



FRONT GALLERY

In the exhibition “Acceptable Differences: Pluripotentiality and Painting,” at the Belgrade Cultural Center, the nature of painting as a means through which to unleash the incredible variability of perception latent in all of us was displayed. The exhibition, curated by the Serbian curator Maja Ćirić, was composed of two parts.

First, in the front gallery was a live performance of *The Education of the Eye* in which eight volunteer painters produced the eight paintings displayed sequentially on the wall of the front gallery. In the back gallery she displayed a series of new rainbow brushes and performative pulls from the *Rainbow Brushes* series as well as the outcomes from the Berlin and Dafen *The Education of the Eye* experiments.







Front Gallery: The eight palettes are exhibited and displayed as paintings.



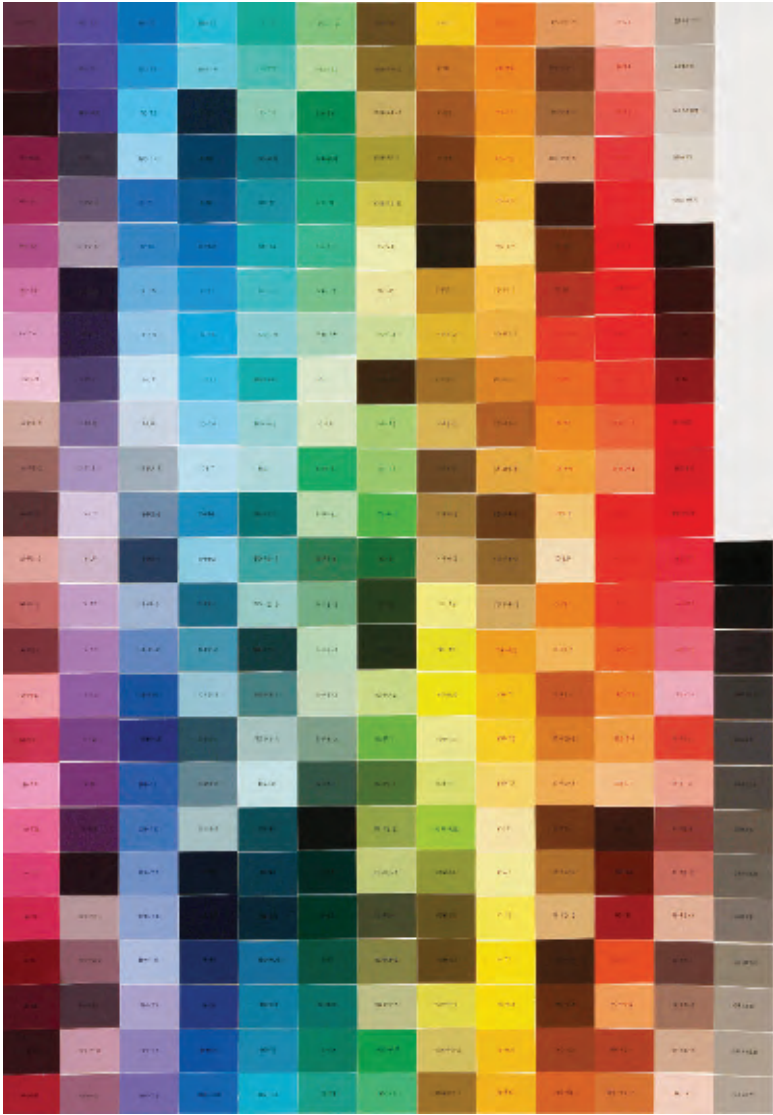
Acceptable Differences: Pluripotentiality and Painting, 2011, Belgrade Cultural Center.

Back Gallery: Left side, *Rainbow Brushes*, 2008-2012, Performative Pulls. Back wall: Six palettes from Berlin Studio Experiment. Right side: Two palettes from China Experiment plus video.





The final movement of *The Education of the Eye* project took place in Neidich's studio in Los Angeles. He had always been curious about whether or not the painters' color matching skill might skew the experimental results. He had tried to control this variable by only inviting skilled painters to participate and, in the case of Dafen, an expert copyist, however, in Los Angeles, he wanted to control this variable even more. He wondered if he would obtain the same results by substituting the color mixing acrylic paint task with a simple color matching task accomplished with a full set of Color-aid papers first used by Joseph Albers in his own color experiments of simultaneous contrast. Twenty-five art painters from the Los Angeles area were invited to his studio at 5005 Exposition Boulevard, where again the Hogarth self-portrait painting was installed and lit with a 3200 K photographic lighting system. This time instead of acrylic paints and a palette they were each given a full box of 314 Color-aid papers. Their task was again to discover as many colors in the painting as possible but this time all they needed to do was to match them to one of the colored papers which were then glued to a piece of 16x24 inch hot press paper.



The Complete Set, 2012, full set of Color-aid paper samples on paper, 36 x 39 inches.



What resulted corroborated the past results. Again the project emancipated the conditions of perception and unleashed the tremendous differences in color appreciation found between individuals. The same two styles of probing the color landscape of the painting, the analytic and the intuitive, were again expressed here. The final work of the experiment was entitled "in the absence of choices made" which was constructed from each artist's pile of color rejects.







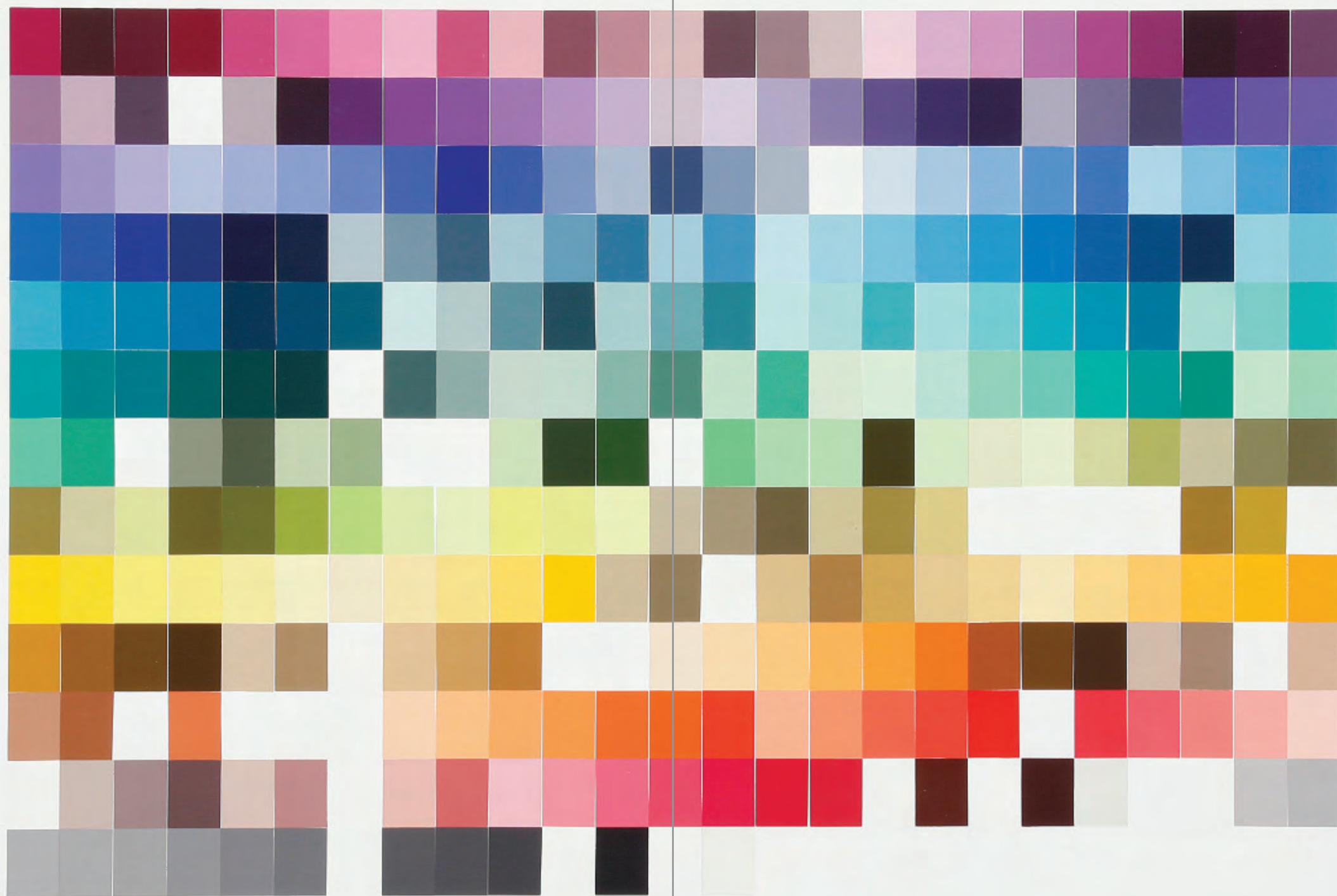
Top: *Agreeable*
Composition in Grey
and *Green*, 2012

Bottom: *Agreeable*
Composition in Brown
and *Green*, 2012



Top: *Disagreeable*
Composition in Red
and *Orange*, 2012

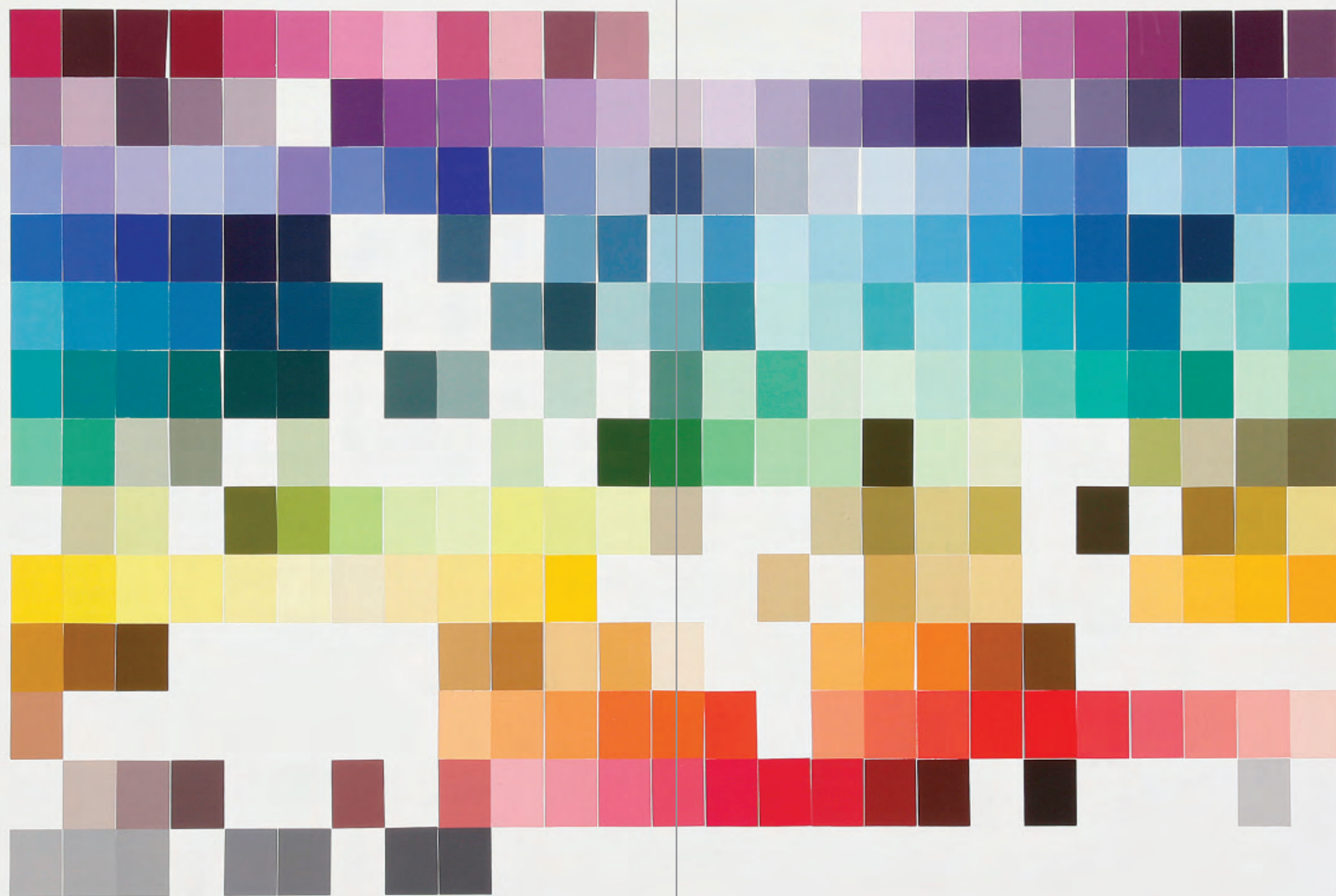
Bottom: *Disagreeable*
Composition in
Brown, 2012



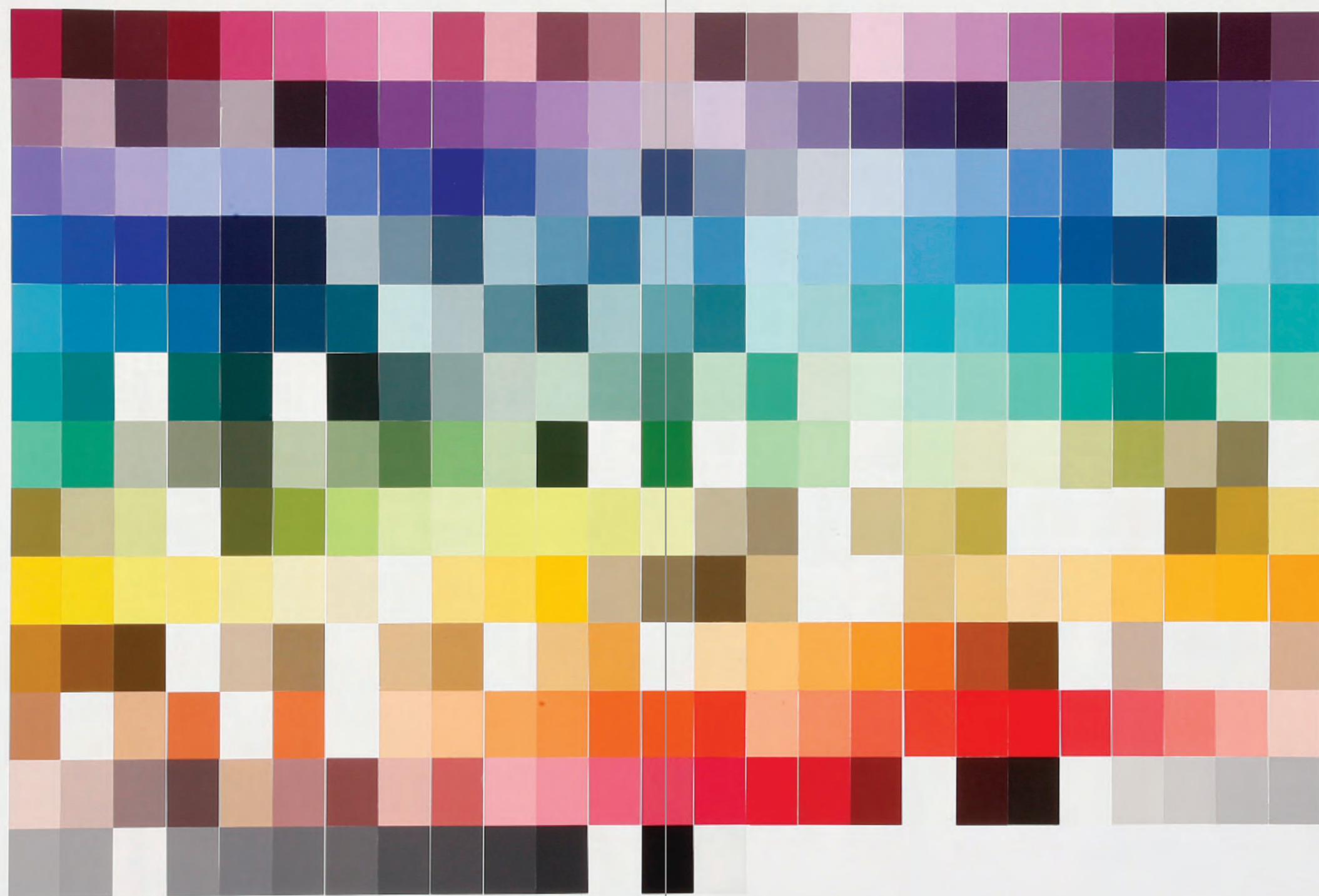
In the absence of choices made #1, 2012
Color-aid paper samples on paper,
 36 x 39 inches.

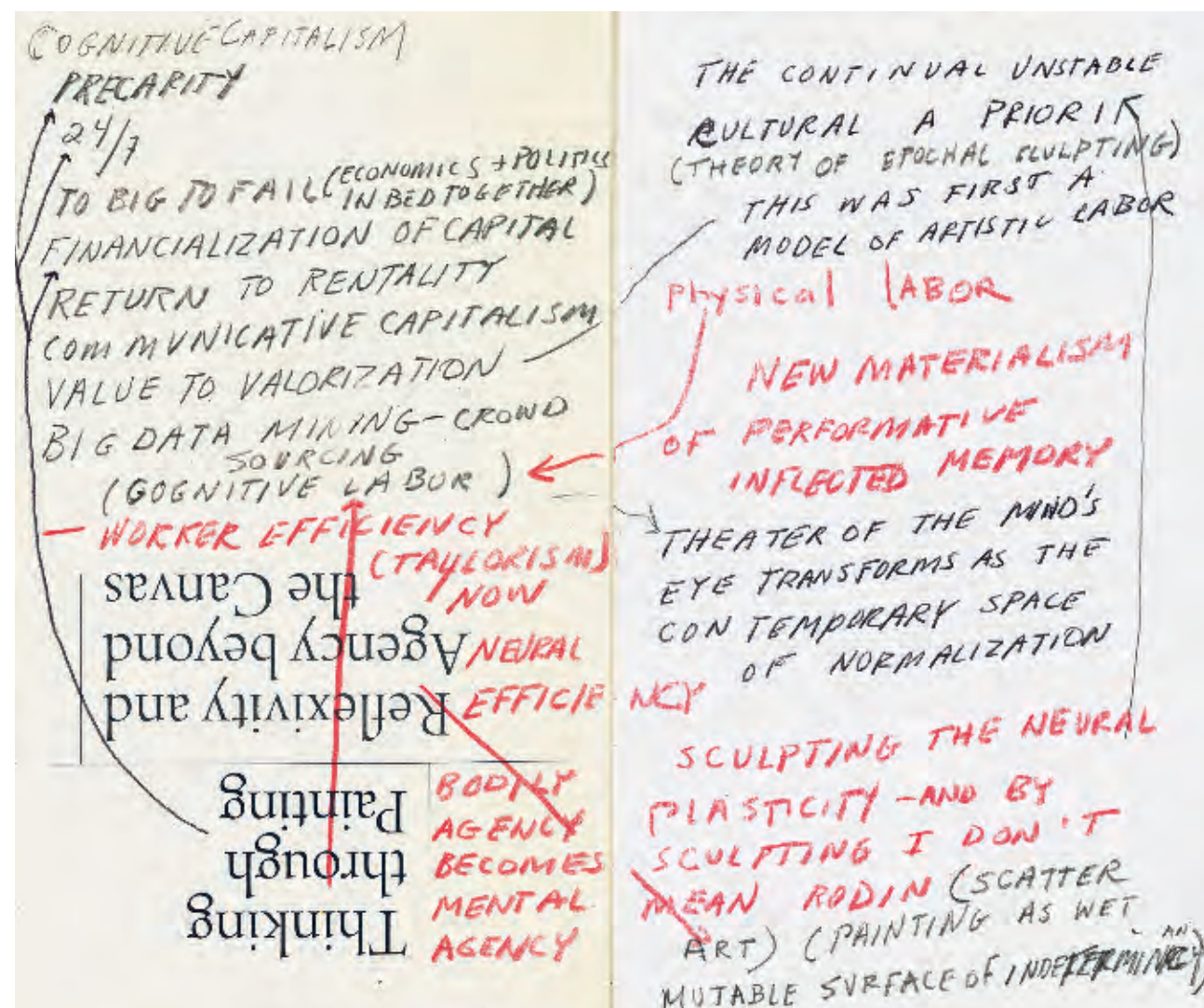
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In the absence of choices made #2, 2012,
Color-aid paper samples on paper,
 36 x 39 inches.





Constitution and Contingency by John C. Welchman

How many rainbows can light create for the untutored eye?¹
Stan Brakhage (1963)

The three projects by Warren Neidich brought together in this exhibition and publication mobilize a sustained series of questions about constituency and its contexts, addressing the production, reception and overlay of material, perceptual, cognitive, formal, chromatic, representational, and symbolic constitutions. What is constituted is different in each case, and also double or even reversible. In *The Education of the Eye* pre-constituted self-portraits—William Hogarth’s *Self-Portrait* (1757), used in Berlin and Dafen, China; and Vasa Pomon’s *Self-Portrait of the Artist with a Palette* (1932), in Belgrade, Serbia—were closely analyzed under “laboratory” conditions by professionally trained artists and effectively de-constituted so as to “return” them to the palette of colors from which they might have been assembled. *Rainbow Brushes* (2008) addressed the differential constitution of rainbows in several modes of social accountancy, including their scientific description and visual representation in the history of art. Neidich offers to fill the space between these differentials with another constitution engendered by a series of “pulls” of a broad, house-painter’s brush which activates ideas of “negatives” and afterimages as they reconstitute the paint on the apparatus of their own production as a reversal.

The analytic dispensation of these projects is offered a metacritical extension in *The Noologist’s Handbook* which grew out of the imaginary collaborative exhibitions produced discursively during several iterations of *In the Mind’s I* (first presented at Maison Gregoire, Brussels, 2009, then recreated in more socially-oriented performances, *The Noologist’s Handbook*, at the Emily Harvey Foundation, New York City, 2011, and Archive Kabinett, Berlin, 2012). The figure of the sculptor of thought and embodiment of a renovated curatorial practice (the Noologist) is a propositional negotiant between the fissures and incommensurabilities that separate the discursive adjudication of social, scientific, and aesthetic constitutions. The signal message of these interleaved projects undermines the old-order positivism predicated on a static or definitive constitution, creatively besetting it with another insistence: on the intrinsic deviance of making. One effect of this is to re-think the negative cast of what Richard Dawkins termed the “anaesthetic of familiarity”;² so that what is “made-up” can only be envisaged as a convergence of serial interventions meted out between the contingencies of making-do, making-over, and make-believe.

¹ Stan Brakhage, “Metaphors of Vision” in *Film Culture* no. 30, Fall 1963; 2nd ed. Anthology Film Archives (1976).

² Richard Dawkins borrows from Keats the title of his recent attempt to temporize and recondition the antithesis between art and science, which includes arguments against the “anaesthetic of familiarity,” in *Unweaving the Rainbow: Science, Delusion and the Appetite for Wonder* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998).

In what follows, I will outline some propositional reflections on the historical predicates and critical implications of the pluri-dimensional constitutionality of the primary objects of these inquiries—the rainbow, the palette, and the exhibition; and on the genres in relation to which they are ventured: self-representation; chromatic articulation; and the wider capacities of aesthetic generation.

1.

Do not all charms fly

At the mere touch of cold philosophy?

There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:

We know her woof, her texture; she is given

In the dull catalogue of common things.

Philosophy will clip an Angel’s wings,

Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,

Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine—

Unweave a rainbow.

John Keats, “Lamia”³

2.

Once, in the age of Enlightenment, rainbows had just two ends or conditions, locked in inexorable conflict: on the one hand, their empirical or scientific constitution—albeit contested and controversial—which envisaged them as specific emanations of refracted light; on the other, their overriding symbolic signification organized around their promissory intimations. Freightened with awe and sublimity, crossed with divine deliverance and figural religiosity, the latter readings were also correlated by Albert Bierstadt and others with the selective nationalist reflex of Manifest Destiny—Bierstadt’s legion of chromatic arcs included *Discovery of the Hudson River* (1874); *Home of the Rainbow, Horseshoe-Falls, Niagara* (ca. 1869); *Rainbow in the Sierra Nevada* (c. 1871-1873); *Rainbow over Jenny Lake, Wyoming* (1881). Neidich mobilized several of these images in the American version of his ongoing *Rainbow Brushes* project in which a range of differently-scaled brushes are harnessed together, loaded with color in the same order and proportions as the rainbows in each correlated painting and then pulled across a blank canvas made to the size of the original. Each *Rainbow Brushes* work is named for the artist and the year of the painting (but not the title): so *Rainbow over Jenny Lake, Wyoming* becomes *Albert Bierstadt, 1881*. What Neidich puts in play here is the status of the artist as an agent in the transmission of period conditions and the notion of the rainbow as an “encrypted symbolic gesture.”⁴

³ *The Complete Poems of John Keats* (New York: Modern Library, 1994), p. 155. At a dinner party in 1817, John Keats (1795-1821) and the critic Charles Lamb (1775-1834) lamented that Newton had “destroyed all the poetry of the rainbow, by reducing it to a prism.” Cited in Penelope Hughes-Hallett, *The Immortal Dinner: A Famous Evening of Genius & Laughter in Literary London, 1817* (Chicago: New Amsterdam, 2002), p. 138. See also, Robert Finlay, “Weaving the Rainbow: Visions of Color in World History,” *Journal of World History*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (2007), pp. 283-431.

⁴ Warren Neidich, email to the author, August 11, 2012.

3.

At the same time, corrosive skepticism about the inert or reductive claims of the scientific articulation of these colored arcs was frequently attested to well into the twentieth century. If Keats bears special witness to this, more common grounds can be found in popular reflections on the subject around the turn of the last century. The author of an installment of “From a Country Window” in *The New Country Life: A Magazine for the Home-maker in the Country* in 1917, for example, writes as follows: “I glanced about toward the east, and there, spanning the heavens, was the Bow of Promise in all its wondrous banding of ... brilliant pinks and oranges and lavenders which look so unreal in a painting and so celestial in the sky.”⁵ Almost incidentally, painted rainbows are made-over here as inadequate re-presentations, “unreal” imitations of the transcendent providence of a “natural” phenomenon illuminated by the tinctures of pre-modern cosmological wonder. Having skewered the vacuous insufficiency of art, the un-named columnist of *The New County Life* offers a more animated condemnation of the pretensions of “SCIENCE, which, according to [Edgar Allan] Poe, has dragged Diana from her car,” “torn the Elfin from the green grass,” and committed other “heinous acts of wanton vandalism”: for science “exhibits a pernicious predilection for attributing utilitarian ends to most of the beauties of nature.”⁶ We should note the two degrees of misunderstanding ventured here: the attribution to painting of a passive inadequacy to comprehend the “celestial” properties of the rainbow; and the flagrant perversions of science in which false attributions are nothing less than destructive, violent, and iconoclastic.

4.

Variants and inversions of this argument can be found in any number of popular science journals in the later 19th century. J. Norman Lockyer’s “Physical Science for Artists,” published in the journal *Nature* in 1878, for example, pointed to the lamentable general ignorance by artists of the scientific conditions of light and color within the phenomenal horizons of “air, and sky, and sea” especially in comparison to their more reasonable fidelity to the rules and logic of anatomy, topography, and perspective. The anecdote that underwrites Lockyer’s disquisition relates how a certain un-named artist who “had painted a rainbow practically inside out” waxed so indignant at the insult to the “highest style of imaginative creation” occasioned when the work was returned to him for “correction” that he charged an outlandish fee for putting nature right.⁷ Lockyer concludes his essay with a stridently positivistic coda in which he offers two lists of paintings: in one, artists (including Bierstadt) are said to have observed the natural effects of the rainbow “truthfully”; the other enumerates wanton defections from the would-be scientific verification of its luminous multi-chromatic appearance, which he takes it upon himself to adjudicate.

⁵ “From a Country Window,” *The New Country Life: A Magazine for the Home-maker in the Country*, Volume XXI (February, 1917), p. 50.

⁶ Ibid., p. 50.

⁷ J. Norman Lockyer, “Physical Science for Artists,” *Nature*, May 9, 1878, p. 30.

The corrosive epistemological gaps between the imputed feebleness of art, the reductivism of science, and the surrogate divinity of nature so fulsomely elaborated upon in the pages of *New Country Life* are recalibrated here by the suggestion that art might learn from and be improved (from the point of view of descriptive accuracy) by the objectively benign verisimilitudes of science.

5.

1878 was a pivotal moment in addressing the issues of color, light, and refraction for both scientific and artistic communities. It was in the year that the German physiologist Ewald Hering (1834-1918) published his 4-primary color wheel based on Opponent Theory; and in another dimension of reckoning that same year, Edwin D. Babbitt wrote *The Principles of Light and Color* in which the hope and divinity of the rainbow are reinvented in one of the first articulations of chromotherapy. The following year Ogden Rood released his *Modern Chromatics, with Applications to Art and Industry* (with German and French translations appearing in 1880 and 1881), in which he divided color into three constants: purity, luminosity, and hue. In 1878, Georges Seurat was studying at the École des Beaux Arts, which was followed by a brief stint of military service before he established a studio near his parents’ home on the *rive droite* and took up the systematic study of contemporary scientific color theory, including Rood’s.

6.

The avant-gardes of the earlier twentieth century happily deferred the corrections resisted by Lockyer’s anonymous painter, flouting the proper appearance and coloristic sequence of the rainbow or untethering it from standardized locations (Wassily Kandinsky). They substituted solar wheels and disks for arcs and semi-circles (Robert Delaunay); and even coated the rainbow in celluloid before summarily exploding it (in Bruno Corra’s *The Rainbow*).⁸ André Breton layered fantasy and self-projection with “mystery, beauty,” and “fear” in the transformational project of purging everything “disheartening” or “enchanted” from what he termed the “little house” of his own formation.⁹ Breton’s elevation of the overriding savagery of vision in the opening paragraphs of “Surrealism and Painting” reorients the religious forecasting and transcendental confirmation of the rainbow by consuming it with a “wild eye” that looks with renewed purpose, bearing “witness” to the “marvels of the earth” by tracing “all its colors back to the rainbow.”

⁸ Bruno Corra, “Abstract Cinema – Chromatic Music” (1912) in Umbro Apollonio, ed., *Futurist Manifestos* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), p. 69.

⁹ André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism* trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), pp. 222-23.

7.

It was inevitable, then, that when a combination of suitable technological parameters and display paradigms emerged in the era after Modernism, rainbows would be confected in the name of art—with varying degrees of dependence on science—rather than observed and represented (truthfully or otherwise). This is the case with Andy Goldsworthy’s *Rainbow Splashes* generated at various remote beauty spots in the English countryside in the early 1980s—and pointed to by John Gage in one of his social and scientific histories of color.¹⁰ In the work of Anya Gallacio and others in the mid-1990s the photographic capture of a rainbow-inducing gesture gives way to the development of process-oriented eventuations, often subject to a more perceptualist inflection, as in Olafur Eliasson’s tendentiously titled *Beauty* (1993) in which rainbows were spawned in tumbling curtains of water droplets, or Seth Riskin’s *Rainbow Man* (1995), which posits the artist himself as a seed for the weather, feeding back the engineered event by creating an interactive light and dance performance that was part New Age reverie, part ecological theatre, with the rainbow cast as altar, synthesizer, and stage. We can point to three forms of the manufacture—or faking—of evanescence that arose at this time: the production of simulated or para-meteorological rainbows; the use of new technologies—associated with lasers, holography, and virtual reality—for the generation of rainbow-related visual events; and the correlation of the many-colored sign with various kinds of nostalgia for what appeared to be salient lost moments of multi-chrome history—the ages of Technicolor, psychedelia, and disco from the 1950s through the 70s.¹¹

8.

In section 47 of *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein uses the rainbow division of colors to elaborate on the elusive nature of composite complexity: “is white simple,” he asks, “or does it consist of the colours of the rainbow?”¹² Wittgenstein’s response, largely deferred until his later *Remarks on Colour* (in which this kind of question was itself put in question) marks the second of three moments in the entanglement of color with the battle between logic and experience in the unfolding of perception.

Wittgenstein suggests elsewhere that propositions themselves—like games and jokes—and the acts of generating or responding to them comprise “a rainbow of meanings.”¹³ The plurality and simultaneity of the rainbow becomes in effect a figure for the insufficiency of “necessary” (quasi-mathematical) propositions and their redescription as active contingencies.

¹⁰ See, John Gage, *Colour and Culture: Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 102-04.

¹¹ See, “Parametrology: From the White Cube to the Rainbow Net” chapter 7 of my *Art After Appropriation: Essays on Art in the 1990s* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 215-44.

¹² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Part 1, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958).

¹³ Moore’s *Wittgenstein’s Lectures in 1930-33* in *Philosophical Occasions: 1912-51*, eds. J.C. Klagge and A. Nordman (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), p. 107; see also pp. 55, 60.

9.

Associated above all with the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the first of these moments was phenomenological. The third is emergent (doubtless from Wittgenstein's slipstream).

10.

In effect, the palette is a kind of artist-domesticated rainbow, organized by the aesthetic equivalent of non-utilitarian husbandry. Materially, it is a vector wielded in the space between caches or supplies of pigment and the surface (wall, board, canvas) being painted, and a locus for the overlay and mixing of physical colors. In the 19th century, the signature punctured and curvilinear surface of the palette became a support for the alignment and distribution of what Thierry de Duve argued were ready-mades, as paint was one of the first of many conditions for visual representation to be synthesized, systematized, commercially regulated, and found—then taken off—the shelf.¹⁴ As a primary constituting ground for painting practice, the palette has a (somewhat one-dimensional) genomic disposition by virtue of the almost infinite combinations of tone and tint to which it might give rise as its operating system is activated through a panorama of aesthetic contingencies, including form, depth, iconography, expressive intimation, and so on. In roughly the same postmodern time-frame that gave rise to artist-generated rainbows, however, the palette also became a double emblem of contextuality and specificity betokening key elements in the aesthetic particularity of its artist operator. The evidentiary aspect of the palette saw it relocated into vitrines and other display formats alongside notebooks, sketches, letters, and other testimonial materials. The studio of Francis Bacon represents the architectural engorgement of the palette-as-context, a room crammed full of drips, cuttings, and sundry deposits that purportedly reveals and underwrites the production etiquettes, and wider social becomings, of the artist.

11.

In addition to being assembled during some thirty years of occupation, beginning in 1961, Bacon's South Kensington studio was famously—and painstakingly—"deconstructed" by a team of "archaeologists, conservators, and curators," and then reconstituted at the Hugh Lane Municipal Art Gallery, Dublin.¹⁵ But the desire to transfer and replicate one of the most thorough antitheses to the autonomous conditions of the white cube was motivated by a conservationist agenda quite at odds with the tonal un-stitching of Neidich's project.

¹⁴ See, Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade*, trans. Dana Polan with the author (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

¹⁵ See, e.g., Margarita Cappock, *Francis Bacon's Studio* (Merrell, 2005).

12.

The Education of the Eye threatens to dissolve the inordinate complexity of two self-portraits and refer them back to the sum of material potentials from which they may have started out. From one point of view, Neidich's project is an exercise in futile reparation, akin to giving a body back to the sperm and egg from which it "originated." But because it operates on a plane of consistency organized by color-gradation, *The Education of the Eye* expands into a commentary—at once technical, professional, and intuitive—on the operating conditions and constitutional formation of perceptual experience. The project uses surrogate actors connected to the generation of the originating totality only by a loose genealogy of training and artistic experience (or, in the case of the Chinese edition, the somewhat different contingencies of commercial simulation). And by staging artistic perception in reverse, the prolonged "unweaving" of the selected images gives rise to a special zone in which constitution and contingency are overlaid. That this convergence is both necessary and approximate testifies to the multiple becomings assumed and engendered in the system of aesthetic looking and making. Neidich has configured a space in which we glimpse a colored silhouette of that place where the panoply of things (given and experienced) crosses through a domain of structures and forms to produce a fleeting outline of the artistic *condition*. The education to which his title refers does not point, therefore, simply to a set of institutional or instructional protocols, but to a sum of conditions known and unknown.

13.

How, then, do we reckon with the space between givenness, experience, and making and the questions of constitution, education, and contingency to which Neidich's projects bear witness in the organizing figure of the Noologist and the activity of exhibition? The artist himself has made one suggestion, noting that "I see the works, especially the brushes, as Conceptual Expressionism."¹⁶ For Neidich, the conceptual aspect of this conjunction arises from the decision to "empty my mind of everything when I make the Performative Pull which leaves the brush stroke on the paper [so that] the production of the apparati and the presentation of the brushes is a conceptual condition."¹⁷ So while "the exploration of the conditions of the rainbows and the investigation of the color hue and order is a form of artistic research," conditioned by various protocols, the artist leavens the conditioning of conditions with an expression of expressing. The meta-form of these suggestions is not accidental, and will help us make some final conjectures about the relational silhouette around which these remarks are traveling—an outline that derives quite directly from

¹⁶ Warren Neidich, email to the author, July 5, 2012.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Neidich’s projection of colored slides in *The Noologist’s Handbook*, which created black silhouettes on colored fields effectively staging the associative qualities of the imagination with emotion and affect.

14.

To do this we need to push back as far as we can. We need, in other words, to understand how thinking reaches out to—and possibly beyond—the limits of referring conditionality to its previous constitutions. And we need to engage with the widest implications of the understanding of education, drawing that term down so that it escapes the limits wherein it acts only as a species of formative determination. We can find something of the first “necessity” in Quentin Meillassoux’s *Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (2008) in which he mobilizes a framework of anterior conditions for thought caught up in ideas of “ancestrality,” the “arche-fossil,” and “dia-chronicity.”¹⁸ As one commentator suggested, “It is a question of thinking an absolute without thought, an absolute both independent from thought, and able to be conceived by thought in the eventuality of thought’s own absence or disappearance.”¹⁹ From this point of view, the art object might be understood as a temporary elision between the ontological and the contingent, bearing with it traces of what it means to constitute an ontological event, one that is absolute as process and contingent in relation to its contexts.

15.

So far as our second consideration is concerned, we can look to a number of proposals by Alain Badiou who has picked out a route by which art is expressly related to a particular concept of education. “Art is is pedagogical,” he suggests, “for the simple reason that it produces truths and because ‘education’ (save in its oppressive or perverted expressions) has never meant anything but this: to arrange the forms of knowledge in such a way that some truth may come to pierce a hole in them.”²⁰ Neidich’s piecing together—whether of assemblages of (art) objects for exhibition or of the chromatic constitution of a particular painting—and Badiou’s “piercing” through are two fronts: one more material, the other more conceptual, that converge in the educational affirmation of art. But while Badiou suggests that “what art educates us for is therefore nothing apart from its own existence,” for Neidich’s Noologist, the place to which education “leads” is more processional. It is founded not so much in the general “existence” of art, but on its coming into being and the aesthetic contingencies of its constitution.

The gap between these propositions is not inconsiderable. Yet in the project of thinking about art and science in mutual relation, it is one of the crucial spaces of our time.

¹⁸ Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. (London: Continuum, 2008).

¹⁹ Gabriel Riera, review of *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, <http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/23797-after-finitude-an-essay-on-the-necessity-of-contingency/>

²⁰ Alain Badiou, “Art and Philosophy” in *Handbook of Inaesthetics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 9. See also, Jan Jagodzinski, “Badiou’s Challenge to Art and its Education: Or ‘art cannot be taught — it can however educate’” in *Thinking Education through Alain Badiou*, ed. Kent den Heyer (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), pp. 26–44.

RAINBOW BRUSHES