

FIVE PAINTINGS · 2026

Glass Bead

Light, weather and the city seen through rain



Paintings and text by Sean Byrne

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THE SERIES

Through the glass

The Glass Bead paintings began with photographs taken from the upper deck of a bus on a wet winter night. Rain gathered on the window and the familiar city outside changed before my eyes: lights became pools of colour, the outlines of buildings loosened and traffic and vegetation merged in the moving glass.

The raindrops acted as small lenses, breaking the scene apart and bringing it together again. Each of the five paintings follows a different possibility within that experience - a search for connection, a flash of energy, a point of orientation, a suggestion of growth and the light that remains in memory.

The name draws partly on Hermann Hesse's The Glass Bead Game and its interest in relationships between apparently separate fields of knowledge. The paintings also remain grounded in something immediate and physical: water, light, movement and the weather shaping a city made by people.

The complete series

01 Glass Bead Master · 120 × 60 cm

02 Glass Bead – Ember · 50 × 40 cm

03 Glass Bead – Signal · 50 × 40 cm

04 Glass Bead – Red Garden · 50 × 40 cm

05 Glass Bead – Afterlight · 50 × 40 cm

The following pages reproduce the longer reflections accompanying the paintings on chanbhas.com. The shared series introduction appears once here.

01 / 05 · THE PAINTINGS

Glass Bead Master



120 × 60 cm · 2026 · Acrylic and mixed media on board

[View this painting on chanbhas.com](https://chanbhas.com)

01 / 05 · REFLECTION

Glass Bead Master

Glass Bead Master is the central work in a series inspired by Hermann Hesse's *The Glass Bead Game* and an encounter with the urban landscape on a wet winter night. The painting originated from photographs taken through a rain-covered bus window, where artificial lights, reflected colours and the movement of water transformed the familiar city into an intricate abstract composition.

Deep greens, turquoise illumination and muted earth tones create a landscape that seems to exist somewhere between the natural and constructed world. Forms suggest pools of water, reflected light, vegetation and fragments of an urban environment, yet none resolves into a definitive image. The painting invites the viewer to search for relationships within its apparently fragmented surface.

The influence of Hermann Hesse

In Hesse's *The Glass Bead Game*, the central character, Joseph Knecht, becomes Master of a complex intellectual discipline that seeks connections between different branches of human knowledge. The game brings together music, mathematics, philosophy and other forms of intellectual enquiry, exploring the possibility that apparently separate systems might be understood as parts of a larger, interconnected whole.

Yet Hesse also questions the limitations of intellectual understanding when it becomes detached from the experience of ordinary life. *Glass Bead Master* draws upon this tension between order and experience. Its intricate network of colours and forms suggests a world of underlying relationships, while its fluidity and ambiguity resist any attempt to impose a single, definitive interpretation.

The viewer is invited to participate in a visual game of discovery, finding connections between forms that may initially appear unrelated.

Nature, weather and the constructed world

The painting's original subject also introduces a contemporary dimension. Rain transforms the carefully organised structures of the city into something unpredictable. Buildings, roads, traffic and artificial lights become subject to the movement of water and the changing conditions of the atmosphere. The resulting composition suggests that the natural world is not separate from the environment we construct, but remains an active presence within it.

In an era of increasing concern about changing weather patterns, the painting can also be read as a reflection on the limits of human control over the environment. The orderly systems through which we organise our lives remain vulnerable to forces that cannot always be anticipated or contained.

An interconnected whole

The title *Glass Bead Master* suggests the possibility of finding understanding within complexity. However, the painting offers no final solution to the visual puzzle it presents. Instead, its overlapping forms, shifting colours and ambiguous structures encourage continued exploration. What initially appears chaotic may reveal underlying relationships; what seems familiar may become strange when viewed from a different perspective.

The painting becomes an exploration of the continuing human search for understanding — a search in which knowledge, experience and the natural world remain inseparably connected.

02 / 05 · THE PAINTINGS

Glass Bead - Ember



50 × 40 cm · 2026 · Acrylic and mixed media on board

[View this painting on chanbhas.com](https://chanbhas.com)

02 / 05 · REFLECTION

Glass Bead - Ember

Glass Bead Ember takes its inspiration from the transformation of artificial light through rain-covered glass on a wet winter night. Within the painting, crimson and vermilion emerge from darker passages, intersecting with cooler turquoise and green. What began as the reflections of an urban landscape develops into a composition suggesting fire, molten earth and fragments of energy suspended within an uncertain environment.

The title Ember introduces the idea of something that continues to glow after the original source of energy has diminished. An ember is a remnant of fire, but also a source from which new energy may emerge. The painting explores this tension between persistence and transformation.

The transformation of light

Through the rain-covered bus window, individual points of artificial light lose their familiar shape and become fragmented, multiplied and dispersed. The resulting forms no longer belong exclusively to the urban environment. They may be read as flames, reflections, geological structures or traces of natural processes. The intense red passages suggest warmth and vitality, yet their emergence through the darker surface also introduces a sense of uncertainty.

Light becomes both a source of beauty and an indication of forces that may be difficult to contain.

A world in transformation

The contrast between warmer reds and cooler turquoise creates a visual tension that can be understood in terms of opposing but interconnected natural forces. Fire and water, heat and cold, stability and change are brought together within the same composition. These relationships introduce a contemporary environmental reading. As familiar weather patterns become less predictable, natural processes increasingly challenge the assumptions upon which our constructed environments depend.

The painting does not attempt to depict a particular weather event or environmental disaster. Rather, it explores the emotional character of a changing world, where beauty and unease may coexist within the same experience.

The influence of The Glass Bead Game

The painting also draws upon Hermann Hesse's exploration of interconnected systems of knowledge and experience. Where *Glass Bead Master* suggests the search for underlying order, *Ember* introduces the disruptive energy that can challenge established structures. The fragments of colour become elements of a larger visual relationship, suggesting that transformation is not necessarily the destruction of order but may also be the beginning of something new.

The painting invites the viewer to consider whether the glowing forms represent the remnants of something passing, the emergence of something new, or both. In this ambiguity lies its central theme: transformation as an essential, sometimes unsettling, dimension of existence.

03 / 05 · THE PAINTINGS

Glass Bead - Signal



50 × 40 cm · 2026 · Acrylic and mixed media on board

[View this painting on chanbhas.com](https://chanbhas.com)

03 / 05 · REFLECTION

Glass Bead - Signal

Glass Bead Signal explores the transformation of familiar urban structures through the distorting effects of rain, reflected light and movement. The painting originated from photographs taken through the upstairs window of a bus on a wet winter night. As water moved across the glass, individual lights and recognisable elements of the city became fragmented and displaced, creating an abstract landscape in which natural and artificial forms could no longer be easily distinguished.

Pools of turquoise and green are interrupted by an intense red vertical form, introducing a contrasting element that suggests a signal, warning or point of orientation within the surrounding complexity. Yet the meaning of this signal remains unresolved.

The search for meaning

Signals are fundamental to the ways in which we understand and navigate the world. They help us recognise patterns, communicate information, identify danger and establish direction. Within the painting, the red form introduces a possible point of reference, but the surrounding colours and structures resist a straightforward interpretation. The viewer may recognise fragments of traffic lights, illuminated buildings or the reflections of an urban landscape.

Equally, the forms may suggest organic growth, waterways or atmospheric movement. What initially appears to offer certainty becomes part of a more complex visual puzzle.

The natural world and human systems

The painting can also be understood as a reflection on the relationship between the natural world and the systems through which we organise human activity. Roads, transport networks, signals and communications systems depend upon an underlying expectation of stability and predictability. Rain and changing atmospheric conditions transform the appearance of these systems, reminding us that our constructed environment remains exposed to natural forces.

The red signal therefore becomes an ambiguous presence. It may represent communication, direction or reassurance, but it may equally suggest uncertainty and the need to pay attention to a changing environment.

The Glass Bead Game and interconnected knowledge

Hermann Hesse's *The Glass Bead Game* explores the possibility of discovering relationships between seemingly separate systems of knowledge. *Glass Bead Signal* extends this idea into the contemporary urban landscape. The painting brings together fragments of infrastructure, natural movement, colour and memory, inviting the viewer to seek connections between them.

Yet it also acknowledges the limitations of perception. A signal may be visible without its meaning being fully understood. The painting becomes a meditation on the continuing human effort to interpret an increasingly complex world — and the uncertainty that remains even when we believe we have discovered a pattern.

04 / 05 · THE PAINTINGS

Glass Bead - Red Garden



50 × 40 cm · 2026 · Acrylic and mixed media on board

[View this painting on chanbhas.com](https://chanbhas.com)

04 / 05 · REFLECTION

Glass Bead - Red Garden

Glass Bead Red Garden develops an unexpected landscape from the fragmented reflections of a city seen through rain-covered glass. A concentrated crimson form emerges within darker greens and earth tones, suggesting something organic developing within a more complex surrounding environment. The forms may be read as flowers, roots, vegetation or fragments of an urban landscape transformed by water and reflected light.

The painting remains deliberately ambiguous, allowing the boundaries between natural growth and human construction to dissolve. Its title introduces the idea of a garden — a place where nature and human intervention exist in a continually evolving relationship.

The garden as a living system

A garden is neither entirely natural nor entirely constructed. It develops through the interaction of human intention and natural processes, bringing together cultivation, growth, decay and regeneration. Within the painting, the central red form suggests the energy of something emerging or developing. The surrounding greens and darker structures may be understood as an interconnected environment through which this growth becomes possible.

Yet the composition does not resolve into a recognisable botanical image. The garden remains imagined — a space in which the viewer is encouraged to discover organic relationships within an apparently abstract surface.

Nature within the city

The original photographs for the Glass Bead series were taken from a moving bus on a wet winter night. Through the rain-covered window, artificial lights, vegetation and fragments of the city became increasingly difficult to distinguish from one another. This transformation offers an alternative way of understanding the urban environment. Rather than presenting the city as separate from nature, the painting suggests that both remain part of the same living system.

Rain alters the appearance of buildings and roads; vegetation occupies the spaces between constructed structures; and changing atmospheric conditions continually reshape the experience of place. The garden becomes a metaphor for this relationship between human intervention and natural processes.

Growth, change and interconnectedness

The painting also reflects the influence of Hermann Hesse's *The Glass Bead Game*, particularly its exploration of relationships between different forms of knowledge and experience. Where the game seeks intellectual connections, *Red Garden* suggests a more organic process of discovery. The viewer encounters a network of forms in which individual elements appear to depend upon and develop through their relationships with one another.

The central crimson presence may suggest growth, vitality or transformation, while the surrounding forms evoke the environment through which change becomes possible. Ultimately, the painting offers an imagined landscape in which the distinction between nature and the constructed world becomes less important than the relationships connecting them. It is a garden of memory and perception, shaped by the continuing movement of life through an ever-changing environment.

05 / 05 · THE PAINTINGS

Glass Bead - Afterlight



50 × 40 cm · 2026 · Acrylic and mixed media on board

[View this painting on chanbhas.com](https://chanbhas.com)

05 / 05 · REFLECTION

Glass Bead - Afterlight

Glass Bead Afterlight presents a quieter interpretation of the fragmented urban landscape that inspired the Glass Bead series. The painting originated from photographs taken through a rain-covered bus window on a wet winter night, where reflections of artificial light merged with water, movement and the surrounding atmosphere. A luminous golden upper region gives way to cooler blues and greys, with muted red passages suggesting traces of the original urban environment.

The resulting composition occupies an uncertain space between a landscape and its reflection. It may suggest a distant horizon, water, mist or the lingering illumination of a city obscured by rain.

The persistence of light

The title Afterlight suggests the presence of light beyond the immediate moment of its source. It may be understood as the illumination remaining after sunset, the lingering glow of artificial lights or the visual memory of something that has already passed. Within the painting, warmer and cooler colours interact to create a sense of transition. The golden upper passages suggest illumination, while the more subdued regions introduce a quieter, reflective atmosphere.

The composition does not describe a specific moment in time. Instead, it brings together impressions that may have occurred before, during and after the original experience.

Memory and the transformation of place

The rain-covered window becomes more than a physical barrier between the viewer and the world outside. It acts as a means through which the familiar landscape is transformed into something less immediately recognisable. This process offers a visual parallel to memory. Our recollection of a place or experience rarely preserves every detail with equal clarity. Certain colours, forms and impressions remain vivid, while others gradually dissolve.

Within the painting, individual elements of the original city appear to survive as fragments of light and colour. Their exact origins become less important than the atmosphere and emotional associations they retain.

The natural and artificial worlds

The merging of golden light, cooler atmospheric colour and indistinct forms also recalls the continuing relationship between nature and the constructed environment. The city remains present, but its familiar structures have been transformed by rain and changing light. Artificial illumination becomes inseparable from the natural processes through which it is experienced.

The resulting image suggests a landscape in which the boundaries between human activity and the natural world have become fluid.

A concluding reflection

Within the wider Glass Bead series, *Afterlight* offers a more contemplative perspective on the themes explored in the other paintings. Where *Master* searches for understanding, *Ember* suggests transformation, *Signal* explores uncertainty and *Red Garden* evokes growth, *Afterlight* reflects upon what remains. The painting invites the viewer to consider how experiences continue to shape our understanding of the world after the original moment has passed.

It becomes an exploration of the relationship between light and memory, presence and absence, and the continuing transformation of experience into understanding.

SEAN BYRNE

About the artist

I am an Irish artist working between Swords in North County Dublin, Aughrim in County Wicklow and Err in the French Pyrenees. I have drawn and painted for more than 50 years, returning often to questions of light, landscape and the point where recognisable forms move towards abstraction.

In the Glass Bead series, an everyday bus journey became the starting point for five paintings about how weather and movement can change what we think we see.

Explore the paintings and contact the artist at chanbhas.com

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