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Picturing the Immaterial with Colour – Symbolist Ideal?

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When I first read about this session, 'Shades of Grey: Painting without Colour' I was thrilled since there are very few sessions that are actually devoted to colour and its research.

I'm delighted to have this opportunity to introduce a concept, which formed a big part of my doctoral thesis, namely *Colour Asceticism*. With this colour concept I have studied colour and meaning in Finnish and international art from the 1860s to 1906.

In this paper I discuss how the turn towards colour – that is when 'material' became a part of the content – is one of the main signifiers of Modernism in European art. First, my focus is on the new adaptation of the more achromatic palette which was broadly used during late 19th century, not just in the Nordic countries, but also elsewhere in Europe. The use of a colour ascetic palette was especially popular within the Symbolist circles. At the time, this kind of 'reduced palette' carried certain connotations, such as spirituality, musicality, harmony, melancholy, stillness, intimacy, silence and immateriality, and these concepts were among the topics widely discussed in the art circles of the turn of the 20th century. Moreover, 'abstract' elements, such as musicality and spirituality, which were so highly valued in this period, were not introduced through form, composition or subject, first, but through the idea of *colour* harmonies.

The pioneers of the colour ascetic palette included Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, who created 'mother tones' to imitate greyish fresco painting, as well as Edward Burne-Jones and also James McNeill Whistler, whose tonal technique inspired so many Nordic artists. Édouard Manet was one of the major promoters of colour contrasts and a fellow Frenchman, the now virtually unknown artist Eugène Carrière – who was nevertheless celebrated in his own day – was a real inventor of using only one colour on a pale background. Carrière explored the limits of using total monochromatism in the 1890s.

Secondly, I focus on changing colour practices and experiments with flat, shadowless surfaces, especially with a medium other than oil on canvas. Although artists were able to access more varied colours at this time, for some reason they chose to limit their palettes to two or three main earth colours. I also argue that, irrespective of whether a painting was created in oil, gouache or tempera, the colour itself became highly important – signifying deeper meaning and abstract thought in painting. This process, I believe, was part of the break from the long mimetic tradition. Thus the idea of simplification, colour harmony and abstraction in painting goes back considerably further than, for example, Wassily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian or Kazimir Malevich. This important shift

was not only created with intensive, bright colours, but also with a bold, achromatic colour scheme preferred by artists widely in Europe and especially in the Nordic countries.

Here I will concentrate on the Finnish artists Magnus Enckell, Ellen Thesleff and Helene Schjerfbeck, but I will also discuss some of the artworks by the Danish painter Vilhelm Hammershøi. To be precise, I will look into their different palette practices and their ways of approaching colour asceticism. And to explain how Nordic artists adapted the non-mimetic colour palettes of their immediate predecessors for their own ends, I hope to show that colour asceticism was also used in different ways. These new palette practices were an essential part of European modern art, and artists' attendant simplification and manipulation of the palette were vital to the permanent break from the mimetic ideal of colour. The vital role played by colour in the practice of painting profoundly changed the concept of modern art.

My investigations reveal that 'anti-colourist' art is a recurring phenomenon in the history of the visual arts which, in both Eastern and Western art, has always had its moments. Chinese monochromatic ink painting holds a powerful place in Chinese art, while the Japanese took their influences from the Chinese to Zen painting before it was introduced in Europe.¹ In Western art, however, this colour ascetic art is well-known through various artists such as Manet, with his 'Black Spanish period', inspired by Velázquez and Zurbarán, whose mystic art is based on a strict muted palette. Interestingly, it should be noted that when mentioning Velázquez's art, I am referring to his reduced-palette portraits which were so striking in their simplistic power. The same may be said of the Dutch painters Hals, and Rembrandt in his later years. All these artists were much admired by Manet, Carrière and Whistler, as well as by the Finnish artists Enckell and Schjerfbeck.

It is clear that artists ranging from Whistler and Manet to Schjerfbeck and Hammershøi, all admired the Old Masters as well as ancient art: these artists sought out and borrowed ideas from European and non-European art history. In the international ambience of Paris, Nordic artists too found the latest modern art, but also the archaic art treasures of the Louvre. From this melting pot came the enthusiasm for the 'primal sources of Western art', as they were then seen – Assyrian, Egyptian and later Early Renaissance fresco painting. All this was reflected in the change in understanding colour in a new way.

There is also another reason why the ascetic palette became so influential. Modern times needed a new language for the 'new art'. Even though these artists looked to the past for inspiration with the specific palettes they created: they included inter-textual levels in their paintings; a contemporary subject with a reference to or gesture towards the Old Masters, or suggesting timelessness with a reference to ancient fresco technique or to Egyptian art, as in Enckell's painting *Seine Net Weaver* (1896). This echoes well the ongoing dualism and discourse of their time. On the one hand, Baudelaire had stressed that without the gaze into history man loses himself to 'superficial' progress, whereas the critic Hugo von Hofmannsthal wrote in 1893 that the very notion of 'Modernism' was the concurrent conflict between two opposite responses to the hectic *fin-de-siècle* existence: 'Today, two things seem to be modern: the analysis of life and the flight from life... Reflection or fantasy, mirror image or dream image.'² Here I would extend Von Hofmannsthal's idea and claim that colour ascetic art can, in fact, be seen as art which grew from (self)reflection, as a mirror image and from the analysis of life.

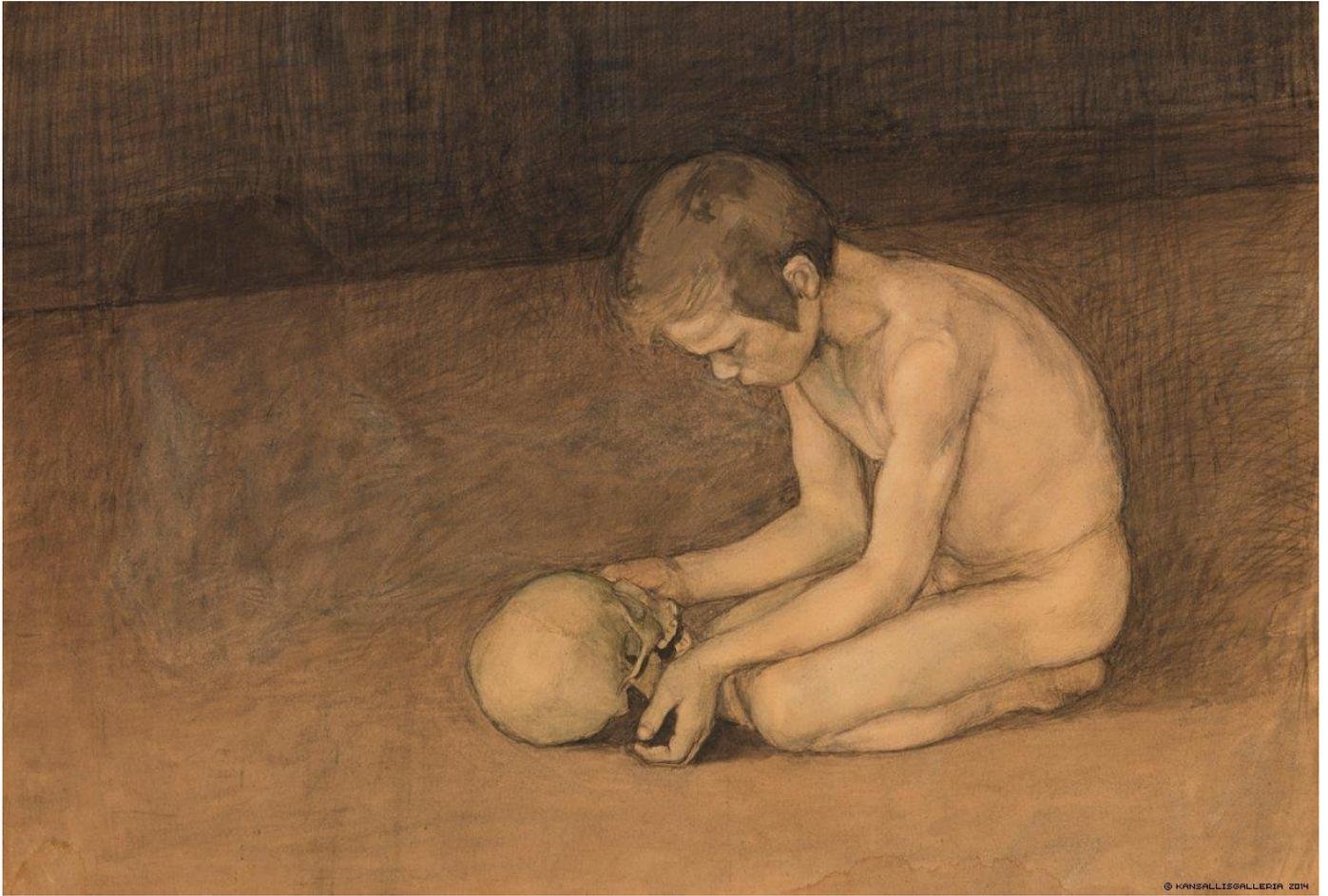
Furthermore, the artists' aspirations to spiritualism, to the dematerialisation of the real, became the ideal;³ this neo-platonic awareness inspired artists to work on the basis of *true art*. These aspirations towards a mysterious and immaterial art of poetic qualities, indistinctness and suggestion, became manifest in the 1890s. However, since colour asceticism does not appear merely in the Symbolist period,⁴ and it is used frequently by artists such as Hammershøi and Schjerfbeck, I would suggest that sources for their 'immaterial' art were to be found more within the new practices as a modernistic device. These ideas grew up during the 1860s and,

¹ This aspect has been very hard to trace due to the fact that artists did not differentiate Chinese from Japanese art. This Far-Eastern art can be addressed as *japonisme*.

² Von Hofmannsthal, Hugo, 'Gabriele D'Annunzio', 149, as cited and trans. by James McFarlane in Bradbury, Malcolm and McFarlane, James (eds.) 1991. *Modernism. A Guide to European Literature 1890–1930*. England: Penguin, 71.

³ Rapetti 1996, 15–16 in Geyer, Marie-Jeanne & Le Fur, Yves & Rapetti, Rodolphe 1996. *Eugène Carrière 1849–1906*. Paris: Musées de Strasbourg.

⁴ Riout, Denys 1989. 'La Peinture monochrome: une tradition niée'. *Les Cahiers du Musée National d'Art Moderne*. Paris, 81–98.

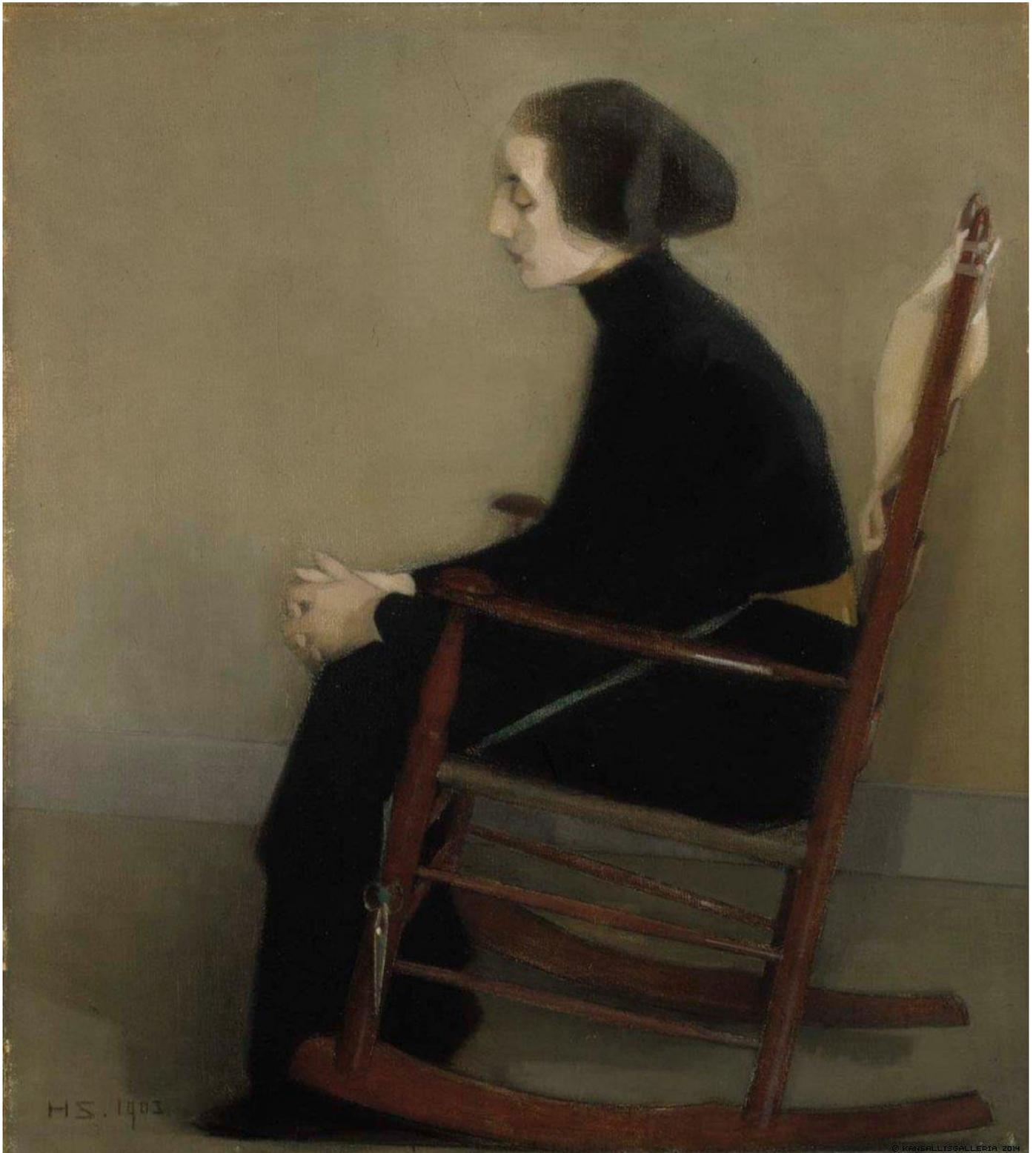


Magnus Enckell, *Boy With Skull*, 1893. Ateneum Art Museum. Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Yehia Eweis.

http://kokoelmat.fng.fi/app?lang=en&si=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.muusa.net%2Fteos_9FB88B44-382C-4F12-857C-DAEF3727EC78



Ellen Thesleff, *Aspens*, 1893. Ateneum Art Museum. Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Hannu Aaltonen.http://kokoelmat.fng.fi/app?lang=en&si=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.muusa.net%2FE42_Object_Identifier%2FA-1991-218



Helene Schjerfbeck, *The Seamstress (The Working Woman)*, 1905. Ateneum Art Museum. Photo: Finnish National Gallery / Hannu Aaltonen.

http://kokoelmat.fng.fi/app?lang=en&si=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.muusa.net%2Fteos_042D1118-D090-45B1-A27B-A56363C958F2

interestingly, this is the time when colour asceticism started to be used in the works of Manet, Whistler, Burne-Jones, Puvis de Chavannes and in the 1880s by Carrière. The dualistic Baudelairean quest was also for something eternal and spiritual that was contained in colour and was given central importance in art which strove to depict the modern world and the world beyond the visible. The ascetic palette also brought innovative practices to Nordic art. These muted, restrained ascetic colours were the key element in depicting melancholy, stillness, spirituality, mirror image, 'inner world', isolation, musicality and intimacy and they were an essential part of dematerialisation in modern painting.

From the point of view of the history of colour, there is a clear gap in the 19th century between artists such as Seurat and Kandinsky.⁵ Even though artists of that period, such as Manet, Whistler, Cézanne, Hammershøi,⁶ Khnopff, Klimt and even Van Gogh, are very well studied, their colour-conscious art which also includes 'non-colourist' periods has, however, still not been studied comprehensively. Why is that?

One important reason is that the focus on the art-historical study of colour, and perhaps also the art market, concentrated more on bright colours and so-called colourism or chromaticism, whereas achromatic art frequently received only a brief mention in art-historical studies⁷. Where it is mentioned, it is in more negative terms than positive, especially if we compare it to the Impressionists and the study of their palette practices in, for example, Anthea Callen's extensive research. However, in the 1860s many chose to explore with an almost achromatic range and developed it further.⁸ And by using these new kinds of palettes, artists such as Carrière and Whistler were able to explore the limits of medium and canvas.

So, it is time to name these 'non-colour' periods or practices, not only because they meant a lot to artists, but also to show the innovative side of them. From the outset of my research I have been fascinated by the 'absence of colour', the 'anti-colourism'⁹ in art and by its historical recurrences. In art literature, this palette has traditionally been described as 'limited colour spectrum',¹⁰ 'subdued tonal range',¹¹ 'limited colour scale',¹² 'reduced palette', 'monochromatic (*peinture monochrome*)',¹³ 'tonalism',¹⁴ 'black colourism'¹⁵ and 'archaism' or where a painting has simply been described as minimalist or having 'absence of colour'.¹⁶ While this kind of palette

⁵ Many 'colour historians' have taken as their examples Georges Seurat and Wassily Kandinsky. There is, however, a big gap between them and the history of colour has been somewhat one-sided. These artists were, of course, famous for their analyses of colour but as artists they were also highly individual. There are many artists who were interested in colour and developed their own palettes at that time.

⁶ Not even the Danish painter Vilhelm Hammershøi, who used a colour ascetic palette all his life, has been studied from the point of view of his palette.

⁷ For example, John Gage has pointed to 'the greatly reduced palette of Rembrandt' and discusses the black colour in the chapter 'Matisse's black light'. Gage, John 2006. *Colour in Art*. Thames & Hudson World of Art. London: Thames & Hudson, 18–19, 228–232. Gage uses the term 'anti-colourism' and draws its long tradition from Pliny the Elder and Roman times. He also mentions American modernist artists, such as Ad Reinhardt, who connoted the asceticism of Chinese monochrome painting. Gage 2006, 202–205. Riout 1989, 81–98.

⁸ It should be noted that Impressionism did not strictly speaking have an impact on Finnish art where *plein air* painting and Naturalism were preferred by such leading artists as Albert Edelfelt and Helene Schjerfbeck.

⁹ Pincus-Witten uses the term *anticolourist* when considering Cy Twombly, but I find this too negative a word. Pincus-Witten, Robert 1984. *Eye to Eye: Twenty Years of Art Criticism (Contemporary American Art Critics no. 4)* Kuspit. Donald (ed.). State University of New York at Stony Brook. Michigan: UMI Research Press, Ann Arbor, 99.

¹⁰ The critic Maclair uses this term when mentioning Carrière and Whistler. Maclair, Camille 1901. *L'Art en Silence*. Paris: Société d'Éditions littéraires et artistiques, 292; Monrad, Kasper 2012. 'Intense Absence'. In *Hammershøi and Europe*. Munich, London & New York: Statens Museum für Kunst, Prestel Verlag, 2014.

¹¹ Stevens on Whistler and Hammershøi's palettes. Stevens, MaryAnne 2012. 'Hammershøi and England'. In *Hammershøi and Europe*. Munich, London & New York: Statens Museum für Kunst, Prestel Verlag, 152.

¹² Monrad on Puvis de Chavannes' and Hammershøi's colour scale. Monrad 2012, 40.

¹³ A term widely used in art-historical literature dealing with colour, e.g. Gage, John 1999. *Colour and Meaning. Art, Science and Symbolism*. Singapore: Thames and Hudson, 200; Riley, Charles A. 1995. *Color Codes. Modern theories of color in philosophy, painting and architecture, literature, music and psychology*. University Press of New England, 87–91. Riout 1989, 81–98. The term 'tonal monochromism' is used by Robert Pincus-Witten in his essay in *Eye to Eye*, 'White on White: From Tonalism to Monochromism', where he analyses Malevich's *White on White* painting. Pincus-Witten 1984, 43, 45–52; On Carrière's monochromatic art, Bantens, Robert James 1983. *Eugène Carrière. His work and his influence*. Studies in Fine Arts, The Avant-Garde no. 29. Ann Arbor Michigan, 129.

¹⁴ Pincus-Witten 1984, 43–46.

¹⁵ E.g. Sarajas-Korte, Salme 1998. In *Ellen Thesleff*. Ateneum publication no. 7. Helsinki: Ateneumin taidemuseo, valtion taidemuseo, 37.

¹⁶ E.g. Ahtola-Moorhouse, Leena 1998. In *Ellen Thesleff*. Ateneum publication no. 7. Helsinki: Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery, 36–42; Sarajas-Korte, Salme 1966. *Suomen varhaisymbolismi ja sen lähteet*. Tutkielma Suomen taiteesta. Väitöskirja. Helsinki: Helsingin yliopisto, 8, 176–179.

has been given different names, I consider ‘colour asceticism’ the term which best describes it since this answers the question of what *kind* of colour is used.¹⁷ It is also descriptive; it implies the turn-of-the-century’s tropes of restraint, ‘non-emotional’ higher spirituality, simplicity, purity and starkness – all the connotations that many artists aimed for during this period. Thus it is also a period term of ‘modernity’.

Put simply, this kind of palette is based on a few ascetic colours that dominate the work. The colour selection usually consists of black, brown, grey and white, mainly used as *contrasting* pairs of black-white, brown-ivory. Other colours that are mixed with the previous dominant colours include green, blue, and earth tones of reddish brown, umbra, sienna and ochre. Thus the palette is not completely *achromatic* (black, white, grey). In colour asceticism colour was not applied for creating light and shadow – quite the opposite. It was to reduce this element and to create colour surfaces which emphasised a shadowless two-dimensionality. Within colour asceticism there are at least three different technical methods, including tonality, contrast and monochromatism.¹⁸

During his studies in Paris at the beginning of the 1890s Magnus Enckell enrolled in Académie Julian. It was around this time he painted his small, grey-brown-toned *Self-portrait* (1891) which became the first example of his new Symbolist art¹⁹ and also his first colour ascetic painting²⁰. The portrait shows a young, serious, perhaps shy artist looking into the distance. The composition leans on a diagonal line and the light is just on the left side of the face. The palette is very sparse; only white, brown and black are used. This radical reduction caught Enckell’s teacher Albert Edelfelt’s attention, and he warned his student about going too far: ‘I think that your new works are slightly too monochrome. As I said, you should be careful of being too monochromatic.’²¹

Enckell’s young artist colleagues living in Finland also found his works strange. The most interesting comment comes from Väinö Blomstedt, who stated: ‘...his drawings are excellent but his paintings strange. He has painted an old Breton woman using only two or three colours; he says nowadays that there are no colours in Nature!’²² It is interesting to note how for Blomstedt, the colour ascetic palette was the most difficult element to accept, not the simplification or the composition.

At the turn of the 20th century an artwork created with only a few ‘non-colours’ was a bold move: imagine a landscape painted in just black, brown and white. To produce a painting ‘without colour’ must have been as shocking as Gauguin’s use of deep purple and chrome yellow.

Within colour asceticism there are different methods of painting. For example, tonalism was used by Puvis de Chavannes and Whistler who, in their lifetimes, inspired Nordic artists to explore greyish tonality in works imitating fresco, in landscapes appearing from the mist, and also in innovative portraits. Puvis de Chavannes used his ‘mother tones’ to create an imitation of a greyish, dry, matte fresco surface. Whistler, who made skilful use of the tonal technique of ‘symphonic’ art he developed, was more versatile than the somewhat monotonous tonal harmony of Puvis de Chavannes. Whistler shaded the tonal harmony of his works using a single colour – or as he himself put it, ‘a single tone’.²³ Linking the colours and sometimes even the base of the painting together with one principal colour, created a general impression of harmony. Maurice Denis used the term ‘*manier les gris*’²⁴ to describe Whistler’s colour. The young Finnish artist Ellen Thesleff, also educated in Paris, writes home of the disease of ‘*puvanisme chavannisme*’ which had taken them all by storm. All artists went to the Sorbonne or the Pantheon to see those pale and ethereal murals. They did not imitate his murals, however, but they adopted his tonal technique in small-scale paintings. These landscapes were described as poetic and mystical, appearing from another world.

A very different technique was used by Manet and Carrière, who both employed mainly two-colour contrasts. Their use of colour has, for example, been referred to as the ‘black synthetism of Manet’ and the ‘black

¹⁷ All the other above-mentioned terms could also be applied to bright colours, except black colourism and subdued colour.

¹⁸ Bonsdorff, Anna-Maria von, 2000. *Kontrasti ja harmonia: väriasketismi suomalaisessa viime vuosisadan vaihteen kuvataiteessa*. Pro gradu -tutkielma. Helsingin yliopisto, Taidehistoria, 70–76, 112–114.

¹⁹ Sarajas-Korte 1966, 64–65.

²⁰ von Bonsdorff 2000, 84–87.

²¹ Albert Edelfelt’s letter to Magnus Enckell, 15.12.1891. National Library of Finland.

²² Magnus Enckell’s letter home written on 9.11.1891. Sarajas-Korte 1966, 67.

²³ N.B. Whistler used other colours in his single tone technique, including blue, turquoise, green and red, but these were not colour ascetic works and for this reason are not discussed here. For example, *Crepuscle in Flesh Colour and Green: Valparaiso* (1866).

²⁴ Denis’ article on the *Champ de Mars* Salon of 1892. Sarajas-Korte, 1966, 178.

colourism of Carrière'.²⁵ However, their painting methods were very different – Manet with his strong, contrasted brush, and Carrière with his soft mass of sweeping *fantômes synthétiques*. Both artists were admired by a wider group of Nordic artists than the Symbolists.

As we have seen, the adoption of colour asceticism brought innovations into turn-of-the century painting techniques. I also argue that the anti-colourist muted, restrained, ascetic colours were key elements in depicting the 'inner world'. However, in most art-historical writing ascetic colour serves only to emphasise line and form, which of course is not the case. Actually, in many paintings, exact lines and forms are blurred and vague. Especially in the soft, intimate and monochromatic art of Carrière, a nowadays unknown artist but one who, in his time, had many followers, pushed colour asceticism to total monochromatism, painting with one colour only.²⁶ This new handling of the surface was also the reason why young artists followed his rubbing and sweeping technique.

A typical method of colour asceticism was used to depict the imagery of the *estompe*, or atmospheric conditions such as mist, which was used especially in landscapes, blurring lines and enveloping objects in a haze that made them less material, more evocative and immaterial. The pursuit of this method, known as *attente*, or arrested time – shown by means of frozen poses, stilled water and air – could also reinforce the iconic nature of the scene in visual terms.²⁷ As Charles Riley (1995) notes, at the turn of the century grey was considered a true opposite of colour, a 'non-colour'.²⁸ The colour grey, which is in fact white containing black to a greater or lesser degree,²⁹ was perhaps the most frequently used prime colour in the innovative tonalism of both Puvis de Chavannes and Whistler. John Gage's definition 'the notorious greying, the suppression of colour, was the most sincere of the tributes paid by 19th-century painters to the work of Chevreul'³⁰ ably describes the sources associated with this colour harmony.

There were also other Finnish artists, such as Helene Schjerfbeck, who were not part of the young Symbolist group of artists of the 1890s, but who used an ascetic palette in their works. Schjerfbeck herself called it 'a path to the synthetic'. It is thus interesting to compare Schjerfbeck's *The Seamstress* (1905) to Whistler's *Arrangement in Black and Grey: Portrait of the Artist's Mother* (1871). Schjerfbeck clearly was part of the colour-conscious group of Nordic artists who explored the possibilities of manipulating the palette as the means of making modern art. Her art took a turn to an even more simplified form after the 1890s, when she started to experiment with different mediums and bases. Now her self-portraits can be seen in the new Vuitton Museum in Paris.

Vilhelm Hammershøi (1864–1916) on the other hand, is certainly among the pre-eminent Danish artists from the late 19th and early 20th century, and his reputation has nowadays reached further than that of any other Danish painter. Hammershøi was born and lived in Copenhagen and is known for his many paintings of Copenhagen interiors and landscapes. These convey a silent, atmospheric existence that is unique to his art. Some find it intense and depressive, some peaceful and content. His big retrospective exhibition in Copenhagen some years ago, revealed the diversity of his art that was full of different shades of colour, of finely tuned soft colours that are far from monotonous. Yet there does not seem to have been any specific research carried out on his extraordinary palette.

Hammershøi was quite free to do what he liked. He travelled frequently to many destinations within Europe. Hammershøi's enigmatic art is often mentioned alongside Puvis de Chavannes' paintings, whose mysterious atmospheres are achieved partly by placing figures in desolate landscapes and by working with simplified

²⁵ Sarajas-Korte 1966, 77.

²⁶ In this study 'monochromacy' refers to a painting which is done with only one colour, the base working as the other (light) colour. For example: Eugène Carrière, *Paysage et route sinueuse* (ca. 1898), 27 x 28 cm, oil on canvas, Carrière cat. 869. Rapetti, Rodolphe 2008. *Eugène Carrière 1849–1906. Catalogue raisonné de l'oeuvre peint*. Éditions Gallimard, 269.

²⁷ See Donald Friedman, 'Belgian Symbolism and a Poetics of Place,' in Goddard, Stephen H. (ed.) 1992. *Les XX and the Belgian avant-garde: prints, drawings, and books, ca. 1890*. Lawrence, KS: Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, 129. Hirsh, Sharon L. 2004. *Symbolism and Modern Urban Society*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 3.

²⁸ Generally speaking e.g. the Impressionists never used black. Grey, transparent grey is, however, found in their work. Grey has been considered the 'very antithesis of colour'. Riley, 1995, 72–73.

²⁹ Grey can be produced also by mixing vermilion red and blue-green, so-called 'pure grey'. Pusa, Unto 1964. *Värit ja niiden vastakohtat*. Helsinki: Teknillisen korkeakoulun ylioppilaskunta, 8.

³⁰ Gage uses these terms in discussing Seurat's art and with respect to Puvis de Chavannes. Gage 1999, 200.

compositions with subdued colours. This visual language has several traits in common with Hammershøi's painting, and of course Whistler's, as well as the work of the Finnish artist Helene Schjerfbeck.

As has been shown, of all the artists to develop colour asceticism, only Eugène Carrière used an extreme form of total monochromacy, a painting technique³¹ that he himself had developed. In Carrière's monochromatic work one can find both landscapes and human figures, where the painting is created using one colour and the base canvas. It should be noted that these paintings are not studies but finished works. Carrière's misty art was created also by contrasts, but with a very different soft, sweeping technique, usually with two colours – brown and ivory or black and white. Carrière went furthest of all and painted canvases with only one dark colour, the light base being the light colour which glows through where needed. This monochromatic painting, which was the most extreme colour technique, was adopted by one Finnish artist – Magnus Enckell, who instead of using oils, used black watercolour and a light coloured paper as the 'other colour'.³²

To conclude, the move towards colour – when 'material' became a part of the content – was a main signifier of what was modern in Nordic art. An artwork created with only a few 'non-colours' was a bold move: a landscape painted with shades of grey took landscape art into a new era. To produce a painting 'without colour' must have been as shocking as Gauguin's use of deep purple, vermillion and chrome yellow. The pioneers of the colour ascetic palette of tonalism were Puvis de Chavannes and Whistler who, in their lifetime, inspired many Nordic artists to explore greyish tonality in works imitating fresco, landscapes appearing from the mist and innovative portraits. Manet and Carrière, on the other hand, pushed artists to explore the limits of using two-colour contrasts. Both artists were admired and followed by the Symbolists, but also by artists who did not belong to this movement such as Helene Schjerfbeck and Hammershøi. Artists also broke the long tradition of working with oil on canvas, instead many experimented with gouache and tempera on different base materials.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that colour asceticism brought innovation to pictorial practice with a paradoxical shared goal: to achieve spiritual ends through the plastic means of pigment, canvas and, in some cases, primer. The artists' quest for spirituality immersed them in developing stylistic practices to dematerialise the physical surface of the canvas as much as possible, by restricted use of colour. Artists sought to efface the distance between a deficient material world and the ineffable world of dream and the divine.³³ It is evident that ascetic colour was developed to express a new kind of aesthetic in art. This 'dissolution from the real world' towards an immaterial spirituality was one of goals of the artists. This colour-conscious art was clearly created for presenting new content. I hope that this paper has offered new readings to the wider resonances of artistic discourse on technique, matter, and medium and how they tested the limits of painting as a new 'language of colour'.

³¹ Carrière developed this technique also in prints. See, for example, *Carrière* catalogue 1996, 212–213.

³² Von Bonsdorff 2000, 70–76, 84–90.

³³ Silverman points to this aspect with Gauguin. But I see it as relevant to all the artists in question. Silverman, Debora 2000. *Van Gogh and Gauguin. The Search for Sacred Art*. United States of America: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 6. I have brought this aspect to the fore in my MA thesis.