

## Nicholas Hales | Alchemy

"Alchemy is traditionally known as the attempt to purify, mature, and perfect certain 'base metals' into 'noble metals', particularly gold. A lesser-known alchemy was an internal alchemy, where the individual would undergo certain practices to bring about a change or evolution in one's consciousness. Meditation and 'mindfulness' are now part of the contemporary zeitgeist. No longer the domain of spiritual, mystical, or religious traditions, you can find meditation and 'mindfulness' cellphone Apps for greater wellbeing and happiness. From C.E.O's to sportsmen and even military personnel, all are utilising these practices to gain 'peak performance' or high functional efficiency in their professions.

Neurosciences' research on long-term meditators has shown that brain function can be permanently changed. An 'alchemy' occurs in the brain with the rewiring of neural pathways, giving rise to the term, neuroplasticity. 'For some researchers meditation's impact on health and performance was important, but even more intriguing was the role these practices played in cultivating enduring qualities, such as selflessness, equanimity, and impartial compassion.' (Delehanty, 2017)

These meditation and mindfulness practices found now in contemporary culture originally came from both Eastern and Western mystical traditions that practiced an 'inner alchemy'. 'In order to practice inner alchemy, you need the awareness or focus (the alchemical container), the energy (breath or prana), and the substance to be transformed (the etheric body or consciousness). The most important part is to maintain focused awareness. The moment the mind wanders, you have lost the alchemical container and the alchemy cannot take place.' (Grobelaar, 2012).

With the recent interest and research within Western Academia into meditation and particularly the long-term positive changes within brain function, there is a perception within Academia that what was once termed 'inner alchemy' is now understood within scientific thought. However 'stilling' of the mind is only one part of inner alchemy. This body of work is an investigation of the experiential nature of the mystical, mysterious, the knowable, and unknowable.

The recurring grid-like pattern in these works is a visual metaphor for either a repeated focus on the breath in meditation or Japa meditation when one repeats a mantra (either a word or phrase). This focused type of meditation is the process by which the alchemical container is created and sealed while simultaneously causing the dissolving of the 'personal self'. The aspects of 'light' or illumination has reference, on one hand, to the psychological process, as one's mind stills, suppressed painful experience begins to rise and are brought into the 'light', felt and integrated. Light and illumination can also have reference to the mystical experience of light and illumination within a meditative or contemplative practice." - Nicholas Hales

Sources:

\* Hugh Delehanty, December 13, 2017, 'The Science of meditation',  
<https://www.mindful.org/meditators-under-the-microscope/>

\* Richard J. Davidson & Daniel Goleman, September 5, 2017, 'Altered Traits: Science Reveals How Meditation Changes Your Mind, Brain, and Body'



NICHOLAS HALES  
*Illumination and arrow head no.1*, 2018  
Oil and acrylic on wood  
Framed: 38 x 38 x 4 cm  
R 14,000



NICHOLAS HALES  
*Alchemy series, no.3*, 2018 - 2022  
Oil on wood  
Framed: 38 x 38 x 5 cm  
R 14,000



NICHOLAS HALES  
*Alchemy series, no.8, 2019*  
 Oil on canvas  
 Framed: 146.5 x 122 x 5.5 cm  
 R 65,000



NICHOLAS HALES  
*Illumination with 'pine cone', 2020*  
 Oil and acrylic on wood  
 Framed: 38 x 38 x 4 cm  
 R 14,000



NICHOLAS HALES  
*Alchemy, him/her, 2019 - 2022*  
Oil on wood  
Framed: 146 x 122 x 5.5 cm  
R 65,000



NICHOLAS HALES  
*'untitled'*, 2020  
 Oil on wood  
 Framed: 38 x 38 x 4 cm  
 R 14,000



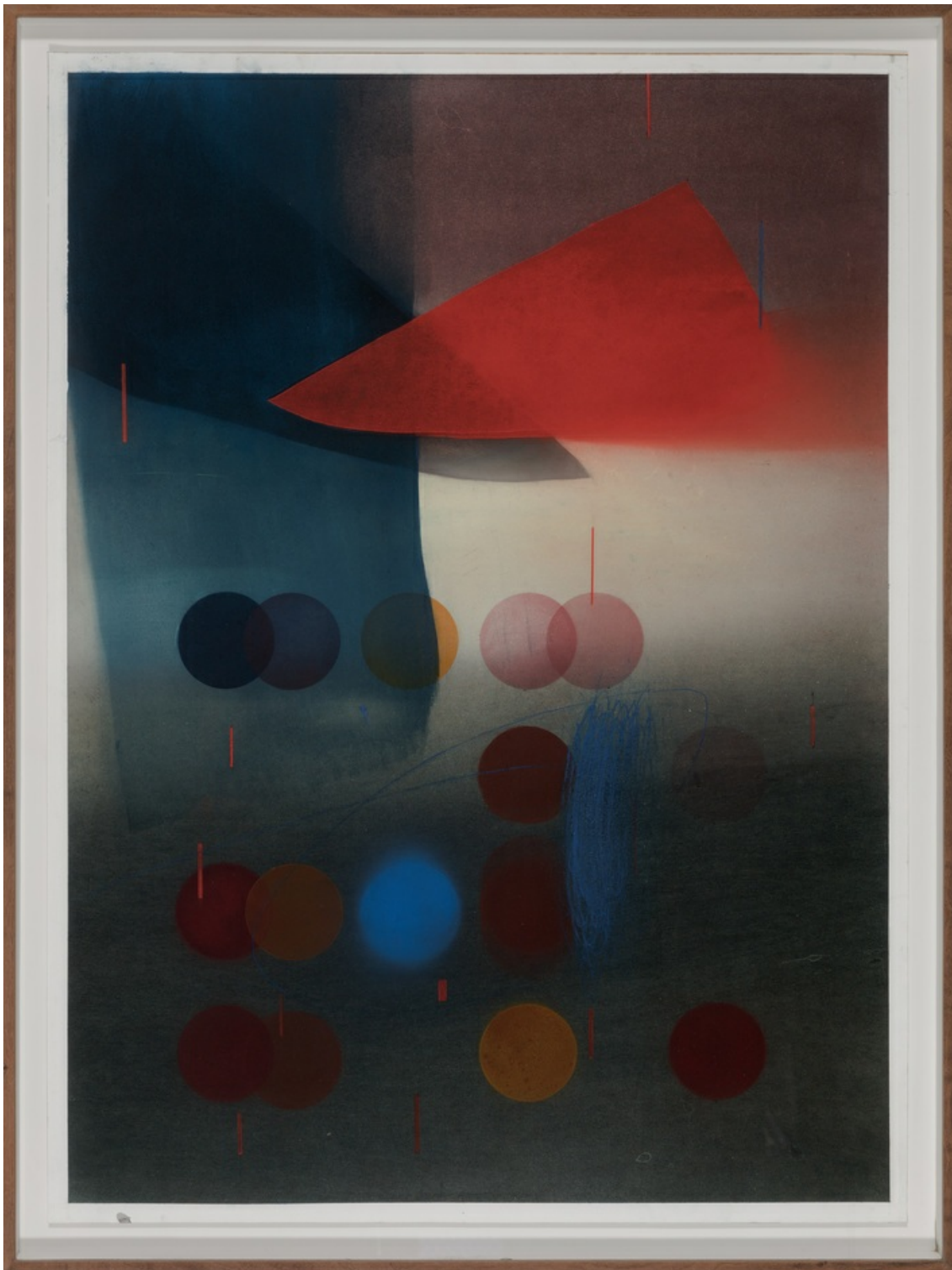
NICHOLAS HALES  
*'Golden vessel'*, 2020  
Oil on wood  
Framed: 38 x 38 x 4 cm  
R 14,000



NICHOLAS HALES  
*Untitled, 2018 - 2022*  
Oil on canvas  
Framed: 63 x 63 x 5 cm  
R 30,000



NICHOLAS HALES  
*Alchemical series, 'Arrow head and illumination', 2019*  
 Pastel, gauche and tempera on paper  
 Framed: 94 x 74 x 3.5 cm  
 R 28,000



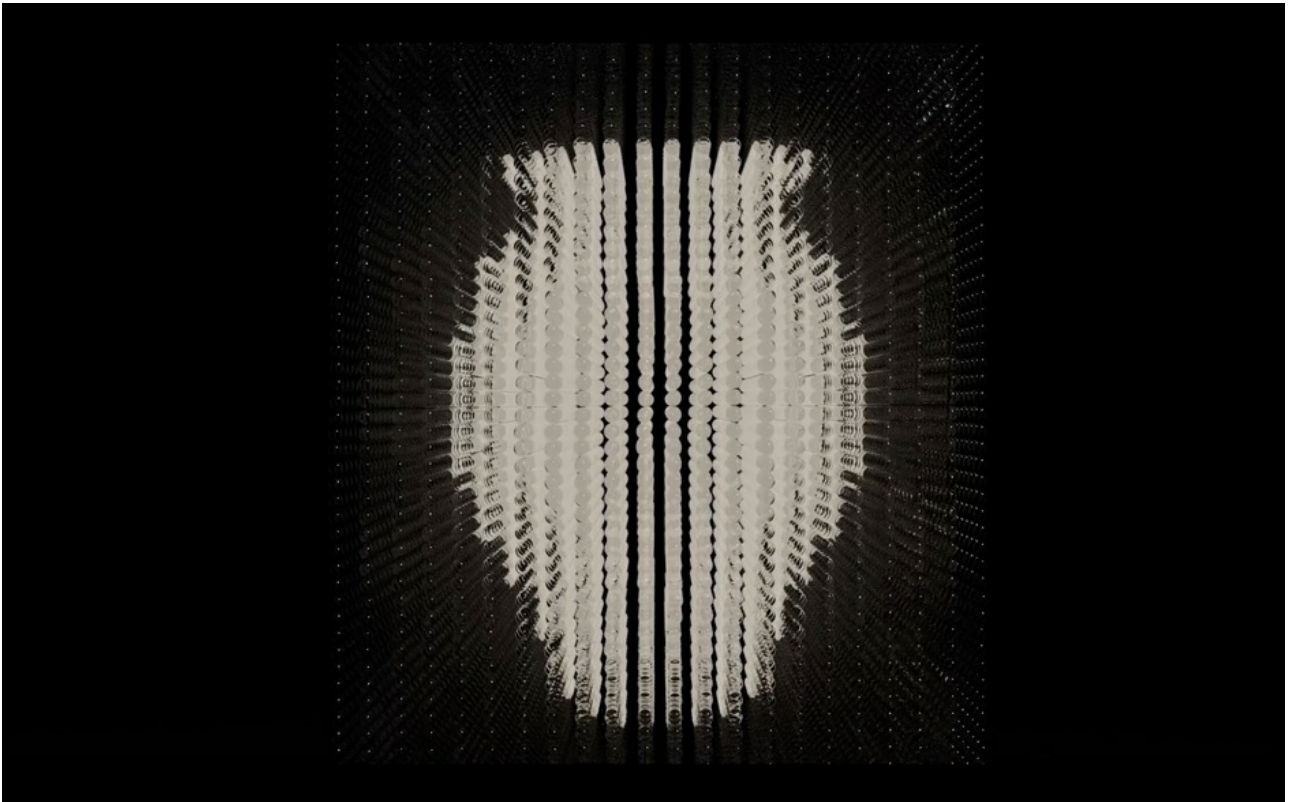
NICHOLAS HALES  
*Alchemy, illumination series no.1*, 2019  
 Pastel, gauche and tempera on paper  
 Framed: 94 x 70 x 3.5 cm  
 R 28,000



NICHOLAS HALES  
*Alchemy series, no.2*, 2018 - 2020  
Oil on wood  
Framed: 63 x 63 x 5 cm  
R 30,000



NICHOLAS HALES  
*Ascent/Descent*, 2019 - 2022  
Pastel, pastel pencil and gauche on paper  
Framed: 170 x 127 x 4 cm  
R 70,000



NICHOLAS HALES

*Alchemy in a pandemic, 2022*

Video/digital installation (2 mins 16 seconds)

Price on request