

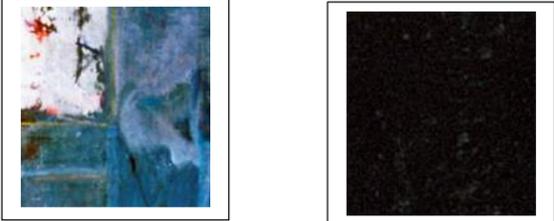
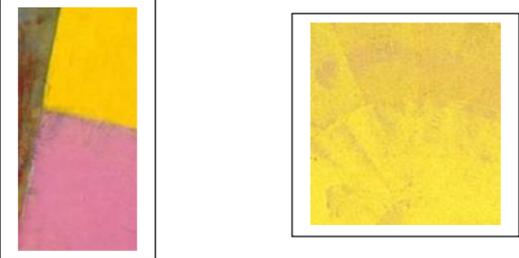
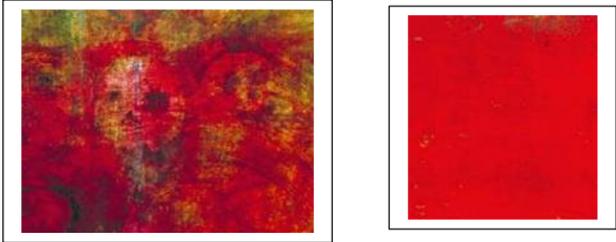
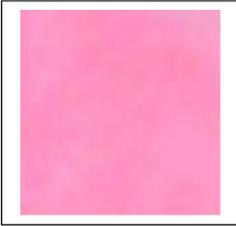
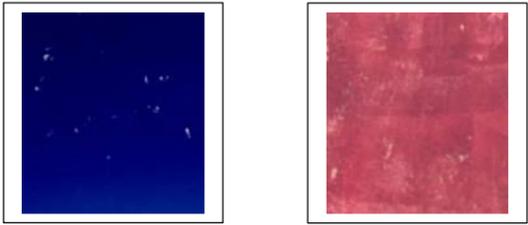
Symbols and Their Meanings In the Wall Paintings by Richard J. Olsen

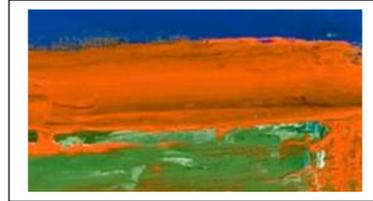
Assembled by Andrew Hayes

Paintings by Richard Olsen are composed of symbols that give the complete work an overall meaning that is more than the pictorial: the meaning is not what viewers see; but rather, the experiences that can be imagined *from the collection of symbols embedded in the image*. Symbols may have different meanings among paintings depending upon the context in which they are placed. Moreover, the meaning intended for each work is more than the simple sum of the parts: Olsen says that when interpreting symbols, “2+2 is not equal to 4”. The literal recognition of symbols is not the same as giving them meaning in a painting. Meaning comes to the viewer from the collection of symbols that trigger thinking.

The symbol system represented in Olsen’s works of art are complex and include both **colors** and **objects** (which he refers to as **Nouns**). Among the symbols common among his paintings, and some meanings they may have in particular paintings, depending upon the context, are ones described below:

<p style="text-align: center; color: red;">Examples cropped from paintings</p>	<p style="text-align: center; color: red;">Colors</p>	<p style="text-align: center; color: red;">Colors usually have meaning in combination with others, as in the examples of cropped images pictured.</p>
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;">   </div>	<p style="text-align: center;">Green</p>	<p>Rice paddy, jungle, playing field, life, growth, hope, and shades of green may represent the military</p>
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: center;">  </div>	<p style="text-align: center;">Blue</p>	<p>Sky (directly overhead, middle, horizon), water and river or water reflection, such as from the Perfume River, Mekong River, or South China Sea, Pathfinder landing light, distant Nui Ba Den Mountain, tape on paintings</p>

	<p>White</p>	<p>Death, sky, horizon, clouds, moon, Zink white refers to night, original studio wall color indicates journey of the work to make the painting</p>
	<p>Black</p>	<p>Mystery or the unknown, lurking danger, the night, holes, caves, tunnels, mourning, womb, Vietcong, black pajamas (worn by Vietcong soldiers)</p>
	<p>Yellow</p>	<p>Sun, sunrise, South Vietnamese flag, mud, stucco buildings, earth, tape, linen</p>
	<p>Red</p>	<p>Blood, sunrise, sunset, South Vietnamese flag, fire, references to art of Matisse (The Studio)</p>
	<p>Pink</p>	<p>Pale flesh, doom, dawn</p>
	<p>Violet/Mauve</p>	<p>Clay, death, clouds at sunset, dawn</p>

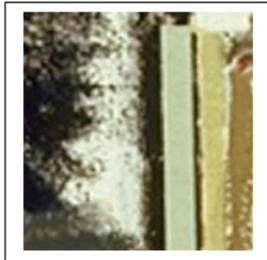


Orange

Tracer rocket fire, twilight, sun rays, Koi, Eastern dragon, Matisse, Goldfish

Objects

Common Meaning



Linen

Canvas showing through, (or painted faux canvas) depicting that which is or that which could be, separation of frames or images, linen is real, depicted is not real



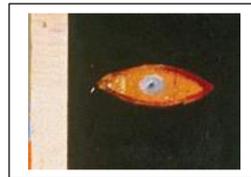
Tape

Faux tape painted into picture (depicted): a mask or separator for areas in painting, defines a picture plane or panel, zone borders



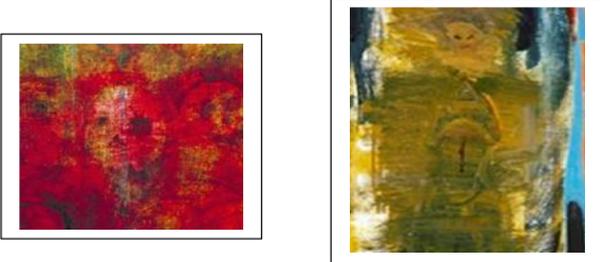
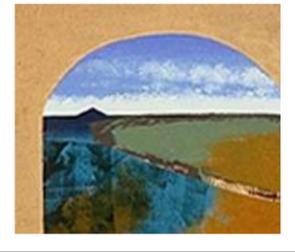
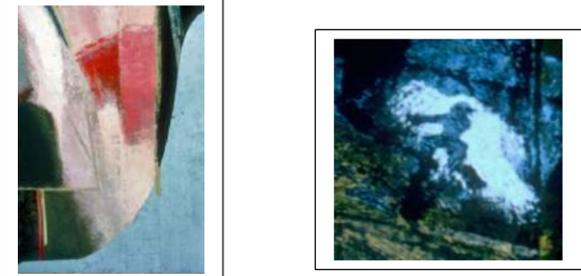
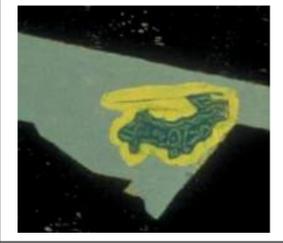
Strip Frame

Depicted as paintings-in-paintings, evolution of meaning, idea within an idea

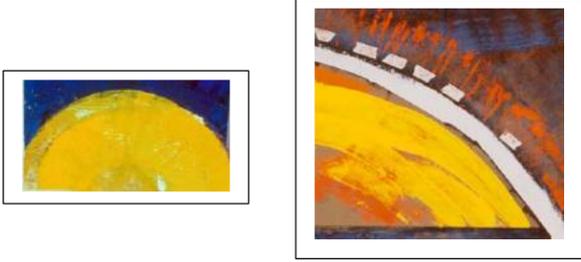


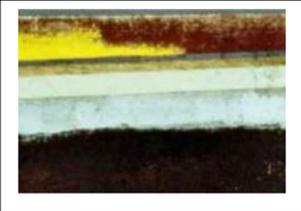
Eye

Kao Dai Religious Order symbol featured on Temple exterior and ceiling, the all-seeing eye, beyond universe, God. Also may refer to Tay Ninh and the D zone where the Temple is located

	<p>Skull</p>	<p>Vanitas, terror, ancestry, ever-presence and inevitability of death, civil war</p>
	<p>Roman Arch</p>	<p>Door of helicopter, exit into, portal, aerial flight</p>
	<p>Striding Man or Hill</p>	<p>Sisyphus and the Sisyphus legend (endless struggle—progress and fall back), soldier, struggle, an overwhelming wave or force</p>
	<p>H-21 Helicopter</p>	<p>Aerial flight, combat, drama, readiness, suspense, bravery, personal (my) experience</p>
	<p>Koi</p>	<p>Goldfish, Metamorphoses into Eastern Five-Toed Dragon, locates Halong bay (the Myth of the Dragon, a good omen in the Vietnamese culture)</p>
	<p>Triangle</p>	<p>Parapet (a safe place), Nui Ba Den Mountain (lurking danger), view from helicopter window</p>

	<p>Nui Ba Den</p>	<p>Black Lady Mountain or Black Virgin Mountain, usually as seen from helicopter (A fortified mountain honey-combed with caves and the surrounding tunnel complex in Tay Ninh Province), aerial flight, the Delta, III Corp, battleground, temple, Khmer myth, hill, or ordeal</p>
	<p>Parapet</p>	<p>Secure place, safe place, hamlet, fort, suspense, night attack</p>
	<p>Arrow</p>	<p>Direction, penetration, surprise, ambush, Sampan, Skiff, Swift Boat</p>
	<p>Waves</p>	<p>Overwhelming, looming, incoming danger</p>
	<p>Rain</p>	<p>Rain, columns of rain seen from helicopter, monsoon</p>

	<p>Barbed Wire</p>	<p>“Ready for the night”, perimeter defense, tense, alert, war; impending death</p>
	<p>Semicircular Form</p>	<p>Moonrise or sunrise</p>
	<p>Banking</p>	<p>Tilted horizon, (tilt left-tilt right refers to “turn and bank indicator” in the cockpit.) Tilting in a half-standard left turn or half-standard right turn. View of the horizon from the cockpit during turns, indicates flying</p>
	<p>Slash Mark</p>	<p>Helicopter blade (as caught in photographs out the window), aerial flight, action, also cannon fire and tracers</p>
	<p>Wrapped Body</p>	<p>Dead Vietnamese wrapped in banana leaves, death</p>
	<p>Mountain, Island</p>	<p>Myth of the Dragon, Good Omen, Halong Bay, North China Sea</p>

	<p>Night</p>	<p>Depicted with Black, muted color tints usually with Zink white</p>
	<p>Day</p>	<p>Depicted with intense color, tints with flake white</p>
	<p>Head on Stake</p>	<p>Traditions of Goya, Guerilla terror, constant danger, death</p>
	<p>Target Wall</p>	<p>Circular shape referring to Jasper Johns' concept of "myself as target", helicopter doorway, Nui Ba Den, water, rice paddy</p>