

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: REBORN IN ULTRAMARINE
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Because of my personal history, I express myself through color, the language of the non-verbal. Ultramarine means beyond the sea, a reference to the foreign origin of lapis lazuli.....The thesis discusses the idea of color in sculpture, and its impact on the brain.....

REBORN IN ULTRAMARINE

by

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CHAPTER 1: LANGUAGE AND FOREIGN APPRENTICESHIP

The journey starts with blue.

Being the granddaughter and the daughter of two exiled families, a displaced French from French displaced descent, I decided, as an adult, that the country where I was born or the one where I was educated were not the countries where I would fulfill my dreams. I travelled back and forth to four continents. Voluntary displacement has had repercussion on my descendants and myself, as insertion and separation require control, compassion and adaptation. Blending with foreigners is an extremely difficult and painful process especially in countries where the language is a barrier.

Art is a way to communicate in a manner that is understandable by multiple groups, where vision replaces words. The interpretation of art involves common profound primitive human feelings that seem to be more adaptable to consensus. Reaching deeply in the collective subconscious, art involves color that builds a bridge between objective physics and subjective sensations; it is antithetical to intelligence and sophistication. For Kant [a pioneer of the new theoretical discipline of aesthetics] color, assigned to sensation, was inferior to form.¹

¹ Charles A. Riley Color Codes: Modern Theories of Color in Philosophy, Painting and...London, University press of New England 1995. P20

CHAPTER 2: PIGMENTS AND SCULPTURE

Ancient sculpture has little to do with the world of color. Time and the difficulties to preserve colored pigments explains in part the achromatic perception -in black and white, that we usually have from that past. All the manifestations of ancient art use polychromy - a rather vivid polychromy: painting, of course, but also architecture and sculpture. Awareness of this fact occurred at the end of the 18th century -when neoclassicism flourished in Europe², with artists inspired by Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome where color played an important role. Indeed, travelers and archaeologists found traces of polychromy in the ancient sites they visited or studied, in southern Italy, and in Greece. Like the Egyptians, the Greeks and the Romans were color experts. Pre-Columbian artists were also color alchemists. The shimmering of colors occupied a central place in archaic cities; the mottling was a refined symbol of prestige, a mode of social recognition, not the sign of a frustrated and primitive popular culture. In the seventeenth century during the “quarrel of color”,³ an esthetical debate supporting drawing versus color, a tradition hostile to color was born in Europe.

“Color has been the object of extreme prejudice in Western culture and has been systematically marginalized, reviled, diminished and degraded. Generations of philosophers, artists, art historians and cultural theorists of one stripe or another have kept this prejudice alive, warm, fed and groomed”⁴. For many people, classical sculpture was white. Whiteness imparts a sort of purity, a sense of being the ground zero of Western culture, the original from which an

² Strokstad Marilyn, *Art a Brief History* (Upper Saddle River NJ Pearson Prentice Hall 2007), p494, 495.

³ Adeline Grand-Clément, « L’inventaire des différences » en couleurs : à la recherche du paysage sensible des Grecs à l’époque archaïque », 2007, Jan 2012, accessed March 08,2017. URL: <http://anabases.revues.org/>

⁴ David Batchelor, *Chromophobia*, London Reaktion Books Ltd, 2000.p 22.

entire civilization's canon has sprung. Even if there was a controversy within the world of scientists, mainly in France, the members of the Academy of Fine Arts refused for decades to imagine color on Greek sculptures. The architect and artist Phidias heroically scaled statues that were meant to be seen from a distance with ease, but a monument symbolizing the apogee of Athenian classicism was for many years unthinkable in color.

“I knew, of course, that Greek and Roman sculpture was once painted,” says Susanne Ebbinghaus, Hanfmann curator of ancient art at the Harvard University Art Museums, “but there is a big difference between this abstract notion and actually attempting to imagine what the sculptures might have looked like. We now assume that almost all Greek marble sculpture was painted.”⁵ Would we view these sculptures differently if they were in color?

For Aristotle color was a drug- *pharmakon*; the line was the repository of thought in art. For XXth century's purists, to paint sculptures completely was often a miserable way of hiding or a path towards pleasantly decorative objects. In Western culture, color has often been treated as corrupting, foreign or superficial, describing the primitive, the infantile, the vulgar and the pathological.⁶ For Jean Jacques Rousseau “colors, nicely modulated give the eye pleasure, but that pleasure is purely sensory. It is the drawing, the imitation that endows those colors with life and soul; it is the passions which they express that succeed in affecting us. Interest and sentiment do not depend on colors; the lines of a touching painting touch us in etching as well: remove them from the painting, and the colors will cease to have any effect”.⁷

⁵ Gods in Color: Painted Sculpture of Classical Antiquity Arthur M. Sackler Museum Christopher Reed Ancients reborn in bright array. Nov Dec 2007. <http://harvardmagazine.com/2007/11/dazzlers-html> accessed 3/20/2017.

⁶ David Batchelor *Chromophobia*, London Reaktion Books Ltd, 2000. p23.

⁷ Ibid p 24.

On what ground is the colored sculpture world nowadays connected with bad taste and folklore? Color is a supplement, but it is also, potentially, a seduction.⁸ Color influences cognition and mental processes: some colors can make us hungry, angry, feel weaker or safe. For me, color added to a neutral object has the same impact that the tonality of a foreign language. It sends a direct message to the brain connected to the subconscious. Light green or yellow green relates to nature, trees, grass or jungle. My work, *Chico*⁹ is a deconstruction of a palm branch inspired by the destruction of the tropical forest. The Palmira ruins and other post war rubbles had a strong impact on me and I found that Blue could give a new materialistic presence linked to the color of precious stones like lapis lazuli or sapphire.

A sculpture is an arrangement of lines, volumes, bumps, hollows, and rhythms producing spatial shapes that play with light to produce a compound object. The notion of value (in the painting sense: the nuances of luminance) is provided by the patina. For some people, the contribution of color is not a benefit -an added value, as it is disruptive to the vision of form. For me to paint a sculpture is a way to dress it up. At first glance, the movement may seem to disappear under the painting, but the movement is there and waiting to be discovered, it is a personal choice not to reveal everything at first glance. Power, movement and lines are there... underneath, revealing themselves slowly. Is it painting? Is it sculpture? It is both. The distinction between a painting and a sculpture is not as simple as if it is two or three dimensional, but whether it can be “traveled”. Can you see it from different viewing points? It is a sculpture. Can you see part of it from one point and other parts from other points? It is a combine. Can you see it only from one point? It is a painting. Paintings are flat, as flat as the screen of a laptop; they enclose the viewer in one position, they do not invite to the promenade, they convey to the false, to the

⁸ Ibid p 52.

⁹ Tribute to Chico Mendes defending the forest in the north of Brazil.

reproduction, to the thing that ‘looks like’. Welcome to Fakeland...What I love about sculpture is that it needs to be seen from different angles and cannot be reproduced on a flat screen.

A sculpture is considered subtractive when material is removed to create it, while adding materials form additive sculptures. My work is a form of assemblage created on a substrate that consists of three-dimensional elements projecting out of or from the substrate, where each form projects to the viewer. It will be different depending on the viewer’s position forming an addition of an infinity of different paintings. Controlling shadows with their color reflection is an integral part of my objects.

Modernism, from Jackson Pollock motion controlled drip painting to Katharina Grosse’s color buildups, leading to Anish Kapoor’s pigment accumulation, and Yves Klein’s monochrome blue canvases lead to a new global interpretation of Art. Fighting the Minimalist movement, artists like Jean Dubuffet, Alexander Calder, Sol LeWitt, or Nikky de Saint Phalle brought back color in the second part of the 20th century. In the last twenty years, color made a comeback with major artists like Anish Kapoor, Katharina Grosse, Jeff Koons, Franz West and lately Arne Quinze, Enrique Oliveira and Dan Corson.

CHAPTER 3: POETRY

« La terre est bleue comme une orange. »

"The world is blue like an orange"

Paul Eluard

A noir, I rouge, U vert, O bleu :
voyelles,
Je dirai quelque jour vos naissances
latentes :
A, noir corset velu des mouches
éclatantes qui bombinent autour des
puanteurs cruelles,
Golfes d'ombre ; E, candeur des
vapeurs et des tentes,
Lances des glaciers fiers, rois blancs,
frissons d'ombelles ;
I, pourpres, sang craché, rire des lèvres
belles
Dans la colère ou les ivresses
pénitentes ;
U, cycles, vibrations divins des
mers virides,
Paix des pâtis semés d'animaux, paix
des rides
Que l'alchimie imprime aux grands
fronts studieux ;
O, suprême Clairon plein des strideurs
étranges,
Silences traversés des Mondes et des
Angeles :
O l'Oméga, rayon violet de Ses Yeux !
Arthur Rimbaud

Sobre París la luna
tiene color violeta

A black, E white, I red, U green, O blue:
vowels,
I shall tell, one day, of your mysterious
origins:
A, black velvety jacket of brilliant flies
which buzz around cruel smells,
Gulfs of shadow; E, whiteness of vapours
and of tents,
Lances of proud glaciers, white kings,
shivers of cow-parsley;
I, purples, spat blood, smile of beautiful lips
In anger or in the raptures of penitence;
U, waves, divine shudderings of viridian
seas,
The peace of pastures dotted with animals,
the peace of the furrows
which alchemy prints on broad studious
foreheads;
O, sublime Trumpet full of strange piercing
sounds,
Silences crossed by Worlds and by Angels:
O the Omega, violet ray of His Eyes!
Arthur Rimbaud

Over Paris the moon's
got a violet color

y se pone amarilla
en las ciudades muertas.
hay una luna verde
en todas las leyendas,
luna de telaraña
y de rota vidriera,
y sobre los desiertos
es profunda y sangrienta.
Pero la luna blanca,
la luna verdadera,
solo luce en los quietos
cementerios de aldea

COLORES

Federico García Lorca¹⁰

and yellow
in the dead cities.
There's a green moon
In all the legends,
a spider web moon
and cracked stained-glass moon
and over the deserts
it is deep and bloody.
But the white moon,
The true moon
Only shines on the soundless
Graves in small towns.

COLORS

Federico Garcia Lorca

Verde que te quiero verde
Verde viento. Verdes ramas.
El barco sobre la mar
y el caballo en la montaña.
Con la sombra en la cintura
Ella sueña en su baranda,
verde carne, pelo verde,
con ojos de fría plata.
Verde que te quiero verde.
Bajo la luna gitana,
las cosas le están mirando
y ella no puede mirarlas.

Green, how I desire you green.
Green wind. Green branches.
The ship upon the sea
and the horse in the mountain.
With the shade wrapped around her waist
she dreams on her balcony,
green flesh, hair green,
with eyes of cold silver.
Green, how I desire you, green.
Beneath the gypsy's moon,
all things look at her
yet she sees them not.

¹⁰ Havard, Robert G. "The Symbolic Ambivalence of 'Green' in García Lorca and Dylan Thomas." JSTOR. 1972. 6/10/2010. Web. Parrot, Louis. "A Poet Crazy About Color." Lorca: A Collection of Critical Essays. Ed. Manuel Duran. NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1965. Print.

Verde que te quiero verde.
Grandes estrellas de escarcha,
vienen con el pez de sombra
que abre el camino del alba.
La higuera frota su viento
con la lija de sus ramas,
y el monte, gato garduño,
eriza sus pitas agrias.
¿Pero quién vendrá? ¿Y por dónde..?
Ella sigue en su baranda,
verde carne, pelo verde,
soñando en la mar amarga.

VERDE

Federico García Lorca

Green, how I desire you green.
Big stars of frost,
come with the fish of the shadow
that open the path of dawn.
The fig tree fondles its wind
with the sandpaper of its branches,
and the forest, cunning bobcat,
bristles its acrid thorns.
But who will come? And from where...?
She remains on her veranda,
green flesh, hair green,
dreaming in the bitter sea.

GREEN

Federico García Lorca

CHAPTER 4: ROLE OF COLOR

What is the true color of an object? The intrinsic color of an object does not exist; it presents different colors according to the constitution of the light that illuminates it. It results from the action of light on its surface. Color is a radiation to which human eyes are sensitive; it is not a material, it is a sensation. A magical trick. The light is at the origin of the colors but, if it encounters no object on its way, one sees nothing. Light is characterized by its frequency, wavelength and propagation velocity. The luminous radiations perceived by our eye are thus distinguished by their intensity (the impression that the light diffused (or reflected) by the bodies makes on the eye). When we say that an object is blue, it actually means that the molecular surface of this object absorbs all the light radiation except blue. Thus, color does not exist on its own and is not a physical property of objects around us: the brain interprets a sensation of the eye after a stimulus. The sensation of color is therefore linked to the combination of the following four elements: the light source with its spectral distribution; the material with its qualities of reflection; the eye with its trichromatic sensor; and the brain with its interpretation system.

The eye is a highly perfected evolution of a cell that specialized in the capture of waves. In order to widen the reception range of light waves, the human eye is equipped with three sensors (red, green and blue) which send all the colors to the brain in the form of mixtures. Isaac Newton presented his new theory of light and color in 1672¹¹ and demonstrated experimentally that white light (sunlight) contained all the colors from red to violet (colors of the spectrum or "rainbow"). 130 years later Thomas Young proved, based on experimental work on the

¹¹ Stromer Klaus, Wamberg Jacob, John Gage, et al. Color in Art. Louisiana Museum of Modern Art p 75.

dissection of the eye, that the physiology of perception is governed by a trichrome mode: the visual cells lining the background of the retina (the cones) have a variable chromatic sensitivity corresponding to the blue, green or red areas of the light spectrum. The brain does not take this trichromatic color analysis into account, but is based on a complementary opposition system with subjective values related to quantity (luminosity), quality (hue) and purity (saturation). Furthermore, color perception also depends on age, gender, environment and personal culture. For example, the aging of the cornea will play the role of a very slightly yellow filter, which will lead the observer to use bluish white as reference for absolute white. Color is a very personal and subjective experience: there are not two individuals with the same color perception.

COLOR THEORY

For centuries, artists and philosophers have theorized that color is three-dimensional.

Contemporary neuroscientists have confirmed this theory, finding that our sensation of color comes from nerve cells that send messages to the brain about the brightness of color, greenness vs. redness and blueness vs. yellowness. When colors are dark or light, we perceive less variation in their vividness. We see the maximum range of color saturation for middle-toned colors.

MEANING OF COLORS

Color symbolism in art refers to the use of color as a symbol in various cultures. Diversity in color symbolism occurs because color meanings and symbolism occur on an individual, cultural and universal basis. Color symbolism is also context-dependent and influenced by changes over time.¹²

Colors are ubiquitous, they infuse us with states of mind, feelings; they give us the strength to move forward or burst into deep silence. Moreover, according to countries, cultures and times, colors have different meanings, sometimes at the opposite of those of neighboring cultures: for example, white is associated with purity in the West, while it is associated to mourning in most Asian countries.

Bearer of meaning and symbolism, color cannot be chosen lightly.

Like the blue sky or the sea that opens the horizons, blue and its shades (turquoise, cyan) is a color closely related to dreams, wisdom and serenity. It is one of the favorite colors of Westerners: indeed, it is omnipresent. Blue is the echo of life, travel and discoveries in the literal and figurative sense (personal introspection). Like water that refreshes, blue has a refreshing and pure side that allows us to recover a certain inner calm connected with deep things. Blue is a symbol of truth, like clear water that cannot hide anything: from ultramarine - the purest and richest but most expensive blue made from lapis lazuli mined in remote caves of the Hindu Kush Mountains in Afghanistan's Kochka River Valley - to the 19th-century discovery of an artificial form, French Ultramarine.

Green is surely the color most present in nature. Rightly associated with the vegetable world, which is its most worthy representative, green is a soothing, refreshing and even invigorating color. In Western culture, it is associated with hope and luck. However, this color can sometimes be a carrier of failure and misfortune. It was banned from theaters in France after Moliere died on stage wearing a green garment. Green is also associated with hospitals and pharmacies that

have included it in their logo. It was common for artists to struggle before the end of the 18 century to find natural materials like green hearth or malachite to make this color¹³.

Color has a deep emotional resonance amplifying and going beyond many of the other qualities of visual impressions.¹⁴

My colors are pigments, that is to say, colored material (substances). Additive synthesis (mixtures of colors-light) should not be confused with subtractive synthesis (mixtures of pigments). It is important, therefore, to distinguish color, perceptual notion, and wavelength, physical notion. I buy my pigments in Paris; it is a form of tradition, a complicate and joyful moment. I step in the shop which has not been touched since Monet or Cezanne used to buy “the newest” chemical pigments. It all began in 1887 when a dedicated chemist by the name of Gustave Sennelier, advised by his expressionist friends, founded the art supplies store Maison Sennelier in Paris.¹⁵ This is where I find the inspiration for my color palette. On my flight back to Washington DC my suitcases are full of blended pigments that will create my own colors. Like Yves Klein, I try to find the binder that will allow the maximum color saturation, one “that would begin to deform the shape and dislocate the surface of its supports”¹⁶. In my blue work, inspired by the destruction of the Syrian site of Palmyra and the destruction of the city of Mosul in Iraq, I pay a tribute to those rubbles so they become the fake emblem of precious stones, one of the few natural palpable blues in the world. The blue omnipresent in my works is not identical; it is a variation on a blue theme. The different selections show the notable difference in

¹³ Pastoureau Michel *Symbolique médiévale et Moderne* Ecole pratique des hautes études. 2014.
<http://ashp.revues.org/1616>

¹⁴ Stromer Klaus, Wamberg Jacob, John Gage, et al. *Color in Art*. Humlebæk, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art p 105.

¹⁵ <http://www.sennelier.fr/>

¹⁶ David Batchelor *Chromophobia*, London Reaktion Books Ltd, 2000. p 107.

the use of this color. At first, I use the dispersion, spreading over the whole surface of the support; my color seems to be diluted in a rich cloudiness of varied values, presenting imprecise contours. Later, covering the whole support, I associate the expressiveness of the trace and the luminosity of the color to translate a movement, an almost violent impulsiveness. In another work, motivated by the deforestation of the Amazon in the north of Brazil, I deconstruct a palm branch, symbol of peace and eternal life.

My work, based on a fragmentation of global forms, wants to destabilize the viewer: the spectator has to recognize it and rebuilt it in order to fully identify it. I worked on 2D objects for half of my MFA and I discovered sculpture -“wall free” objects that can be seen from 360 degrees, a year ago. I needed to step out from 2D that I found static and flat, too similar to the XXIst century’s world of screens. I stepped into 3D with great anxiety. It was like moving from one country to another and going to an alien part of the world, to the unknown. The perspective was not the same, the codes changed; the perception and the language were different. My work is composed of both a form of assemblage and deconstruction created on a substrate that consists of three-dimensional elements projecting out of or from the substrate.

My first sculpture introduced me to polystyrene extruded and expanded, a cheap material used in construction but very controversial because of its chemical components. For me this material was ideal: easy to maneuver, to carve, to paint, to bind and to cast.

My work, mainly consisting of simple geometric shapes, playing on the imbalances, joins some of the minimal art approaches. For me, imbalance gives life to sculpture. The floor counts a lot,

whereas it seems to shrink; my sculptures are in danger of falling, or, at best, present several possible points of equilibrium.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

My work deconstructs the information that bombards me on the screens I use in my everyday life. Images of destruction in cities at war and of ecological damages and earth pollution inspire my work; I reconstruct them alleviating their aggressiveness and violence using intense colors that act like filters transforming reality into a dream zone. I like to restructure chaos, recycling construction material to give them a new life. In editing what I have found, I redefine the layers and textures in my compositions. Information captures my imagination and influences my research, carving my vision of society and how I would like people to perceive it. Like in a carnival, using forms and colors that just suggest the importance of the phenomena and with the association of unconventional materials and pigments I make work that is not easily reproducible: a talisman to the future of the made by hand.

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1. Giotto, Arena Chapel, Padua, 1305.



2. Johannes Vermeer 1665 Girl with a Pearl Earring



3.1 SE 71 La grande eponge bleue Centre Pompidou 1962.



3.2 Yves Klein Piege bleu pour lignes 1957.



3.3 Yves Klein Centre Pompidou Paris 1962 Portrait relief d'Arman



4. Franz West, 2002



5. Frank Stella Polish Village, 2014.



6. Wohrer, Dominique. Installation shot from the MFA thesis exhibition.



7. Wohrer, Dominique. Installation shot from the MFA thesis exhibition.



8. Wohrer, Dominique. Installation shot from the MFA thesis exhibition.