

## 2024 Claire Frances Peasnell Memorial Award – Evaluation

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*Samples of own work*

My proposal was to develop my Jungian psychology-based art practice by refining and simplifying my symbolic visual language. After years of researching ancient symbols and artifact designs—elements I incorporated into my own artworks—I reached a point where my compositions had become so intricate that they risked becoming impenetrable. To move my work forward, I planned to undertake mentoring sessions with György Olajos, a prominent Hungarian artist whose approach closely aligned with my vision. With his guidance, I aimed to clarify my imagery while preserving its depth, ensuring that my woven, carpet-like compositions remained rich in meaning yet more accessible to the viewer. I had long struggled with balancing complexity and clarity in my work, and I believed that this mentorship would provide the necessary insight to refine my visual language. My goal was not only to enhance the way I integrate ancient symbolism with contemporary dreamscapes but also to create paintings that invite deeper engagement and connection.



*Samples of Olajos's work*

With the financial support of the St Hugh's Foundation, I had the opportunity to visit Olajos in his studio in Hungary, Budapest, where we discussed the different approaches he uses to depict his *Hybrises*. I also attended exhibitions showcasing his work. After my return, we continued our conversations online, as the simplification of visual language is an ongoing exploration, constantly presenting new ideas and approaches to consider.

What I learned was that the most important aspect of art is how we see and feel life, as this is what we ultimately pass on through our work. To simplify a visual language, clarity in thinking is essential—the process must begin from within.

Of course, there are many physical actions that can guide this process, and they can also work the other way around—helping to clarify what is inside one's mind.

Olajos observed that in my artworks, the use of larger, more prominent shapes combined with an abundance of colours creates a busier, more vibrant texture. In contrast, his work fills space more meticulously and evenly, often forgoing colour entirely, or using it minimally when it is included. This approach makes his work more abstract, creating a surface with a more subtle, rhythmic pulsation.

He explained that he primarily follows the structural principles of plant growth, such as the formation of tree bark, which results in what I would describe as an elegant pattern. Although someone once referred to these as textures, he sees them more as structures, with the texture-like quality being more of a phenomenon. Texture consists of small, repeated design elements, such as cross-hatching, while structure refers to the larger components of a piece and how they relate to one another.

In Olajos's view, the world is so rich and multilayered that it is almost impossible to reproduce in full detail; therefore, it can only be represented through a certain degree of reduction in visual art. This concept is evident in Turner's white paintings, for example. Similarly, in Mondrian's early realistic works, like his forest scenes, the trees are arranged with such incredible order that, while not strictly realistic, they evoke a spiritual levitation—as if he had captured the very soul of the forest. This idea is reflected in a poem by István Vöröss: 'My soul is a forest.' Not a lonely cedar, as depicted in the famous Hungarian painting by Tivadar Kosztka Csontváry.



Turner, Mondrian, Csontváry

"In my own drawings," says Olajos, "themes vary and repeat improvisationally, creating a continuous flow. My mentor, Imre Magyarász, often said that simplicity is the greatest mystery. Perhaps progress follows this principle as well—moving in small steps, whether upward or downward, always leading somewhere. The same gestures repeat, yet we do not remain in the same place; instead, we arrive at something new."

### Closed and opened isles techniques

"At first glance, it may not seem to matter whether a line structure is open or closed. However, its "meaning" is entirely different. The structure is composed of "disintegrated" elements assembled together, and the uniform tone further enhances its sense of disjointedness and fragmentation."



Samples of Olajos's closed and opened technique

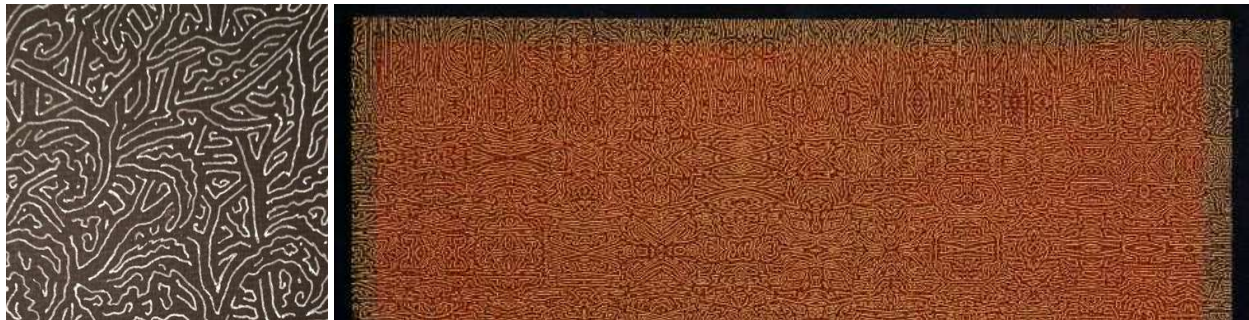
According to Olajos, his drawings are "flows," sometimes resembling the energetic sparks of Keith Haring. In the last work above, the influence of Paul Klee is evident, as he incorporates small graphic elements such as dots and zigzag lines. In some pieces, the background consists of subtle colour vibrations, but here, the entire background becomes more dynamic and alive.

The structure can either appear more fragmented or be preserved as a central image. A closed structure allows for the addition of colour, as certain elements form contained 'islands' within the composition. This version offers greater potential for incorporating colour, which is important to me.

### Rapport of a pattern

"This was a very exciting process. The original plant drawing was a 12–13 cm strip, about 40 cm long, but this type of drawing could be mirrored and repeated, allowing it to expand into a much larger surface. I cut up photocopies and assembled the pieces, creating a seamless composition where the repetition remains subtle unless one actively looks for it."

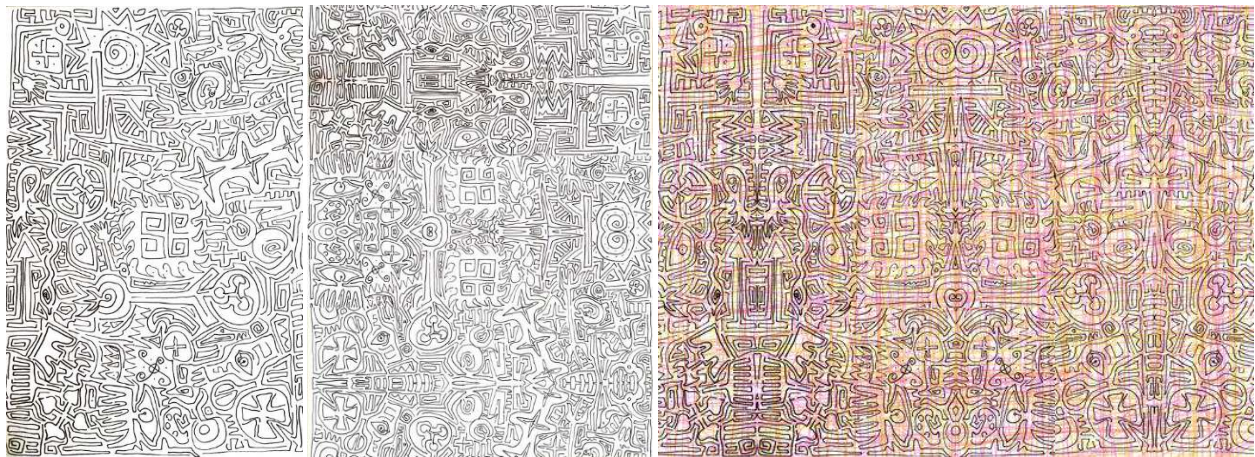
Olajos refers to these works as 'Maya veils'—a term derived from Sanskrit, where *mayā* means illusion or dream."



*Olajos's plant pattern and a detail of the 'Maya veil' type work*

I wanted to experiment with the same repetitive and mirroring process. As a practice, I created a version of an open structure, using my own symbols as building blocks. Next time, being more precise—maintaining consistent line thickness and even spacing—will further enhance the final piece.

This structure results in a more homogeneous surface or 'carpet' compared to my previous designs.



*1: My own carpet of symbols 2: Cut up, copied, mirrored and re-assembled at a larger scale 3: Colours added in three layers, final piece*

### How do you start a new work?

"The only plan is the theme—once again, the *Hybris* invasion. As I began, I realized it resembled my previous works: a self-contained network system. This structure makes it look like a map or, at first glance, a labyrinth. However, in reality, it is the opposite—something enclosed within itself, like a vascular system. *In Traces* contains fragments of *Hybris*."

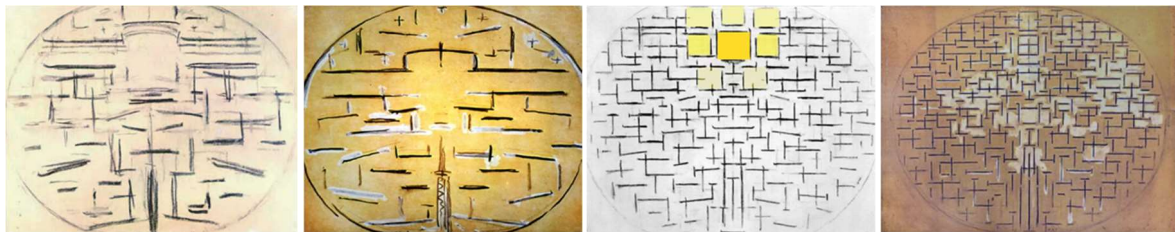
The *Hybris* figures became symmetrical as they gradually took shape. A line on the right side is reflected on the left, creating mirror symmetry. This "face-to-face" quality, like seeing oneself in a

mirror, carries something sacred—perhaps an undeniable presence. Their existence cannot be disputed. They are stable. An archetype of human aggressive weakness.

A theme introduces a kind of pattern. For example, closed forms often appear in a circular arrangement. In textile design, a pattern's rapport relies on repetition, with character defined by colour or shape. I use the expressive power of both, unfolding the theme spontaneously. However, space is still filled economically—just as tree leaves do not overlap, yet branches grow organically into a network, always seeking light. Similarly, in my drawings, the pattern is distributed like water flowing into deeper spaces, following the terrain. There are also many backwaters. People in a tram distribute themselves evenly over time—though they may crowd near the first door, they eventually spread out. Thickening, thinning, branching—each of these movements conveys something spatially and relationally.

Horror vacui—the fear of empty space—perhaps stems from anxiety, a power-driven expansion, or a small section extracted from a greater whole. Entropy. Children often draw labyrinths during times of crisis. A balanced, even surface requires inner peace and self-control. When I started drawing, my patterns gradually became smaller and more structured as I moved away from the city. I believe many artists compose as they do because they pour their inner state into their work. Some compositions feel tangled, colourful but disharmonious—like a half-cooked meal. Everything is thrown in.

One of my favourite series is Mondrian's *Pier and Ocean*. His early studies—forest scenes, for example—are wonderfully clear, ethereal images, almost like patterns themselves.”



Mondrian: *Pier and Ocean* series

“I'm not consciously aware of where I'm going—I don't even know if it's progress. If I manage to create a smooth surface, there's no obligation to introduce smaller or larger motifs, spatial relationships, or other elements. It's like murmuring a prayer, hoping something will improve. As long as I'm immersed in it, it feels right.

I have a thick book filled with colourful aerial photographs of the Earth's surface—almost every image reveals a pattern.”

### Simplification

When I asked Olajos about the simplest version of his *Hybrises*, he showed me panels—made from paper or MDF—featuring cut-out figures. This technique requires all parts of the figure to remain connected for continuity while ensuring the shape remains visually striking without relying on tonal variations. The intricate, delicate pieces especially reminded me of lacework.



### *Olajos's laces and panels*

As the first step in the simplification process, I decided to create a series of works using my motifs. I chose lino as the medium, aiming to distil some of my previously colourful imagery into reduced black-and-white compositions that emphasize simplicity, impact, and clarity. My plan is to print the base layer in a very light colour, just enough to lift off the main images. This work is still in progress and has not yet been printed, but the following images already show a cleaner representation than before.



*Lino prints of simplified imagery, work in progress*

Experiencing Olajos's works up close and having in-depth discussions about his approaches and processes was a powerful experience with long-lasting effects. The opportunity provided by the funding allowed me to immerse myself in these conversations, which have directly influenced my own practice. I now have new painting ideas focused on exploring the carpet-like depiction of symbols and motifs, as well as the process of simplification—how to make my works more subtle and delicate. This experience has also encouraged me to experiment with different techniques and compositions, shaping the direction of my future work.