



Making Comics Without Stories: A Conceptual Approach to Sequential Art

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Abstract:

This thesis explores the boundaries of comics as an art form, taking Will Eisner's definition of comics as "sequential art" as a starting point and extending it into the realm of conceptual art. By approaching comics as sequences of images stripped of narrative, language, and traditional representational structures, I test what remains of the form when it is reduced to its most minimal elements. The work consists of abstract, minimal comics that function as both visual experiments and conceptual propositions. Influenced by conceptual art's insistence on idea over form, these comics are not intended to communicate fixed stories, but to question what it means for a sequence of images to be read as comics at all. The thesis combines these visual works with reflective writing, treating the drawing process and the act of thinking about it as a single, intertwined practice. The result is an inquiry that does not seek to answer what comics are, but to keep that question alive—framing sequential art as an open-ended space of experimentation, interpretation, and redefinition.

Keywords:

Comics, Sequential Art, Conceptual Art

Contents

1	Introduction	4
1.1	Background and Motivation	4
1.1.1	Why Comics	5
1.1.2	Closing in on “Sequential Art”	6
1.1.3	Exploring Conceptual Art	6
1.2	Objective	7
1.3	Theoretical Context	7
1.4	Methodology and Artistic Process	8
2	Theory	9
2.1	On Comics	9
2.2	On Conceptual Art	11
3	Methodology	14
4	Exploring the comics	15
4.1	If comics are sequential art, then what can comics be?	15
4.2	If comics tell stories, then what are stories?	16
4.3	Idea and Art	17
4.3.1	Killing and idea and executing its funeral	17
4.4	The Comics	18
4.4.1	Work 1	18
4.4.2	Work 2	19
4.4.3	Work 3	21
4.4.4	Work 4	21
4.4.5	Work 5	22
4.4.6	Work 6	23
5	Discussion	25
5.1	Further exploration: Conceptualism and comics, Conceptual Comics as a Theoretical Framework	25
6	Conclusions	27
7	References	28

1 Introduction

For this thesis I use my own artistic work — specifically, abstract comics — as a tool to question and reflect on what comics can be. My goal isn't just to make comics, but to explore the conceptual limits of the medium. To do that, I place my work in conversation with theoretical ideas, especially those of Will Eisner “Sequential Art” and conceptual art principles. In this work comics are a method of thinking. I am not illustrating ideas — the comics are the ideas.

My work is driven by a mix of intuitive choices and theoretical interests. The thesis becomes a space to reflect on how those two things meet. While Eisner’s definition of comics supports experimentation in artistic expression within the medium, conceptual art provides a lens that values ideas over formal technique. I am not using Eisner or conceptual art principles to necessarily explain my work, but to enter conversation with it. The theoretical context helps me ask better questions and situate my practice contextually. The process aims to explore the soft boundaries between categories: comics / image series, storytelling / abstraction, visual form / conceptual intent.

The writing in this thesis reflects on my process, on the works I have made, and on the ideas they explore. The analysis doesn’t aim to interpret the works in a final way, but to think through them.

1.1 Background and Motivation

In this chapter, I outline the personal and conceptual journey that led me to choose comics—and, more specifically, abstract comics—as the focus of this thesis. I trace how the idea of “sequential art,” as proposed by Will Eisner, first opened up the possibility for me to explore comics beyond traditional narratives and genres. I also reflect on how the principles of conceptual art have informed my thinking about comics, shaping my interest in their potential as idea-based, process-driven works. These reflections provide the foundation for

understanding why this project exists and how I have approached it: as a space for experimentation, questioning, and reimagining what comics can be.

1.1.1 Why Comics

I have never had a special relationship with comics. I remember loving the WITCH animated series and the comics and getting introduced to art form thanks to it. I'd stay at a local bookstore for hours reading the story of 5 teenage girls with superpowers, saving money till the day I could buy another issue of said story.

Years later, maybe around 2019, somehow, I got it in my head that I wanted to make comics. I had no clear vision or idea, nor did I maintain any substantial friendship with the art form. Why I decided to make comics is a mystery, the evidence of which exists in unfinished sketches and books on “making in in the comics industry”. Come to think of it, “making it” was always at the front of any of my beginnings, genuine interests forced to take a backseat further and further away from the driver to the point where not only ignored in the process of taking a direction but eventually residing in meek silence.

The decision to make comics the central theme of my thesis has two parts in it. First, I needed to pick something for the topic. Dragging burnout and the weight of numerous mental health conditions, some of which remain unnamed, I had to make a commitment for the sake of it and go with it once and for all. I wanted to graduate. It's time. At the same time, I have talked about my plans and aspirations to make comics - without any practical efforts to actually make them mind you - for so long that ironically comics became a part of my image. People would tell me that they can see me thriving in the comics industry telling stories, making art for it without ever seeing one single comic strip made by me. I even hosted a comic making workshop a few months back. People started putting me into the comics box, dismissing my interest in other art forms such as painting, sculpture, photography and performance. And it was my own doing. So, it was time to figure out if comics is my format after all. If writing a thesis on the topic will not kill my interest in comics, maybe there is something in it to me after all.

1.1.2 Closing in on “Sequential Art”

As I mentioned earlier, I was booked for a comic making workshop without the prior experience in making comics. I was mortified beyond reproach, yet as by that point I have also been overworked in the past couple of months, the newfound philosophy of trying to make my life easier has become my trusted companion. They say laziness is a cousin of creativity, and close one at that. They are right. I put the two together, they started plotting. I needed to find a way to make comics - “a medium more demanding of diverse skills and intellect than [...] fully appreciated” (Eisner, 1985, p. 6) - a more approachable subject to my participants but still make it interesting and challenging in a rather intellectual than technical manner. And the cousins have delivered. That is how I discovered Eisner’s intriguing definition of comics put elegantly as “Sequential Art”.

My curiosity with The Sequential Art as a definition for comics as a medium came to be out of my attempts to creatively wiggle my way out of a technical limitation. And what a sleek definition it is, easy on the qualification standards and full of permissive promise that yes, even you can make comics too. And so I said to my participants that apparently comics are but a sequential art. No need to create characters and follow a plot structure just now, make sequences that follow one another, make it abstract, strip the word comics layer by layer until only bare bones are left and then look at the skeleton in front of you and tell me what you think. This is a yassified version of what happened. Most participants wanted to make stickers.

Since the decided theme for my thesis was comics anyway and I already got blissfully drunk on the possibility of Eisner’s cheat code, I had myself a full cup of impulsively brewed audacity and decided that I will in fact make the kind of abstract comics I’ve been preaching to my workshop participants and I will certainly write my thesis about them.

1.1.3 Exploring Conceptual Art

My comics were to be abstract, minimal and with a pretentious claim to be thought provoking. My comics were not to communicate or express an idea, they were to be the idea. I felt as though a piece was missing, that to express this intention I needed another anchor. Having been in the beginning of my art history studies I pulled out my notes, my books, my phone. I started searching for an explanation, a backbone to rest my comic experimentations upon. What I

intuitively searched for and found was Conceptual Art and its principles that helped me shape the framework for reflecting on my comic pieces.

Like with most art movements there are many layers to Conceptual Art. It is questioning the process of art making, it is questioning what is the meaning of art, it is questioning what art is supposed to be like, to look like. It is questioning, questioning, questioning. Questioning is good, it fuels creativity, it makes one's brain tingle, and at the very least it makes for an amusing conversation. Another thing I admire conceptual art for is it is art of ideas, of meanings. And meanings are what I'm here for, why you're here for. Including conceptual art as theoretical support for my work felt organic to my process.

1.2 Objective

The aim of this thesis is to explore the conceptual boundaries of comics through the lens of Will Eisner's definition of the medium as "sequential art" in combination with conceptual art principles such as its emphasis on ideas over the form by utilizing my own artistic experimentation in the form of hand drawn abstract comics that results and is supported by the preceding theoretical findings. The intention with the artistic experimentation is to deconstruct the medium to its essential components and explore the expressive and conceptual potential that remains.

The objective of this work is, then, to position my artistic experiments within a broader theoretical context, drawing from the writings of Will Eisner and the discourse around conceptual art, in order to better understand the intersections between form, idea, and medium.

1.3 Theoretical Context

This thesis grows from the overlapping edges of two artistic definitions: comics and conceptual art. In exploring what comics can be when approached through conceptual art principles, I've chosen to look at definitions not as fixed truths but as starting points, as invitations.

The central definition explored in my work comes from Will Eisner, who proposed that comics are "sequential art." It's a definition that opens a space rather than closing it off.

Conceptual art, especially in the form it took from the 1960s onward, was never just about the final object—it was about the idea, the process, the system, and often the questioning of art’s definition itself. Key principles of conceptual art have helped me direct my comics experimentations providing the theoretical backbone for this work.

1.4 Methodology and Artistic Process

This thesis is developed through an artistic research approach, grounded in practice and reflection. The primary method has been the creation of abstract, minimal comics — pages that explore the boundaries of what can be considered sequential art.

Alongside the production of these works, I engage in written reflection, not necessarily to analyze the pieces in the traditional sense, but to articulate the intentions behind visual choices. My methodology is both experimental and analytical, moving between making and thinking.

2 Theory

2.1 On Comics

In the realm of visual storytelling, Will Eisner stands as a seminal figure who redefined the boundaries of comics. His term "sequential art" encapsulates the essence of comics as a unique medium that combines images and words to convey narratives. Eisner's exploration of this concept is thoroughly examined in his book *Comics and Sequential Art*, where he articulates the theoretical underpinnings and practical applications of this art form.

Eisner posits that comics are not merely a juxtaposition of text and imagery but a cohesive language that communicates through the sequence of images. As he puts it:

As I began to dismantle the complex components, addressed the elements hitherto regarded as 'instinctive' and tried to examine the parameters of this art form, I found that I was involved with an 'art of communication' more than simply an application of art. (Eisner, 1985, p. 6)

He emphasizes that the arrangement of these images in a deliberate order is what imparts meaning, stating that "this work is intended to consider and examine the unique aesthetics of Sequential Art as a means of creative expression, a distinct discipline, an art and literary form that deals with the arrangement of pictures or images and words to narrate a story or dramatize an idea" (Eisner, 1985, p. 5).

The power of sequential art lies in its ability to evoke emotions and convey complex ideas through visual cues and narrative flow:

The format of the comic book presents a montage of both word and image, and the reader is thus required to exercise both visual and verbal interpretive skills. The regimens of art (eg. perspective, symmetry, brush stroke) and the regimens of literature (eg. grammar, plot, syntax) become superimposed upon each other. The reading of the comic book is an act of both aesthetic perception and intellectual pursuit. (Eisner, 1985, p. 8)

Eisner underscores the importance of the reader's engagement, noting that comprehension of an image necessitates a shared experience between the artist and the audience. This interaction

is pivotal, as the artist evokes images stored in the minds of both parties, creating a resonance that transcends the page.

Moreover, Eisner draws parallels between the evolution of written language and visual storytelling. He observes that letters are symbols derived from images, which over time have become abstracted. This abstraction is mirrored in comics, where the artist's style and the application of line and form contribute to the narrative's emotional depth and rhythm.

In *Comics and Sequential Art*, Eisner also explores the potential of imagery to stand alone in storytelling. He presents examples where narratives are conveyed entirely through images without the aid of words, demonstrating the medium's capacity for expression and the reader's role in interpreting the visual language.

Eisner's insights into sequential art have profoundly influenced the perception of comics, elevating them to a legitimate form of artistic and literary expression. His work serves as a foundational text for understanding the mechanics and aesthetics of comics, providing invaluable guidance for creators and scholars alike.

When thinking about what comics are — about where they begin and where they could end — I keep returning to Will Eisner's way of naming them. He called comics "sequential art," a term that immediately pulls away from rigid definitions and invites a much wider field of possibilities. It suggests not a narrow form or a strict set of rules, but a kind of movement. A way of arranging images, maybe words, maybe something else entirely, into a sequence that carries meaning forward. A dance between frames, a rhythm of perception.

Eisner's understanding of comics, as he describes it in *Comics and Sequential Art*, feels less like a formula and more like an open space — a foundation that holds room for transformation. He doesn't reduce comics to "comic strips" or "graphic novels" or even "illustrated stories." Instead, he describes them by what they *do*: they communicate through a sequence of visual moments, creating a language built from time, motion, and interaction between reader and page:

The phenomenon of duration and its experience — commonly referred to as 'time' — is a dimension integral to sequential art. In the universe of human consciousness time combines with space and sound in a setting of interdependence wherein conceptions, actions, motions and movement have a meaning and are measured by our perception of their relationship to each other. (Eisner, 1985, p. 25)

Choosing Eisner's definition means choosing openness. It means that what I am making, or trying to make, doesn't have to follow a strict path. It could be broken, abstract, spare, or dense.

It could shift between image and text or abandon one entirely. It could move slowly, almost still, or rush forward so fast the frames blur into one another. Eisner's words remind me that comics are not only a product, but a method. A thinking-through of how visuals can speak, how sequence can build meaning:

In its most economical state, comics employ a series of repetitive images and recognizable symbols. When these are used again and again to convey similar ideas, they become a language — a literary form, if you will. And it is this disciplined application that creates the 'grammar' of Sequential Art. (Eisner, 1985, p. 8)

For me, this is crucial. If comics were only a fixed genre, a certain kind of paneling, a recognizable style, I'm not sure I would find myself at home in them. But Eisner's "sequential art" is different. It makes room for experimentation. It tells me that even in simplicity, that even in just two images placed next to each other, there is already storytelling happening. Already an invisible thread pulling the viewer forward, asking them to participate, to imagine, to fill in the blanks.

When I think about my own work, what it might look like or feel like, it's Eisner's wide, generous view of comics that lights the way. Not only as a guide, but as an invitation: to play, to test the edges, to see what happens when words and images, or even images alone, are allowed to move in sequence, to breathe, to carry meaning without apology.

2.2 On Conceptual Art

As described in *Contemporary Art Issue*, "Conceptual Art is a (historical) art movement from the 1960s and 1970s in which the idea functions as the artwork itself, shifting the value and quality of the artwork from the physical object to the immaterial concept" ("Conceptual Art," 2023). This shift away from materiality is not just stylistic, it's philosophical. It's a response. It's an insistence that art is not what is seen, but what is understood or not understood.

Conceptual art begins where the object ends. Or at least, where its importance fades into the background. It asks us to shift our attention not to what something looks like, or how it's made, but to why it exists in the first place, and what it means that it does. The materiality of the artwork is still there, but it no longer takes center stage. The idea becomes the work; the physical form is an afterthought. According to Sol LeWit:

The idea becomes a machine that makes the art. This kind of art is not theoretical or illustrative of theories; it is intuitive, it is involved with all types of mental processes and it is purposeless. It is usually free from the dependence on the skill of the artist as a craftsman. It is the objective of the artist who is concerned with conceptual art to make his work mentally interesting to the spectator, and therefore usually he would want it to become emotionally dry. (LeWitt, 1967, pp. 79-84)

It is a reversal of expectations, a kind of turning inside out.

Conceptual art isn't necessarily cold. It can be deeply personal, even if it resists expression in the traditional sense. It doesn't trade in sentiment, but that doesn't mean it's devoid of feeling:

Conceptual art is not necessarily logical. The logic of a piece or series of pieces is a device that is used at times only to be ruined. Logic may be used to camouflage the real intent of the artist, to lull the viewer into the belief that he understands the work, or to infer a paradoxical situation. (LeWitt, 1967, pp. 79-84)

It instead operates through paradox and distance between the idea and the object, between what is seen and the thought. "In conceptual art the idea of concept is the most important aspect of the work." (LeWitt, 1967, pp. 79-84). It's not about making something, but about questioning the making itself.

The core characteristics of conceptual art are often described as "dematerialization," "installation," "language," and "institutional critique."

The artwork is the idea, not the execution of the idea. However, the execution of the idea – thus the art object – is a vehicular medium to communicate the idea visually. As the emphasis is on the concept of the artwork, the material presence is often reduced to a minimum – influenced by Minimal Art – resulting in a dematerialization of art. ("Conceptual Art", 2023)

The art might not even exist in physical form; it might live as an instruction, a plan, a record of an idea. As the article explains, "Conceptual Art is also the form of art in which the artwork is dematerialized. Most works of Conceptual Art exist solely as texts or instructions and have a strong connection with performance, installation and language art" (Contemporary Art Issue, 2023).

Conceptual art is both generous and elusive. It doesn't give itself away. It's not immediate. It requires time. And it assumes that the viewer is not just a passive receiver, but a co-creator—someone willing to meet the work halfway, to fill in the gaps, to think alongside it.

Conceptual art teaches you how to look differently—how to attend to small gestures, to silence, to space. It slows you down. It interrupts the spectacle. It resists consumption. It is, in some ways, an art of resistance—quiet but firm. And even though it's sometimes accused of being overly intellectual or inaccessible, at its heart it is often a question, an offering, a thought that is often left open.

Conceptual art doesn't tell a viewer what to think. It doesn't give answers. It poses questions, then sometimes walks away before one could even realize it was there to begin with. And maybe that's what makes it feel so alive.

3 Methodology

In this work, I approach the subject of comics not just as an art form to be analyzed, but as a living practice — something that can be stretched, questioned, broken apart possibly reimaged. My methodology is built around two intertwined movements: first, a gathering of theoretical background, second, a personal and experimental engagement with the form of comics itself.

The first part of this work lays the groundwork. I explore different ideas about what comics are — not to find a single, fixed definition, but to open up the field of possibilities. Writers like Will Eisner, who described comics as "sequential art," are especially important here, because their way of thinking gives permission to move beyond traditional formats and expected structures. Rather than being bound by conventions, I am more interested in the potential of sequence, image, and narrative to create meaning in unexpected ways. I also look at the influence of conceptual art and conceptualism, especially their emphasis on the idea behind the artwork being as important as — or even more important than — the final form.

From this theoretical base, I move into the second part of my methodology: the making and thinking through of my own experimental comics. Here, I treat comics not as a fixed medium but as an open question. I create works that play with the boundaries of what can still be called "comics": works that may stretch sequence, compress narrative, blur the line between image and text, or even leave out one or the other. I pay attention not only to the final pieces but to the thought processes that led me there — the questions, doubts, accidents, and intuitions that shaped each experiment.

Throughout this process, writing becomes a tool for reflection rather than just explanation. I use it to map the terrain of my own making, to catch the fleeting thoughts and contradictions that arise when trying to push a form beyond its familiar edges. Rather than presenting a clear-cut answer to what comics are or should be, my aim is to stay inside the space of experimentation itself — to show how theoretical ideas can live inside artistic practice, and how practice can feed back into theory.

This thesis, then, is both a document and a process: a tracing of thoughts, influences, and experiments that together explore the potential of comics as sequential art, as conceptual exploration, and as a personal language still in the making.

4 Exploring the comics

In this chapter I will present the work that stems from the theoretical exploration of separate concepts such as Comics and Conceptual Art and that is positioned in the broader sense of the theoretical context of said concepts.

4.1 If comics are sequential art, then what can comics be?

When I think about comics as sequential art, I find myself circling around a set of questions that don't seem to have clear or final answers — and maybe that's the point. If comics are defined by the idea of sequence — by the movement from one image to the next, by the construction of meaning across frames — then it opens a door to rethink what comics can be, and how far the form can be stretched before it becomes something else.

I notice, almost instinctively, that a photo collage doesn't feel like a comic to me. Even though a collage brings multiple images together on a single surface, it doesn't usually carry the feeling of time moving forward, or a story unfolding. The images coexist more than they interact. On the other hand, if I imagine a series of very simple images — a dot bouncing, interacting with a line, maybe changing shape or position over a few panels — it does feel like a comic. Even if the "story" is abstract, even if there are no characters in a traditional sense, there's a sense of progression, a cause and effect, a rhythm that feels narrative.

This raises a bigger question for me: if comics are about sequence, then how minimal can that sequence be? How abstract can the content become while still holding onto the feeling of comics? Can a comic be made of nothing but shifting shapes, movements, rhythms of visual beats? And where is the threshold, the invisible line where a series of images stops being a comic and becomes something else — a pattern, a design, a random arrangement?

I realize that part of the answer comes from the reader's perception. Sequence is not just something that is objectively built into the images themselves — it's something we, as viewers, are trained to create. We see two related images and our minds start weaving a story between them, even if none is clearly spelled out. Comics, in this sense, are an agreement between the artist and the reader: a shared habit of seeing.

By treating comics as sequential art, I am less interested in fitting my work into the traditional expectations of the medium, and more interested in exploring these grey zones, these unstable areas where meaning might emerge or fall apart. My experiments ask whether sequence alone

is enough — whether a simple visual rhythm can generate the emotional or narrative weight we usually expect from comics. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't — but it's in this space of trying, testing, and failing that new forms begin to appear.

Maybe the real power of thinking about comics in this way is that it keeps the form alive. It resists easy definitions. It keeps inviting me to ask not just "what are comics?" but "what else could comics become?"

4.2 If comics tell stories, then what are stories?

At first glance, a story feels like something big: characters, events, a beginning, a middle, an end. But when I really start to pull it apart, it seems that a story doesn't have to be any of those things. After stripping away all the traditional structures, what's left is something much simpler. A movement. A change. A suggestion of time passing, something shifting from one state to another.

I believe a story can be almost anything. It doesn't have to have words. It doesn't have to have characters. It doesn't even have to make sense in the usual way. A black shape that gradually grows and then recedes across a series of comic strip boxes — that is a story. A series of three images, each showing the same circle in slightly different ways — that, too, can carry the weight of a whole narrative. Not because it explains itself, but because it invites the mind to enter it, to move through it, to connect the dots.

A story might not even be about events anymore. It might be about sensation. About presence. About the way something feels when it appears, changes, and disappears.

When I think about it like this, it becomes clear that a story doesn't have to be loud or complicated. It doesn't have to explain itself. A story can be a whisper. A hint. A single moment stretched across time.

In the context of comics, this opens up so many possibilities. If comics are sequential art, and if a story can be as minimal as a shifting black dot or a trembling circle, then the language of comics can be as simple or as experimental as I want it to be. The story isn't confined to what's "happening" in the traditional sense — it's happening in the movement between images, in the mind's willingness to follow, to imagine, to fill the space.

In this way, the comics I create don't have to follow the old rules. They can be made of silence, of tiny changes, of abstract gestures that still somehow move. They can trust the reader to find the story not on the surface, but in the act of looking.

4.3 Idea and Art

Most of the artwork presented in this paper has been created without a clear idea preceding it. As per one of the principles of Conceptual art, “The artwork is the *idea*, not the execution of the *idea*.” (“Conceptual Art”, 2023). In other words, there was no conscious effort to convey a specific message as well as no preparation and research, no brainstorming and drafting associated with creating said artworks.

Without knowing the discourse around the question of whether art without a clear, digestible and effective message is considered real art in any degree of substantial depth, as an artist I know the anxiety of feeling the need to defend the legitimacy of three dark circles drawn on a piece of recycled paper as an art piece.

Can an art piece, an art project claim legitimacy when the traceable chain reaction from a thought to an art piece does not show up as a witness to the creative process? Can an art piece without a message be a message on its own? And if so, what message is that?

4.3.1 Killing an idea and executing its funeral

The moment an idea visits my mind, they are a guest in it, and to be treated accordingly. Oftentimes in the creative industry artists are expected to take this guest and mummify it, preserve it, conserve it, making it no longer alive and evolving, moving and changing. In other words, artists are to kill their ideas, fit it in a digestible coffin and the process of materializing the idea becomes an act of planning and executing the funeral for said idea, for said guest.

Ideas are to stay alive, to interact with its hosts and to have the room to spread themselves wide and to leave transformed with a promise of coming back. And creative industries as well as schools training next generations of creative workers such as Arcada would greatly benefit from more open ended projects that are not suffocated by the claws of results and practicality.

4.4 The Comics

4.4.1 Work 1

Drawing the sequence of rising and subsiding blackness in the comic strip boxes I was in a near meditative state of scribbling each black line next to the other. Like with some of my artworks I did not know where I was going only that I needed to go. And despite LeWitt's sentiment about an idea for conceptual piece of artwork needing to be planned in advance (that he later corrected noting that the ideas may change throughout the process) I believe this process to be a valid conceptual art creation. 6 frames into the work I realized what I was doing. I was creating a loop of rising and subsiding, and eternal cycle of life.

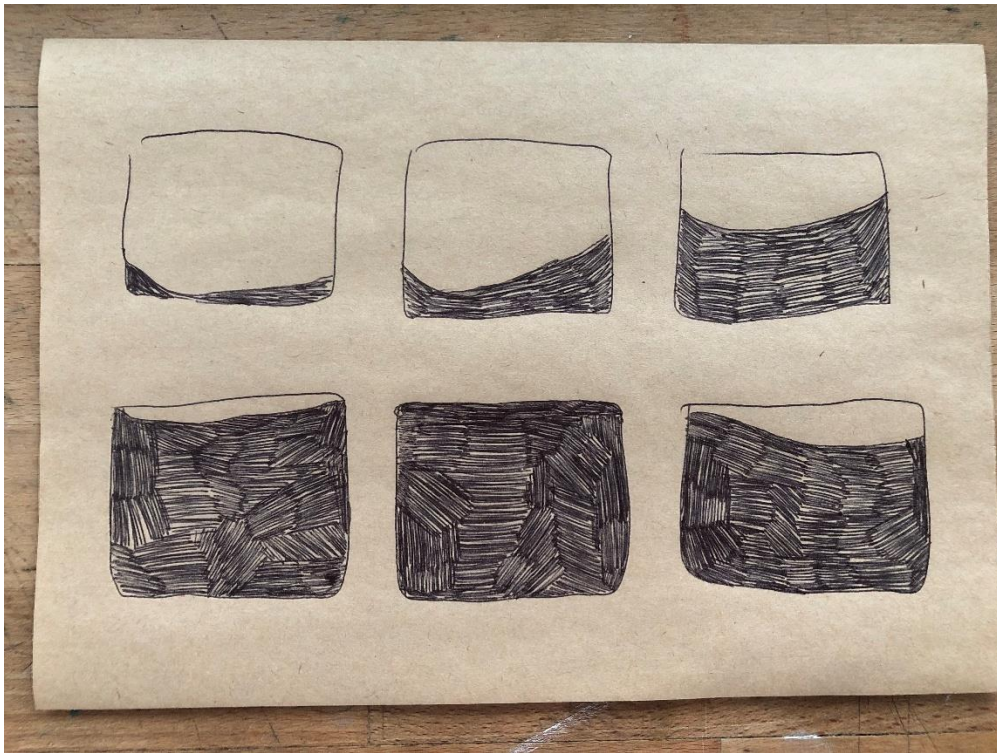


Figure 1. Work 1, part 1.

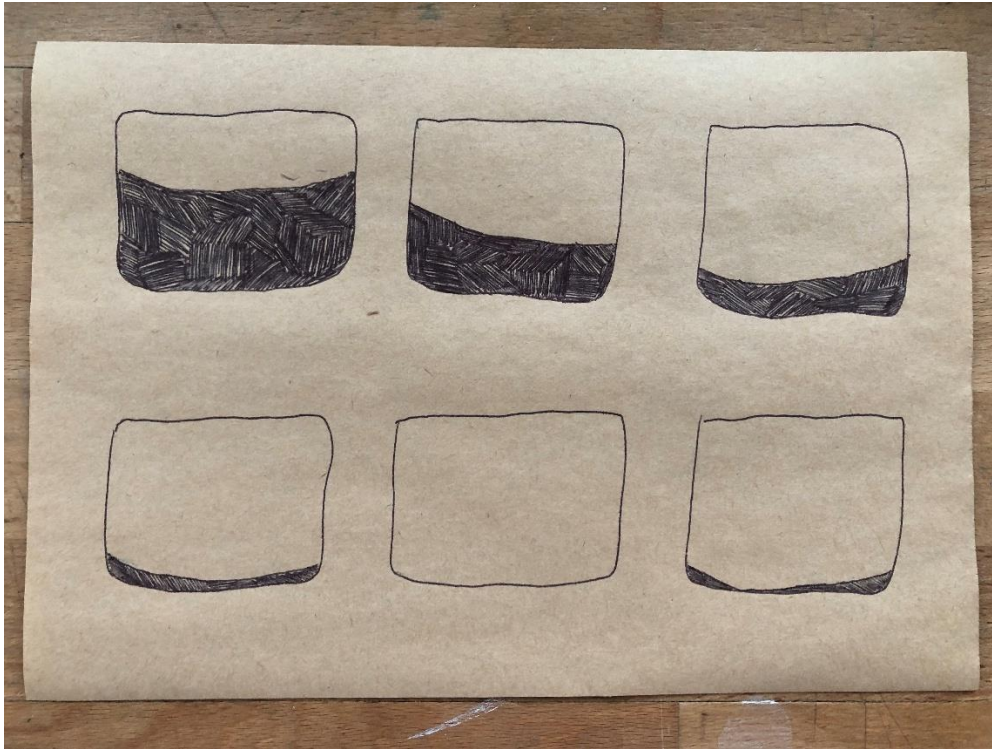


Figure 2. Work 1, part 2.

4.4.2 Work 2

This piece is similar to the first one in its cyclical nature. Only this time instead of rising and subsiding the blackness fills the space before retreating back into the edges. This technically may seem like the same process as rising and subsiding as both essentially fill in the space. But visualize something rising within you and falling back down versus that something veiling your very being from every direction and holding you in the darkness until finally letting go creating more space to breathe — and you will feel the difference between the two pieces.

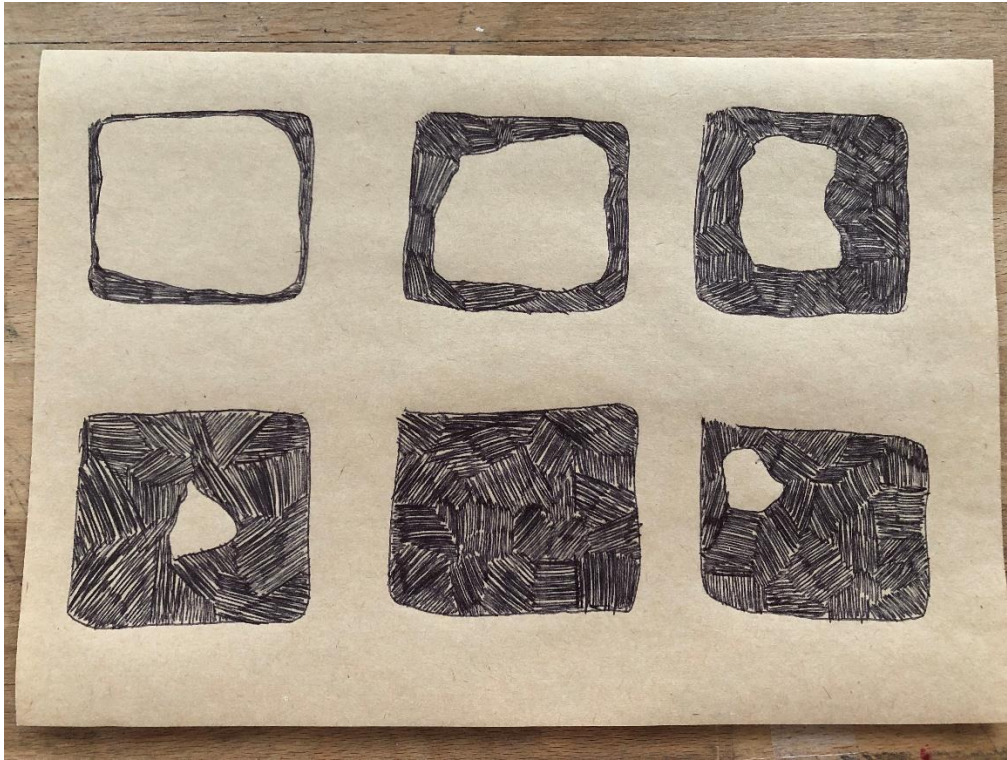


Figure 3. Work 2, part 1.

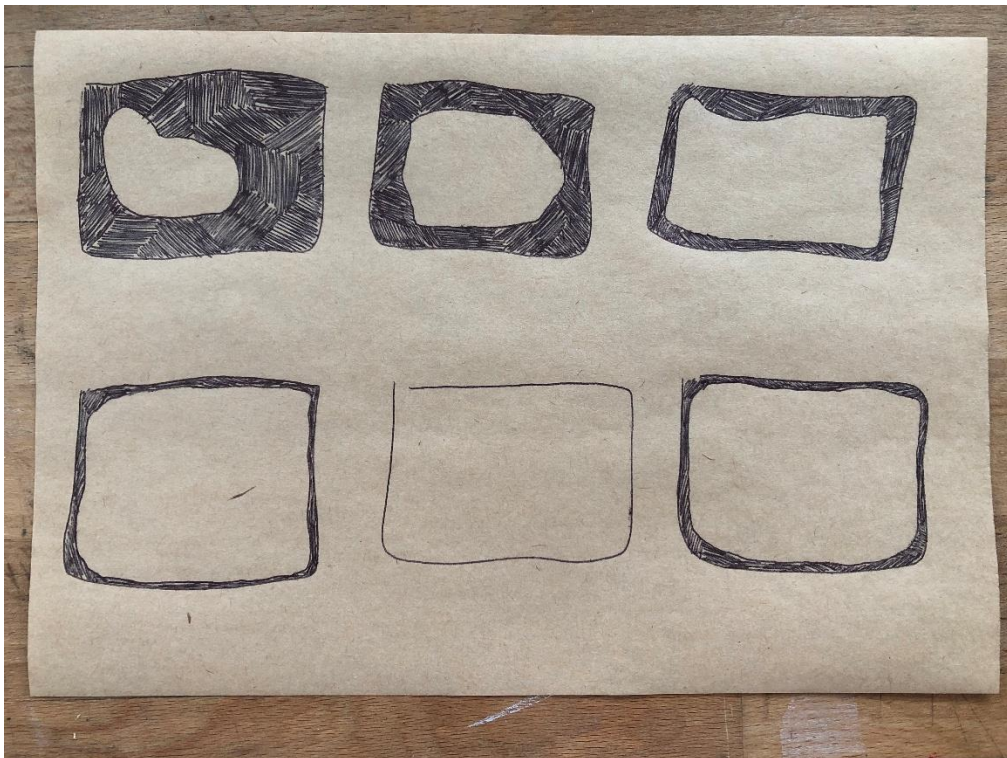


Figure 4. Work 2, part 2.

4.4.3 Work 3

This 3 frame comic strip is the feeling of the dread of blackness invading the space with a temporary pause or slowing down the time that allows the recognition of what's to come followed by complete blackness.

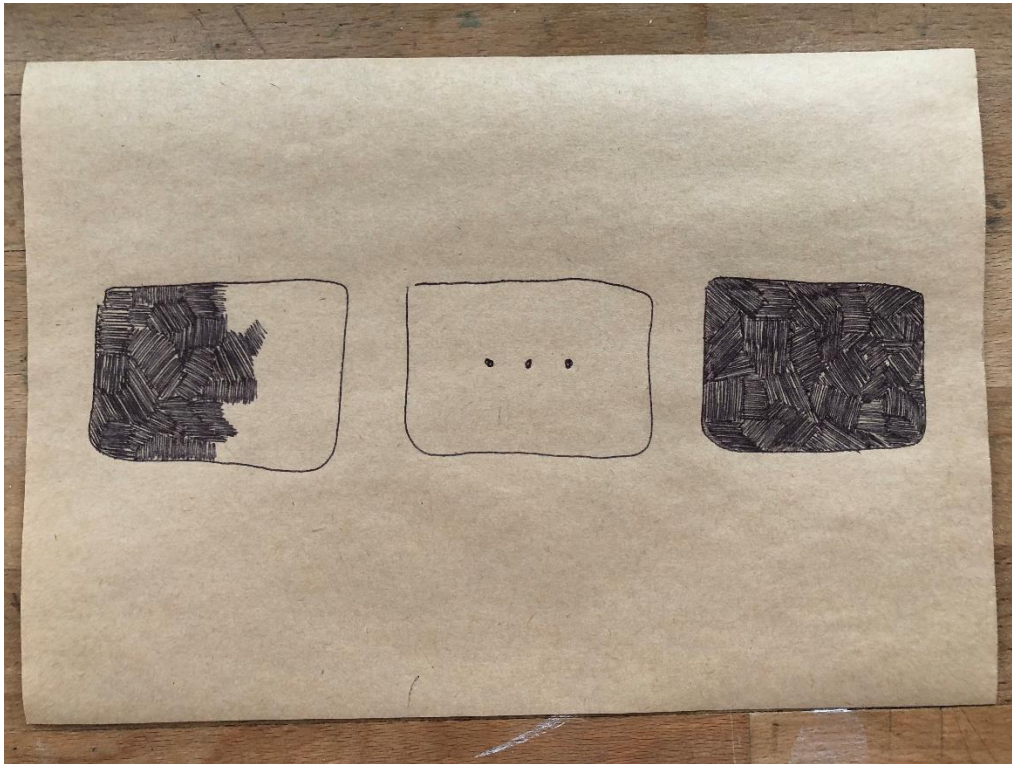


Figure 5. Work 3.

4.4.4 Work 4

This small comic strip is the most fascinating story happening on earth. Don't you see it? Look closer, whatever you imagine — it's there.



Figure 6. Work 4.

4.4.5 Work 5

This comic is an object in the background, taking considerable space. Followed by a turbulent intervention. Followed by freed space in previously occupied background.

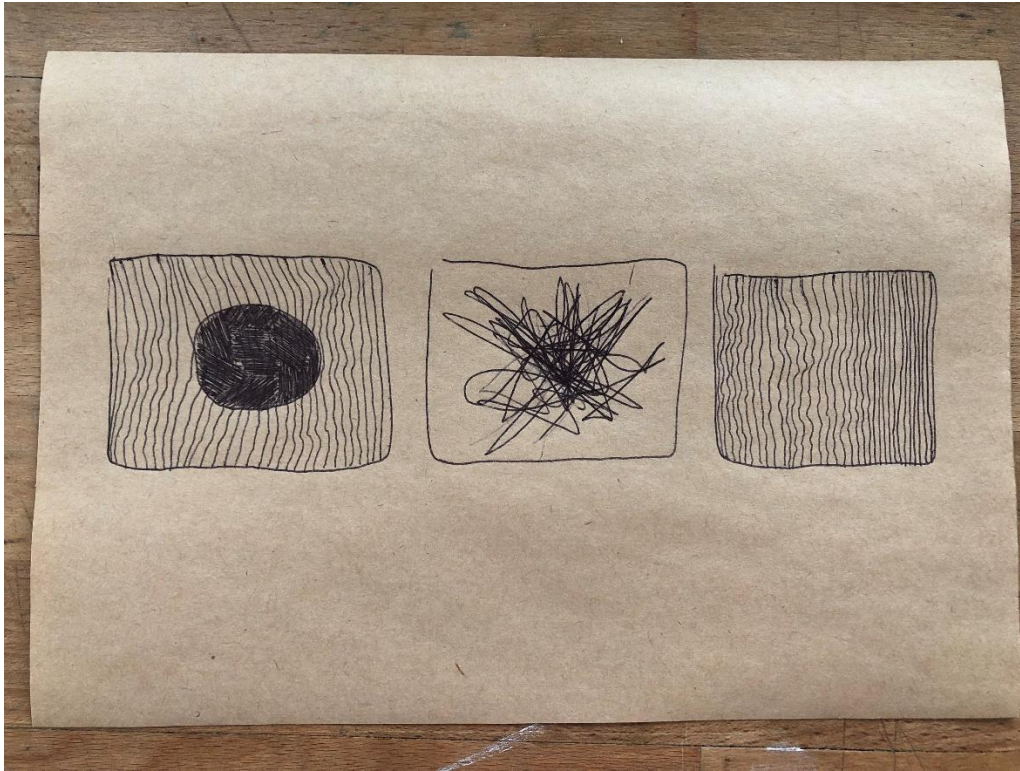


Figure 7. Work 5.

4.4.6 Work 6

This 3 frame comic is a black dot in the whirls of lines. Floating from one end of a frame to another. Never fully grounded in one spot but held nonetheless.

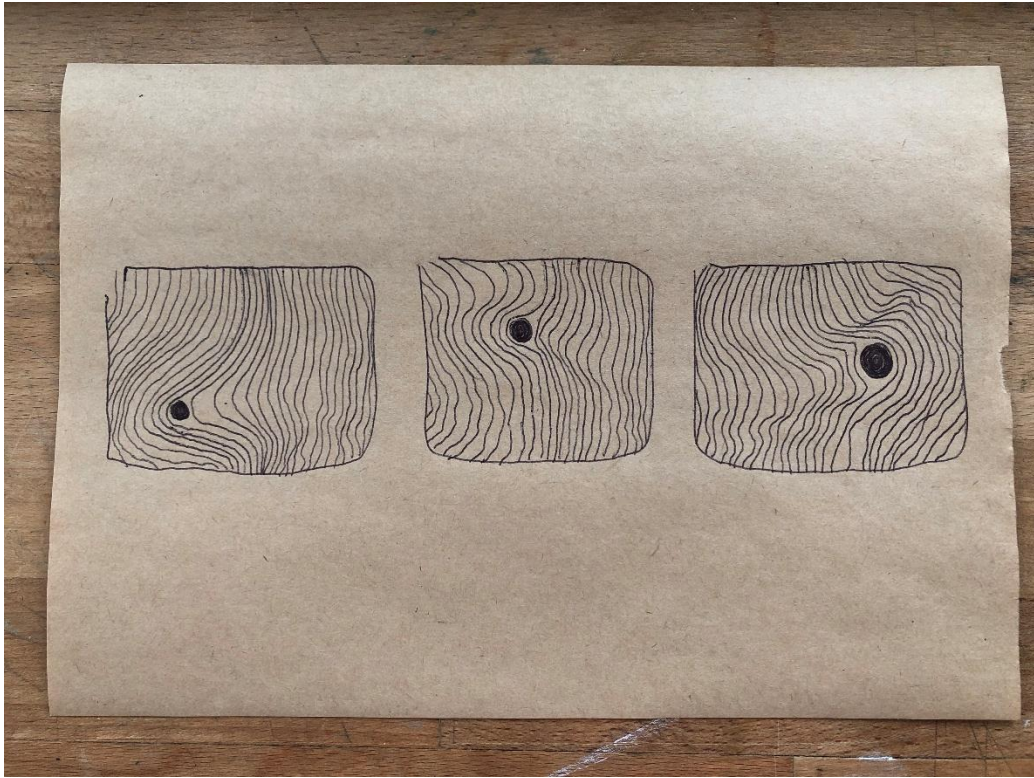


Figure 8. Work 6.

5 Discussion

This thesis set out with the objective of exploring the conceptual boundaries of comics by working within Will Eisner's idea of sequential art, while also drawing on principles of conceptual art. The aim was to question what can be considered a comic when narrative, representation, and language are stripped away, leaving only the essential gesture of sequence. Through creating and reflecting on a series of abstract, minimal comics, this objective has been approached not as a fixed destination, but as an open-ended inquiry—a process of testing, adjusting, and thinking through the possibilities of the form.

In making these abstract, minimal comics, I have found myself less interested in telling stories and more interested in discovering what remains when storytelling itself is stripped back to its most basic form. Working with the idea of sequential art as Eisner defined it, I have explored how sequence alone can create meaning—how even a line, a dot, or a shifting blackness can suggest a movement, a rhythm, and perhaps a story.

These comics are not driven by narrative in the conventional sense. Instead, they explore the gaps and the pauses, the small transitions that might otherwise be overlooked. They ask whether a sequence of images—no matter how abstract—can still be read as comics, or whether at some point they become something else: a poem, a gesture, a set of questions that never quite settles.

This work has also been shaped by the influence of conceptual art, with its emphasis on idea over form. In my pieces, the idea is not merely the starting point—it is the work itself. The marks on the page are traces of a process that resists easy categorization. Some of them feel almost unfinished, or intentionally hesitant, as though they are inviting the viewer to fill in the missing pieces.

What emerges from this process is a sense of openness. There is no single interpretation of these pieces. They are not about communicating a specific message, but about holding space for thought. In this way, they continue to move and shift, both for me as their maker and for anyone who looks at them.

5.1 Further exploration: Conceptualism and comics, Conceptual Comics as a Theoretical Framework

If comics have always been caught between the shelves of children's entertainment and literary respectability, then conceptual comics fall off the shelf entirely. They are not so much about telling stories as they are about questioning the very shape of storytelling. Or questioning whether something needs to be told at all.

Conceptual comics borrow their backbone from conceptual art, where the idea is not just a starting point—it is the artwork itself. I'm tempted to believe that, in this sense, a conceptual comic doesn't need panels, characters, or even images to be real. It only needs a system, a structure, or sometimes simply an intention. A comic that happens in the mind. A comic you can't see but can somehow still read.

There is an unease in this kind of making. Because it doesn't quite feel like making. It feels like proposing, or invoking. Some of the pieces in this thesis don't begin with messages. There is no grand insight hiding behind the brushstrokes, no precise origin I can trace from thought to finished page. The work exists in that liminal space where an idea is half-thought, half-felt. In the world of conceptual comics, this isn't a failure of discipline, but part of the method. The act of drawing becomes a trace, a remnant of a larger, intangible conversation.

There is something comforting in this open-endedness. In this refusal to resolve or entertain. Conceptual comics let the reader participate in the work. Sometimes as a co-author, sometimes as a witness to something that refuses to take a final shape. And maybe that's the point: to allow ideas to stay alive, to move and shift, to resist being embalmed into tidy conclusions.

If comics are usually about clarity, clarity of action, of time, of emotion, then conceptual comics invite something messier. Something slower. Something that stays unresolved, maybe even unreadable. They are comics not despite the lack of punchlines and protagonists, but because they still operate within a frame that suggests sequence, rhythm, and meaning. Even if that meaning is delayed, fragmented, or entirely personal.

So what happens when we loosen our grip on the definition of comics? What happens when we stop asking them to entertain or explain themselves? What happens when a comic is just a thought you forgot to write down? Maybe it still counts. Maybe it's still breathing.

6 Conclusions

Through this thesis, I have used my own artistic practice as a site for questioning and reflection. Working within the framework of sequential art as defined by Will Eisner and informed by conceptual art, I have explored the possibilities of abstract, minimal comics. My aim was not to define what comics are or to offer a new set of rules, but to test the edges of the form—to see how far it can be stretched, and what might emerge when it is stripped down to its most essential elements.

These comics are small gestures, small experiments, but they carry within them the seeds of larger questions: about what it means to make art, about how we read images, about the spaces between what we see and what we imagine. They suggest that meaning is not always fixed, but something that flickers and shifts in the act of perception.

By approaching comics through the lens of conceptual art, I have found a way to work that values process over product, intuition over certainty. It is a way of working that feels alive and open-ended—a space of possibility rather than resolution. And perhaps that is the most honest answer I can give to the questions this thesis set out to explore.

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Lärdomsprov

Rufina Kulbaeva

Att göra serier utan berättelser: ett konceptuellt angreppssätt på sekventiell konst
Yrkeshögskolan Arcada: Online Media, 2025.

Sammandrag:

Detta examensarbete är en undersökning av serier som konstform och som en plats för konceptuell utforskning. Med utgångspunkt i Will Eisners definition av serier som "sekventiell konst" försöker jag tänja på gränserna för vad serier kan vara och vad de kan bli. Genom att kombinera detta med principer från konceptkonsten – där idén och processen står i centrum snarare än det färdiga objektet – har jag använt mitt eget konstnärliga arbete som både metod och material för att ställa frågor om mediets möjligheter och begränsningar.

Projektet växte fram ur ett personligt och praktiskt sammanhang: ett oväntat uppdrag att hålla en workshop i serieteckning, trots att jag själv inte hade någon etablerad relation till mediet. Denna utgångspunkt, både utmanande och befriande, blev en katalysator för att utforska Eisners tankar om sekventiell konst. Hans definition av serier fungerade som en påminnelse om att serier kan vara långt mer än underhållning eller narrativ struktur. Denna insikt öppnade för en experimentell hållning där sekvensen i sig – inte berättelsen eller karaktärerna – blev utgångspunkten.

I detta arbete har jag valt att betrakta serier inte bara som berättande, utan som ett sätt att tänka. Genom att skapa abstrakta, minimalistiska serier har jag försökt förstå vad som händer när man skalar bort språket, representationen och de traditionella berättargreppen. Vad återstår när en serie inte längre vill berätta en historia, utan istället blir en följd av visuella gester? Jag har ställt frågor som: När upphör en serie att vara en serie? Hur kan man kommunicera utan ord, eller ens utan igenkännbara motiv? Dessa frågor blev ledstjärnor i arbetet och formade både processen och reflektionerna kring den.

Konceptkonsten har här varit en viktig teoretisk och konstnärlig ledsagare. Sedan 1960-talet har konceptkonstnärer betonat vikten av idén över den färdiga formen, och ofta ifrågasatt vad konst egentligen är och hur den uppstår. I mina abstrakta serier är idén inte något som ska förmedlas eller illustreras; den är själva verket. Processen, det intuitiva tecknandet och de små justeringarna av form och rytm är lika viktiga som den visuella slutprodukten.

Arbetet består därför inte bara av de abstrakta serierna i sig, utan också av de reflekterande texter som följer dem. Dessa texter fungerar inte som traditionell analys, utan snarare som en fortsättning av det konstnärliga arbetet i ord. Jag skriver för att förstå vad jag gör, för att följa

tankarna som dyker upp när jag ritar, och för att hålla frågorna levande. På så sätt blir skrivandet och tecknandet två sidor av samma process – en dialog mellan handling och eftertanke.

Syftet med detta examensarbete är inte att definiera vad serier är eller bör vara, utan att använda mitt eget konstnärliga arbete för att pröva och tänja på mediets gränser. Genom att arbeta med sekventiell konst som ett konceptuellt fält har jag velat öppna upp serierna för nya tolkningar och möjligheter. De abstrakta serier jag skapat är inte lösningar eller svar, utan snarare förslag och experiment: sätt att utforska och tänja på definitionerna, snarare än att fastställa dem.

Resultatet av detta arbete är ett utforskande som förblir öppet. De abstrakta serierna – de små rörelserna av prickar, linjer och ytor – bär på en potential att bli lästa som berättelser, men också som poesi, eller som något helt annat. De påminner om att sekvensen i sig kan vara nog för att väcka tankar och känslor. Genom att kombinera principerna från konceptkonsten med seriernas språk, har jag funnit en arbetsmetod som är både undersökande och accepterande: en som inte strävar efter perfektion, utan efter ett samtal med mediet självt.

Denna process, där jag växlat mellan att rita, skriva och tänka, har gett mig en fördjupad förståelse för serier som ett flexibelt och mångsidigt språk. Jag ser nu serier inte som ett fast medium, utan som ett fält av möjligheter – där sekventiell ordning, visuella val och läsarens blick tillsammans skapar något som ständigt förändras. Genom detta arbete har jag försökt visa att serier kan vara både enkla och komplexa, tydliga och tvetydiga, och framför allt: öppna för tolkning.

Sammanfattningsvis är detta examensarbete ett försök att förena det intuitiva och det teoretiska, det personliga och det konceptuella. Genom att låta mina abstrakta serier bli en plats för frågor snarare än svar, hoppas jag att detta arbete kan bidra till samtalet om vad serier är – och vad de kan bli – när vi vågar släppa taget om berättelsen och låta sekvensen tala för sig själv.

Nyckelord:

Serier, Sekventiell konst, Konceptkonst