



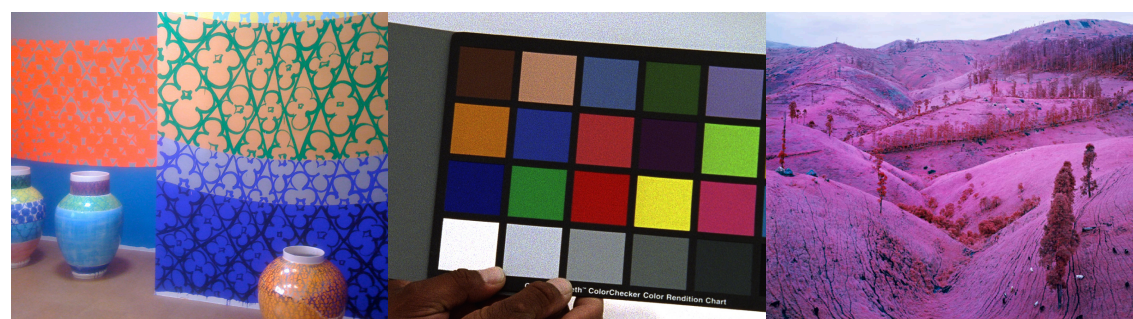
Polly Apfelbaum Ali Bailey John Baldessari Madison Brookshire and Tashi Wada Zachary Buchner



Tyree Callahan Anne Collier Jacob Dahlgren Jose Dávila



Gaylen Gerber Adam Grossi Gary Hill Rashid Johnson Anna Kunz



Judy Ledgerwood Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle Richard Mosse

Spectral Landscape (with Viewing Stations)

Curated by Pamela Fraser and John Neff

April 27 – June 9, 2012

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Images, left to right:

1. Polly Apfelbaum, *Reno*, 2009, fabric, 55 x 15 x 8 in. Courtesy the artist and D'Amelio Gallery; Ali Bailey, *Spectrum*, 2010, rotated magazine advertisement, 15 x 13 in. Courtesy the artist and Andrew Rafacz Gallery; John Baldessari, *Six Colorful Tales: From the Emotional Spectrum (Women)*, 1977, video, 17:10 min. (still). Courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York; Madison Brookshire and Tashi Wada, *Passage*, 2011, double 16mm film projection with sound, 13:00 min. (still). Courtesy the artists; Zachary Buchner, *Untitled (Pink Yellow)*, 2010, plaster, enamel, burlap, and plywood, 72 x 48 in. Courtesy the artist and Andrew Rafacz Gallery.

2. Tyree Callahan, *Chromatic Typewriter*, 2011, mixed media, 34 x 29 x 19 in. Courtesy the artist; Anne Collier, *(Aura) John Baldessari*, 2003, dye-diffusion transfer (Polaroid) print, 4 1/4 x 3 1/2 in. Courtesy the artist and Anton Kern Gallery, New York; Jacob Dahlgren, *Demonstration 14th of June*, 2009, color film with sound, 30:00 min. (still). Courtesy the artist and Galleri Andrehn-Schiptjenko; Jose Dávila, *Untitled*, 2011, ceramic tiles, 20 x 20 in., 15 3/4 x 15 3/4 in., 12 1/4 x 12 1/4 in., 7 3/4 x 7 3/4 in. (installation view, *Ceramica Suro*, Casey Kaplan Gallery). Courtesy the artist and Casey Kaplan Gallery.

3. Gaylen Gerber, *Backdrop*, 2005, background paper, dimensions variable (installation view, Musée Des Beaux-Arts, Dijon, France). Courtesy the artist and Frac-Bourgogne; Adam Grossi, *Call and Response*, 2011, acrylic on wood panel, 48 x 48 in. Courtesy the artist; Gary Hill, *Remarks on Color*, 1994, single-channel video and sound installation: color projector, LaserDisc player, amplifier, and speaker, 43:00 min. Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago; Rashid Johnson, *Cosmic Slop #1*, 2008, wax and black soap on board, 30 x 20 in. Courtesy Dan Berger; Anna Kunz, *the day*, 2011, latex on scrim, 164 x 240 x 60 in. Courtesy the artist.

4. Judy Ledgerwood, *One Voice*, 2010, tempera and ceramic (installation view, 1301PE, Los Angeles). Courtesy the artist and Rhona Hoffman Gallery; Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle, *Guerrero Negro*, 2008, super 16mm film digitized to HD video, loop (still). Courtesy the artist and Donald Young Gallery, Chicago; Richard Mosse, *Taking Tiger Mountain*, 2011, digital C-print, 74 x 92 in. Collection Nick Cave. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

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Design by Tahira Merchant in consultation with John Neff
 Cover: Richard Mosse, *Taking Tiger Mountain*, 2011, digital C-print, 74 x 92 in. Collection Nick Cave. Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.



GALLERY 400

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A funny thing happened on the way to red, yellow, and blue

“Expanding the dimensionality of color.” I came across this phrase in my own notes as I sat down to summarize this exhibition. I had written it to encapsulate ideas found in two scientific essays, but in many ways it sums up what *Spectral Landscape (with Viewing Stations)* sets out to accomplish. To backtrack, let me relay what the phrase originally referred to. The sentence was meant to condense Jonathan C. Fish’s “Colour and Sensation in Visual Art and Science,”¹ and “It’s not really red, green, yellow, blue: an inquiry into perceptual color space” by Kimberly Jameson and Roy D’Andrade.² Fish’s essay provides an account of contemporary uncertainties on the number and nature of color attributes, while the Jameson and D’Andrade paper challenges conventional optical theories and commonly utilized color models. In their contestation of customary organizations of color space, they consider notions of elemental, or primary colors, those that are irreducible and cannot be created through mixture. The writers test the widely held belief that only specific hues are primaries by challenging the concept of irreducibility as criteria, raising the possibility that any three equidistant axis points in color space could be considered primary. The clear-cut ideas in both writings quietly fracture established ideas of primary color, as well as the metaphorical values they carry.

Basic two-dimensional color models, with primary, secondary, and tertiary hues, became well known through their broad use at the influential Bauhaus, though they originate further back in a predominantly German history of science, philosophy, and education. In the United States, the field of art education has stuck to these pre-1930s models, relying on a framework for perceptual experience generally regarded as part of the past. In the meantime, other disciplines have widened the scope of the considerations, variables, and questions involved in organizing color. Ensuing color space visualizations, the charts and models used in manufacturing as well as hard and social sciences, have evolved into more complex and more mathematical constructs. While a specific German aesthetic history involving primary colors and notions of primary-ness is in the past, remnants and dialogues remain and continue. This writing scans through some of the neglected details of that history in the hope that it not be collapsed into a simplified version of itself, into the too-simple dichotomy of the

formal versus the socially engaged. If we look at some of the key thinkers such as Goethe, Schopenhauer, Froebel, the Gestaltists, and those associated with the Bauhaus, and recall their actual objectives and aspirations (though sometimes quite flawed), we can recognize points of continuity, as well as of departure, in our broad artistic landscape in relation to the details of this specific history.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s treatise on color, *Zur Farbenlehre (The Theory of Colors)* (1810), is a significant text in a number of ways. Written largely as a repudiation of Newton’s *Opticks* (1704), Goethe was driven by the belief that Newton had made errors in his work, including the emphasis on the existence of color outside the realm of human response. Goethe’s emphasis on experience and on the subjective provided impetus for future fields of study that posited the primacy of the psychological and physiological in the perceptual process. His friend and peer Arthur Schopenhauer’s use of the term “color theory” in his *On Vision and Colors* (1816) makes the specifics of this then-new term clear. He characterized it as a field of study that sought to comprehend and codify color with physiological, psycho-logical, and philosophical applications. Goethe and Schopenhauer’s relationship dissolved over their differences on these issues, with Goethe ultimately believing in an objective aspect of color, while Schopenhauer understood the experience of color to be entirely subjective, existing only within the retina.

Also in early 19th century Germany, childhood education pioneer and kindergarten creator Friedrich Froebel created his “gifts” and “occupations,” pedagogical objects meant to encourage children to discover concepts of unity and harmony. These objects emphasized the importance of learning through play and tactile experience, via direct interaction with varieties of material qualities (textures, shapes, and colors) in fundamental forms. Froebel’s research exerted a strong influence on German intellectual culture, including the specific theory of harmony associated with Modernism. Indeed, the gifts forecast many of the artistic aims, materials, and color use (red/yellow/blue) of Modernist philosophy across Europe almost a century later.

Similarly, the impact of the school of Gestalt psychology on the arts was dramatic, and its legacy is still with us, exemplified by words in general usage in the arts such as “wholeness,” “balance,” and “harmony.”

Gestalt, which began in Germany in 1910, demonstrated a continued interest in perception as it related to psychological and spiritual development. Like much early psychology, the focus was on the study of human response, rather than on individual behavior. Founded by Max Wertheimer, Kurt Koffka, and Wolfgang Köhler, it sought to discover holistic organizing principles of the mind and was of great interest to many artists and designers who saw their visual work as a parallel investigation. Bauhaus-hosted Gestaltist lectures, Paul Klee’s specific interest in Wertheimer, and Josef Albers and Wassily Kandinsky’s attendance at a series of lectures about Gestalt theory by psychologist Count Karlfried von Dürckheim, are just some of the documented interactions between the Gestaltists and artists of the era. Klee, Kandinsky, and Albers, as well as Lazlo Moholy-Nagy and Johannes Itten, all taught special courses on color that understood it to be an instinctual phenomenon whose symbolic use could be codified on universal and absolute terms.

Albers went on to become considered an authoritative teacher and artist whose life work in both areas was essentially dedicated to the elusive-ness of color. Albers is widely credited with a revival of interest in “simultaneous contrast,” an effect first described in 1839 by a French chemist, Michel Eugène Chevreul, who found that the appearance of colors changes when moved from one background to another. Albers had learned about this from von Dürckheim’s lectures, interested in the idea that “we always experience perceptual wholes, not isolated parts. We never see figures (or swatches) alone, only dynamic ‘figure-ground’ relationships.”³ From a contemporary perspective, it seems that the idea of the dynamic whole was conceived within purely visual terms. As we look at Albers’ work today, the isolated aspect of the studies is striking. While they were studies in the inter-relatedness of human response, they are still color swatches, without social context, as if in a laboratory.

Johannes Itten’s work and teaching were of a mystical bent, a fact that caused some conflict at the Bauhaus, and ultimately factored into his resignation there. His books, including *The Elements of Color* (1970), are still fairly well read and used in American art school curricula. One has to wonder if anyone actually reads the texts or perhaps only looks at the beautiful charts he designed, since the chapter entitled “Subjective Timbre” in *The Elements of Color* contains a quite stunning (and silly) bit

of racistist profiling. In the chapter, Itten advises that students should be taught to use color differently from one another on the basis of their complexion, how their skin and hair colors factor into their aptitudes and that they must work in ways that suit their “constitutions”:

Light blond types with blue eyes and pink skin incline towards very pure colors, often with a great many clearly disting- uished color qualities. Contrast of hue is the basic feature. Depending on the forcefulness of the individual, the colors may be more or less luminous. A very different type is represented by people with black hair, dark skin, and dark eyes, for whom black plays an important part of their harmony.

He continues:

The blond type should be assigned such subjects as Springtime, Kindergarten, Baptism, Festival of Bright Flowers, Garden at Morning. Nature subjects should be vivid, without light/dark contrasts. Good assignments for a dark type would be Night, Light in a Dark Room, Autumn Storm, Burial, Grief, The Blues, etc. Nature studies can be done in charcoal or black and white pigments.⁴

A Google search today for the book finds absolutely no reference to this bizarre bit of pedagogy, only links to the book as a still-current teach- ing tool. Amazon.com reader reviews are glowing, and none of this seems to be addressed anywhere in print. My own discovery of this chapter, found as a young teacher researching in a dim Northwestern University library, was my introduction to the formal and discreet study of color, that which is called color theory. Its problematic logic immediately made clear the necessity of situating the field of study of “color theory” in its very specific historical and cultural context, giving rise to the challenging prospect of re-framing the subject of color as a focus of inquiry.

In a discussion of color and culture, recent exchanges in linguistic anthropology are relevant, specifically an ongoing debate concerning color terms and color categorization. Much of this particular discussion began with a famous cross-cultural study of color naming, conducted by Brent Berlin and Paul Kay in their *Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution* (1969). They conducted extensive multi-lingual research, asking subjects to respond to Munsell

color chips. While they discovered coherent cross-cultural patterns of naming and thus argued for universal semantic uniformities, many were critical of their method.

Linguist and psychologist John A. Lucy’s essay “The linguistics of ‘color’”⁵ explores this debate, essentially between universalists and relativists, and returns us to the idea of “expanding the dimensionality of color.” Lucy’s essay examines the inherent assumptions in Berlin and Kay’s study, and points out that it presupposes that the Western three dimensions of color (hue, value, and saturation), and only these three dimensions (leaving out luminosity, luster, and reflectance), are cross-cultural denotations. In English color naming, luminosity, luster, and reflectance, as well as adjectives such as wet or dry, for instance, are modifiers to chromatic categories (a shiny red and a dull red are still red, for example). In some languages, however, chromatic differentiation is not understood in the same way. Factors that we see as adjectives that modify nouns are understood as separate entities, indicated by separate words (what we see as a wet red and a dry red would be two separate words, two separate things). Lucy also points out that the study assumes “speech is about labeling accuracy rather than ‘situational intelligibility.”⁶ This shift in the field of linguistics can be seen as analogous to the shift in art practices from Formalism to those that identify context and contingency to be instrumental to meaning, and that identify meaning as socially and historically determined. Lucy’s essay concludes with the idea that the only way to establish what uniformities of thought actually do exist across language and culture is to recognize that “the communica- tively relevant encodings of visual experience do not lie ‘in there’ in the biology but out in the socially anchored linguistic systems.”⁷ This specific idea also has parallels in art practices, and in this exhibition, comprised of artists who use color through a lens informed by—but not limited to—an appreciation of the cultural and social dimensions of experience.

Ah, the exhibition. I’ve discussed it only by proxy. Much has transpired between now and the days when pre-war German art and design had a stronghold on the use of color, when color and art were inter- twined with research around perception. This would include movements certainly well documented; the use of ready-made color thoroughly explored in the Museum of Modern Art’s exhibition *Color Chart*:

Reinventing Color, 1950 to Today (2008), the mysticism of Barnett Newman or the phenomenology of Mark Rothko, the iridescence and effervescence of L.A.’s Light and Space movement. It also includes noteworthy individual color investigations that don’t fit neatly into established groups: Anne Truitt’s inscrutable combinations, Sam Gilliam’s stained, draped, and freed transparencies, Hélio Oiticica’s studied liveliness, Blinky Palermo’s humorous undermining of color as universal, and Kara Walker’s restricted palette. David Batchelor’s 2001 book *Chromophobia*, which combined cultural and literary theory to propose a culture-wide fear of color should be mentioned too, as an indication of a conceptual shift on ideas of color in art.

For *Spectral Landscape (with Viewing Stations)*, John Neff and I brought together others who (like us) have recently ruminated on color, from a variety of frameworks, in a myriad of ways. In doing so, we hope to demonstrate how the rich relationship between color and aesthetics continues to expand outward, reckoning with its own past, ever intermingling with other fields of inquiry. In describing his piece *Elogio de la sombra (Praise for the Shadow)* (not in this exhibition), artist Jose Dávila writes “There is no primary discourse: the elements are subject to the continuous restructurings and transformations of any being that becomes generated in the shadow...What is new shall be subject to experience and not to explanations.”⁸ His statement captures some of the central ideas contained within *Spectral Landscape*: that the field of investigation is wide open; and that possibilities are not restricted by the need to participate in a singular, dominant conver- sation. Most significantly, it conveys the idea that while we recognize the constructs that frame experience, our recognition does not change the actuality of the occurrences and encounters that make up experience, does not change our desire to be immersed in—and endlessly surprised by—it.

—Pamela Fraser

¹Jonathan C. Fish, “Colour and Sensation in Visual Arts and Science,” *Leonardo* 14, no. 2 (1981): 89-98.

²Kimberly Jameson and Roy D’Andrade, “It’s not really red, green, yellow, blue: an inquiry into perceptual color space,” in *Color Categories in Thought and Language*, ed. C.L. Hardin and Luisa Maffi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 295-319.

³Albers in Roy Behrens, “Art, Design, and Gestalt Theory,” *Leonardo Online* 31, no. 4 (1998): 299-303. 5 April 2012. <http://www.leonardo.info/isast/articles/behrens.html>.

⁴Johannes Itten, *The Elements of Color* (Cincinnati: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1970), 24-25.

⁵John A. Lucy, “The linguistics of color,” in *Color Categories in Thought and Language*, ed. C.L. Hardin and Luisa Maffi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 320-46.

⁶Ibid, 323.

⁷Ibid, 341.

⁸Jose Dávila: *In Praise of the Shadow*. Zapopan: Museum of Art Zapopan MAZ, Mexico, 2012. Exhibition catalog, n.p.