







THE TABULA PROJECT

**A New Perspective  
on the Mind**





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“***The Tabula Project*** aims to provide a new perspective on the mind. The paintings depict states of consciousness and thought, and fundamental questions of our existence are explored in the writings and workshops.

For real and lasting change to occur we need to begin with ourselves. Ultimately it will be through the cumulative impact of changes at the individual level that society might change”.

**Claire Haigh**

*Founder, The Tabula Project*



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# Introduction

**If we consider the many self-created challenges we face** it is not unreasonable to conclude that there is something fundamentally wrong with how we think.

Social injustices and inequalities, widening extremes of wealth and poverty, inhumane treatment of each other and of other species, wars and acts of terrorism, unsustainable plundering of the planet's resources, anthropogenic climate change. The list goes on.

The question is, why do we keep making the same mistakes? What can we do to change things for the better?

**We need to change how we think.**

We need a shift in consciousness away from being narrowly focused on our individual desires, preoccupied by our own repetitive thoughts and unable to live in the present - to one where we operate from a higher level of consciousness, at one with our society, our environment and the world around us.

Changing *behaviour*

**Changing how we think**



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**The Tabula Project** aims to provide a new perspective on the mind.

1. **Examining Thought** seeks to explore current predominant thought forms;
2. **Clearing the Mind** is about achieving a state of consciousness without thought;
3. **Building a New Framework** is about discovering a new integrated framework for thought, where the whole mind is in balance.

The full collection of paintings can be viewed at **[www.thetabulaproject.com/paintings](http://www.thetabulaproject.com/paintings)**

In the age of mass information, it is even more important to recognize that it is not *what* we know, but *how* we know what we know, that matters.

The development of the paintings was informed by extensive research into how the subject of thought and consciousness had been explored across a range of disciplines. A summary of the findings is at **[www.thetabulaproject.com/about/evolutionofthought](http://www.thetabulaproject.com/about/evolutionofthought)**

In order to understand consciousness, with or without thought, we need to understand the thinker, the self. Fundamental questions of existence are explored in freethinking workshops. For more information visit **[www.thetabulaproject.com/about/consultation](http://www.thetabulaproject.com/about/consultation)**

# Who are we?

## Why are we here?

## Where are we going?







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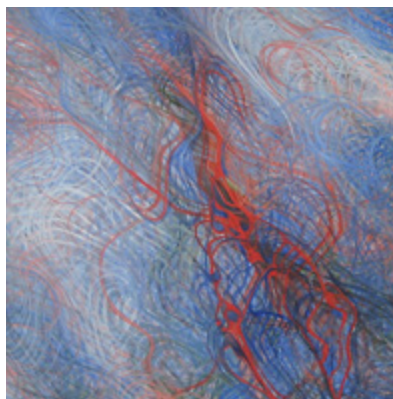
# 1. Examining thought

Faulty perception is at the root of our suffering, and of much of the trouble in the world. If we can correct this perception the world will radically change.

We need to examine ourselves, the filter through which we perceive the world. This leads to the recognition of our fundamental interdependence with each other and the biosphere.



**1a *Metamorphosis***  
1993, 15 paintings, oil on canvas,  
each 96 x 106 cm



**1b *Evolve to Survive***  
1994, 4 paintings, oil on canvas,  
each 80 x 88 cm



**1c *Forms of thought***  
1994-2007, 9 paintings, oil on canvas,  
each 80 x 88 cm



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# We have the power to recreate ourselves

The self is not a fixed entity but a pattern of thoughts and ideas which are constantly changing and re-forming. We are each a collection of narratives which we share with those in our lives. Our sense of who we are is crafted out of these narratives.

We have the ability to choose which narratives about ourselves to hold, but most of the time they are unconsciously assimilated and become part of who we think we are.

**Metamorphosis** (1a) explores the fluidity of the self and the infinitely malleable and changeable nature of consciousness. The paintings depict generic states of awareness, and a range of sensations of pain and pleasure which could be experienced by any sentient being. The fourth painting in the series *Easing the burden of consciousness* encapsulates the driving motivation behind *The Tabula Project*.

We need to get beyond the separate self which is the greatest obstacle to realising our potential. The sense of a separate self is just an illusion, but this illusion becomes the filter through which we perceive the world. Our minds become defined by the “selves” we construct, and our perception is limited to what these “constructed selves” can comprehend.



*Easing the burden of consciousness*, 1993

**We need a fresh perspective on ourselves, and a radical change in how we perceive ourselves in relation to others.** Relationships are prior to and constitutive of the individual self<sup>1</sup>. The old mechanistic world view embodied by thinkers like Newton and Descartes, where the individual is separate, is obsolete<sup>2</sup>.

Our minds and our sense of self emerge not only from our inner life but also from our “inter-life”<sup>3</sup>, from our sense of ourselves in relation to others. We need to embrace a more holistic perspective where the individual and the social cannot be separated.

# Inter



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# We must evolve to meet the challenges of the times

The massive acceleration in our technological and scientific capabilities has caused the level of risks we face to rise exponentially. At the same time, ancient grievances mixed with new toxic ideologies are writ large through social media.

We are ill equipped to cope with the challenges we face, and have insufficient understanding of the wider and ethical implications.

**Evolve to Survive** (1b) explores the self-limiting nature of much of our current thinking. The paintings depict stills from a poem describing a dystopian future. The poem is a cautionary tale about how thinking that is focused primarily on self-interest can become self-defeating and destructive. "In me a giant crater groans / as life shrinks further inside"<sup>4</sup>

We are hard wired to focus on that which serves our immediate narrow self-interest, but this leads us to make poor decisions based on short term expediency and is putting massive strain on our ecological system. By focusing on the "common sense" dictates of our individual consciousness we are destined to become "greedy and unwise"<sup>5</sup>. The result is a lack of systemic wisdom.

**The modern world is unsustainable.**

**We urgently need to think and act in a global context with a long-term horizon<sup>5</sup>.**

We need to develop the maturity and wisdom to recognize what is important, and to handle the responsibility that our knowledge gives us. This includes recognizing our fundamental interdependence with each other and the biosphere.

Short term  
expediency

Lack of systemic wisdom

dependence



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## We need first to examine how we think

In order to focus our minds on what matters we need to look first at how we think. This involves examining assumptions governing our understanding of the world, how we perceive ourselves in relation to others, and how we relate to society and the world around us.

Does language determine thinking, or is it the other way around? Where can meaning and truth be found? Are there inalienable truths, or is everything we know just opinion?

What can we really know?

Where can truth and meaning be found?

The ***Forms of Thought*** (1c) series of paintings attempts to represent generic thought forms. The paintings are deliberately devoid of figurative content, the assumption being that the patterns depicted could apply to a wide range of subject matter. The paintings seek to explore in the most abstract sense how the mind processes and generates information.

What we choose to focus our attention on is itself a hugely selective process and reveals as much about ourselves as it does about the object of our attention. We are not capable of direct perception. Perception is a largely unconscious process. Very few people understand the enormous theoretical power of the distinction between what “I see” and what is actually there<sup>7</sup>.

**We need to evolve our thinking. The key is to recognize the limitations in our awareness.**

To understand knowledge, we need to know the special characteristics of the groups which create and use it<sup>8</sup>. The map is not the territory, no map shows all its presumed territory – and crucially it leaves out the map maker<sup>9</sup>. And the map maker is heavily influenced by the prevailing paradigms.

# The map is not the territory











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## 2. Clearing the mind

Our minds are often cluttered with repetitive thoughts that make it very difficult for us to be fully present. Managing the mind is a key skill, and this includes the discipline at times to be able to switch thought off.

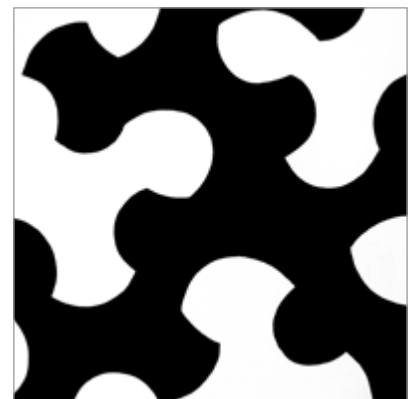
We need to discover the ability to live fully in the here and now. This is the pathway to true understanding.



**2a States of Mind**  
1993, 15 studies, ink on papers,  
each 34 x 44 cm



**2b In Search of the Perfect Line**  
1994, 6 paintings, oil on canvas,  
each 80 x 88 cm



**2c Tabula Rasa**  
1995-2015, 16 paintings, acrylic on board,  
each 92 x 92 cm



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## A high level of self-awareness is necessary

A high level of self-awareness is necessary if we are to evolve our thinking. We need to change ourselves on every level, in a continuous process of learning, growing and evolving.

As we evolve, we discard previous versions of ourselves. Progress in awareness can be likened to the change from a dot, to a line, to a plane. Each successive stage encompasses what went before. As we evolve we liberate the self from that in which it was previously embedded.<sup>10</sup>

Change on  
every level is  
needed

Learn, grow and evolve

The ***States of Mind*** (2a) series of ink washes depicts different states of consciousness. Each ink wash was produced quickly, the result of a spontaneous outpouring of visual thoughts and feelings. It was an enormously cathartic process. The effect was one of at least briefly decluttering the mind, momentarily accessing some stillness, before more thoughts and feelings emerged to fill up the space.

It takes time to change deeply engrained thought patterns and it can be a messy and painful process. It is a kind of push-pull operation where new thinking leads to new behaviours, which further reinforce and evolve the new mindset.

**The transformation we need to make is for thinking to become a tool at our disposal.**

The aim is to use the mind as opposed to being used by it. This includes the freedom to choose what to think, where to put our attention and at times to clear the mind of thought.

You are not who you  
think you are



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## We need to discover the ability to live fully in the present



*In Search of the Perfect Line, Part III*, 1994

Our minds are often burdened with conflicting thoughts and feelings, which create confusion and hinder us from responding adequately to the challenges we face - both as individuals and as a society.

***In Search of the Perfect Line*** (2b) illustrates the challenge of quietening the mind. The paintings seek to define the mind at rest, the landscape upon which new thought will eventually emerge. The perfect line represents a clear mind. But in searching for the perfect line, new lines continue to appear seeming to replace the previous ones - like repetitive thoughts which echo unprompted and repeatedly through the mind.

Only when we can see the repetitive nature of much of our thinking can we begin to move beyond to a place of stillness. Meditation can assist, but a high degree of self-awareness is also needed because the thinking mind can trick itself.

The mind needs to be free of baggage and conditioning, free of all attachments and issues, free of thought. In the awakening of true intelligence "Silence is the only fact"<sup>11</sup>.

# Silence is the only fact



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## The foundation of the new mindset is a *tabula rasa*

The ***Tabula Rasa*** (2c) series depicts the mind at rest, free of thought and full of infinite potential. A mind free of all baggage, of the past, of the ego. The perfect line emerges as the interface between black and white. The mind is clear, at one with the universe and of God-like intelligence - able to understand life, to contemplate infinity, to transcend our current level of awareness, to see beyond the illusions and artificial constructs of the mind, and to be a channel for pure wisdom.



*Tabula Rasa, Part XVI*, 1995-2015

### Definitions of *tabula rasa*

*Tabula rasa* is the Latin term for “blank slate”, and originates from the Roman tabula or wax tablet, used for making notes which was then repeatedly blanked by heating the wax and smoothing it again to create a *tabula rasa*.

The concept has been used variously by philosophers from as early as Aristotle. The modern Western idea of the theory is attributed mostly to John Locke's formulation that at birth the human mind is a “blank slate”, without rules for processing data, and that data is added and rules for processing are formed solely by one's sensory experience. In his expression of the concept Locke emphasised the freedom of the individual to define the content of their character and author their own soul.

In *The Tabula Project* the use of *tabula rasa* refers to the original Latin definition. Clearing the mind of thought, creating a blank canvas upon which one can create anew. This creating the conditions for mindfulness, pure potentiality and the freedom to redefine ourselves.











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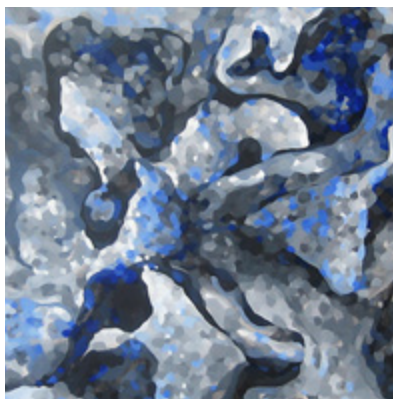
## 3. Building a new framework

The goal is a new integrated framework for thought, where the whole mind is in balance, with thoughts, feelings and intuitions working together in harmony.

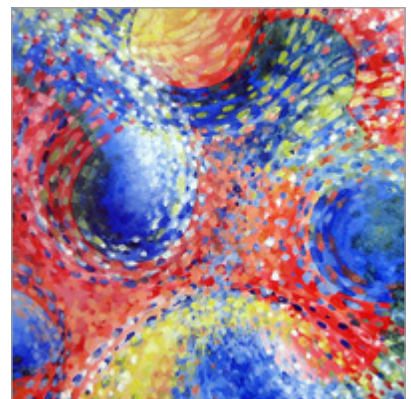
The mind becomes a tool at our disposal. Free from incessant thought we become open to new insights, and will eventually reach a place of enlightenment.



**3a Building a New Framework**  
1994-2010, 9 paintings, oil on canvas,  
each 80 x 88 cm



**3b Finding New Frontiers**  
2006-2007, 6 paintings, acrylic  
on board, each 92 x 92 cm



**3c A New Framework**  
2001-14, 3 paintings, oil on board,  
each 92 x 92 cm



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## In knowing itself, the human mind can transcend itself

To understand itself the mind needs to step outside of rational thought. If we use analytical thought we will be fighting a losing battle, because we would be using the same thinking to understand the very thing we are trying to transcend.

**Art can be a window into higher awareness.**

Beauty and truth stem from the same source. Once the workings of our minds can be understood they can be improved and ultimately transcended.



*Building a New Framework, Part VII, 2008*

**Building a New Framework** (3a) develops further the generic patterns of thought depicted in the *Forms of Thought* series. The nine-part series presents an evolution towards an increasingly integrated thought system. The journey begins with a representation of basic cognitive aspects of awareness and gradually builds in layer by layer more developed rational thoughts, feelings and intuitions. The ninth painting in the series seeks to bring together all these aspects into an integrated whole.

The first step in building a new framework for thought is preparing the foundation layer, creating the blank canvas, the *tabula rasa*. This involves developing self-awareness, overcoming personal blocks and learning to silence the internal dialogue.

Gradually we reach a place where we address daily problems from a different perspective, at a greater intuitive level, integrating all our senses and sensibilities. The mind is now a tool at our disposal - with thoughts feelings and intuitions working together in harmony.

# A fully integrated



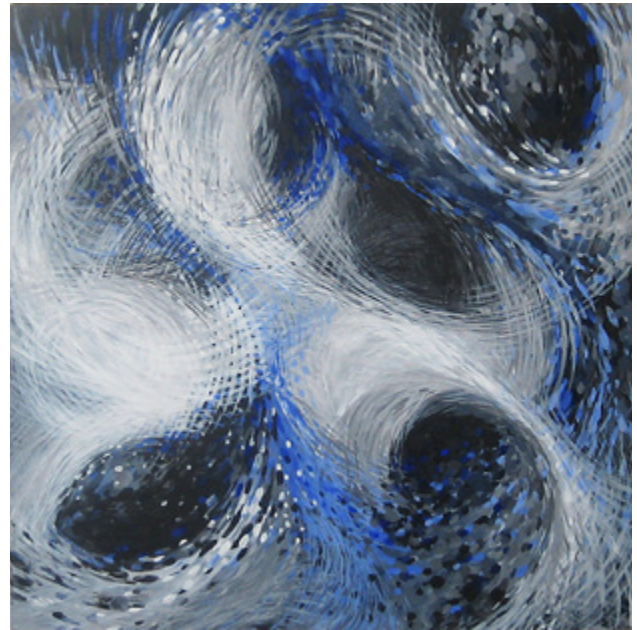
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## We become open to new insights, to new ways of seeing

A clear mind is one of the prerequisites for achieving breakthroughs across all fields of human endeavour. The space between thoughts is as important as the thoughts themselves.

We are all linked to and part of our surroundings. To become fully ready to receive the mind needs to be clear in a state of consciousness without thought. Breakthroughs come from unexpected sources. Understanding is a process of recognition.

The series of paintings ***Finding New Frontiers*** (3b) illustrates some insights from the fields of quantum mechanics, string theory and the complexity sciences which are revolutionizing our understanding of the physical world. Time plays a strange role in conscious perception and creativity. Einstein spoke of the non-verbality of thought, how conventional words only come much later<sup>12</sup>.



*The Particle and the Wave*, 2007

**Patterns can be a means of expressing the inexpressible**, where verbal communication is inadequate. There are fundamental principles about how things work<sup>13</sup>, and these principles cross all boundaries, all disciplines, all fields of human endeavour, all matter, all phenomena, everything – including the human mind. These principles can be captured in patterns.

The key is to look for harmony, patterns which resonate with the way it works. We start to recognize intrinsic patterns, patterns which replicate. We find new ways into impenetrable mysteries.

mind

Breakthroughs come  
from unexpected  
sources

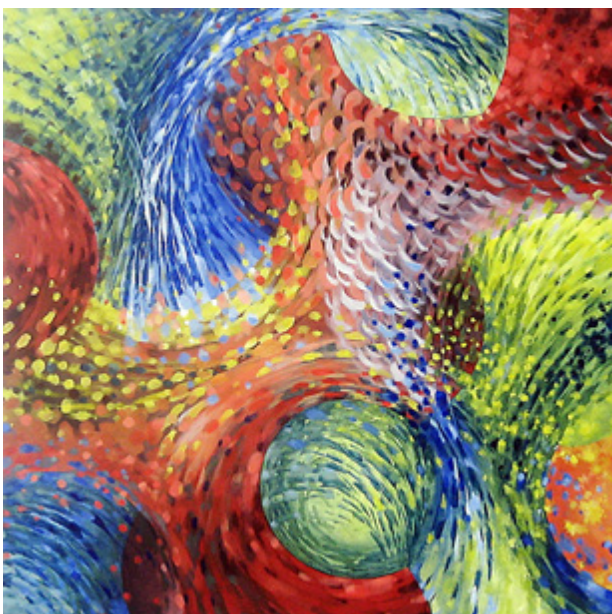


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## Where we will be one day

Free from incessant thought, conscious of the filters hitherto blocking our perception, we reach a more enlightened place. The mind is fully integrated, aware of its own workings and open to new insights and inspiration. Internal conflict has ceased.

**The ultimate goal is to be free from the bondage of self.** The self is a necessary tool on the journey to wisdom and non-dual awareness, but ultimately it is an obstacle to true understanding.



*A New Framework, Part I, 2012*

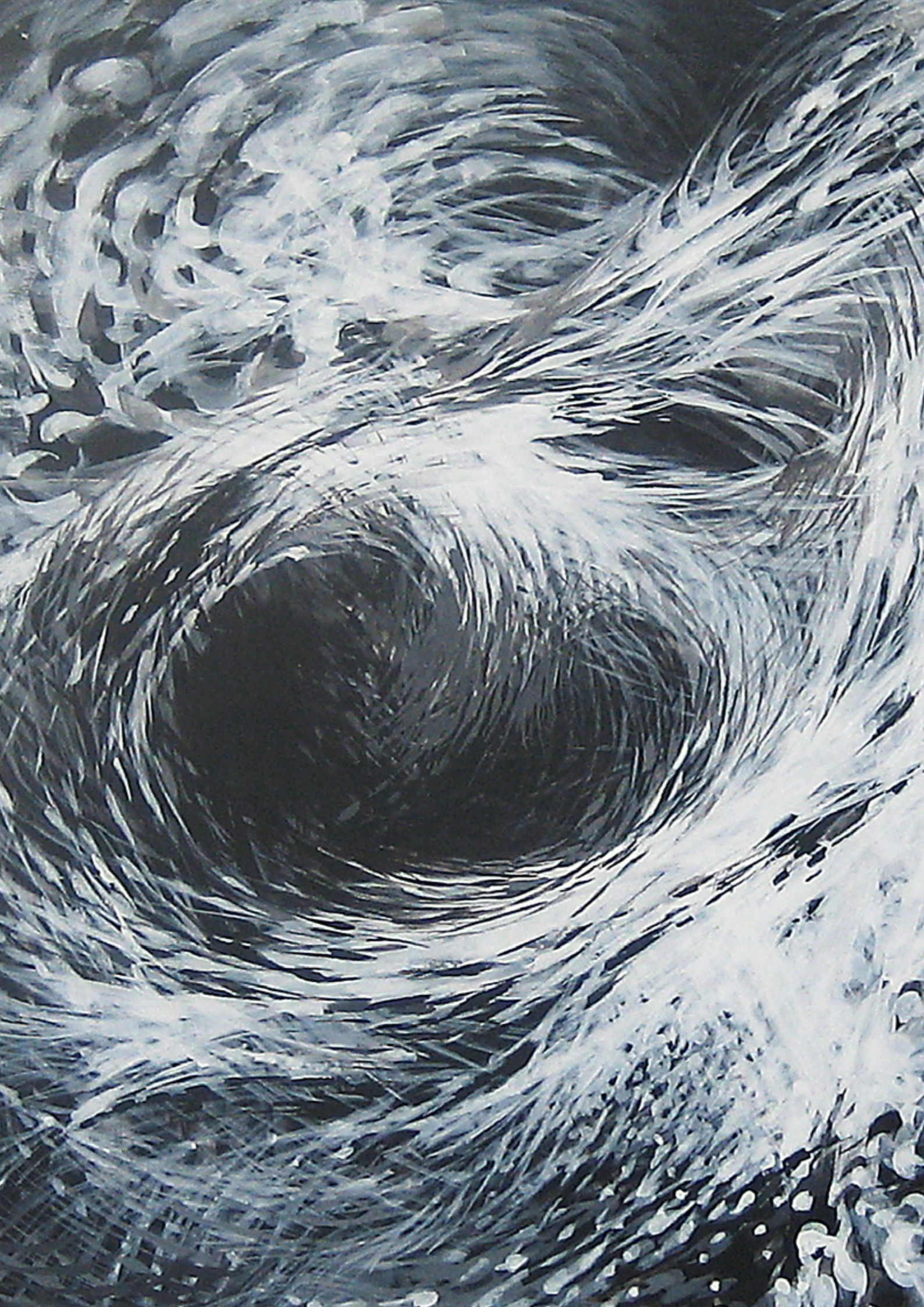
In the final series **A New Framework** (3c) the boundaries between thoughts, feelings and intuitions begin to dissolve. The paintings point to the beginnings of a new framework for awareness. We recognize that the self too is an object in our awareness, an inevitable filter through which we see the world. The more we can recognize this filter, the greater our level of understanding becomes.

Increasingly we may come to see our knowledge as a tool or a construction, and our "selves" as constructions too. This brings the possibility of real change: the liberation from the self.

With this liberation comes the realization of essential oneness, that any division between ourselves and the world is an illusion. This is a state of enlightenment.

The main goal in  
life is to discover  
our true essence















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## Further information

Claire Haigh's paintings are inspired by a deep desire for positive change, and by her belief that for real and lasting change to occur we need to begin with ourselves. She became interested in the early 1990s in exploring the nature of thought and consciousness through art, believing that paintings could provide a new window of understanding. This led to her embarking upon ***The Tabula Project***.

She has had five solo exhibitions in central London.<sup>14</sup> Her work has been bought by private and corporate collectors including NatWest, Marks & Spencer and the Boston Consulting Group. She has also completed many notable portrait commissions, including Sir Peter Hendy, Chairman of Network Rail; Ken Livingston, Mayor of London (2008); and, Tim O'Toole CBE, CEO FirstGroup PLC.

She is Chief Executive of Greener Journeys, a campaign dedicated to encouraging people to make more sustainable travel choices.

She is also a Director of the Low Carbon Vehicle Partnership, and a columnist for the magazine Transport Times. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures & Commerce (FRSA), and a Chartered Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (FCILT).

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## References

- <sup>1</sup> George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self & Society*, University of Chicago Press, 1934
- <sup>2</sup> Fritzof Capra, *The Tao of Physics*, 1975, Fontana Paperbacks 1983
- <sup>3</sup> Daniel J Siegel, MD, *Mind: A Journey to the Heart of Being Human*, W.W. Norton & Company 2017
- <sup>4</sup> <http://www.thetabulaproject.com/paintings/examining-thought/evolve-to-survive/life-shrinks-further-inside>
- <sup>5</sup> Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 1972, University of Chicago Press, 2000
- <sup>6</sup> Ervin Lazlo, *The Chaos Point: the World at the Crossroads*, Piatkus Books Ltd, London 2006
- <sup>7</sup> Gregory Bateson, *Sacred Unity: Further steps to an ecology of mind*, Harper Collins, 1991
- <sup>8</sup> Thomas Khun, *The Structure of Science Revolutions*, 1962
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- <sup>10</sup> Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads*, Harvard University Press, 1994
- <sup>11</sup> J Krishnamurti, *The Awakening of Intelligence*, Victor Gollancz Ltd, London, 1973
- <sup>12</sup> Albert Einstein, quoted by Robert Penrose in *The Emperor's New Mind*, 1989
- <sup>13</sup> Ludwig von Bertalanffy, *General Systems Theory*, Penguin Middlesex, 1973
- <sup>14</sup> Turtle Key Arts Centre, 1992; Smith's Gallery Covent Garden, 1993; The Mall Galleries, 1993; The Boston Consulting Group, 1996; The Troubadour Gallery, 2007