

Significant Colour

## Introduction

At a time when people are thinking green and feeling blue The Aram Gallery reflects on the significance of colour. For designers and artists colour can be one of the most compelling and critical aspects of creative work.

Significant Colour explores the use of colour and colour as subject matter in different disciplines. The works chosen are all memorable because of their use of colour; from the first impact on the eye, to the emergence of meaning and the way they make us feel. Linking buildings and furniture, lighting and photography, textiles and communication design, the selected pieces from ten different practices embody The Aram Gallery's post-disciplinary approach and its specific interest in the way designers think and work. The artists and practitioners share a versatile engagement with colour and use it for inspiration, as a subject matter, as material and as a method to communicate meaning.

Significant Colour was co-curated by Ptolemy Mann, textile artist and architectural colour consultant. To her debut as co-curator Ptolemy has brought a passion and refined understanding of colour which she has built through her work as a maker and theorist. The treatment of the gallery space in particular demonstrates Ptolemy's approach towards the subject.

The Aram Gallery would like to thank the participants for the loan of their works, Alan Cristia Gallery for the kind loan of a Josef Albers print, to Dulux for their special contribution to this exhibition and to the Arts Council England for their continued support.

Daniel Charny  
—April 2009

## The Aram Gallery

The Aram Gallery is an independently curated space that encourages and promotes understanding of contemporary design, by presenting experimental and new work with a special interest in the work of designers and artists in their early careers.

Curator - Daniel Charny  
Assistant Curator - Ellie Parke  
Director - Zeev Aram

The Aram Gallery  
110 Drury Lane  
Covent Garden  
London  
WC2B 5SG

www.tharamgallery.org

## Exhibitors

### dRMM

Slivers of canary yellow, tangerine and cadmium red link the site between the yellow London stock brickwork of a Victorian terrace and the red brick of a former Town Hall. In their model for Wansey Street Housing, London based architects de Rijke Marsh Morgan show the actual architectural materials used in a graduated, striped composition across the façade. The glass façade of Clapham Manor Primary School resulted from extensive discussion with staff and pupils. The collaborative colour spectrum of 38 colours, ambitiously dappled throughout the scheme, is visible internally and externally. Samples of these colours, a slice of real façade, are shown. In both projects saturated, tonal colours vibrate in a spectacular way bringing intense colour to the urban London landscape.



Clapham Manor Primary School  
Detail of Glass Façade colours 2009  
www.drmm.co.uk

### El Ultimo Grito

Scarlet disks of circular light shimmer on the wall like a red moon. Guau translates as 'howl' or 'bark'. El Ultimo Grito's wall light, for Spanish lighting manufacturer Arturo Álvarez, has a metal plate that can be adjusted to partly cover or reveal the light source echoing the moons phases. The light comes with a choice of three different coloured light bulbs making the piece an interactive colour equation.



'GUAU' 2008  
Multidirectional wall lamp  
45 x 45 x 9cm Coated Steel  
www.eugstudio.com

### Olivier Droillard

An afternoon walk in the French Alps last year prompted Olivier Droillard to create a quietly poetic piece of furniture. Reflecting the de-saturated colour nuances of natural light and flora his 'Cladis' table, named after the mountain 'Glade' in question, evokes a personal memory of colour from a particular moment in time translated into an everyday and functional table. 'Foulden', the name of the street where Droillard lives, brings together two colours that have private significance for him. Secret colours.



'Cladis' 2009  
MDF, twopack, oak and metal  
836 x 624 x 450mm  
www.olivierandco.com

### Ori Gersht

In his Rear Window series of photographs taken over a period of two years from the same window in his flat, Ori Gersht records the dramatic skies above London and explores the optical effects that the light and atmospheric pollution of the city have on the sky above. Through colour saturation, these abstract images assert both the primacy of natural light (the raw material of photography) and the ability of colour photography to interpret it. Shot without filters or other manipulation these images are pure atmospheric colour.



'Rear Window 5' 2000  
1.25 x 1.25m C-type photograph

### James Goggin

A dedicated colour obsessive, graphic designer James Goggin created the project 'Dear Lulu' during a teaching workshop in June 2008. Each student dressed as, and found objects of, a certain colour and was photographed. The resulting images were sent to four different print-on-demand companies where the nuances of their colour reproduction could be compared. The project is so elegantly and playfully documented that it reveals as much about human emotion as the technical questions it sets out to ask.



'Dear Lulu' June 2008  
Print-on-demand calibration + publication  
workshop at Hochschule Darmstadt  
www.practise.co.uk

### Sauerbruch Hutton

Exquisite and intelligently coloured façades personify the work of Berlin based architects Sauerbruch Hutton. Their 2008 completed project, Jessop West for Sheffield University, reveals a delicate 'woven' façade of several colour palettes, used to delineate different departments within in the large centralised campus. 'City Dress' introduces a new kind of architectural model, depicting the scheme as a giant textile 'glove' hung on the wall. 'Colour can't really be treated as a 'scientific' subject; it is to do with doing.'

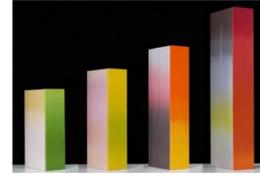
— Sauerbruch Hutton



'Jessop West'  
Photograph by Jan Bitter 2008  
www.sauerbruchhutton.de

### Ptolemy Mann

Complementary opposites vibrate across the woven surfaces of four free standing textile monoliths. Depending on what side you look at them from their codes shift and change. Saturated colours, matt and non-reflective gradually disappear into cool neutrals, a cacophony of greys juxtaposed with neon brights. Low tech and high tech in equal measure, textile artist Ptolemy Mann, presents floor based, human scale sculpture for the first time.



'Monolithic Colour Codes 1-4' 2009  
Hand dyed and woven mercerized cotton stretched over wood  
1: 40 x 24 x 80cm 2: 40 x 24 x 100cm  
3: 40 x 24 x 125cm 4: 40 x 24 x 160cm  
www.ptolemymann.com

### Mah Rana

"Permanent Red is a nasty pigment! It is hard to control, spreading out all over, insistent, almost overpowering and aggressive. Even if you manage to clean your tools, your bench and hands after completing your work, you may find your shoes, curtains or dog slightly powdered with the pigment and they will turn deep red when you wash them. Opening the Permanent Red container always reminds me of opening Pandora's box. With this pigment I dusted a vertical gold oval, a calm and powerful shape, connected with the egg and the ovum. The oval form is common in locket, cameo and enamel portraits and oval mirrors reflect and frame the human face in an organic and almost natural way. The Permanent Red will rub off the gold brooch to leave long lasting nasty traces again."

— Mah Rana



'Permanent Red' 2001/02  
Brooch. Gold, pigment  
4.4 x 3.3 x 0.5cm  
www.mahrana.com

### Sophie Smallhorn

The colour wheel is reinvented by artist Sophie Smallhorn in the guise of delicate wall mounted blocks in circular sequence. Three-dimensional colour theory explorations, they echo something we are already familiar with, bringing a sense of surprise to the classic spectrum. "For me colour offers endless possibilities, never-ending scenarios; pairs, groups, subtle movements, uncomfortable jumps, easy colours and difficult colours but all vital to the workings of a composition"

— Sophie Smallhorn



'Circle 1' 2008  
130cm diameter x 5cm deep  
Chemil wood, acrylic paint  
www.sophiesmallhorn.co.uk

### Cristian Zuzunaga

A myriad of geometric 2D blocks flicker across the surface of the gallery windows. Cristian Zuzunaga has installed two printed textile panels illustrating his use of "colour as a spatial medium that enforces identity and contributes to the creation of places with emotional qualities". At first glance these panels seem abstract and decorative but soon become highly evocative and sensual. This is intuitive colour inspired by dream analysis. Zuzunaga brings colour to daily life and aims to "counterbalance present dark and negative ways of seeing and therefore of thinking".



'Aurea' 2008  
Printed in Time 2000 by Foadrat  
(100% Trivera CS) 340cm long x 140 wide  
www.cristianzuzunaga.com

## Significant Colour

Colour is a deeply emotive subject. For most of us it is also highly personal, we each have a unique response to colour that we develop internally through experience and association. How we feel about certain colours often has more to do with what our childhood bedroom walls were painted with than anything else. Experiences, good and bad, associated with certain colours affect our response. Josef Albers showed 100 people the exact same shade of red and the resulting descriptions implied 100 different shades of that colour. We all see and relate to colours individually therefore making it an almost impossible subject to predict and define with any certainty. What can be said is that colour is deeply significant for human beings. Our awareness in some cultures of how significant is questionable but our desire to place colour in and around our environments, on our bodies and the outside of our dwellings has been in strong evidence from the beginning of mankind's journey into consciousness. In western thinking of the late 20th century colour and its potential gravitas seems to have diminished, become secondary, decorative; deeming an object or artwork less serious or intellectual than its less chromatic counterparts. More recently there seems a desire to readdress this balance. Especially on the façade of buildings, a most visible renaissance is taking place where intelligent, serious colour is being used to serve form and function and take pole position. A more refined appreciation and understanding of colour as a tool is shaping how we use it. Recognising the importance of not just the 'chroma' (shade) of a colour, but its 'saturation' (depth and brightness) and 'value' (lightness or darkness) can enhance its role within art and design. Scientific colour tests reveal that often it is the saturation of a colour that we respond to rather than the colour itself. A very intense and saturated blue can be much more energizing to the heart and mind than a dark, somber red, defying the common notion that blue calms and red stimulates. The interaction of colours with each other; the myriad of combinations and effects produced by placing different proportions and spectrums together can take a lifetime to analyze. When you also consider 'after-image', the simultaneous contrast colour that we get a flash of when we look at white after a block of one colour, it then becomes not just about the colours we see visually but the impression they leave behind physically. Colour is a strangely infinite subject crossing emotional and scientific barriers in equal measure.

'Significant Colour' is an exhibition that shows work that is not merely about being 'colourful' but engages the viewer to think more deeply about why objects and artworks employ the colours they do and the implications behind their nuances of tone, shade, material colour, surface and application. Some play with process and substance, others with scale and emotion but they all reveal and celebrate the significance of their colour.

Ptolemy Mann

## Codified Colour

In spite of its ubiquity in the world around us, it is worth reminding ourselves that colour is essentially intangible. In a sense it doesn't really exist — its immateriality is made manifest only through our subjective perception of light frequency (just as music is the perception of the frequency of sound). Subjective, because this perception is influenced by biology (e.g. colour blindness), experience (memories, associations) and context (colours juxtaposed with other colours).

Faced with such a mysterious and powerful phenomenon, human beings have done with colour precisely what we always do with nature: corralled, codified and commodified it. Yves Klein famously trademarked his 'International Klein Blue' (IKB), an ultramarine mix of pigment and resin which uniquely captured the intensity of dried pigment without the typical dilution of colour by production processes. Klein may have been one of the first to explore ownership of colour, but today the practice is commonplace. The artist died prematurely aged 34 in 1962, the same year, suspiciously or not, that Pantone Inc. was founded. The New Jersey-based colour conglomerate (corporate tagline: 'Where Color Comes From') has the ownership of colour as its primary business model. Corporate multinationals lay claim to specific hues, spending millions on branding in order to differentiate themselves from competitors, yet out of Pantone's 1,114 possible colours, a disproportionately large number of corporations (such as Ford, IBM, GM, Panasonic, HP and VW) gravitate to the IKB-esque 'Reflex Blue' (Pantone 185).

As testament to the acceptance of Pantone's definitive colour system, in 2002 scientists at Baltimore's Johns Hopkins University measured the spectral range of light from more than 200,000 galaxies to determine 'the colour of the universe', assigning a specific Pantone reference to their findings. The initial result of pale turquoise Pantone 7472 was later revised, due to a calculation error, to a more prosaic beige, wishfully dubbed 'Cosmic Latte'.

While the human eye can reportedly distinguish up to 10 million different hues, Isaac Newton narrowed it down to the seven colours of the rainbow we all know from childhood: Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo and Violet (ROYGBIV). Appropriations and subversions of Newton's spectrum abound. Russian composer Alexander Scriabin included a colour score alongside the musical notation for his 1909 symphony *Prometheus*, inventing a key-colour scheme assigning colours to notes played by a *klavier per luce*, or keyboard of lights. Apple Inc.'s original striped logo embodied the company's founding philosophy: 'the symbol of lust and knowledge, bitten into, all crossed with the colours of the rainbow in the wrong order. You couldn't dream of a more appropriate logo: lust, knowledge, hope and anarchy'. Also mixing up Newton's spectrum, albeit in more clueless than wilful fashion, was the widely ridiculed US government's 2002 Homeland Security Advisory System. Capitalising on post-9/11 public paranoia, the system coded chromatically-incorrect rainbow colours with such ambiguous terrorist-threat categories as 'Severe', 'High' and 'Elevated'.

On a more quotidian level, we all use colour for classification and organisation: various friends of mine order their records or bookshelves chromatically, rather than by artist/author or genre. We park our cars in colour-coded sections of parking houses, and arrange file binders on office shelves by colour. Implicit in our supposedly pragmatic use of colour are the emotional and experiential associations we continuously make on a subconscious level. Colour, for designers and non-designers alike, remains a ubiquitous and universal visual language with all the dialects and multilayered meaning found in the spoken word.

James Goggin

## Sponsor

ICI Paints AkzoNobel is the world's leading decorative coatings company and number one in the world for decorative paints and performance coatings. Its portfolio includes market-leading brands such as Cuprinol Trade, Dulux Trade, Glidden Trade, Hammerite, Polycell Trade, and Sikkens.

ICI Paints AkzoNobel is continuously working to develop new and differentiated products and services to meet customer needs, and is the leader in environmental sustainability. Experts in colour with an unrivalled colour range, the company ultimately offers specifiers, contractors and decorators the support they need to do a great job.

The company's leadership in formulation science, combined with its commitment to improve the environmental footprint of its products throughout their life cycles is the perfect combination for the journey 'Step Towards Greener'. Although decorative coatings contribute less than two per cent of the total amount of VOCs emitted in the UK, ICI Paints is at the forefront of implementing the new regulations regarding VOCs which will come into force in 2010.



Kindly supported by  
The Arts Council England  
Design by Allcity  
www.allcitymedia.com

## Significant Colour

dRMM  
El Ultimo Grito  
Olivier Droillard  
Ori Gersht  
James Goggin  
Sauerbruch Hutton  
Ptolemy Mann  
Mah Rana  
Sophie Smallhorn  
Cristian Zuzunaga

8th May —  
27th June 2009

THE ARAM GALLERY  
FOR EXPERIMENTAL OR NEW DESIGN