COLOR SHIFT

Ann Temkin

1. The Muralo Company. Chart for Calcimo Colors. c. 1900. The text reads, "They will smoothly under the brush and will keep ectly sweet in tins for years."

This exhibition takes as its point of departure the commercial color chart, an item that openly declares the status of paint as a factory-made commodity. The color chart possesses no higher truth than the materials that were required to make it, and no higher classificatory logic than those the manufacturer deemed useful for builders and contractors, decorators and designers, craftsmen and do-it-yourselfers. It invokes not the realm of fine art but rather the nonart purposes for which the overwhelming majority of paint in the world is made.

Color charts came into use by the 1880s, as a direct result of the mass production of ready-mixed paints for household use and the de-professionalizing of the handyman's or housepainter's job. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth, paint companies mounted ambitious campaigns to convince the general public that it could do its own painting. Advertisements suggested the pleasure and satisfaction that these tasks could give to the ordinary householder, and the ease with which he or she could acquire the necessary skills.

This broad new consumer base generated the need for cards, brochures, and catalogues presenting the full array of a paint manufacturer's colors. The earliest color charts included glued-in samples, made by applying paint to cardboard or thick paper that was then cut into units for the charts.[1] Their design established a format that, remarkably, has been retained to the present day: a set of individual color units arranged in rows and columns on a neutral field (figs. 1 and 2). The colors are unmodulated by any brushstrokes or other textures, so as to demonstrate how flat the paint will appear on the surface to which it is to be applied. Unlike that of a spectrum or color wheel, there is no necessary logic to the sequences of color ranges—it is simply a nonhierarchical list of what is available. In a color chart, black and white—usually referred to in color systems as the absence and combination, respectively, of all colors—are just two more colors (and, like all the other colors, are available in multiple shades).

The color chart serves as a lens through which to examine a radical transformation in Western art that took place midway through the twentieth century, when long-held convictions regarding the spiritual aspects and scientific properties of particular colors gave way to a widespread attitude that took for granted the fact of color as a commercial product. The artistic quest for personal expression, so often achieved through color, had been replaced by Andy Warhol's "I want to be a machine," and the mastery of a palette by Frank Stella's desire "to keep the paint as good as it is in the can." A contemporary position had evolved—one that might be called a color-chart sensibility—that set aside theories of relational color harmo-

ny just as it rejected the symbolic or expressive import of color choices, accepting color as a matter of fact, even happenstance.

Put differently, much of the most advanced art of the last fifty years has treated color as *readymade*, Marcel Duchamp's term for the mass-produced objects that he designated as works of art merely by selecting and then adjusting them in some way. The concept of the readymade reminds us that color itself had undergone a rapid transformation during the course of the nineteenth century from handmade product to synthetically manufactured, standardized, and commercially packaged commodity. Duchamp acknowledged this fact in the last oil painting he would make: *Tu m'* of 1918 (plate 1). In a complex and enigmatic composition that constituted a virtuosic summation of his own work to date, he included an echelon of painted, lozenge-shaped color swatches cascading from the upper-left corner. As Duchamp bid his own farewell to painting, he offered as his bequest to the future the notion of color as readymade.

Color Chart explores this legacy from 1950 to the present, as it was only after World War II that the consequences for art of mass-produced color became fully apparent. The exhibition examines the use by artists of ready-made color in two separate but related senses: color as store-bought rather than hand-mixed, and color as divorced from the artist's subjective taste or decisions. The works in the exhibition span numerous disciplines, mediums, and art-historical lines: the subject of color "after the palette" is addressed in paintings, sculptures, drawings, prints, video, film, and installation; color appears as colored papers, paint swatches, caviar and axle grease, auto enamel, and adhesive vinyl tape. The forty-four artists represented here do not by any means share a methodology that is typically considered Duchampian. For some, such as Ellsworth Kelly and Alighiero Boetti, color remains or remained a central concern throughout their careers. For others, including Richard Serra and Dan Graham, color has been a less obvious concern but makes an appearance in revelatory works.

Fig. 2. DuPont. Color chart for Duco paint. Mid-1920s

Today color charts, once the domain of the hardware or paint store, seem to be everywhere, broadcasting the easy availability and virtually infinite choice of color in products ranging from cars to cosmetics. In the age of digital color, every home and office computer offers a convenient world of ready-made color to its user, courtesy of the red, green, and blue phosphorus dots that coat the inside surface of a computer screen. The palette of thousands of colors that can be summoned by a single click is simply a somewhat more manageable selection from among the computer's nearly 17 million possible color combinations.

The color chart has largely supplanted the color wheel, which for three centuries embodied the attempt to organize color meaningfully and hierarchically according to spiritual or scientific theories.[2] During the course of the past century, those systems have come to be understood as reflecting the human desire for order more than any intrinsic truths about color. Classifications once considered immutable are now recognized as reflections of personal choice or historical context. For example, Issac Newton's decision in 1675 to identify the spectrum as seven colors rather than eight was based on his desire to make an analogy to the notes of the musical octave. So-called primary colors—a notion codified around 1600—have been variously considered in terms of three (red, yellow, blue) or four (plus green). The history of color, it turns out, abounds in subjectivities. In his *Remarks on Color*, written in 1951, Ludwig Wittgenstein succinctly noted that J. W. von Goethe's *Theory of Color* of 1810, arguably the most influential text of its kind, "really isn't a theory at all."[3]

The search for universal truths about color dates back to ancient analogies between color and the four humors or the four elements. But anthropological studies revealing vastly different, even contradictory practices of nomenclature among cultures indicate that any universality in the experience of color is an illusion. For example, many ancient and non-Western languages use a single term for what

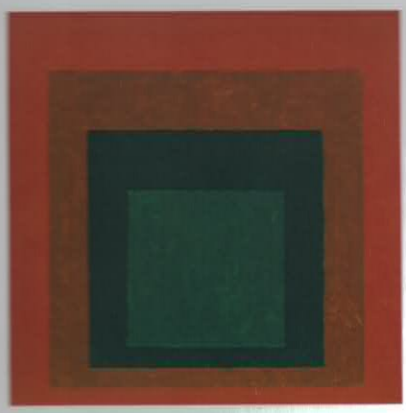


Fig. 3. Josef Albers. *Homage to the Square: Coniferous.* 1958. Oil on composition board, 18 x 17 ⅞" (45.6 x 45.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Jay R. Braus

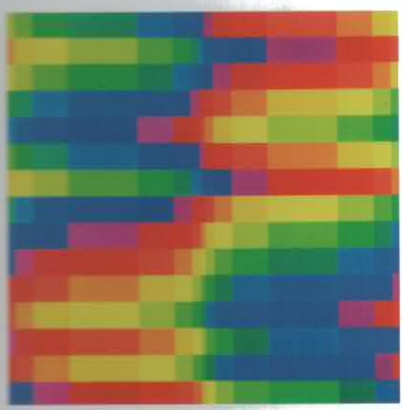


Fig. 4. Richard Paul Lohse. *Fifteen Systematic Color Rows with Vertical Condensations.* 1950–58. Oil on canvas, 59 ⅛ x 59 ⅛" (150 x 150 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of The Riklis Collection of McCrory Corporation

Westerners understand as unrelated colors, such as blue and yellow. Generalizations about the affective qualities of different colors—red as angry, blue as calm—are also now known to be culturally specific, and even highly variable within cultures. A contemporary awareness of color's historical and ideological contingency is reflected in the unsentimental, pragmatic quality of the commercial color chart. At the same time, the color chart as the foundation of standardization—evident in the success of international color-matching systems such as Pantone—is symptomatic of a global age in which cultural differences in color are being eroded no less than those in language and cuisine.

The color-chart sensibility of the artists whose works are presented in this exhibition extends from a set of profound questions about assumptions that not long ago had seemed certain: the possibility of individual genius or even originality, the inviolability of the unique handmade object, and the clear separation of art and life. In this context the color chart embodies the desanctification of color that accompanied the end of the idealism of such early modernists as Henri Matisse, Vasily Kandinsky, and Piet Mondrian. As this exhibition sets out to demonstrate, the color chart furnishes a compelling allegory for an approach to color adopted by those contemporary artists who disavow transcendent goals of truth or beauty while forging a new quotidian sublime.

Teachers and Students

"This is the most stupid thing I have ever seen; I dun't even vant to know who did it."[4] Such was Josef Albers's harsh pronouncement on the work of his student Robert Rauschenberg at Black Mountain College, North Carolina, in 1949. Rauschenberg's memory of Albers's impatience with him handily conveys—if with a bit of caricature—the degree to which the mid-century adoption of a color-chart sensibility discredited many decades of color pedagogy, of which Albers was a mighty exemplar. Nevertheless, Albers himself served as an important influence for a subsequent generation of artists whose de-skilling of color was in many ways a logical extension of his methodologies.

A veteran of the Bauhaus who fled Nazi Germany in 1933, Albers taught generations of American students to work with color relations, first at Black Mountain (1933–49) and later at Yale (1950–60). Albers's approach was an empirical one, rejecting the color theories that had been current in Europe during the early part of the century. His career of teaching and painting was founded on the principle that the perception of color depends entirely on adjacencies—that, in fact, color is "the most relative medium in art."[5] These ideas are exemplified in his series of Homage to the Square paintings, which he made between 1950 and 1976, the year he died (see fig. 3). Albers's pragmatism had tremendous repercussions for the artists who studied under him, as well as for those taught by his followers and those who read and used the compilation of his teachings published in 1963, *Interaction of Color*. But his attitude eventually seemed beside the point to an emerging avant-garde. Finally, as Rauschenberg summed up his own case, "In the exercises, seeing the clinical tricks that were involved in color, I met a lot of nice colors, but I couldn't justify with any idea what would be a better one or not."[6]

The profound difference in ideology between Albers's generation and Rauschenberg's is illuminated by an anecdote told by Gerhard Richter.[7] In 1972 Richter was in Venice for the Biennale, where he was showing his four paintings *180 Colors*, done in 1971, consisting of squares of color distributed as a grid by chance operations (page 91, fig. 2). Walking down a street during opening week, Richter saw across the way the seventy-year-old Swiss painter Richard Paul Lohse, a leading color theorist and practitioner of color-centered geometric abstraction (see fig. 4). According to Richter, Lohse caught sight of him and began to jump and shake like Rumpelstiltskin; he approached the forty-year-old Richter and hissed, "How could you *do* that?" The random juxtaposition of colors was for Lohse a heresy worthy of artistic excommunication.

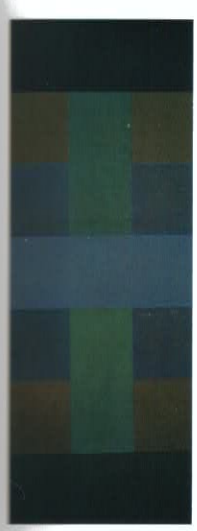


Fig. 5. Ad Reinhardt. *Abstract Painting.* 1957. Oil on canvas, 9' x 40" (274.3 x 101.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase

Fig. 6. Barnett Newman. *Ulysses.* 1952. Oil on canvas, 11' x 50" (337 x 127 cm). The Menil Collection, Houston. Gift of Adelaide de Menil Carpenter and Dominique de Menil

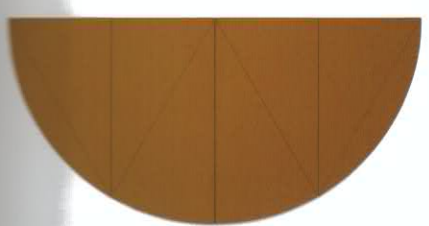


Fig. 7. Robert Mangold. *1/2 W Series.* 1968. Synthetic polymer paint on composition board, in two parts, each: 48 ¼ x 48 ¼" (122.5 x 122.4 cm), overall: 48 ¼" x 8' ½" (122.5 x 245.1 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Larry Aldrich Foundation Fund

For Rauschenberg, Richter, and their contemporaries, alternative role models did not necessarily come from the world of art. The ideas of John Cage, for example, greatly influenced artists, although his primary discipline was music. Cage taught classes at Black Mountain (where he met Rauschenberg) and later at the New School in New York, but he also disseminated his views through countless lectures and appearances in New York City and elsewhere. His advocacy of nonintention on the part of the artist, as well as his willingness to let the ambience of ordinary life infiltrate the sphere of art, were instrumental in the shift away from both geometric abstraction and Abstract Expressionism. His now-famous "Lecture on Nothing," first given in 1949 at the Studio School in New York's Greenwich Village, encapsulates the openness of his philosophy, which applied just as well to color as to sound:

> I begin to hear the old sounds—the ones I had thought worn out, worn out by intellectualization—I begin to hear the old sounds as though they are not worn out. Obviously, they are not worn out. They are just as audible as the new sounds. Thinking had worn them out. And if one stops thinking about them, suddenly they are fresh and new.[8]

Cage inspired artists as various as Rauschenberg and Kelly, whom he befriended in Paris in 1949, to approach their art without preconceived ideas. Like Duchamp, he gave license to a contemporary form of iconoclasm that gently but swiftly toppled long-heralded heroes and ideals. Cage's presence and influence were transatlantic, and his thinking had as much resonance for the American Minimalists as for Richter or Daniel Buren.

Ad Reinhardt and Barnett Newman were also instrumental in the shift toward a color-chart sensibility—despite the fact that they put enormous stock in the mystical profundity of color. Reinhardt's attitude was best expressed in the "black" paintings he made between 1954 and the year of his death, 1967. He deliberately made pictures that took a long time to see, sequestering nuanced color in "black" compositions that seemed at first glance empty rather than full (see fig. 5). There is no way to perceive, optically, the glowing color hidden in the black paintings without standing in front of them for several minutes, a commitment that for Reinhardt allowed a shift from an ordinary to an aesthetic state of mind.

Whereas Reinhardt distanced himself from the expressionism of the New York School, Newman in many ways shared the attitudes and goals of peers such as Mark Rothko and Clyfford Still, for whom color carried a fundamental emotional charge. Newman prided himself on the uniqueness of his palette (see fig. 6): its singularity was metaphorically equivalent to his uniqueness as an artist, and by extension, to the uniqueness of each and every viewer. To explain his position, Newman differentiated between the terms "color" and "colors": he was involved with "the color I make out of colors." Colors were something that "anybody can buy and squeeze . . . out of tubes," whereas color was what Newman created himself.[9]

Newman's point of view, like Reinhardt's, runs contrary to that of the artists in this exhibition. Yet their work was of great importance to the generation who came to prominence in the 1960s. The paintings of both Newman and Reinhardt, when divorced from their original intentions, offered models for what the next generation was trying to achieve. Although these two artists invested their work with feeling and spirit, their paintings were read as cool and objective; the evidence of the artist's hand in the making of the painting, apparent in the gestural bravura of Willem de Kooning and Jackson Pollock, and in Rothko's floating fields of color, seemed minimized, if not invisible. This misreading is apparent not only in the work of artists who used color in a nonexpressive, ready-made, or systematic way—for example, Stella, Dan Flavin, and Sol LeWitt—but also in restorations conducted by conservators who would repaint Reinhardt's or Newman's damaged paintings with a roller.

The mid-1960s was a period of extraordinary intellectual exchange among

Fig. 8. Vincent van Gogh. ***Portrait of Père Tanguy***. 1887–88. Oil on canvas, 25 ⅝ x 20 ⅛" (65 x 51 cm). Private collection

Fig. 9. Pablo Picasso. *Violin, Glass, Pipe and Anchor, Souvenir of Le Havre*. 1912. Oil on canvas, 31 ⅞ x 21 ⅜" (81 x 54 cm). Narodni Galerie, Prague

artists. In New York, artist-thinkers such as LeWitt and Donald Judd, and many others as well, had an enormous impact on their peers and those slightly younger, both through their published writings and through the constant conversation that filled the small downtown art world. But color was virtually absent as a subject, even when present in the work itself. The rejection of Abstract Expressionism—whether by the Pop or the Minimalist artists—brought with it an attendant attitude toward color that equated it with excessive melodrama. Even Newman went through a period in the early 1960s of limiting his output to black paintings on raw canvas, and influential younger artists such as Agnes Martin and Robert Ryman intentionally restricted their palettes. Robert Mangold—one of the few painters to address the subject—spoke of how he wanted to use colors that evoked a bland office environment of steel file cabinets and manila envelopes (see fig. 7). Exhibitions with titles like *Black and White* and *Black, White and Gray* showed curators falling in behind the artists.[10]

The suppression of color, already evident in much painting of the mid-1960s, carried over into the beginnings of what would be known as Conceptual art. As LeWitt wrote in his "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," published in *Artforum* in June 1967,

> Conceptual art is made to engage the mind of the viewer rather than his eye or emotions. The physicality of a three-dimensional object then becomes a contradiction to its nonemotive intent. Color, surface, texture, and shape only emphasize the physical aspects of the work. Anything that calls attention to and interests the viewer in this physicality is a deterrent to our understanding of the idea and is used as an expressive device.[11]

Color would nevertheless turn out to be ideally suited to the Conceptualist methodologies of seriality and system, in the sense that the placement of objective parameters on the use of color provided a perfect vehicle for demonstrating—even calling attention to—the objectivity of the artist. The Conceptual artists' preference for obtaining and using color designed for the general, nonspecialized customer would also underscore their desire for independence from the history of several centuries of bourgeois painting.

Shopping for Color

Until the nineteenth century, certain artists' colors were luxury goods of the highest order, often difficult to obtain and to make ready for use. The relative esteem accorded different pigments, usually imported from far away, corresponded to their rarity and consequent expense. Renaissance patrons specified in contracts the exact colors for the works they commissioned, and artists' guilds set harsh penalties for any attempts to cheat by using inferior paints. Only with the invention of oil paint, which could be mixed to produce new colors, did the gradual dissociation between a given color and its natural source begin. Nature was placed at an even greater remove when, in the mid-1800s, chemical companies began the synthetic production of paints. The bright Impressionist and Post-Impressionist palette was in part made up of newly invented colors, one no more or less intrinsically precious than another.

For centuries one of the artist's principal tasks had been mixing his own color. Oil paints were secured from an apothecary or a grocer, and came in animal bladders that the artist punctured to squirt paint onto a palette. It is possible that in their theoretical writings, artists long ranked *disegno* over *colore* precisely because the latter was so closely bound up with manual, messy work, an aspect of their occupation they wished to downplay. In the early 1800s, companies devoted to artists materials—such as Winsor and Newton, established in London in 1832—began to

Ripolin Lime Green paint, ⅛-gallon
1940

make their appearance, and in 1841, American portrait-painter John Rand invented the tin tube as a way of packaging oil paint. But the preparation of color was still often the work of a "color man," on whom an artist relied for paints that were vivid, durable, and free of adulteration. Among the most famous was "Père" Julien Tanguy in Montmartre, who had opened a shop in 1874, serving clients who included Renoir, Pissarro, Cézanne, and van Gogh (see fig. 8).

By the mid-twentieth century an artist had access to an unprecedented variety of premixed, prepackaged colors. For Albers, procuring paint was its own reward. As he explained to the visiting art critic Jean Clay in 1968:

> On this shelf alone I have eighty different kinds of yellows and forty grays. I have them sent from all over the place. In town yesterday I bought eighteen different reds. I can't finish that picture over there because I'm waiting for a blue to come from Paris.[12]

No matter how objective and rigorous Albers's practice was, his passion for the stuff of color bubbles over into these remarks. Although he never mixed his own paints, he compensated by obsessively tracking down and purchasing as many off-the-shelf colors as he could. This is borne out in his more than one thousand Homage to the Square paintings. Each bears on the reverse of its Masonite or Formica support, in Albers's handwriting, the full recipe for the composition on the front: the paint used for the white ground layer (color name and brand), those used for each of the concentric sections, and the varnish, with the colors noted as being applied "directly from the tube."

Few artists shared Albers's energy and commitment to shopping for color. In 1966, Darby Bannard, an abstract painter who had taught Stella at Princeton, lamented in the pages of *Artforum* the relative poverty of color in contemporary painting. He complained that artists settled for what the local art store offered, and were too lazy to go elsewhere or to mix anything beyond that. "Most paintings I have seen contain the same thirty or forty colors. In effect, therefore, the color range of the artist is set by the company from which he buys his paints."[13] Instead, he recommended purchasing commercial paints at a hardware store, where the paint-mixing machines offered "an extremely sophisticated system of color selection, more complex than that of any art paint company."[14]

By this time, however, for certain artists, the deliberate selection of a particular color—whether from an art-supply or a hardware store—would have associated with the color a personal taste, an expressive or descriptive need, or a decorative or harmonic goal. In contrast, found color held a greater attraction. The remainder bin was a preferred source for both Rauschenberg and Stella in the 1950s, incidentally assuring that their work would not bear the curse of a fashionable palette. Similarly, James Rosenquist made what he called his "wrong color paintings" with discards from his job as a billboard painter. "How," he asked himself, "could I make a beautiful, colorful painting with these low-value colors?"[15]

In fact, the use of commercial paint in works of art had begun much earlier in the twentieth century, as part of the ongoing avant-garde campaign to reject the trappings of accepted painting. The first appearance of vivid color in Analytic Cubism, outside the usual range of browns, grays, and ivories, was the blast of red, yellow, and blue at the top of Pablo Picasso's 1912 oval composition *Violin, Glass, Pipe and Anchor, Souvenir of Le Havre* (see fig. 9)—an introduction made even more conspicuous by the shine of Ripolin paint. Ripolin (see fig. 10), a commercial enamel manufactured for use on wood, plaster, and metal, was a medium that Picasso favored at various points in his career. Gertrude Stein quoted him as pronouncing Ripolin "the health of color," and Roland Penrose's notebooks tell of a 1955 visit to Picasso during which the artist extolled the virtues of Ripolin and declared that "the limits of oil paint from tubes had been reached."[16]

Fig. 11. Francis Picabia. *Veglione, Cannes, 1924.* 1924. Ripolin on canvas, 36 ⅝ x 28 ¾" (93 x 73 cm). Private collection

Fig. 12. Willem de Kooning. *Painting.* 1948. Enamel and oil on canvas, 42 ⅝ x 56 ⅛" (108.3 x 142.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase

Fig. 13. Edouard Manet. *The Fifer.* 1866. Oil on canvas, 63 x 38 ½" (161 x 97 cm). Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Picasso's enthusiasm for paint in a can was shared by a number of his conte raries. Commercial paint took a star turn in Duchamp's "assisted readymade" of 1916–17, *Apolinère Enameled* (page 43, fig. 3), made on a display card for Sap enamel. Francis Picabia chose Ripolin for his "monster paintings" of the mid-1 using the shiny, vivid paint to dramatize their provocative imagery (see fig. 11). Fernand Léger, an artist devoted to the idiom of the modern city and technolo considered Ripolin the perfect material for his work at a mural scale.[17] In a very different tradition, David Alfonso Siqueiros relied on Duco enamel for his outd murals in the 1930s, and taught workshops on using it to a group of New York ists, including Pollock.

The Abstract Expressionists—for whom Picasso, especially, was a constant, like presence—were well aware of such antecedents for their forays into comm color. The presence of nonart materials in midcentury paintings by artists such Pollock, de Kooning, and Franz Kline enhanced their work's revolutionary aur while the low cost of commercial paint fit well with the bohemian stereotype th cultivated. It was an important part of their self-image: for the rest of his life, d Kooning (see fig. 12) kept the first five-gallon cans of zinc white and black ena paint he had bought on the Bowery with Kline.[18]

In due course, nonart paint came to assume a role in the practice of many a Large-scale work in particular invited the use of commercial paint, as buying c by the tube would have been both absurdly inefficient and prohibitively expens In addition to being relatively cheap, house paint is designed to flow easily and to produce a smooth, opaque surface that conceals any evidence of the brush— sought-after quality for the artist looking to attain the depersonalization of styl so widely desired in the 1960s.

It is fitting that color charts were first made as part of a process of democra ing the task of painting. The color-chart sensibility that began to spread among artists in the middle of the twentieth century—after a delay of about seventy-fi years from the debut of the first color charts—was very much tied to a rhetoric favored the democratization of the realm of fine art. The reference point for th artists was to be ordinary life, industrial or consumer culture, rather than a tran dent realm apart. They positioned themselves and their work not as an elite fra nity but as part of the real world—as exemplified by the blunt utilitarianism of housepainter's color chart.

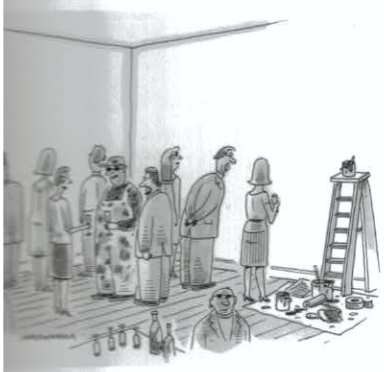
Artists and Painters

The question of where exactly the difference between the housepainter and the artist lay reveals many of the anxieties and ambiguities that accompanied the de opment of modern art. The trade of painting as the perpetual "other" to the art of painting was a subject that had haunted the avant-garde for a century. Emile Zola defended Edouard Manet's *The Fifer* of 1866 (fig. 13) after it was dismisse by a fellow artist as a "tailor's signboard." Zola turned the insult into a complim saying that he agreed "if by that he means that the young musician's uniform w treated with the simplicity of a sign. The yellow braid, the blue-black tunic, the breeches are here just large spots." Zola noted approvingly that Manet's flat han of color had produced a canvas that was "acutely real."[19]

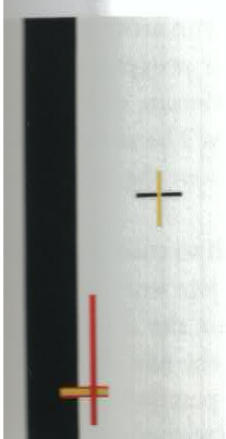
Renewed accusations that an artist was no more than a painter accompanie the rise of abstraction in the early twentieth century. When Aleksandr Rodchen showed his three paintings *Pure Red Color, Pure Yellow Color, Pure Blue Color* (fig in the *5x5=25* exhibition in Moscow in 1921, a critic wondered why the exhibiti did not include an advertisement for the artist's sign- and fence-painting servic Thirty years later, a critic for the *New York Herald Tribune* observed that the pa ings in Newman's second show at the Betty Parsons Gallery appeared to be "ha somely painted walls against which pictures would probably look beautiful."[21]

Artists have made this persistent misreading of modern art into a fruitful so

Aleksandr Rodchenko. *Pure Red Color, Pure Yellow Pure Blue Color.* 1921. Oil on canvas, three panels, 14 ⅜ x 20 ⅝" (62.5 x 52.5 cm). A. Rodchenko and anova Archive, Moscow



Mick Stevens. Cartoon published in *The New* November 20, 2006



László Moholy-Nagy. *Telephone Picture* 1922. Porcelain enamel on steel, 18 ¾ (47.5 x 30.1 cm). The Museum of Modern New York. Gift of Philip Johnson in ory of Sibyl Moholy-Nagy

for new approaches. Once art had been divorced from ideas of self-expression and spiritual content, it was worth asking what made it art at all. It obviously did not depend on the kind of paint the artists employed. Instead it rested in their ambitions and intentions and the ultimate use to which the work of art was put. The finer the line between art and non-art, the clearer was the importance of the parameters of the artwork and the institutions and conventions that supported it, including the ritual of the opening party (see fig. 15).

The blurring of the line between the tradesman and the artist, or between applied and fine art, has its roots in the movements of the late 1910s and the 1920s that envisioned the integration of art, daily life, and the environment: Russian Constructivism, de Stijl, and the Bauhaus. It was assumed that an artist should work for the sake of society, not for himself, and should produce objects for the ordinary person rather than luxury goods. Many of these artists saw themselves as instruments of social change, agents for the integration of art into the daily life of the ordinary individual. A radical streak more Dada than Constructivist in tone was embedded in the practical concerns and utopian aspirations of these artistic programs. Jean (Hans) Arp and El Lissitzky, in their 1925 publication *Kunstismen/Isms of Art*, under the heading of Suprematism, declared that with the simplified production of works of art, now "nobody can do better than order his works by telephone from his bed, [from] a common painter."[22] They probably had in mind the enamel paintings that László Moholy-Nagy had made in Berlin three years earlier (see fig. 16):

> In 1922 I ordered by telephone from a sign factory five paintings in porcelain enamel. I had the factory's color chart before me and I sketched my paintings on graph paper. At the other end of the telephone, the factory supervisor had the same kind of paper divided into squares. He took down the dictated shapes in the correct position. (It was like playing chess by correspondence.)[23]

Lucia Moholy-Nagy later wrote that her husband's account hyperbolized the event, which had indeed involved a factory, but nothing more than Moholy-Nagy's comment that "I even could have done it by telephone."[24] Even if so, the value he placed on the anonymous hand remains, as does his instinctive association between what he was doing and modern technology. Painting by hand felt old-fashioned in the age of the telephone. A desire for objective and collective production was bound up with a conviction—one might say an anxiety—that art had to keep up with technological advances. Theo van Doesburg echoed the logic expressed by Moholy-Nagy's telephone paintings in his manifesto for what he called "Art Concret" in 1930: "Typewriting is clearer, more legible, and more beautiful than handwriting. We do not want artistic handwriting."[25]

These art-historical movements held great interest for artists in the 1960s who wanted to establish a new objectivity. And although there no longer were grand collective visions to which they contributed their talents, their own work echoed that of these predecessors in terms of a downplayed signature, the use of industrial materials, and the presence of art in contexts more often associated with daily life. Buildings gathered appeal as the ground for a work of art. Both Kelly and Richter imagined their colored grids at architectural scale, an aspiration that has been realized fully in the case of both artists only later in their careers (see figs. 17 and 18). At one level this was a rejection of canvas, which had become no less a symbol of obsolete attitudes than the palette. At another, it reflected a will to break down categories such as architecture, painting, sculpture, drawing, and performance. By the late 1960s LeWitt in New York, Niele Toroni in Paris, and Blinky Palermo in Düsseldorf were all drawing or painting directly on the wall.

For many artists of the 1960s, paint became as expendable as canvas. For Palermo, the department-store fabric counter was the ideal supply shop, offering

Fig. 17. Ellsworth Kelly. *Color Panels for a Large Wall.* 1978. Oil on canvas, eighteen panels, each: 48 x 68 ½" (121.92 x 173.99 cm), overall: 36 x 75' (10.97 x 22.86 m). The National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Purchased with funds provided and promised by The Glenstone Foundation, Mitchell P. Rales, Founder

Fig. 18. Gerhard Richter's abstract stained-glass window for Cologne Cathedral. 2007. Colored glass. 75' 5 ½" x 29' 6 ¾" (23 x 9.02 m)

wide bolts of cotton for "cloth paintings" of one, two, or three bands of unmodulated color. LeWitt, who made his first wall drawings with graphite in 1968, branched into Koh-I-Noor colored pencils the following year, choosing the three primary colors and black as the entirety of his palette. Once Ed Ruscha decided to take a break from paint in 1970, he explored in printmaking the potential of organic substances and manufactured products as fine-art mediums. For Buren, the vendors of striped awning canvas at the Marché St. Pierre in Paris offered all the color he needed for works that were at first stretched paintings but were later applied directly to surfaces in settings that might or might not be art-related. For all these artists, an analogy to a workman was not an insult; on the contrary, it provided an apt metaphor for their goals. As Buren observed to an interviewer, a plumber who comes to fix a dripping tap "fixes it quite independently of his state of mind."[26]

Unsurprisingly, automobile paint has a significant presence in the history of ready-made color. It offered possibilities of colors that were far brighter and more industrial in appearance than those offered by oil or house paint; it too connected the world of art to that of the everyday consumer, narrowing the divide between the gallery and the salesroom, art and life. In 1958, Richard Hamilton, an avatar of Pop art, sprayed car paint on a section of his painting *Hers Is a Lush Situation* (fig. 19). His logic was simple: "It's meant to be a car, so I thought it was appropriate to use car color."[27] A year earlier, John Chamberlain had begun to use painted metal from automobile scrap yards to make sculptures, which allowed him not only to incorporate found color as an integral part of the sculptures' structure but to have a palette as American as that of Jasper Johns's red-white-and-blue flags. In the early 1960s Chamberlain was inspired by Los Angeles artists such as Billy Al Bengston to use automobile lacquer in paintings that in turn inspired New Yorkers such as Judd.

Car colors continued to fascinate European artists as well. In 1967 Michel Parmentier in Paris and Boetti in Turin each decided to use automobile paint to make paintings, the former using a single color in stripes, the latter a wide range of colors for monochromes. And in the mid-1970s, both John Baldessari in Los Angeles and Jan Dibbets in Amsterdam turned the camera on the parked car as a subject for photography in and about color. For most of these artists, the non-art materials they chose joined forces with a noncompositional methodology to make art that looked more anonymous than personal, seemingly a product of chance rather than deliberation.

"Brand New in the World"

For artists born after World War II, and who came of age in the 1970s, '80s, and '90s, the distinction between fine artists' paints and other materials has lost much of its ideological significance. Today it is taken for granted that an artist works with anything he or she wishes—that a Pantone chart or a computer program might be an essential accessory, and that chance operations, borrowed sources, and arbitrary systems are legitimate and meaningful ways to work with color. The same is true for color created and composed (or non-composed) on the computer: the circumstances of its origin are incidental rather than a matter of interest.

Yet, far from acting as a constraint, a ready-made approach to color has opened the way to new opportunities. The celebration of color in the late work of artists such as LeWitt and Judd demonstrates this phenomenon within the arc of a single career. Neither artist recanted the principles he articulated in the mid-1960s, but two decades later each recognized and acted on the expansive possibilities contained therein, shedding the suspicion of virtuosity that was so much part of the mid-century avant-garde aesthetic. After a gradual evolution throughout the 1980s to a wider range of colors, mediums, and compositions, LeWitt in the 1990s began to create wall drawings in acrylic paint. The brilliant color and gloss of the acrylic, often coupled with monumental scale, gives the late drawings (see fig. 20) a vivid theatricality unprecedented in his earlier work. In 1984, Judd, whose sculptures,

9. Richard Hamilton. *Hers Is a Lush Situation*. 1958. ellulose, metal foil, and collage on panel, 32 x 48" 122 cm). Private collection

9. Sol LeWitt. *Wall Drawing #918 (Irregular vertical and horizontal bands)*. 1999. Latex paint, 13 x 29' 8.83 m) as installed

though optically seductive, had previously featured only one or two colors—generally a Plexiglas or industrial paint color and that of a metal—ventured into polychromatic territory with spectacular results.

The same increased exuberance is visible in the later work of Europeans such as Boetti and Buren. Boetti expanded his use of ready-made color to Italian embroidery yarns that came in dozens of hues. The Afghani women who made his embroidered works known as *Tutto* (Everything) were to follow their own discretion in distributing the colors throughout the composition, obliged only to use abundant color in each work (page 109, fig. 4). Buren, still loyal to his stripes but not necessarily to the awning fabric and its seven-color palette, has developed his color in parallel fashion. For every one of these artists, it is as if sheer pleasure made a return by proving its compatibility with a system that initially had seemed Spartan in its implications.

The evolution of such 1960s-generation artists during the 1980s and '90s is mirrored in the work of those who came of age in the 1970s. In the practice of artists such as Katharina Fritsch, Mike Kelley, and Sherrie Levine, a new tolerance for chromatic opulence is wedded to an a priori acceptance of ready-made color and its implications. Most of them had learned color theory in school, yet when they came into their own, during the primacy of Conceptualism, color, like painting, was off the table. Even though color had a prominent place in the art of the 1970s, the critical rhetoric suppressed that fact, privileging the cerebral over the sensual. It was only well into their own careers that the next generation felt able to indulge what earlier would have seemed an illicit love of color. They came out of the closet as colorists, much as Judd and LeWitt had.

Nevertheless, the anxiety of influence was once again at work. Just as artists at mid-century had to distinguish themselves from their predecessors, so did the artists who positioned themselves as part of the Conceptual tradition have to set themselves apart from the first wave of Conceptual artists. As Fritsch recalls, in reference to her own milieu in Germany, there had to be "somewhere to go" after Richter's Color Charts.[28] Accordingly, her generation found a new place for subjectivities in their work. In part this is because the temporal distance from the art of mid-century shows it to be less absolute than the rhetoric that surrounded it. Despite their own declarations, it is clear that an earlier avant-garde—even as they spoke of the artist as a machine or chose an office or a laboratory or a street as a metaphor for the studio—had brought to their work profoundly individual sensibilities and styles that have become more evident over time.

For the successors to these artists, therefore, personal narratives as well as sociopolitical context can be invoked as color is thickened with layers of reference. In the 1960s, for example, the grid was considered a neutral, objective template, a desirable corrective to the theatricality of the Abstract Expressionists. In late-twentieth century art, the grid is intentionally adulterated, its suggestion of elementary purity a foil for new superimpositions. These might include Kelley's use of kitsch men's-magazine covers as the basis for chromatic harmonies in his Missing Time Color Exercises (see plates 77 and 78), or Byron Kim's panels of different flesh tones, which make implicit references to the genre of portraiture and the history of racial classifications (see plate 75).

Ready-made color has a host of new meanings and potentials for the generation of artists working in the 1980s and after. The modernist myth of originality seems to have lost much of its remaining allure, and the connection between the artist's hand and the product known as the work of art is often nonexistent. New work does not pretend to independence from what preceded it. Damien Hirst is happy to make spot paintings that openly evoke Richter's color charts, that exist in more than 600 versions on individual canvases, and that are made by an army of assistants (see plate 84). The aura of the unique object has also evaporated, as ever-changing incarnations of installations or editions of photographs or videos overcome the primacy of a single authoritative configuration. Jim Lambie's *ZOBOP!* floors (see cover of this

catalog and plate 87) marshal vinyl tape into colored patterns that change from on installation to the next and are of no importance to what is considered the compos tion of the work. They superficially recall the Op art of the 1960s, but whereas th paintings were calculated to elicit specific optical effects, Lambie aims only for a casually composed profusion of color.

For other artists, the computer pixel as a source of ready-made color lends itse to endless manipulation. Angela Bulloch invented her pixel boxes in 2001 (see plat 88) to provide a unit for making art; each one marches through the 256-color pale of a Macintosh operating system, much as Richard Serra's 1971 film *Color Aid* (pla 57) paraded through the 220 sheets in a box of Color-aid paper. Cory Arcangel's *Colors*, (2005; plate 89) transforms the photographic imagery of the 1988 movie of the same name, about L.A. gangs, into an abstract work of colored stripes. He converted a one-pixel-high strip from each frame of the film into a stripe that stretche from the top to the bottom of the image. Having taken the title of the film as an in vitation, Arcangel produced a work of art that provides just that (accompanied by t film's original soundtrack). Abstraction is made from figuration, which is shown to be as arbitrary and malleable as the click of a mouse or the push of a button permit

New technologies will continue to transform artists' approach to color just as the first availability of synthetic paints did over a century ago. In the past two decades, Photoshop and Epson have joined, if not sidelined, Winsor and Newton, Crayola, and Color-aid as names immediately associated with color. These changes parallel a historical trajectory in which color has come to be identified less with nature than with culture. While the original referent for color was of course the natural world—flora, minerals, sky, sea—over time the ratio of natural to artificial color in our lives has steadily decreased. But this is not necessarily cause for lament As Judd wrote in 1991, "There is much more to be done; in fact color is almost brand new in the world."[29]

Notes

1. The earliest color charts were made to be presented in counter books available for consultation in the store. Not until after World War II would color reproduction reach a level of accuracy that enabled the printing of paint cards and catalogues, thus making them available in quantities that allowed individual consumers to take them home.
2. Note that the mixing of colors to create a variety of new colors was made possible by the development of oil paint in the 1400s On the relationship of color charts and color wheels, see David Batchelor, *Chromaphobia* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), p. 104ff. On the general history of color, see John Gage, *Color and Culture: Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
3. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Color*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe, trans. Linda L. McAlister and Margarete Schättle (Malden, Mass., and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1977), p. 11.
4. Josef Albers, as quoted by Robert Rauschenberg, (mimicking Albers's German accent), in Calvin Tomkins, *Off the Wall: Robert Rauschenberg and the Art World of Our Time* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980), pp. 31–32.
5. Josef Albers, *Interaction of Color*, 1963 (reprint ed. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 1.
6. Robert Rauschenberg, quoted in Emile de Antonio and Mitch Tuchman, *Painters Painting: A Candid History of the Modern Art Scene, 1940–1970* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984), p. 88.
7. Gerhard Richter, conversation with the author, Cologne, February 3, 2006.
8. John Cage, "Lecture on Nothing," in *Silence*, 1961 (reprint ed. Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press [University Press of New England], 1973), p. 117.
9. Barnett Newman, conversation with Frank O'Hara, transcript of *The Continuity of Vision*, Channel 13, WNDT-TV, 1964, p. 2. Produced by Colin Clark, directed by Bruce Minnix. The Barnett Newman Foundation archives, New York.
10. "Robert Mangold and Urs Rausmüller: A Talk on December 5, 1992, in New York," in Christel Sauer and Urs Rausmüller, *Robert Mangold* (Schaffhausen, Switz.: Hallen für Neue Kunst, and Paris: RENN Espace d'Art Contemporain, 1993), p. 53. The two exhibitions cited were at the Jewish Museum, New York, in 1963, and at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, in 1964.
11. Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (Summer 1967): 83.
12. Albers, quoted in Jean Clay, "Albers: Josef's Coats of Many Colors," *Réalités* (March 1968; English-language ed., August 1968): 68.
13. Darby Bannard, "Color, Paint and Present-day Painting," *Artforum* (April 1966): 35.
14. Ibid., p. 36.

15. James Rosenquist, quoted in Walter Hopps, "Connoisseur of the Inexplicable," in *James Rosenquist: A Retrospective* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2003), p. 5.
16. Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1933; Modern Library, 1993), p. 191, and Roland Penrose, *Visiting Picasso: The Notebooks and Letters of Roland Penrose*, ed. Elizabeth Cowling (London: Thames and Hudson, 2006), p. 111.
17. When Fernand Léger wrote to Katherine Dreier about his first solo exhibition in the United States in 1925, he foresaw commissions for new versions of particular paintings that "can be executed in any size whatsoever and in mural *materials* (*Ripolin* or another kind). These are architectural paintings. All the others are easel paintings." Léger, letter to Dreier, August 1, 1925, quoted and trans. in Robert L. Herbert, Eleanor S. Apter, and Elise K. Kenney, eds., *The Société Anonyme and the Dreier Bequest at Yale University, A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 400.
18. See Mark Stevens and Annalyn Swan, *De Kooning: An American Master* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), p. 246.
19. Emile Zola, "A New Manner in Painting: Edouard Manet," in *La Revue du XIX^e^ siècle* (January 1, 1867), reprinted in May 1867 as a pamphlet, *Edouard Manet, étude biographique et critique*; quoted in George Heard Hamilton, *Manet and His Critics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), p. 101.
20. See Aleksandr Lavrent'ev, "On Priorities and Patents," in *Aleksandr Rodchenko* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), p. 58. I thank Mr. Lavrent'ev for informing me that the text to which he referred in this article is Bahwam, "Karandashom," *Teatralnaja Moskva* no. 2 (November 3, 1921).
21. Emily Genauer, "Art and Artists: Super-Realistic Old and Nearly Blank Modern Art Both 'Fool the Eye,'" *New York Herald Tribune*, May 6, 1951, section 4, p. 5.
22. Jean (Hans) Arp and El Lissitzky, *Kunstismen/Isms of Art* (Erlenbach, Switzerland: E. Rentsch, 1925; Rolandseck, Germany: L. Müller, 1990), pp. 9–10. The trilingual volume uses "Anstreicher" and "peintre de décors" in German and French, more precise than the English "painter."
23. László Moholy-Nagy, *The New Vision* and *Abstract of an Artist*, 1947 (reprint ed. New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1949), p. 79.
24. Lucia Moholy-Nagy, *Moholy Nagy Marginal Notes: Documentary Absurdities . . .* (Krefeld, Germany: Scherpe, 1972), pp. 75–76.
25. Theo Van Doesburg, "Base de la peinture concrète," in *Numéro d'introduction du groupe et de la revue Art Concret* (Paris, 1930), the only issue published, quoted in George Heard Hamilton, *Painting and Sculpture in Europe, 1880–1940*, 6th ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 325.
26. Daniel Buren, in "Daniel Buren: Napoli, 1972–1983," in Achille Bonito Oliva, *Dialoghi d'artista* (Milan: Electa, 1984), p. 187.
27. Richard Hamilton, quoted in Jo Crook and Tom Learner, *The Impact of Modern Paints* (London: Tate Gallery, 2000), p. 71.
28. Katharina Fritsch, conversation with the author, June 15, 2006.
29. Donald Judd, *Josef Albers*, exh. cat. (Cologne: Distel, in association with The Chinati Foundation, 1991), p. 23.