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# The Politics of Colour

Doctoral dissertation in the field of art,  
in the discipline of fine arts and art conservation

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**Wrocław, 2026**

# Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Doctoral Project Framework	5
The Myth of the Artist	9
Between Inspiration and Strategy	15
The Politics of Colour	19
The Painter vs. Artificial Intelligence	27
Between Strategy, Project, and the Limits of Painting Design – Process Description	32
Conclusion	43
Documentation of the Artistic Work	46
Bibliography	67
List of Figures	69

## INTRODUCTION

Each year, approximately 250<sup>1</sup> graduates complete painting programs at Academies of Fine Arts in Poland. In 2015, when I obtained my Master of Arts degree, I joined this group and at the same time, immediately after my thesis defense, I received an offer of employment at my alma mater and faculty. However, graduating with distinction and functioning institutionally within the field of art did not translate into artistic recognition or acknowledgement within the art community, nor into the financial benefits that often follow such recognition. My professional position—connected with working within the structures of an Academy of Fine Arts—did not result in market visibility or presence within the dominant circuits of promotion for young painters.

Painting—and art in general—has today become a highly democratized field, and no form of license is required to practice it. It would therefore be somewhat naive to assume that a diploma from a higher art institution could guarantee “success,” regardless of how that success is defined. In reality, however, it was precisely a sense of disappointment, a certain form of frustration, and an increasingly evident tension between institutional participation in the art world and the mechanisms of market selection that became the impulse for undertaking this doctoral project. The particular dissonance between institutional status and the mechanisms through which artists build visibility—mechanisms that, in my view, are increasingly connected with tools of communication, promotion, and marketing—led me to reflect on the necessity and possible forms of constructing artistic strategies within contemporary art, and especially within contemporary painting. An additional factor that influenced my decision to explore this issue was the intensifying competition for the viewer’s attention, which manifests itself not only among artists and painters but also in the emergence of a new and exceptionally powerful competitor: the dynamic development of generative imaging technologies and artificial intelligence.

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<sup>1</sup> Own estimate based on data from the ELA system (Graduate Tracking System) for the field of ‘Painting’ at: the Academies of Fine Arts in Warsaw, Krakow, Gdansk, Katowice, and Wroclaw (data for the years 2014–2023), supplemented by the self-assessment report of the Magdalena Abakanowicz University of the Arts in Poznan (2019–2024), and comparative data regarding admission limits and the number of diplomas at other public art universities (the Academy of Fine Arts in Lodz, the Academy of Art in Szczecin). Due to the lack of complete, uniform data for all universities and years, the result is an estimation.

In response to these conditions, this doctoral dissertation has been conceived as an artistic experiment whose aim is to develop and implement an original painting strategy designed to increase the visibility of artworks and potentially lead to artistic and market success. The experiment includes both the stage of designing the strategy and its practical realization in the form of a series of paintings. The stage of verifying the effectiveness of the adopted assumptions—understood as actual presence within the art market, recognition, and the sale of artworks—extends beyond the scope of this dissertation and will constitute the subject of further artistic activities undertaken after the completion of the doctoral process.

Within this project, I undertake an attempt at a critical analysis of my own creative path, understood as a process entangled in biographical, institutional, and economic conditions. I examine the tensions between the authentic imperative to create and practices aimed at achieving recognition, popularity, and the sale of artworks. At the same time, I ask to what extent a contemporary painter is compelled to function not only as an artist but also as a subject capable of navigating the fields of visual communication, social media, and current aesthetic trends, while simultaneously engaging in a polemic with the widespread perception and instrumental use of the myth of the artist.

In this dissertation I also explain the way in which I understand and employ color—not merely as an aesthetic or formal category, but as a tool operating within a specific social, market, and technological context. I am interested in whether and how color may function as an element of a visibility strategy and as a means of attracting attention in conditions of image overproduction, as well as one of the key resources of contemporary painting confronted with the culture of screens, algorithms, and visual trends. Color therefore constitutes the foundation and the central component of the artistic strategy I have developed, which is described in detail in the following chapters.

## DOCTORAL THESIS ASSUMPTIONS

The basis of this doctoral thesis is an attempt to develop and implement an original artistic strategy, calculated to achieve an effect materializing in the form of artistic — and simultaneously commercial — success. Therefore, I assumed the creation of a series of paintings executed in the oil-on-canvas technique, based on a thorough analysis of the market and trends. In fact, it is specifically the practice of painting that serves as the primary area for identifying artistic, formal, and conceptual problems in this project, while I treat the process of working on the paintings as the actual field of research. The role of this doctoral dissertation is, thus, to accompany the creative practice and to attempt to organize and name the personal experiences resulting from the work of painting.

This text is reflective and problematic in nature, and its aim is to describe the adopted strategies, assumptions, and artistic decisions that shaped the creation of the series. For me, painting is not a tool for illustrating previously formulated theses, but an autonomous way of recognizing the relationship between formal decisions, the status of the image in contemporary visual culture, and the strategies of an artist's functioning within the field of art. At the same time, an essential element of the work remains self-reflection on my own creative position and on the ways of situating my practice in the face of current technological, cultural, and institutional changes.

A significant problem area of the work is color — understood not exclusively as an aesthetic and formal category, but as a tool for visual impact and an element of artistic strategy functioning under conditions of image overproduction, the attention economy, and screen culture. I am particularly interested in how so-called *chromatic decisions*<sup>2</sup> participate in the processes of building the image's visibility, its recognizability, and the artist's position in the field of art. Essential goals of this work also include an analysis of the functioning of the myth of the artist in contemporary culture and its influence on the perception of painterly creation. A further stage involves reflection on the myth's impact on the percep-

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<sup>2</sup> I understand a chromatic decision as a conscious choice and the design of color relationships within a painting, encompassing the selection of hue, saturation, temperature, and contrast, as well as the method of its technological production (including through multi-layered glazes). This decision is not purely aesthetic or intuitive in nature; rather, it is subordinated to a broader visual strategy that co-shapes the perception of the image.

tion of formal decisions in painting, specifically decisions regarding color, understood here as elements of artistic strategy.

One of the fundamental assumptions of my dissertation is the rejection of the opposition between inspiration and strategy. In place of this dichotomy, I propose viewing the practice of painting as a design process in which intuition, experience, and artistic sensitivity coexist with an awareness of the cultural, technological, and economic context. A significant goal of the work is also critical self-reflection on my own creative practice, conceived as a field for testing and verifying the adopted assumptions. Furthermore, an important thread addressed in the dissertation remains the problem of painting's functioning in the face of the dynamic development of artificial intelligence and generative imaging technologies, which significantly influence contemporary methods of image production and perception.

## Formal assumptions

The fundamental formal assumption of the artistic part was to execute the developed strategy in the form of a series of paintings in the classical technique of oil on linen canvas, while simultaneously striving to achieve a visual effect associated with the aesthetics of digital images, with the maximum possible (or total) reduction of the element of chance in the image realization process. Initially, I assumed the realization of paintings on unprimed linen canvas. This choice was motivated by a desire to juxtapose the materiality and historical weight of the medium — natural linen, its texture, and characteristic rawness — with the aesthetics of form and color characteristic of contemporary screen culture.

I describe the entire process — detailing the strategy and its execution — in the chapter „Artistic Strategy – A Case Study“; however, it seems important to outline the basic formal and aesthetic assumptions here in general terms. In the context of realization, one of the goals was to achieve a surface effect that is maximally smooth, devoid of visible brushstrokes, and visually similar to a digitally generated image. A significant formal assumption was also to leave most of the canvas surface untouched by paint. The image was to unfold exclusively

in distinct areas where forms materialize, constituting a type of visual digital „blooms“ on this raw, natural, earthy surface, manifesting on the canvas surface as luminous, semi-transparent anomalies. Their appearance seems to be the result of some supernatural interference from the borderlands of the digital and spiritual worlds, acting as a kind of error, a „glitch“<sup>3</sup> — originating from another, digital order, and manifesting in material reality. I decided to call these forms „ectoplasms“. Ectoplasm — understood historically as a materializing substance originating from another order — functions here not as a reference to spiritualist iconography, but as a concept describing the particular status of these forms within the image.

„Ectoplasms“ are neither autonomous representations nor elements of classical painterly composition. Rather, they appear as traces of a momentary revelation of a different image logic — alien to its material, workshop-based genesis. Their presence disrupts the stability of the painterly plane and undermines traditional relations between background and figure, process and result, intention and chance. This term also allows me to emphasize the ontologically ambivalent nature of these forms, suspended between what is produced and what is, as it were, „evoked“. In this sense, ectoplasms are situated on the boundary of my own agency as an artist and non-human image-generation processes — algorithmic, random, or simulative — evoking the idea of the image as a field of manifestation, rather than solely a planned formal construction.

The reference to the concept of ectoplasm also strengthens the thread of materializing what usually remains immaterial: system errors, signal interference, data discontinuity, or digital „noise“. I translate them into the language of painterly matter, where they reveal themselves as physical, local, and not entirely controllable interventions in the structure of the canvas. Ectoplasms thus become visual equivalents of digital artifacts, yet they are devoid of screen anchoring and are instead embedded directly in the materiality of the canvas. Consequently, the term „ectoplasms“ does not serve a purely metaphorical function here; rather, it describes the way these forms exist as manifestations of a transitional, unstable state of the image — a moment in which the painterly surface reveals its potential to generate anomalies, cracks, and excesses of meaning that go beyond the classical understanding of the image as a coherent, closed whole.

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<sup>3</sup> The term ‚glitch‘ refers to a short-lived error or disruption in the operation of a digital system, manifesting as an unforeseen deformation of an image, sound, or signal. In an aesthetic context, the glitch functions as a category describing visual effects resulting from malfunction, the interruption of continuity, or improper data processing, revealing the materiality and imperfection of digital technology.”



## THE MYTH OF THE ARTIST

The myth of the artist is a cultural, socio-historical construct according to which the artist is described not as a craftsman or a market producer/participant, but essentially as a unique individual endowed with a special gift and almost divine characteristics. Crucially, according to this narrative, the artist creates under the influence of an internal imperative—a kind of creative compulsion. To quote Plato: „For the poet is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and the mind is no longer in him: when he has not attained to this state, he is powerless and is unable to utter his oracles.”<sup>4</sup> This portrayal of the artist as an individual acting under the influence of a higher power constitutes one of the foundations of the modern myth of the artist. Although it seems to be most heavily exploited today—for instance, in cinematography (where almost all fictionalized biographies of artists take on the character of hagiographies and push the narrative of the artist as a tortured genius)—the genesis of this phenomenon can likely be traced back to antiquity. It was the aforementioned Plato who wrote about *mania*<sup>5</sup>—a creative frenzy in which the artist does not act fully rationally but is, in fact, possessed by the Muses. It is worth noting that even here, one of the key elements of the myth appears: creativity is a kind of gift or compulsion; it comes from within and is not the result of calculation.

In the Renaissance, the figure of the artist-genius began to take shape. The artist ceased to be a guild craftsman and became an individual; biography started to hold significant interpretive weight for the work and the entire body of creation, further strengthening the myth. However, the era to which we probably owe the most in the context of the myth of the artist is Romanticism. It was then that the myth crystallized into the form that functions to this day: the artist as an outsider, a loner, a tortured genius; an eminent but misunderstood individual who suffers and creates under the ancient compulsion to produce. Here, however, creativity becomes a tool of rebellion—an act of expressing dissent against re-

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<sup>4</sup> Plato, quoted in R. M. Paraschiv, “Is Artistic Genius a Myth?,” *Ekphrasis* 1 (2015): 37, accessed online: [https://www.academia.edu/29587253/Is\\_Artistic\\_Genius\\_a\\_Myth](https://www.academia.edu/29587253/Is_Artistic_Genius_a_Myth).

<sup>5</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1995), 244a.

ality and an emanation of authenticity. Interestingly, it was also during this time that commercial success began to be perceived as something suspicious, almost undesirable.

In light of these issues, several key elements of the myth of the artist can be formulated: the artist as genius, inspiration over strategy, and suffering and sacrifice as the highest values. The literature on the subject indicates that the catalog of myths associated with the figure of the artist is, in fact, even broader, encompassing the myths of uniqueness, individualism, genius, sensitivity, suffering and rejection, the disinterestedness of creation, and artistic freedom<sup>6</sup>. These myths, though they do not always align with the realities of how artists function today, remain strongly present in the collective social consciousness and influence the way creators are perceived<sup>7</sup>. The artist is thus endowed with something more than talent—a kind of divine element, a unique gift. This allows for the construction and reinforcement of hieraticism in art and builds a cult of individual style.

Inextricably linked to this is the narrative of the compulsion to create resulting from inspiration. The work is not created for any specific purpose; it is essentially a byproduct of the process itself. The artist creates, haunted by the need to produce, forced by an internal imperative of unknown etiology. The myth also links creativity with suffering, while authenticity is confirmed through sacrifice. According to the myth, the work should be born in pain, discomfort, and perhaps a certain agony. Spontaneity and following intuition at every stage of the process—including when making formal decisions—are also essential. The myth of the artist strongly influences the interpretation of art, the creative process, and the artist's relationship with the audience and the market, while commercial success, calculation, and strategy are phenomena that, in this context, contradict the qualities promoted by the myth.

These myths perform an important cultural function, serving as one of the elements shaping the image of the artist in the minds of the audience, often independently of the actual conditions of their work and functioning in the art market.<sup>8</sup> At this point, however, one must properly recognize the functions the myth performs, as they are culturally and economically significant: the myth of the

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<sup>6</sup> Magdalena Sobocińska, *Tożsamość, rola i mit artysty jako uwarunkowania jego wizerunku* [Identity, role, and the myth of the artist as determinants of their image], *Zarządzanie w Kulturze* [Culture Management] 20 (2019), no. 2: 146–147.

<sup>7</sup> Magdalena Sobocińska, *Tożsamość, rola i mit artysty jako uwarunkowania jego wizerunku* [Identity, role, and the myth of the artist as determinants of their image], *Zarządzanie w Kulturze* [Culture Management] 20 (2019), no. 2: 146.

<sup>8</sup> *ibidem*

artist legitimizes the artist's exceptional status and justifies the high price of the work<sup>9</sup>. Paradoxically, the myth of the artist is intensely utilized by the art market, often becoming a marketing tool, whether in pushing a specific biographical narrative or romanticizing the creative process. There are artists who employ the myth of the artist, cynically using it to more effectively commercialize their activities.

In my view, the functioning and promotion of the myth of the artist has a significant disciplinary effect on artists, as it prevents them from engaging in discussions about market methods or the potential to support oneself through artistic practice. Today, however, one can observe a certain shift in thinking and increasing attempts to either break with the myth, discourse with it, or at least attempt to bring the figure of the artist back to reality within society. For several decades now, many artists have been attempting to deconstruct the myth. A perfect example is the artist Katarzyna Wójcicka, who describes her series of works „Full-time Job” (Etat) as follows: „I draw by the hour, filling pages with a repetitive, tiny module. In doing so, I imitate the routine of monotonous office work. At the end, I scrupulously record the hours and add them up. Thanks to the adopted rate (dictated by my value in the labor market), I can precisely determine the cost of each drawing. In this way, I complete a full-time monthly workload—8 hours a day, 5 days a week. The conditions are defined by a fictional employment contract. The monthly salary is frozen capital that I will receive at the moment the work is purchased.” In this way, the artist ironically distances herself from the myth of creative work, positing that perhaps we should stop sacralizing artistic practice and start treating it simply as work.

Essentially, a similar—though far less radical—strategy is implemented by the painter Agata Bogacka, who, in Agata Napiórska's book *How They Work 2* (*Jak oni pracują 2*), describes her creative process, which strikingly resembles „going to work.” Bogacka writes: „It's about carving out five consecutive hours in the day for work. It's not worth it for me to come in for one hour; that's too little time to get moving with painting. (...) Such a limit is a matter of common sense. Sometimes it's longer, but painting is physically exhausting work<sup>10</sup>.” Bogacka also touches upon the issue of the work itself—in this case, the act of painting—which is just as often a victim of excessive romanticization, while she fits perfectly within the framework of physical labor: „When I think about painting, pleasure is the last thing that comes to mind. It is not pleasant at all. The end result is a light at

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9 Raymonde Moulin, *The Art Market: A Sociological View* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987).

10 Agata Bogacka, statement in Agata Napiórska, *Jak oni pracują 2. Rozmowy o pracy i życiu twórczym* [*How they work 2: Conversations on work and creative life*] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo W.A.B., 2019), p. 12.

the end of the tunnel. The process itself is hard, physically exhausting, and even more so mentally.”<sup>11</sup>

In the context of the myth of the artist and its lack of alignment with contemporary realities, one must also mention artificial intelligence. The development of AI particularly undermines the foundations of the myth of the artist, leading to a unique crisis of genius and the cult of uniqueness. If an algorithm, possessing no experience, emotions, or difficult biography, can generate an image that is highly rated in terms of aesthetics and content, it may challenge the belief that the value of a work is the result of an artist’s inner uniqueness.

In my conviction, the myth of the artist is a harmful, toxic, and outdated construct that hinders honest and open dialogue regarding the role and functioning of artists in the market and society. It is worth noting that myths regarding artists do not always adequately reflect their actual situation; nevertheless, they persist in social consciousness and co-shape the way they are perceived. In the face of intense efforts by some artistic circles regarding issues such as establishing a minimum wage for participating in exhibitions or professionalizing the status of the artist, the cynical use of the myth of the artist to strengthen one’s „personal brand” in the art market seems to me a particularly harmful practice.

Criticism of the myth of the artist does not, however, mean negating the importance of intuition, experience, or individual sensitivity in the creative process. Rather, it is about shifting the emphasis: from an essentialist narrative based on the uniqueness of the individual toward an understanding of artistic practice as



Fig. 1. Monika Drożyńska, *Artistic Work Is Work*, 2025, artistic embroidery on fabric, 60 × 30 cm  
11 ibidem

a product of competence, decisions, social relations, and conscious strategies. Demystifying the figure of the artist allows us to view creativity not as an act of revelation, but as a process in which choices play a vital role—including rational, planned, and instrumental ones—while also allowing us to see it for what it truly is: work. As one of Monika Drożyńska's famous embroideries states: „Artistic work is work.”<sup>12</sup>

In this sense, the myth of the artist effectively blurs the fact that art has always been a field of negotiation between expression and rules, individuality and convention, autonomy and dependence on patronage, institutions, and the market. The belief that strategy and calculation are the antithesis of „true” creativity leads to a false opposition: inspiration versus planning. Either-or. Meanwhile, historical analysis and contemporary artistic practice show that these orders not only do not exclude each other but often coexist, conditioning one another. The myth of the artist performs an ideological function here: it naturalizes specific conditions of art production and obscures their economic and political dimensions. As Pierre Bourdieu notes, the artistic field is based on a paradoxical economy in which the denial of interest becomes one of the conditions for symbolic capital. Declared disinterestedness, an apparent aversion to the market, or a distance from commercial success are often, in fact, strategies for accumulating prestige, which in the long run can be converted into real economic value.<sup>13</sup>

In this context, the question of the place of strategic awareness in the creative process becomes particularly interesting. If the myth of the artist dictates that formal decisions—regarding color, composition, or medium—be perceived as the result of intuition or internal compulsion, then any attempts to rationalize them are often considered derivative or even suspicious. Meanwhile, artistic practice shows that these choices are often the result of an analysis of cultural context, the history of the medium, institutional expectations, or the ways the work is received.

In my view, rejecting the myth does not lead to the banalization or pauperization of art, but rather enables a more adequate description of the actual mechanisms of its functioning. It also allows for a more honest reflection on the responsibility of the artist as a participant in social and economic life.

From the perspective of this work, the demystification of the figure of the artist

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<sup>12</sup> Monika Drożyńska, *Artistic work is work [Praca artystyczna to praca]*, hand embroidery on fabric, source: <https://monika.drozynska.pl/artworks/praca-artystyczna-to-praca/>, accessed: March 17, 2026.

<sup>13</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 142–147

serves as a starting point for further considerations on the status of formal decisions in painting, and specifically on the role of color as a tool not only of expression but also—and perhaps primarily—of conscious artistic strategy. Rejecting the opposition between inspiration and calculation allows for the analysis of color as an element subject to negotiation between intuition, convention, cultural context, and the intended effect of impact.

## BETWEEN INSPIRATION AND STRATEGY

Before commencing my studies and during the first 2-3 years, my perception of what I was studying, what painting practice is, and my perception of other artists were guided by certain established—and simultaneously very naive—archetypes of the painter-artist. On many levels, these were identical to the previously described myth of the artist, embellished with personal fantasies of fame and material wealth. Meanwhile, over the years, as I achieved a more complex artistic and life maturity, these archetypes, childish beliefs, and phantasms underwent a certain deconstruction. The process of making my beliefs—and the expectations associated with them—more realistic was aided by working at the Academy, which allowed me to observe other artists, peek into their artistic practices and glimpses of their private lives; teaching undoubtedly also played a very significant role in this entire process.

Thus, I have traveled a long way from the internalization of the myth of the artist to its conscious critique. Finally, over the years, I have managed to settle into the conviction and conclusion that, in essence, „being an artist“ does not differ significantly from other professions and should be treated as such. Granted, it is a profession with a certain unique specificity; however, granting it a status of exceptionality, supernatural, romantic traits, or framing artists as a group somehow separate from, better than (and certainly more enlightened than) the rest of society, began to provoke my internal resistance. Meanwhile, in my immediate environment, I observed both academics and painting graduates actively participating in the artistic life of Wrocław (and indeed all of Poland), achieving market success, and running painting studios, who seemed to me at times to cynically play with the myth of the artist, fueling and grounding the prevailing social beliefs on the subject. It is difficult to state with complete certainty what motives drove such practices; however, it seems likely that it was often simply a consistently conducted PR campaign of sorts, aimed at building a specific image around a given person or group. Utilizing the myth of the artist thus appears to be a clever and well-thought-out artistic strategy. Mechanisms identical to those observed in social media—Instagram, TikTok—are at play here: the pushing of an untrue, falsified image of reality which, nevertheless, is successfully monetized. In the book *High Price*, Isabelle Graw points out: “The price of a work of art

is based on its symbolic value, which cannot be measured in economic terms. In this sense, the work is simultaneously priceless and has a price—its market value is justified by symbolic importance that cannot be translated into money.<sup>14</sup> As Graw notes, the price of a work of art does not result solely from its material characteristics but from the symbolic value attributed to it, which eludes economic quantifiers. In this sense, the symbolic value—and consequently the market value of the work—constitutes the sum of the narratives and meanings created around it.

It is precisely the effectiveness in the area of monetization, driven by an appropriately constructed strategy, that seems to me to be the key—the most significant factor of the entire mechanism. How boring and mundane painting seems when it is created „just like that,” from 9 to 5, out of a prosaic need to earn a living. This also provides fertile ground for potential accusations of opportunism, catering to the client, or painting to match the proverbial sofa. Painting treated as a 9-to-5 job is boring and ordinary; paradoxically, therefore, it is the myth of the artist that becomes useful here, as its performance allows for the monetization of art. Contemporary artists thus act strategically, and the myth is a tool, not a source of creativity. Inspiration as the driving force of creation is thus absorbed by strategy, becoming one of its resources. The functioning of an artist in the current reality is based on conditions of fierce competition, requires recognizability, and is dependent on visibility and narrative. The image itself, deprived of packaging in the form of an exciting story or a polarizing narrative, immediately vanishes in a sea of other images, particularly in a culture of visual glut and in times where, it seems, everything has already been done before. As Sarah Thornton notes, the contemporary art world functions as a „statusphere”—a network of dependencies based on reputation, visibility, and symbolic hierarchy, in which the value of works is co-created by institutions, the market, and the environment. Thornton writes: „Great works of art do not just appear; they are made... by artists, dealers, curators, critics, and collectors.”<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps it is for this reason that contemporary artists who wish to support themselves through artistic practice are somewhat forced to develop some kind of strategy. As Angela McRobbie notes, contemporary workers in the creative sectors function as „self-managing entrepreneurs,”<sup>16</sup> and their success depends

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14 Isabelle Graw, *High Price: Art Between the Market and Celebrity Culture* (Berlin–New York: Sternberg Press, 2010), p. 27.

15 Sarah Thornton, *Seven Days in the Art World* (New York–London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), p. 10.

16 Angela McRobbie, *Be Creative: Making a Living in the New Culture Industries* (Cambridge–Malden: Polity Press, 2016), pp. 13–15.

on constant self-promotion, networking, and visibility. It seems that the cleverer and more determined artists managed to recognize the potential associated with social media and the power of the artist myth in time. After all, the myth of the artist does not disappear—on the contrary, it undergoes a peculiar professionalization. It ceases to be a spontaneous expression of uniqueness and begins to function as a tool: consciously utilized, modulated, and adapted to the expectations of audiences, institutions, and the market.

In this sense, it is increasingly difficult to speak of inspiration as the primary and dominant motor of contemporary artistic practice. It seems far more accurate to perceive creativity as an element of a broader professional strategy, encompassing not only formal and thematic decisions but also the way of communicating one's own practice, building an image, and positioning oneself toward current trends in the field of art.

In the context of the above considerations, I feel obliged to include myself in this critical self-reflection. Evaluating from the perspective of time the final years of my painting studies and the ten years that have passed since obtaining my Master's degree, I have no doubt that in my case, there was a lack of a proper (or indeed any) artistic strategy and a lack of effective—meaning, above all, persistent—implementation of one. In 2015, when I graduated from the Wrocław Academy of Fine Arts, having an Instagram account seemed somewhat „uncool”; it was a medium reserved rather for hipsters, used mostly for posting photos of a coffee cup from a popular American chain—it was a kind of visual diary. It seems I failed to notice the moment when a transformation began to take place: artists (usually very young ones) started taking matters into their own hands and using social media to promote their own work, becoming the curators of their own careers. Perhaps the fact that already during my studies I ran my own business, and later was also employed at the Academy, provided me with a certain financial stability, which suppressed the need to commercialize and sell my own works. Regardless of the circumstances, however, I never started an Instagram or TikTok account dedicated to promoting my own creativity; I ignored competitions and auctions, effectively committing self-sabotage of my career as an artist. In this context, I evaluate my strategy (or rather the lack thereof) as a kind of life failure. Paradoxically, however, it was this conclusion of my own failure that was one of the motivators and quantifiers for the creation of this doctoral thesis. I wanted to develop a set of works based on an analysis of trends in art and design—particularly those concerning color—that would guarantee my paintings

success expressed in popularity and sales. When I began working on the doctorate, I did not plan any activities related to social media; that thought appeared much later, during the formulation of notes for this dissertation. In this sense, this doctoral thesis constitutes an attempt to consciously shift the emphasis: from a romantic notion of creativity as the result of an uncontrolled impulse toward an understanding of painting practice as a design process, embedded in the realities of the contemporary art market and visual culture. This does not mean a total rejection of the category of inspiration, but rather its redefinition—as one element of a larger whole, subordinated to an overarching strategy.

In this light, „ectoplasms”—those luminous anomalies appearing on my canvases—cease to be the result of metaphysical epiphany and become a precisely designed element of a visual game. Their presence is not a matter of chance, but the result of an adopted chromatic strategy aimed at simulating a system error or a digital artifact within the traditional medium of painting. Instead of waiting for inspiration to „dictate” the shape of a form, I employ a design process: I analyze the interaction of color and light to evoke a specific perceptual experience in the viewer—one typical of screen culture, yet embedded in the materiality of linen.

The contemporary artist functions in conditions where a lack of strategy becomes synonymous with invisibility. This visibility is no longer given or guaranteed by institutions like the Academy or galleries but must be consistently and painstakingly earned. In the face of an overproduction of images, aesthetic glut, and fluid boundaries between art, design, and commerce, the artist is forced not only to create but also to design their own presence in the field of art and to manage it skillfully.

I therefore treat this doctorate as an attempt to regain agency: to develop and test an artistic strategy based on the analysis of trends—particularly those regarding color—and on the conscious design of potential success, understood both as recognizability and actual sales of works. It is simultaneously a critical gesture toward the myth of the artist and an attempt to function outside of it, without resorting to its performance. For perhaps, contrary to romantic notions, the contemporary artist no longer faces a choice between inspiration and strategy. Perhaps the only real alternative today remains a strategy that can absorb inspiration without losing its creative autonomy.

## THE POLITICS OF COLOR

In the context of this work, I understand the politics of color as a set of conscious formal, technological, and design decisions that determine how an image functions in several areas: visibility, visual competition, and within institutional and market circulation. I do not use the term „politics“ in an ideological or thematic sense, but rather in an operational one—as a method of managing visibility and the intensity of impact. Color is of interest to me as one of the key resources of contemporary painting practice when confronted with the culture of screens, algorithms, and visual trends. In this sense, the „politics of color“ signifies the way in which my chromatic decisions participate in the processes of negotiating the artist’s position, recognizability, and potential success.

In the chapter „The Myth of the Artist,“ I indicated how this myth negatively affects the positioning of artists in the face of contemporary challenges, acting as a disciplinary force in discussions regarding market functioning and the commercialization of one’s work. On one hand, creators cynically exploiting the myth of the artist are becoming more common; on the other, the same mechanism is often employed by the art market, galleries, and institutions. This helps maintain the status quo—characterized by low earnings for artists and a lack of correlation between the price of a work and its quality—while reinforcing the belief that art should be a disinterested act. As a result, the art economy does not function like a typical market economy and is governed by opaque, poorly formalized mechanisms.

Many of these issues are addressed by Hans Abbing in his book *Why Are Artists Poor?*, where he notes: „People believe that artists are selflessly devoted to art, that price does not reflect quality, and that art is free”<sup>17</sup>. In this view, low financial gratification and precarious working conditions function as a natural consequence of the creative ethos and are inextricably linked to the myth of the artist. Furthermore, it is expected that the artist will operate outside the logic of the market and economic interest. Abbing points out: „Artists are often expected

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<sup>17</sup> Hans Abbing, *Why Are Artists Poor? The Exceptional Economy of the Arts* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2002), p.17-18.

to sacrifice their own material interests for the sake of art”<sup>18</sup>. This fits into the mechanism of normalizing precarious conditions in artistic labor. The myth of the disinterested artist thus becomes a tool for maintaining a system in which rationally designing one’s position, building visibility strategies, and consciously managing formal decisions are perceived as contrary to the ethos of creativity. Such a narrative simultaneously obscures the real conditions of artistic production, including dependence on institutions, exhibition circuits, the market, and promotional mechanisms. At the same time, Abbing emphasizes that „although many artists operate in the market, only a few obtain significant remuneration”. This disproportion between the number of active creators and real access to stable income confirms the structurally unequal nature of the art market. This phenomenon is not the result of individual failure but rather the effect of a field where a vast oversupply of creative labor meets a very limited number of positions that allow for genuine professional stabilization. Abbing describes this logic as a „winner-take-all” mechanism, in which „a few artists achieve recognizability and financial success, while the majority remain on the margins”.<sup>19</sup>

In such conditions, the weight of an artist’s functioning shifts from the act of creation itself—which proves insufficient—to the necessity of building visibility, recognizability, and a coherent visual identity. Consequently, formal decisions (including chromatic ones) cease to be purely individual aesthetic choices or results of subjective expression. They become essential tools for positioning the image and the artist in a highly competitive art field. Color, understood as an element of visual strategy, participates in differentiating creators, building recognizability, and constructing an artistic image. In this sense, the politics of color aligns directly with the structural conditions of the art market, where the myth of sacrifice coexists with the mechanism of concentrated visibility and success in the hands of the few.

A chromatic decision, as understood in this work, is not a negation of the intuitive dimension of the creative process, nor is it an attempt to eliminate it in favor of cold formal calculation. On the contrary—it constitutes a form of consciously channeling intuition and subordinating it to specific conceptual, perceptual, and technological assumptions. Intuition, traditionally cast in the myth of the artist as a source of spontaneous and not fully conscious choice, is subjected in my practice to reflective control and verification within the context of the adopted

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<sup>18</sup> Hans Abbing, *Why Are Artists Poor? The Exceptional Economy of the Arts* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2002), p.46-47.

<sup>19</sup> „winner-take-all” – a mechanism in which the majority of profits and recognition accrue to a small number of market participants („the winner takes it all”)

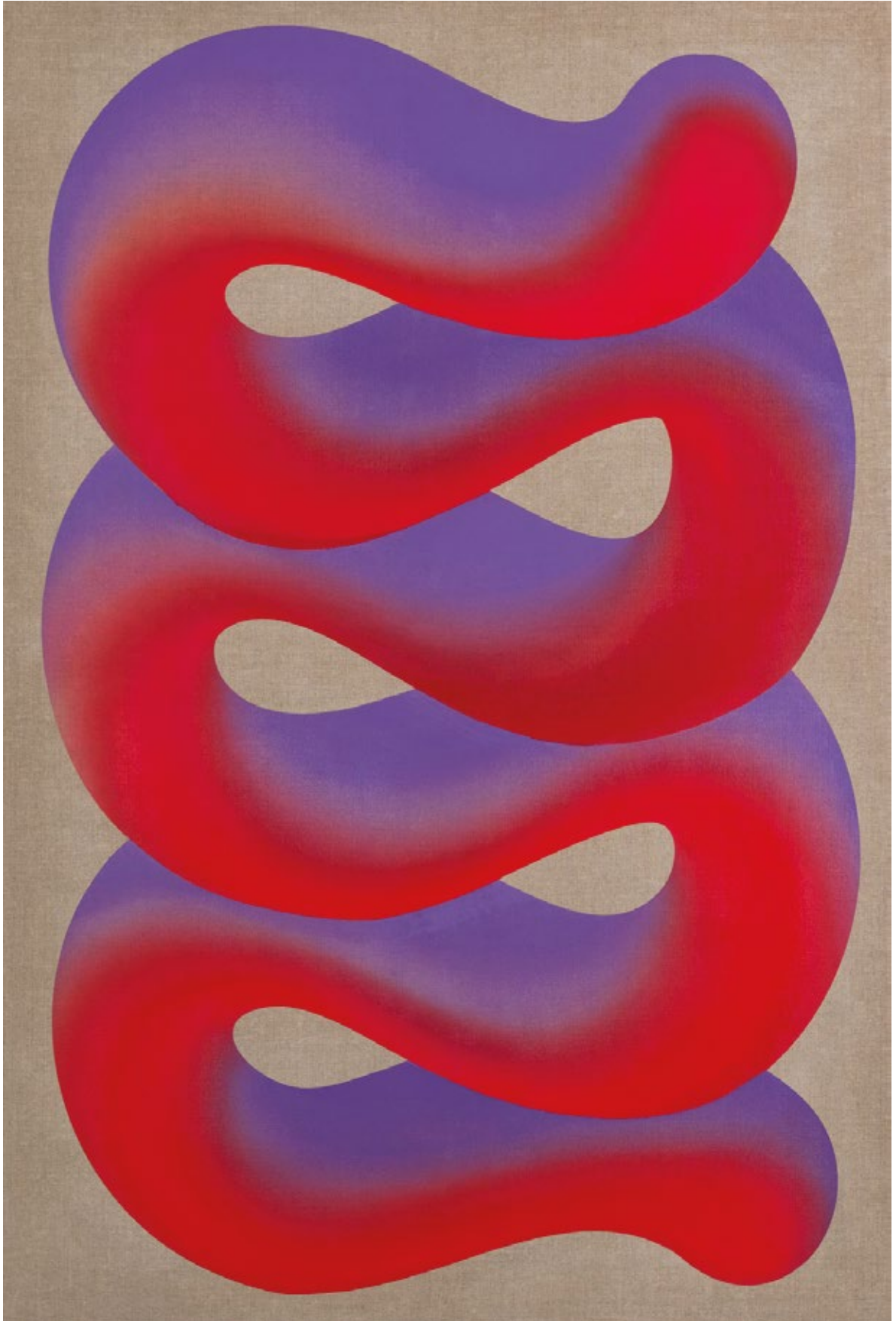


Fig. 2. Patrycja Sap-Przedwojewska, *Ectoplasm No. 4*, 2026, oil on canvas, 80 × 120 cm

visual strategy. Thus, a chromatic decision is not an impulse here, but the result of a series of insights regarding how color functions in the painting—its relationship with the glazed surface structure, the degree of transparency of layers, visual intensity, and the way color co-creates the impression of the syntheticism and immateriality of the depicted forms: „ectoplasms”. In this sense, I treat color not only as a carrier of the creator’s expression but also as a tool for designing the viewer’s perceptual experience.



Fig. 3. Patrycja Sap-Przedwojewska, *Ectoplasm No. 10* (detail), 2026, oil on canvas

A chromatic decision encompasses both the choice of a specific hue and the determination of its saturation, temperature, contrast relationships, and the method of its technological construction through multi-layered, glazed applications of paint. The final visual effect remains a result of the tension between an intuitive recognition of a color relationship's potential and conscious, methodical work on its material realization. This decision is thus situated between the sphere of my subjective experience as an artist and the area of a rationally designed image strategy, becoming a key tool for negotiating the relationship between the myth of creative spontaneity and the actual, technological, and time-consuming process of creating a painted image.

It is worth emphasizing that such chromatic decisions are a common element of practice (whether more or less conscious) for other painters as well, particularly those who possess a so-called „signature color“ or operate within a highly defined and characteristic palette. Chromatic decisions then remain inextricably linked to the constructed creative image and a modernized form of the artist myth. Here, color acts as an element of visibility strategy, co-creating the artist's symbolic capital and participating in the building of their „painterly personal brand“ In the context of this work, however, chromatic and technological decisions do not function as two separate stages of the creative process, but as a single, indivisible act of designing the image. In my case, the choice of color relationships was coupled from the beginning with an awareness of the possibilities and limitations of oil painting technology—specifically, the necessity of building appropriate color saturation through multiple, very thin glaze layers. Color does not exist here as an abstract visual value to be merely realized materially, but as the effect of a specific sequence of technological actions—drying time, number of layers, the method of rubbing them, and the degree of transparency of subsequent layers. In this sense, every chromatic decision I make is simultaneously a decision about the process, pace, and structure of the painterly work. Every color relationship has been designed by me, and the intuitive recognition of a combination's potential was immediately confronted with technical knowledge and technological experience, which determine the possibility of achieving specific effects of luminosity, soft tonal transitions, and the impression of synthetic surface smoothness.

The fusion of chromatic and technological decisions allowed me to shift the weight of the creative process from gesture and expression to designing the conditions under which the image arises. In this case, painting became a practice operating at the intersection of intuition, craft, and procedure, where the aesthetic of a „digital“ image is achieved not through the simulation of digital

tools, but through the consistent use of the properties and limitations of the oil medium.

Crucially for me, the politics of color also relates to the problem of the contemporary standardization of visual aesthetics—specifically the aesthetics of gradients, luminous tonal transitions, and synthetic, saturated color palettes characteristic of interface design, animation, applied graphics, and algorithmically generated images. I consciously draw upon a visual language strongly recognizable in digital culture and transpose it into the realm of time-consuming, material, and technologically demanding painting practice, revealing the tension and inequality between the ease of digital image production and the physical effort and limitations of the oil medium. In this sense, the politics of color remains a response to the conditions of contemporary image production shaped by generative and algorithmic systems. Color, as one of the fundamental parameters of images created by artificial intelligence, becomes an area particularly susceptible to automation and aesthetic homogenization. A design-based and technological approach to color in my painting practice constitutes an attempt to regain control over the process of its material production and over the time and effort that stand behind its visual intensity.



Fig. 4. Patrycja Sap-Przedwojewska, *Ectoplasm No. 9* (detail), 2026, oil on canvas



Fig. 5. Patrycja Sap-Przedwojewska, *Ectoplasm No. 3* (detail), 2026, oil on canvas



Fig. 6. Patrycja Sap-Przedwojewska, *Ectoplasm No. 3*, 2026, oil on canvas, 80 × 120 cm

## THE PAINTER VS ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE



Fig. 7. Paweł Susid, *Untitled*, 2000, acrylic on canvas, 41 × 41 cm

„Sometimes, friends, I’m actually afraid that we won’t win against paintings with a TV”<sup>20</sup>—proclaims the text painted against a background of colorful geometric figures. These shapes immediately evoke the test card displayed on a television screen, informing the viewer of a lack of terrestrial signal. In this way, nearly a quarter of a century ago, Paweł Susid—an artist associated with the Warsaw

<sup>20</sup> Paweł Susid, *Untitled*, acrylic on canvas, 2000.

Academy of Fine Arts—commented with his characteristic irony and sense of humor on the reality in which contemporary artists must operate. It is a reality where artists, especially painters, wage an unequal battle against what dynamically developing technology has to offer the audience's attention. When painting this work in 2001, Susid likely did not foresee, even in his wildest fantasies, the size of the Goliath artists would face two decades later. However, it is difficult to resist the impression, especially from the perspective of an artist in 2026, that this seemingly playful sentence hides a shadow of genuine fear.

Currently, one of the greatest challenges facing contemporary artists is Artificial Intelligence, specifically its role in the context of artistic creation. This is not about the potential of AI to speed up certain processes—an issue secondary to this dissertation. The art world is at a turning point, and the impact that the development of AI will undoubtedly exert remains unknown. However, given that AI can generate photos, paintings, graphics, films, and animations, the truly vital question is: can AI replace the artist? The staggering pace of AI development accelerates certain phenomena, making this question increasingly pertinent.

Anjan Chatterjee, in the essay *Art in an Age of Artificial Intelligence*<sup>21</sup>, argues that human attachment to concepts of originality, creativity, and intention is deeply rooted. According to research<sup>22</sup> cited by Chatterjee, experiment participants significantly more highly valued and reacted better to an identical abstract painting when presented in a gallery setting than those who knew the image was generated by an algorithm. In this context, it is easy to reach a simple conclusion: artists' fears of being replaced by AI are unjustified. Furthermore, currently, AI lacks common sense, cannot think abstractly, and does not understand metaphors. Chatterjee writes: „Given these limitations, how could an AI appreciate or create art? If art conveys abstract and symbolic ideas or expresses subtle emotions, an intelligence that cannot think abstractly or feel emotions seems poorly equipped to understand or create art“.

However, Chatterjee emphasizes that it is difficult to predict how people will perceive and understand art in 10 or 30 years within this dynamic reality; perhaps a shift in what societies expect from art and what values they cherish in it will soon occur. It is already difficult to dispute the thesis that AI may have a funda-

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21 Anjan Chatterjee, *Art in an age of artificial intelligence*, *Frontiers in Psychology* 13 (2022): 1024449, accessed online: <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1024449/full>.

22 Kirk, Ulrich; Skov, Martin; Hulme, Oliver; Christensen, Mark Schram; Zeki, Semir, *Modulation of aesthetic value by semantic context: An fMRI study*, „*NeuroImage*“ 2009, t. 44, nr 3, s. 1125–1132.

mental impact on almost all fields of human life. Moreover, it is hard to predict the pace and direction of its further development, though experience suggests it will remain rapid. The author also notes that many experts believe AI will eventually develop *sentience*<sup>23</sup>—a kind of self-awareness—and will consequently acquire those „human“ abilities currently lacking for the production of valuable art. Considering this, perhaps comfort can be found in Chatterjee’s words, as he considers whether such a self-aware AI would even be interested in art and creativity. Chatterjee concludes: „The view that creative activity is an unassailable bastion of humanity is unsustainable. (...) The ongoing development of aesthetically sensitive machines will challenge our views on beauty and creativity, and perhaps our understanding of the nature of art“.<sup>24</sup>

With the dizzying pace of AI development, we can observe an acceleration of certain phenomena. Perhaps a scenario will unfold in which „aesthetically sensitive machines“ satisfy the human need for art—especially since, as per my observations, this need is increasingly met by content that cannot necessarily be classified as art. However, I am deeply convinced that we will soon witness a phenomenon that can be termed a „renaissance of craftsmanship“. In an era where a sixth-grader can generate complex, aesthetically attractive graphics with a short prompt, all visual content belonging to the category of „images“ undergoes a certain pauperization; accessibility and ease of production cause a kind of visual fatigue and trivialization.

In the face of this „embarrassment of riches“—aesthetically satisfying but ultimately banal content—and the phenomenon of overproduction and visual glut, I believe that craftsmanship, technical excellence, and masterly skill will once again gain importance. These are areas foreign to AI, which is incapable of guiding a brush across a canvas and can only process, replicate, and remix. In this context, I have decided to design my artistic strategy to maximize my own technical potential and treat it as a direct weapon against AI. I treat craftsmanship not only as a means to achieve aesthetic excellence but also as an instrument for defending the artist’s identity against technology. It is worth noting that a return to technical skill does not mean regression or nostalgia, but a conscious strategy: precision, the individual style of a brushstroke, the uniqueness of the material, and subtle nuances of color and texture become values impossible for an algorithm to replace or replicate. Artisan perfection and control over every stage of the process thus become a way of articulating the uniqueness of the human

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<sup>23</sup> Anjan Chatterjee, *Art in an age of artificial intelligence*, op. cit.

<sup>24</sup> Anjan Chatterjee, *Art in an age of artificial intelligence*, op. cit.

contribution to art.

In the context of my own painting practice, the „renaissance of craftsmanship“ does not mean a return to the aesthetic of the visible gesture or a demonstrative materiality. On the contrary—technical precision becomes a tool for producing images that deliberately resemble the visual effects characteristic of digital and algorithmic environments. In my practice, I do not defend craftsmanship through the „aesthetic of the workshop,“ but through appropriating the aesthetic of the enemy using a medium he does not possess. This strategy relies on consciously using painterly potential to construct images that compete with machine-generated aesthetics at the level of visual effect, while maintaining a distinct, human, and time-consuming process of creation. Furthermore, the role of the artist in this new balance of power may shift from the creator to a curator of their own skills and aesthetic decisions. An artist conscious of their technique and material can not only stand out against mass-generated content but also use AI as a partner—for example, in conceptual experiments or color analysis—without losing control over the final work. Audience perception is also significant; in an age of overproduction, viewers increasingly seek an authentic experience that an algorithm cannot provide. The physicality of the material and conscious technical decisions become a carrier of a message that AI cannot fully replicate. Ultimately, we can speak of a transformation of artistic strategy: from the cult of genius and inspiration toward a strategy of craftsmanship and conscious aesthetic decision. The future of painting depends on defining and emphasizing what is irreplaceable in human art. AI may be a catalyst for new solutions, but it cannot take over the artist’s intent. AI should be perceived two-fold: as a useful tool for navigation in a ruthlessly capitalist art market, and as a potential rival in the silent battle for the audience. Paradoxically, the glut of AI content may ensure that true creativity and technical mastery become the most valuable elements of contemporary art—a renaissance of craftsmanship where human choices and competencies gain new status.



## BETWEEN STRATEGY, PROJECT, AND THE LIMITS OF DESIGNING PAINTING – A PROCESS DESCRIPTION

In a sense, the natural consequence of subjecting my creative path to critical self-reflection—recognizing my own mistakes and failures within the artistic circuit and, perhaps most importantly, ceasing to project responsibility for these failures onto vague „external factors”—was an impulse to act and an attempt to change the existing order, even if only slightly. I decided to utilize the doctoral process to conduct a kind of artistic research-experiment, consisting of developing and implementing an artistic strategy and an associated politics of color that would translate into artistic and commercial „success,” however that might be defined. I have explained this extensively in previous chapters; in this chapter, I describe the entire process in detail, both in terms of concept development and its execution as a creative process.

Throughout the project, it was vital for me to remain consistent with my own philosophy, my understanding of the artist’s role, and my conviction regarding the necessity of deconstructing (or perhaps reconstructing) the myth of the artist in a way that fits contemporary realities, while simultaneously normalizing painting as a profession. To avoid becoming a hostage to my own assumptions in practice, I knew it was important to remain within the areas where my painting had been situated thus far; I should avoid genre painting, matter painting, or hyperrealism. This was not so much about staying within my creative comfort zone or navigating my own workshop resources, but rather about fears of adopting a false, inauthentic, or even charlatan-like facade—a kind of „dressing up” in a foreign aesthetic—and the associated charges of hypocrisy, especially in the context of criticizing the myth of the artist and its instrumentalization by both creators and institutions. Consequently, I decided to remain within the realm of abstract painting focused on color issues, while engaging in a nuanced game of balancing on the edge of abstraction and materiality through the creation of „ectoplasms.”

„Ectoplasms” were designed by me as entities lacking a clear, drawn edge, whose form undergoes gradual dissipation within a soft, multi-stage tonal transition. The boundary between form and background was not meant to be a sharp cut

but to function as an intermediate zone—blurred, luminous, and difficult to pinpoint. This effect enhances the impression that the color does not so much cover the surface of the canvas as emerge from it, hover upon it, or emanate from within. My goal was for the „ectoplasms” to lose their unequivocal corporeality and function as visual objects of a simulative nature, closer to images generated in a digital environment than to traditionally understood matter painting. At the same time, it was important to me that the visible structure of the raw canvas, peeking through successive glaze layers, remained in tension with the illusion of a smooth, synthetic surface. This tension between the physicality of the support and the impression of a digital, immaterial form constitutes a key element of the images’ visual ambivalence.

I began the entire design process by thoroughly identifying so-called trends, not only in areas directly related to art or painting but also spanning broadly understood design, fashion, and design aesthetics popular on social media or platforms like Pinterest, paying the closest attention to phenomena related to color. In this case, color does not function solely expressively. I treat it as a tool for perceptual impact, a carrier of visual intensity, and an essential element for attracting attention in conditions of increasingly ruthless competition between images.

This kind of market research allowed me to isolate a specific color palette within which I decided to operate. However, the selection of colors did not consist of simply copying ready-made visual combinations, but of gradually isolating repetitive chromatic patterns appearing in the analyzed works from the fields of design, digital graphics, and social media aesthetics. I paid particular attention to the frequency of specific color relationships, the degree of saturation, the contrast between colors, and the presence of specific optical effects associated with backlighting, fluorescence, or glowing. As a result, I isolated a set of colors characterized by high visual intensity and the ability to quickly attract attention under screen-based perception. The color schemes of the paintings were thus based on a palette I define as „digital”—encompassing intense, saturated colors often absent in nature, characteristic of screens and interfaces rather than a traditional palette.

Since one of the main assumptions was to minimize the element of chance—both in the strategy development and during execution—each work was detailed by me before I started painting. After initial sketches made using a tablet in Procreate, I moved the work to Adobe Illustrator, where I created vector ver-

sions of the „ectoplasms.“ Working in a vector environment allowed for precise control over composition, the shape of forms, their scale, and the relationships between them, as well as easy testing of color variants before the actual painting stage. The next stage was the chromatic decision phase—the process of selecting the most optimal color combinations. In the vast majority of cases, I paired two colors on each painting; it was important to me that these combinations created a specific, elusive tension, influencing one another or creating characteristic optical effects.

Crucially, in the context of my experiment, the chromatic decision and the technological decision do not function as two separate stages, but as a single, indivisible act of designing the image. This is where the politics of color manifests. The choice of color relationships was coupled from the start with an awareness of the possibilities and limitations of oil painting technology, particularly the necessity of building color saturation through multiple, very thin glaze layers. In this case, color does not function as an abstract visual value to be materially realized, but as the result of a specific sequence of technological actions. In this sense, a chromatic decision is simultaneously a decision about the process, pace, and

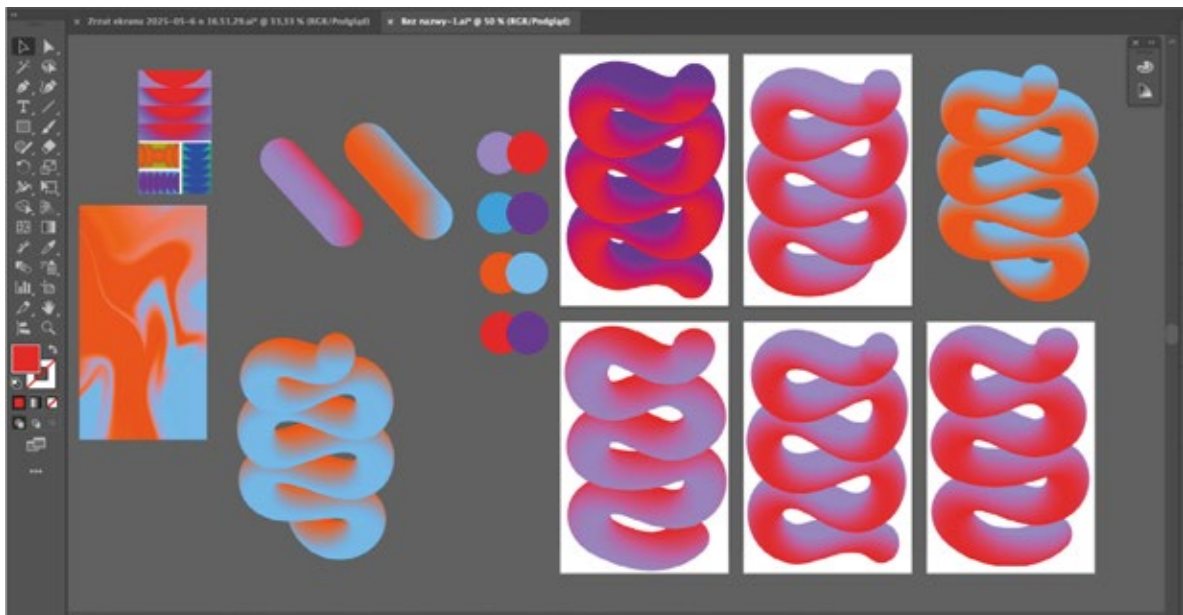


Fig. 8. Screenshot from the design process, 2026. Author's own work

structure of the work. Every color relationship was designed, and I immediately subjected the intuitive recognition of a combination's potential to a confrontation with workshop knowledge and technological experience, which determine the possibility of achieving specific effects of luminosity, soft transitions, and synthetic smoothness.

This fusion of chromatic and technological decisions allowed me to shift the weight of the creative process from gesture and expression to designing the

conditions of the image's creation. Painting became a practice operating at the intersection of intuition, craft, and procedure, where the aesthetic of a „digital“ image is achieved not through simulating digital tools, but through the consistent use of the properties and limitations of the oil medium.

The next step was producing appropriate stencils—the forms of individual ectoplasms, saved as vectors, were cut by a plotter on self-adhesive foil and then applied to the canvas in precisely defined locations. In this context, I did not so much abandon creative intuition as subordinate it to my decisions to maintain full control at every stage. Interestingly, the stencils, produced precisely to the dimensions of each painting, masked the entire canvas except for the form of the ectoplasm; I only removed them when I considered the painting finished. This caused most of the painting's surface to remain outside the immediate field of work, focusing my attention solely on the isolated fragment of canvas. In practice, this resembled working under conditions of a highly restricted field of vision, reinforcing the impression of procedural and technical action. The use of stencils covering almost the entire surface introduced an element of radical irreversibility. It prevented ongoing control of the relationship between form and background and verification of effects at the junction of painted and unpainted fragments. In practice, this meant I had to rely on the previously prepared design, technological knowledge, and trust in my own competencies. Only after removing the stencils could I verify if the painting met the assumptions—whether the tensions of selected colors, clashed with the characteristic earthiness of the raw canvas, actually functioned according to my will, and whether the image, extracted from the digital context of vector graphics and transformed into the material world, became an independently functioning visual object. Thus, the moment of removing the stencil became the only stage where the design confronted the material reality of the image. In this context, I implemented a strategy of control that, paradoxically, generates uncertainty.

I decided to execute the paintings on unprimed linen canvas. Unprimed linen, with its natural, light ocher, heterogeneous color, became an essential compositional element. Its visual presence was intended to strengthen the contrast between the material, physical support and the synthetic, digital aesthetic of the colored forms. During the work, for technological reasons, the canvases were covered with a transparent primer, which did not significantly affect their visual character.

The painting process itself—the execution of the adopted strategy—was simultaneous; many paintings were created in parallel within a single, organized work

system. This process was consciously shaped as a counterpart to a manufacturing process rather than a spontaneous creative act.

The process looked as follows: based on the design, I purchased appropriate oil paints, which I then mixed until the desired colors were achieved—crucially, in quantities that allowed me to complete the entire painting without remixing, which would carry the risk of a subtly different tone. I placed the mixed paints in



Fig. 9. Detail of a painting in progress, 2025. Author's own work

glass jars, covered them with linseed oil to prevent drying. In the next stage, I proceeded to paint. Each painting consists of many—several or a dozen—very thin, glazed layers of oil paint. I applied each layer and then precisely rubbed it with a brush to achieve an impeccably blended effect—a gradient, a gradual, ungraspable moment of color melting into the support structure, an ephemeral balance between opacity and transparency. This process required appropriate technological breaks for drying. However, this painting mechanism was a necessity, as maintaining the glazed character of the surface and the consistent game between transparency and opacity, which enhanced

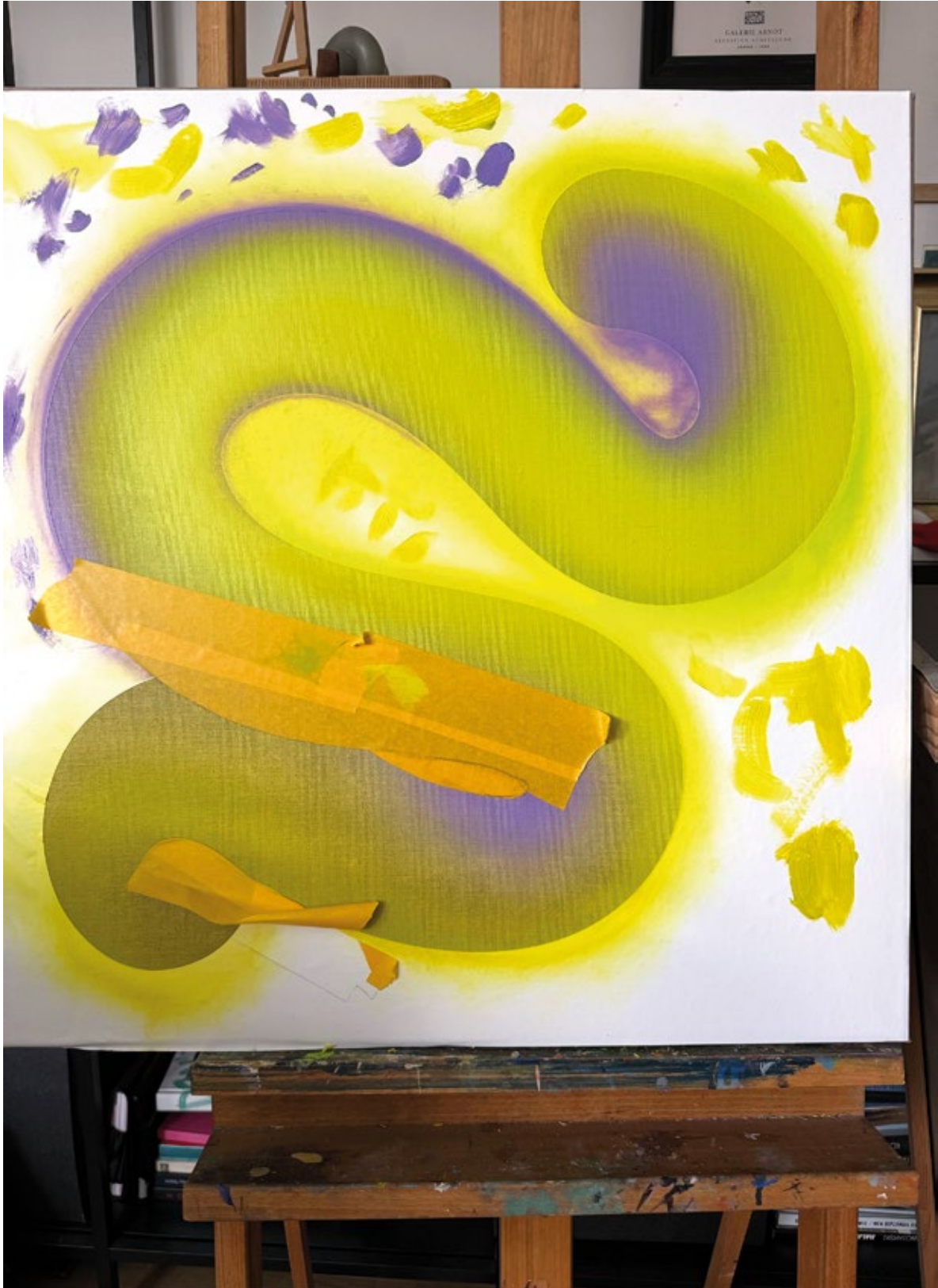


Fig. 10. Detail of a painting in progress, 2025. Author's own work



Fig. 11. Detail of a painting in progress, 2025. Author's own work

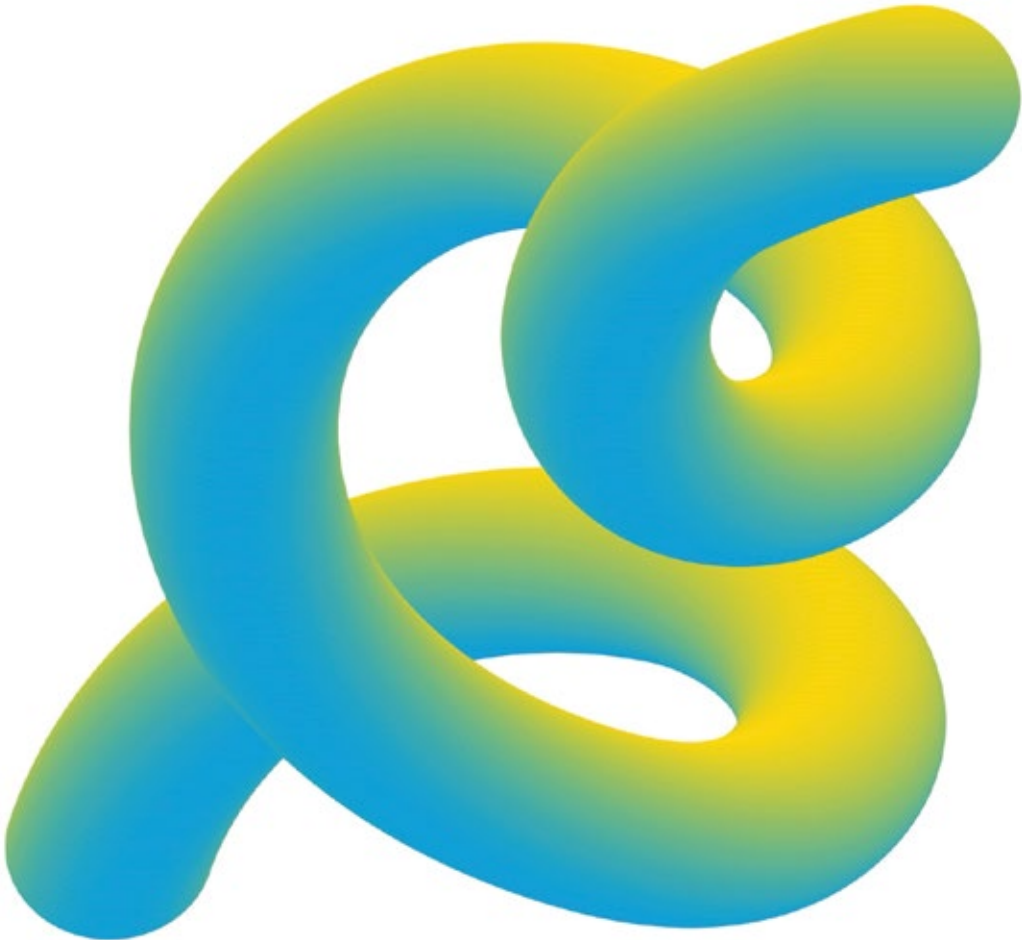


Fig. 12. Painting design. Author's own work

the impression of immateriality, remained extremely important.

The multi-layered, thin application of paint allowed me to achieve a particularly intense, saturated „sound” of color, giving the effect of internal glowing while maintaining optical lightness and apparent bodilessness. The applied technology directly influenced the functioning of the „ectoplasms,” which—thanks to the glazed structure and smooth surface devoid of material hand traces—sit even more strongly between a painted image and a generated one. These forms give the impression of being printed or synthetically produced rather than painted, deliberately challenging traditional notions of the materiality of an oil painting and its manual, gestural character.

At the same time, this technology constitutes a kind of subtle game „for initiates”—viewers with experience in oil media who are aware of the difficulty involved in achieving such saturation while maintaining transparency and building an optical „glow” without resorting to strictly digital solutions. In this sense, the technological layer functions not only as a formal tool but also as a hidden plane of communication between the artist and a competent viewer, revealing the tension between painterly craft and the aesthetic of simulation.

However—as I discovered much later during execution—the adopted methodology revealed the limits of designing the painting process. The drying time of oil paint, the multi-stage nature of the work, and the physical strain associated with the precise execution of layers proved to be factors that cannot be fully subordinated to the logic of planning. In this sense, the painting medium introduces an element of resistance, which becomes an important part of the reflection on the status of artistic work as productive labor. Indeed, the area where my strategy proved least effective against digital technologies—where I was defeated by them—was the time and physicality of the painting process. Generative imaging technologies can produce an aesthetically satisfying image in minutes, whereas painting one image took me several months. Paradoxically, the elements considered a special value of traditional painting—materiality, multi-layering, subtle tension between opacity and transparency—turned out to be factors that significantly slowed down the production process. Even under the most favorable conditions, the pace of execution remained limited by the properties of the medium and the necessity of technological breaks. Concurrently with the creative work, I carried out teaching and organizational duties, and I also became pregnant and took nearly a year of maternity leave, which further extended the project’s duration.



Fig. 13. Patrycja Sap-Przedwojewska, Ectoplasm No. 6, 2025, oil on canvas, 80 × 120 cm

As a result, the execution phase of my experiment was significantly stretched over time. Initially, I assumed I would complete about 20 paintings in a year; however, over four years, 15 were created, 10 of which are included in this work. These data illustrate the discrepancy between the designed and actual pace of production in oil painting. In this sense, digital imaging technologies reveal an operational advantage in speed and efficiency, while oil painting remains a medium requiring time, physical engagement, and the acceptance of the material's inherent resistance. Thus, the implementation time became not only a practical limitation but also a significant factor redefining the original assumptions of the artistic strategy.

Yet, these limitations do not mean painting loses its significance. The time-consuming and physical nature of the process is, in my view, the condition for creating visual and material qualities that remain inaccessible to generative technologies. An oil painting is a material object with a specific surface structure, weight, scale, and traces of the creation process that cannot be fully hidden on one hand, nor simulated in digital space on the other. The experience of its reception is based not only on visual perception but also on the awareness of the object's physical presence and the labor time materialized within it. In this sense, the advantage of digital technologies in speed does not translate into the ability to produce the same kind of aesthetic and cultural objects. Painting remains a medium based on the relationship between time, matter, and labor, not just on generating visually satisfying representations.



Fig. 14. Detail of a painting in progress, 2025. Author's own work

## SUMMARY

The starting point of this dissertation was a need for an internal redefinition of myself as an artist and painter, but also as a person functioning within the institutional circuit and the artistic community. This was inextricably linked to the necessity of critical self-reflection; the result is an attempt to develop, implement, and test an original artistic strategy. This dissertation is also a reflection on the tension between the culturally entrenched myth of the artist and the actual conditions of contemporary painting practice. Amidst an overproduction of images, ruthless visual competition, and the growing role of digital media, the artist today functions in a reality where the mere production of works—creativity in its broad sense—proves insufficient. In this context, the question of the possibility of consciously designing an artistic practice is crucial, as is the role of formal decisions (in my case, specifically chromatic decisions).

This doctoral thesis was designed as an artistic experiment aimed at developing and implementing an original painting strategy based on an analysis of the relationship between color, image perception, and the mechanisms of visibility in visual culture. The artistic component ultimately took the form of a series of oil paintings on unprimed linen canvas, supplemented by neon objects that serve as spatial extensions of the problems addressed in the painting. In the completed works, a key role is played by forms I refer to as „ectoplasms”—luminous, semi-transparent structures appearing on the surface of raw canvas. Their presence introduces tension between the materiality of the painting medium and the aesthetic characteristic of contemporary screen culture and digitally generated images.

The process of executing the series allowed me to practically work through the assumptions regarding the relationships between chromatic decisions, painting technology, and image perception. Color—understood here not solely as an element of expression but as a tool for designing visual experience—proved to be a key component in building the intensity of the image’s impact. Chromatic decisions remained inextricably linked to technological decisions regarding layer application, drying times, and the degree of transparency of subsequent glazes. In this sense, color functioned not as an autonomous aesthetic value, but as the result of a specific technological procedure and labor time inscribed in the image’s materiality.

The realization of the series allowed me to shift the emphasis from gesture and spontaneous expression to designing the conditions under which the image arises. Painting was treated as a process situated between intuition, craft, and strategy—a process where formal decisions are simultaneously decisions about technology, work time, and the image's impact on the viewer. Such a painting practice represents an attempt to transcend the opposition between inspiration and calculation that has long organized thoughts on creativity within the myth of the artist.

It must be emphasized, however, that this dissertation primarily covers the conceptual and execution stages of the proposed strategy. The resulting series of paintings materializes the formal and chromatic assumptions, but a full verification of the strategy's effectiveness—understood as its functioning within the exhibition, institutional, and market circuits—falls outside the scope of this doctorate. In this sense, the artistic experiment conducted stops at the stage of designing and implementing a model of action, the further testing of which will only be possible in the future, with the presentation of works in the broader art circuit and their confrontation with actual market mechanisms, reception, and valuation.

An important context for this work remains the dynamic development of generative imaging technologies and artificial intelligence, which significantly influence contemporary modes of production and perception. From this perspective, painting appears as a medium operating with a different logic of time, materiality, and labor. An oil painting functions as a physical object whose creation is inscribed in a long-term, technologically complex process. Its reception is not limited to visual perception but is also linked to the awareness of the time, effort, and material presence built into its structure.

In this sense, the project I term the „politics of color“ constitutes an attempt to consciously utilize one of painting's fundamental resources—color—as a tool for negotiating the image's position in contemporary visual culture.

This doctorate should therefore be treated not as the conclusion of a process, but as a starting point for further artistic endeavors. The developed strategy will be subjected to further trials, modifications, and, above all, verification in the realities of the art market. Regardless of future results, the process of realizing the series has allowed for deep reflection on my own creative path, the role of autonomous formal decisions in painting, and the necessity of treating artistic practice as work.



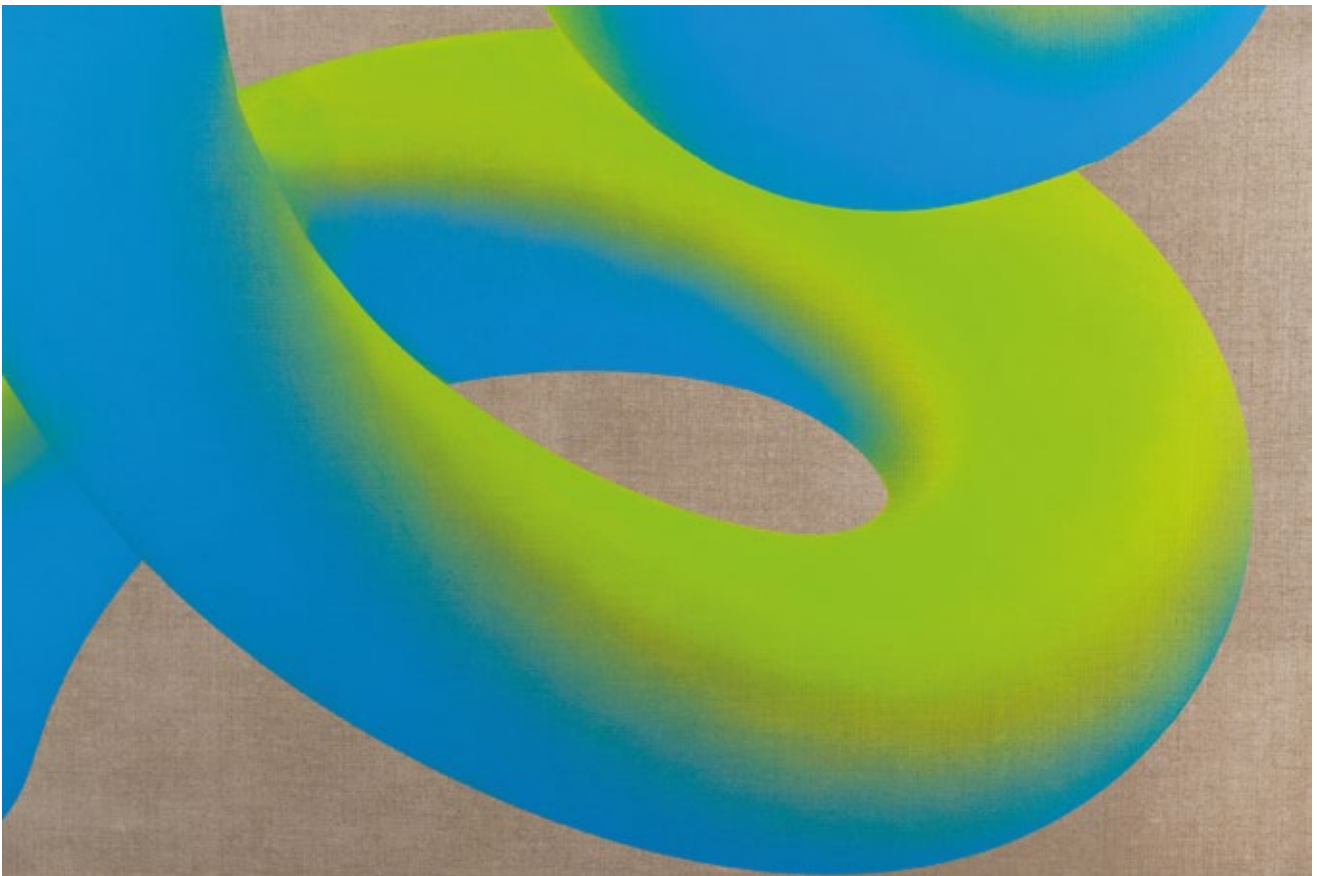
## Documentation of the Artistic Work



*Ectoplasm No. 1*, 2025, oil on canvas, 120 × 120 cm



*Ectoplasm No. 1* (detail), 2025, oil on canvas, 120 × 120 cm



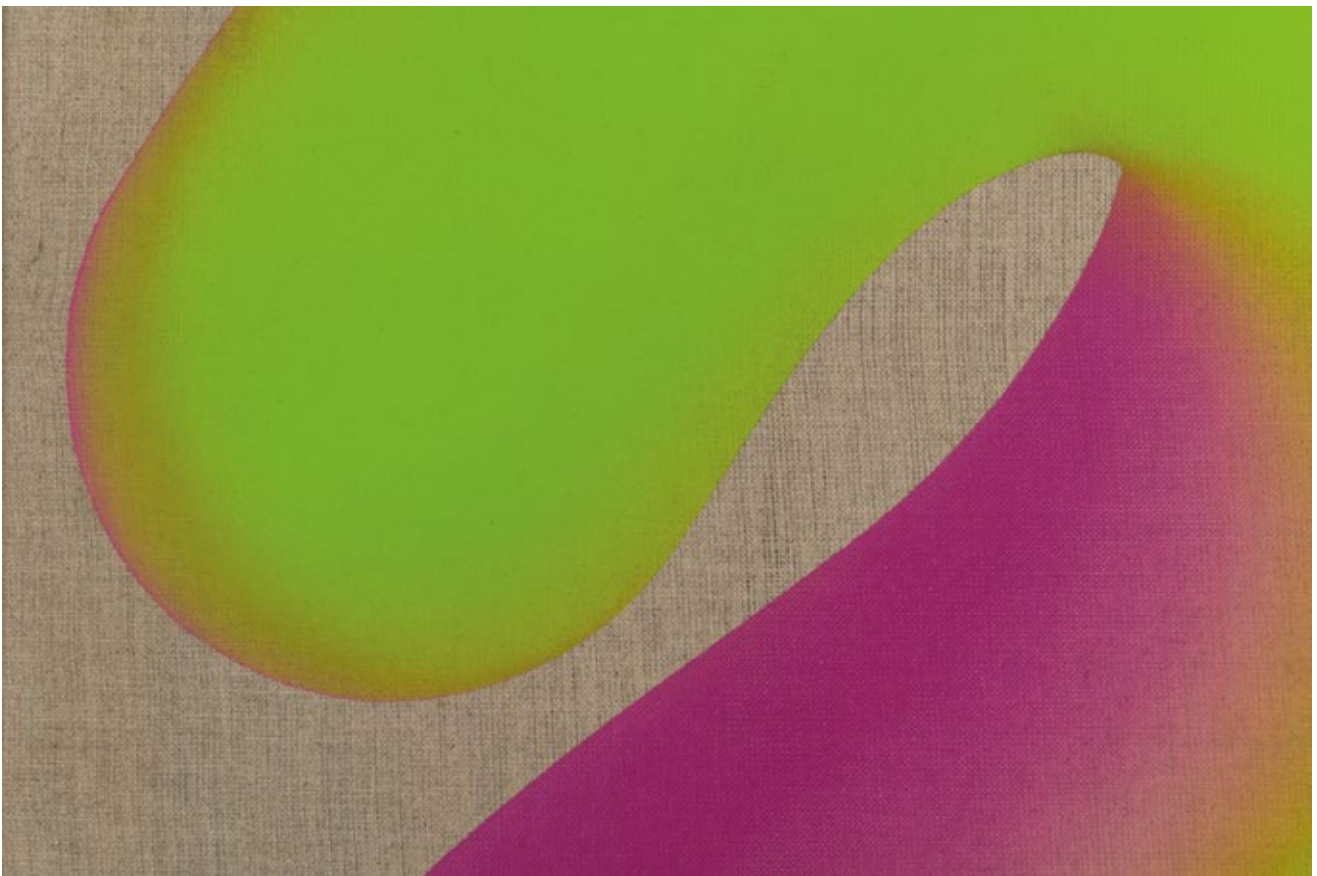
*Ectoplasm No. 1* (detail), 2025, oil on canvas, 120 × 120 cm



*Ectoplasm No. 2*, 2026, oil on canvas, 120 x 120 cm.



*Ectoplasm No. 2* (detail), 2026, oil on canvas, 120 x 120 cm.



*Ectoplasm No. 2* (detail), 2026, oil on canvas, 120 x 120 cm.



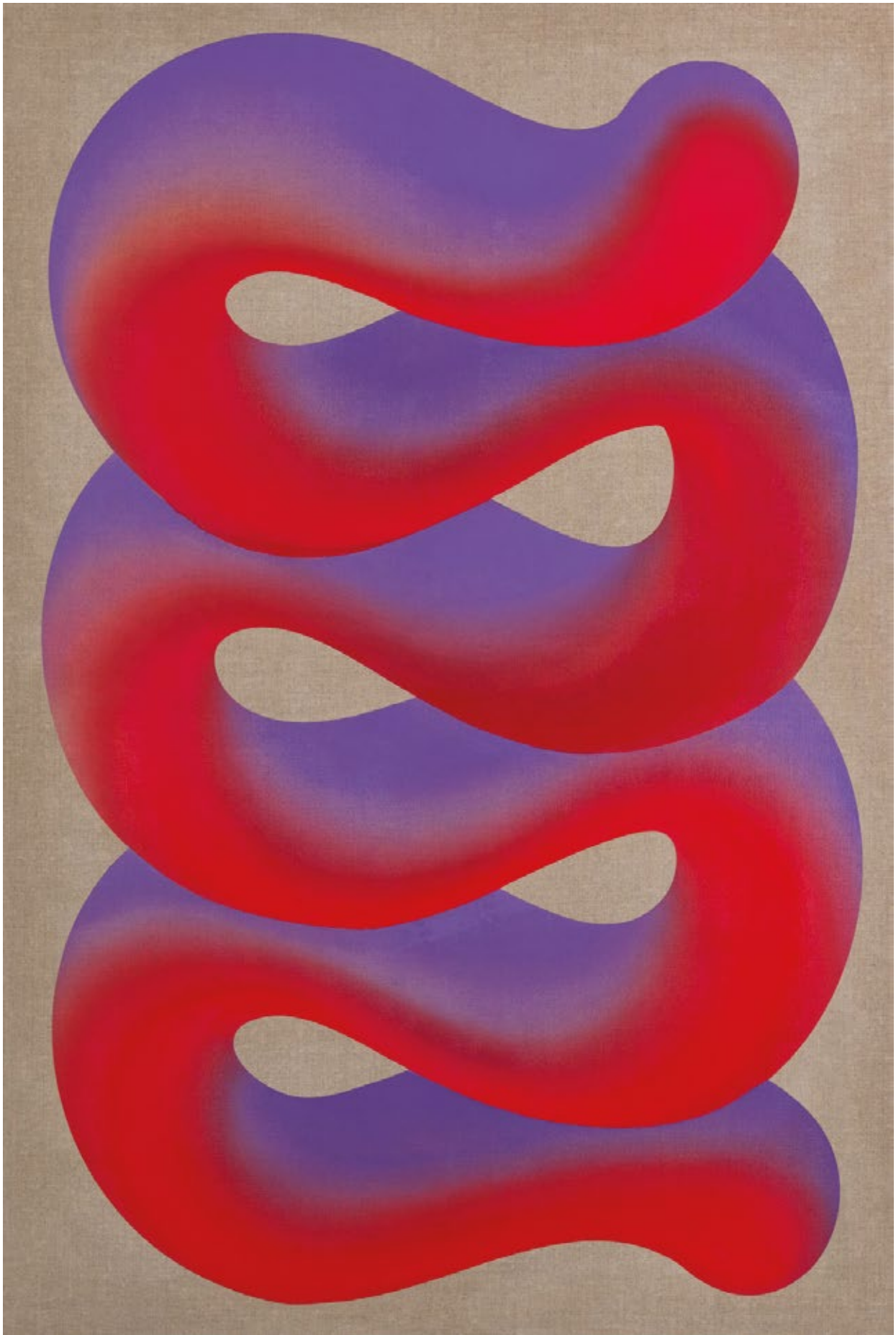
*Ectoplasm No. 3*, 2026, oil on canvas, 80 x 120 cm.



*Ectoplasm No. 3* (detail), 2026, oil on canvas, 80 x 120 cm.



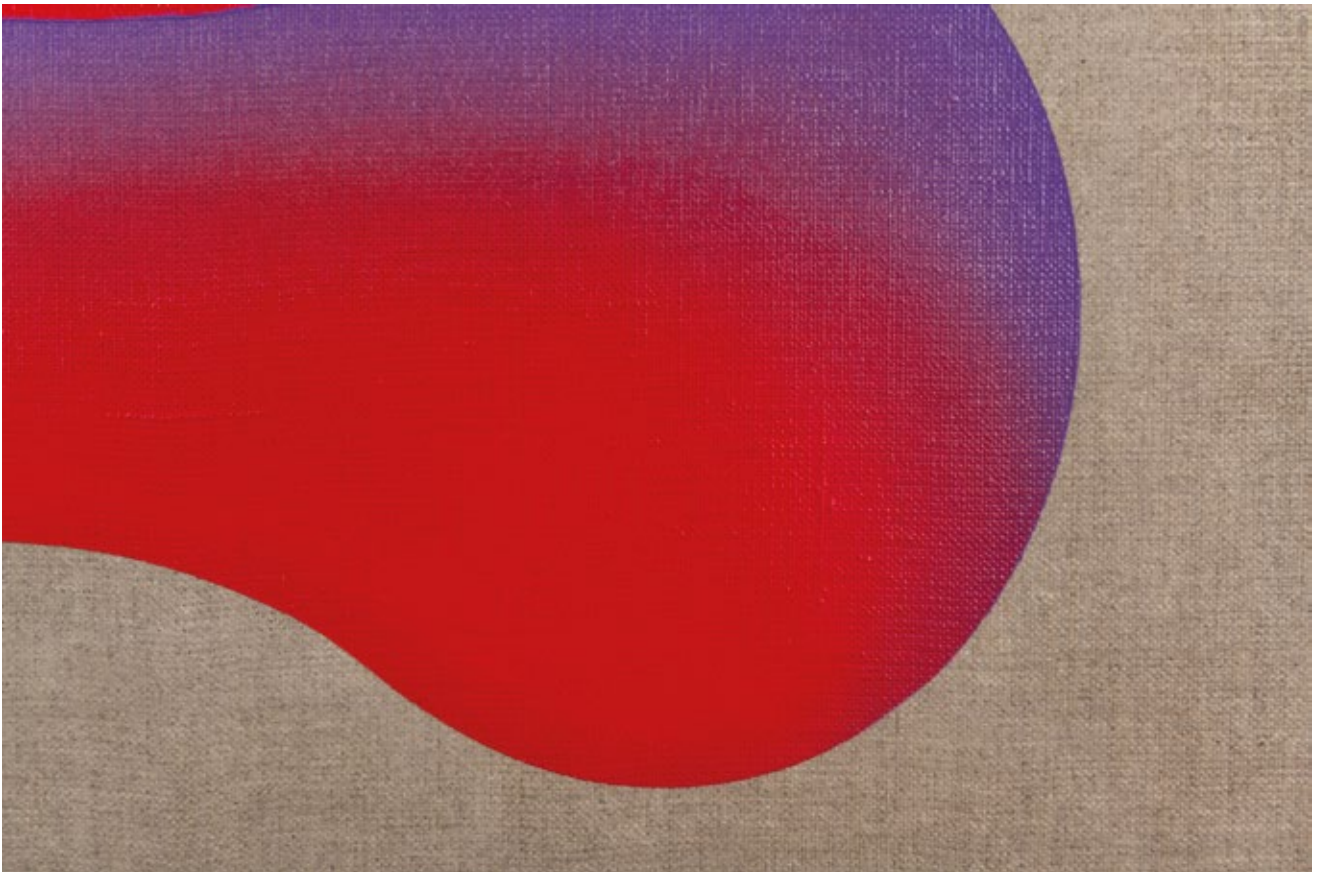
*Ectoplasm No. 3* (detail), 2026, oil on canvas, 80 x 120 cm.



*Ectoplasm No. 4*, 2026, oil on canvas, 80 x 120 cm.



*Ectoplasm No. 4* (detail), 2026, oil on canvas, 80 x 120 cm.



*Ectoplasm No. 4* (detail), 2026, oil on canvas, 80 x 120 cm.



*Ectoplasm No. 5*, 2026, oil on canvas, 80 x 120 cm.



*Ectoplasm No. 5* (detail), 2026, oil on canvas, 80 x 120 cm.



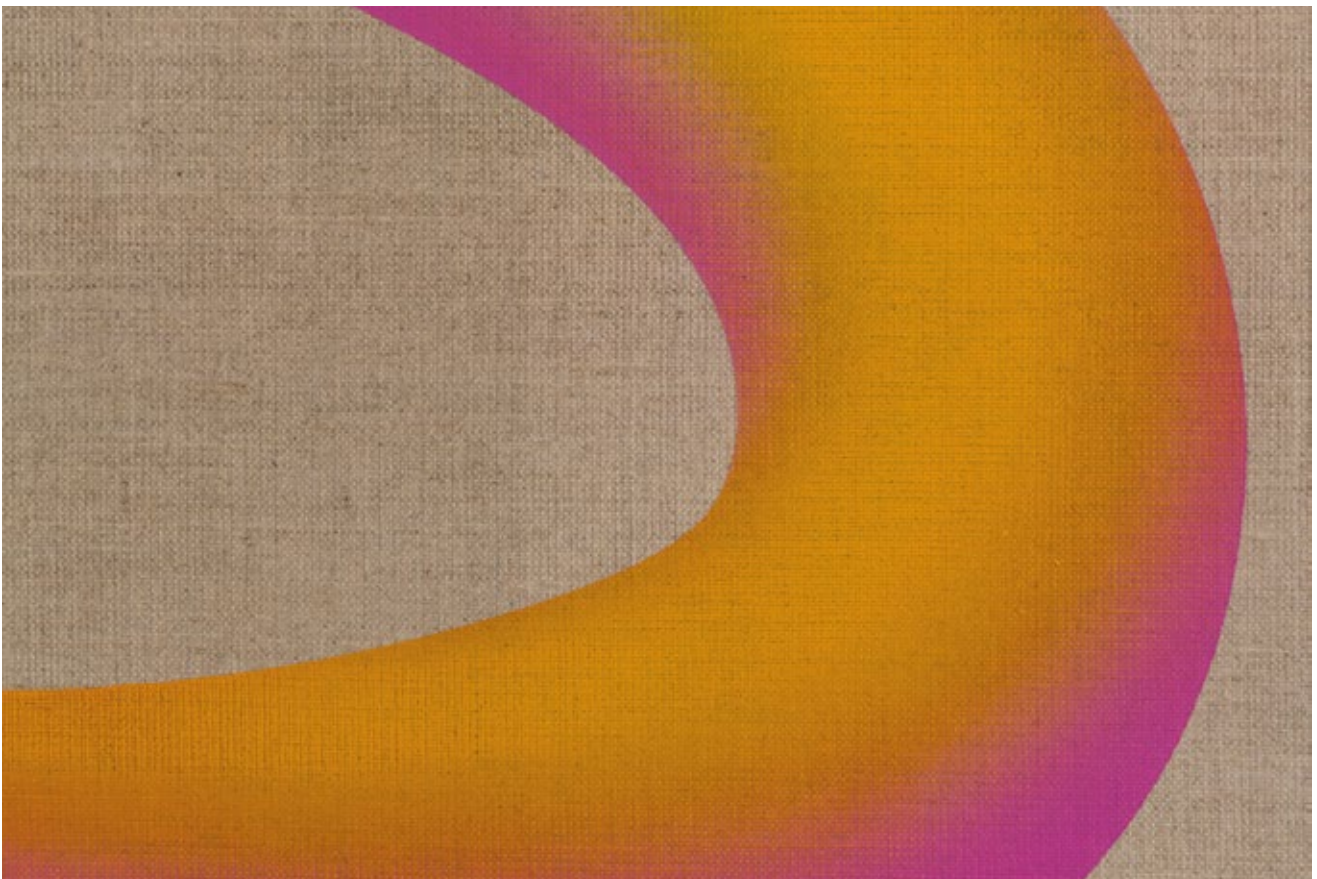
*Ectoplasm No. 5* (detail), 2026, oil on canvas, 80 x 120 cm.



*Ectoplasm No. 6*, 2026, oil on canvas, 80 x 120 cm.



*Ectoplasm No. 6* (detail), 2026, oil on canvas, 80 x 120 cm.



*Ectoplasm No. 6* (detail), 2026, oil on canvas, 80 x 120 cm.



*Ectoplasm No. 7*, 2025, oil on canvas, 100 x 100 cm.



*Ectoplasm No. 7* (detail), 2025, oil on canvas, 100 x 100 cm.



*Ectoplasm No. 7* (detail), 2025, oil on canvas, 100 x 100 cm.



*Ectoplasm No. 8*, 2025, oil on canvas, 60 x 60 cm.



*Ectoplasm No. 8* (detail), 2025, oil on canvas, 60 x 60 cm.



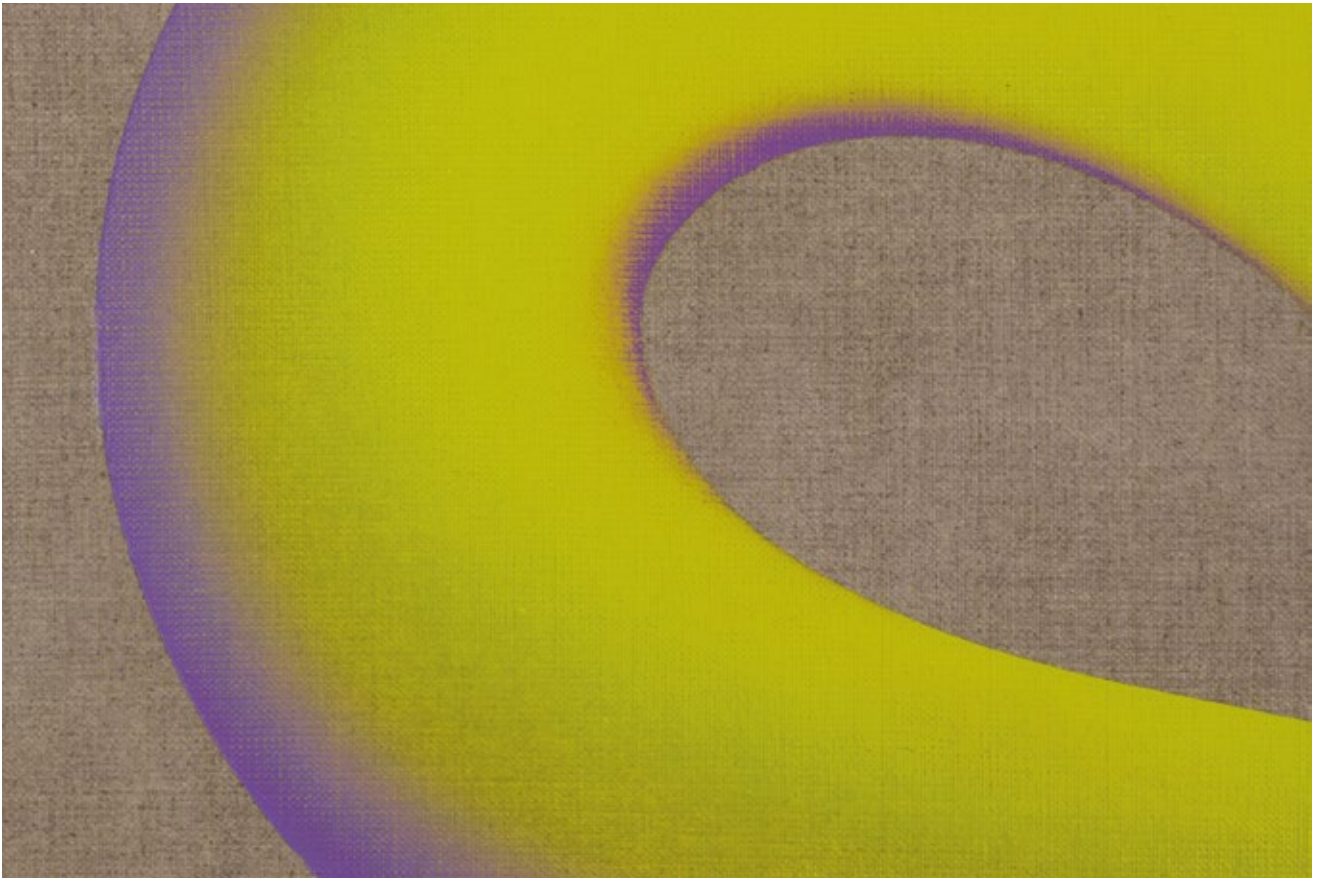
*Ectoplasm No. 8* (detail), 2025, oil on canvas, 60 x 60 cm.



*Ectoplasm No. 9*, 2026, oil on canvas, 60 x 60 cm.



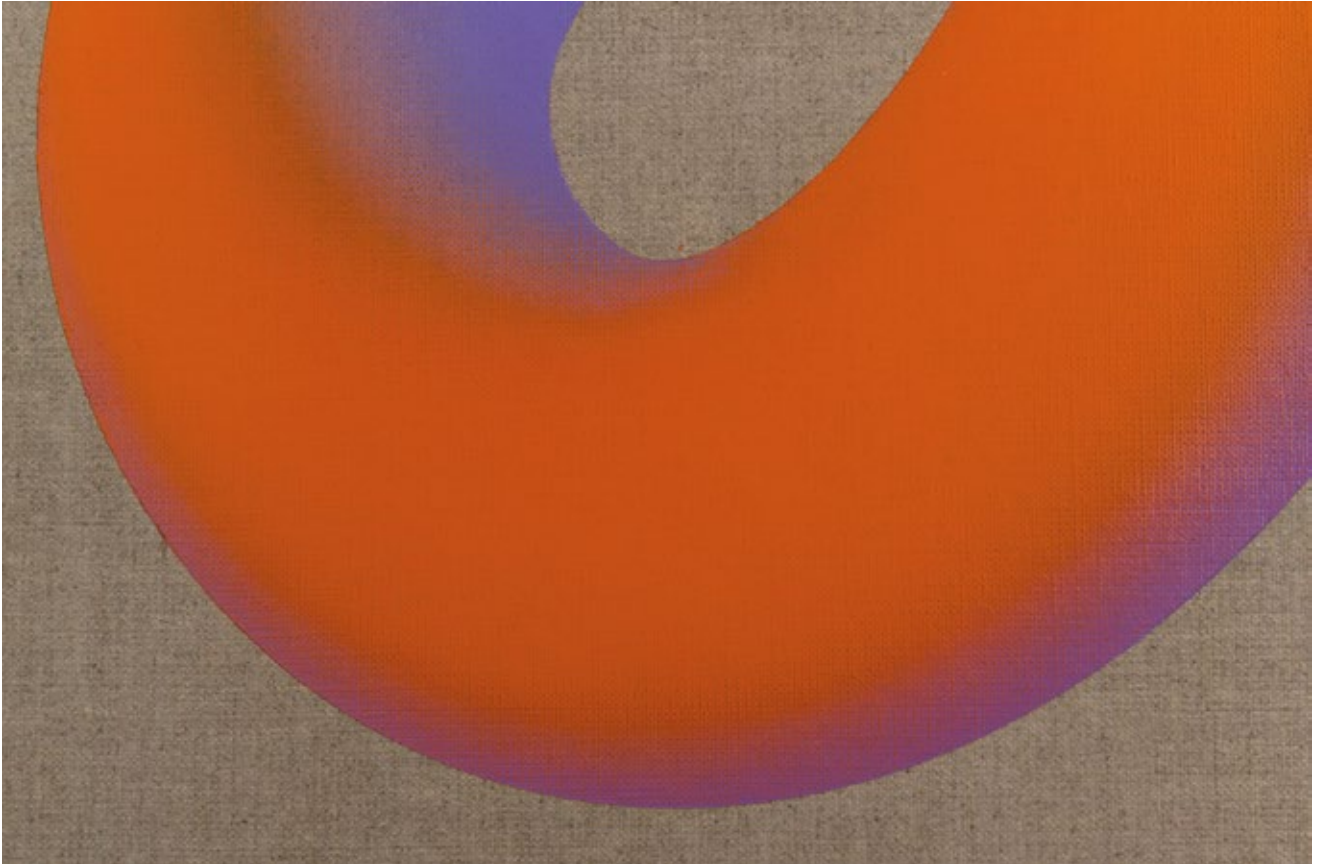
*Ectoplasm No. 9 (detail)* , 2026, oil on canvas, 60 x 60 cm.



*Ectoplasm No. 9 (detail)* , 2026, oil on canvas, 60 x 60 cm.



*Ectoplasm No. 10*, 2026, oil on canvas, 60 x 60 cm.



*Ectoplasm No. 10* (detail), 2026, oil on canvas, 60 x 60 cm.



*Ectoplasm No. 10* (detail), 2026, oil on canvas, 60 x 60 cm.

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## LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1. Monika Drożyńska, *Artistic Work Is Work*, 2025, artistic embroidery on fabric, 60 × 30 cm

Fig. 2. Patrycja Sap-Przedwojewska, *Ectoplasm No. 4*, 2026, oil on canvas, 80 × 120 cm

Fig. 3. Patrycja Sap-Przedwojewska, *Ectoplasm No. 4* (detail), 2026, oil on canvas

Fig. 4. Patrycja Sap-Przedwojewska, *Ectoplasm No. 9* (detail), 2026, oil on canvas

Fig. 5. Patrycja Sap-Przedwojewska, *Ectoplasm No. 3* (detail), 2026, oil on canvas

Fig. 6. Patrycja Sap-Przedwojewska, *Ectoplasm No. 3*, 2026, oil on canvas, 80 × 120 cm

Fig. 7. Paweł Susid, *Untitled*, 2000, acrylic on canvas, 41 × 41 cm

Fig. 8. Screenshot from the design process, 2026. Author's own work

Fig. 9. Detail of a painting in progress, 2025. Author's own work

Fig. 10. Detail of a painting in progress, 2025. Author's own work

Fig. 11. Detail of a painting in progress, 2025. Author's own work

Fig. 12. Painting design. Author's own work

Fig. 13. Patrycja Sap-Przedwojewska, *Ectoplasm No. 6*, 2025, oil on canvas, 80 × 120 cm

Fig. 14. Detail of a painting in progress, 2025. Author's own work