, violet, grey, brown.

STAGE 2: Respondents are asked to repeat the process. In both cases, the order in which the colours are displayed is random. The order of selection this time was as follows: black, blue, green, red, violet, yellow, brown.

THE RESULTS OF THE TEST: Colours play a major role in the psychology developed by Sigmund Freud, who attributed them to specific emotional states. Prof. Dr. Max Lüscher also drew on the fundamental psychological structures in his colour test, structures that the founder of analytical psychology, Carl G. Jung, went on to study

⁴⁵³ A psychological test devised by the Swiss psychologist Max Lüscher in 1947; he believed that the sensory perception of colour was objective and universally shared by all, and that, because colour selections are guided in an unconscious manner, they reveal the person as they truly are, not as they perceive themselves or would wish to be perceived.

further.⁴⁵⁴ Because the language of colours belongs to the unconscious, their selection is connected to the emotions associated with them. Lüscher's hypothesis was that, through the selection of colours, parts of the subconscious of which we are not consciously aware come to light. Correlating the studies of Freud, Lüscher, and Jung, it is evident that there is a correlation between the structures of the psyche and artistic expression (as an expression of the *self*)

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE LÜSCHER TEST		
Basic colours	Blue	Represents emotional depth. Its affective aspects are calm, contentment, tenderness, love, and affection.
	Green	Is associated with will, passivity, the defensive and reserved side, and possessiveness. Its affective aspects are persistence, self-assertion, stubbornness, and self-esteem.
	Red	Is the colour of force and action. It is also associated with aggressiveness, autonomy, and competitiveness. Its affective aspects are desire, dominance, and sexuality.
	Yellow	Represents spontaneity, and to it are attributed eccentricity, projection, and inquiry. Its affective aspects are variability, expectation, originality, and enthusiasm.
Auxiliary colours	Violet	Is linked to identity and to the persistent need to seek reality in everything that is thought and desired.
	Brown	Refers to the bodily senses, the state of the body. It also denotes rigour and strictness.
	Grey	Represents noninvolvement, concealment, passivity, the absence of desire.
	Black	Black represents the absolute boundary beyond which life ceases, and thus expresses the idea of nothingness, of disappearance. Black is negation, self-sufficiency. It denotes egocentrism, hidden emotions, fear of the unknown, the fear of being emotionally wounded. If black is selected in the first half of the test, and especially in the first three positions, it denotes compensatory behaviour. Whoever selects black in the first position is predisposed to swift actions and may abandon everything if they sense that nothing is as they believe it should be. The personality of the person who selects black is in continual revolt against fate, or at least against their own destiny. With black in second place, the individual is willing to give up anything else on condition of obtaining what is represented by the colour they selected first. If, for example, red is the first choice and black the second, then everything that red represents is exaggerated, as a compensatory effect for everything that is lacking. If blue precedes black, then calm and affection are expected to restore the disrupted harmony and the emotional unrest. ⁴⁵⁵

Table 12: The interpretation of the Lüscher test

Given that black was the second choice in the first stage and, respectively, the first in the second stage of the test, followed by the colours blue, green, and red, the collective

⁴⁵⁴ Notable in this respect are Jung's studies on the relationship between the mandala and art therapy. Jung found the mandala across all the cultures of the world and attached particular importance to those that appear in art, since, in his view, these were "visible declarations" of the psychic structure (see: Maralynn Hagood Slegelis, "A study of Jung's mandala and its relationship to art psychotherapy", in *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, vol. 14, Pergamon Journals Ltd., 1987, pp. 301–311.)

⁴⁵⁵ Max Lüscher, "The Lüscher Color Test", (trans. Ian A. Scott), Simon and Schuster, New York, USA, 1971, pp. 79–80

personality⁴⁵⁶ may be interpreted as follows: those who selected this order offer and seek self-sacrifice and mutual trust. They tend to believe firmly that their principles are well founded and imperative. They insist that their hopes and ideas are realistic, and when these are violated they feel wounded and seek affection, calm, and encouragement. Characterized by a high degree of sensitivity and egocentrism, they find situations that do not conform to their value system disagreeable, and so they avoid them. They have a permanent need to ally themselves with other people whose value system resembles their own. As perfectionists, they seek to assert themselves through recognition.

The next dimension of the questionnaire (Q8) addressed the gap between present and past perception with regard to various aspects relating to the colour black, on a scale from 0 to 5.⁴⁵⁷ The objective of this question was to track whether and how perception changes over time. Graphically, the test is represented in Fig. 147.

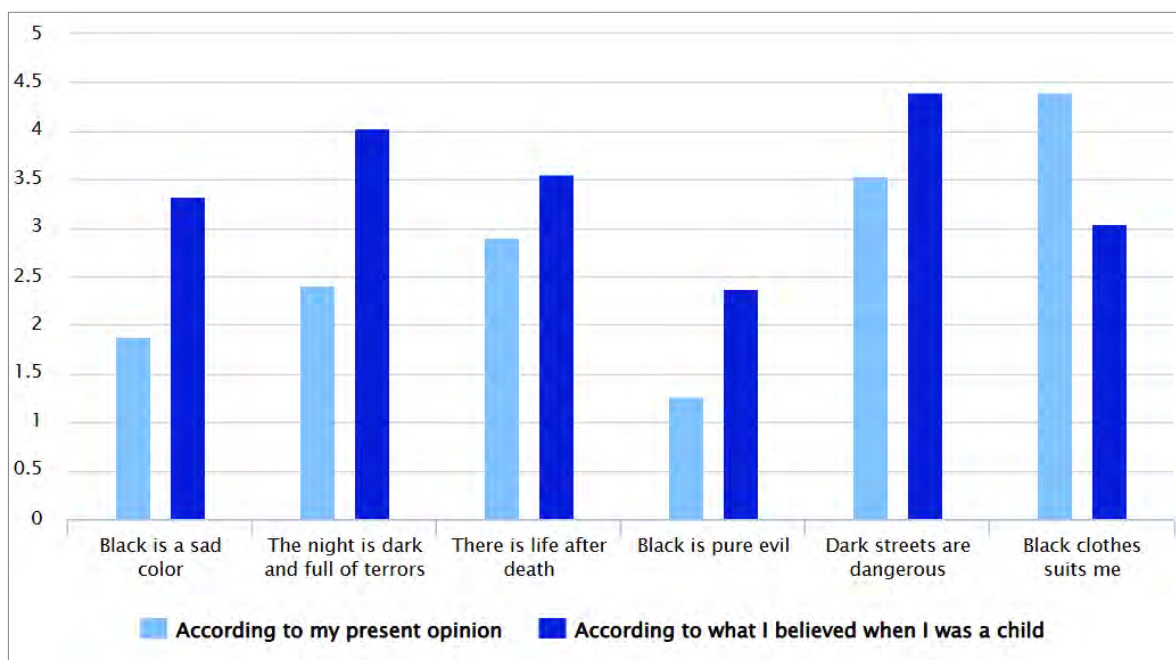


Fig. 147: GAP analysis. The horizontal axis shows the statements from the test, and the vertical axis the scale from 0 to 5.

As can be observed, the cumulative gap is approximately 1.5 points. In the case of the statements that addressed an association of black with negative percepts⁴⁵⁸ (sadness, fear,

⁴⁵⁶ Reference can be made strictly to the median of the sample.

⁴⁵⁷ The *GAP analysis*, or *gap analysis*, is defined as an assessment of the differences between two variables belonging to the same group.

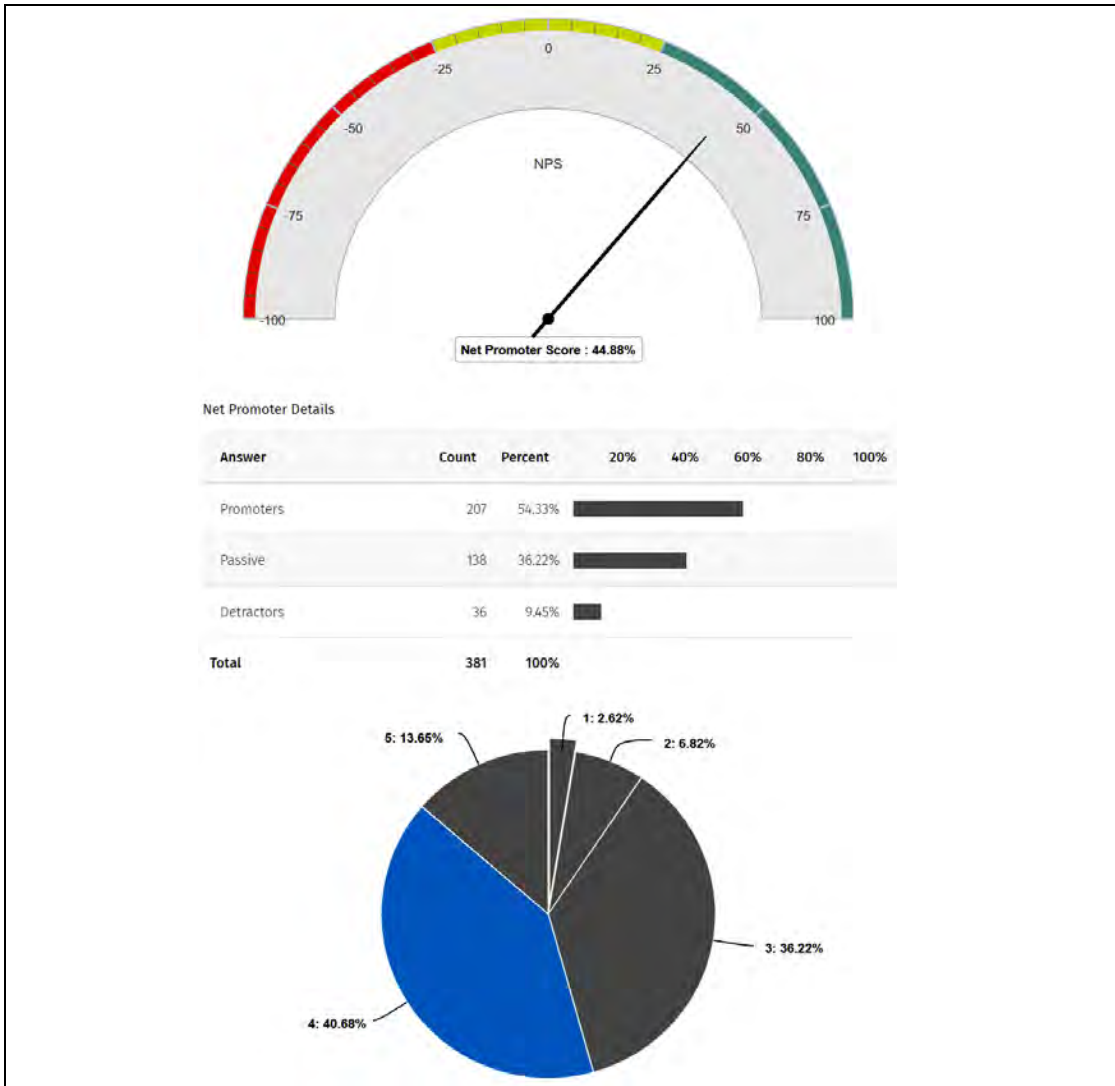
⁴⁵⁸ Statements 1, 2, 4, and 5.

malice, danger), the gaps are more pronounced (mean: 1.26), which can be interpreted as the primary perception (the one from childhood, instilled) changing over time on the basis of one's own experiences. More precisely, the degree to which black is associated with a negative connotation decreases over time. The smallest gap (0.64) was observed in the case of the statement concerning the existence of an afterlife. The final statement, the one concerning black-coloured clothing, was introduced in order to verify, through its own logic, the validity of the preceding statements.

The next two questions of the questionnaire addressed how black is perceived in abstract contemporary art (Q9/Fig. 148) and what connotations respondents attribute to the colour black (Q10/Fig...).

THE AESTHETIC APPRECIATION OF THE COLOUR BLACK IN ART

(1 – MINIMUM, 5 – MAXIMUM)



Respondents were asked to assess, on a scale from 1 to 5, the aesthetic dimension of the colour black in art. The figure 1 was assigned to a wholly negative appreciation, the figure 2 to a negative appreciation, the figure 3 to a neutral appreciation, the figure 4 to a positive appreciation, and the figure 5 to a wholly positive appreciation. During the processing of the data, variables 1 and 2 were combined and correlated with a negative appreciation (detractors), variable 3 with a neutral appreciation (passive), and the variables corresponding to the figures 4 and 5 with a positive appreciation. The Net Promoter Score graph thus resulted. The conclusion is that the average appreciation is a positive one.

Fig. 148: Result of the mixed-methods research – The aesthetic appreciation of the colour black in art.

CONNOTATIONS ATTRIBUTED TO THE COLOUR BLACK

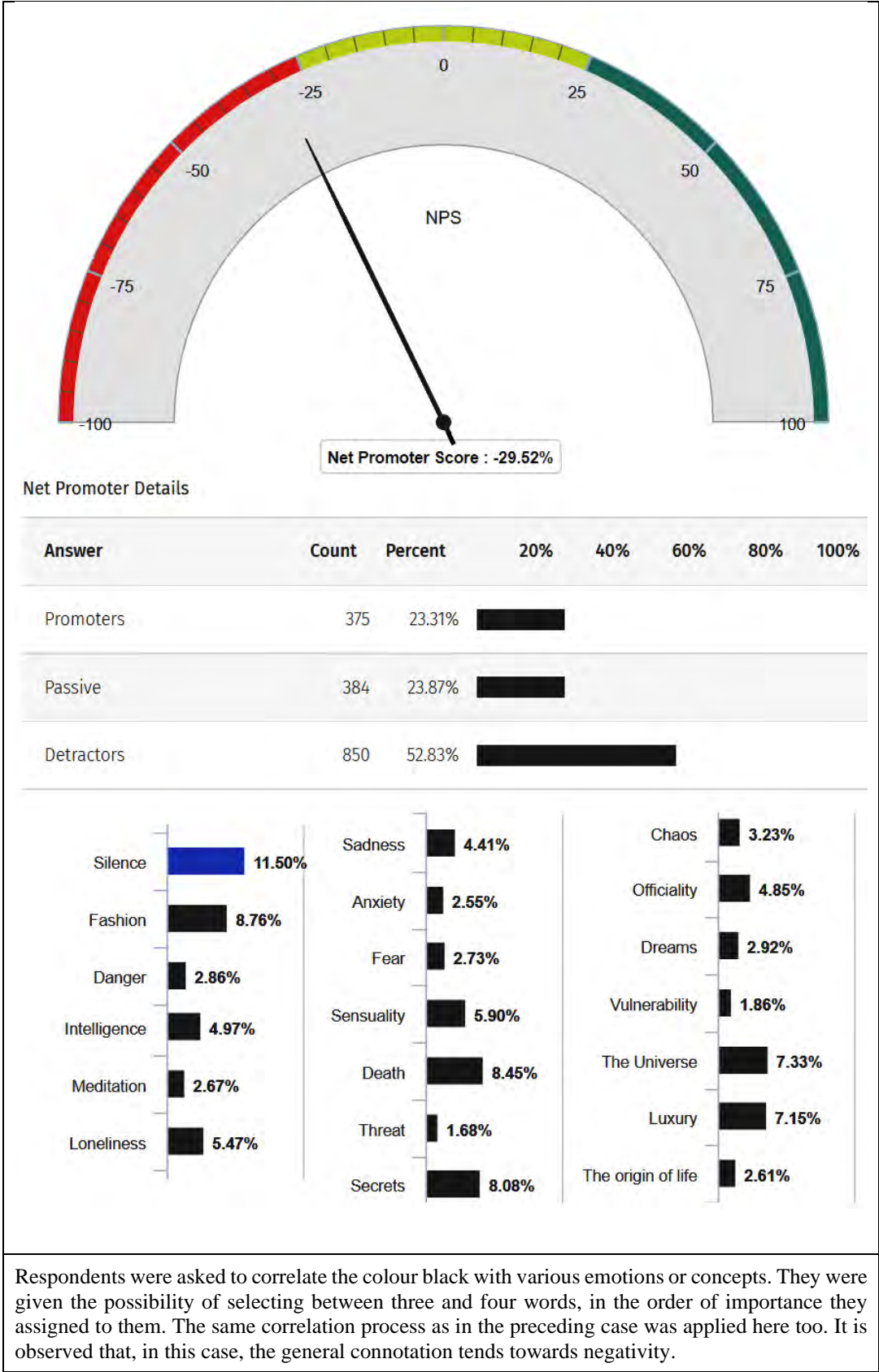


Fig. 149: Result of the mixed-methods research – Connotations attributed to the colour black.

Chapter 7. Applied (Practice-Based) Research – A Personal Artistic Project

7.1. Preliminary Theoretical Considerations

In the preceding chapters, my own research fell within what the specialist literature on artistic research terms “*research about art*”,^{459, 460, 461} yet, according to those same sources, this also includes *research through and for art*, which may take the form of exhibitions, workshops, or various artistic events that, even when they do not assume the “classical” form of scientific research projects, are nonetheless projects entailing a process of reflection akin to the scientific one – including the artist's reflection on the materials with which he works, that is, the experiments and activities he carries out within the artistic process. In research through and about art, the chain of thought – theme – hypothesis – method – results – is part of the artistic product, its aim being not verbal communication but visual, iconic, or imagistic communication.

The indicators specific to the field – the number of reviews and critical notices, the number of visitors, the standing of the gallery in which the exhibition is held, and so on – may offer indications as to the quality of the artistic act in question.⁴⁶² Thus, according to the specialist literature, the solo exhibition takes the form of an applied undertaking, in the sense of an experiment, whose conclusions make a considerable personal contribution to the theme under investigation, in part through corroboration with the results of the other research methods.

This chapter, in presenting research through and for art, completes the research undertaking of the present doctoral thesis, which addresses the use of black in the work of art through reference to my own personality. The hypothesis, as noted in the “*Introduction*”, posits the investigation of a possible, hypothetical cause-and-effect link between the

⁴⁵⁹ Sir Frayling, John Christopher. "Research in Art and Design", in *Royal College of Art Research Papers*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1993/1994, Royal College of Art, United Kingdom, 1993, pp. 1–5.

⁴⁶⁰ Mariana Cosumov, "*Teoria și metodologia cercetărilor științifice în educația artistică*", Alecu Russo State University Press, Bălți, Republic of Moldova, 2020, p. 24

⁴⁶¹ Darren Newbury, "Viewpoint: Knowledge and Research in art and design", in *Design Studies*, Elsevier Science Ltd, no. 17, 1996, pp. 215–219

⁴⁶² University of Art and Design of Cluj-Napoca, "Planului strategic 2016-2020", doc. *Strategia și politica de cercetare și creație artistică*, p. 11.

subconscious/conscious and the predominance of the colour black in my own artistic expression.

7.2. The Importance of the Concept of “*Physical Reality*” in the Context of the Applied Research Project

Since the objective of the theme called for the analysis of certain interdisciplinary concepts, that of *physical reality* was also taken into account.⁴⁶³ This is a reflection of the individual state, of the *self*, of the state of our consciousness, of our ideas, thoughts, and so on. Physical reality is strictly personal; it is a concept of one's own, which we experience from a particular perspective. Even so, the way in which we choose to analyse the particular, individual dimension of physical experience is as though we were in a “realm” of time and space. Although the time–space dimension is illusory, we do not register its effect, its presence, in our lives as physical beings. We are never, in truth, in a particular place called physical reality; everything takes place within our consciousness, and it is experience that makes this reality appear to lie outside us.

Accordingly, physical reality must be seen and experienced in the same way as one's own reflection in a mirror, when we know that we are not on the other side of the mirror, and we know, too, that if we wish to change the reflection in the mirror we cannot do so by manipulating the mirror itself, but must instead change ourselves. Physical reality, then, being a reflection, being “a chamber of mirrors”, works in much the same way: any change we wish to make in the so-called external physical reality must begin within us, within the interior of our own reality. This explains why each of us perceives reality differently and ascribes different values to it, according to what our consciousness validates as being reality.

On a far broader and more subjective level, one's own experiences, curiosity, investigation, and the selectivity involved in the personal interpretation of events shape reality as it is seen by a single person, and it is for this reason termed *phenomenological*. While this form of reality might be shared with others, at times it may be so unique to the self that it is never experienced or understood by anyone else.

In conclusion, there is no reality beyond personal perceptions or convictions; yet the sharing of these personal perceptions and convictions, in whatever form, leads invariably to knowledge. Accordingly, the concepts of the applied undertaking may be interpreted as considerations belonging to physical reality which, as has been noted, make a considerable

⁴⁶³ Cf. the philosophy of perception (Kant, Thomas Kuhn, Peter L. Berger et al.)

personal contribution (at the very least through corroboration with the results of the other research methods) to the theme under investigation.



Fig. 150: The poster for the solo exhibition – Beyond Black

7.3. A Personal Artistic Project – The Doctoral Exhibition “*Dincolo de negru*”

The applied undertaking, falling within research *through and for art*, took concrete form in the solo/doctoral exhibition *Dincolo de Negru*, held at the “*Helios*” Art Gallery of the Union of Visual Artists of Romania – Timișoara branch, from 14 to 28 August 2021. The role of curator fell to the supervisor of the present doctoral thesis, Professor Stelian Acea (Dr habil.), while the critical text and opening address were delivered by the art critic Associate Professor Gabriel Kelemen (PhD). The exhibition served as an argumentative support for the theme under investigation, taking its place within a process of self-referential and metaphysical interrogation of the valences of the colour black. On the hanging wall one could note the presence of several forms of artistic expression – photography, photo collage and digital image processing, painting, and generative art – the conceptual congruence being provided by the intersection of these various artistic media.

7.3.1. The Objectives of the Research Project

1. To complement the types of research undertaken in the preceding chapters with a practical, applied one.
2. To contribute to the body of knowledge pertaining to the field under investigation, through the conceptual framing given to the artistic project, some of the novel techniques employed, and the author's own artistic expression in itself.
3. To interrogate the self-referential component, one's own consciousness, and to express it through the work of art.
4. The possibility of extrapolating the artistic concept along two axes: one grounded in the relationship between *self-reference and reference*, and another with the function of *self-knowledge and knowledge*, without ruling out the possibility that, through correlation, a *conceptual network* might result.
5. To highlight my own trajectory of ideas, with the aim of verifying the extent to which it intersects with the conclusions yielded by the research methods employed in the preceding chapters.
6. Since contemporary art is no longer strictly confined to a single medium in its creative process, the intention was to test the use of different media of artistic

expression (photographic art, painting and digital art, generative art) in order thereby to substantiate the conceptual basis of the research undertaking.

7. To experiment with the way in which the “*mattest*” black⁴⁶⁴ available on the market (Black 3.0, released in 2021) affects the perception of the hues of some of the oil paints mentioned in the section “*Black Pigments Used in Painting and Graphic Art*”, namely: ivory black, mars black, and lamp black.
8. To interconnect the concepts assigned to the bodies of works within a general, fluid, and coherent narrative, given that the works on display were produced through different techniques.
9. The hanging of the works in the exhibition space sought to suggest the narrative of the overall artistic concept, but also to invite visitors towards reflection and, by the same token, self-reflection.
10. To observe the referential conceptual dimension (described above). This objective formed the basis for devising the indicators specific to the field.

7.3.2. The Conceptual Trajectory of Ideas

To begin with, a diagram is presented (Diagram 4: The basis of the applied research.) that seeks to illustrate my own view, a hypothesis concerning the interconnection of the psychological and social (self-referential) elements that lead to artistic expression. This

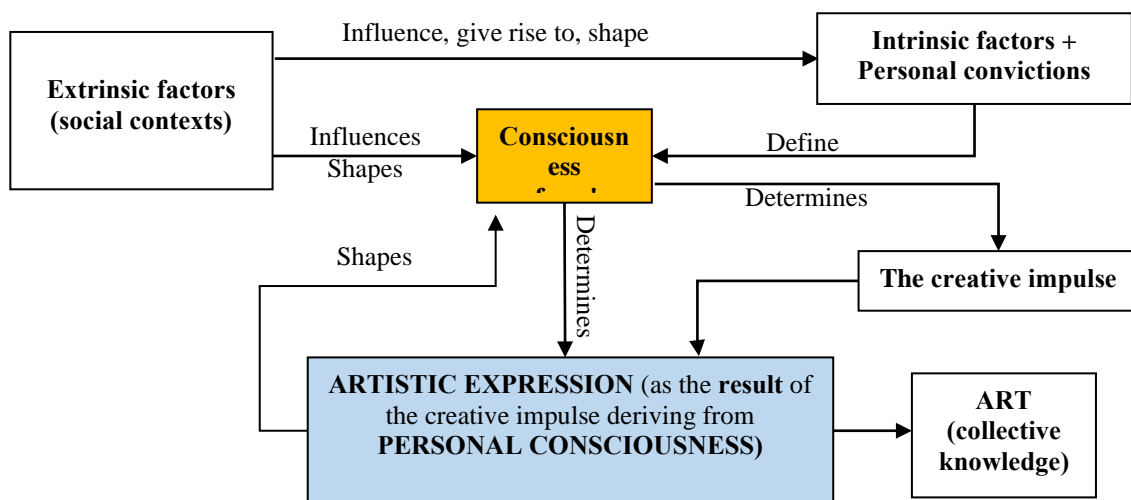


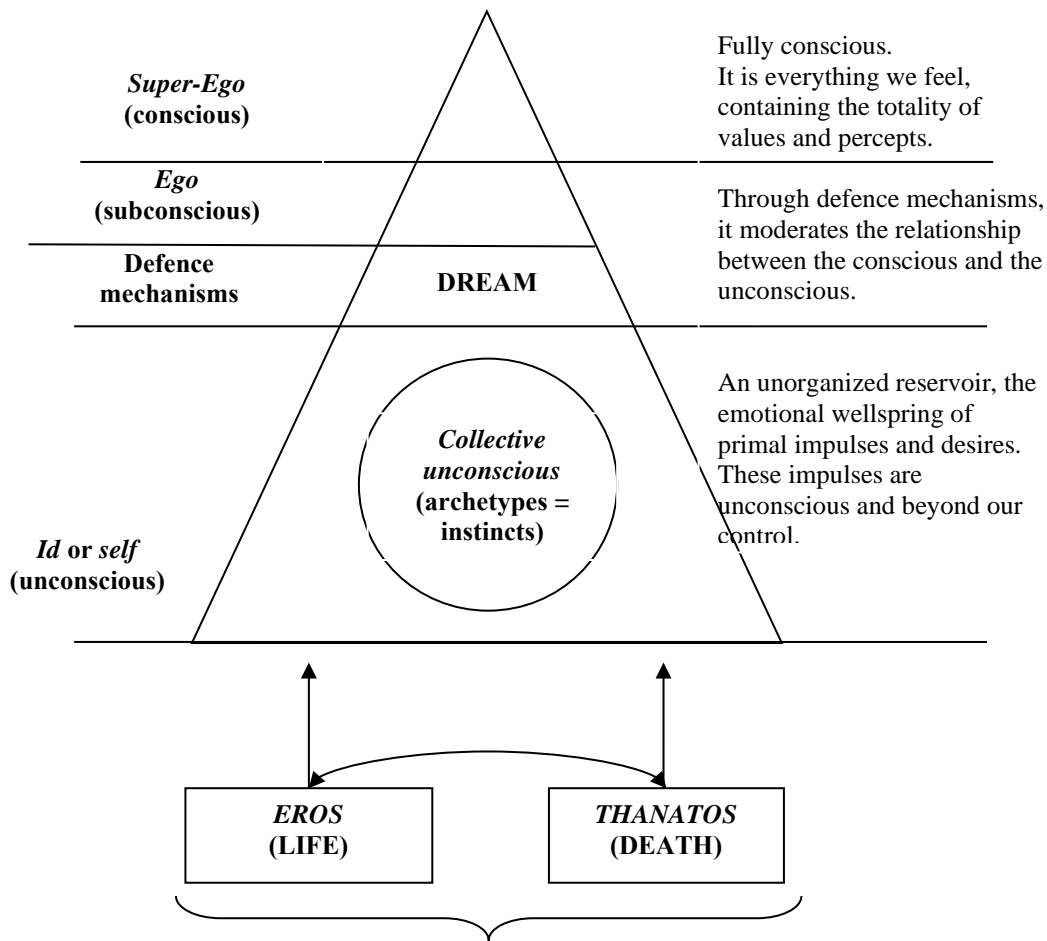
Diagram 4: The basis of the applied research.

⁴⁶⁴ According to the manufacturer.

expression derives from the artist's consciousness and is shaped by extrinsic and intrinsic factors.

If artistic expression is, by definition, subjective, its result, the work of art, becomes a component part of the collective cultural heritage, of collective knowledge. In the present case, we are speaking of the cause-and-effect relationship between the subconscious/conscious and the predominance of the colour black in artistic expression.

The starting point was the agencies of the human psyche: the *self* (the conscious), the *Ego* (the subconscious), and the *Super-Ego* (the unconscious), in accordance with the psychoanalytic theory developed by Sigmund Freud. This theory was interpreted in comparison with the psychoanalytic theory of Carl Jung in the subchapter "*Black in Psychoanalysis: Nonmanifestation, the Subconscious, Melancholy*". In order to reach the underlying mechanisms of the self-referential conceptuality, it was deemed useful to undertake an analysis of my own psyche, an analysis presented in extenso in the subchapter "*Expert Interview: Psychotherapist Alina Anghel*" – Diagram 5.



The two fundamental drives that filter all the information we come into contact with and that is stored in the *unconscious* (according to Freud).

Diagram 5: The three agencies of the human psyche, together with the two fundamental drives. The author's own work, after the expert interview.

ation
 they contain is unique. The *self-referential conceptuality* assumed and attributed to the works created arose from the intersection of the conscious, the subconscious, and the unconscious. Although we have no control over the unconscious, it being an unorganized reservoir, the emotional wellspring of impulses, this structure of the human psyche, precisely by its nature, reflects upwards onto the structure above it, the subconscious. The subconscious, in turn, through its defence mechanisms,⁴⁶⁵ permits, or does not permit, the bringing into awareness of the information that the unconscious tends to externalize through impulses in order for it to be made manifest. What lends the subconscious such particular importance is the fact that, although it has the power to transform information arising from

⁴⁶⁵ The defence mechanisms identified by Freud are: denial, fantasy, compensation, projection, rationalization, regression, repression, and sublimation

the unconscious into a conscious thought, it does not allow every thought to materialize. This happens because the subconscious is governed by the moral laws of the world, whatever their source may be.

The Ego operates according to the reality principle; that is, it attempts to satisfy the impulses arising from the unconscious in realistic ways that, in the long run, bring benefit rather than pain. At the same time, Freud acknowledges that, as the Ego seeks to mediate between the unconscious and the conscious, it is often obliged to cloak the commands of the unconscious in its own preconscious rationalizations, to take account of reality, even when the id has remained rigid and unyielding. The reality principle by which the ego operates is a regulatory mechanism that allows the individual to defer immediate gratification and to function effectively in the real world.

The Ego is thus the organized part of the personality structure, encompassing defensive, perceptual, intellectual-cognitive, and executive functions. Awareness resides in the ego, although not all of the ego's operations are conscious. The *Ego* helps us to organize our thoughts and to make sense of them and of the world around us, being that part of the *Id* that has been modified by the direct influence of the external world. The *Ego* represents what may be called reason and common sense, in contrast to the *Id*, which contains drives that do not correspond to moral reality. Its task is to find a balance between the primitive drives and reality, thereby satisfying both the unconscious and the conscious. Its chief concern is the safety of the individual, and it permits the expression of some of the desires of the *Id*, but only when the consequences of those actions are marginal.

But the *Super-ego* constantly monitors every move of the *Ego* and punishes it with feelings of guilt, anxiety, and inferiority. To overcome this, the ego employs *defence mechanisms*. Defence mechanisms do not operate directly or consciously. They reduce tension by masking our impulses, which are threatening. Defence mechanisms are often used by the *Ego* when the behaviour of the *Id* comes into conflict with collective reality.

Further on, the second part of the trajectory of ideas concerns the construction of my own visual discourse. Its importance is determined by two essential factors: the result of self-reflection, expressed through art (without excluding self-referential conceptuality), and the possible correlations with the conclusions of the other research methods.

As may be observed in Diagram 6, self-referential conceptuality (which itself derives from feelings, the past, perception, and so forth) leads, on the one hand, invariably to self-knowledge. Even though the axis *self-referential conceptuality – self-knowledge* is

purely subjective, belonging to the artist, it is not self-contained (subjective for the artist, objective for the viewer). This phenomenon is due to the fact that the *work of art*, as soon as it is exhibited to the public, changes its conceptuality, in the sense that the viewer may confer upon it a different one, one with which he identifies. Thus, *self-referential conceptuality* is transformed, becoming *referential conceptuality*, which is characterized by generalization (objective for the artist, subjective for the viewer).

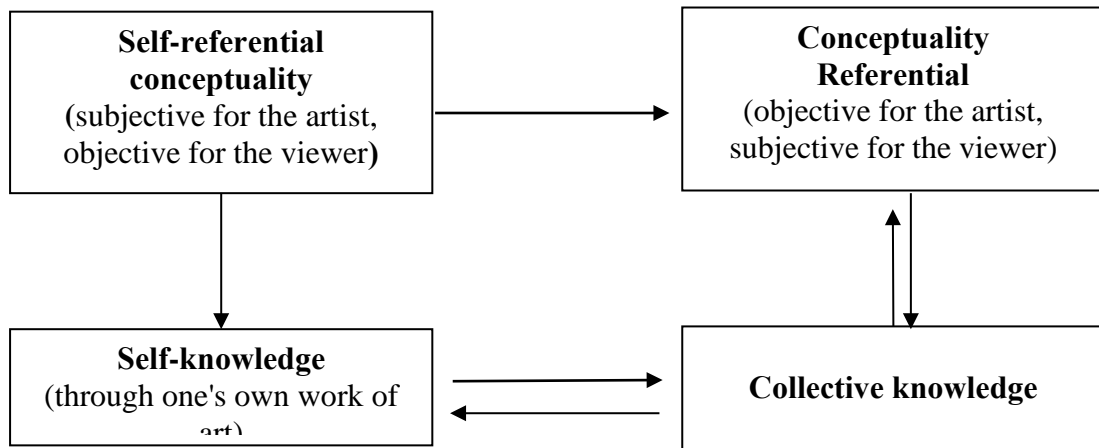


Diagram 6: The construction of my own visual discourse

It is interesting that *self-knowledge* – which, although it derives from *self-referential conceptuality* (the artist comes to know himself through the conceptuality attributed to his works, a stage of transcendence, of the *nigredo* phase) – stands in a bilateral relationship with *collective knowledge* (what is known about it).

It should also be emphasized that *self-knowledge* is closely bound up with the process of *self-acceptance* – which may lead to that "liberating role", as was shown in the case study "*Black and the Dialogue Between Media: Petru Lucaci*".

In conclusion, my own conceptuality culminates in three distinct yet interconnected directions: a) first, it may lead to self-knowledge; b) second, it contributes to collective knowledge; c) and third, it may contribute to referential conceptuality.

7.3.3. The Conceptual Trajectory

The analysis and correlation of the information obtained through the research methods applied earlier, together with the relating of that information to my own artistic expression, formed the basis for elaborating the concepts that took material shape in the forty-four works of art shown in the exhibition "*Dincolo de Negru*". The transposition of feelings, impulses, and ideas, anchored in my own personality, was realized through the process of creation. In practical terms, I sought to express, through an artistic idiom, a part of what I am and what I feel, by testing the metaphysics of the colour black. The conceptual content of the works on the gallery walls, being a purely subjective reflection, is to be interpreted as an extension of *physical/subjective reality*, a reality proper to the researcher, the artist.

The cyclicity that defines this conceptual content is not conferred by works produced through a single technique, but by series or groupings produced through several means of visual-arts expression. The fact that the symbolism of black has diversified over time, together with my wish that the applied project should bear the characteristics of the new media and of interdisciplinarity, were the elements that led to the choice of working with varied means of expression. Although each series of works has its own conceptual content, following the general narrative thread, that content shifts and rounds itself out, allowing for a new interpretation, one different from that of its component parts.

The concept of cyclicity and that of universality are two of the fundamental driving forces of this creative project, thereby continuing and complementing the results of the methods of scientific research addressed in the preceding chapters. The concept of the whole has no defined beginning or end; it refers to the immutable *circle* derived from the *primordial black point*, and to the effects this point creates. If the *origin* is interpreted as a *point of departure* at the level of the macrocosm, then the circle, within the conceptual framework of this personal project, is an expansion of the point, represented as a manifestation of the material (*existence as being*) and of the immaterial (*memory and time*). This extrapolation is rendered through artistic expression, its motivation being self-referential, a microcosm – *personal consciousness*.

The circle, through its continuity, is also the symbol of time, a recurring theme in my own series of works. Taking cultural anthropology into account, it likewise refers to the *rites of passage*⁴⁶⁶: birth and death (the beginning and the end, light and darkness, white and

⁴⁶⁶ A concept introduced by Arnold van Gennep (1873–1957), the first anthropologist to study the significance of ceremonies relating to the transitional stages of human life.

black, purity and sin), which are natural phenomena, whereas marriage, for example, is a social phenomenon. A parallel thus takes shape between the cyclicity of time and the succession suggested by the rites of passage. Although this interpretation is strictly subjective, like *physical reality* itself, its essence also defines universal existence.

The circle also symbolizes a "*limit beyond which one cannot pass*",⁴⁶⁷ suggesting both the natural course of all the elements within the sphere of the material and the delimitation of the immaterial (one cannot know what lies outside the circle, the projection of the sphere). Both interpretations are present in the concept of the applied project: if the material sphere is represented by my own existence, including the accumulation of the experiences and interactions I have lived through, then the sphere of the immaterial is bound up with perception, my own consciousness not existing outside the area of the circle constituted by knowledge and self-knowledge.

The square, present also in the format of the works, is enclosed within the imaginary circle created by the exhibition space, thereby referring to the *mandala*, a spiritual journey proceeding from the exterior towards the interior, passing through various stages (*layers*), in accordance with ancient Eastern beliefs. This passage towards *nirvana*, from the square towards the circle, symbolizes the metaphysical passage from Earth to Heaven, a course leading from the material towards the immaterial.⁴⁶⁸

In Fig. 151, the plan of the "Helios" Gallery space is set out schematically, with photographs of the works added as they were displayed in the personal exhibition; this plan serves as a point of reference.

⁴⁶⁷ Jean Chevalier; Alain Gheerbrant, "*Dictionar de Simboluri. Mituri, Vise, Obiceiuri, Gesturi, Forme, Figuri, Culori, Numere*", Polirom, Iași, p. 224

⁴⁶⁸ For example, the black cube of the Ka'ba, at Mecca, is built at the centre of a circular white space.

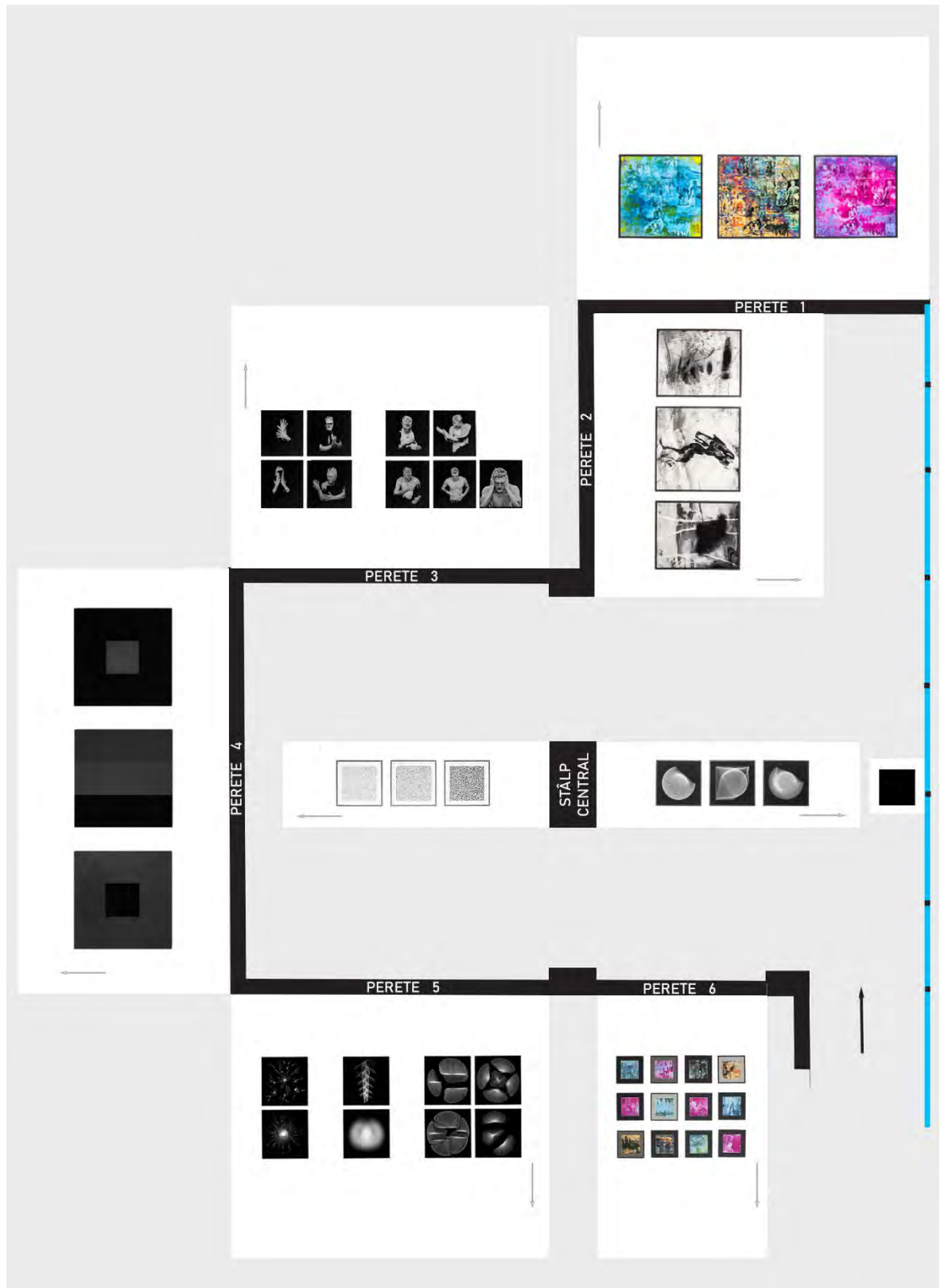


Fig. 151: Architectural plan of the "Helios" Gallery – Union of Visual Artists of Romania, Timișoara branch, together with the works displayed in the personal exhibition. Wall 1: the photographic series "The Memory of Time I"; Wall 2: the photo collage series "Memory and the Storeys of the Imaginary"; Wall 3: the photographic series "Genesis"; Wall 4: painting – "Black on Black"; Wall 5, the front and rear of the central column: generative art – "Between Order and Chaos"; Wall 6: the photographic series "The Memory of Time

What follows are remarks on the exhibition by the art critic, Associate Professor Dr Gabriel Kelemen:

"The doctoral exhibition of the artist Atila Gomboş, a doctoral candidate at the Faculty of Arts and Design in Timişoara, supervised by the distinguished Professor Stelian Acea, conceived and centred on the unfathomable region of the beginning in a cosmogonic sense, provokes the viewer through its minimalist, abyssal discourse, focused on the metaphysics of vacuity, of the fertile darkness preceding the logos, seen as a generative archetypal matrix, a kind of mysterious materia prima upon which, or out of which, the appearance and construction of the cosmos is manifested in stages.

Thus, the exhibition Dincolo de negru operates with the hermetic symbolism of black, of ancestral darkness, not in its funereal guise but as an implosive, sidereal instance, flirting in a postmodern manner, with nihilistic inflexions, with the quantum void, touching with tact and syncretism upon the origin of the universe alongside the great interrogations of Genesis.

The series of works in black and white is based on photography, generative mathematical algorithms, or photomontage with multiple interventions as a technique, deliberately alternating, within the compositions, glossy black with matt black. The works, grouped in a singular geometry, take the viewer by surprise; the scenographic orchestration, conceived with precision from the vertical to the syncopated rhythm of horizontal serialism, constructs a singular and well-considered hang.

The large-scale works, arranged in a mysterious, airy disposition, invite multiple connections of a transdisciplinary character. The exhibition thus brings to the walls of the Helios Gallery a genuine and promising debut, one that prefigures a prodigious conceptualist trajectory based on photography, though not on photography alone, and on the mysteries of the camera obscura, seen as an intangible primordial receptacle."

7.3.3.1. The Cycle "The Memory of Time I": Photo Collage and Digital Image Processing



Wall 1: the triptych "The Memory of Time I". 3 pieces × 110/110 cm.

The narrative begins, tracing a course of roughly a century, with the photographic series "*The Memory of Time I*", a series composed of three works that refer to my own family tree, collages comprising what has remained in memory after the passing of time. The large, square formats convey, through the very significance of the form, a sense of the durable and the stable.

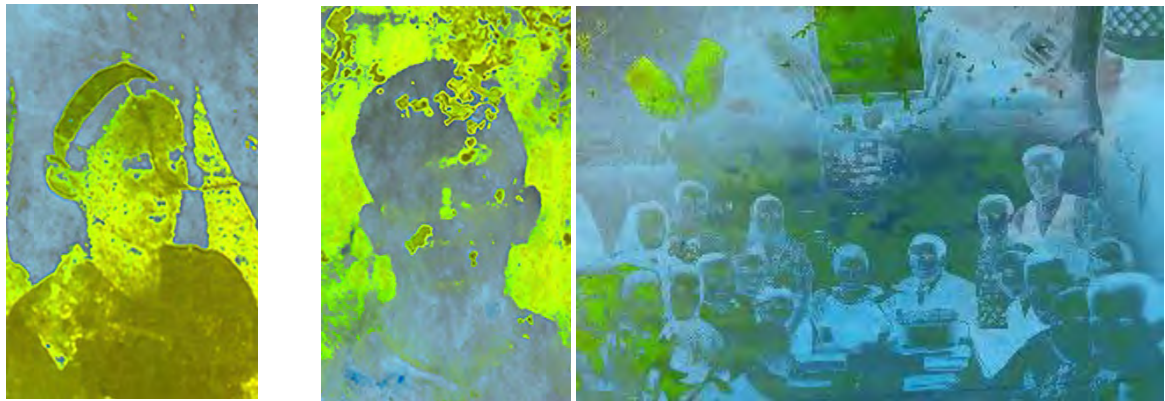
The series "*The Memory of Time I*" is a reference to my own family tree.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁹ In the representation of the genealogical tree, the square is assigned to the male sex and the circle to the female sex. Birth is represented by the year of birth written on the outside of the square or circle, while death is represented by the same geometric figures, with the difference that the year of death is inscribed within them, at the centre.



The work "*The Common Self #1*" from the series "*The Memory of Time I*".

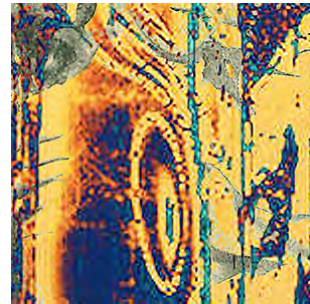
The triptych consists of square works,⁴⁷⁰ of relatively large dimensions, 110 cm × 110 cm.



Details from the work "*The Common Self #2*", series "*The Memory of Time I*".

The technique used to make these works consisted in scanning family photographs taken over the course of the last century, representing moments from within the rites of passage – on a broader scale.

⁴⁷⁰ One of the four fundamental symbols, alongside the circle, the cross, and the centre.



The work "*The Common Self #1*" from the series "*The Memory of Time I*".
Dimensions: 110×110 cm.

Detail.

Then, through successive superimpositions, a new image resulted, one that can be "read" like written lines: from left to right, from top to bottom – this type of arrangement suggesting the passing of time.

Subsequently, three masks of different colours were applied digitally – cyan, magenta, and yellow – with reference to the black obtained by superimposing these colours through subtractive synthesis. In this way an abstraction was produced, intended to break the image down, to fragment it, allowing fragments of the body to be glimpsed, "shadows" of what once existed.



Gomboş Atila, the work "The Common Self #3" from the series "The Memory of Time I". Dimensions: 110×110 cm. Right, detail.

This conceptual content is a reference to memories, to one's personal "shadow". At the same time, by eliminating the recognizable, the aim was to endow the works with the capacity to provoke a sense of "travelling back in time" and of universality. Thus, the series "*The Memory of Time I*" constitutes a stimulus that is perceived subjectively by each viewer, leading to the experience of a particular feeling.

The central image was intended to appear as though made up of nine squares with equal sides, alluding to an end and a new beginning. In the account given by Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, the number nine is "*the last of the numbers belonging to the manifested universe; it opens the phase of transmutations. It expresses the end of a cycle [...]*."⁴⁷¹

The tonal shift along the diagonal formed by the axis descending from upper-left to lower-right is intended to make this series, even though its constituent elements are odd in number, also perceptible as two halves, namely masculine (the first work in the series and half of the second) and feminine (the other half of the second work and the third work).

⁴⁷¹ Jean Chevalier; Alain Gheerbrant, *op. cit.*, p. 628

The art critic Associate Professor Dr Gabriel Kelemen, on the occasion of the opening, remarked of this series:

"...a grid, the elements seem to belong to a Taoist temple, a cyan, magenta, and yellow diagram, passing into one's own memory, into the trembling and unfathomably mysterious tree of one's own family. It is a kaleidoscopic discourse, formed of negative and positive, suggesting to us the profound substance of the image. We may think of Andy Warhol, or of other practices that operate with the deep womb of printed substance."

7.3.3.2. The Photo Collage Series: "Memory and the Storeys of the Imaginary"

Next on the picture rails comes the series "*Memory and the Storeys of the Imaginary*", likewise made up of three large works, in which one glimpses, distorted, fragments of my parents' letters, superimposed on or partly covered by images, a "*palimpsest, in the narrower sense of the family tree, with black appearing in the form of digital dripping...*".⁴⁷²

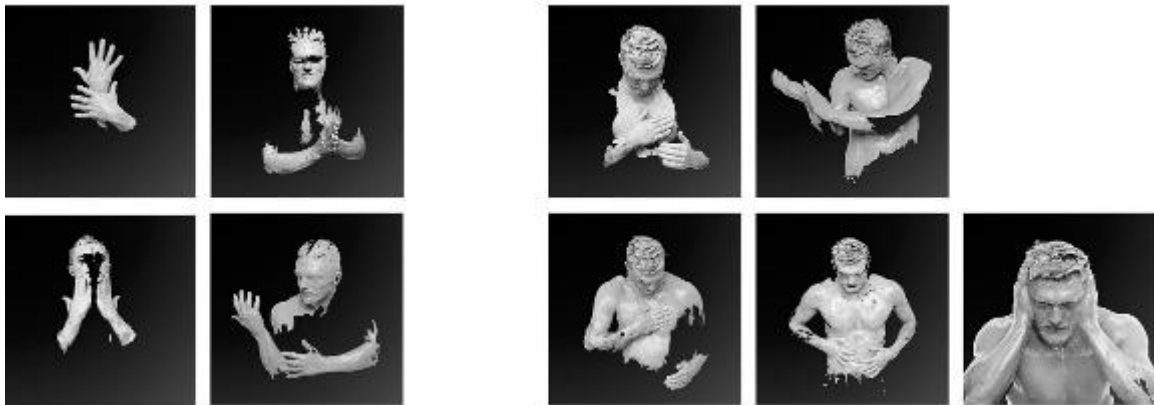


Wall photograph 2: the triptych "*Memory and the Storeys of the Imaginary*". 2 pieces × 80/110, 1 piece × 110/110 cm.

If the first photographic series traced a course of roughly a century, the second confines itself to fleeting moments. This triptych sets out to provoke the imagination, that is, an interpretation shaped by the personality of the viewers. Moreover, the black patches may suggest degradation, or stand as a sign of some disorder or anomaly. The background plane is composed of distortions, precisely in order to raise questions that the sphere of the imaginary is challenged to answer.

⁴⁷² Gombos, Atila. Doctoral exhibition "BEYOND BLACK" hosted by the "HELIOS" Art Gallery. YouTube, 19 Aug. 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yfCQgwCwzEw>.

7.3.3.3. The Cycle "Genesis": Photography



Wall photograph 3: the series "*Genesis*". 9 pieces × 60/60 cm.



Detail from the work "Self-Creation #5" in the series "Genesis".

Next, the photographic series "*Genesis*", composed of nine works, has self-creation as its fundamental meaning. Here the figurative, staged in a certain sequence, intersects with the abstract, which is present beyond what is seen: beginning and end, birth and death, primordial black and light, chaos and order.

Here, abstraction does not exist as a cursory traversal, but appears as something conditioned by contemplation. The process of deconstruction that preceded this series turns into a process of reconstruction; the self-referential component detaches itself from the past, pointing

towards a staging of the construct of consciousness. The black background is a reference to primordial black and to the human subconscious.

"On the wall devoted to 'Genesis' we have that figure photographed in several guises, who creates himself, develops himself; he is the creature, the projection of the divine countenance. So we see how Adam creates himself and appears by developing, becoming ever more concrete, in the form of a metaphor conceived in an extremely interesting way on the pattern of Genesis, which remains a heavy touchstone for many in the realm of complex hermeneutic depth." – Associate Professor Gabriel Kelemen, PhD

7.3.3.4. Painting – "Black on Black"

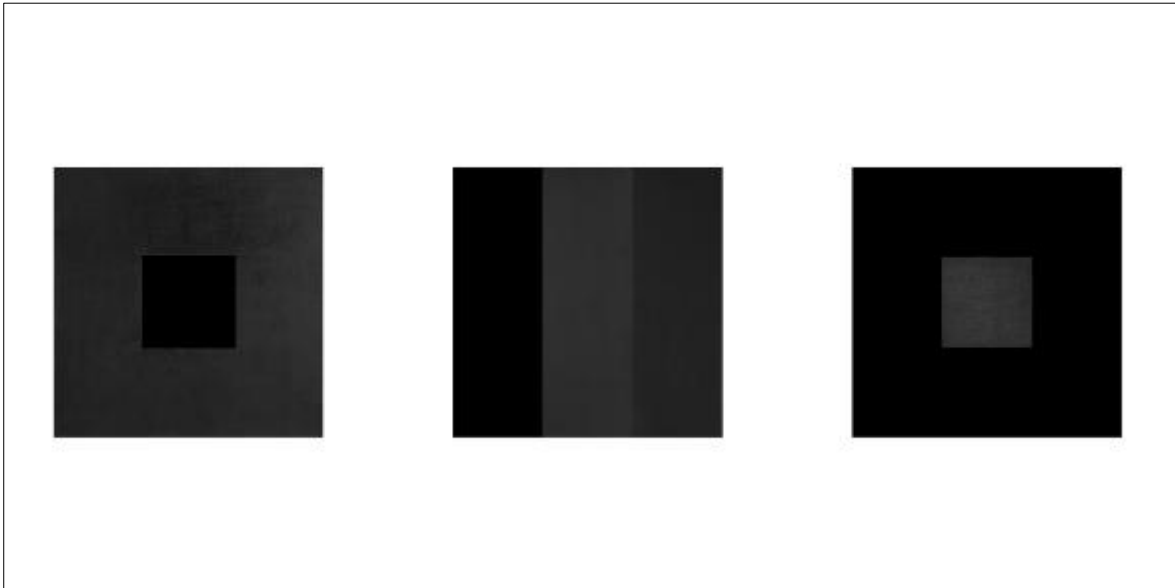
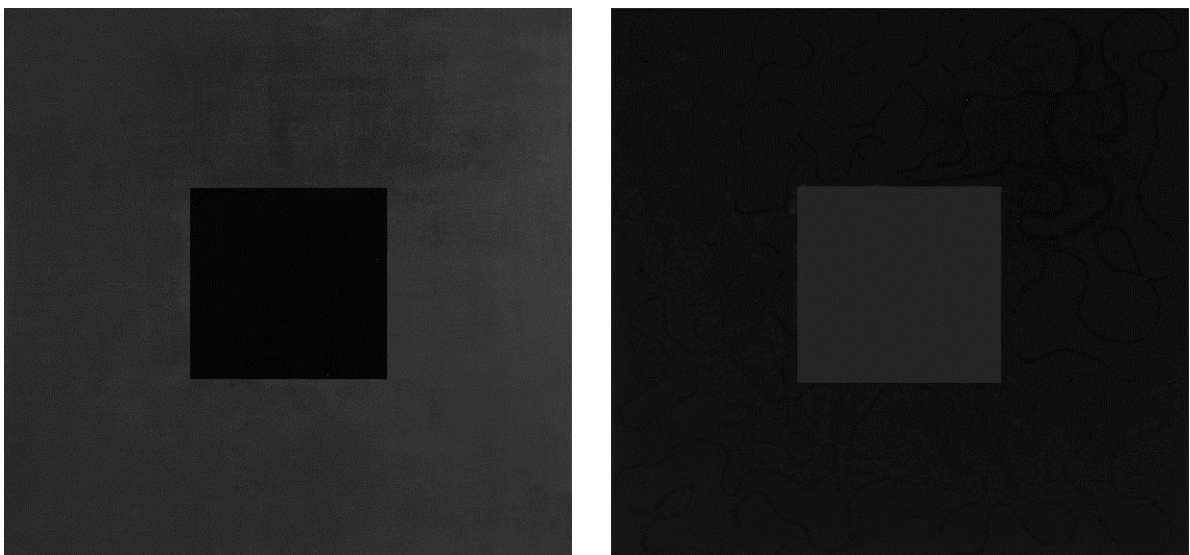


Illustration:... Wall 4: painting – the triptych "Black on Black". 3 pieces × 130/130 cm.

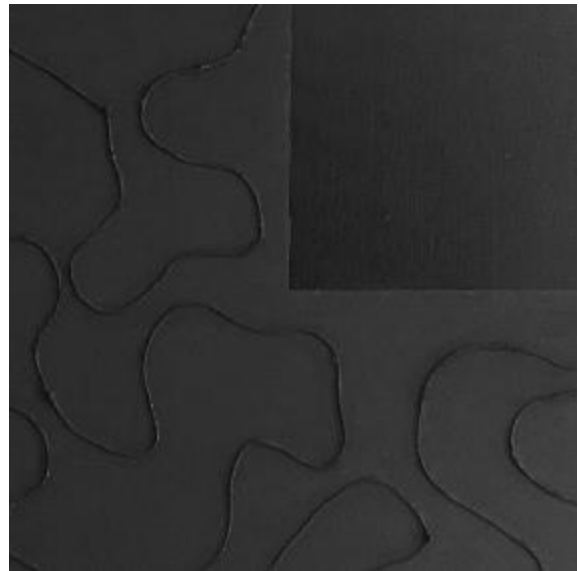
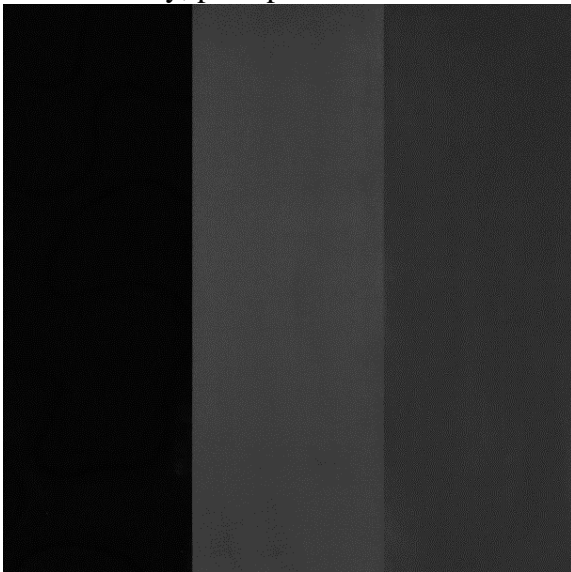
The next sequence involves the presence of three black-on-black paintings, these too square and of large dimensions, deliberately displayed on the most distant wall of the gallery. At both ends of the triptych, central squares stand out, relying on the nature of symbolic perception: truncated pyramids viewed from above.



The effect of the juxtaposition of black is heightened in the central work, where three columns appear, pillars – pilasters, three vertical strips covered with different types of black

(*Black 3.0*, released in 2021 – "the mattest black paint" according to the manufacturer's specifications, Ivory Black and Lamp Black).

Whereas the abstraction of the photographic series "*Genesis*" was a reference, among other things, to primordial, undifferentiated black, the series of paintings "*Black on Black*" has this concept as its very foundation. At the same time, two interpretative paths can be distinguished: the paintings that contain the central square allude precisely to the instances of the human psyche, paraphrasing "*truncated pyramids*" – the unconscious, the basis of the subconscious (without the conscious side appearing, precisely because it has already been transferred to the psyche of the one who looks on from outside), while the central work refers to the sensory, perceptual function.



"... we have other elements of force, extraordinary ones... this triptych, shocking from my point of view, involves the paraphrasing of the truncated pyramid, the perspective that leads from the proximal towards the distant zone; on the other hand there are the bands of black, very interestingly constructed.

Think of Kazimir Malevich, of the Black Square, and of other Suprematist metaphors, which Atila Gomboş surpasses, without remaining beholden to this domain. It is a very interesting, complex discourse, which raises the fundamental question: what lies beyond black?

The central work and a detail from the work "*Black on Black #3*" obtained through **overexposure**, in order to bring out the structure of the area covered with Black 3.0

A vacuum, God, no one, or another black, deeper still, as the adherents of Taoism used to say, the seven kinds of emptiness, the archetypal space as a plea for the black out of which light and the logos then emerge?" (Associate Professor Gabriel Kelemen, PhD)

7.3.3.5. Generative Art – "Between Order and Chaos"

The conceptual content continues its course with the generative-art works, of equal dimensions, conceived and grouped in a manner that conveys the idea that they encompass, at one and the same time, the microcosm and the macrocosm.

The grouping was conceived in the form of a deconstruction, a fragmentation, which migrates towards the central pillar of the hall, so that, on the side opposite the light and facing the black paintings, three further works appear, by contrast, on a white ground; and the networks that compose them allude to the fact that all things are, in one way or another, interconnected, whether we are speaking of our own person or of the whole of humanity.

As a counterpoint, on the front side of the column, the three works, arranged vertically as in a kind of *axis mundi*, refer, paradoxically, to a disturbance of order.

"Continuing along the course, we observe that Atila Gomboş does not stop here; he moves also towards the realm of generative, fractal art. These works are the result of the creative algorithms developed by the artist, which are laid out before us in the form of a visual language." – Associate Professor Gabriel Kelemen, PhD

7.3.3.6. The Photographic Series: "The Memory of Time II"

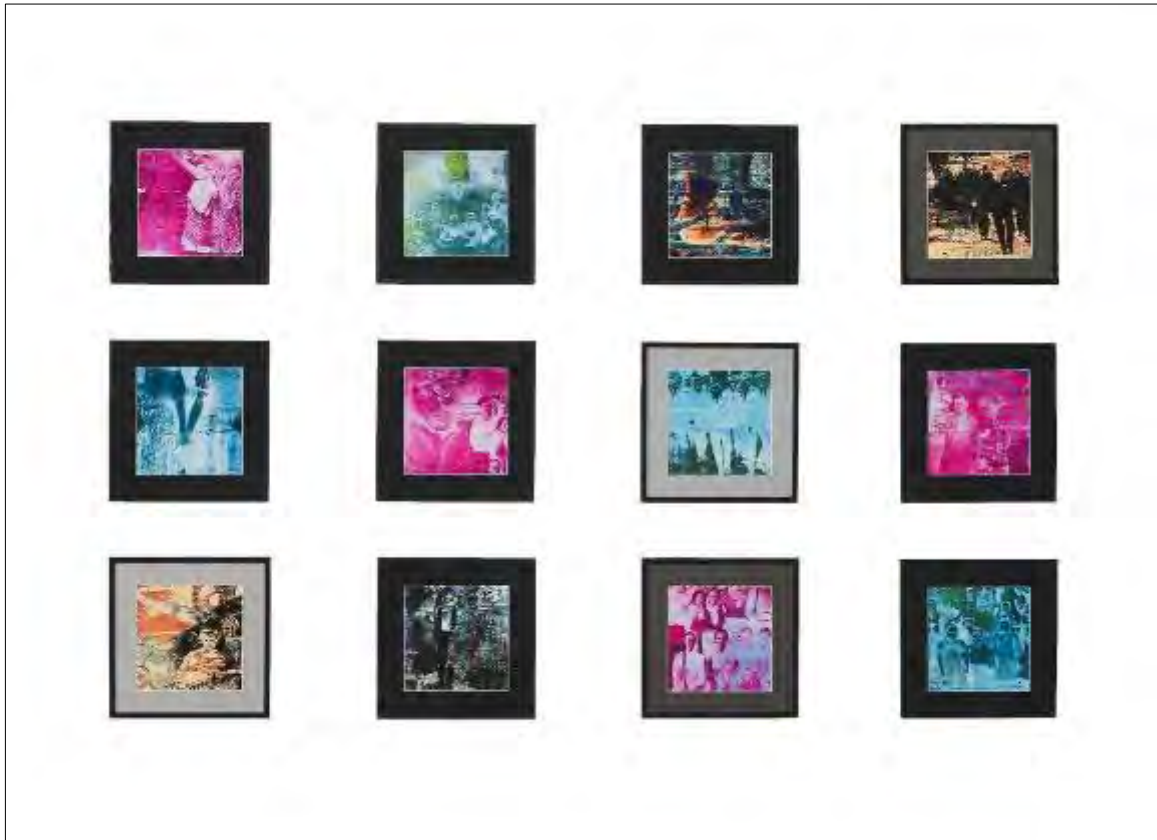


Illustration:... Wall 6: the series "The Memory of Time II". 12 pieces × 35/35 cm.

The grouping of the last twelve works continues fragments of the initial idea, that of the family tree, but is also a reference to black, derived, as already mentioned, from the superimposition of the three dominant colours; thus the cycle relating to the symbolism of the colour black is brought to a close, while the more concrete idea of chromatic composition and decomposition is also emphasized. One may observe that the manner of hanging supports a certain cyclicity, an allusion to the metaphysics of black in art:

"the archetypal space, as a plea for the black, out of which light and the logos then emerge...." (Gabriel Kelemen, PhD)

NOTE: Reproductions of the exhibited works are presented in Appendix 1.

7.3.3.7. Specific Indicators Relating to the Quality of the Artistic Act

A. The exhibition space:

The Helios Art Gallery, the premises of the Timișoara branch of the UAPR.

B. Articles on specialist websites:

- UAP: <https://uap.ro/en/dincolo-de-negru-timisoara/>
- UAPT: <https://uapt.cjtimis.ro/helios/index.htm>
- Faculty of Arts and Design: <https://arte.uvt.ro/cercetare/evenimente/>
- Modernism.ro: <https://www.modernism.ro/2021/08/15/expozitie-atila-gombos-dincolo-de-negru-galeria-de-arta-helios-din-timisoara/>
- Radio Romania Cultural: <https://www.radioromaniacultural.ro/artistul-timisorean-atila-gombos-dincolo-de-negru/>
- Bookhub: <https://bookhub.ro/artistul-timisorean-atila-gombos-dincolo-de-negru/>

C. Reports in the local press:

- Ziuă de Vest: <https://www.ziuaDEVest.ro/dincolo-de-negru-cu-artistul-timisorean-atila-gombos-la-galeria-helios/>
- Banatul Azi: <https://www.banatulazi.ro/artistul-timisorean-atila-gombos-dincolo-de-negru/>
- Orașul Timișoara: <https://orasul-timisoara.ro/local-15772/>

D. Attendance by the public:

Interest in the exhibition was evident from the opening onwards, with teaching staff from the Faculty of Arts and Design in Timișoara, visual artists, colleagues, and other people with interests in the field, and beyond all present.

Chapter 8. Conclusions

8.1. Final Conclusions

The theme of the present doctoral thesis, "*Black: An Aesthetic Dimension in Contemporary Painting and Photography*", proved to be a vast one, and in order to be investigated properly it required the consultation of a relatively extensive specialist literature, given that the publications relating to this field cover only certain aspects of it.

Because a high degree of accuracy was sought in the conclusions reached, the decision was taken to employ several research methods. The intra- and interdisciplinary approach was carried out using both *scientific research methods* (information gathering, the study of documents, observation, theoretical analysis and synthesis, generalization and systematization, theoretical modelling; hermeneutic methods) and *practical, applied methods* – the personal creative project. Following the hermeneutic analysis, the conclusions showed that the shaping of the aesthetic dimension of black was, to a large extent, brought about by the meaning of the works of art. By rendering mystery, ambiguity, drama, pathos, black lent light a *dynamic* quality – a light that, from the standpoint of visual language, was concentrated around, or upon, the centre of interest, whether the source was invisible, beyond the pictorial plane, or visible.

The value and role of black are heightened above all through the study of colour, which brings to the fore, among other things, the optical effects that result from juxtaposing black with other colours. Subsequently, in modern and contemporary art the colour black is, more often than not, the subject of complete abstraction, black in this case taking on a metaphysical role, symbolizing spiritual transcendence. The exploration of black as an artistic medium, from its historical roots to its contemporary resonances, brings out its unrivalled depth and versatility. Every artist, from Malevich's "icons" to the integrative works of Rauschenberg, has used black to move beyond mere chromatic representation, embedding within it layers of philosophy, emotion, and sociopolitical comment. At the same time, artists have invested black not only with aesthetic choices but also with complex psychological narratives, often shaped by personal trauma and personal struggle.

The appeal of black lies in its dual nature. It symbolizes both absence and presence, the void and totality, silence and resonance. This duality is evident in the works of the artists studied. Kandinsky, for instance, drew on the harmonizing force of black, whereas

Soulages explored its luminous possibilities. The psychological dimension of black becomes pronounced when it is viewed through the lens of personal disorders and mental health. For many artists, the colour became a refuge, a means of externalizing inner struggles, a way in which the complexities of the mind were laid bare.

Historical and cultural contexts, interwoven with personal traumas, shaped many artists' attraction to black. Malevich's "Black Square", for example, although a symbol of pure feeling, may also be read as an emblem of existential emptiness, possibly a reflection of the sociopolitical chaos of his time and of his personal disillusionments. Similarly, Rodchenko's Constructivist vision, anchored in the industrial ethos of his age, promoted black as a symbol of modernity and progress.

The Abstract Expressionists, with their emphasis on raw emotion, brought out the emotive potency of black. Whether in Rothko's meditative fields or in Kline's vigorous lines, black became a recurrent theme for introspection, existential anxiety, and, by extension, artistic expression. This emotional interplay was further underscored by Reinhardt's monochromatic explorations and by Rauschenberg's integrative narratives.

The impact of trauma and mental health on artistic expression is likewise to be found in the works of the Abstract Expressionists. Rothko, known for his ethereal fields of colour, struggled with depression, a fact that many art critics regard as having influenced his later works, dominated by darker shades. His works, especially those with vast expanses of black, may be seen as windows onto his psychological state. Likewise, Reinhardt's explorations might be interpreted as an effort to find solace in simplicity, a respite from the noise of the external world and, possibly, from inner turmoil. In the collective case study concerning black in modern and contemporary painting, in the case of the artist Joan Witek, it was concluded that her paintings carry emotional and even spiritual meanings, and, like Stella's early works, Witek's paintings convey a sense of mystery, with black possessing countless tones and meanings. Rendered exclusively in black and white, Witek's compositions reflect on the interplay of proportional masses and forms in their purest form. Movement is manifested here either vertically or horizontally, using the grid as the overall structural backbone.

In the case of low-key photography, the works of such artists as Alex Majoli, Misha Gordin, Juha Arvid Helminen, Bill Hansen, Lee Jeffries, Jürgen Klauke, Thomas Ruff, and Touhami Ennadre, among others, were analysed. Following the comparative synthesis, it was observed that at the intersection of the constituent units of the critical group there are

common themes that may be situated within social, political, or spiritual contexts: human nature, extreme emotions, the mentally alienated, dehumanizing themes, poverty, the theme of death, fiction and reality, transition, armed conflict, cosmogonic and spiritual themes, the afterlife, and so on. Thus, the results of this case study confirmed the findings of the previous case study as well as those of the observational research.

Further, two artists who work exclusively with black, Petru Lucaci and Touhami Ennadre, were analysed by means of individual case studies. In the case study "*Black and the Dialogue Between Media: Petru Lucaci*", the resulting conclusions demonstrate that there is a close link between the subconscious and artistic expression. Anguish, unease, suffering, sadness, obsession, drama, insecurity, and fear are transposed into the work of art. As for the valences of black in the art of Petru Lucaci, two distinct directions can be distinguished: (a) black predominates in the artist's visual discourse because through black he is able to bring out his artistic undertakings (valences, perception, concept, interpretation); (b) black in the artist's work does not have negative valences but, on the contrary, a liberating, purifying role for his own self.

Black is also endowed with metaphysical convictions: the ancestral black that covers over the flaws of the world, the foregrounding of the extremes of the world in which we live and an impulse to blur them through the use of black, the connection of the identity-less human being with genesis and birth, extending even to that being's suffering (the fragmented body, connections with occurrences from everyday life, the "clothing" (*dressing the body*) of that body in "healing black". The blending of types of artistic expression in turn plays a demarcating role between night and day, darkness and light, the subconscious and the conscious, dream and reality; moreover, it foregrounds fragmentation through the absence of subtle transitions from black to white, so as to exploit the demarcating power of black. The universality of black is another important aspect, one that bears directly on my own research project.

Following the case study, a common denominator can be discerned: the conceptual art of Petru Lucaci has its roots in the relationship of *subconscious–artistic expression*, which is not in itself a novel element in general artistic practice, but it exceeds the latter precisely in the fact that black is the colour chosen in order to externalize his own anguish and inner experiences. The "*raw truth*", although difficult for the "fragile" person of everyday life to accept, is in fact the face of the world, the characteristic of a sick, fragmented society.

Perhaps it is precisely for this reason that beauty, harmony, or symmetry are not represented in the "black art" of Petru Lucaci. The sensation is that the artist tears you out of the dream and places you before reality; a reality expressed in the form of a cry of despair, one that urges towards a protest, a manifesto that boldly offers up the truth. This "exhortation" of the artist, expressed in his works, may be interpreted as an act of courage, and it shares traits with those that brought about the great changes on the cultural scene, especially from Modernism onwards. In order to decipher the meaning of black in the works of Petru Lucaci, one must take on his "courage", that of showing another world, a world that is not his alone: those anxieties and inner experiences are, after all, universal characteristics; art, as a transmitter, has the freedom to subject to critical reflection a comfortable zone, before which we look on passively, and a less comfortable zone which, once assumed, calls for active intervention, at least in moral terms.

Then, following the case study "*Black, Trauma, and Artistic Expression: Touhami Ennadre*", an artist who works exclusively in low-key photography, the following conclusions were drawn: what fascinates Ennadre is the *passage*, the extreme point, the *moment of truth* in which death is already there and life ceases, in that very moment, to exist. Through his creation, the artist immortalizes disappearance, and he does so in order to draw out its quintessence, to consecrate its memory, a kind of *memoria temporis*. Ennadre's photographs contain no artifice, only darkness and light. His world is a realm of myth, the myth of origin and of the end, but also that of rebirth. The cosmic order demonstrates the indissociability of life and death, which only a poetic vision can reveal.

The use of black allows Touhami Ennadre to map the dialectic between the living and the dead, a relationship closely bound up with the artist's consciousness. His imposing, black images communicate through contemporary symbols, probing the tragic character of human existence. They are a silent testimony to the ravages of time, which wear down the ageing body, to bodily rupture, to deliberate acts of savagery that exhaust entire populations.

Further, the results obtained from the interviews bore on the possibility of setting referential elements in antithesis to self-referential ones. The latter formed the object of the applied project. Alongside the conclusions described above, my own artistic creation is a contribution to the knowledge pertaining to the field under investigation, through the conceptuality given to the artistic project and through some of the original techniques employed. Interrogating the self-referential component, my own consciousness, and expressing it through the work of art led to the possibility of extrapolating the artistic concept

in two directions: one grounded in the relationship between *self-reference and reference*, and another with the role of *self-knowledge and knowledge*, not excluding the possibility that, through correlation, a *conceptual network* might result.

Thus, the analysis and correlation of the information obtained through the research methods applied, together with its relation to my own artistic expression, formed the basis for elaborating the concepts that materialized in the works of art exhibited within the exhibition "*Beyond Black*". The conceptuality of the works is presented, stage by stage, in subchapter 6.3.3. In essence, the figurative, staged in a sense, intersects with the abstract, present beyond what is seen: beginning and end, birth and death, primordial black and light, chaos and order.

The contemporary articulations of black, although they echo global narratives, also bear the imprint of personal struggles. Artists confronted with various traumas often use black to convey their experiences. The deep, absorbent quality of black offers a medium for expressing the suffering, the loneliness, or the introspection that these challenges generate.

The intersection of black with psychology and trauma in art offers a profound commentary on the human condition. In its infinite depths, black serves as a canvas on which artists can navigate their psychological landscapes, externalize trauma, and offer insights into the labyrinthine corridors of the mind. Reflecting on the artistic journey of black, it stands not merely as a colour, but as a testament to resilience, introspection, and the profound depths of the human psyche.

Contemporary reflections on black follow a path parallel to the world's pressing challenges, from identity politics and migration to wars and pandemics. The colour, though timeless, evolves as a mirror of the spirit of the age, capturing the essence of social and technological change and of the human condition.

In sum, black stands as a testament to its power to transcend, through art, out of and into the deep strata of the psyche and of the society in which we live. Black, as it has always been, remains without limits, awaiting new narratives, interpretations, and explorations, thereby securing its enduring legacy across past, present, and future.

8.2. Possible Future Developments

The basic elements of the approach proposed for the writing of this thesis were, among others, a command of the methodology of analysis and synthesis as it relates to research in the field of the visual arts, the advancement of personal, original research, and the development of a system for assessing the role and significance of the chromatic approach in general, combined with a subjective mode of engagement with knowledge of the particularities of contemporary art.

The subject proposed for study and analysis continued to yield new elements, contributing, among other things, to the development of the skills necessary for producing a scholarly work of a certain complexity, which was carried out, in part, through the constructive extraction of existing information, its interpretation, and the production of new scholarly knowledge.

The development of this theoretical and applied, practice-based research undertaking proceeded, among other things, under conditions of substantial bibliographic documentation. In parallel with the processing of the data here, as throughout any research undertaking, working through the existing bibliography on the proposed research theme is inevitable: critically analysing prior knowledge and assessing objectively the possibility of making original contributions to the question under investigation. Elements of originality may also be furnished by one's own observations or investigations, the conclusions seeking to synthesize the essential particularities through the lens of the specific situations analysed.

The originality of the theoretical and applied research undertaking within this thesis is revealed, among other aspects, through its structuring, development, and integration into the concept of the research project. Moreover, care was taken to ensure a logical correlation, in both substance (content) and form (presentation), of the general ideas specific to the theme, within the overall structure of the work and of each individual chapter, with particularizations of the theoretical and methodological approach realized as appropriate.

I consider that the present research constitutes a contribution to the relevant knowledge in the field, through the results obtained from the research methods employed, both empirical and nonempirical, which in turn open the way to new opportunities for intradisciplinary and interdisciplinary research.

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ACTIVITY REPORT FOR THE PERIOD OF THE DOCTORATE (09.2019-09.2022) Surname and given name of doctoral candidate: GOMBOȘ ATILA Surname and given name of supervisor: Prof. Univ. Dr. Habil: STELIAN ACEA		
Title of the event	Date on which the event took place	Description of the event
A. SOLO EXHIBITIONS		
Doctoral exhibition „DINCOLO DE NEGRU” [English: Beyond Black]	14.08.2021 – 28.08.2021	Solo exhibition, national level, venue: "HELIOS" Art Gallery, Timișoara. Curator: Prof. Univ. Dr. Stelian Acea; art critic: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Gabriel Kelemen.
B. GROUP/COLLECTIVE EXHIBITIONS AT LOCAL AND NATIONAL LEVEL		
Contemporary Art Exhibition „LEBĂDA ALBĂ, LEBĂDA GRI, LEBĂDA NEAGRĂ” [English: The White Swan, the Grey Swan, the Black Swan]	13.08.2022 – 27.08.2022	Reperaj Art Gallery, Cetate, Oradea; organizer: UAPR, Oradea branch.
„Salonul Premiaților UAPT”, Ed. a X-a [English: The Salon of UAPT Prizewinners, 10th edition]	16.05.2022 – 07.06.2022	Organizer, curatorship, and album: Rodica Strugaru – UAPR, Timișoara branch.
„SUB SEMNUL CRUCII” [English: Under the Sign of the Cross] – The National Exhibition of Sacred Art by Doctoral Candidates, ENAS 2022	08.05.2022 – 30.05.2022	Organizer: West University of Timișoara, IOSUD UVT – Doctoral School of Arts, Faculty of Arts and Design Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca Faculty of Orthodox Theology.
The exhibition „Pe firul pânzei de păianjen” [English: Along the Thread of the Spider's Web]	21.01.2022 – 21.02.2022	Organizer: CR – CERC, the Regional Centre for Research and Expertise in Restoration and Conservation of the Faculty of Arts and Design, West University of Timișoara.
„Zis și făcut: expoziție de artă vizuală” [English: Said and Done: A Visual Art Exhibition]	20.12.2021 – 31.01.2022	Event organized online by UAPR, Iași branch. Project coordinators: Prof. Carmen Sîrbu and Prof. Univ. Dr. Constantin Tofan, "George Enescu" National University of Arts, Iași.
„SALONUL ANUAL AL ARTELOR VIZUALE, Timișoara 2020”, ediția a 90-a [English: The Annual Salon of Visual Arts, Timișoara 2020, 90th edition]	04.01.2021 – 01.03.2021	Organizer: UAPR, Timișoara branch. Curator: Prof. Univ. Dr. Daniela Constantin.

Visual art exhibition „Portret și autoportret” [English: Portrait and Self-Portrait] – 3rd edition	21.12.2020 – 31.01.2021	Event organized online by UAPR, Iași branch. Project coordinators: Prof. Carmen Sîrbu and Prof. Univ. Dr. Constantin Tofan, "George Enescu" National University of Arts, Iași.
Digital Art Exhibition „In Virtu-In virtutea virtualității digitale”. [English: In Virtu – By Virtue of Digital Virtuality]	16.01.2021 – 31.01.2021	Reperaj Art Gallery, Cetate, Oradea; organizer: UAPR, Oradea branch.
Contemporary visual art exhibition: „Luminiscente” [English: Luminescences]	16.02.2021 – 30.02.2021	Reperaj Art Gallery, Cetate, Oradea; organizer: UAPR, Oradea branch.
„SALONUL NAȚIONAL DE PLASTICĂ MICĂ BRĂILA 2021”, ediția a XXII-a [English: The National Salon of Small-Format Fine Art, Brăila 2021, 22nd edition]	27.02.2021 – 14.04.2021	Brăila Art Gallery; organizer: UAPR, Brăila branch.
Collective fine art exhibition “DRAGOBETE ART. RO”, 9th edition	24.03.2021 – 31.03.2021	Event organized online by the "Spiru Haret" Teachers' Training Centre and UAPR, Iași branch.
„SALONUL PREMIAȚILOR UAPT”, ediția a VIII-a [English: The Salon of UAPT Prizewinners, 8th edition]	01.03.2021 – 30.03.2021	Online exhibition, on the Facebook page of the "HELIOS" Gallery, Timișoara. Organizer, curatorship, and album: Rodica Strugaru – UAPR, Timișoara branch.
The exhibition „Alb, negru și încă ceva...” [English: White, Black, and Something Else...]	17.05.2021 – 31.05.2021	Collective exhibition, organized by Cluj Art Gallery. Venue: Cluj Art Gallery, Cluj-Napoca. Curator: Prof. Univ. Dr. Dorel Găină.
Anniversary exhibition "70 de ani de la înființarea Filialei Timișoara a Uniunii Artiștilor Plastici din România (1951-2021)" [English: 70 Years Since the Founding of the Timișoara Branch of the Union of Fine Artists of Romania (1951–2021)]	02.06.2021 – 18.06.2021	"Helios" Art Gallery in Timișoara; organizer: UAPR, Timișoara branch. Curators of the exhibition: Prof. Univ. Dr. Daniela Constantin and Prof. Univ. Dr. Adriana Lucaciu.
Contemporary Art Exhibition „TOM-BE-RON. Cultura'n tomberon vs. Tomberonul ca și haină de gală.” [English: TOM-BE-RON. Culture in the Bin vs. the Bin as Gala Dress.]	26.06.2021 – 30.07.2021	Group exhibition, national. Reperaj Art Gallery, Cetate, Oradea; organizer: UAPR, Oradea branch. Curators: Vioara Bara and Prof. Univ. Dr. Dorel Găină.
Anniversary exhibition „GALERIA HELIOS- 53” [English: HELIOS GALLERY – 53]	01.08.2021 – 31.08.2021	Online, on the Facebook page of the "HELIOS" Gallery, Timișoara. Organizer, curatorship, and album: Rodica Strugaru – UAPR, Timișoara branch.
Contemporary Art Exhibition „Povești despre Europa” [English: Stories About Europe]	25.09.2021 – 20.12.2021	Reperaj Art Gallery, Cetate, building C, organized by the Union of Fine Artists of Romania, Oradea branch. Curator: Magda Cârnelci.

„ARTIȘTI PLASTICI SĂTMĂRENI ȘI INVITAȚII LOR, SEMN TAINIC, TAINIC SEMN, INSEMN TAINIC, ÎN SEMN TAINIC”, ediția a VIII-a [English: Satu Mare Fine Artists and Their Guests; Secret Sign, Sign Secret, Insign Secret, In Secret Sign; 8th edition]	20.10.2021 – 20.11.2021	Satu Mare Art Museum. Organizers: UAPR, Satu Mare branch, and Satu Mare Art Museum.
The exhibition „Micro Maps 2021”	02.11.2021 – 30.11.2021	National Art Museum of Timișoara. Organizer: the Regional Centre for Research and Expertise in Restoration and Conservation of the Faculty of Arts and Design in Timișoara, in partnership with the National Art Museum of Timișoara.
Photography exhibition „INTERFOTO 2021”	22.11.2021 – 30.11.2021	Bastion Multifunctional Centre. Organizer: the Faculty of Arts and Design of the West University of Timișoara.
„Ocheanul întors-ateliere de artiști” [English: The Reversed Telescope – Artists' Studios]	18.12.2021 – 18.01.2022	Reperaj Galleries. Organizer: UAPR, Oradea branch; Oradea Art Museum; and the Triade Foundation in Timișoara. Curator: Sorina Jecza.
„SALONUL ANUAL AL ARTELOR VIZUALE, Timișoara 2021”, ediția a 91-a [English: The Annual Salon of Visual Arts, Timișoara 2021, 91st edition]	19.12.2021 – 16.01.2022	National Art Museum of Timișoara; organizer: UAPR, Timișoara branch. Curator: Prof. Univ. Dr. Daniela Constantin.
„Gala studentească de fotografie” [English: The Student Photography Gala]	22.12.2020 – 10.01.2021	CCS Petroșani
„Salonul Anual al Artelor Vizuale Timișoara 2020”, ediția 90-a [English: The Annual Salon of Visual Arts, Timișoara 2020, 90th edition]	12.2020	UAPR, Timișoara branch (online edition)
„Salonul National de Arta Contemporană” [English: The National Salon of Contemporary Art]	01.11.2020 – 01.12.2020	Bucharest, Simeza Gallery. Organizers: UAPR and the Ministry of Culture.
„Expo ALUMNI”	16.11.2020 – 30.11.2020	Temporary Museum of Contemporary Art – Timișoara. 30 years since the re-establishment of the Faculty of Arts and Design of the West University of Timișoara.
„Memorii” [English: Memoirs]	02.11.2020 – 12.11.2020	Students' House of Culture, Timișoara.
„ART United 2020”	31.07.2020 – 03.08.2020	Unirii Square; organizer: UAPR, Timișoara branch
C. INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITIONS HELD IN ROMANIA		

International Art Biennial "Meeting Point", 8th edition	11.11.2021 – 22.01.2022	Arad Art Museum and the Delta National Gallery. Organizers: the Arad City Hall, the Arad Municipal Culture Centre, and UAPR, Arad branch. Project director: Dumitru Șerban. Collective exhibition.
The "Inter-Art" Intercontinental Biennial of Small Graphic Art, Aiud, 8th edition	16.08.2021 – 16.09.2021	The "Inter-Art" Galleries, Aiud, Romania. Organizers: the "Inter-Art" Foundation, Aiud, Romania, and the "Liviu Rebreanu" Multicultural Centre, Aiud, Romania. Curator: Ștefan Balog. Group exhibition.
The International MailArt Exhibition „Diversitate culturală” [English: Cultural Diversity] – Aiud 2021, 27th edition	16.08. 2021 – 16.09.2021	The "Inter-Art" Galleries, Aiud, Romania. Organizers: the "Inter-Art" Foundation, Aiud, Romania, and the "Liviu Rebreanu" Multicultural Centre, Aiud, Romania. Curator: Ștefan Balog. Group exhibition.
International Collage Biennial – „Collage Obsession”, Timișoara 2021, 1st edition	25.11.2021 – 25.12.2021	The Online Gallery of the Faculty of Arts and Design, West University of Timișoara; a project carried out by the Faculty of Arts and Design – West University of Timișoara; project director: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Valentina Ștefănescu. Group exhibition.
„Bienala Internațională de Arte Miniaturale Timișoara 2020”, ediția a patra [English: The International Biennial of Miniature Arts, Timișoara 2020, 4th edition]	26.11.2020 –	Online edition; BIAMT project director, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Valentina Ștefănescu.
„Dialog cu Sacrul” [English: Dialogue with the Sacred] – 10th edition.	25.11.2020	Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God, Galata, Iași.
D. ROMANIAN EXHIBITIONS HELD ABROAD		
The international exhibition „Artiști români pe simeze internaționale 3-Mestre, Veneția” [English: Romanian Artists on International Display 3 – Mestre, Venice]	26.04.2021 – 08.05.2021	Venue: the D'E.M. Venice Art Gallery in Venice, Italy. Organizer: Cluj Art Gallery and the D'E.M. Venice Art Gallery. Group exhibition.
The international exhibition „ROMANIAN COLORS – Discovering Romanian Art”	01.07.2021 – 16.07.2021	Venue: the "Nikola Petrov" Gallery, Vidin, Bulgaria. Organizer: Cluj Art Gallery and the "Nikola Petrov" Gallery in Vidin, Bulgaria. Group exhibition
„Tradiții și Experiment în Fotografia Academică”, [English: Tradition and Experiment in Academic Photography]	01.12.2019 – 20.12.2019	Vârșac Cultural Centre, SERBIA.
E. INTERNATIONAL GROUP EXHIBITIONS		
International Photography Exhibition: „Erd(reich) - rich(Soil)”	01.10.2022 – 31.10.2022	ART FACTORY FLOX Gallery, 1–31 September, Kirschau, Germany

„Mail Art Biennale”	01.08.2022 – 30.08.2022	<i>The Orphanage Gallery</i> , Dayton, OH, USA
„SPONTANEOUS INSPIRATION”	04.06.2022 – 30.06.2022	<i>ARTLIFE Foundation</i> , Museum of Ventura County, California, USA.
„2nd International Salon Fortuna 2022”,	01.05.2022 – 20.05.2022	Organizer: Ljiljana Vrzić, Belgrade, Serbia.
„50-4th ASROPA International Online Art Exhibition”	01.03.2022 – 30.03.2022	Organizer: Prof. Dr. Clemens Beungkun SOU, South Korea.
„The 42th ASROPA International Art Online Exhibition in South Korea”	01.02.2021 – 01.03.2021	Exhibition held online; organizer and curator: Prof. Mag. Dr. Clemens Beungkun SOU.
„1st Salon Bokeh Belgrade 2021 - Belgrade, Serbia”	17.02.2021 – 17.03.2021	Online, Belgrade, Serbia. Organizer: Serbia PHOTO International Salon of Photography.
„1st Salon Bokeh Guiyang City 2021 - Guiyang City, Guizhou, China”	17.02.2021 – 17.03.2021	Online, Guiyang City, Guizhou, China. Organizer: Serbia PHOTO International Salon of Photography.
„1st Salon Bokeh Auckland 2021 - Auckland, New Zealand”	17.02.2021 – 17.03.2021	Online, Auckland, New Zealand. Organizer: Serbia PHOTO International Salon of Photography.
„International Mail Art Exhibition 2021”	16.04.2021 – 16.05.2021	" <i>Bilsem Art</i> " Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey. Organizer and curator: Muberra Bulbul.
„Mostra Internazionale di Arte Postale”	12.06.2021 – 12.07.2021	The „ <i>O' Vascio Room</i> ” Gallery, Naples, Italy. Organizer: Antonio Conte
The „BROT” exhibition	22.08.2021 – 22.09.2021	"ART FACTORY FLOX" Gallery, Kirschau, Germany. Organizer and curatorship: Holger Wendland.
„6th International Annual Photography Award”	18.08.2020 – 18.09.2020	35PHOTO Professional Photo Community
F. PARTICIPATION IN NATIONAL CONFERENCES IN THE FIELD OF THE VISUAL ARTS WITH A SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE		
Conference of the Doctoral Schools within IOSUD	04.11.2021 – 06.11.2021	Presentation of my own theme, „ <i>Statutul imaginii în postmodernitate</i> ” [English: The Status of the Image in Postmodernity], at the International Conference of the Doctoral Schools within IOSUD, CNFIS-FDI Project, „ <i>Sensuri ale interpretării în cercetarea artistică</i> ”, [English: Meanings of Interpretation in Artistic Research], "George Enescu" National University of Arts, Iași. Participant, plenary discussions.
„The National Conference of Doctoral Candidates of the Universitaria Consortium, 3rd edition”	09.10.2020 – 10.10.2020	Organizer: the Doctoral School of the Faculty of Arts and Design of the West University of Timișoara.
G. PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES IN THE FIELD OF THE VISUAL ARTS WITH A SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE		

12th International Conference of Artistic Research	07.04.2021 – 09.04.2021	Organized by: the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, in cooperation with the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and the University of Applied Arts Vienna. Participant, plenary discussions.
PARSE Biennial Research Conference	17.11.2021 – 19.11.2021	Faculty of Fine, Applied and Performing Arts at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Participant, plenary discussions.
H. PARTICIPATION IN CONFERENCES IN THE FIELD OF RESEARCH AND EDUCATION		
„Webex Web of Science: Utilizarea datelor Web of Science în managementul colecțiilor de bibliotecă”. [English: Webex Web of Science: Using Web of Science Data in Library Collection Management]	28.04.2022	Organized by: the Web of Science Group (a Clarivate Analytics company) and Enformation, with UVT affiliation. Participant.
„Webex Web of Science: Soluții Clarivate pentru strategii legate de clasamentele universitare”. [English: Webex Web of Science: Clarivate Solutions for Strategies Relating to University Rankings]	27.04.2022	Organized by: the Web of Science Group (a Clarivate Analytics company) and Enformation, with UVT affiliation. Participant.
„Webex Web of Science: Web of Science pentru începători” [English: Webex Web of Science: Web of Science for Beginners]	18.01.2021	Organized by: the Web of Science Group (a Clarivate Analytics company) and Enformation, with UVT affiliation. Participant.
„Webex Web of Science: Datele de finanțare în Web of Science” [English: Webex Web of Science: Funding Data in Web of Science]	27.01.2021	Organized by: the Web of Science Group (a Clarivate Analytics company) and Enformation, with UVT affiliation. Participant.
„Web of Science: O actualizare a noii platforme Web of Science” [English: Web of Science: An Update on the New Web of Science Platform]	23.02.2021	Organized by: the Web of Science Group (a Clarivate Analytics company) and Enformation, with UVT affiliation. Participant.
„Web of Science: Vizibilitatea și analiza conținutului Open Access în Web of Science” [English: Web of Science: The Visibility and Analysis of Open Access Content in Web of Science]	25.02.2021	Organized by: the Web of Science Group (a Clarivate Analytics company) and Enformation, with UVT affiliation. Participant.
„Webex Web of Science: Integrarea datelor Web of Science” [English: Webex Web of Science: The	25.03.2021	Organized by: the Web of Science Group (a Clarivate Analytics company) and Enformation, with UVT affiliation. Participant.

<i>Integration of Web of Science Data]</i>		
„Romanian International Conference for Research and Education”	27.10.2020 – 29.10.2020	Organized by: the Web of Science Group (a Clarivate Analytics company) and Enformation, with UVT affiliation. Participant.
I. ARTICLES PUBLISHED IN SPECIALIST JOURNALS INDEXED IN INTERNATIONAL DATABASES (BDI)		
1. GOMBOȘ, Atila, (2022), „Despre negru în artele vizuale” in <i>EmART</i> , Astra, Deva, Hunedoara, Year 3, no. 13, January 2022, pp. 22–25. ISSN: 2734 – 7923		
2. GOMBOȘ, Atila, (2022) „Estetica negrului: între percepție și expresie artistică” in <i>Caiete de Arte și Design</i> , Eurostampa, no. 9, pp. 164 – 173, 2393-042X.		
3. GOMBOȘ, Atila, (2021) „Analiză critică a evoluției negrului în artele plastice” in <i>RevArt</i> , Eurostampa, vol. 38, no. 3, 2021, ISSN: 1841-1169, pp. 154–164.		
4. GOMBOȘ, Atila, (2021) "Ontologia operei de artă în contemporaneitate și contextul său interdisciplinar" in <i>Caiete de Arte și Design</i> , Eurostampa, no. 8 (8), pp. 42–45, ISSN 2393-042X;		
J. BOOK CHAPTERS PUBLISHED IN VOLUMES ISSUED BY NATIONAL PUBLISHERS ACCREDITED BY THE NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH		
GOMBOȘ, Atila, "Niveluri perceptivă ale negrului în arta contemporană", in <i>Tendențele actuale în științele umaniste</i> , Vol. I, ed. Dana Percec, West University of Timișoara Press, Timișoara, Romania, 2021, pp. 221–228, ISBN 978-973-125-848-5		
K. COPYRIGHTED ILLUSTRATIONS (A SELECTION)		
The author's own photograph on the poster for the International Photography Exhibition "Erd(reich) – rich(Soil)", ART FACTORY FLOX gallery, Kirschau, Germany, 2022.		
"Salonul Premițiilor UAPT", 10th ed., 2022. [poster concept]		
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The catalogue of the "SALONUL PREMIȚIILOR UAPR Filiala Timișoara", 2021 – 10th ed., curator: Rodica Strugaru. [Poster concept and photographic documentation.]		
The author's own photograph on the poster for the International Photography Exhibition "BROT – Öffnet jeden Mund", Schirgiswalde-Kirschau, Germany, p. 2, 2021.		
The journal "4 Foi de Artă", no. 33, September, 2021, p. 5, p. 7, ISSN 2668-0238, ISSN-L 2668-0238.		
The catalogue of the "Salonul Premițiilor 2020", 10th edition, April 2021. Organized by UAP, Timișoara branch, curator: Rodica Strugaru. [poster concept]		
The anniversary exhibition "GALERIA HELIOS- 53", Timișoara. [Photographic documentation]		

The anniversary exhibition "*70 de ani de la înființarea Filialei Timișoara a Uniunii Artiștilor Plastici din România (1951-2021)*". Photographic documentation.

"*SALONUL ANUAL AL ARTELOR VIZUALE, Timișoara 2020*", 90th edition. Photographic documentation.