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**Stream of Consciousness as a tool in practice
of contemporary figurative painter
in Digital Age**

Doctoral thesis

in the field of art in the discipline of fine arts and art conservation

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*Every notion is born along with its form.
I make reality of ideas as they come into my head*

~Meret Oppenheim

Abstract

In the following text, I present a method of figurative painting in the Digital Age, which functions on principles similar to the literary technique of stream-of-consciousness. The main characteristic of the presented method is the non-linear depiction of reality using painting. Stream-of-consciousness allows addressing contemporary issues without imposing specific answers. The painting here does not illustrate a given problem but offers the possibility of multiple interpretations. I divide my work using the stream-of-consciousness technique into two main phases: the sketch stage and the painting realisation stage. I base my description of the functioning of the first phase on the four stages of innovative thought formation presented in Graham Wallas's book *The Art of Thought: Preparation, Incubation, Illumination* and *Verification*. An essential element in the *Preparation* stage is a careful and holistic approach to gathering information about the surrounding socio-political situation. Related to this stage is the issue of information gathering in the Digital Age and its associated obstacles. Then, during *Incubation*, the innovative thought that will develop into a sketch for an image is shaped at the edge of our consciousness. *Illumination*, generally preceded by an *Intimation*, is the stage where the initial sketch for the image appears. The final stage is *Verification*, during which we consciously make the necessary corrections and make the final decision regarding the realisation of the painting from the prepared sketch. During the painting realisation phase, being familiar with the *Flow Theory* described by Mihály Csíkszentmihályi is vital, allowing us to unleash our experimental potential during creation. Applying the stream-of-consciousness technique results in compositions with multidimensional meaning and experimental character. Stream of consciousness as a metaphor to describe the work of painting has yet to be considered in art theory. The stream-of-consciousness technique differs from the Automatism used in Surrealism or Cubism, as I demonstrate in the following work. The research carried out within the framework of this project had an artistic dimension. During the three-year exploration, 50 paintings were created using oil techniques (all the reproductions are attached in the annexe). I selected nine works that will be part of the doctoral exhibition and present them in Chapter IV.

Purpose of the research

The main objective of the artistic research I have undertaken is to analyse the stream-of-consciousness technique as a tool for figurative painters working in the Digital Age. The final result of the conducted experiments will be a solo exhibition consisting of paintings made in oil technique. Analysing the stream-of-consciousness technique through the prism of figurative painting created in the Digital Age will explore new avenues of medium development. The multidimensionality inherent in works created using the stream of consciousness means that a painting can simultaneously address, for example, the current political situation and post-humanism. The works created as a result of an experiment based on a broad knowledge of the medium, observation of modernity and its characteristic elements, and a dialogue with art history will contribute to broadening the horizons of painting and recording contemporary history.

Description of research methods used

I analyse issues related to the main topic by observing my creative process and juxtaposing conclusions drawn from these observations with information on the stream of consciousness from other fields (literary theory, philosophy, psychology and art history). I am interested in what the stream of consciousness is and what can affect the stream of consciousness during the creative process today. The first part of the title of the dissertation, *Search by Image*, refers to the central premise of the artistic research undertaken, which is to work with Internet browsers to search for motifs of interest to me. One of the methods used in my artistic research is the incorporation of information media influencing the stream of consciousness of modern man into the practice of painting. As a representative of the generation of digital natives, I am exposed daily to the endless information new media provides. When creating works, I tried to listen to the broadest possible spectrum of political and cultural podcasts and audiobooks on sociology, history and fiction. 2020-2023 were full of events that influenced our lives, shaping our daily stream of thought. This influence is reflected in the paintings created during my artistic research during this period. Creating a sketch is an essential aspect of the theoretical analysis of artistic research. Sketch is the most crucial stage in creating a work, where the main thought and formal tropes of a painting work are formed. After the initial selection of motifs of interest, I used graphics programs, smartphone apps and AI programs to work on the paintings, which was crucial to the outcome of the artistic research. Assuming that we are moving in the digital age, the use of these methods of image

manipulation was natural for me. During the artistic research, I noticed that the stream of consciousness connects the individual images like trees in a forest through a mycelium: each is a fully autonomous work; they may belong to different species, but they still share a common denominator.

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I. Entry

The stream-of-consciousness technique is primarily known as a literary term associated with a specific type of narrative in the early twentieth-century novel. My research focuses on the significant potential this technique brings to contemporary figurative painting and image creation. In professional magazines related to contemporary art (including *Artforum* and *Frieze*) and literature devoted to the theory of contemporary art, we will not find articles that relate the stream-of-consciousness technique to contemporary figurative painting. The stream-of-consciousness technique in modernist literature bases its main assumptions on the mimicry of issues in psychology. In order to describe the characteristics of the stream-of-consciousness technique in contemporary art, especially in the context of the painting technique, we must first examine whether it is possible to replace verbal information with visual information.

1. How do we think with images?

Suppose you inform me that ‘ the blood rushed violently from the man’s heart, quickening his pulse at the sight of his enemy.’ Of the many latent images in this phrase, how many were salient in your mind and in mine? Probably two—the man and his enemy—and these images were faint. Images of blood, heart, violent rushing, pulse, quickening, and sight, were either not revived at all, or were passing shadows.¹

~William James

On the other hand, a deaf and dumb man can weave his tactile and visual images into a system of thought quite as effective and rational as that of a word-user. The question whether thought is possible without language has been a favorite topic of discussion among philosophers. Some interesting reminiscences of his childhood by Mr. Ballard, a deaf-mute instructor in the National College at Washington, show it to be perfectly possible.²

~William James

Psychologists Elinor Amit and Evelina Fedorenko from Harvard Medical School, thanks to research conducted in 2017, discovered that even when trying to think verbally, people internally create visual content. This fact draws our attention to how deeply visual thinking is ingrained in our brains. Studies in which the brain functions of volunteers were monitored by magnetic resonance imaging showed that people generate more coherent verbal representations during deliberate internal monologue. However, visual information always accompanies our thoughts to a greater or lesser extent.

The question we wanted to answer was: Can you engage in one without the other modality popping up?” Amit said. “Can you use one without invoking the other unintentionally?³

Amit and colleagues designed a series of two-step experiments to understand better how people use both ways of thinking. In the first, volunteers were asked to create images or sentences from pairs

¹ William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1950, p. 556

² William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1950, p. 545

³ Peter Reuell, *The Power of Picturing Thoughts*, The Harvard Gazette, 2017

of words. The first word always represented a profession, such as ballerina, policeman or teacher. In the first half of the trials, the second word was an object, and in the second half, place. After creating a visual or verbal representation of a previously drawn pair of words, participants had to answer the following questions: How distinct were the individual representations created intentionally, and how distinct were those created unintentionally?

What we found was there was no difference in the vividness of images - Amit said. - The subjects didn't care if we asked them to create an image or not; it was vivid regardless of what we asked them to do. ⁴

The only change observed was the effect of the instructions on the clarity of verbal thinking: it was more pronounced when participants intended to form sentences than when they were produced by chance. The second stage of the study, involving MRI tests, revealed that even when participants consciously tried to think visually, their brains showed relatively low levels of activity in the visual area, leading to questions about whether visual thinking is related to a particular aspect of our inner lives. Amit and colleagues found that people think visually about things close to them (temporally, socially, or geographically) but use inner speech when contemplating things far away.

So if you think about Harvard Square versus San Francisco, you're probably visualizing the former, but thinking verbally about the latter. The same goes for whether you think about yourself or someone else, or in-group versus outgroup, or tomorrow versus 10 years from now.⁵

The fact that a visual aspect almost always accompanies verbal thinking suggests that people are grounded in the present, even when they try to use a way of thinking typical of the future. Verbal thinking is a relatively new invention in the history of human development. For a long time, we have perceived the world visually, so language is an addition to our thinking, not vice versa.

⁴ Peter Reuell, *The Power of Picturing Thoughts*, The Harvard Gazette, 2017

⁵ Peter Reuell, *The Power of Picturing Thoughts*, The Harvard Gazette, 2017

- **Author's comment**

The fact that we think visually about things closest to us led me to the hypothesis that with the stream-of-consciousness technique in figurative painting, we can find new ways to interpret the present and the problems that bother us the most. This technique can also result in sincerity and authenticity of artistic expression. As Nicolas Callas said:

In a philosophy based on intuition, what truth is to science, sincerity is to art.⁶

⁶ Nicolas Callas, *Madness in the Arena*, Artforum, 1977

II. What is the stream of consciousness?

Research by Elinor Amit and Evelina Fedorenko from Harvard Medical School shows that visual thinking is deeply rooted in our brains. To understand the stream-of-consciousness technique in figurative painting, I researched the definition of this process in psychology. I focused on combining the definition of William James and aspects of psychology by Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, who emphasises the importance of attention in stream-of-consciousness formation.

1. Definition of stream of consciousness according to William James

Stream of consciousness is a metaphor used by Alexander Bain in 1855 in the first edition of his *The Senses and the Intellect*. However, it is generally attributed to William James, often considered the father of American psychology, who developed the term's meaning in 1890 in his *The Principles of Psychology*. The book by William James shows us that the changes in our consciousness are not sudden. We all feel where our thoughts are going. As our mind evolves, the various components of our consciousness gradually merge. They form a unified, continuous consciousness, constituting one uninterrupted current. Even in a time gap, consciousness continues after its occurrence as if it were an integral part of the previous consciousness, constituting the subsequent unveiling of the same cognitive entity. In considering the stream of consciousness interrupted by sleep, the feeling of lack is not the same as the lack of feeling. On the contrary, it is a feeling of exceptional intensity. The break itself becomes a crucial, intensely active element.

*To expect the consciousness to feel the interruptions of its objective continuity as gaps, would be like expecting the eye to feel a gap of silence because it does not hear, or the ear to feel a gap of darkness because it does not see. So much for the gaps that are unfelt.*⁷

According to James, understanding this phenomenon is not about seeing consciousness as a collection of fragments. Terms such as chain do not adequately reflect its nature. Consciousness does not function by any connections; it is flowing. For a more adequate description, we can use the metaphors of a river or a stream, which best convey this idea. We can define it as a stream of

⁷ William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1950, p. 494-495.

thought, consciousness or subjective life. From *The Principles of Psychology* by William James, we can distinguish several characteristics of the stream of consciousness, which will be used in the following sections describing the presented research work:

- Knowing that our thought has stopped is quite different from knowing that our thought has ended.
- Our consciousness ignores most things that are in front of us.
- We understand our intention only after expressing it in words. Before speaking, we only have a rough outline of what we want to convey, but after expressing it, we find that our speech came out surprisingly well.
- In each of its stages, the mind acts as a stage full of simultaneous possibilities.
- Between the essential components lies a transitive form of consciousness, where words and images are not explicit but peripheral.
- Thought is constantly changing. Once passed, no state can return and be identical to what was before.
- The power of emotions caused by individual words is much greater in our consciousness than the meaning of the entire phrase, which may be less critical.

William James points out the subjectivity of the stream of consciousness:

*[...] elementary psychic fact were not thought or this thought or that thought, but my thought, every thought being owned.*⁸

According to James, human consciousness maintains continuity and unity, creating a common whole that we naturally call *self*. Each of our minds stores its thoughts internally, and there is no exchange between streams of consciousness. The belief that the objects of our thoughts have a double existence - both in our consciousness and outside - arises from the fact that other people's consciousnesses contain the same objects. If my thought shares the same object with someone else's thought, I perceive my thought as related to external reality. My past and present thoughts may have the same subject; this is the foundation of our belief in reality beyond the realm of thought.

⁸ William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1950, p.470.

2. Attention and stream of consciousness in Mihály Csíkszentmihályi's theory

According to Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, if we assume that our body is a complete and finite system - consciousness is a process that covers every aspect of this system. The definition of consciousness must include monitoring internal states and external environmental conditions, thus representing the most complex and integrated form of information processing humans can. We should not break consciousness down into physiological components because it loses meaning at the most exciting level: integrated human action and experience. Human attention is a form of psychic energy needed to control the stream of consciousness, and its resource is limited. It is a process that regulates states of consciousness by allowing or refusing to accept various contents into consciousness. At the same time, man is not free to decide what feelings he will feel, but he is free to decide what feelings should be at the centre of his consciousness. What to pay attention to, how intensely, and for how long are the choices that will determine the content of consciousness and, therefore, the empirical information available to our organism. An interesting phenomenon is dreams, an excellent example of a mental process in which attention plays no role. In dreams, we are aware; we experience emotions and visual images, and to some extent, we perform logical thinking. However, we have no choice among these elements of consciousness. Awareness and attention appear as two closely related systems, each controlling and being controlled by the other. The first contains information and gives direction; the second provides energy and new information, introducing changes into consciousness. Mihály Csíkszentmihályi recalls a university professor friend who describes his state of mind while mountain climbing, his favourite leisure activity:

*When I start to climb, it's as if my memory input had been cut off. All I can remember is the last thirty seconds, and all I can think ahead is the next five minutes... With tremendous concentration the normal world is forgotten.*⁹

⁹ Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, *Attention and the Holistic Approach to Behavior; The Stream of Consciousness Scientific Investigations into the Flow of Human Experience*, Plenum Pres., New York, 1978, p. 335-354

He goes on to give an example of a composer who describes her state of mind while working:

*I am really quite oblivious to my surroundings after I really get going . . . the phone could ring, and the doorbell could ring, or the house bum down.... When I start working, I really do shut out the world.*¹⁰

A professional chess player says:

*When the game is exciting, I don't seem to hear anything. The world seems to be cut off from me and all there is to think about is my game.*¹¹

This level of attention is also associated with another type of experience - when the body has to face a specific threat to solve a problem imposed on it by the environment. What is the difference between these two types of concentration? Between optimal and anxiety-inducing experiences? Many people need stimuli that can evoke negative feelings in the rest of society: climbers and skydivers, for example, seek a particular type of intense, seemingly unpleasant experience because they enjoy it. The relationship between a balance of challenge and skill on the one hand and enjoyable voluntary concentration on the other exists not only in various recreational and creative pursuits but also in professions such as surgery. If attention is a means by which a person exchanges information with the environment, and this process is voluntary, i.e., under the person's control, then this type of attentional focus is a state of optimal interaction. In such a state, a person has complete control and feels entirely alive because he can direct the flow of information that connects him with the environment in an interactive system. I know that I am alive, that I am someone, that I matter. Subjectively valued experiences depend on the voluntary focus of attention on a limited field of stimuli, also in work in art, because it requires focused attention to exclude all other stimuli that temporarily become irrelevant.

¹⁰ Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, *Attention and the Holistic Approach to Behavior; The Stream of Consciousness Scientific Investigations into the Flow of Human Experience*, Plenum Pres., New York, 1978, p. 335-354

¹¹ Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, *Attention and the Holistic Approach to Behavior; The Stream of Consciousness Scientific Investigations into the Flow of Human Experience*, Plenum Pres., New York, 1978, p. 335-354

3. Attention and stream of consciousness in painting technique

The main characteristic of the stream of consciousness is its subjectivity. The transformations of our consciousness can be compared to a stable stream, the direction of which is known to us, although it is knowledge from the *periphery* of our consciousness, which is an intensely active element, sometimes incorrectly referred to as a *break* in consciousness. Our mind is full of potential by being in constant change. Our body is a complete, finite system where consciousness controls every internal and external process. *Attention* is a psychic energy that controls this process by selecting the information the consciousness receives. By focusing on the *periphery* of our consciousness, we can bring out many exciting solutions that are not available to us through rational consideration alone. Following the flow of our thoughts and limiting external stimuli to achieve the highest level of focus can positively affect our artistic creation.

4. Stream of consciousness as a literary technique

[...] why all this fuss and bother about the mystery of the unconscious, what about the mystery of the conscious? ¹²

~James Joyce

Stream of consciousness is often encountered in literature, especially in literary analysis. Its meaning is varied and unclear, sometimes referring to the narrative technique, other times to the literary genre. Often, however, these two aspects are combined into one. A stream-of-consciousness novel is distinguished primarily by its focus on the inner thoughts and feelings of the character. The primary purpose of these novels is to show the consciousness of one or more characters, where their thoughts and emotions are the focal point, and the narrative acts as the screen on which it all takes place. It is worth remembering that writers are not usually experts in psychology, which we must remember in our further analysis of the stream of consciousness from a literary perspective. Consciousness encompasses the entire sphere of mental activity, from the subconscious through the various levels of the mind to the highest level of transparent and communicative awareness. The

¹² Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, Oxford University Press, New York Oxford Toronto, 1982, p. 436

last area is significant in the context of most psychological works. Stream-of-consciousness fiction stands out from other psychological works because it focuses on peripheral areas of the mind. The analysis of stream-of-consciousness fiction is about considering the different levels of thinking - from deeply hidden, just above oblivion, to those expressed verbally or formally. However, it is essential to separate consciousness from intelligence, memory and similar limited concepts. Depending on the degree of logical ordering, we classify them as high or low. The division can also be made into speech level and preface level. The preface level is an area of thought not directly related to communication; it is not controlled logically or rationally, unlike the level of speech (oral or written). We can think of consciousness as an iceberg - we only see a small part on the surface, but what lies beneath is just as important. Analysis of stream-of-consciousness fiction focuses on what lies deep beneath the surface of thought. There is no single concept of stream-of-consciousness in the literature. Instead, different techniques can be distinguished that serve to show this phenomenon. Among the novels categorised as examples of stream-of-consciousness are titles such as *Ulysses*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, and *To the Lighthouse*. However, it is crucial to understand that the original meaning of the term, coined by William James, was for a different concept. James developed a psychological theory stating that memories, thoughts, and feelings exist outside the primary consciousness and appear as a fluid stream, not a linear chain. In a literary context, the term has been used to represent a character's inner consciousness. Stream-of-consciousness literature is a form of psychological literature that should be analysed through the combination of psychology and epistemology. Penetration into human consciousness in literary works is an attempt to understand the essence of human nature. The authors explore the areas where we find our human experiences. For a writer, it is a place full of inspiration. They precisely show the richness of sensations, memories, feelings, abstract concepts, fantasies and imaginations. In addition, they undertake to understand phenomena that, while not always philosophical, are inherent in human nature - such as intuition, visions, and brilliant insights. Stream-of-consciousness literature focuses on the mental and spiritual life, and through the deep character descriptions central to the genre, one can see the influence of 20th-century psychological and philosophical concepts. In short, authors of stream-of-consciousness literature, like naturalists, strive to describe human nature precisely, but in their case, it happens through the prism of the individual's mental life. How does literary fiction enrich itself by showing the internal states of characters? Let us look at this issue with examples of novels that use stream-of-consciousness techniques. The pioneer of flow-of-consciousness representation was Dorothy Richardson. Her work, *Pilgrimage*, is a psychological self-portrait in which the recesses of inner life are revealed, shedding light on the

area that helps to understand the surrounding reality. Virginia Woolf, one of the outstanding writers associated with the stream-of-consciousness technique, used it to explore internal processes. Woolf strived to capture the possibilities and mechanisms of revealing the inner truth - the truth that is difficult to express in words. The essence of this process lies in the peripheral areas of the mind. An example is her two novels, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*. The author sincerely believed in man's constant striving to understand the meaning of life and his own identity. Clarissa Dalloway, Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe experience visions. Preparations for the final moment of understanding are visible throughout the novel; the author draws our attention to mutual fleeting glances of characters who undertake a synthesis of ancient symbols. In her essays, Virginia Woolf emphasises that an artist should express her vision of reality and the subjective dimension of life. According to her, the search for the truth does not consist of spectacular external actions:

Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions : trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel.

From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old

Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end

Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall,

let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance,

which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness.¹³

Most people are unaware of the deeply hidden mental activity that is one of the main themes in Virginia Woolf's work. The author focuses on characters of exceptional sensitivity, whose minds are often absorbed in these deep searches. She used the stream-of-consciousness narrative as the primary medium for a fully mature portrayal of this topic. The idea of using a new literary method in the work of James Joyce developed on the occasion of his earlier novels *The Dubliners* and *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*. Inspired by the approach to inner monologue in Dujardin, George Moore, Tolstoy and even in his brother's diary, he played with Freud's verbal association theories, although in an interview with Djuna Barnes, he expresses a negative attitude towards his achievements:

¹³ Blair, Linda Nicole. "Virginia Woolf and Literary Impressionism." 2010

[...] In *Ulysses* I have recorded, simultaneously, what a man says, sees, thinks, and what such seeing, thinking, saying does, to what you Freudians call the subconscious, - but as for psychoanalysis it's neither more nor less than blackmail ¹⁴

Joyce saw his artistic activity as the most potent weapon to expand freedom by opening perceptions. His works confront the political reality in which the writer does not allow his freedom to be sacrificed by presenting the subject's stream of consciousness to the reader. The verism in *Ulysses* is so convincing that Joyce was ridiculed as more of a follower than a reality maker in his works, which, being untrue, became a compliment. Like the divine creator, Joyce is present in his work - both outside and above it - invisible, sublime, unreal, and indifferent. This masterful approach makes the reader feel a direct connection to the life depicted in the book. The author shows life as it is - without prejudices and judgments. The characters' thoughts and actions are as if created by an invisible, indifferent creator. We have to accept them by the very fact of existence. In Joyce's work, existence takes the form of comedy, where a man is gently, without bitterness, ridiculed for his absurd role in it. James Joyce was never an ex-nihilo artist; he recreated what he remembered and experienced personally in his works. The influence of the surrounding socio-political situation on the created works is an aspect of artistic creation that is difficult to ignore. The departure from the classical literary, musical, and artistic styles that are so characteristic of the 20th century was an indirect reaction to people's disillusionment with Western civilisation's inability to avoid the bloodshed of World War I. It is no coincidence that Einstein's theory of relativity, Freud's explorations of the human subconscious, Eliot's free verse, Stravinsky's twelve-tone music, Martha Graham's abstract choreography, Picasso's deformed figures, and James Joyce's stream of consciousness all came about at the same time that empires were collapsing and old certainties rejected beliefs. The use of the *Odyssey* pattern in *Ulysses* serves to juxtapose heroism with everyday life, and the character's internal monologue, devoid of clear boundaries, is a tool to equate the trivial with the profound. Joyce paints a detailed picture of life, down to the smallest detail, leaving no room for other values. Through satire, he shows life in the fullness of its flaws and inevitable contradictions. James Joyce and Virginia Woolf made a vital contribution to belles-lettres, enriching it with the inner existence of characters and expanding the sphere of motives and actions. Their literary work focused on the essence of human experience. The form they developed fits

¹⁴ Djuna Barnes, *A Portrait of the Man Who is, at Present, One of the More Significant Figures in Literature*, Vanity Fair, New York, 1922

within the framework of literary conventions and draws attention to the fact that the creator's mind is too complex and unpredictable to convey its nature in standard ways.

5. The stream of consciousness technique in literature and contemporary figurative painting - a comparison

The stream of consciousness, both in literature and in contemporary figurative painting, can be pretty vague, but in painting, this term refers only to the technique used, not to the genre.

Depending on the author's approach, this technique can take different forms. In both cases of using the stream-of-consciousness technique, we focus on thoughts and feelings that are peripheral (inaccessible to rational thinking), but in literature, these are the thoughts and feelings of a literary character and, in painting, the author of the work. Striving to understand the essence of human nature, exploring human experiences, and thus an attempt to show the inner truth, often difficult to express in words, can be an inspiration for the work of a contemporary figurative painter. Presenting a personal vision of reality and the subjective dimension of life can be the most potent weapon to expand freedom by opening perception in contemporary figurative painting. However, as in the case of literature, images created using the stream-of-consciousness technique cannot be material for the author's psychoanalysis:

The figure would need to jump out of the painting! Just because you have a figure, that doesn't mean you don't realise it's also an abstraction. It's also a painting, it's also a thing on a wall. ¹⁵

Figurative painting based on the stream-of-consciousness technique can be an essential tool in analysing the current socio-political situation, as it can allow you to combine burning problems with a sense of humour that characterises the most outstanding works of modernist and contemporary art. The mind of a contemporary artist is also too complex and unpredictable to try to express it using standard painting forms, and the stream-of-consciousness technique can be a way to free oneself from the framework imposed by the world of art.

¹⁵ Artspace editors, *Miss Interpreted: Marlene Dumas on Why Artists Should Embrace Ambiguity If They Want Staying Power*, tłum. własne, Artspace, 2016

6. Stream of consciousness and the thought of Carl Gustav Jung

The influence of contemporary philosophical thought is felt in the works of 20th-century writers using the stream-of-consciousness technique. Although Carl Gustav Jung antagonised James Joyce, his essays on modernist literature and art are worth noting.

• Carl Gustav Jung on psychology and literature

Although psychology and literature, according to Jung, are closely related, even interdependent, neither can be used to interpret the other. In his essay *Psychology and Literature*, we read that the characteristic of the psyche is not only to be the source of all productivity but mainly to express itself in all the activities and achievements of the human mind. Jung points out that we cannot grasp the nature of the psyche per se anywhere but can only encounter it in its various manifestations. In the case of a work of art, according to Jung, we are dealing with a product of complex mental activities - but a product seemingly intended and consciously shaped. All conscious mental processes can be causally explained, but the creative act, rooted in the vastness of the unconscious, will always elude our attempts to understand. Jung distinguishes between two types of artistic creation: the psychological piece and the visionary piece. *Psychological* works include countless literary works: novels about love, family, and society, including didactic poetry and drama. Regardless of their artistic form, the most crucial characteristic of psychological work is the experience that provides material for artistic expression, well known from everyday life. In the case of *visionary* works, the sheer amount of experience related to the reception of a given poem, for example, gives it value and a shocking impact on the individual:

*[...] The very enormity of the experience gives it its value and its shattering impact. Sublime, pregnant with meaning, yet chilling the blood with its strangeness, it arises from timeless depths; glamorous, daemoniac, and grotesque, it bursts asunder our human standards of value and aesthetic form, a terrifying tangle of eternal chaos, a crimen laesae majestatis humanae. On the other hand, it can be a revelation whose heights and depths are beyond our fathoming, or a vision of beauty which we can never put into words. [...]*¹⁶

¹⁶C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Literature; Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature*, Princeton University Press, 1950, p. 110-138

Works of art of this kind must be analysed in isolation from the artist, never through psychoanalysis of the author, which would suggest a Freudian approach. According to Jung, the vision presented in *visionary* works is a genuine primal experience. It is not something derivative or secondary, nor a symptom of something else; it is an autonomous symbol - an expression of something real but unknown.

Through our senses we experience the known, but our intuitions point to things that are unknown and hidden, that by their very nature are secret. If ever they become conscious, they are intentionally kept secret and concealed for which reason they have been regarded from earliest times as mysterious, uncanny, and deceptive. They are hidden from man, and he hides himself from them out of religious awe, protecting himself with the shield of science and reason. The ordered cosmos he believes in by day is meant to protect him from the fear of chaos that besets him by night—his enlightenment is born of night-fears! What if there were a living agency beyond our everyday human world—something even more purposeful than electrons? Do we delude ourselves in thinking that we possess and control our own psyches, and is what science calls the “psyche” not just a question-mark arbitrarily confined within the skull, but rather a door that opens upon the human world from a world beyond, allowing unknown and mysterious powers to act upon man and carry him on the wings of the night to a more than personal destiny? ¹⁷

According to the phylogenetic law, the psychic structure must, like the anatomical structure, bear traces of the earlier stages of evolution through which it has passed; this is the case with the unconscious because, in dreams and mental disorders, creations of our psyche come to the surface, which show all the characteristics of the primal levels of development. In their form, but also content and meaning, they resemble fragments of esoteric teachings:

Mythological motifs frequently appear, but clothed in modern dress; for instance, instead of the eagle of Zeus, or the great roc, there is an airplane; the fight with the dragon is a railway smash;

¹⁷ C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Literature; Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature*, Princeton University Press, 1950, p. 110-138

*the dragon-slaying hero is an operatic tenor; the Earth Mother is a stout lady selling vegetables; the Pluto who abducts Persephone is a reckless chauffeur, and so on.*¹⁸

Jung concludes that what appears in the artistic vision is the imagination of the collective unconscious. According to him, every creative person is characterised by duality. On the one hand, he is a man with a personal life; on the other, an impersonal creative process. Art deprives the artist of free will and achieves his goals with its help.

*Whenever the creative force predominates, life is ruled and shaped by the unconscious rather than by the conscious will, and the ego is swept along on an underground current, becoming nothing more than a helpless observer of events. The progress of the work becomes the poet's fate and determines his psychology. It is not Goethe that creates Faust, but Faust that creates Goethe.*¹⁹

According to Jung, the artist, essentially an instrument of her work, is subordinated to it, and we have no right to expect her to interpret it for us. She has done her best in giving her work a form and must leave the interpretation to others and the future. Every great work of art is objective and impersonal yet profoundly moving. Therefore, the artist's personal life is, at best, a help or obstacle that is never essential to her creative task.

¹⁸ C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Literature; Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature*, Princeton University Press, 1950, p. 110-138

¹⁹ C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Literature; Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature*, Princeton University Press, 1950, p. 110-138

• Carl Gustav Jung on *Ulysses*

Jung argues that James Joyce's *Ulysses*, unlike its ancient namesake:

*[...] is a passive, merely perceiving consciousness, a mere eye, ear, nose, and mouth, a sensory nerve exposed without choice or check to the roaring, chaotic, lunatic cataract of psychic and physical happenings, and registering all this with almost photographic accuracy.*²⁰

According to the psychologist, this is a cubist novel in the most profound sense of the word because it transforms the image of reality into a highly complex one, in which the dominant note is a melancholic unreality. Cubism is the tendency to represent reality in a certain way - grotesquely realistic or abstract. The need for expression through Cubism in Jung's contemporaries was due to the collective manifestation of the times. According to Carl Gustav Jung, they did not follow an individual impulse but the collective's current. The psychologist writes that the life depicted in *Ulysses* does not arise directly from consciousness but from the collective unconscious of the modern psyche.

*This, surely, is its real secret, the secret of a new cosmic consciousness; and it is revealed not to him who has conscientiously waded through the seven hundred and thirty-five pages, but to him who has gazed at his world and his own mind for seven hundred and thirty-five days with the eyes of Ulysses. This space of time, at any rate, is to be taken symbolically—"a time, times and a half a time"—an indefinite time, therefore; but sufficiently long for the transformation to take place.*²¹

Jung believes that *Ulysses* is objective, absolutely honest, and therefore trustworthy. You can trust his testimony about the power and insignificance of the world and spirit. Only the figure of *Ulysses* is reality, life, and meaning; it contains the whole phantasmagoria of mind and matter, ego and non-ego.

²⁰ C. G. Jung, „*Ulysses*“ : *A Monologue; Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature*, Princeton University Press, 1950, p. 139-174

²¹ C. G. Jung, „*Ulysses*“ : *A Monologue; Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature*, Princeton University Press, 1950, p. 139-174

• Carl Gustav Jung on Picasso

Jung points out that Pablo Picasso's work is related to James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

He begins his analysis of non-representational art by stating that it draws its content from within.

This interior cannot correspond to consciousness because consciousness contains images of objects as generally perceived and whose appearance must, therefore, necessarily correspond to general expectations. Picasso's objects, however, seem to him different from what is commonly expected - so different that they seem to refer to no object of external experience at all:

*Taken chronologically, his works show a growing tendency to withdraw from the empirical objects, and an increase in those elements which do not correspond to any outer experience but come from an "inside" situated behind consciousness—or at least behind that consciousness which, like a universal organ of perception set over and above the five senses, is orientated towards the outer world. Behind consciousness there lies not the absolute void but the unconscious psyche, which affects consciousness from behind and from inside, just as much as the outer world affects it from in front and from outside. Hence those pictorial elements which do not correspond to any "outside" must originate from "inside".*²²

According to Carl Gustav Jung, those pictorial elements that do not correspond to any "outside" must come from "inside". Unlike more explicit, objective, or conscious representations of thoughts and intentions, representations of background processes and effects of the mind are more symbolic and may be more difficult to understand or express in simple words. They indicate roughly the meaning, which is not yet known. Therefore, it is impossible to determine anything with any degree of certainty in a single isolated case. One has only the impression of strangeness and confusing, incomprehensible mess.

²² C. G. Jung, *Picasso; Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature*, Princeton University Press, 1950, p. 178

7. The stream of consciousness technique in contemporary figurative painting and the visionary work according to Carl Gustav Jung

Carl Gustav Jung draws attention to the fact that works of art are the product of complex mental activities rooted in the vastness of the unconscious so that even if they seem intentional and consciously shaped, they elude attempts at understanding. The philosopher defines a visionary work, which can also represent a contemporary image made using the stream-of-consciousness technique. It emerges from the timeless depths of our consciousness and creates new aesthetic standards, presenting a vision of beauty that we cannot express with words. It is an authentic primal experience, an autonomous symbol - an expression of something real but unknown. Carl Gustav Jung draws attention to the fact, which is also the basis of the stream of consciousness technique in painting - *visionary* works must be analysed in isolation from the author because the process of creating a work is based on submitting to intuition, which leads the artist towards undiscovered and hidden aspects of reality. According to the philosopher, what appears in the artistic vision is an expression of the collective unconscious, which carries traces of the earlier stages of evolution through which it has passed. According to Jung, the artist is the tool of her work and her private life is at most a help or an obstacle, but it is never necessary for a creative task. We have no right to expect the artist to interpret her works for us. Many contemporary painters intuitively consider interpreting their works as something incorrect:

*[...] you have to justify everything and then your work will suck because you have to give reasons for everything. I will do it when I am really broke in a couple of years. [...]*²³

Every great work of art is objective and impersonal. Works created using the stream-of-consciousness technique have features that lead the observer to the appropriate interpretation:

So delicate and incessant is this recognition by the mind of the mere fitness of words to be mentioned together that the slightest misreading, such as 'casualty' for 'causality,' or 'perpetual'

²³ Andy Battaglia, *The ARTnews Accord: Painters Peter Saul and Jamian Juliano-Villani Talk Humor in Art, Life in the Studio, and More*, The ARTnews, 2020

for 'perceptual,' will be corrected by a listener whose attention is so relaxed that he gets no idea of the meaning of the sentence at all. ²⁴

Carl Gustav Jung compares the stream of consciousness in literature to Cubism. He writes that the similarity of these two forms is related to focusing attention on presenting unreal objects only. In my opinion, this is the wrong approach. The stream-of-consciousness technique in painting assumes complete freedom of choice of the presented elements of the composition. In addition, James Joyce emphasises that the stream of consciousness focuses on the mysticism of consciousness, which excludes all forms of unreality. It is also worth noting here that the stream-of-consciousness technique is not the same as the techniques used by the surrealists, who focused mainly on the dream sphere, guided by concrete principles:

[...]Today the young generation takes it so damn seriously, so that Surrealism is getting to be a bore. It's too dogmatic in the mind of these young people. They are not inventive or imaginative; they use all the ideas they have seen or heard about, use them again in dogmatic form, and probably write books about it. [chuckles] ²⁵

By focusing on real-life elements and avoiding all kinds of dogma, the stream-of-consciousness technique is an autonomous form of painting expression.

²⁴ William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1950, p. 538

²⁵ Calvin Tomkins, *Marcel Duchamp, The afternoon Interviews*, Badlands Unlimited, New York, 2013

III. How do we create with the stream-of-consciousness technique?

Working on an image using the stream-of-consciousness technique can be divided into two main stages: the sketch phase and the implementation of the painting. The moment of creating the concept of the work is related to Graham Wallas's *theory of the art of creating a new thought*, and the process of realising a painting work should have the characteristics of Mihály Csíkszentmihályi's *flow*.

1. *The art of creating a new thought, according to Graham Wallas*

Graham Wallas, in his book *The Art of Thought*, recalls the digressions of the scientist Hermann von Helmholtz, who reflects on how his best ideas haunted him:

*[...] After previous investigation of the problem 'in all directions', happy ideas come unexpectedly without effort, like an inspiration. So far as I am concerned, they have never come to me when my mind was fatigued, or when I was at my working table. They came particularly readily during the slow ascent of wooded hills on a sunny day.' [...]*²⁶

Wallas points out that in Helmholtz's description, we find three stages in forming a new thought. The first, which he called the *Preparation* stage, is the stage where the problem has been thoroughly investigated; the second is the *Incubation* stage, in which the scientist did not consciously think about his problem; the third, in which the successful resolution of the problem occurs along with the psychological events that immediately preceded and accompanied this emergence, Graham Wallas called the stage of *Illumination*. Wallas added a fourth *Verification* stage, in which the idea's validity is checked. An economist reading the latest statistical summaries, a physiologist observing an experiment, or a business person reading the latest press release may simultaneously be *incubating* a problem he set himself a few days ago, gathering knowledge in the *Preparation* stage for a second problem, and *verifying* his conclusions in a third problem. As you can see, the path leading to successful problem-solving, according to the psychologist, is not a trivial problem-solution scheme. Wallas draws attention to the fact that in the *Preparation* stage, a man familiar with the area of life from which the problem he is solving comes has the advantage of regulated thinking; this is a term

²⁶ Graham Wallas, *The Art of Thought*, Solis Pres., Kent, England, 2014, p. 95

used by Thomas Hobbes in his book *Leviathan*. Hobbes contrasts *regulated thinking* with the *wild swings of the mind*, where the thought process is intermediate and lacks the characteristics of genuine searching.

Sometimes a man knows a place determinate, within the compass whereof he is to seek; and then his thoughts run over all the parts thereof, in the same manner as one would sweep a room to find a jewel. ²⁷

Paying attention to another aspect of the discussed problem, Graham Wallas also quotes Aldous Huxley, who once quoted Francis Bacon:

Truth comes out of error much more rapidly than it comes out of confusion. If you go buzzing about between right and wrong, vibrating and fluctuating, you come out nowhere; but if you are absolutely and thoroughly and persistently wrong you must some of these days have the extreme good fortune of knocking your head against a fact, and that sets you all right again. ²⁸

The *Incubation* stage is the voluntary refraining from consciously thinking about a particular problem, which can take two forms: the period of abstinence can be either consciously mentally working on other problems or relaxing from consciously mentally working. A scientific discovery, the creation of a poem or a play, or the formulation of an important political decision requires a pause free from conscious thinking about the problem at hand and a total absence of interference with the free work of unconscious or semi-conscious processes of the mind. In these cases, the *Incubation* stage should include a large amount of actual mental relaxation. Mental relaxation during the *Incubation* phase can sometimes require a certain amount of physical exercise, as in the case of Helmholtz and climbing wooded hills on a sunny day. An interesting point is that Graham Wallas recalls his conversation with a colleague from the University of Cambridge, who expressed gratitude for any evidence that all white-collar workers must spend their holidays alpine climbing. Alpine climbing undoubtedly has a lot to offer, both health and imagination.

²⁷ Hobbes, Thomas. "Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme, & Power of a Common-wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civill."

²⁸ Graham Wallas, *The Art of Thought*, Solis Pres., Kent, England, 2014, p. 99

The more difficult issue is how our will can influence the less controlled stage, which Wallas called the stage of *Illumination*, during which a sub-stage of *Intimation* may also occur. Each problem-solving process is different. Sometimes, the solution comes to us as a single associative jump; sometimes, it is a series of consecutive associative jumps. Wallas called it the sub-stage of *Intimation*. The process must be conscious and reasonably slow to control the psychological process during the illumination stage. Then, it is most fruitful for the author. The evidence presented by the psychologist shows that both successful associations and the final solution to the problem usually take place in the *periphery* of our consciousness, which is arranged like a solar corona surrounding the centre in full splendour. The period of *peripheral* awareness can last until the moment of flash and, in some cases, longer. Graham Wallas points out that it is just as challenging to see the corona if the sun is not in total eclipse as it is to see the *periphery* of our consciousness at the moment of full *Illumination*. Moreover, as William James says:

*When the conclusion is there, we have always forgotten most of the steps preceding its attainment.*²⁹

Many of the best ideas do not come in a flash but start with vague feelings and weak intuitions that must be picked up and fostered before they can be fully defined. The *periphery* of consciousness is the area most often occupied by poets. The poem's production is a psychological experiment, tested in harsher conditions than laboratory ones, and the poet describes the *periphery* of consciousness with language more accurate and sensitive than most laboratory psychologists. We can meet the description of the sub-stage feeling that it is something that we have lost and cannot find because we have forgotten what it is. In a conversation with Socrates, Aristophanes complains that his disciple asked him a question and caused a valuable thought to *miscarry*. Probably quoting Socrates himself, whose mother was a midwife and who liked such metaphors, he drew attention to the characteristic transience of the moment before the *Illumination*. A *Intimation* often comes up while reading. Then, it is best to look away from the book, avoiding the danger that the following sentence will distract a valuable moment. If we feel that something is happening in our preconscious mind that must be directly related to the problem that bothers us, we should put the book down for a moment and let it come to the surface. At the stage of *Illumination* with its margin of *Intimation*, the thinker should realise that the main rule of his art is to move with the most

²⁹ William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1950, . 260

extraordinary delicacy. The *Verification* stage is the last stage of shaping an innovative thought, which consists in rationally checking its correctness.

- **The *Preparation* Stage in the Digital Age**

Regarding the issue of *regulated thinking*, an essential aspect of the preparation stage these days is to be aware of how the Digital Age we live in is affecting how we gather information. It is worth taking a look at what influence the times we live in have on our daily stream of consciousness. The Digital Age is a period from the late 20th century to the present day characterised by rapid technological development. We are observing the spread of new media, e.g. computers, the Internet, and mobile phones, resulting in far-reaching social, economic and cultural changes. The main features of the Digital Age are the ability to store, process and transmit vast amounts of information quickly and efficiently, as well as the general availability of information with a global reach. All this has resulted in profound changes in how we work, communicate and consume media, which bring new opportunities and challenges in every aspect of the functioning of modern society.

- **What is affecting our stream of consciousness in the Digital Age?**

- **Social media:** Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Most of us are users of these platforms. Thanks to them, we have constant access to the stream of images and information other users share; this is one of the most egalitarian forms of information exchange, so we must be aware that most of it is highly subjective or false.³⁰
- **News media:** traditional news sources such as magazines, TV channels, online news media, socio-political and cultural podcasts. Each moment in history has its primary information sources, usually characterised by specific political views. Obtaining information from as many reliable sources as possible is essential to maintain the transparency of opinion formation.
- **Literature:** Thanks to podcasts and audiobooks, information can also be collected during creative work.
- **Personal experiences, influence of environment and peers:** Recent years have brought many historical events (The COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine), which have influenced the changes we experience in everyday life. For most of us, this has become a significant variable in our daily stream of consciousness.

³⁰ Quinn, Kelly, *THE NAVIGATION OF BOUNDARIES IN ONLINE SOCIAL SPACES*, 2015.

- **The Positive Impact of the Digital Age on Stream of Consciousness:**

- **Broad access to information:** Thanks to the Internet and digital sources, we have unlimited access to various information. We can instantly find answers to questions, develop our knowledge and explore topics that interest us without consulting traditional sources.
- **Global Communications:** The digital age has enabled us to communicate globally. We can connect, share ideas and collaborate with people from all over the world in real-time.
- **Content Sharing:** Through social media platforms and other digital media, we can create and share our content, allowing us to express ourselves, build our brand, and engage in various projects.
- **Innovation and Creativity:** The digital age has opened the door to new forms of creativity and innovation. We can experiment with multimedia, virtual reality, artificial intelligence and many other technologies, which drive the development of new ideas and projects.
- **Efficiency and automation:** Digital tools allow you to automate many processes, increasing efficiency at work and in everyday life. Thanks to this, we have more time for more valuable tasks.
- **Accelerating the pace of life:** While this can be both an advantage and a disadvantage, the digital age has accelerated many life processes, which can lead to greater productivity and efficiency.
- **Accessibility and Dissemination:** The digital age has made art more accessible and widespread. The Internet enables creators to make their works available to a global audience without being confined to traditional exhibition spaces or galleries; this allows for a greater understanding and impact of art on diverse groups.
- **Preservation and Archiving:** Thanks to digital technologies, it is possible to accurately archive and preserve works of art; this is important for future generations who can learn about and study current artistic achievements.
- **Awakening Creativity:** Introducing new tools and technologies can spark the artistic imagination, encouraging you to explore new creative paths and experiment with different techniques.

- **What can disturb our stream of consciousness?**

- **There is too much information.** The enormous amount of content available on the Internet can lead to information overload. Constant exposure to an avalanche of data, news and social media

makes our cognitive abilities overwhelmed, and it takes much effort to focus on our stream of consciousness. It is worth supervising your time spent on social media and selecting the sources of information provided to the brain. We also often forget to calm down and give our mind a rest by, for example, practising sports in nature.

- **Virtual Distractions:** The Internet offers many factors that can disrupt our thinking, such as social media alerts, emails, and online entertainment. We must be vigilant about our time on fruitless wandering in virtual nooks and crannies.
- **Social Media:** Social media platforms are designed to attract and keep our attention. Constantly scrolling, liking, and sharing on social media can affect our thought patterns, emotions, and even self-esteem when we compare ourselves to others.³¹
- **Algorithms and filter bubbles:** Online platforms use algorithms to tailor content to individual preferences, creating filter bubbles that reinforce existing beliefs and limit exposure to different viewpoints.
- **Promoting multitasking:** The Internet encourages multitasking. Its structure means we often switch between online activities simultaneously, affecting our ability to concentrate intensely on one particular task and leading to a more diffused stream of consciousness.
- **Reduced attention span:** Fast-paced web content such as short articles, tweets, and video clips can contribute to reduced attention spans, making it difficult to maintain deep, focused thinking.
- **Instant gratification:** The Internet provides instant access to the information we are interested in, which our brain perceives as instant gratification; this can affect our patience and ability to engage in prolonged, contemplative thought processes.
- **Hyper-connectivity:** The constant connectivity provided by smartphones and other devices means we are always reachable and accessible, leading to a constant stream of incoming information that can disrupt our consciousness.
- **No inhibitions in human communication:** Online anonymity and distance make people feel more comfortable expressing their thoughts and emotions without everyday social constraints; this can affect the tone and content of online conversations and discussions.
- **Polarisation of society:** The Internet can contribute to the polarisation of public opinion. Humans naturally gravitate towards like-minded communities and sources of information; this can lead to the reinforcement of more extreme views and the narrowing of our consciousness.

³¹ Gen Z: Shaping Location and Expansion Decisions - Area Development.
<https://www.areadevelopment.com/skilled-workforce-STEM/Q3-2019/genZ-shaping-location-and-expansion-decisions.shtml>

The primary skill of a contemporary artist should be to carefully observe the individual threads that intertwine in the image of the present. We are recipients of a constantly changing, multidimensional stream of experiences and information. Patience is the greatest virtue of any reasonable observer these days. Mental activities can cause the formation of various habits because this is how human nature works. We must assume that each of our actions is the beginning of developing a specific habit. Creative people, in particular, must be sensitive to this danger to avoid becoming slaves to specific action patterns. Gathering information from various sources, breaking habits in everyday creative work, and observing ideas emerging from the periphery of our consciousness make up effective artistic activity nowadays. Critical practice is also to observe and select one's observations emerging while listening to podcasts or reading articles.

A. Sketch phase based on Graham Wallas's *theory of the art of creating new thought*, taking into account the influence of the Digital Age

In shaping the concept of an image using the stream-of-consciousness technique, we can compare our creative process to forming a new thought, which Graham Wallas writes about in his book *The Art of Thought*. The sketch phase is then divided into four stages: the *Preparation* stage, the *Incubation* stage, the *Illumination* stage with a sub-stage of *Intimation*, and the *Verification* stage. In the *Preparation* phase, it is essential to maintain *regulated thinking*, which can be achieved by broadening knowledge in art history (emphasising contemporary and modernist art) and orientation in contemporary socio-political issues. We should constantly increase our knowledge of the areas of life that interest us in order to be able to have the most extensive possible spectrum of selection of information that interests us. However, it is worth being aware of how and from what sources we get our information because, living in the Digital Age, we can encounter many obstacles that negatively affect the quality of the data we collect. During the *Incubation* phase, we voluntarily refrain from consciously thinking about the sketch for the painting that is forming in our minds. It is a process that we can compare to the gap in consciousness, which is its intensely active element, as William James wrote. During this time, we can devote ourselves to mental work on another problem that interests us, or we can relax and abandon all conscious mental work:

I can conceive of a society where the lazies have a place in the sun. My famous thing was to start a home for the lazies—hospice des paresseux. If you are lazy, and people accept you as

doing nothing, you have a right to eat and drink and have shelter and so forth. There would be a home in which you would do all this for nothing. The stipulation would be that you cannot work. ³²

Relaxation during the incubation phase can often also be associated with physical exercise, e.g. climbing - a sport that trains our logical thinking. The preliminary form of the sketch will appear during the stage of *Illumination*, which is preceded by a *Intimation* on the *periphery* of our consciousness. Not every good idea comes like a bolt from the sky. We should observe thoughts appearing on the *periphery* of our consciousness, and if we feel that a successful solution to a painting problem may be near - we should help it come to the surface by focusing our attention even more. We must also remember that the feeling that our thought has stopped is entirely different from the feeling that our thought is fully formed. During the *Verification* stage of working on the image using the stream-of-consciousness technique, we make the necessary corrections and make the final decision about making a sketch.

³² Calvin Tomkins, *Marcel Duchamp, The afternoon Interviews*, Badlands Unlimited, New York, 2013

2. Implementation of the painting

[...] The human mind has evolved to handle multiple tasks simultaneously and perform various cognitive processes. This evolutionary development has contributed to our identity. However, the downside is that we often lack a predefined course of action in different situations, unlike animals that instinctively know what to do when hungry, such as seeking food.

*[...]*³³

~Mihály Csíkszentmihályi

Oil painting as a medium gives us an infinite number of possibilities. The stream-of-consciousness technique can be used both when collecting inspiration and creating sketches, but also during the stage of work implementation. Getting to know Mihály Csíkszentmihályi's theory of flow and the approach to painting by the leading contemporary painter Luc Tuymans will be invaluable.

A. Flow of creativity

*I'm not the type of painter that just paints or creates a style, because I think that's the death of everything. Of course there is a mark, but the mark is like handwriting, or riding a bicycle. Otherwise you lose the intensity of what you're doing. When executed, it has to go fast, though you should not see the speed with which it is painted. You should first see the image, and then how it is made — that is another rule. After the conceptualisation of the image, which takes months, all the ideas and images on the computer, on the iPhone, all that work gushes out in one burst. Which is necessary, because at that point, I change. You have different kinds of intelligence: you can think, but you can also think with your hands. At that point, I don't want to think anymore, I want to concentrate on what I physically can do.*³⁴

~ Luc Tuymans

Csíkszentmihályi points out that all creative people love and enjoy what they do. What matters is not what we do but how. Typically, creative people indicate that they enjoy discovering something

³³ Tomasz Stawiszyński, *Życie dobrze przepłynięte*, kwartalnik Przekrój 3569/2020, translated by me

³⁴ Jason Farago, *An Interview with Luc Tuymans*, www.evenmagazine.com

new the most. Each, even the most minor discovery, brings a specific dose of excitement. Creativity is the production of new ideas. We are generally torn between two opposites: the imperative of least effort on the one hand and the urge to be creative on the other. To investigate this problem, Mihály Csíkszentmihályi many years ago began studying people who seemed to do things they enjoyed but were not rewarded with money or fame: chess players, mountain climbers, dancers and composers who devoted many hours a week to their activities. Why did they do it? From conversations with them, it was clear that what motivated them was the quality of the experience they felt when they were engaged in a particular activity. This feeling did not arise when resting, taking drugs, drinking alcohol, or consuming accumulated wealth. Instead, it often involved painful, risky, challenging activities that stretched the individual's capabilities and contained elements of experimentation. Mihály Csíkszentmihályi called this *optimal experience flow* because many respondents described the feeling of everything going well as an almost automatic, effortless, but highly focused state of consciousness. The psychologist's research has identified nine main elements that describe the experience we are interested in:

- Clearly defined action goals.
- Possibility of quick analysis of effects and quick feedback from the environment.
- Balance between challenges and skills.
- Action and awareness merge into one.
- Intense concentration.
- There is no fear of failure (some describe it as a sense of total control, but we do not have control; we do not allow the possibility of failure to become conscious. Otherwise, the total concentration would be impossible. We have a clear idea of what needs to be done, and our skills are adequate to the challenges we face).
- Self-awareness disappears (we may even think that we have transcended the boundaries of the ego and become part, at least temporarily, of a greater whole.)
- The sense of time is distorted.
- The action becomes autotelic. Csíkszentmihályi gives an example:

I may be scared of using a computer and learn to do it only because my job depends on it. But as my skills increase, and I recognise what the computer allows me to do, I may begin to enjoy using

*the computer for its own sake as well. At this point the activity becomes autotelic, which is Greek for something that is an end in itself.)*³⁵

In the following, Mihály Csíkszentmihályi elaborates on particular issues related to the feeling of *flow*:

- **Clarity of goals - the goal is to solve the problem.**

Artists do not find the purpose of their actions so quickly. The more creative the problem, the less clear it is what needs to be done. The most groundbreaking issues are also difficult to develop because of their elusiveness. In such cases, the creative person must try to develop mechanisms at the *periphery* of his consciousness that tell him what to do. The poet György Faludy usually does not start writing until an inner voice tells him, often in the middle of the night, that it is time to start writing. The poet adds sadly: This voice has my number, but I do not have his. The ancients called this voice the Muse. Csíkszentmihályi writes that it could also be like Robertson Davies:

[...] „You are always writing, and you're always fantasising. Probably if I had told myself rationally that this is what the book would be about I would have thought it a trivial goal, not worth all the time and effort. ³⁶

However, fortunately, the goal presented itself as a *vision*, a mysterious summons that he felt compelled to follow. Very often, the Muse communicates in this way - as if through a dark window; this is an excellent arrangement because if the artist had not been deceived by secrecy, perhaps he would never have ventured into uncharted territory.

- **The feeling that you are doing well.**

How can *flow* be experienced without positive feedback from the external environment?

Csíkszentmihályi claims that a scientist who enjoys his work is the one who knows what a good experiment is all about. Then, he does not have to wait until October to see if his name is on the

³⁵ Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, *Creativity*, HyperCollins e-books, 2007

³⁶ Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, *Creativity*, HyperCollins e-books, 2007

Nobel Prize list. Creative scientists say the difference between them and their less creative peers is their ability to separate bad ideas from good ones, so they do not waste much time exploring dead ends. You have many ideas, and you reject the bad ones. To do this, you need extensive knowledge in your chosen field to judge which elements are good or bad.

- **Balance between challenges and skills.**

Trying to solve a creative problem is rarely easy. For it to be fun, it should be challenging, and by definition, it is. A creative person has to treat it as a kind of struggle. It is blood, tears and sweat, as Mihály Csíkszentmihályi writes. It would be best to force yourself to move forward, consistently hoping for a satisfactory result. Only after passing this stage can we enter the state of *flow*. The hard part about overcoming your weaknesses in the *pre-flow* stage is that we are never sure we are going anywhere. A creative person must be self-denial and diligent to overcome these problems. She must also be well acquainted with the field in which she moves.

- **Combination of action and consciousness**

*I always find that when I am writing, it is really the fingers that are doing it and not the brain.*³⁷

- **Avoiding distractions**

While working on *In Search of Lost Time*, Marcel Proust locked himself in a soundproofed room without windows, which meant that no noise could tear him from his total concentration, which was crucial in working on the novel. Csíkszentmihályi also evokes many statements from artists, which show that we cannot experience the feeling of flow when we are seriously ill or too busy solving heavy problems of everyday life.

- **Loss of self-awareness, distorted sense of time, and not paying attention to surroundings**

A *flowing* person is so imbued with this experience that he does not think about the future or the past. It remains as an extended present to which it gives meaning. According to Mihály

³⁷ Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, *Creativity*, HyperCollins e-books, 2007

Csikszentmihályi, it is a form of total communication with the world around us. When you are working on something going well, you feel there is no other way to express what you are saying.

- **Creativity and autotelic experience**

The word success is an ambiguous word. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi emphasises that we should treat success as a phenomenon concerning ourselves. Then our work has a chance to become an autotelic experience, i.e. that gives us satisfaction.

- **Flow and Happiness.**

The critical point is that pleasure as such does not lead directly to creativity but soon to addiction. Hence, entering the flow state must be preceded by appropriate work on ourselves and the area of life we develop.

- **Flow is the evolution of our consciousness.**

B. *Flow* during the realisation of the painting

I always hated those artists who were so consistent and had this sort of unified development; I thought it was terrible. I never worked at painting as if it were a job; it was always out of interest or for fun, a desire to try something. ³⁸

~Gerhard Richter

Mihály Csíkszentmihályi draws attention to a crucial issue related to the realisation of an image with the help of stream of consciousness - it is a process during which, above all, we derive pleasure from discovering something new. As in the cases described by the psychologist, it is often associated with strenuous activities that strain our abilities. An experimental approach to the problem characterises him. After overcoming the initial difficulties, the creator is immersed in a semi-automatic state of highly concentrated consciousness. As in the case of the *flow* in the activities described by Csíkszentmihályi, in the case of the final painting work using the stream of consciousness, it is essential to:

- Keeping goals clear: visualise the work's final look and analyse its stages before starting.
- Often, we can encounter such a complex creative problem that we will have to reach the periphery of our consciousness. The solution can be presented as a *vision*:

*[...] So the duty of chance is to express what is unique and indeterminate about us beyond the rational. [...] Chance is the only way to avoid the control of the rational. [...]*³⁹

- Extensive knowledge of painting and art history is necessary to know whether our experiment can succeed. Thanks to our knowledge and experience, we can separate bad ideas from good ones.
- We must be aware that working on a painting is a struggle and arm ourselves with large amounts of self-denial and diligence. Consistently pursue your goal; do not be afraid to go against the grain. Robert Storr compares Gerhard Richter's approach to Willem de Kooning:

³⁸ Robert Storr, *The Day Is Long*, tłum. własne, Art in America, 2009

³⁹ Calvin Tomkins, *Marcel Duchamp, The afternoon Interviews*, Badlands Unlimited, New York, 2013

[...] (de Kooning) always said, 'The minute it's obvious you cannot do something, you have to do it.' [Laughter] When it was no longer possible to paint the figure, he said, "Fine, then I will have to paint women, because obviously it is impossible to do." ⁴⁰

- When we work on an image, combining our activity with intense concentration and avoiding distractions, we can reach a state of unconsciousness. A lack of time perception and attention to the surroundings characterises this state.
- We must treat potential success as a phenomenon only concerning ourselves. Success is job satisfaction.

IV. Summary of artistic research. Documentation of artworks

ARTnews: Jamian, about your process of envisioning and then making a painting, you once said, "I'm trying to deliver a baby. The baby has eight arms and is really fucked up, and I don't know how to deliver a baby." You described searching for a state when a "painting can change from an image-based narrative to something else." What is that something else you're looking for?

Juliano-Villani: Once you get to the point where no one can decide anything and even you are unsure of what it is, that is what I like. Not just: here is my stupid dumb narrative idea that is basic as fuck. I like it when it becomes more confusing and hard to explain. The way I work is intuitive. I will make lists and whatnot, and I will try to re-create ideas visually that sometimes won't look good. I wanted to paint a tumbleweed going into a garage—that sounded great as a painting idea, but it didn't look good.

Peter Saul: It has to look good. That's the bottom line. ⁴¹

Summarising the information gathered so far regarding the stream of consciousness in the practice of the contemporary figurative painter, we can list the following characteristics of the technique we are describing:

⁴⁰ Robert Storr, *The Day Is Long*, Art in America, 2009

⁴¹ Andy Battaglia, *The ARTnews Accord: Painters Peter Saul and Jamian Juliano-Villani Talk Humor in Art, Life in the Studio, and More*, The ARTnews, 2020

- We **think visually about things closest to us**, thanks to which using the stream-of-consciousness technique in figurative painting allows us to find new ways of **interpreting the present and the problems that bother us the most**. The use of this technique results in **sincerity and authenticity** of artistic expression.
- The main characteristic of the stream of consciousness is its **subjectivity**. The transformations of our consciousness can be compared to a stable stream, the direction of which is known to us, although it is knowledge from the *periphery* of our consciousness, which is an intensely active element. Our mind is full of potential by being in constant change.
- Our body is a complete, finite system where consciousness controls every internal and external process. *Attention* is a psychic energy that controls this process by selecting the information the consciousness receives. By **focusing on the periphery of our consciousness**, we can bring out many **exciting solutions** that are not available to us through rational consideration alone.
- Following the flow of our thoughts and **limiting external stimuli** to achieve the highest level of focus can positively affect our artistic creation.
- The stream of consciousness, both in literature and in contemporary figurative painting, can be **pretty vague**, but in painting, this term refers only to the technique used, not to the genre. Depending on the person's approach, **this technique can take different forms**.
- The stream-of-consciousness technique in literature and painting **focuses on thoughts and feelings that are peripheral** (inaccessible to rational thinking), but in literature, these are the thoughts and feelings of a literary character, and in painting, **the author of the work**.
- **Striving to understand the essence of human nature**, exploring human experiences, and thus attempting to show the inner truth, often difficult to express in words, can inspire contemporary figurative painting.
- Presenting a personal vision of reality and the subjective dimension of life is a *weapon* to **expand freedom by opening perception** in contemporary figurative painting. Images created using the stream-of-consciousness technique **cannot be material for the author's psychoanalysis**.
- **Works of art are the product of complex mental activities rooted in the vastness of the unconscious** so that even if they seem to be something seemingly intentional and consciously shaped, they elude attempts at understanding.
- An image made using the stream-of-consciousness technique is like Carl Gustav Jung's *visionary work*- **an authentic primal experience, an autonomous symbol** - an expression of something real but unknown.
- The paintings must be **analysed in isolation from the author** because creating a work is based on submitting to intuition, which leads the artist towards undiscovered and hidden aspects of

reality. What appears in the artistic vision is an expression of the *collective unconscious*, which carries traces of the earlier stages of evolution through which it has passed.

- **The artist is the tool of her work**, and her private life is at most a help or an obstacle, but it is never necessary for a creative task. **We have no right to expect the author to interpret her works for us.** Every great work of art is objective and impersonal.
- In shaping the concept of an image using the stream-of-consciousness technique, we can compare **our creative process to forming a new thought**, which Graham Wallas writes about in his book *The Art of Thought*.
- **The sketch phase** is then divided into **four stages**: the *Preparation* stage, the *Incubation* stage, the *Illumination* stage with a sub-stage of *Intimation*, and the *Verification* stage.
- During the **Preparation stage**, it is essential to maintain *regulated thinking*, which can be achieved by broadening knowledge in art history and orientation in socio-political issues bothering the present.
- It is worth being aware of how and from **what sources we get our information** because, living in the Digital Age, we can encounter many obstacles that negatively affect the quality of the data we collect and the stage of preparing the sketch for the image.
- During the **Incubation stage**, we voluntarily refrain from consciously thinking about the sketch for the painting that is forming in our minds. It is a process that we can compare to the *gap in consciousness*, which is its intensely active element, described by William James.
- The preliminary form of the sketch appears during the stage of **Illumination**, which is preceded by an **Intimation** on the *periphery* of our consciousness.
- During the **Verification** stage of working on the image using the stream of consciousness, we make the necessary corrections and finalise the sketch.
- Making an image using the stream of consciousness is a process during which we derive **pleasure from discovering something new**.
- After overcoming the initial difficulties, the creator is immersed in a **semi-automatic state of highly concentrated consciousness**.
- Before starting the implementation of the painting, we should remember to **visualise the final look** of the work and analyse the individual stages of its execution.
- The solution to the most complex creative problems can be presented as a **vision**.
- Working on a **painting is a kind of struggle**. We will need a lot of self-denial and diligence. We must consistently pursue the goal and not be afraid to go against the current.
- When working on an image, we combine **action with focused awareness**. We **avoid distraction** and enter a state of loss of consciousness - time begins to flow faster, and we ignore the surroundings.

- We must treat potential success as a phenomenon only concerning ourselves. **Success is job satisfaction.**

The analysis of the image-making process and the stream-of-consciousness literature resulted in the above summary. During my artistic research, I created a series of works without a visible common denominator to freely face the issue of work under the influence of the stream of consciousness. The stream-of-consciousness technique results in various painting methods, thanks to which the painting layer may sometimes resemble the sudden changes of threads characteristic of *Ulysses* or *Mrs Dalloway* or the chaos of the main characters' internal monologue. At first glance, the motifs that make up individual paintings may seem random, but after a deeper analysis, it turns out that they are firmly rooted in the present day and create a mosaic of symbols related to the current socio-political situation. Stream-of-consciousness technique can also be the common denominator of creativity, consisting of many different aesthetics. Thanks to this, the artist can face many formal and conceptual problems. The more often we undertake experiments, the more experience we gain and learn new solutions; this allows us to push the boundaries and introduce new qualities to art history. The confirmation of this theory can be found, among others, in the biographies and works of great painters, such as Philip Guston or Gerhard Richter. The stream-of-consciousness used as a medium to present pressing social problems is characterised by an unusual approach to a given topic, which can result in a polarised reception of works. I consider this a precious characteristic. The image triggers discussion on a topic and makes the observer look at the issue differently. Thanks to the stream-of-consciousness technique in figurative painting, we can analyse our current geopolitical problems, such as the war in Ukraine and the current situation in the European Union. Works created under the influence of the stream-of-consciousness technique do not show any form of escapism. The subconscious always refers to the most current problems, presenting them in a completely new form and prompting deeper reflection. We can analyse problems related to our corporeality, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Describing your problems in this way can lead to a work that will be more understandable to the general public because everyone will judge it based on their own experiences. Reducing the barriers that stand in the way of making an image using the stream-of-consciousness technique is directly related to excluding unnecessary elements interfering with the process. Many experiments related to creating sketches on a computer and smartphone allowed me to increase my experience handling graphic programs. Thanks to this, I was able to expand the range of tools in my painting practice that are available in the Digital Age. I have introduced many workshop solutions to my practice because they significantly increased the

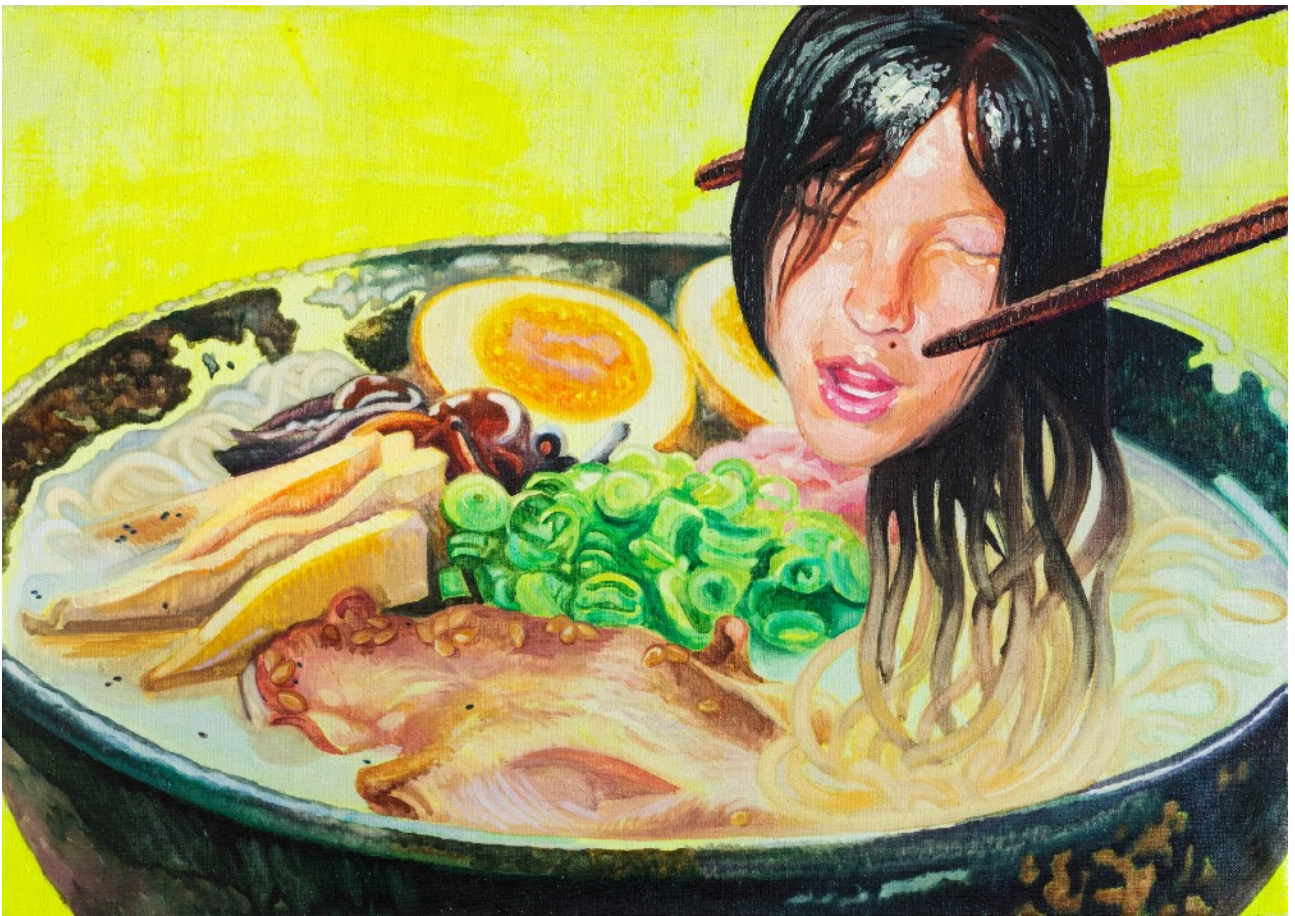
comfort of painting work and positively impacted the final effect. Stream-of-consciousness technique in contemporary figurative painting is invaluable for analysing contemporary problems. Nowadays, when we are constantly bombarded with new information, the stream of consciousness as a technique in painting allows us to capture the relationships between the elements of our reality, which makes it easier for us to organise it:

*[...] The difference in the rate of change lies at the basis of a difference of subjective states [...] When the rate is slow we are aware of the object of our thought in a comparatively restful and stable way. When rapid, we are aware of a passage, a relation, a transition from it, or between it and something else. [...]*⁴²

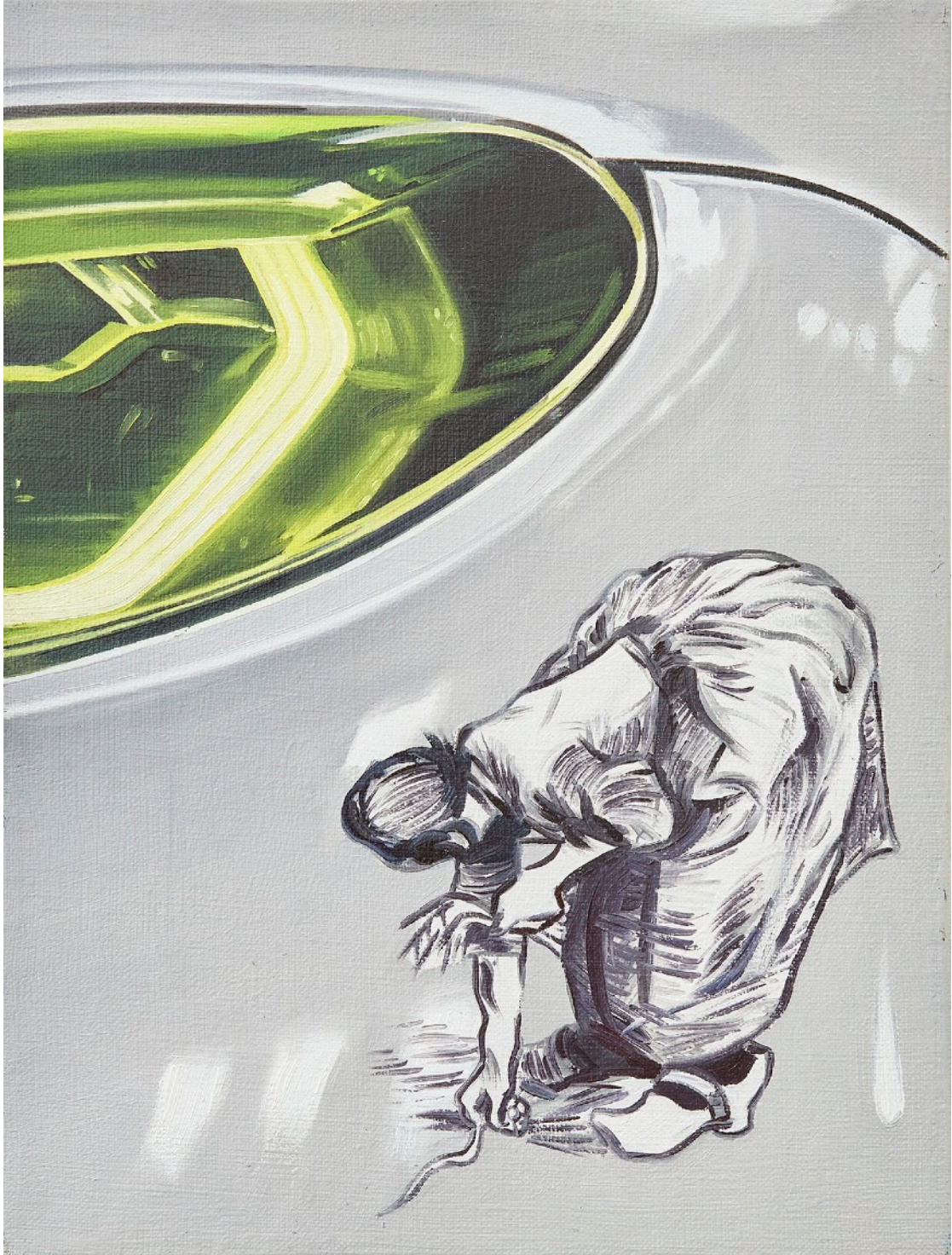
⁴² William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1950, p. 504



00 max, 2020, oil on canvas, 200 x 150 cm



Getting Dirty in the Shower, 2021, oil on canvas, 50 x 70 cm



Sangfroid, 2021, oil on canvas, 40 x 30 cm



There You Were Sitting High and Fine, with a Rose-bush up Your Arse, 2022, oil on canvas, 70 x 140 cm



Effortlessness of Movement, 2022, oil on canvas, 70 x 140 cm



If You Don't Want to Suffer, You Should Tear Yourself Apart, 2021, oil on canvas, 160 x 120 cm



Illest Motherfucker Alive, 2022, oil on canvas, 160 x 120 cm



Quiet Storm, 2022, oil on canvas, 90 x 70 cm



Best Song on the Album, 2022, oil on canvas, 70 x 90 cm

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