



An exhibit of three triptychs exploring different aspects of creativity.

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November, December, 2007



The “Three by Three” exhibit, presents three oil paintings. Each triptych explores different aspects of creativity – the moment of creation, the ingredients for creation and the process of creation.



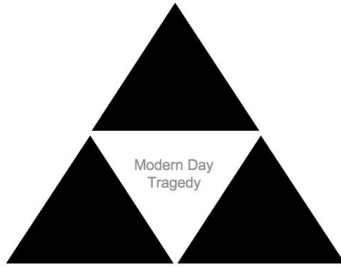
Modern Day Tragedy (1984)



Fire, Earth, Air and Water (1997)



Primary – Red, Yellow, Blue (2007)



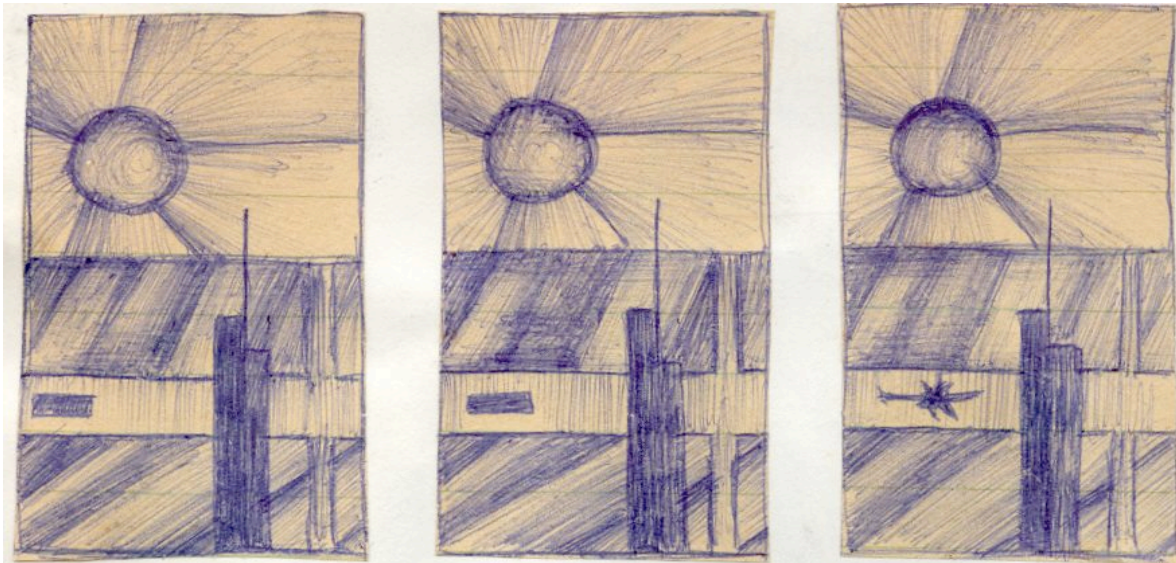
Modern Day Tragedy (1984)

the moment of creation

Modern Day Tragedy is based on the dramatical rules of ancient Greek Tragedy. Namely that the action of the play should span only a small amount of time and occur in a limited space. The action itself should concern a single dramatic event.

Ideas can often be created after a sudden change in perspective or viewpoint. A single dramatic event can alter the way we see or understand things. A change to our personal way of seeing things, our context or reference frame can occur quite suddenly. A new idea is created. Often it is hard to back track and remember how the world seemed before our mind was changed.

You can view the picture as three frames of an animation. The dramatic event represented is perhaps a car accident in a city street. However, the picture is intended to be metaphorical. That is, it simply represents an idea exploding – a sudden change of how we think. Later it became associated in my mind with the sudden death of a friend in a real car accident. The meaning also took on different significance when people began to refer to it as my 9/11 picture. I was thinking about New York when I painted the picture so the connection is now quite strong in my mind. Of course for many people that sudden tragic event caused a sudden major shift in the way they saw the world.



Original Ink sketch for *Modern Day Tragedy*.



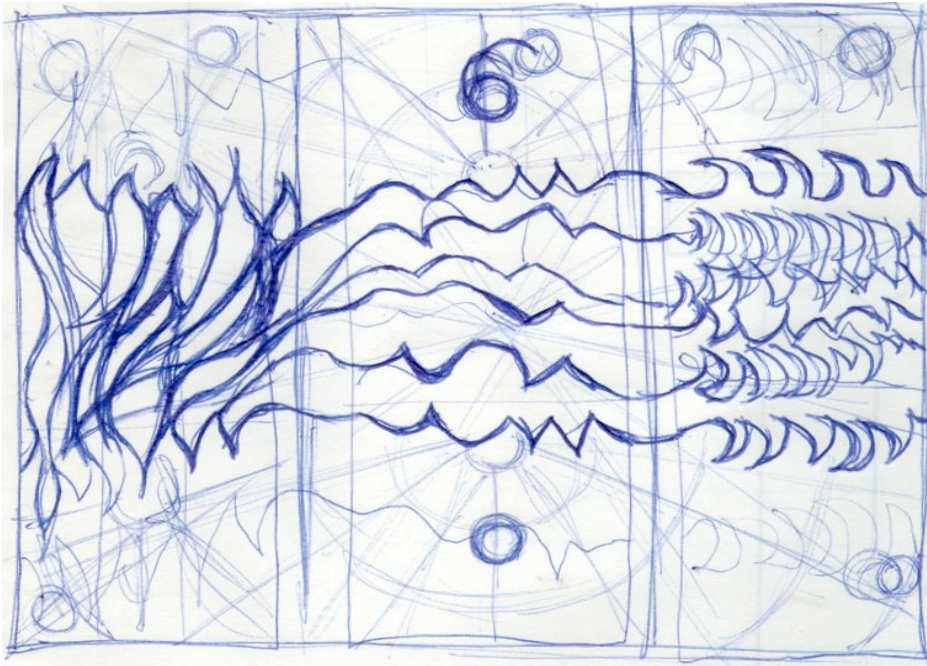
Fire, Earth, Air & Water (1997)

the ingredients for creation

This picture is based on the four fundamental elements of fire, earth, air and water. Even with only these four elements, ancient Greek scientists were able to develop quite sophisticated models of science and engineering. Indeed in simpler times, these four elements were enough to describe the known world. This model was used to develop sophisticated machines, such as, coin-operated, holy-water dispensers for the temples.

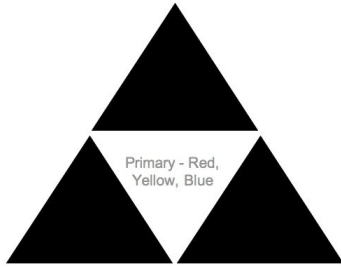
Creativity, like many other processes can seem very complex. How do the parts come together to make a new idea? It would be nice to develop simple models to explain such complex things. This modelling approach is used in the field of Complex Systems, where simple parts interacting under simple rules generate very complicated systems of pattern and behaviour. For example, the weather is a good example of this. Aristotle's idea that "the whole is greater than the sum of the parts" is also a tenet of Complex Systems. Of course we also find this with creativity, as the new idea can often be much greater than the simple parts used to make it.

At the time of painting this picture I was thinking about human character traits and how these might be modelled with the concepts of fire, earth, air and water. Perhaps these units might be mapped to complementary pairs, of neurotransmitters. This dichotomy metaphor is also in the picture as the element of sky is made of the two parts day and night..



Original Ink sketch for *Fire, Earth, Air and Water*.

The colour scheme uses the elements of the rainbow, from red on the left through to violet on the right. Newton's work in breaking white light into the spectrum of parts was a significant event in science. Light had always been considered as something that couldn't be divided into parts.



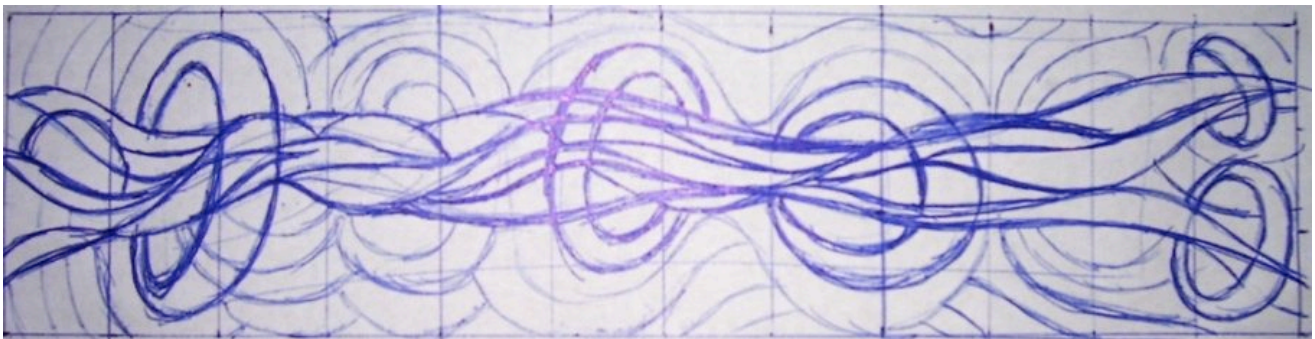
Primary – Red, Yellow, Blue (2007)

the process of creation

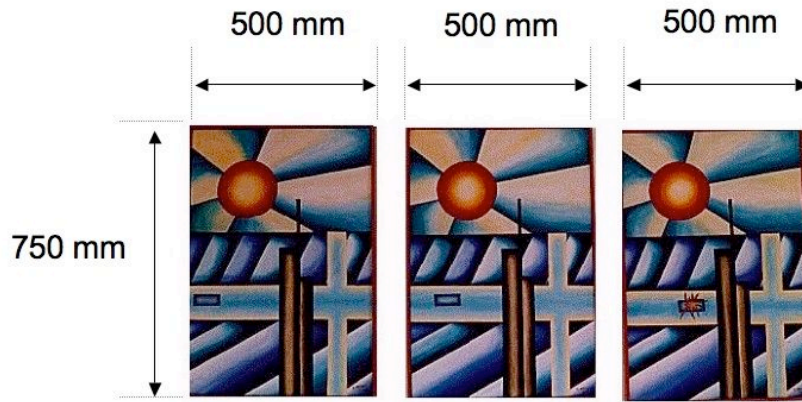
This picture was painted ten years after “Fire, Earth, Air and Water”, but also explored how complex patterns can emerge or evolve from the interaction of simple or primary elements. When I drew the picture I had nothing on my mind except that it would be painted in the three primary colours of red, yellow and blue. I was curious to see what would emerge. As always the process of making a picture can be a delicate balance of accident and design. Evolution as a process model for creativity makes a lot of sense as accidental mutation and selection explains in a simple way how ideas are generated.

As I painted the picture a female form emerged in the foreground. Later I found a male germ cell had appeared in the yellow and red parts. Because of this I sometimes think of it as a picture of the mother of creation. At the most abstract level the picture represents an idea evolving. At the time I was still intrigued by models based on dichotomies, so if you start at the left you can see one idea becoming two ideas. Time can run both ways in the picture and so you can look from right to left and see two ideas merge to become a single idea. The background in the picture can be thought of as the context under which the idea evolves. You can also read it from left to right as an abstract story of cosmogenesis. The world begins as a single part on the left and finally divides into two separate parts on the right. The parts might then divide again to make further parts. Parts may also be destroyed at some time or join together to make a single element.

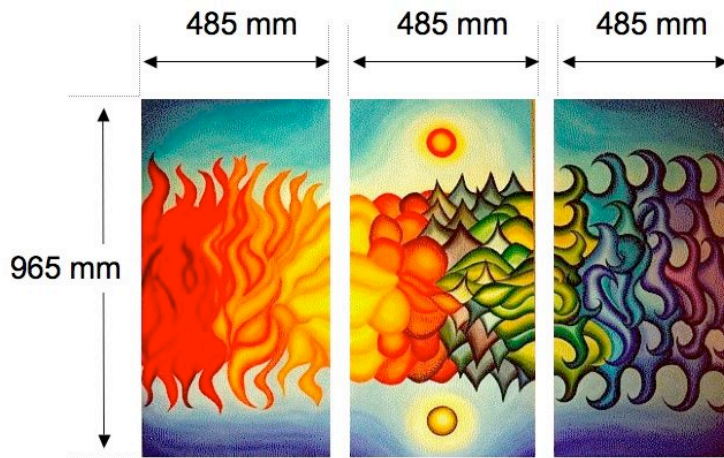
The picture also reminded me a lot of how my mind feels when it is making music, with waves and harmonics combining and reinforcing each other to create some unexpected structure. As a joke I subtitled the picture, “Chromodynamics” because it shows some complex dynamics and uses similar colour categories that are of interest to physicists who model subatomic particles. Modelling the physical world from it’s constituent parts is a long tradition in physics although more recently there has been a move away from this reductionist thinking to consider not just the parts, but the parts at different scales and also how these parts interact to create the world we experience.



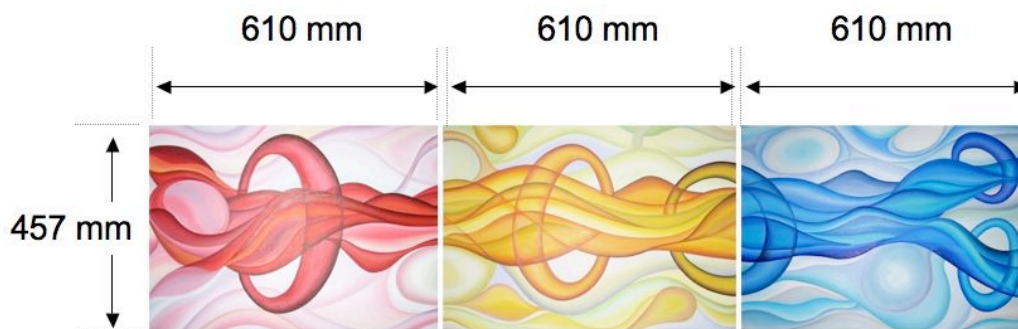
Original Ink sketch for *Primary – Red, Yellow, Blue*



17. Modern Day Tragedy 1984



26. Fire, Earth, Air and Water 1997



48. Primary - Red, Yellow, Blue 2007