

Group Show
*Light Is Therefore
Colour*

22 December 2023 –
23 March 2024

Light Is Therefore Colour

by Claudine Metzger

Inspired by winter in the Upper Engadine, when snow blankets the landscape in white and the sun intensifies the blue of the sky, Galerie Tschudi presents *Light Is Therefore Colour*, a group exhibition featuring several artists from the programme. The title, borrowed from William Turner, refers to a simple physical law: without light, we cannot perceive colour. The theme also points to two fundamental elements of artistic creation that play a key role for the represented artists on view. The works in this exhibition are captivating in their luminosity and interplay of colours; their arrangement in space activates perception and heightens sensitivity to subtle nuances. The metallic grey of aluminium and silver suddenly takes on different shades when reflected in the light. Glass, in the form of a dark block of obsidian, seems not only to reflect light but also to absorb it. As a support for reverse glass paintings, it makes colours appear more intense. But the exhibition also raises questions that may lead to some unexpected insights: do colours appear more luminous when applied over a larger surface? Or do fine lines suffice? Can colour create spatial depth? Or at least the illusion of it?

Julian Charrière *Thickens, pools, rushes, slows*, 2021

The sculpture consists of a block of obsidian. Created from rapidly cooling lava, the volcanic glass with a jagged surface has been meticulously perforated and polished by the artist. The resulting smooth, bowl-like cavities simultaneously channel light into the centre of the stone while reflecting the surrounding environment, creating a blurred mirror image. The ancient material acts as a kind of conduit, revealing glimpses of another time or faraway place; it speaks of both the history of our world and of an uncertain future.

Callum Innes *Untitled Lamp Black*, 2023 | *Untitled*, 2023

Innes' paintings evolve through a multi-step process of selective application and erasure, in the addition and removal of oil paint. Their inherent tension lies in the delicate balance between meticulous precision and the appearance of chance. The procedural essence of his work is particularly evident in the artist's watercolours, where subtle streaks of colour at the edges show layers of paint and offer a glimpse into the genesis of the artwork. In a recent series, Innes explores the use of shellac—a quick-drying binder used, among other things, to seal wooden instruments and furniture. The artist uses shellac as the first layer onto which he subsequently drips black or red oil paint. As the paint dries, it moves across the surface like miniature droplets of mercury, eventually solidifying. In an untitled circular painting, the dark dots against a luminous background evoke images of sunspots, transforming the

painting into either a sun or a moon. In *Untitled Lamp Black* (2023), a bluish-black pigment known as 'lamp black' enhances the luminosity of magenta. The latter hue, which is not one of the seven spectral colours (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet) but an additive mixture of red and blue, appears even brighter as a result.

Julian Charrière «Buried Sunshines Burn», 2023

The starting point for this series was a set of aerial photographs of Californian oil fields, which the artist has transposed onto stainless steel plates using the technique of heliography. Developed in the 19th century, heliography uses sunlight to create images. The process involves coating a metal plate with bitumen, a naturally occurring asphalt sourced by the artist from the La Brea, Carpintera and McKittrick tar pits in California. When the bitumen-coated (and therefore light-sensitive) metal plate is exposed to a film, the asphalt solidifies in the areas touched by the light. As the title of the work suggests, the light effectively burns the image into the surface of the plate. The chosen subject of the photograph—in this case, the oil fields near Los Angeles—aligns with the technology and materials used to create the artwork.

Kimsooja «To Breathe: Invisible Mirror / Invisible Needle», 2003–2005

Trained as a painter, Kimsooja explores the surface of paintings, which she transforms in her works using a variety of techniques. Her video *To Breathe: Invisible Mirror / Invisible Needle* (2003–2005) finds the artist intertwining an investigation of surface properties with a meditation on colour. The word 'mirror' in the title alludes to a surface that implies depth, while 'needle' refers to our gaze, which—like a needle—stitches together surface and space. The projection, a digital colour spectrum composed of various hues of light, has a simultaneously ethereal and spatial quality. It draws viewers in by means of its accompanying soundtrack. Guided by the rhythm of inhalation and exhalation, they are immersed in a meditative study of colours that shift subtly, almost imperceptibly.

Andrea Büttner «Untitled», 2021 | «Tent (psychedelic)», 2012 | «Breadlamps», 2023

Andrea Büttner often takes a conceptual approach to her work, but in a compelling contrast, she also frequently employs pre-modern craft techniques such as woodcut or reverse glass painting. Reverse glass painting is an interesting method in the context of questions around colour and light. Paint applied to the back of the support not only gains a distinctive sheen as a result of the glass, its colour also appears brighter or more intense when seen through the material. The untitled reverse glass paintings on view reference the tradition of modernist experiments with colour and abstraction in the early 20th century, a tradition that Büttner both embraces and questions in her own way. Contrary to the tenets of abstract modernism, Büttner's deliberately freehand colour fields and stripes accommodate the figurative rather than suppress it. The two woodcuts show light and colour explored in very different ways. While *Breadlamps* depicts just a few rays of light finding their way through the darkness, the tent in *Tent (psychedelic)* radiates a vibrant glow from within, moving through a colour gradient from pink to blue to red, almost glaringly illuminating the black night.

Dan Walsh «Untitled (OGV-Violet, OGV-Green, OGV-Orange)», 2007

Walsh's works evolve within the strict confines of grids and squares, adhering to self-imposed rules and sequences. The artist experiments with basic geometric elements, multiplying and interweaving them into linear, sometimes irregular patterns and rhythms.

The three woodcuts have a simple horizontal structure, within which the interaction of form and colour is explored in various combinations of hues. A compositional simplicity draws attention to nuanced interactions between delicate bands of colour; fine lines, hand-drawn or in this case meticulously carved into the wood block, enliven the picture plane and evoke associations with woven fabrics or carpets. In this way, Walsh skilfully bridges the gap between the autonomy-loving modernist tradition and the collective-minded history of applied arts and crafts.

Julian Charrière «Controlled Burn», 2023

The photo series *Controlled Burn* (2023) captures structures designed for the extraction and processing of natural resources amidst the billowing smoke of exploding fireworks. Decommissioned power station cooling towers and open-cast coal mines appear enigmatically illuminated in a cosmic expanse of pyrotechnics. The focus is on the 'dark energy of materials' that provide us with electricity and facilitate mobility, but at the same time wreak havoc on our environment. In the nocturnal darkness, illuminated only by the intense bursts of fireworks, the scene appears apocalyptic, but it might also hold a glimmer of hope: fire, the embodiment of excess, is an agent of destruction—and renewal.

Kimsooja «Meta-Paintings», 2019–2023

The *Meta-Paintings* are conceived as artworks that both contemplate the medium of painting and reflect on its production and reception at a fundamental level. A key element in these works is the material Kimsooja has chosen to 'paint' with. Rather than using pigments mixed with binders, the artist opted to employ nano-polymer glass, a medical material that refracts light. Unlike the spectrum of colour rendered with pigments, the hues created with nano-polymer glass come from intricate structural patterns and textures in the material itself. The effect is similar to that of light on a butterfly's wing, giving rise to an iridescent spectrum of colours. As a result, the surface appears in different shades depending on the perspective from which it is being viewed. The quality of the rainbow-coloured surface chimes with Kimsooja's vision of the interplay between colour and light, a concept she connects with the traditional Korean colour system known as *Obangsaek* (meaning "five-orientation-colour"): white (west), black (north), blue (east), yellow (centre) and red (south).

donna Kukama «Even in their kindest-kindest kindness, they remain violent», 2023

donna Kukama's artistic practice encompasses performance, video, text, sound and multimedia installations. The artist uses poetic gestures to analyse socio-political realities, historical narratives and institutions, and to subvert the construction of value systems. The wall painting *Even in their kindest-kindest kindness, they remain violent*, created by Kukama for her exhibition in July, features boldly applied characters that flicker like illuminated lettering against a black night sky. It is a text rendered illegible by the superimposition of multiple layers of writing, one that captures the complexity—not to say impossibility—of communication in a single image.

Su-Mei Tse <Spiral Incense (Reminisces)>, 2016

Su-Mei Tse's work often centres on a feeling, a fleeting state or a memory, drawing strength from the fusion of mystery and formal simplicity. Spiral Incense is inspired by the spiral incense burners widely used in Asia. These spirals, which burn for several hours, are also used in the context of spiritual rituals. They are lit in temples to honour various deities or to cleanse rooms of negative energy. They are said to create a harmonious, tranquil atmosphere and to contribute to the alignment of body, mind and spirit. Suspended from red threads, the colour of life and happiness in Asia, the white light emitted by the neon spiral is as invigorating as its infinite, serpentine lines are soothing.

Martina Klein <Untitled>, 2011

Martina Klein's practice is concerned with the fundamental aspects of painting, including the impact of colour, material and space on perception. She works in the tradition of analytical painting, a movement that since the 1970s has used painterly means to reflect on and explore the foundations and possibilities of the medium. At the same time, Klein develops her own unique visual language by stretching monochrome painted cotton onto L-shaped wooden supports and positioning them in space. Rather than attempting to transcend the nature of painting, Klein seeks coherent ways of questioning the medium. Her approach to colour as a material, for example, goes beyond focusing solely on its abstract appearance to emphasise its physical properties and sensual qualities, an effect she achieves by applying paint in multiple layers with meticulous regularity, resulting in maximum luminosity. These works vividly illustrate the intrinsic relationship between colour and light, a fundamental condition for the perception of painting.

Katie Paterson <IDEAS – Matchsticks that burn the colour of newborn stars>, 2022 | <IDEAS – A dimmer switch that adjusts the brightness of space>, 2022

Katie Paterson works with scientists to develop projects that consider our place on Earth in the context of geological time and facilitate intimate, poetic and philosophical encounters between people and their natural environment. One large body of works is the artist's 'thought experiments', many of which revolve around elusive concepts such as time or distances of cosmic proportions. Paterson captures these in haiku-like poems on paper or materialises them as text reliefs in sterling silver. Light, which Paterson describes as the most extreme manifestation of distance, is one of the artist's preferred materials. It plays a key role in two sentences on view in the exhibition: 'Matchsticks that burn the colour of newborn stars' and 'A dimmer switch that adjusts the brightness of space'.

Federico Herrero <Finca Verde>, 2023 | <Untitled>, 2022 | <I forgot one part>, 2021

Herrero's murals and paintings are composed of freely painted abstract forms and splotches, revealing a fascination with transcending boundaries. Throughout his career, Herrero has often exhibited his work in public spaces, creating a dialogue with architectural elements. Inspired by the landscape of his native Costa Rica and the dynamic urban environment of San José, Herrero's palette is characterised by a continuum of hues, with light blue, green, yellow and pink dominating. For the mural created specifically for the current exhibition, Herrero incorporates colours and

shapes inspired by the Engadin region. These include the distinctive funnel-shaped windows of old Engadine houses and the almost golden yellow of the larch forests that characterise the high valley in autumn.

Bethan Huws <WHITE GREY BLACK>, 2016

Bethan Huws' work WHITE GREY BLACK philosophically intertwines the two keywords of the exhibition's theme: 'colour' and 'light'. The piece revolves around a central concept of Huws' practice, materialised here in the medium of the neon object: language as a tool of communication and an inherent condition of art. The work explores the contrast between the form (signifier) and content (signified) of words, and grapples with the impossibility of representing all three colours in a way that completely reconciles form and content. Although at a content level the words appear to signify the three achromatic colours (white, grey and black), various inconsistencies emerge at a formal level. Since all three fonts are rendered in white, form and content are only congruent for the word 'white'.

Carl Andre <8x8 Steel Triangle Pairs (128 units)>, 2008

Carl Andre is a central figure in Minimalism, a movement dedicated to a profound exploration of how works of art are perceived through the interplay of objects and space, the aesthetics of specific materials, the effects of light, and a drastically reduced and minimal order. In line with these principles, Andre's artistic focus since the 1960s has included the creation of extremely flat sculptures, exemplified by 8x8 Steel Triangle Pairs (128 units). The work consists of two sets of 64 steel triangles, each only one centimetre high, arranged edge to edge. The play with spatial perception becomes a means of artistic expression; form and content are one. This achromatic, dark grey artwork is only completed by the interplay of light and the viewer's movement and perspective in space.