
AIDA TOMESCU
From the scarlet-word



‘The structure developed in the course of the work is living, not static, nor fixed or final. Form emerges gradually through all of the connections and relationships developed across the surface. It builds fullness through an intricate chain of transitions. We don’t suspect its workings on the image and on us, yet it is precisely because of its elusive grace that a painting comes to life.’

Aida Tomescu



From the scarlet-word, 2026
Oil & Sennelier pigment on Belgian Linen
206 x 160 cm (Each panel)
81 1/8 x 62 Inches (Each panel)

From the scarlet-word

November 28, 2026 - January 30, 2027

'Each series, irrespective of media, is like a new beginning; informed by previous experience and yet restlessly, determinedly eschewing the easy, known path in search of new life.' Deborah Hart, Senior Curator, National Gallery of Australia

With each new exhibition, Aida Tomescu's work advances imagery previously established in her paintings. 'From the scarlet-word' (2026) emerges with unexpected freshness, unsettles the metaphors of earlier works and signals something special, whistling in a new tune. The free, adventurous line of her drawings with the introduction of coloured pastels positioned in the realm of painting, acts in synchronicity with vibrant pigments in a notable departure from previous series. Painting and drawing rub on each other, and no longer constitute separate blocs.

Chromatic lightness and transparency have entered her work. The colour is bright and clear. The heat of Cadmium scarlet applied and reworked gradually without admixtures of other colours reinforces the sensation of excitement and adventure, and three small paintings from the Phosphor series bring in spaciousness and radiance offering a sense of pause, and complementing the high energy of the larger works. Open, ever-changing passages of white built deliberately layer upon layer, construct localised densities, lending depth and substance.

One of the most distinctive qualities of Aida Tomescu's paintings is intensity. This intensity is sustained throughout the course of the series and never lets up. It is there in the delicacy and fluid passages of the new work. The subtlety that is more apparent in this show is always part of Tomescu's rigorous approach and the gradual construction of her painting. The build-up of her work is circular, insistent, simultaneously intense and playful. There is tension and there is always elevation.

For Tomescu *'The structure developed in the course of the work is living, not static, nor fixed or final. Form emerges gradually through all of the connections and relationships developed across the surface. It builds fullness through an intricate chain of transitions. We don't suspect its workings on the image and on us, yet it is precisely because of its elusive grace that a painting comes to life.'*

The idea of a painting holding multiple meanings is characteristic of Aida Tomescu's work. Fluid, semi-transparent registers intervene to edit, undo and redo connections until a new configuration moves across the canvas and an enduring presence emerges. For her, painting is a question of relationships and nothing exists in isolation in a work; everything plays an active part, makes very exacting demands and fundamentally holds the content of the painting.

Tomescu's work has long incorporated literary references generating its rhythm during the journey of its making. It develops connections between multiple sources always charged by the present. 'From the scarlet-word' is a verse from Paul Celan, whose poetry continues to offer rich thematic material. For her *'Celan poems progress through imagery and trigger associative thinking ..yet never a narrative.'* She responds to the purity of form and the structural musical precision of his poetry. *'As repetition becomes variation, Celan coins new words, words that connect to others and become composites, while others break down into syllables and each syllable acquires its own unique identity and weight.'*

Aida Tomescu's works are almost always the result of repeated painting over, scraping back, veiling and eliminating what does not clarify her new direction, without ever losing their immediacy. The painting grows from the original intentions and conception and acquires a complex life of its own. It always leads *'to somewhere new, a unity altogether more stimulating.'*

'I am interested in painting, where themes and connections arise simultaneously and there is no sequential order establishing a narrative. In the midst of the painting, when things are going well, you often feel that you are drawing on the sum of many experiences that are somehow essentially related. In other circumstances, all those experiences might seem very disparate, yet in the realm of the work they come together into complete accord, bringing multifaceted subjects into a whole, unified thought.'







From the scarlet-word, 2026
Oil & Sennelier pigment on Belgian Linen
206 x 160 cm
81 1/8 x 62 Inches

‘Brushstrokes and pastel lines are not there to describe the edges of forms; they have to both penetrate, become part of that surface, connect to its history and ‘lift’ and generate space-they have to be constructed. I can never see drawing with a brush or pastel, as mark-making or of being ‘gestural’. Where one line or brush stroke pauses, where it interrupts, where it overlaps with another, it asserts planes of construction that build form. Ultimately it is as remote as it could be from spontaneity and self-expression. There is nothing arbitrary about it..’

Aida Tomescu







From the scarlet-word I & II, 2026
Oil & Sennelier pigment on Belgian Linen
206 x 160 cm (Each panel)
81 1/8 x 62 Inches (Each panel)

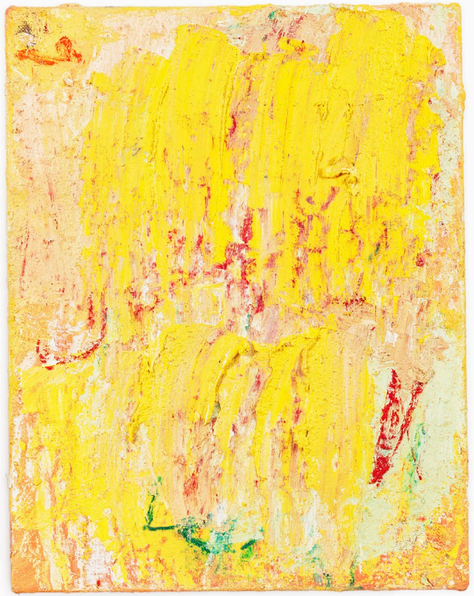




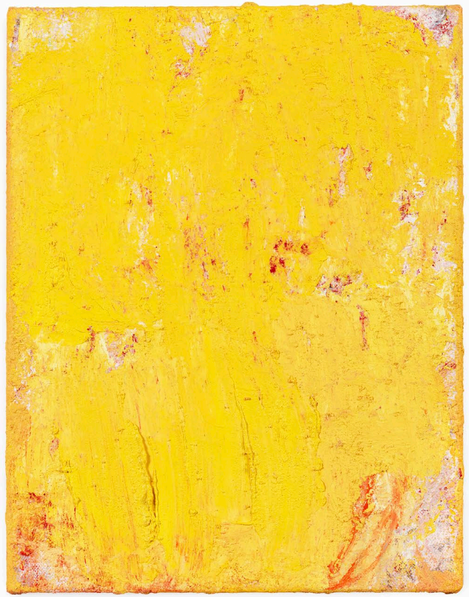
‘There are occasions where we encounter art in a way that speaks to us… seeming to simultaneously recognise ourselves, and our connection to something immense and boundless. The depth of Tomescu’s process..from observation, reading and thinking, to extended material play, brings forth objects that contain a vast embodied knowledge, or ‘intelligence’ as Tomescu puts it. Standing before these works is deeply moving as we feel this echo or vibration and respond in kind. For a moment we are embraced in a field of alert stillness.’

Lia McKnight, Curator John Curtin University Gallery





Phosphor 2, 2026
Oil & Sennelier pigment on Belgian Linen
46 x 36 cm
18 1/8 x 14 1/8 inches



Phosphor 3, 2026
Oil & Sennelier pigment on Belgian Linen
46 x 36 cm
18 1/8 x 14 1/8 inches





Angels and bed, 2026
Oil & Sennelier pigment on Belgian Linen
46 x 36 cm
18 1/8 x 14 1/8 inches



Phosphorous, 2026
Oil & Sennelier pigment on Belgian Linen
200 x 153 cm
78 3/4 x 60 Inches



About Aida Tomescu

Aida Tomescu is one of Australia's foremost abstract painters. The literary references and intensively worked surfaces of her paintings are the result of a breadth of interests and a rigorous work ethic, combining a vital physical presence with a powerful handling of scale, to create what she describes as "living structures", forming from within.

Born in Bucharest, Romania, Tomescu has forged her acclaimed career in Australia since 1980. She graduated from the Institute of Fine Arts, Bucharest, in 1977, and later completed a postgraduate Diploma of Art at the City Art Institute in Sydney, in 1983. The inaugural winner of the prestigious LSFA Arts 21 Fellowship in 1996, Tomescu was awarded the Sulman Prize in the same year. In 2001 she received the Wynne Prize and in 2003 won the Dobell Prize for Drawing at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. In a career spanning almost five decades Aida Tomescu has consistently held solo exhibitions including in London, Hong Kong, New York, Auckland, Melbourne and Sydney, and her work continues to be included in major curated shows in Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and the United Kingdom. Aida Tomescu is represented in all major art museums, and in regional galleries, universities and corporate collections within Australia and internationally including: The National Gallery of Australia, The National Gallery of Victoria, The Art Gallery of New South Wales, The Art Gallery of South Australia, Queensland Art Gallery, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Auckland Art Gallery, New Zealand, and the British Museum, London.

Photography courtesy Jenni Carter



A Long Line of Sand III, 2021, Oil on Belgian linen, 206 x 480 cm (triptych), Collection National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

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