



## ColorLove

Sept 8 – Oct. 20, 2002

Johnson County Community College • Gallery of Art

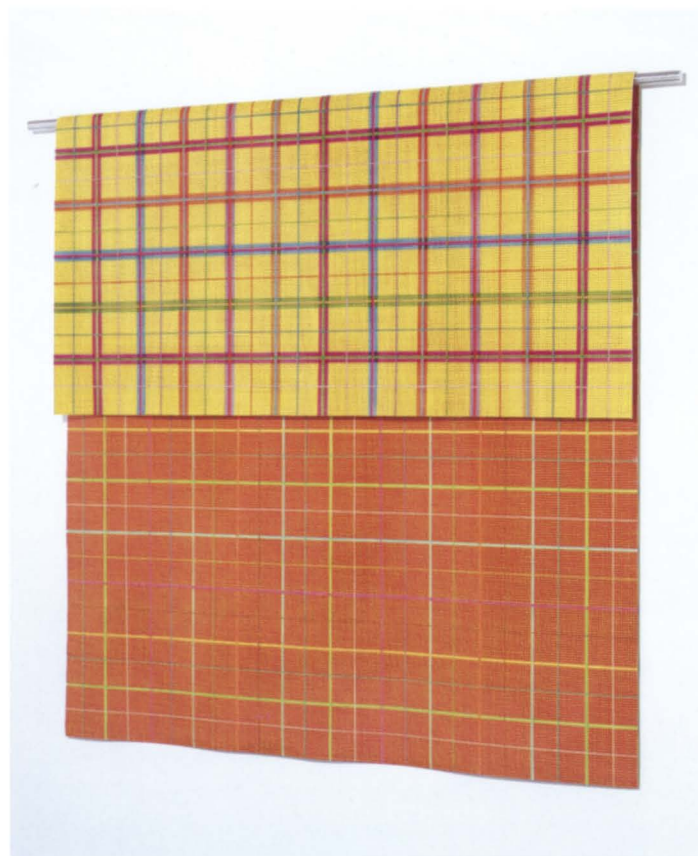
Our experience of colour has been transformed over the last hundred or so years. This revolution in colour, a small but highly visible part of the larger revolutions in industry, electrification and electronics, has meant that colour in the modern city is almost entirely new and completely unnatural. Most of the colour we now see is chemical or electrical; it is plastic or metallic; it is flat, shiny, iridescent, glowing or flashing. (Or it is broken, switched off and as if it were never there.) This colour is intense but also ephemeral; it is vivid but also contingent. And it is ubiquitous: always everywhere allied to commerce and the street. And it is beautiful, although it is an unnatural, irregular and impure beauty.

This for me is where colour begins, not in traditional colour theory or in oil painting but in the swatch books for commercial paints, lighting gels and Plexiglas. The materials are commercially available in convenient sizes, and nice people deliver them direct to the studio. And this is where the problems begin: It is difficult to do anything to make these materials look better than they do in their raw state. These colours and surfaces are so intrinsically interesting that most of the time work in the studio feels like a series of minor acts of well-intentioned vandalism. For the most part, I have found the best way to work with these materials is to combine them with some very unshiny and uncolourful supports, found objects that are often broken and usually abandoned. Dirty ready-mades for shiny monochromes.

—David Batchelor



Linda Besemer, *Fold Quadrant #2*, 1999, acrylic paint on aluminum rod, courtesy Angles Gallery, Santa Monica, CA



Linda Besemer, *Fold #55*, 2001, acrylic paint on aluminum rod, courtesy Angles Gallery, Santa Monica, CA

I suppose the most important thing about color for me is its uneasy relationship to language. Throughout the history of Western painting, with few exceptions, drawing and form have eclipsed color as the aesthetic and formal criteria of art. It is more than coincidence that the history of Western painting has also been a history of narration, of storytelling and of literary allusion and illustration (as one could argue it continues to be). Color gets in the way of storytelling and formal description. Form and design must be sacrificed a bit to accommodate color. While color does have vague symbolic references such as yellow (sun) or blue (sky), the colors yellow and blue in themselves are not the mimetic equivalent of the sun or the sky. Whereas in drawing, one can reproduce a likeness of an object such as a chair, and a linguistic recognition between the drawn chair and the word "chair" is immediate. If you then paint the chair red, the color adds something to the meaning of chair, but it is more a semiotic meaning than symbolic, more imaginary than linguistic.

This makes color very imprecise. And it is this imprecision that narrative (and some abstract) traditions of Western art feared and loathed. Color is excessive, illusive, unpredictable and in need of regulation. Some color is OK, but it can easily become too much. The "proper" recipe for the "good colorist" is conditional upon taming color. It must become a red chair – something nameable – it cannot remain ambiguously mute.

For me, the imprecision of color – its silence, its excess, its unpredictability, its decoration, the impossibility of its containment and its abstraction – is the exciting potentiality of color.

—Linda Besemer

Color originates in light. It has energy, heat. Color is sensuous and unstable. It is uncontrollable, wild, undomesticated and not fully understood. It is resistant to language as it pierces the heart. Despite being dismissed as a secondary characteristic or as mere ornament, color unabashedly inhabits the world. We can no more will it away than we can stop breathing.

I began this series, *Blindnesses*, with the idea that photography is not about something; it is something. And in an age that can be characterized by our desire to organize and control, this work seeks the uncertain and the unpredictable. It is, in fact, the inexact, contingent, not entirely controllable nature of making these photograms that is so compelling and irresistible to me. Starting with vinyl LPs, (blue, red, clear and white) and the light from an enlarger, photograms are made that record the action of light and motion through time. The images are vibrantly alive as a light darts, dances, slithers and spills across the surface of the paper. Color erupts and glows out of darkness. These glows are oddly meditative, quixotic, even fanciful. This most immaterial of substances is momentarily preserved and richly embodied.

These photograms raise interesting questions about the medium. They are examples of the most basic, primitive form of photography (made without camera or lens), yet they simultaneously confound our expectations about how photographs tells us things and what a photograph is. They refuse to represent and are strange in their otherness.

What is out there (visible in the prints) is really in here (the mind's eye). What is invisible takes shape, becomes real. Light, momentarily arrested, is given form through color. The image functions as a metaphor for how the mind works as we move back and forth between order and disorder, sense and intellect, the concrete and the abstract. The process involves chance, intuition and learned response. It incorporates a physical memory much like playing a musical instrument; my hands move through and break away from remembered patterns.

The making of the work is a decidedly physical process. Yet, once printed through color chemistry, all is for the eye. The images are completely optical and fixed. Emerging out of darkness, color takes shape through the cumulative effect of patterns of movement as I twirl, twist and turn the record albums. The images record a pattern of activity rather than objects or things. The process itself is a generative one. From a relatively small number of elements (vinyl LPs, a color enlarger, a flashlight) an infinite number of images can be constructed.

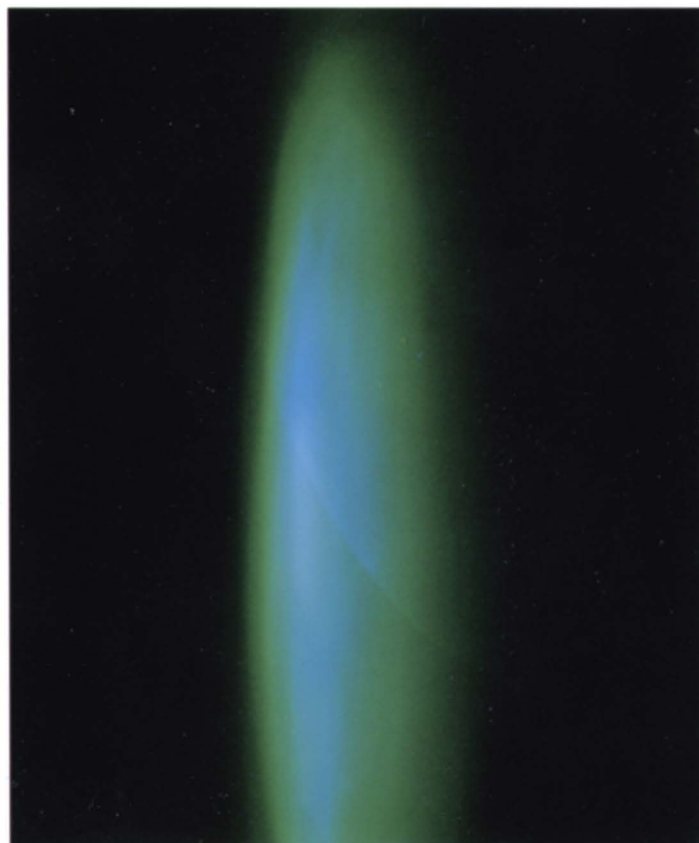
Photography has been described as an extremely plastic medium. Perhaps somewhat impishly I make this quite literal, since these photograms both begin and end with plastic. Although they are made by hand, the resulting images run counter to the tactile or gestural. The acrylic glass on the face of the print ensures absolute flatness. There is no sense of surface texture or even that what you are seeing is photographic paper. The crystalline clarity of the Plexiglas draws you in while at the same time it serves as a barrier to touch. They connect photography to painting and drawing and open a space for subjective vision.

At its root, photography is "drawing with light." Here light is given form, primordial and muscular. Out of chaos a momentary stillness. I am in a darkened room illuminated by the faint glow of an amber safelight. But nothing is safe. What is the color of pleasure or terror for that matter? What shape do dreams take?

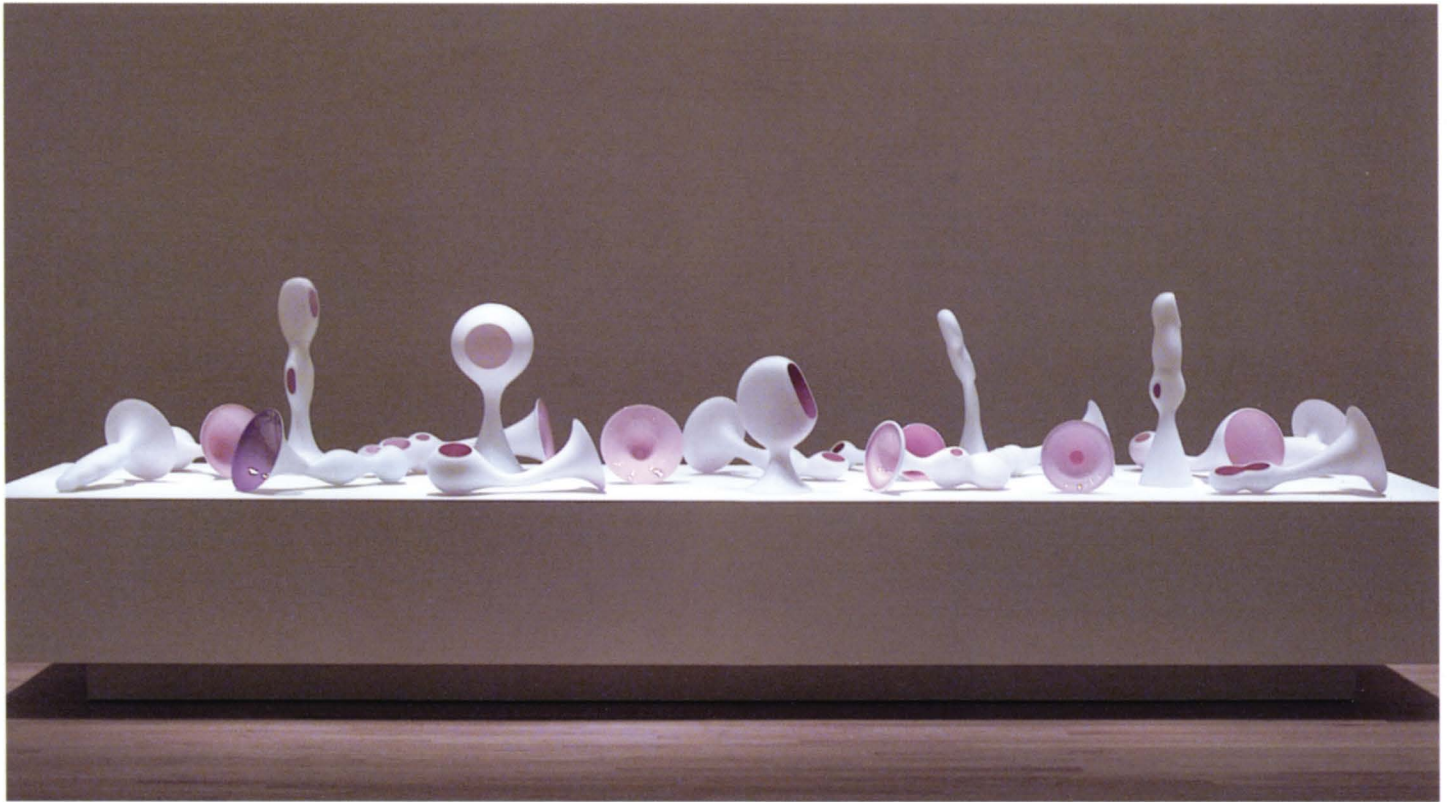
—Mary Wessel



Mary Wessel, *Untitled* (from the series *Blindnesses*), 2001, chromogenic print, courtesy Byron C. Cohen Gallery for Contemporary Art, Kansas City, MO



Mary Wessel, *Untitled* (from the series *Blindnesses*), 2001, chromogenic print, courtesy Byron C. Cohen Gallery for Contemporary Art, Kansas City, MO



Jeff Zimmerman, *Dream Sequence*, 2002, glass, courtesy of the artist, New York, NY

Pink. The sound of the word, the feel of it in your mouth, off your tongue, your pink tongue, is both an inhalation and an exhalation. Pink. It is perfect. Pink is so ... Punk. Porn. Petunia. Peaceful.

Walls of prisons are coated in pink to sublimate the violent tendencies of inmates. It is sexual. The hot pink of lace panties and a push-up bra, a contradiction. Innocence. Sweet, the color of cotton candy, gossamer against the neon pink of a midsummer sunset or sweet, the light pink of a baby's soft woolen blanket against a perfect, newborn pink cheek. Or nostalgic, Grandma's faded nightgown, pale pink roses on dusty-rose background. Pink is grotesque. Lucien Freud. Oversized canvasses of oversized bodies. Francis Bacon, figures demented and warped. Lisa Yuskasavage. Abundant and ripe. And primal. Pink is raw meat and strawberry ice cream.

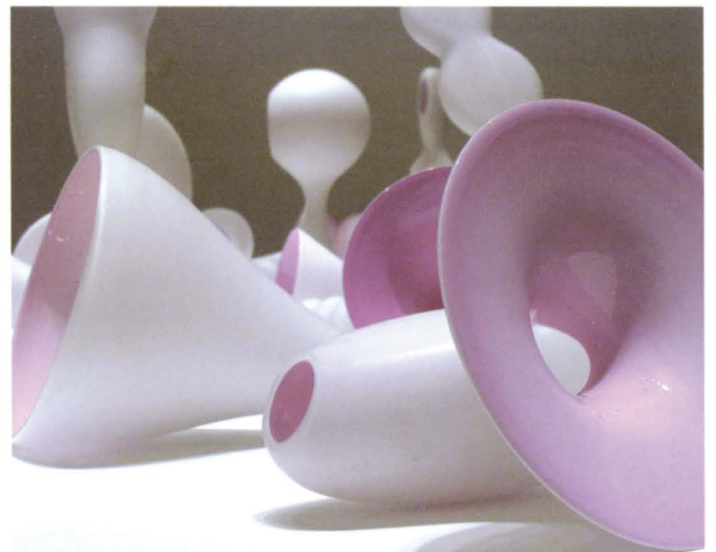
Pink is as evocative of memory as smell. Name a pink, a particular tone and hue, and you name the different shades of your past. Bubblegum pink. No other color is as variably charged as Pink. It is a stereotype of itself – drawing attention, poking fun at its own pinkness. It is nauseating and medicinal. Pepto Bismol. Carnival and clownlike. Or pathetic and theatrical. Patches of rouge in the hollows of a face. Tammy Faye Baker exiting the pulpit. It is American and Americana. Pink flamingos. Barbie and Ken. Rhubarb pie.

Pink is scientific. It is the retinal response to and neural processing of fractured wavelengths. Objects do not possess color. That dog-chewed, dirty-pink fuzzy slipper is simply a conglomeration of surface, shape and

absorption properties. The pink is the scattering of light rays off that surface and our perception of it. All color is like that. And all color is like infinity or black holes – easily definable scientifically but somehow still magical. The accidental magic of a rainbow on your wall.

Pink is pretty. The blush on a bashful face. Painful – that sunburn in the crook of a knee. Or just plain pastel. Pink is ... Which is your Pink?

–Jeff Zimmerman



Jeff Zimmerman, *Dream Sequence* (detail), 2002, glass, courtesy of the artist, New York, NY

Cover: David Batchelor, *I Love King's Cross and King's Cross Loves Me*, 6, 2002, and *Electric Colour Tower JCCC*, 2001-2, various materials, courtesy Anthony Wilkinson Gallery, London

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