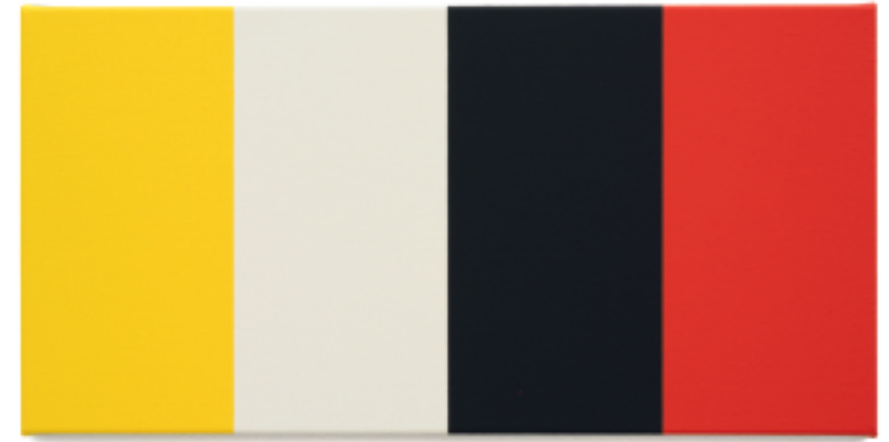


COLOUR NARRATIVE

KLEURVERTELLING

RUDI FUCHS



Four Halves (Blue, Yellow) 2021, oil on linen, 30 × 60 cm  
Four Halves (Red, Blue) 2021, oil on linen, 30 × 60 cm  
Four Halves (Yellow, Red) 2021, oil on linen, 30 × 60 cm

As we read from left to right, it is inevitable that I also begin to see the four colours lined up in this painting after one another, in that same order. Now that I am looking, *begin to look*, I see their progression: blue next to grey next to white next to yellow. At the same time, the four colours each appear separately, one *after* the other. The form of each of the colours is upright and rectangular. The four appear to be standing up straight, next to one another. Each colour has an outline, the shape of which seems at first to be regular and clean. Steven Aalders's idiom has grown out of the rich and wide variety of geometrical forms. A scheme for a painting thus develops out of a pattern of rectangles. But that is only the *beginning*. A painting like this one, *Four Halves*, was only initially a clever structure of rectangles. That design is a bare skeleton within which colours can unfold. The painting is *mysterious*, a narrative of colours that finds its wonderful way within a straight scheme. Geometric form is free and adaptable and provides space for colour. Within that freedom of space, in Aalders's paintings, the colours are irresistibly bright.

It is not sleekness of line that characterises the outlines of the colour planes in this painting. There is a different sleekness that sets a tender tone for the four colours and their light sequence. Now I come to the painter's handwriting. The outline of the form, I see, is noticeable when the one colour, for example the blue, stops and very cautiously gives way to the grey beside it. The blue becomes grey becomes white becomes yellow. We see an extremely ethereal boundary between the colours. That is how the painting's simple scheme was designed: a small horizontal rectangle, 30 x 60 centimetres, made up of two squares, a balance *completely at rest*, which is divided vertically into four rectangles. The four coloured shapes are the same size. The equal vertical division has made the scheme even more tranquil. The form of the four colours has been painted as uniformly as possible: the skin of the paint is completely smooth. It was softly fluid oil paint, several careful layers, so thin that the colour flowed into the canvas. The brush left no trace. There were boundaries between the colours. What Aalders did then was apply the colours very carefully, spreading them so that, *as if whispering*, they quietly mingled within the canvas. This act of painting, however patient, was accompanied by a certain trembling of the artist's hand. Think of smooth, still water that nevertheless shows a little movement, as there is always at least a trace of wind. Of course, there are straight boundaries in the painting. I see these as *tremors* along the edges of the colours in the order of their straight appearance. But there is something else. The colour boundaries are not only hairline tremors – when I look at their sequence very closely, I also notice in the fragile transition from one colour to another, as in music, a very brief *interval*, minimal moments of delay, as arises between words when pronounced slowly, one after the other. In a manner of speaking: blue – grey – white – yellow. And also: white – blue – yellow – grey, or any other combination. In spite of the geometric order, the viewer is entirely free to see the colours in *Four Halves* in different combinations that might occur. The artist himself did indeed choose a sequence for his painting. He must have done. But the meaning of art is the freedom of imagination. Paintings seek out what is still beyond the imagination.

Another two versions of this *Four Halves* have been made. Their rectangular design and layout are the same. It was a small series of three paintings, their design in colour as intimate as sonnets. In addition to the tonal pairs of blue/grey and white/yellow, a third was added, black/red. Each pair also appears in *reverse* order. In this way, the three paintings combine to show six different colour positions – a spacious narrative about colour always in the same arrangement. There is nothing strict, then, about the *principle* of order. Painting is something different. I still remember seeing my painting, *Four Halves*, for the first time. It was hanging rather high on a matt white wall; the light in that white was muted. The painting's austere clarity of colour was therefore gently subdued. I saw the painting in a brief moment, passing it as I entered Steven Aalders's studio. At exactly that moment, I had a sudden and complete overview of the painting as a *whole*. In other words, I saw all four of the colours *simultaneously*. It was wonderful. That was certainly the intention of the painting: I saw a surprise, a visualisation of colour of a kind I had never seen before.

I saw what the artist gradually discovered *while* he was making it and also what he saw when the painting was finished. This was all about that one painting. The other two of the three operated within the same idiom and the same geometric scheme. In their design, they therefore resemble one another. And yet they are not interchangeable. In every painting, the colours (their form and narrative) were *painted* by the painter's hand. When painting colour, a very different, much freer depiction comes into play than with the description of form. I must say that emphatically. It is four colours that, next to and with one another, composed my *Four Halves* as it appears. The four colours were not, however, painted schematically. Each colour was painted *separately* and by itself. We saw Aalders painting, with his brush, imperceptibly fragile and *trembling* boundaries between colour forms. Layers upon layers of thin, liquid oil paint were carefully laid down on top of one another. Colour remained transparent. The brushstrokes went up and down but at the same time followed other directions when appropriate. It also seems as if the colour is an *interweaving* of brush movements. In every colour, I see a matt balance develop. In the interweaving of colour, in the soft velvet surface, there is inimitable movement. That is what painters do. They bring colours to light and life. These are tones that come together in a narrative to create a unique, new, complete painting. That was the painter's discovery, *Four Halves*, a discovery I now get to see and will continue to explore in the future.