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READY-MADE COLOR
la couleur importée

20 Euros

POSITIONS & MCA

READY-MADE COLOR
la couleur importée

Project directed by Claude Briand-Picard
and Antoine Perrot,
with the collaboration of Gwenael Kerlidou
and Pierre Louaver in New York.

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Martha KELLER

I welcome the endless color/structure conundrum knowing that my obsession with painting can't not go on being de-reconstructed.

1. When you first started to use raw materials in your work did you do it in view of historical continuity (collage, constructivism, pop art, nouveau realisme, arte povera...) or did you on the contrary think in terms of rupture ?

In the 1970's I used dirt, raw pigment, graphite, sand, oil, resin, water, wax, etc. I thought in terms of ironic break with the minimalist end-game which was the controlling narrative in American abstraction at the time.

In retrospect, however, rupture is always part of history. I was unknowingly influenced by my early art experiences in Italy in the 1960's. While I thought of myself as working against tradition in the 1970's, my anti-Greenbergian, anti-minimalist stance was fully inside of an American tradition, but which came through the Dada Zen of John Cage and the color of Klein versus the anti-color of Manzoni as well as the color and materialism of Fontana and Burri. Later my influences were American. Newman and Rothko color fields with the non-color grit of Smithson and the de-structure of Gordon Matta Clark.

2. The use of colored materials is contrary to the traditional act of painting which consist in covering a surface with paint. How would you call this passage from cover-all to non-cover ? How can painting still call itself painting when it moves away from surface covering, replacing it with colored materials ?

Greenberg's surface is hardly the only subject in modern abstract painting, especially after Duchamp. In the essay *The Readymade and the Tube*

of *Paint*¹, Thierry De Duve establishes a common context for both abstract painting and for Duchamp's ready-made. For Duchamp it was the same whether the artist chose blue paint or a bottlerack. The difference in meaning between colored materials and paint then, depends only on the intent of the artist/painter, nor on the particular material themselves.

Some artists today use colored objects in relational structures (like Hoffman's pictorial plate rendered literally) and they legitimately call such installations « painting » even though no paint is used.

My intent is not to model painting through other materials, but to paint its impossible inevitability. I make paint out of all kinds of materials. Color /non-color is an important aspect. I try to destabilize color's connection to nature, to art history and to its name.

It is an effort to re-constitute paint's (and color's) cultural significance for/against my body, moment and place in an endless « desistance of mimesis »². Color cannot be separated from substance, and yet it must be separated from it. This is the double bind of abstract painting and of color itself. It exists in « an unstable homoeiosis that circulates endlessly between inadequate resemblance and resembling inadequation, confounding memory as well as sight... »³

3. When choosing materials, do you favor the materials themselves (their formal qualities, surface, texture, etc...) over the color or vice versa ? Does the choice of a ready-made colored material imply that surface and space coexist with the materials itself and with its color ?

I don't separate color from texture or any other formal qualities of the material at hand, it is both the color and the texture of a material which attracts me to make a paint out of it. Color is always contextual. Sometimes it is the irony of a certain cartoony acid green color as a matte stain next to a traditional oily color which attracts me, or the way a decorator « tangerine » tint affects everything else. However, what is most interesting about color is its essential formlessness, not its attachment to things.

The other side of the coin is that color is always attached to something and therefore total abstraction is unattainable (which is why it is so fascinating). All forms of color whether as « traditional » pigments, industrial ones or colored objects have a pre-history. They all have names which pre-exist their use in painting. Color is « always in a past in advance of the event »⁴ Color is always ready-made. As in *The case of the Colorblind Painter*⁵, a physical trauma erased not only the painter's ability to see

7. *Does the name of these colors (for example when using house painting), their social role, their commercial function, reflect on color's irrationality?*

My use of color is often inspired by its name, but that is secondary like a title. Knowing that perylene green, a black/green is the color used to paint the *Stealth Bomber*, adds an edge to the color's meaning, so I might name the painting *Stealth*.

I am a somewhat passive consumer of my culture, trusting chance to bring me materials/colors, counting on the irrational and the ironic. I have an emotional relationship to color, at the same time, I am not interested in self-expression but in losing the expected meaning / reference of a color while retaining its specificity. I am indifferent as to whether the viewer knows that the crusty brown stuff on a surface of my painting is actually dried cow blood or nitrogen in polyurethane or *Epsoma Fertilizer*, Coloring Blossoms Since 1929. The name of the color is an inside joke.

8. *In 1975, Catherine Millet wrote the following about the use of colored materials in Donald Judd's work : « He was confusing color and materials » in order « to avoid an irrational investment in color by way of a phenomenology of color and materials, where color is considered in relation to materials, forms, space, but no in relation to the individual subject, or its own symbolic function in that particular subject's thinking. » What would you think of this analysis if applied to your own work. Does the use of colored materials imply the repression of color's irrational?*

That analysis is impossible with regard to my work. The subconscious always functions in the choosing of any materials even if they are chosen by chance methods, or in the case of Judd, chosen to resist subjective interpretation. Unlike Judd, however, I welcome the irrational, the provisional, the erotic and the emotional power of color, even while I am in resistance to it.

9. *Can one talk of a realism of color in regard to colored materials?*

I'm not sure what you mean by realism here?

10. *Does assemblage create a new pictorial space, or a new illusionism as Frank Stella would have it. Is the color of the material part of this*

illusionism, as it refers to two simultaneously opposite meanings : the regular use of the colored material in everyday life and its presence as painting ?

No. Painting is the illusion and the paradox, assemblage may be what you mean by realism. The meaning depends upon the intent of the artist.

New York, 1998

Notes :

1. Thierry De Duve, *The readymade and the Tube of Paint*, Artforum, 1986
2. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography, Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, Introduction : *Desistance*, Jacques Derrida, p. 27, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, England, 1989.
3. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, op.cit., p. 121
4. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, op. cit., Introduction : *Desistance*, Jacques Derrida, p. 2
5. Oliver Sachs, *An Anthropologist On Mars, The case of the Color Blind Painter*, Vintage, 1996.