



Text by Amy Pettifer

In cartoons, one sees brightly coloured stars in such circumstances. In hospitals, she ponders, one cannot see the colour which slides straight through her make-up, her skin, her eyes, paints the inside of her head, her broken nose. The ability of the short and energetic x-ray wavelength to pass through obstacles – alternatively its inability to rest, to lazily and gloriously pool itself on a surface – was what excited her about colour. And these qualities of different wavelengths were like a book of strategies for her: to pass through solid objects or to decorate surfaces.

Out of the darkness creeps bright things. Daily we move through colour from night shades, past grey, into weak sun, to luminosity – bright then melting back into dark shading again; the palindromic colour chart of the day. Out of the dark and into the light. There is a sense of something to escape or be rescued from – to emerge from concealment in shadows into Chromomagnificence. Light suggests the spectrum, a band of possible hues latent within white, available to be split and mixed. The fantastic comes into life beneath the spot light; buds crack open; things wake up; we are compelled to dance - we need to see things in order to bathe in their glory.

There is no spectrum within black; darkness absorbs, contains and keeps. ‘Colour is swallowed by the dark.’ⁱⁱ But whereas colour ricochets with light - tones shifting treacherously and evading definite capture – darkness holds colour. Or rather, colour becomes it. Rainbow specks lurking between the crosshatch; black is never dull. It is luminescence and gloss or else depth and texture. “In black lies the possibility of hope”ⁱⁱⁱ. And if colour ascends/escapes from darkness then it must sometimes dwell there – within it achieving a solid radiance, foregrounded more sharply than it can be against the day.

The utter dark of space kicks out eternal light from planets; ridiculous life forms glow neon at the blind depths of the sea; cartoon-bright stars circle in the dull dark of a concussion; luminous Marilyn’s emerge from Warhol’s light sealed Factory; the x-ray ‘paints the inside of her head’ –radiating the skull beneath the skin - brilliant brightness of bone amid corporeal darkness.

The dark side is multihued – a motley alternative destination to the monochromy of tyrannical white^{iv}. “We are not just surrounded by colour; we are colour ourselves”^v that is until fear sets in and we lose it. Not always pure and redemptive, terror is physically realised by the draining of colour from the cheeks; a sick nose dive from pleasure into white-out. White/Light is what remains when colour goes. It is a better absence than the chromatic possibilities of the void or black hole.

In darkness we can see colour, as opposed to being blinded by it. We can revel in it too – and like all negative spaces between words/translations/history/gesture/thought/event, this dense gap offers itself up in art to be squared with the visual and experiential. The fascinating possible contents of the void clamour to be shaped and drawn.

In art it is difficult for the use of colour to remain passive or accidental, such is the eloquence of its language and range of its referential field. Within abstraction there exists the possibility of a shared recognition of the meanings and nuances suggested by particular single colours or combinations of colours. Some kind of common chromatic vocabulary through which the artist may transcend form without abandoning subject. Within objectification colour occupies the status of the found - reflecting the world around us. Creeping from kitchen cupboards and onto canvasses or sculptural surfaces – sliding back and forth between the realm of art and that of experience.

Apocalypstick brings together 12 artists to create a platform for a discussion about the use of colour in both contemporary art and in the wider world.

Colour has long been associated with the wild, primal and the feminine, as well as being considered intuitive, instinctive and against logic. Encompassing a spectrum from the childlike and playful through to the disturbing and sinister, the work in the show operates on a sliding scale of chaos and sensory disquiet. Pigment and hue is not only a formal element but a psychological one, with colour employed as a metaphor for seduction and intoxication. A radical colour key often refers to a skewed reality, symbolising a loss of control, a sensory overload.

Influenced by our everyday experiences of lurid popular culture, these artists appropriate languages from the ever-morphing multi-media world to produce work that is often overloaded with information. Here, vibrant hues attract and simultaneously repel. The Twentieth Century saw vivid colour move from associations with bejeweled opulence, religion and power to the tasteless tackiness of advertising, television and high street fashion. Resplendent in the neon and plastics of contemporary consumer culture, synthetic colours changed the face of the landscape whilst technicolour cinema and fractal, glowing computer graphics altered perceptions and imaginations. Trash was colourful, and colour became trash.

Some of the artists' work reflects the psychological noise emanating from pop culture's velocity, as in James Howard's garish collages of appropriated internet imagery, John Walter's screaming neon and glitter quotations and day-glo collages, and Ludovica Gioscia's wallpaper and accessory encrusted tributes to the Paninaro phenomenon of 1980's Milan.

Colour is used to conceal objects and meaning, just as makeup such as lipstick is used to conceal the true flesh underneath. Shane Bradford's Auto-Fascist painting and sculpture are the antithesis of the chaotic rainbow meltdowns seen elsewhere in the show. Rebelling against his previous work where objects were dipped in seductive candy-coloured layers of gloss paint, here he has imposed a strict set of colour rules. His Fasci (a Roman weapon consisting of sticks bound together) is dipped in white, green, black and silver – colour itself is used as a weapon. Sinta Tantra also utilises colour rules in her geometrically patterned ceiling mural that warps the space and disorients the viewer, whilst Siân Hislop's tributes to teenage pinups explore the notion of nostalgia through psychedelic tie-die and 1980's neon takes on Victorian colour-tinted photographs.

When bright colours are introduced, the work automatically changes in meaning – colour skews reality and images and objects become more appealing, more sensuous or more repulsive. Apocalypstick unites artists who are unashamed chromophiles, in a gleefully grotesque mardi-gras of pigment, plastic and optical chaos.

Apocalypstick is curated by Siân Hislop and Jeremy Willett, and features work by: Jonathan Baldock, Shane Bradford, James Ferris, Richard Gasper, Ludovica Gioscia, Siân Hislop, James Howard, Dunstan James, Sinta Tantra, Bea Turner, John Walter and Jeremy Willett

Special event: Friday 25th February, 6.30pm – 9pm The artist and writer David Batchelor, author of *Chromophobia*, will give a talk. This will be followed by Artists' Desert Island YouTube, where the exhibiting artists present a selection of videos that have influenced their work in an informal discussion.

The multitudinous possibility of colour is there to be harnessed, each shade resonating a different note from eye to eye, surface to surface, delirium to delirium. Colour is polyphonic then, able to communicate in many voices at once, an incessant hubbub of sent and received references, tinted memories and recollections to and from the viewer. This din is perhaps what forms the notion of chroma as a sign of madness or misrule - the cacophonous noise of the colour clash threatening to render things insensible.

Multicolour - fervent and fast - travelling in waves of 'troubled light,'^{viii} has the ability to split skulls and addle perfectly sound minds. But what about its equal tendency to rest decorously^{ix}; draping and caking like make up. The colour palates we inhabit are subject to constant change, just as shades remain inconstant in light, there is no fixed or empirical chromatic schema to the man-made world. Where we are able to exercise control in our surroundings we do so by either indulging a schizophrenic desire to decorate and re decorate, or else we fall, overwhelmed into the infinite arms of white – fooled by the notion that purity has shades.

There is something sublime in the possibility of choosing to colour your world; not abandoning its recognisable forms and functions but just skewing them, perhaps returning them to the way you always supposed they should be; of screwing tight your eyes, plunging yourself into darkness and attempting to forget the hues that plague you. In the dark negative – the presence of other colours becomes possible.

Re Apply / Re Colour / Re Decorate.

Pick up your pencil and register your delirium.

Amy Pettifer.
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i Reena Spaulings, Bernadette Corporation (New York: Semiotext(e), 2004)

ii On Painting, Leon Battista Alberti (London: Penguin, 2001)

iii Chroma, Derek Jarman (London: Vintage, 1994)

iv Reference to discussion in the chapter 'Whitescapes' in Chromophobia, David Batchelor (London: Focaal, 2000)

v Chromophobia, *ibid.*

vi This is a reference to a section from Josef Albers Interaction of Colour from 1963 in which the subjectivity of the colour red is discussed at length.

vii Apocalypstick, Serge Gainsbourg (Lyric) 1969 © Melody Nelson Publishing

viii Goethe, referenced in 'Black Moods', Gabriel Ramin Schor. (TATE etc, Issue 7, Summer 2006)

ix See opening quote from Reena Spaulings.

x Rough translation of the Gainsbourg lyric.