

Nul

Text by [Deb Covell](#) for the [Icons \ Objects](#) exhibition.

"We are planning to put out a journal and have begun to discuss the how and what of it. Since in it we intend to reduce everything to zero, we have decided to call it Nul. Afterward we ourselves will go beyond zero."

Kazimir Malevich.

I became reacquainted with Kazimir Malevich and the other Suprematists after a trip to New York in 2013 where I saw many of their works in the wonderful exhibition 'Inventing Abstraction' at [the Museum of Modern Art] MoMA. Before I went to New York I had completed a series of black and white three dimensional paintings out of acrylic paint skins - without a traditional support such as a canvas, which were made by following a particular systematic and intuitive process. On returning from New York I was about to exhibit these works in the UK and I was looking for a title that suited the works which included the word 'Zero' because of their stripped back nature. On reading the 'Inventing Abstraction' catalogue I was reminded of the famous 0.10 exhibition in Moscow which included many Suprematist works by Malevich and after some deliberation I decided to call my exhibition 'Zero'. I became particularly interested in Malevich's notion of 'Nul' forms where he stated that Suprematist paintings were "the construction of forms from nothing", I drew comparisons with my own practice as it echoed what I was trying to do in part and I thought carefully about what my work said that differed from theirs. I noted that their forms were painted on canvas – a three dimensional object with edges and a surface, which I felt could have limited the freedom the Suprematists seemed to be looking for. Furthermore, the geometric shapes they were using floated or hovered on white grounds, suggesting an element of spatial depth. My intention became to push 'Null forms ' in painting even further by not only eliminating the pictorial and illusionistic elements in my work, but crucially freeing the painting from any support altogether.

Since rediscovering Malevich in 2013 I have remained very interested in his ideas and the visual forms they took. I feel there is constantly something fresh to learn and discover from him even now, 100 years later. I became interested Malevich's spiritual and religious concerns which were something that he wanted to convey in his work from a very early age. He seemed to have a particular interest in taking the viewer away from a tangible reality into another space beyond the picture plane. In works such as Red Square and Black Square, we are released from the perimeters of the shape, as Malevich deliberately makes the squares non-symmetrical. In the soft edges of his Dissolution series, colour and form fade away altogether, and begin to liberate the shapes from the world of visible forms. My Black and White paintings I showed in the 'Zero' exhibition were aimed at bringing a form into the world and keeping the viewer in the present through experiencing the very physical and tangible qualities they contain as they enter the viewer's space. However on thinking about the dissolution series by Malevich as well as going through personal experiences of death and loss I have begun to produce work that I initially bring into the world but then go on to partially or entirely lose the works body or form by dissolving it in strong light or submerging the new forms with paint.

The cycle of life, death and rebirth is still a current theme in my work which I know owes a great deal to Malevich's idea of 'Nul' and going beyond this zero point.

Deb Covell, 2018