



A+D



COLOR: FULLY ENGAGED
CURATED BY JAMILEE POLSON LACY
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Ghost Cat (White)
2010, Archival digital photograph,
30 x 24 inches
Image courtesy of the artist

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As silly as it sounds, my fascination with color is because my mother had red hair. I use the past tense because her hair has metamorphosed into a light, strawberry blonde. However, the journey from the hair color of her youth to its current, and in her words, “more mature” shade was an interesting, humorous and informative one for the whole family. Throughout her childhood, my mother experienced many of the slights that redheads typically face, the majority of which was playground taunting. In order to survive her formative years, she carved out an identity for herself, in part by claiming the name-calling a central theme of her own comedic routine. She always laughed as she told my sister and me of how her schoolmates constantly called her carrot or fire top, flame, Little Red-Haired Girl, referring to the *Charlie Brown* character, and, I’m sure, some other not so G-rated nicknames. When I was in elementary school I always drew my mommy with “fire-engine red” hair not because that was the color I saw on her head, but because those were the words she used to describe it. And it is this, the way we use color to experience, remember and describe, that ingrains it into our lives.

The *Color: Fully Engaged* exhibition came into being as a result of my love for experiencing, remembering and describing color’s clichés, intricacies and all-out mysteries. While at first it may seem that contemporary artists outside of the modern painting tradition are in David Batchelor’s words “chromophobic,”¹ I have found that color often embodies the most thoughtful and powerful aspects of much contemporary artwork. I wanted to take an approach that reaches beyond presentation to reveal artistic process and discourse. Therefore, my goal in organizing this exhibition and ancillary publication is not to provide a thorough overview of color in Chicago (or Chicago-connected) contemporary art, but to seek insight on this captivating subject in which visual pleasure and intelligence are intertwined. The final product exemplifies the innovative and multi-faceted ways in which color diversely informs the work of many artists within our city and actively engages the eyes, hearts and minds of so many.

A number of people have provided me with the support needed to plan this project. I am especially grateful to the A+D Gallery committee for giving the go-ahead for *Color: Fully Engaged*, and to the gallery staff, Jennifer Murray, Gallery Director; Julianna Cuevas, Assistant Director; Megan Ross, Preparator; each of whom has been a source of excellent information and guidance. Most importantly, I am so appreciative of the *Color: Fully Engaged* artists who so graciously went along with my every whim. Their generosity, talent and art smarts are beyond incredible. I would also like to thank my friends and family for perfectly playing the roles of sounding boards, especially my mother and sister for their ginger humor. And finally, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to my husband for encouraging and helping me every step of my way.

Jamilee Polson Lacy
Curator, *Color: Fully Engaged*

¹ Batchelor, David. *Chromophobia* (London: Reaktion, 2000) 23.

WHAT DOES COLOR MEAN?



COLOR IS SINGLE, NOT AS A LIFELESS THING AND A RIGID INDIVIDUALITY, BUT A WINGED CREATURE THAT FLITS FROM ONE FORM TO THE NEXT.

—Walter Benjamin

Color memory is a person's worst. Though we savor color in recalling our favorite things, we are remarkably inaccurate when it comes to remembering just what are the particularities of a certain hue. We can never pick a specific color out of a line-up twice, forcing us to re-mix this pigment, repaint that newly done parlor room, return these stockings for a pair that better matches those shoes. Honing one's color memory would certainly make life more convenient, but is it important? Could it be that color is more valuable to us for what it potentially represents than for what it actually is—unabsorbed light? *Color: Fully Engaged* concerns itself with color's multi-faceted role and, rather than confronting and solving any theoretical problems, further explores the correlations between color and perception. Via contemporary artworks created as part of conceptual and fine arts, design and architecture disciplines, the exhibition follows modern and contemporary trajectories of color as both scientific and associative methodology. Featuring essays, artworks and artist interviews, this catalog exists not only as a record of the exhibition, but as an opportunity to further expand on the unique employment of color in the practice of contemporary art making. In reflections on their studio practices, artwork and lives, each *Color: Fully Engaged* participant posits part of the whole question: what does color mean?

Universal truths about color have been sought for ages, though it was only three centuries ago that the color wheel materialized as an effort to meaningfully and hierarchically organize color. Designed according to spiritual and scientific thinking of the time, the initial color wheels and their partnering theories are now understood as more a reflection of human preference and desire for order than as any essential truths about color. In the more recent 19th and 20th centuries, color wheels, charts and other organizational systems of color began to operate in ways in which we are more familiar with today—as guides for the creation and consumption of color using ready-made pigments. Well-known artists

like John Baldessari, Dan Graham, Mike Kelley, Sherri Levine and Andy Warhol, to name but a few, have made references to commercial color guides, and in their paths to matters more paramount, *Color: Fully Engaged* artists Anna Kunz, Jessica Labatte, Matthew Metzger and Liz Nielsen briefly allude to aspects and the display of ready-made color. So influential is the color wheel and its counterparts, New York's Museum of Modern Art organized the *Color Chart* exhibition in 2008 to call attention to its recurring appearance in modern and contemporary art. With so many inclusions within recent works of art, the argument could be made that the initial purpose of the color wheel has been renewed as today's artists search for a more substantial discourse on the conceptuality of color.

The radically differing functions of early and current color wheels exemplify the contradictory narrative of the history of color. One school of thought asserts that color is subjective, encompassing intuitive, expressive qualities in its conveyance of the language of aesthetic feelings and emotions; another contends it is scientific, systematic, and entirely objective. The color ideas of da Vinci and Vasari, Newton, Goethe and Runge, Blake and Turner, Seurat and Matisse, Albers, Judd, Gage and Batchelor run the gamut of historically and theoretically opposing views. Made difficult by these conflicting accounts, the study of color is broad and complex, including disciplines such as art and design, language and literature, science, and psychology. It is the purpose of the *Color: Fully Engaged* project to consider how color affects content and us as spectators or inhabitants of a colorful world.

A logical starting point for any study of color is the interaction of light and color, for without light we would observe no color or shape or space. Most surfaces have the capacity to absorb particular wavelengths or kinds of light; those not absorbed are visible to the onlooker. But what the onlooker means when using language—a particular color term or description—to communicate what is seen may

be quite different from what others understand. For example, *Color: Fully Engaged* artist Matthew Metzger rightly points out that “certain colors, especially reds, are often perceived in over 1400 different ways,”¹ because the eye has the theoretical capacity to discriminate millions of different colors (even though there are only 150 discernible wavelengths in the spectrum). However, the average person can, with reliability, name only a dozen or so, and even these identifications are subject to change with individual mood and association². In addition to these variant factors, color identification, terminology and concepts do not usually cross cultures. Some languages do not have separate words for green and blue or yellow and orange, and the Eskimos are famous for their use 17 different words for white to describe snow and ice conditions. In addition to color terminology, descriptive language becomes intrinsic to color’s meaning. However, just as color refuses to conform to any one system of order, it resists being fully articulated by verbal systems. With so many eyes seeing and referring to so many colors, how can we trust color? And how can we trust ourselves with it? The answer is surprising yet simple: we cannot. Instead, we must strive to understand and rely upon our instinctive and learned reactions to color.

While human eyes universally expand and contract to let light reach the retina, each human brain uniquely dictates how a body will respond. Case in point, a person immersed in the flooding red zone of the colored lights of Olafur Eliasson’s *360° room for all colours* might feel his or her body temperature rise because the eyes see what the brain thinks is heat. The large-scale installations of *Color: Fully Engaged* artist Anna Kunz additionally use color in a way that physically imposes upon the viewer. The saturated, hyper-color wall paintings and scrimms often cause the eyes to countervail and falsely correct themselves, creating a vibrating sensation as if the space created by the installation were rotating and closing in around them. To top it off, the viewer leaves a Kunz installation or painting with an intense afterimage that is nearly impossible to blink away.

Reactions that are physical may have some bearing on psychological responses to color as well. Repeatedly told is the wives tale proclaiming a bedroom should never be painted bright yellow because its inhabitant will go mad. Well, there is truth to this as bright yellow proves to be the most difficult color for the retina to process. The eyes tend to become blurry and strained when overexposed to the color, causing the brain to create images not actually delivered by the optic nerve. Red light has also been shown to produce physical and psychological affects as it enhances functions of the autonomic nervous system, evoking more tension, excitement, and hostility than cooler colors. For that matter, red light seems to produce anger and anxiety in infants and the mentally ill, and tests at Yale University indicated that the color red tended to detrimentally affect such mental activities as problem solving, decision-making and social conversation³. Additionally, red light has been shown in some experiments to increase bodily activity and extreme emotion, while blue light is physically calming. Certainly, the effects of transition from the tranquilizing atmosphere of an essentially blue space like Eliasson’s *One-way colour tunnel* to the artist’s warm-hued *Room for one colour* would catch one’s physical and psychological presence off guard.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of color’s presence in the world is our learned reactions to it. Psychological response factors into their making, but these kinds of responses to color are a product of influence. Environment and culture play especially important parts in our perceptions and feelings about color, and symbolism is, in some sense, an outgrowth of perception in its portrayal of our environments’ associations and customs. As follows, colors are forever joined with phenomenon, and sanctified by time and usage. They become inseparable from our uniforms, social and religious icons, and institutions. They are the colors of our flags, although various studies indicate that even these choices are the reflection of color preferences within the social-psychological context of traditions and aspirations.

In the recently influential book, *Chromophobia*, artist and theorist David Batchelor writes, “Color’s omnipresence in everyday experience transcends purpose and aesthetics to create its own symbolic order.” Yes, and the multiplicities of any color’s symbolic order is astonishingly great, reaching content outside the perimeters of an image. Thus the literary world has enjoyed the sensual richness of

color-coding within the works of James Joyce and Wallace Stevens, and Thomas Pynchon’s rainbow takes the reader on a magical, exegetic trip by way of the spectrum. The green of an Ellsworth Kelly painting comes loaded with significance for any member of the Arabic-speaking Islamic community; Derrida’s white—the white tied to the purity for a Western, virgin bride—is the color of mourning in China, while the orange and white of *Color: Fully Engaged* participant Academy Records’ less-than-tender *Self-titled* banner are sacred colors denoting true love in various aboriginal tribal traditions. In “The Problem with Pink,” Claudine Ise writes that “as soon as color is taken out the clinical white cube, it once again becomes something more than itself,” creating an interesting scenario for artists—artwork employing color as a conveyor of idea can be presented inside or outside of any model to evoke vastly different meaning than is the work’s original intent.

The infinite possibilities of color’s capacity to act and signify brings us back to our original question: what does color mean? The answer always lies just out of reach because it is contingent. Always, color is a historical occurrence whose meaning, like language, lies in the particular contexts in which it is experienced and interpreted. Color forever retains its mystery.

¹ Metzger, Matthew. Personal interview for *Color: Fully Engaged*.

² Sharpe, Deborah T. *The Psychology of Color and Design*. Totowa, New Jersey: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1981, 55.

³ Malnar, Joy Monice and Frank Vodvarka. *Sensory Design*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2004, 154.

Jamilee Polson Lacy is an artist, curator and writer living and working in Chicago. She founded and currently directs the Twelve Galleries Project, a transitory, collaborative exhibition experiment. Lacy’s independent exhibition and writing projects focus on histories and ideas that have been shared between authors and artists, while her artwork is focused on what is lost and gained between text, image and object. She has engaged in collaborative projects with numerous Chicago creatives and institutions, including Black Visual Archive, Chicago Artists’ Coalition, Chicago Art Review, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Hyde Park Art Center, Quite Strong and Swimming Pool Project Space, among others. Lacy holds two undergraduate degrees in studio arts and art history and a Masters of Comparative Literature from Northwestern University.

2. Jessica Labatte

Green Spectrum

2009

Archival inkjet print

20 x 25 inches

Image courtesy of the artist and Golden Gallery

(Opposite page)

THE PROBLEM WITH PINK CLAUDINE ISÉ



Like many girls her age, my daughter is going through a pink phase. She gravitates towards pink sightings like the proverbial moth to flame. She wants her bedroom pink, her clothes pink, her birthday cupcakes frosted pink and, if asked to choose only one out of the dozens of miniature plastic fairy/princess/fashionista dolls that toy companies have so successfully marketed to her, she invariably selects the one outfitted in the pinkest and “most sparkliest” costume.

My willingness to indulge my daughter’s love of pink has been a source of guilt for me, because today’s culturally-savvy moms are not supposed to encourage their daughters’ pink fetishes. The progressive party line tells us that pink, and everything pink has come to signify, is *bad* for little girls. In Britain, a group of parents have even gone so far as to start a group called Pinkstinks, described as “a campaign and social enterprise that challenges the culture of pink which invades every aspect of girls’ lives.” Citing research that suggests self-esteem among girls is at an all-time low, the Pinkstinks group argues that the reasons for this pretty much boil down to pink, or at least to what they refer to as “the pink stage,” the post-toddler, preteen years in which “young girls are taught the boundaries within which they will grow up, as well as narrow and damaging messages about what it is to be a girl.”

Artist Jeong Mee Yoon’s *Pink & Blue Project* parallels Pinkstinks efforts by documenting pink’s virulent (and, as Yoon also demonstrates, cross-cultural) ability to colonize the hearts, minds, and bedrooms of today’s little girls. Yoon’s photographic series situates young females of different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds in their bedrooms, surrounded by all of their pink possessions: pink clothing, dolls, stuffed toys, games, books, backpacks, pillows and bedroom accents (Fig. 3). These landscapes of pink fur, pink satin, pink plastic, transform the composition into a kind of hidden object game. Can you find the flesh and blood girl in all this pink? Each child sits inside a pink-padded prison of her own (or her

indulgent mother’s) making, a proud little consumer who is simultaneously being consumed by *things*, and even worse, by pink things.

Pink’s cultural association with a passive brand of hyper-femininity has made it almost impossible to talk about in apolitical terms. Still, the idea that the root of all female self-esteem issues lies in an excessive exposure to the color pink requires a giant leap in logic that I’m unwilling to take. Despite identifying strongly as a “black person” (the color, not race), I too harbor a secret attraction to pink. This, I’ve gathered, is a problem, because what I’ve come to think of as “the cultural politics of pink” includes grown-up women along with little girls. Even the esteemed leftist critic Barbara Ehrenreich has joined the war against pink. Ehrenreich has written several smart, caustic essays linking the pink-ified culture of the breast cancer industry to the decline of radical feminist activity, arguing that

To some extent, pink-ribbon culture has replaced feminism as a focus of female identity and solidarity. When a corporation wants to signal that it’s “woman friendly,” what does it do? It stamps a pink ribbon on its widget and proclaims that some miniscule portion of the profits will go to breast cancer research.... So welcome to the Women’s Movement 2.0: Instead of the proud female symbol—a circle on top of a cross—we have a droopy ribbon. Instead of embracing the full spectrum of human colors—black, brown, red, yellow, and white—we stick to princess pink.¹

Interestingly enough, both Ehrenreich and the Pinkstinkers use pink to make their larger political points in a manner not entirely unlike the industries they critique. In each case, pink is made to mean more than the color that it is. Of course there’s no implicit connection between pink and passivity, just as there’s no inherent link between any other color and its associative meanings. Yet of all the colors, pink remains the most denigrated, and not coincidentally it’s the one that’s most often put to metonymic misuse. The reasons for this are varied, and have everything to do with culture and little or nothing to do with pink *qua* pink, which

3. JeongMee Yoon

The Pink Project—SeoWoo and Her Pink Things

2006

Light Jet Print

Image courtesy of the artist

is why I would argue that any discussion of color and meaning—and of how color comes to accrue meaning—must necessarily grapple with problem of pink.

“Color is dangerous, or it is trivial, or it is both,” writes David Batchelor in his book *Chromophobia*, an argument that rings particularly true when considered in the context of pink. Pink attracts and repels, it incites desire and inspires antipathy (often simultaneously) to a degree unparalleled by any other color. For the chromophobic, says Batchelor, color “represents a kind of ruination,” a state of savagery from which “civilization, the nobility of the human spirit, slowly, heroically, has lifted itself—but back into which it could always slide.” Echoes of this idea can be heard in Pinkstinks’ rhetoric as well as in Ehrenreich’s arguments. Both confuse pink with its vapid connotations and consequently view the color as a kind of threat, if not a fall from grace—a turning away from the gains of feminism back into a state of not-so-blissful ignorance.

What are we really talking about when we talk about pink? First, let’s consider pink in terms of basic color science. If you take a look at the color spectrum, you’ll find that pink does not in fact exist. Pink, also known as magenta, isn’t part of the spectrum, because pink doesn’t have a wavelength. Our brains produce pink as a way to bridge the gap between the red and violet. So not only is pink a cultural construct, it’s a neurological one, too. As children, we learn how to produce pink paint by lightening red through the addition of white. Yet we almost never describe the resulting color as “light red” the way we do “light blue.” Pink is so assertive that it has literally overturned the primacy of red in order to possess its own name, its own identity.

Dan Flavin’s minimalist neon installations help us to understand pink’s unique spectral qualities apart from their social or cultural connotations. Pink, yellow, blue and green are the most frequently used colors in Flavin’s work. In an essay written for the Chinati Foundation on Flavin’s colors, Marianne Stockebrand notes that in Flavin’s work pink has two characteristics that distinguish it from other colors: pink can project a great distance, and it does not have a lasting impact on the eye. “After looking at pink for a while, the eye remains clear and is able to adjust easily to other colors,” Stockebrand observes,² which suggests that when placed within an array of colors, pink functions as a kind of retinal palette cleanser. Flavin’s work shows pink to be subtle yet powerful, far-reaching—one might even go so far as to describe it as “virile”—yet accommodating, too.

Flavin’s art also helps us to see color as color, divested of cultural interests. Yet as soon as color is taken out the clinical white cube, it once again becomes something more than itself. Out there (in here?), color accrues meaning through its cultural deployments and associations—that’s when pink starts to stink.

Today, pink has become a primary signifier of gender, a sign of the feminine from the moment it’s first attached to the body in the form of a pink swaddling blanket. Pink is seen as both artificial and superficial, as something applied to something else (makeup, cake frosting). It is a signifier of excess and of that which is essentially decorative, used to convey feelings of lightness and frivolity in the Baroque era-paintings of Jean Honoré Fragonard as well as in the set design of Sophia Coppola’s 2006 film *Marie Antoinette*, whose teenaged heroine’s descent into cake-fuelled, consumerist decadence was signified through the increasing seepage of pink into her surroundings. Pink is infantilizing. When Gwyneth Paltrow wore a pink satin spaghetti-strap gown to the Oscars the year she won for *Shakespeare in Love*, she was ridiculed for wearing a “prom dress” more suited to a little girl than a woman. Yet pink is also used to signify a kind of cheeky sexuality associated with certain genres of soft-core porn (which in Japan are known as *pinku eiga*/pink films), and with Gentleman’s Clubs, which often have names like the Pink Monkey, Pink Pony, and Café le Pink.

An extension of pink’s feminized and feminizing qualities is its connection to Otherness, including queerness. Pink was the color of the triangular badge assigned to the Third Reich’s homosexual concentration camp prisoners, a symbol that was famously hijacked (its triangular point turned upward) by Act Up activists for their Silence = Death campaign. Now, pink is often used to signify empowerment and/or the overturning of power structures. Pink is a frequently-used backdrop color in the dreamy staged tableaux of photographer-fantast James Bidgood, whose 1971 film *Pink Narcissus* was based on the sexual fantasies of a gay male prostitute. Pink (or the excessive use of pink) is also a signifier of class and of low forms of culture, as in kitsch pink flamingo lawn ornaments, which were in turn taken up by film director John Waters as a triumphant emblem for his own dirt-fi, Rabelasian inversions of class and cultural hierarchies. Pink also has links to punk and to punk rock graphics. The Sex Pistols used hot pink and yellow in their posters; pink was the predominant color on the cover of Hole’s debut album *Pretty on the Inside*, and riot grrrl-feminist Kathleen Hannah once wore a shocking pink bra onstage during a Bikini Kill show.

In short, pink is more complicated than it seems. If any color can be said to single-handedly encapsulate the problematic nature of all color, it is pink—an idea which *Chromophobia*’s hot pink cover seems to implicitly acknowledge. To a greater degree than any other color, pink incites contempt and desire, chromophobia and chromophilia, in equal amounts and often simultaneously. Pink is powerful. Pink is passive. Pink is childish. Pink is pornographic. Pink is pretty. Pink is vulgar. Pink is everywhere, and it is nowhere. From a color that can’t be found on the spectrum to one whose meaning has become so culturally overdetermined as to have spawned its own boycott movement—well, pink is clearly a color we must reckon with. As for me and my own pink problem, I think maybe it’s resolving itself on its own. My daughter says she now prefers silver, though this might be because one of her friends likes it (no matter the color, group-think will endure). I’m actually sad to see her pink stage coming to an end. Although I don’t think I’ll ever feel passionate about pink, I do have a lot of respect for it. Pink takes a lot of crap, yet somehow it always comes out smelling like roses.

1 Ehrenreich, Barbara. “Not So Pretty in Pink: The Uproar Over New Breast Cancer

Screening Guidelines.” Blog post for TomDispatch.com, December 2, 2009.

2 Stockebrand, Marianne. “Pink, Yellow, Blue, Green & Other Colors in the Work of Dan Flavin.” Chinati

Foundation website, essay excerpted from a lecture given at the Dia Center for the Arts in February of 1996 on the occasion of Dan Flavin’s exhibition *European Couples, and Others*.

COLLECTING AND CREATING: ADRIANE HERMAN



4. *Adriane Herman installing Wall of Intention at Kansas City Jewish Museum of Contemporary Art.*

Image courtesy of the artist

Adriane Herman is an artist and educator living and working in Portland, Maine. She holds an MFA from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Herman's work investigates conscious and unconscious forms of consumption and collection, currently elevating evidence of human intention toward action by collecting and re-presenting discarded "to do" lists. Herman's independent efforts to normalize consumption of fine art dovetail with collaborative curatorial efforts such as SlopArt. Com. Solo exhibitions include those at Western Exhibitions, Kansas City Jewish Museum of Contemporary Art, Interlochen Center for the Arts, Center for Maine Contemporary Art, and Adam Baumgold Gallery (New York). She has participated in group exhibitions at numerous venues including The Dalarnas Museum, Sweden, Portland Museum of Art, Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita, Rose Contemporary, and chosen barren land in Tainan, Taiwan.

Do you think color has a sense of humor?

Being a relativist, I am hard pressed to think of color as inherently or independently humorous. I think of color as funny or not funny in the context of something else – shape, text and/or dissonance with some preconceived notion such as "girls wear pink / boys wear blue." Maybe this is irony rather than humor, though.

How would describe the color combinations you chose for Crayon Bars?

Crayon Bars (Fig. 6) come in five different models/flavors: peanut, pecan, almond, walnut, and cashew. Certain colors are obviously more unexpected (or "realistic") for some nuts than for others. Reconstituted yellow crayon can make a relatively plausible cashew or peanut, while it's all "wrong" (or since we're talking about art, a bit "surreal") for a pecan. Thus a pecan bar with yellow nuts feels more abstract than representational, more like art and less like faux food or a toy.

Aluminum cupcake or pot pie containers filled with melted crayons (Fig. 5) have become my equivalent of Color-aid paper, allowing me to play with color and form in a direct and immediate way. Patience is required during the melting time because the nuts must cool and harden before I can pour their "bodies" to prevent bleeding. Still, these delays are minimal compared with the processing time involved in most printmaking media.

Casting begins with skinning crayon labels, sorting the colors into like piles and then choosing colors to melt first. Once they melt to a temperature hopefully hot enough to bond nut to body but not hot enough to warp the plastic molds, I direct some of the thin colored liquid into the recessed nut forms. Though ultimately the crayon bars cast next to one another get separated in the fray, I feel compelled to fill the nuts in each of the five bars in the mold with different color combinations. I usually make the nuts all one color and the body another, but sometimes desire for variety or running out of hot wax of a certain color dictates the alternation of color within a nut formation, or even a two-toned crayon bar body, but this is rare. More commonly, the nuts are all one color and the body another. I tend to like combinations that are variants on the same color, like pink nuts with a red bar, or mint green nuts with a dark green bar, though just about any color seems to go well in this context. Sometimes I go low contrast, with the extreme being nuts and body of the same color, which I have only done a few times since the real delight is in getting the combinations to work. Other times I go high key and high contrast.

Are you attempting to evoke particular feelings in your audience?

Interesting question. I can give you a long list of thoughts I want my viewers to have, but I can't really anticipate how those thoughts are going to make them feel. For instance, with *Sticky Situations* (Fig. 7), I wanted to evoke the experience that a Lilliputian might have upon encountering a wall of standard-sized Post-It notes.



5. *Crayon Bars in process*
Image courtesy of the artist



6. *Crayon Bars*
2011
100% post-consumer crayons
Image courtesy of the artist

They are reproduced faithfully in terms of color of paper and hand-writing, but I took liberties by increasing the scale by about 400% The individual prints are quite colorful, rather like Easter eggs. Many seem (and even are) light-hearted.

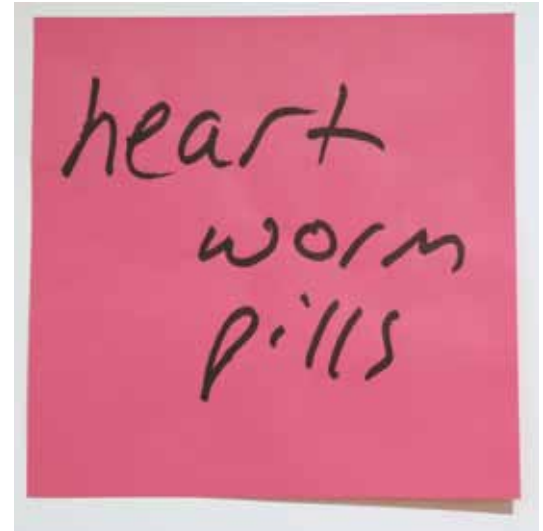
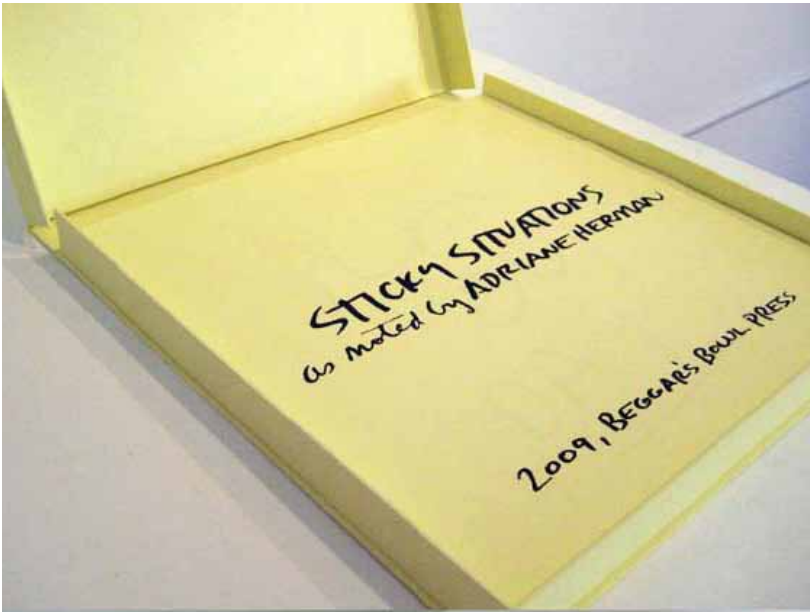
People often laugh and read them aloud, pointing things out to one another. I see a lot of laughing when people look at/read my work. Some people feel happy and delighted when they see the *Sticky Situations* portfolio, while others feel overwhelmed and disheartened. Others probably feel initially buoyed by the color and then a slightly unsettling feeling takes root upon reading some of the more potentially ominous notes like “NOT WORKING.” This [note] was taken originally from a faulty parking meter, but in the current economy this obviously packs a punch for many people beyond that which accompanies the risk of receiving a parking ticket. The color of the original note and the resultant print—safety or “construction” orange—further reinforces some of that irony or perhaps even serves as a taunt.

On the other hand, you could say that I’m trying to evoke compassion or empathy between the viewer and the real or imagined writer. By collecting and reflecting what strangers deal with on a day to day basis ranging from picking up a few things at the grocery store to figuring out who rides in the limo behind the hearse, I guess you could say I myself am trying on the lives of others and creating opportunities for others to do the same.

With projects like Sticky Situations, Wall of Intention, and Checking It Twice, I assume that color often enters your studio by chance or luck. Once a note, a remnant, a material, a found color is put in your hands, what becomes of it? Does it undergo any processes—physical or conceptual—before it is part of the artwork?

The routes taken by various specimens from the fray of daily life to my collection, and from that archive into the realm of being used in particular artworks vary, yet all are connected by becoming part of a quasi-chaotic, quasi-ordered sea of chance and association and a series of contexts for which I need lists. I often find things on the sidewalk or in empty grocery carts. Sometimes something catches my eye that is tacked or taped to a wall, broken parking meter, or bathroom stall that seems like it’s still in use and actually helping prevent disaster (“Precariously balanced on just two screws”) or disappointment (“No T.P.”). In such instances, I try to replicate the artifact’s shape, color, and hand-writing in addition to faithfully copying the content.

Occasionally, I’ve gone to great pains to purchase materials that allow me to remove and replace original notes and lists. Some of those particularly hard-won items have yet to find their way out of their archival sleeves, but I’ve noticed that in some cases I found other important specimens in the poaching process, such as purchasing some counterfeiting supplies. Once I spotted and fixated on a hand-written sign taped to a building in New York that said “NO G.E.D. CLASSES TONIGHT.” After finding a market where I could purchase both tape and a marker (which I always swear I will carry at all times), I went into a nearby restaurant. I bought some hot and sour soup to justify sitting down at a booth and utilizing the back of the paper placemat. While at the counter placing my order I found a standard yellow sticky Post-It containing a list of common Chinese restaurant menu items (“shrimp with garlic sauce/fried dumplings/chicken + broccoli/pork fried rice/2 sprites”). No longer of use to its writer, this abandoned artifact of a collaborative lunch order vividly evoked cubicles and communal kitchens and thus my days of temp work in New York. I know this is a long, circuitous story, but that list of things that seemed like they could, in the end, result in a high degree of stickiness, ended up being one of 42 sticky notes I carefully simulated in *Sticky Situations*.



8. *Heart Worm Pills* (detail)
Image courtesy of the artist

7. *Sticky Situations*

2009
Portfolio containing 42 silkscreen prints on white Masa paper with relief-printed background colors in clamshell box covered with relief-printed Hoshio paper
Prints: 15 x 15 inches
Box: 15.25 x 15.25 x 1.75
Edition of 22
Publisher: Beggar's Bowl Press, Portland, Maine.
Printers: Adriane Herman, Damir Porobic and Gavin Rouille
Installation at Whitney Artworks, 2009
Image courtesy of the artist and Western Exhibitions

Your work is often large-scale installation in its final form. Of the notes/lists/papers, how do you decide what makes the cut?

I believe you're referring to the installations I have created using lists that I have found, as well as some that have been given to me outright, or bartered for various multiples, such as stickers and temporary tattoos. Early in the process of hanging the large installation of original lists, the content seems primary. I begin with some of my old favorites, and several eye-level clusters begin to grow concurrently and finally concatenate. I want to show both the wide variety in what humans prioritize, commit to, accomplish, and seem to avoid, in addition to revealing commonalities through repetition and juxtaposition. The further I go in the process, the more crucial color variation is and finding a list of just the right size and shape. Spaces are created that require certain forms, and it is very satisfying to find the right one. If I am showing other works generated from individual lists, I try to hang several of those source lists where viewers might recognize them readily and begin looking for other such connections. I also try to point them out to curators, docents, student workers, etc., so they can point them out to others once I am gone.

Juxtaposition dictates elements other than color and shape of paper. Lists that are dense and specific benefit from being placed adjacent to classic single item lists

like "SHRED" written on a fuchsia sticky in all caps and a loopily scripted "return dog food." Along similar lines, I have one unassuming yellow sticky that says only "TRASH" and another rather dirty scrap of graph paper that says "Science." These are analogous in some ways to palate cleansers during fancy meals or rests in orchestral music, and yet from a single item list like "COFFEE" one can extrapolate a lifestyle no less vividly than one can from a mint-green list of over twenty items documenting efforts to stay strong and slim at a party in the face of abundant buffet tables.

The installations of actual lists, alternately titled *Human Doings* and *Wall of Intention* (Fig.12), have grown denser and increasingly colorful since 2007, when I made the first one for a show called *Checking It Twice*. The first installation had some colorful "highlights" here and there [that were] comprised of sticky notes and patterned or imaged stationary, but the bulk of the lists was blue or black writing on white paper. However, the next time I installed I had more lists to choose from, and the installation shifted from a content-forward sampling of my collection installed on the walls leading up a staircase, to a colorful constellation obsessively applied to one wall that I began to think of as a "piece." Thus, I sought out and emphasized the colorful notes and lists to increase the visual interest of the overall installation. While searching them out and setting them aside to use to fill small irregular



9. *Adriane Herman silkscreening Sticky Situations*

Image courtesy of the artist

10. *Sticky Situations prints in the drying rack after flats have been relief printed.*

Image courtesy of the artist

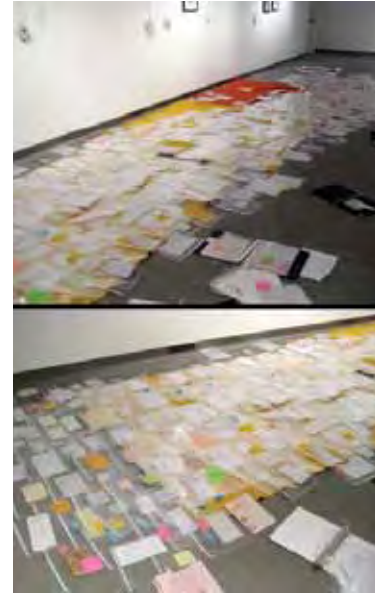


11. *Leoni with List (Weymouth Mercantile)*

2011

Ink-jet print

Image courtesy of the artist



12. *Installation in-progress for Wall of Intention*

Image courtesy of the artist

spaces on the wall of lists, it began to feel like the sticky notes had a higher “point value” than larger white pieces of paper. The yellows were valuable of course, but non-yellow stickies (eg. light and medium blue, fuschia, purple, orange, salmon) are even rarer and more valuable. Some are even die cut in shapes like arrows and stars! When I took that installation down, I remember setting aside all the sticky notes to help me find them later on, akin to how a painter might arrange tubes of paint or organize a palette. When I saw this collection of sticky notes, I started to notice that many of them contained text that pertained to things that were somehow “sticky,” i.e., literally sticky like “gluesticks” or “honey,” or figuratively sticky, like “Call IRS” or “RAW chicken juice.”

If you could write a list on any color, which color would you choose?

There is a deep purple list in my collection that says things like “dollar store” and “cotton balls,” the color of which I particularly love. This list is visible above the handful of candy in *Leoni with List (Weymouth Mercantile)* (Fig. 11). There are few if any other lists of its color in my collection so it stands out. On a mercenary level, I think I might choose that color because I could use more of them when installing, but honestly my own list making process remains rather unselfconscious despite the fact that I am obsessed with the content and composition of other people’s

lists. It is really only before I am just about to toss them into the recycling that it generally occurs to me that yes, I can actually save and even use my own lists, which (I suppose it is somewhat telling to divulge) figure prominently in *Sticky Situations*. However, I also came to notice this spring that I find green and purple a particularly soothing color combination. Thus, I think I would like to have some kind of pre-printed pad of paper that combines those two colors side by side, which would also facilitate my grocery shopping, much of which I can do at the mainstream grocery store, but some of which I need to do at specialty, i.e. “health” food stores and/or the farmer’s market.

JESSICA LABATTE



13. *Bunny*
2008
Archival inkjet print
60 x 50 inches
Image courtesy of
the artist and Golden
Gallery

Jessica Labatte is an artist living and working in Chicago. Her recent solo exhibitions include the 100th UBS 12 x 12 *New Artists/New Work: Jessica Labatte* at Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, NADA Art Fair in Miami Beach with Golden Gallery, *Solo Show: Jessica Labatte* with Humble Arts Foundation in New York, and *Lazy Shadows* at Golden Gallery in Chicago. Recent group exhibitions include *Always the Young Strangers* at Higher Pictures in New York, *Notes on "Notes on Camp,"* at Invisible Exports in New York, *Fact of the Matter*, Poppy Sebire Gallery, London, England, and *P's & Q's* at the Hyde Park Art Center, Chicago, IL. Labatte received her MFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2009.

Think quick! What is your first, or better yet, most vivid memory or experience color?

I only own turquoise chairs.

I ask because when I see and think about your work and its color palettes, a wave of nostalgia comes over me. Interestingly, this nostalgia is varied and complex; the work evokes images and memories that I deem both personal and cultural. How do you select color? Is it specific to your own memories?

My work comes from a desire to be present in the world, to be thoughtful and

aware, and carefully noticing. It is also about the reactivation of color through compositions and assemblages in the studio, which in turn create active formal experiences for the viewer.

All the things that I collect captivate me at some point in my everyday experience. The colors and forms become something that I have to bring to the studio. I am keeping a mental inventory of the objects I accumulate, but I am not engaging with ideas of nostalgia. I don't find nostalgia very interesting. My work is more about appreciating and experiencing color in the moment.

Your body of work is entirely color photography. Is there a particular reason?

I work in color photography because we see in color. My images address faults in our vision and in photographic representations—moments where things may not look quite right upon first glance, so you need to look longer or want to look longer as you appreciate the formal elements.

In each photograph, the line between scale and depth, object and image, reality and illusion is consistently blurred. I've noticed that you often employ synthetic color as a means to this end. You've been quoted to have not created or altered your images using



14. *The Brightness*
 2010
 Archival inkjet print
 59 x 71 inches
 Image courtesy of the artist and
 Golden Gallery

15. *Untitled (Gels #11)*
 2010
 Archival inkjet print
 22 x 23 inches
 Image courtesy of the artist
 and Golden Gallery



Photoshop or any other digital enhancement methods, which makes me curious: how do you balance your color palettes when combining synthetic and natural hues? Do you find synthetic color to be specific to your time and place as an artist?

I am not sure what you mean by synthetic colors. If you are referring to the fact that some of my objects are artificial or made of plastics, yes, those objects are not naturally occurring. However, every color that exists in these objects also exists somewhere in the natural world. Maybe it is not naturally occurring in our everyday urban experience, but the neon oranges of traffic cones are the same oranges of a sunset. The bright pinks of tape and the intense yellows of bouncy balls are to be found in exotic flowers and tropical fish. If you're carefully looking, you will be able to locate all these colors in our surroundings at different times of day and in different intensities.

Very simply, color photographs capture the effects of light rays reflecting off objects, which is a naturally occurring phenomenon. My images are straightforward indexical recordings of these situations.

In much of the work there are references to color charts, color samples and other commercial systems of displaying and selling color. Sometimes it is more obvious with

Untitled (Gels #6) and Untitled (Gels #11) (Fig. 15), while sometimes it is very subtle in The Brightness (Fig. 14), The Situation (Fig. 16), and The Plague. Do you see your work fitting into a tradition of ready-made color?

I am not actively thinking about color charts. That structure is too rigid. I really like working in intuitive and free-form ways. In each composition and from one image to the next, I like to let things unfold. I am interested in the variety of color available in products and objects in our everyday situations and all the possibilities these materials present.

I believe that many powerful and meaningful experiences can be activated by color and that becoming more sensitive to color can be consciousness changing. I think that there is something very interesting about doing this with the set of pre-existing objects in the world.

Final Question: If you could describe your experience of and with color using just one word, what would that word be?

Bright.





16. *The Situation*
2010
Archival inkjet print
60 x 68 inches
Image courtesy of the artist and Golden Gallery

ACADEMY RECORDS

Academy Records is an aegis for live performance, recorded events and printed ephemera. This platform allows working themes to expand and build in multiplicities due to varying forms and delivery strategies. This process produces works that take on a life both immediate and enduring. Academy Records projects are collaborative and inclusive, and many include different kinds of creators, including aural, visual and performing artists, designers, writers and filmmakers. In the past, works have consisted of independently-produced 7-inch records, live broadcast radio plays, 16mm films, performances and installations, and each has contained within them a printed element. Academy Records projects are often of a DIY nature in an effort to open up the experience of collaboration and participation. Therefore, productions purposefully utilize simple means, small economies, readily available resources, and willing participants.

Stephen Lacy is an artist and educator living and working in Chicago. He received his MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2000. His work has been reviewed in publications such as Artforum.com, *Wire magazine*, *New City Chicago*, and the *New Art Examiner*. Lacy exhibits and performs under the name Academy Records and has shown work in solo and group shows at Herron School of Art, the Art Gallery of Knoxville, University of Cincinnati, DePauw University, The Hyde Park Art Center, Linda Warren Gallery and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, among others.

Reflecting on Academy Records' practice—as a collaborative endeavor, as well as an individual film and video maker, sculptor, drawer, performer, musician—how does color move or translate between media?

Dependent upon the project parameters, color sometimes takes a front seat, back seat, or simply operates as a construction mechanism. Due to the interdisciplinary arc of the work, Academy Records tends to use color as a device that provides a focus or honed edge to a given base anchor point. Most projects begin in drawing form. I call them storyboards or overheads, but what they really function as are a concentrated place to focus on movement, time, and space. Color becomes a tool to construct both the temporal and spatial aspects of the coming project. Sometimes the lack of color, or rather the amount of brightness—the introduction of mere black or white—are brought forward. This could also occur when working within a grey scale, using white or brightness as a signifier rather than color.

Does color play a particular role in your performative work?

In the more performative aspects of the work, color provides both a visual and a context. Academy Records, when first conceived, was as a response to a Mod or Pop conceit tied to 1960's-1970's music industry imagery. Orange and white were chosen as *concept* colors. They were to become transient modifiers of 'thought first,' or (in an incredibly coded way, I know) of saying: the thought comes first, the action later. As Academy expanded and developed, there came a point when projects switched from a recorded and represented form to a "you had to be there" vibe. In reference to his white face paint used for the *Rolling Thunder* caravan, Bob Dylan is quoted as having said, "you gotta give 'em something to look at." So, we used color schemes to switch between the studio work, using orange and white for the initial *concept*, and then using red and brown for the live performances or *action* elements of the work. At the time, this worked really well because I was exploring

ideas related to classical division of space and that system's relation to scoring or the division of audio frequencies.

Many of your projects involve participation, collaboration, and complex live productions. The projects then live on as a re-presentation or distributive of that particular event. What is lost and gained between the initial production and the final product?

In terms of what is lost, I suppose everything is lost after the performance. And everything is regained with new clothes in the form of a recorded object. The act of recording the performance and re-distributing it in a new form brings it all back home yet in a much desired altered state. Some projects have attempted to be in two places at once in order to make obvious the fact that perception or understanding is tied to *how*, *where* or *when* the work is experienced. That is tied to a pretty basic sculptural idea—the presence of an object in a space absorbs the content of that space and vice versa, but it pushes the concepts of 'knowing' and 'simultaneity'. These two tenants are intriguing to me due to the problem of relying on forms to tell the audience what is at stake. In essence, simultaneity excludes continuity and cause and effect, throwing off lazy readers by forcing a new headspace. Knowing is, as mentioned above, tied to the perception and reception of what is presented. By utilizing a tool like simultaneity, I'm hopefully pushing the viewer outside of what they already know, and diverting their attention to their presence in a distinct space that is coinciding with yet another distinct space in which they were not originally aware of at first read. The first big experiment with this concept was a live broadcast radio play at the old Hyde Park Art Center for the Whitewalls 25th anniversary exhibition *Fine Words Butter No Cabbage*. Academy Records' piece was entitled *The Weeping Willow and the Burning Flame* (Fig. 18) and was inspired by, or possibly in response to, the JMW Turner painting of classical construction, *The Great Falls of the Reichenbach*. Using the spacial tools in the painting and applying them to a different dramatic form of story construction and sonic environment. A simple non-linear narrative exploring ideas of interior/exterior and personal/private was constructed into a four act play. What the live audience heard was a dramatic reading with foley (live sound effects), musical interludes and voice actors. The performance, mixed live by an engineer, went out over the airwaves as a purely sonic analog of the text and score, connecting foreground space with treble, mid-ground space with mid-range, and background space with bass frequencies.

The drawings and collages are often re-presentations of information too. Yet, many stand alone, connecting but not solely relying on previous happenings. How does drawing inform the live events and time-based productions and vice versa?

I touched briefly on this before, but a bit of clarity might be necessary. Most projects, due to their collaborative and interdisciplinary elements, take a year or two to appear. I use this year in conversation with my collaborators to form the piece, to conceptualize what is at stake, and to reconsider original intentions and let flux inform, but never to guide what is to be realized. The research aspect usually involves drawing, writing and schematizing, allowing a certain level of abstraction to build. These plans are then forwarded and/or discussed. The group aspect of unpacking the work through drawing allows for new ideas to emerge and for the project to move forward. Often times what we end up with is not what we originally intended. It becomes a leaner, meaner, more vicious animal.



Final question. In terms of color usage throughout the history of time-based works, what piece comes to mind and why?

Right now, I would say the film *Pierrot Le Fou* for Jean Luc Godard's use of color fields and, to a lesser degree, mise en scène within the confines of his narrative. At times, the entire scene is bathed in light filtering in through the RGB spectrum, and thus flattening out the space of the scene. At another point, he uses gels on the lights to simulate a car moving through a city. The lights are obviously held off camera and arced over the scene to simulate a speeding car. This spatial and temporal application of light is at odds with the color field baths used earlier in the film. The de-centered use of color to flatten and build space is really interesting, especially in the context of a gangster love story like *Pierrot Le Fou*. However, if you asked me this question every day I might give you a different answer.

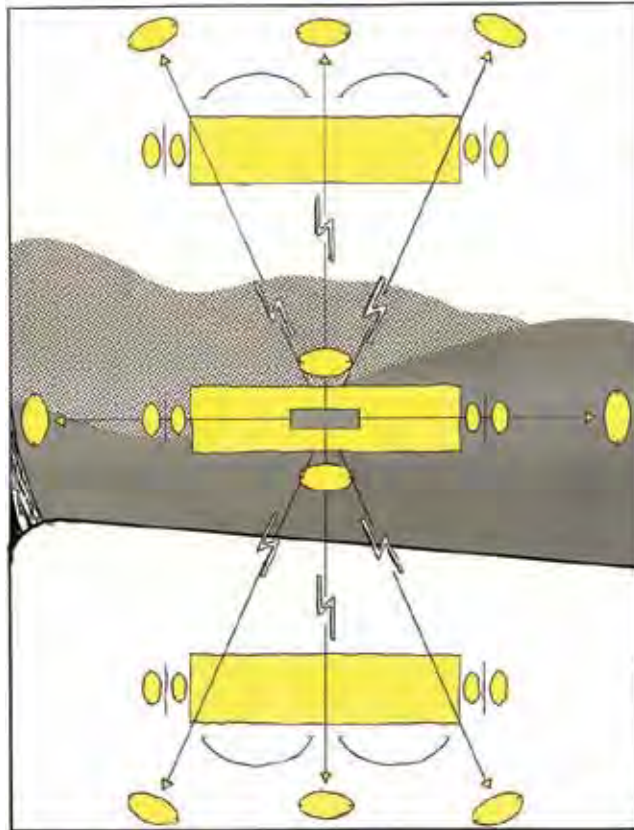
17. *Self-titled*

2009

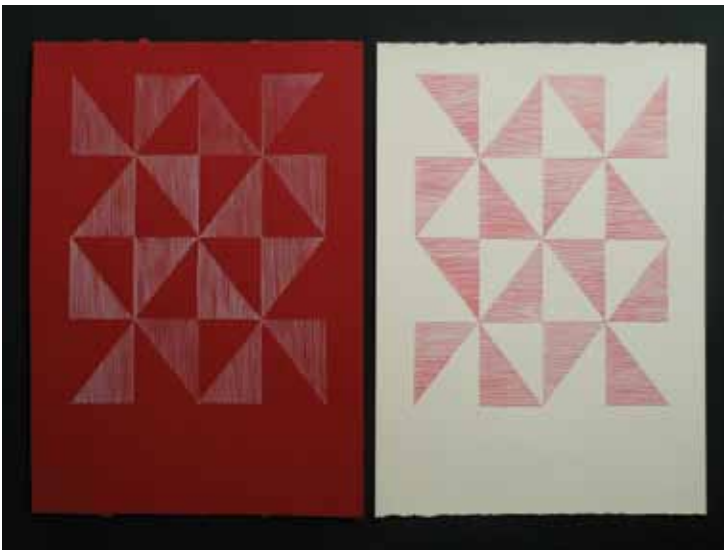
Parade banner

10 x 15 feet

Image courtesy of the artist



18. *Score: Weeping Willow and the Burning Flame*
 2003
 Ink on paper
 17 x 11 inches
 Image courtesy of the artist



19. *A Constant Struggle*
 2008
 Ink on paper
 13 x 25 inches
 Image courtesy of the artist



20. *Color Study: Subdued Action*
 2008
 Acrylic and paper on board
 7 x 14 inches
 Image courtesy of the artist



21. *Wires*
2010
Lighting design and stage for performance
8 x 8 x 8 feet
Image courtesy of the artist

SUSAN GILES

22. *Notre-Dame and
Neuschwanstein Castle*
2009
Paper
15.5 x 8 x 15 inches
Image courtesy of the
artist



Susan Giles is an artist living and working in Chicago. She works in sculpture and video. She has a MA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a MFA from Northwestern University. Giles' work has shown at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, The Renaissance Society in Chicago, Santa Monica Museum of Art in California, and Kunsthalle Goeppingen in Germany, among others. She has received several grants, including a 2009 Illinois Arts Council Fellowship Award for Visual Arts, a 2005 Louis Comfort Tiffany Award and a 1998 Fulbright Grant to Indonesia to conduct research on the intersection of tourism and culture in Bali.

Your primary medium is sculpture with an emphasis on architectural structures, while common working themes for you are travel, tourism and culture. How do medium and themes connect within your work?

Actually, I consider video as well as sculpture to be my primary mediums. Video is important to me because there are some ideas about language and how it

shapes our thinking about place that simply cannot be explored in a static form like sculpture. One reason sculpture is relevant to the theme of travel, tourism and culture is because it results in a tangible object. As tourists, when we take pictures or buy souvenirs, we are attempting to make something ephemeral—an experience—tangible so that we can hold on to it. These objects always turn out to be inadequate in many ways, and it is this failure that forms the foundation of the sculpture in the *Color: Fully Engaged* exhibition.

In terms of tourism and place, does color matter?

Color is one of the main clichés of tourism. Every beach is depicted as having aqua blue water and white sand, and rice paddies are always lush green, but in reality these places are full of interesting, ugly colors too.

In your research and travels, can you recall an especially unique instance of color informing culture or vice versa?



23. *Buildings and Gestures* (detail of video
inside of sculpture)

2010

HD Video

Total Run Time: 2 minutes

Image courtesy of the artist



24. *Guanajuato, Mexico*

Image by and courtesy of the artist

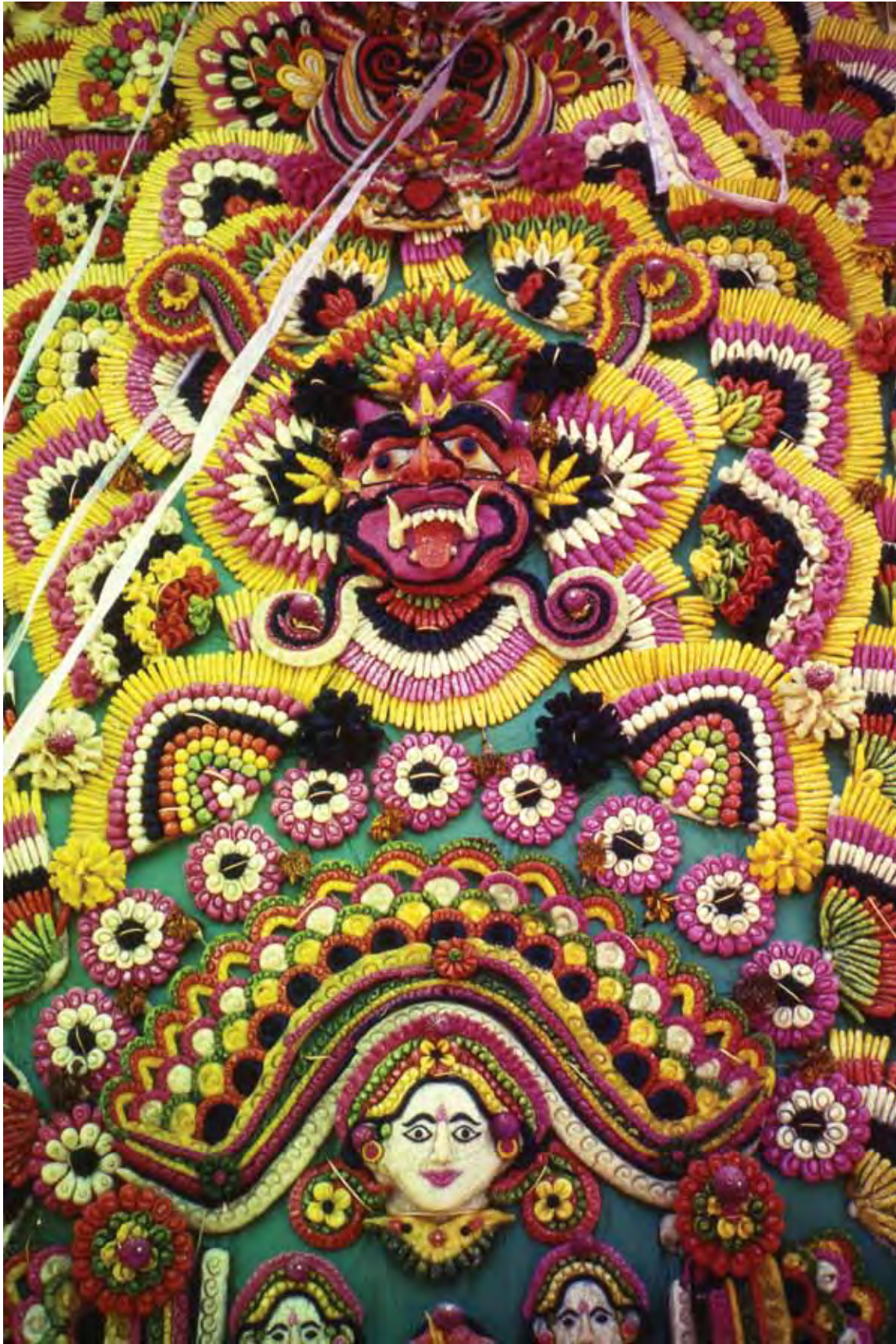
When I was living in Bali, Indonesia and doing research on offerings, I was struck by the way the Balinese were adapting to contemporary culture by incorporating new ingredients into these traditional religious objects. There were neon-hued, artificially colored cakes that were made to be part of a larger offering of fruits, rice, incense and elaborately constructed palm leaf containers. For a twice-yearly ceremony, they were using Coca-Cola for its deep brown color, along with traditional foods, such as coconut milk and rice. Of course, this is not really a new practice for the Balinese. Hinduism came to Bali from India along the Silk Road more than a thousand years ago, and they developed their own, unique version of the religion. Now they are inundated with tourists, and they continue their long history of maintaining their cultural integrity while incorporating outside influences. Still, it was interesting to see how the offerings, such a colorful manifestation of religion, can become even more colorful with our junk food.

For the sculptures presented as part of the Color: Fully Engaged exhibition, how have you selected color? Is it specific to your own memories, or does color in your work connect more with a cultural reference point?

The pieces in this show are part of a series where I wanted the individual iconic buildings to be identifiable even when spliced together with other buildings. I chose to represent each building with a single color and to splice it with contrasting colors to emphasize the juxtaposition of forms. I was also interested in how the color seemed to flatten the form and make it like a place-holder for the original.

Final Question: If you could describe your experience of and with color using just one word, what would that word be?

Intimidating.



25. Offerings, Bali, Indonesia

Image by and courtesy of the artist



26. *Taj Mahal and Sydney Opera House*

2008

Paper

17.5 x 19 x 8.5 inches

Image courtesy of the artist

NATHANIEL ROBINSON

27. *Open Face*

2009

Pigmented polyurethane resin

.75 x 6.25 x 5 inches

Image courtesy of the artist



Nathaniel Robinson is an artist living and working in New York City. He works in several media, primarily three-dimensional. He has undertaken solo exhibitions nationally and internationally, such as *UBS 12 x 12 New Artists/New Work: Nathaniel Robinson* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; *de facto*, Devening Projects, Chicago; *Civil Twilight*, Twig Gallery, Brussels and Feature Inc, New York. He has additionally participated in a number of group shows. Robinson received an MFA in painting at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he was a Jacob Javits fellow.

Your work is primarily three-dimensional. However, you have previously worked as a painter. Does working with color differ between mediums?

That's complicated since there are so many kinds of painting and kinds of sculpture, and so many approaches to color in each. There's also a great deal of overlap between painting and sculpture, and much of my work is in that area. For example, in several of the cast flattish sculptures, especially *Open Face* (Fig. 27) and the glove sculptures, I was thinking a little about shaped monochrome paintings—Ellsworth Kelly's for instance. Of course, the ways in which the sculptures differ

from such paintings far outweigh the similarities. They give a role to 'flat pattern,' but the identity of the object and the fine-grained surface structure are equally present. These things would seem to pull in different directions.

The kind of painting I started with, and have often gone back to, is painting from observation, particularly the landscape. I had a great painting teacher in college, Robert Sweeney, whose practically applied ideas about representation, abstraction, perception and observation are still kind of an ideal for me. Color in this kind of painting is very much relational; those relationships follow from the light conditions you're observing, and you try to set up a parallel logic in the painting. You try to forget about the idea that objects have intrinsic color at all, and instead focus your attention on your own visual perception. Because of that, I still think a lot about how the color of the sculpture will work in different environments, although that is often out of my control.

When I began doing three-dimensional work, I initially kept color pretty much out of it. I thought there needed to be a strict logic to my choices, and I was worried

28. *Distribution* (detail)

2010

Tinted polyurethane resin

Approximately 2,700 parts; .03125 x 1.625 x .5" each; overall dimensions variable

Image courtesy of the artist



about the indeterminacy involved in the perception and interpretation of color. In the last few years, I've been bringing color back, and I don't expect to have fully articulable reasons for it. It isn't arbitrary, but it is a degree of freedom. Looking at the work of Richard Rezac has been influential in this respect (and many others).

You often work with polyurethane resin. In terms of color, what is unique about this material?

The main thing is that the colorant is mixed directly into the material before it is poured into the mold, rather than being laid over the surface. [Therefore,] the structure of the object is not altered the way it would be with a coating such as paint. For many things this might not matter much, but I'm often trying to retain the surface characteristics of the original as much as possible—down to the texture of paper, for example. Of course, you can also mix colorant into plaster, cement, and other casting materials—and I do that sometimes—but it is difficult to get the same saturation and evenness. Polyurethane can take on the surface qualities of the

mold completely, and has no visible grain of its own, so in a way its most important qualities are its non-qualities.

Ken Johnson wrote that you are a "... creator of subtle, trompe l'oeil sculpture," implying that you are a master of deception. Considering that your work often duplicates found environments and objects, color selection likely reinforces the work's illusiveness. However, in pieces here and there you really mix it up—No More Choices (Fig. 29), Other (Fig. 30), Untitled (pancake stacks), Open Face, etc.—by employing non-traditional color (to the original object.) Why the color-change? Does the color-change at hand dramatically alter the work's content?

You're right, in some of my sculptures the coloration seems natural for the original source and in others it does not. Generally, those that are based most directly on a real original are the ones that end up with incongruous color. The sculptures you mentioned are cast in very fine detail mostly from found objects; the outer form of the original has been duplicated with great fidelity, while its materiality has been substituted entirely, which is reinforced by the color. In a way, every molecule of the



29. *No More Choices*
 2011
 Polyurethane, acrylic paint
 Four parts
 .5 x 24 x 16 inches overall
 Image by Philippe D. Photography



surface is contradicting itself. I think the choice of color does alter the content, but as I mentioned above it isn't a didactic choice—[it is] more a matter of happens to like, not should.

Color often conveys meaning through the conventions of language and cultural references. Anecdote of the Jar (Fig. 31) references a poem by the same name written in the early twentieth century by Wallace Stevens. Interestingly, the poem and your sculpture both allude to the ready-made tradition of John Keat's poetical work "Ode to a Grecian Urn" and Marcel Duchamp's trompe l'oeil sculpture Fountain. In combination with the art and literary histories presented, what is the significance of the color palette used for Anecdote of the Jar?

I don't expect literary references in titles to play a central role in people's understanding of works of art—which is convenient for me because I'm sure I miss most of them myself. For me to title a sculpture that way, the words themselves have to work as a title and contribute to the sculpture even if nobody ever knows their source; in case someone does know the source it should add a substantial extra dimension for them. I hadn't thought about "Ode to a Grecian Urn," but I did think about how Stevens' poem incorporates the ready-made. Stevens used it as an incredible fulcrum to move vast swaths of meaning around; for better or worse, we don't seem to have that kind of leverage anymore.

To get to your question—the color situation in the sculpture reverses that of the poem. In the poem, the jar is "gray and bare" and the surrounding landscape is presumably full of color (especially green), although it is not described explicitly.

The object that plays the role of the jar in the sculpture is the bottom of a broken bottle with some sand, water, and a leaf inside, and the small landscape that surrounds it is a gray monochrome, including the disembodied mouth of the same bottle. In the poem, the "slovenly wilderness" surrounds the jar; in the sculpture, the wilderness is also inside the jar, and the jar itself is a piece of detritus in another kind of slovenly wilderness. I don't want to over-explain, so I'll just say finally that all this has more to do with asymmetry than equivalence (in the poem, in the sculpture, between the poem and the sculpture). And that I think reference shouldn't be an end in itself, but a means to something open-ended, which you might call comparison.

By the way, the internet mentioned in passing that [a wide-mouthed canning jar] might have been the kind of jar Stevens was thinking of, which certainly strengthens the connection to the ready-made.

Final Question: What is your most vivid experience or memory of color outside of the studio?

Dogwood tree blossoms lit by orange sodium vapor streetlights against the sky, which was that buzzing deep blue that sometimes happens after sunset.



30. *Other*
2010
Pigmented polyurethane resin
1.375 x 8 x 3.75 inches
Image courtesy of the artist



31. *Anecdote of the Jar (detail)*
2011
Polyurethane, acrylic paint, glass,
stones, pistachio nut shell, water
4 x 23 x 23 inches
Image courtesy of the artist

COLOR IN THE STUDIO: ANNA KUNZ

32. *Swan Attack*

2011

Wall painting, paintings latex on
canvas and scrim

14 x 21 x 3 feet

Image courtesy of the artist



Anna Kunz is an artist and educator living and working in Chicago and New York City. She makes paintings, sculptures, installations and projects that seep out of the rectangle. Her work has been included in numerous national and international collections and has been exhibited in Chicago Los Angeles, Houston, Brooklyn, San Antonio as well as the UK and Poland. Recent exhibitions include *Quarterly Site #4: Registers* at LVL3 gallery, Chicago; *Ai Wei Wei Exhibition/Fundraiser* at White Box, New York City, *Portable Caves* at HKJB, New York City and *Chain Letter* at Samson Projects, Boston. Kunz has also created large-scale projects for the Chicago Public Library, Merce Cunningham Dance Company, New York City and the Smart Museum at University of Chicago, Chicago. Since September 2010, she has been a resident artist in the Marie Walsh Sharpe Studio Program in New York City.

Even with new forms of art, an artist is not working in isolation. There is often an awareness of the cumulative experience. How is color part of your experience, and what criteria do you use to decide what colors come into the work?

Well, like most artists, I'm very aware of my surroundings—yet I'm selectively aware. I'm hyper-sensitive towards color palettes that incorporate everything [Josef Albers discussed. [He] talked about palettes in terms of the formal color relationships, and the idea that there is no true color as its reading depends on its context. I like to think of that paralleling idea that there is no one personality. Each person is in relation to another. I love to think of color seeping into ideas related to the social

and the philosophical. I'm usually noticing colors that are man-made grinding and creating dissonance with those that are more natural. An example—a highlighter-yellow color peeking out from the middle of a pile of browns and grays and burnt reds. And right now, I'm thinking of trash that's unfortunately yet beautifully hiding in a big pile of leaves. Those are mini-narratives that color creates and that play out in my mind, and then often show up in my work. Like this bucket of studio-time leftovers: I've got blue water, some nasty leftover paint tubs of purple and dark blue, and some of my best paint brushes with colored handles (Fig. 35) that I see every day. Its little scenarios like this that can inspire some of the best work. Like John Cage reminds us, the important space is in between the notes... things come together by chance, but they have a logic. It's interesting to figure out why some colors work the way they do together.

And then, in a less abstract process, I often siphon the colors through a swatch process, using Pantone technology. Basically that entails paralleling colors from nature and the man-made world with those in my handy Pantone swatch book. Then, usually most often for the installation and other large works, once I've figured it all out, I take these swatches down to the Home Depot guys and they mix away at them. It's a really exciting process because these Home Depot paint mixers are usually mixing prefab colors from Martha Stewart or Ralph Lauren's bedroom line or seasonal home decor collection. I love that they see me coming, and they just know I've got some intense, extraordinary colors for them to think about. That's



33. *Studio view on June 7, 2011*

Works in progress

Image courtesy of the artist



35. *Studio view on November 12, 2010*

Image courtesy of the artist and Jamilee Polson Lacy



34. *Untitled*

2011

Wall painting, painting latex on canvas and scrim

Two parts; 14 x 21 x3 feet

Image courtesy of the artist

another aspect of the decision-making process that is so personal yet performative in its routine. It's just another way color moves people.

Reflecting on your practice—as a painter, installation artist, sculptor—how does color move or translate between media?

In my work, color is not secondary. It is not an adjective. I do not color things. Instead, I begin with color—often a single hue that I've become enthralled with from my experience in the world. Experiences like those we just talked about. I believe color to be the thread that connects the work. I use it as a framing device in many cases, and I use it as a gesture that moves outward toward the viewer. I start with the color and build around it and its characteristics. Rather than making paintings or sculptures or installations of certain colors, I make pieces that are colors that have been sculpted or painted or installed. I start with the color and build around it as if it were my thesis statement, so that when I bring a color into my studio for the first time it is analogous with bringing a single word to the page. That single word is then what I would build my poem around. That single color is what I build a piece around; that single color as an entity becomes the beginning of a poem; the work is the whole of its poetry.

Poetry, that is an interesting way to think about painting especially. How one builds a story or situation, whether or not that is a linear narrative or not, using color/words. This

makes me think of Kandinsky and his writings on color and spirituality; he actually discusses colors as the building blocks of our individual experiences and connection to the ethereal. Do you see a crucial link between color and the spiritual as Kandinsky did?

A big yes and a big no. Kandinsky was a strange guy. He lived and breathed the magic of color. And that's just it. I am a firm believer in the magic of color; it's ability to transcend objects and create atmosphere, aura and illusions. However, I also believe that color is complex science that has traveled through history and cultures and countless inferences. In my work, I play with those inferences, but I am always aware and considering the science of color—the inherent properties of a color, its wave lengths, and how those wave lengths interact or react with another color's wave lengths and historical trajectories. So yes, like Kandinsky, I believe that color has an inherent quality that is spiritual, or in a better term for me because all the kids are saying it: "fantastical." But unlike Kandinsky, I think that color can be manipulated using both science and subjectivity and that color is more powerful when it is treated as something of this world, of our time, and our place. I believe that color is very much an idea and a reality of specificity. Cultural moments have specific color associations, and for example, any technological advancement of anytime period has been manifested in the way painting looks. The Pre-Raphaelites were given the convenience of tube paints, transportable color, and the works are more vivid; they became starkly contrasting. And what



36. *Floating Frescos*
 2009
 Digital Photograph of floating fresco,
 foam covered with fresco on water
 14 x 17 inches
 Image courtesy of the artist



37. *2nd Ave*
 2011
 Site-specific installation, mixed media: wall painting, oil
 on panel, latex on paper, latex on scrim
 14 x 28 x 6 feet
 Image courtesy of the artist

about artists today? What are we given, and how are we using it? I'm thinking about that stuff now.

The color combinations in your work are complex. At times, they are recognizable, but often they are truly unique. Do these combinations take time to develop, or do they come to you instantly?

I spend a lot of time studying the light and after-image effects of color, as well as the relationship between color and time, and color and space. I like to work intuitively, adding and subtracting color from there in an attempt to work in a more poetic, unexpected way. There is also a possibility that an artist's use of color can become so present in a work, that it feels physical, like a body in space. The color I'm interested in lately is more related to almost semaphore color, which can trigger interesting after-images, and a sense of heightened awareness, or, to my way of thinking about it, it gestures both inwardly and outwardly toward the viewer.

You seem to have a remarkable color memory. Does this take practice?

I do pay very close attention to color and any color's individual characteristics, such as lightness versus darkness, brightness versus dullness, opacity, transparency, temperature and weight amongst many colors. I do this exercise with my color classes that I call "color recall." It is a game that asks one to recall a color experience and describe the exact color that is the basis of the memory. Since we read everything through color, we take it for granted. This exercise helps us to see color more closely. Once you start paying close attention to the nuances of color in atmosphere, architecture and other places, it's hard to shut that off, and you develop a much wider sensory understanding of color.

There is a shift in the palette of your work after about 2003, to colors of "fantastical," almost violent intensity. How do you account for this shift in your work?

To be honest, I can't say precisely. However, I am sure of one thing: that color and its existence in the world is always shifting. Like we earlier discussed, color of the natural world is always arguing with color that we humans make up in our laboratories and studios. I'm constantly considering and reconsidering the things said in that argument. And like many arguments, it is an ongoing and evolving one.



38. *Painting Shroud*

2011

Wall painting and scrim: latex on wall
and scrim, latex on paper (floor)

14 x 18 x 2 feet

Image courtesy of the artist

I guess that the color and the scenarios that I'm building with them are becoming louder, angrier and less realistically inclined. And, like you have noticed, the world and the things my eyes are pinpointing have changed and have shifted my palette.

Speaking of the eyes pinpointing and reacting to color, in the installation work, there is a dramatic opticality. It's almost as if you're getting a dual image and you have to blink to clear up, to get back to a focused vision so that you can look at the second panel of the piece. What were you playing with there?

Oh, good. I'm glad you're noticing that. It's important to me that the color is experienced rather than just looked at. The palette that creates that after-image usually has an extremely dynamic interplay of light and darks. And a color palette of that intensity often has a reflection and a glow that can transform the viewer's space as well as the way the light enters their eye. So, the result is that the viewer's entire body is enveloped, and they begin experiencing color holistically. That is, I think, what Kandinsky might have been looking for...

If there is a particular one, could you describe a vivid experience or memory you have of color?



39. *Thisbe + Pyramus*

2010

Site-specific installation: Wall painting and scrim: latex
on wall and scrim

14 x 17.5 x 11 feet

Image courtesy of LVL3 gallery

I vividly remember Mark Rothko's *Untitled* painting in the [Art Institute of Chicago] collection. My father worked at the Art Institute in the 1970's, and sometimes, I would have to go with him to work. While he was in meetings, I would sit with a security guard named Lundell who would stand at the Rothko. When I first spent time with the painting, I felt an almost sense of horror; I didn't understand how it could be a painting. It felt to me as if it was part of the atmosphere. It shocked me, and I was seduced by color from then on.

Another one, because I like this question: after spending the last year here in [New York City], I have become more aware of lightness and darkness. I've spent so much time under the ground getting places [that] it's always great to come up from the subway and see light. Near the 2nd Avenue stop, there is a wonderful, cluttered shop called Goyal's. He has been selling colorful, imported Indian goods in the East Village for many years. I am always delighted to see the lights of his shop illuminating all the silks and chiffon fabrics that hang in his window. The palette is heavenly—flesh tones mixed with blinding lemon yellows, golds, blood reds, hot pinks and minty greens. You can see how it inspired the palette in my most recent video work.

JEANNE DUNNING



40. *The Edible 1*
1997
Cibachrome mounted to plexiglass and frame
26 x 32 inches
Image courtesy of the artist and Donald Young Gallery



41. *Red Edge with Food*
1996
Cibachrome mounted to plexiglass and frame
18.5 x 17 inches
Image courtesy of the artist and Donald Young Gallery



42. *Untitled Hole*
1992
Cibachrome mounted to plexiglass and frame
39.5 x 38 inches
Image courtesy of the artist and Donald Young Gallery

Jeanne Dunning is an artist and educator living and working in Chicago. Her photographic, sculptural and video work explores our relationship to our own physicality, often looking at the strange and unfamiliar in the body, gender and notions of normality. Dunning's work has been shown extensively throughout the United States and Europe since the mid-1980s. It has been included in the Whitney Biennial in 1991, the Venice Biennale in 1995, and the Sydney Biennale in 1996. She has had one person shows at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington D.C., the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, and the Konstmuseet in Malmö, Sweden, and she completed a web-based work for the Dia Center for the Arts in New York in 2002. A selective survey of her work opened at the Berkeley Art Museum in January of 2006 and traveled to the Cultural Center in Chicago. Her most recent work was shown at Donald Young Gallery in Chicago in 2011.

With the exception of a few black and white pieces, your photographic work is mostly color. Is there any particular reason?

I started using photography (this was back in the late 80s, of course) partly because it seemed like people had a less rarified relationship with photographs than with more traditional mediums that had much longer histories. Because snapshots and advertising were part of people's everyday experience, it seemed easier to create a situation where people reacted to the images rather than to art with a capital A. Having the photographs in color was an important part of that—it

made them more everyday and therefore maybe less squarely Art. You're right; those black and white pieces are exceptions. In those pieces I was specifically trying to make a connection between them and the history of fine art photography, which is why they are black and white, and why they are traditionally matted and framed—something that is also very rare with my color work.

We have talked before about the ambiguous and illusory qualities of the images you create. What do these qualities signify? Does color have anything to do with these ambiguities?

In a lot of my work—not so much the work that's included in this show, but in a lot of it—you can make a pretty good guess about what you're looking at but you're still not absolutely certain, and at the same time whatever it is looks like and reminds you of and makes you think about all sorts of things that are much more suggestive and provocative than what it really is. I think that ambiguity, the never really being sure, is a big part of what maintains the tension and keeps you thinking, and keeps the contradictions and ambiguities alive in the work. I don't know whether color plays a big role in the ambiguity *per se*, but I've certainly used color to up the ante, so to speak, and push the associations.

One of the reasons I have selected your work for the Color: Fully Engaged exhibition is because it seems important in conveying the functions, feelings and existence of the human body. Is this an accurate evaluation of your work's use of color?



43. *Field*
 2005
 Fuji Crystal Archive C-prints and frames
 8 feet 3 inches x 21 feet 3 inches
 Image courtesy of the artist and Donald Young Gallery

Certain colors have really strong bodily associations—with blood and the body's insides, with bodily fluids, with skin, etc. I've often used color to try to trigger those associations. Color's great that way—people have such strong, immediate reactions to it, and yet it still remains inexplicit.

Life and the living are inherent themes of still-lives and portraiture. However, in your most recent vanitas-inspired photographs, gray mold is eating away at the colorful foodstuffs; death has arrived, and it is sucking out the color of life. How do these new works continue the tradition of the original vanitas paintings? How do they defy that tradition?

I guess they picture something that is always understood as implied by those paintings—that plenitude has to be enjoyed while you have it and can't be saved for later, that what is good now may not always be good, and that youth will fade, life will end, and we are all mortal even though we can't really understand how that can be. But I think that something else happens when you show the decay and transformation taking place and make it explicit rather than implicit. The mold is so beautiful, even when it is grey. And sometimes it's green and yellow, and it's full of life too. It turns out to be one kind of plenitude taking over another...

When I see the Field photograph (Fig. 43), I start to wonder if the Nile really did turn to blood. With this thought I wonder, is the employment of color in your work fundamentally a matter of history and cultural perception? Is it a psychological choice before it is an aesthetic one?

It's definitely a psychological choice before it's an aesthetic one. (But then I wonder, are we really so sure that all aesthetic choices are not psychological choices in the end?)

Final question. In terms of color throughout art history, what artwork(s) first comes to your mind?

Probably Ad Reinhardt's black paintings, that aren't really black (just like mold isn't really ugly!), or at least they make you realize that there are just as many blacks as there are Eskimo words for different kinds of snow. Which of course makes me think of Robert Ryman's white paintings. Or Rothko. Or a Flavin-filled room of colored light. But if you asked me on another day, I'm sure I'd say something else. Color has such an extraordinary capacity to move us towards overwhelming experience, both sensually and associatively, taking us towards both the sublime and the traumatic... how could artists not want to wallow in it at times? So there are so many incredible works that are all about color...



44 *Still Life with Pomegranates*

2010

Archival pigment print on Hahnemühle paper and frame

29 x 51.5 inches

Image courtesy of the artist and Donald Young Gallery



MATTHEW METZGER



Matthew Metzger is an artist and educator living and working in Chicago. He has had recent solo exhibitions at Tony Wight Gallery, *UBS 12 x 12 New Artists/ New Work: Matthew Metzger* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago and at Arratia, Beer Gallery in Berlin. He attended the Skowhegan School of Sculpture and Painting Residency Program in 2009. Additionally, Metzger is co-editor of the topical magazine *SHIFTER*. He received his MFA from the University of Chicago in 2009.

Do you think color is scary?

Although I of course have no idea what the absence of my life looks like from my own perspective, for the most conventional reasons I have associated it with complete darkness. By that I am speaking of a nameless atmosphere that renders all senses inept. This frightens me for so many reasons. So because color, both as a sign and a thing, is something that can be seen, it remains closely tied to light. Therefore, because darkness is often considered to be the absence of light, when I think of color, I also think of its absence—death. So, yes.

Many of your pieces simultaneously embody faithful believer and myth-buster of color, Can you tell me what you really think—is color fact or fiction? Reality or illusion?

Fact, fiction and illusions all exist in our reality. They are all real. So, I cannot answer in relation to the reality versus illusion question. But regarding fact or fiction, it is said that certain colors, especially reds, are often perceived in over 1400 different ways. This leads me to believe that color is highly subjective. Therefore wouldn't that make color purely fiction? After all, what good would purely subjective facts do us?

Your body of work is very much an investigation; it questions the history and tradition of object and image, frequently focusing on painting and its relationship to discourse. Do you think the history and theory of color is intrinsic to that of painting?

Modern painting, yes. All of painting, no.

With works like National Geographic (Fig. 46), The Dead Man (The Dead Torreador) and Spectrum (Fig. 47), you are working with pre-existing color palettes and compositions. What draws you to these ready-made combinations?

The color “combinations” are not the driving force for my choices of objects, they are simply an aspect or characteristic of the objects.

And what, if any, conclusions have you drawn from working with them?

From working with the color combinations within each object, attempting to precisely match their peculiar tonal shifts as a way to draw attention to their (the objects that retains the color) idiosyncratic qualities, I have realized how immensely nuanced colors are.

Okay, last questions are just for fun. What is your favorite color and why? And your least favorite color?

Favorite... black, for the incredible amount of theoretical contradiction, semantic augmentation, and philosophical elaboration it perpetuates. I don't have a least favorite.



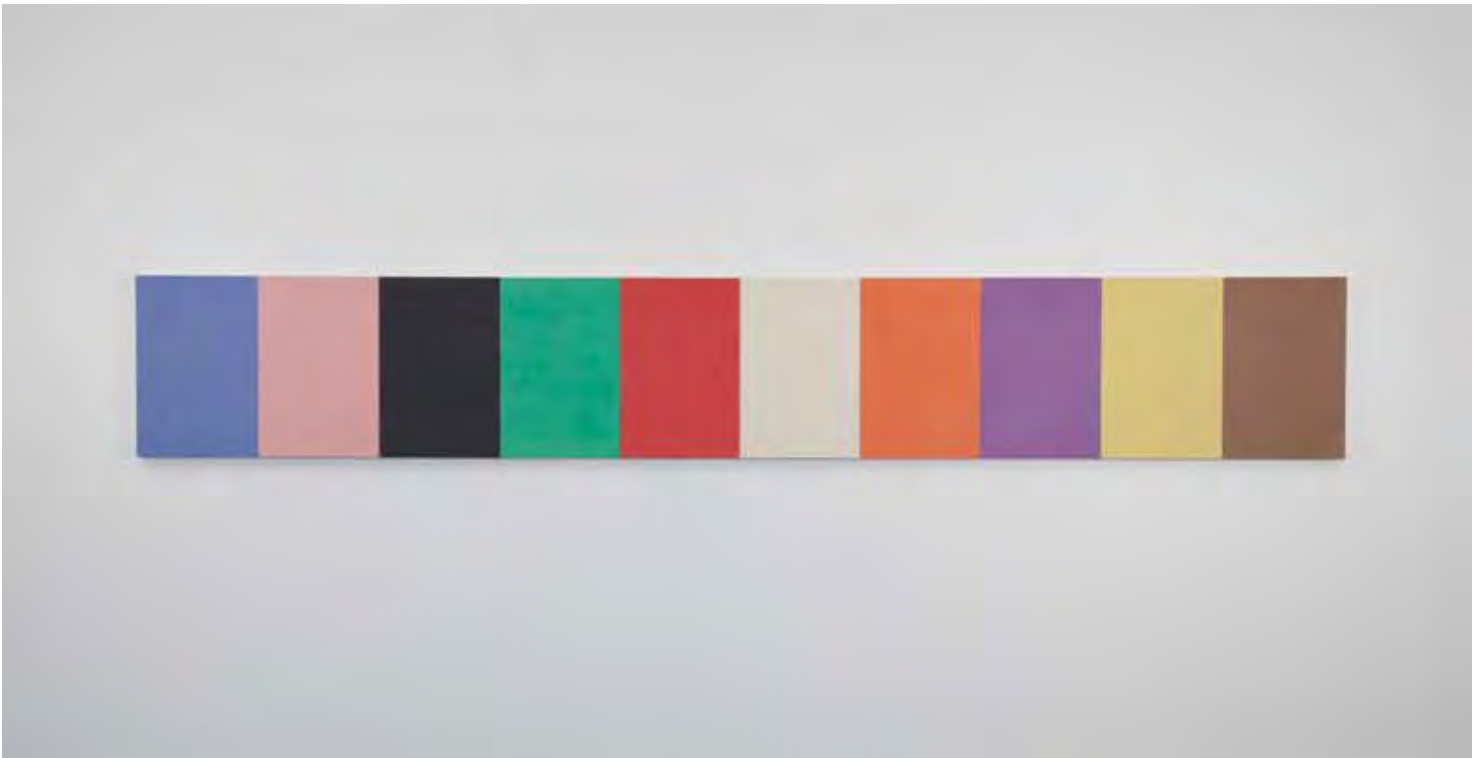
47. *Spectrum*

2011

Oil on MDF panel

17.875 x 118.75 inches

Image courtesy of the artist
and Tony Wight Gallery



45. *Correspondence Between a Formalist
and a Structuralist*

2011

Oil and acrylic on MDF panel

24 x 18 inches

2011

Image courtesy of the artist and
Arratia, Beer Gallery

46. *National Geographic*

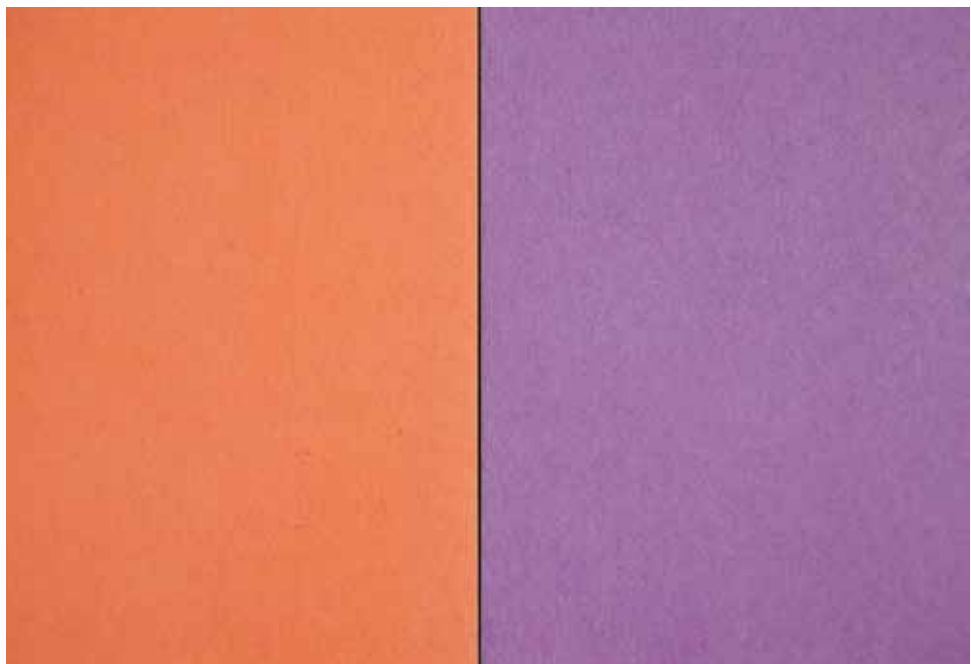
2010

Oil on MDF panel

10 x 7 inches

Image courtesy of the artist
and Tony Wight Gallery

(Opposite page)



48. *Spectrum* (detail)

2011

Oil on MDF panel

17.875 x 118.75 inches

Image courtesy of the artist
and Tony Wight Gallery



49. *Heraldic Marker*

2011

Wood, acrylic paint, mirrored acrylic and wire

68 x 24 x 24 inches

Image courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery

Dan Gunn is an artist, writer and educator living and working in Chicago. In 2010, he had solo exhibition *Multistable Picture Fable* at Lloyd Dobler Gallery in Chicago and was included in the Contemporary Art Council's group exhibition *New Icon* curated by Britton Bertran at Loyola University Museum of Art in Chicago. Recent solo exhibitions include *UBS 12 x 12: Dan Gunn* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago and *Routine Scenic Machine* at Monique Meloche Gallery in Chicago. He received his MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2007.

Dan Gunn also writes about local Chicago art, including the history of alternative and apartment spaces in conjunction with the Hyde Park Art Center's *Artists Run Chicago* exhibition published by Pr and in *Artist Run Digest* from Threewalls and Green Lantern Press. He is a contributor for the Bad at Sports podcast and the Art21 blog and has published articles for Bad at Sports, *Newcity Magazine*, *Proximity Magazine*'s "(con)Temporary Art Guide" and ArtSlant.com.

Does your work come out of a particular time, respond to a particular cultural moment?

I think it comes out of the particularities of my life. So it tends to contain some amount of materials found in the 1980's—broad consumerist references and some middle-American dry humor. The question of response is a much broader one.

The broad cultural moment is fairly confusing and exciting to me actually. There is a multiplicity of viable artistic practices in play, and in my opinion without a clear ethic to guide a choice between them. That makes the broad arc of recent art history hard to push against, so easy reactionary stances against the prior generation are difficult. But generally, I think about trying to find a kind of modernism that

embraces the lessons of minimalism, feminism and post-colonialism. What that might be exactly is not clear. Some things that I've been thinking about are the embrace of all kinds of materiality and marginalized processes from feminism, as well as the celebration of texture, pattern and surface embellishment from pattern and decoration. Also, the Bauhaus's synthesis of distinct cultural practices into total systems. I think the combination of these points of departure could have some promise.

How do you conceptualize the context for color in your work—do you frame it within the materials, a historical reference point, a desired impact?

The strength of color is that it, like all materials/qualities, is transitive. It moves nimbly across categories and creates associations that link disparate contexts. I try not to confine it to "found" color. My objects can be whatever color I choose. But my choices do have a tendency to be in the more historically "natural" category. While I don't believe in that divide, it seems to still operate, especially when my objects are clearly constructions. Also, I use color to unify collections of objects together. I've become more enamored of texture and surface, and in order for those to appear as primary, color needs to recede or at least unify. I think about what a Louise Nevelson work might lose if her works were multi-color.

You use a lot of found materials in your work—fabric, paper, mirror, caning and other non-traditional supplies. Where do you hunt for these, and what attracts you to certain items? Do you generally set off knowing what you're looking for, or do the pieces follow the materials you find?



50. *Trickster Mechanism No. 1*
 2011
 Fabric, wood, acrylic paint, wire and mirrored acrylic
 83 x 42 inches
 Image courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery



51. *Trickster Mechanism No. 3*
 2011
 Plywood, pine slat, fabric, hardware and glitter
 5 x 4 feet
 Image courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche Gallery

I rarely know what I need specifically. I just try to collect things that I'm visually attracted to and keep them around. They rarely fit in exactly where I want them to, but they usually get incorporated unexpectedly somewhere else later on. I seem to stock pile consumer items, rarely junk, mostly purchased outright, especially fabrics in specific colors textures, and items that traffic in the spectacular.

There is often the risk of junk (I use this term loosely and positively) becoming "art" by itself without the artist adding meaning. Does color make the addition of meaning easier or more challenging?

I do think about the difference between "junk" and art. If someone experiences art as junk, in part, it's because the illusion is broken. The system of value or belief can't operate. That's the marvel of the readymade; the fact that Duchamp didn't break it, in fact maybe he couldn't, at least for some. Art is just a quality of attention. Junk in a gallery is art, unless the viewer needs more than the presence of the gallery to justify its existence. And this might be where color could perhaps come in. I don't think about it in that way as much, as "adding" meaning. It's usually something that is already culturally coded in the material that needs to be acted with or against, especially when using a more recognizable substance or object.

While your work isn't representational, installations such as Multistable Picture Fable and Trickster Mechanism #1 (Fig. 50) present qualities of a linear narrative. How do you achieve this level of meaning?

I do think it is representational though. I think in terms of levels of representation. So I like to play with the categories of objects. There are specific formal things that can have metaphorical content. For example, in *Multistable Picture Fable* each section maintains a certain amount of independence but echoes the other parts in the composition, so there is this unity of kinds within a family of difference. Also from that same piece, there are aspects that bring out behaviors that objects elicit in us. There was a wall in the piece as well that had a rectangular hole in it. People inside the piece took on the role of the seller, while people outside the "window," the buyers. This kind of etiquette or habit is in place for those forms. I like thinking about the habit I have as a viewer of different kinds of forms, billboards, computer screens, etc.

Final question. In terms of color throughout art history, what artwork(s) first comes to your mind?

I've been thinking a lot about a strange painting I encountered in the Art Institute of Chicago by a Swiss follower of Mondrian, Fritz Glarner called *Relational Painting No. 82*. In it, all of Mondrian's colors are re-deployed along with the vertical and horizontal rectangles that subtly flex to accommodate the visual impact of the surrounding rectangles. So it's this kind of dance between the parts for harmony that the color participates in as an amplifier. You kind of need to see it to understand.

52. *Childhood House*

2011

Archival digital photograph

16 x 20 inches

Image courtesy of the artist



Liz Nielsen is an artist, curator and educator living and working in New York City. She works in photography and sculpture. Her work has recently been shown at Sullivan galleries and LVL3 gallery in Chicago, and in February, she had a solo exhibition at Shalter gallery in Berlin. Nielsen has been a recipient of Chicago's Community Arts Assistance Program grant and recognized as one of Chicago's breakout artists in *New City*. Nielsen received a MFA from the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Does your work come out of a particular time, respond to a particular cultural moment?

Now. Or now fused with the past or now fused with the future. Many of my images demarcate space in broad sense. I am documenting the past and the future inside the present. I am looking for connections in time and photographing the architectural and the organic structures from the past or hypothetically from the future as if the duration of time that something exists actually imprints or leaves a mark in present space. In a way, it is like a minor architecture.

The color in your work is vibrant and rich, and it often seems to be a primary focus. At what point in your conceptual and/or productive process, does color enter the work?

I use color to highlight mathematical connections that I discover within my environment. I see these connections both physically and meta-physically. By delineating these discoveries, space and time seems to fold.

I embed my concepts by using colored lines, shapes, gradients, filters, spray paint and erasers.

However, the color enters at several points and there is not a constant. Sometimes

I have a preconceived idea of how the color will impose its idea on the environment, and I search for the image. Other times, I take a photograph and apply an idea on top of it in post-production. [I do this] sculpturally, with paint, or digitally.

The photographs you make operate within traditions of photography, drawing and collage. Could you briefly describe how you plan or compose an image?

Quite a bit of my concept is formed by my design/composition. I suppose the goal for me is to place two or more spaces inside of one time [without] using a double exposure or a sandwiched negative. Those spaces could be related to time or simply to vision. If I see a line in space I may move forward with my thought and create another line in space, and another. And those lines, then I add into my image and I am therefore able to manifest my thoughts.

For you, is there a color that is especially loaded in a conceptual sense?

Not particularly, although white is pretty loaded even if it isn't really a color—pigment wise.

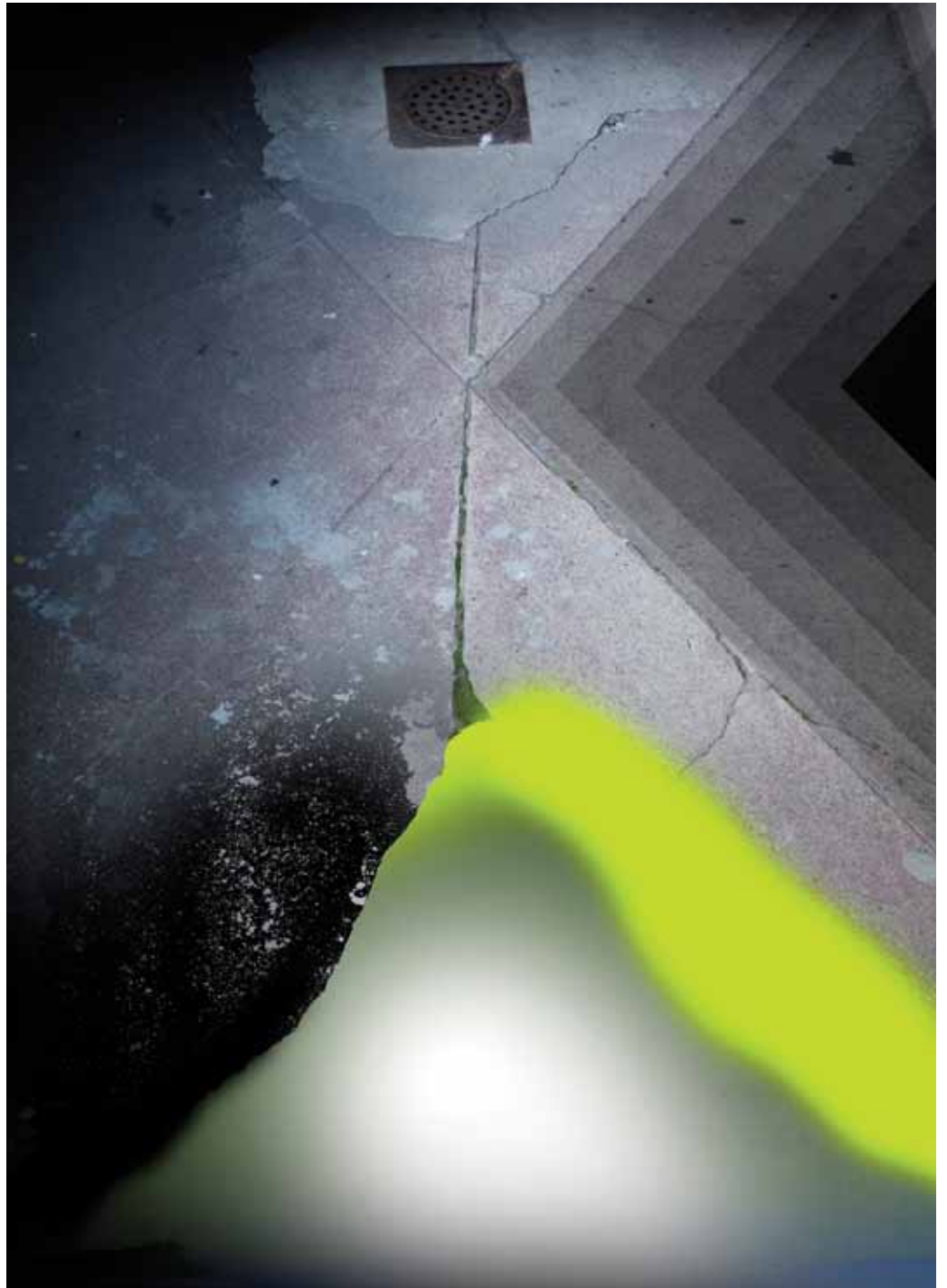
When it comes to colors that I'm drawn to... it is less specific. I'm interested in shades of colors, solid colors and gradients and the way I can use color to manipulate/play with space inside my photographs.

If you could describe your experience of and with color using just one word, what would that word be?

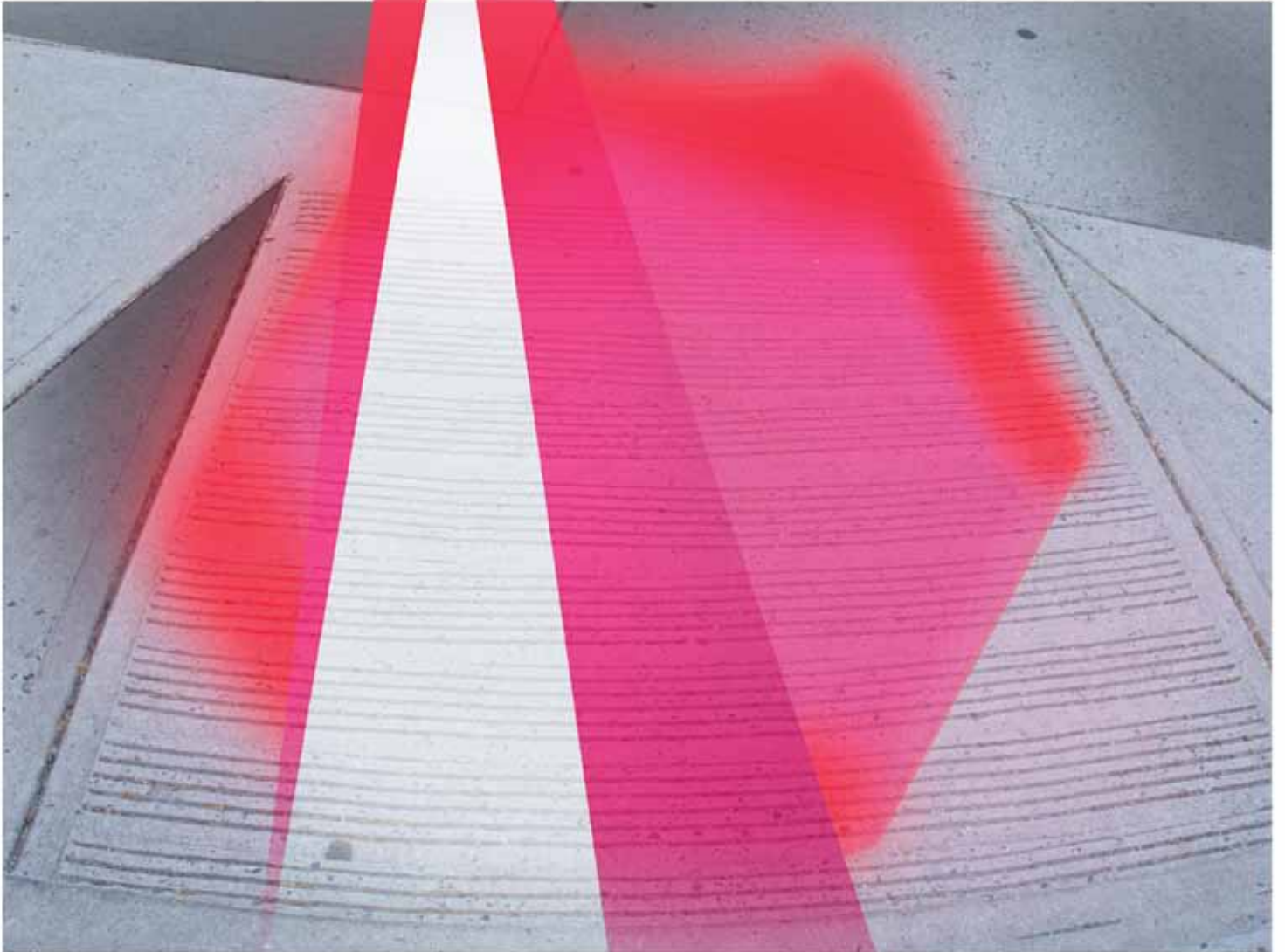
Color-combos! It is hyphenated since it is two words. Hot pink and firey red is my favorite color-combo right now.



53. *Half Atmosphere*
2011
Archival digital photograph
20 x 16 inches
Image courtesy of the artist



54. *Giacometti 2*
2011
Archival digital photograph
20 x 16 inches
Image courtesy of the artist



55. *Stop Walk*

2011

Archival digital photograph

16 x 20 inches

Image courtesy of the artist

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