

## MARK TITMARSH

### Colourism

2011 | *Peloton Gallery*

*Colourism* was a solo exhibition of painting, installation and video at *Peloton Gallery* in Sydney, October - November 2011. It featured a continuation of my investigation into the nature of expanded painting, noticing where painting goes once it breaks its formal boundaries.

*Colourism image view*

The work in the show was generated primarily from collaged dust jackets of books on the topics of art, design, media and philosophy. They were then painted with brightly coloured acrylic paint and in the process made abstract and partially obscured. Painting and the world of text and ideas came together mainly on the basis of colour, with colour forming the subject matter of a supporting catalogue essay.

The work in the show and the catalogue essay entitled “Red+Yellow+Blue=Painting” examined the idea that colour is the most basic aspect of painting. Despite this long held belief, colour itself is not well understood by science or philosophy. While the show featured many bright colours it stood for a ‘chromophilia’ or love of exuberant colours as opposed to a ‘chromophobia’ a common taboo against the use of many bright colours. The show was favourably reviewed in the Sydney Morning Herald in Spectrum on Saturday 29 October 2012 by Andrew Frost.



Installation view



**Peloton**  
25 Meagher Street  
Chippendale  
Sydney NSW 2008

**27 October to 19 November 2011**  
Gallery Hours:  
Thursday to Saturday 1 – 5pm  
(02) 9690 2601  
agebers@gmail.com  
<http://peloton.net.au>

**Colourism**  
Mark Titmarsh (Editor)  
Published by Mark Titmarsh  
in conjunction with Peloton,  
Sydney, Australia, October 2011

Designed by Brittany Denes  
Set in Helvetica Neue  
ISBN 978-0-9871483-2-2

Special thanks to Corinne Sellers,  
Richard Kean and Gary Warner

*Peloton is assisted by the NSW  
Government through Arts NSW.*

*This project has been assisted by the  
Australian Government through the Australia  
Council, its arts funding and advisory body.*



**Colourism**  
Mark Titmarsh

# r + y + b = p<sup>1</sup>

## COLOUR

Colour is one peculiar item. I know it when I see it but when it comes to speaking or writing colour, something else happens, that is neither colour nor language. The more we talk about colour the more we talk about language and its limitation at the phenomenal edge of perception. Because of this, as David Batchelor demonstrates in his book *Chromophobia*<sup>2</sup>, we tend to live in a world of colour prejudices, most of which fall on the side of deeply ingrained cultural taboos against colour, that align good taste and cultural sophistication with a severe restriction on the use of colours. As such the West is inherently chromophobic, equating taste and sophistication with clothes, houses and paintings that are black, white, grey, brown, navy blue and olive green. This is to be contrasted with chromophilia<sup>3</sup>, a wantonness of colour which erupts in the excessiveness of the feminine, primitive, infantile, vulgar, queer or pathological. This apartheid of colour is also reinforced by the ancient argument between colour and line, dating back to Aristotle who had it that the "repository of thought in art is line, the rest is ornament."<sup>4</sup>

**Ever since then colour has been understood as superficial, an ephemeral occurrence on the surface of things, whereas line and the non-coloured is deep, permanent, structural and meaningful.**

Despite some of the prohibitions against immodesty in colour, the meaning of the most basic term in this discussion, namely "colour" itself, is poorly understood. As Umberto Eco claims colour is "one of the worst muddles in the history of science."<sup>5</sup> To put it even more clearly in its obscurity, John Lyons argues that "colour is real but colours are not."<sup>6</sup> By this he means that the experience of colour is verifiable, it surrounds us at all times, but the words we use to divide the spectrum of colour into functional divisions is quite arbitrary and untranslatable between different cultures and ages. The Inuit have a vast language for the colours we call white, the French use brown and purple as interchangeable in certain situations, Russians see two colours where

we just see blue, and Hindus don't differentiate red and orange. The word 'red', or any colour term in any language, has no inherent chromatic value and is only an arbitrary signifier vulnerable to cultural and historical differences. Colour is there, but it continually slips through the grasp of linguistic possession.

Batchelor cites Plotinus<sup>7</sup> to show us why. In short, there is an incommensurability between colour and language because colour is indivisible, there are no breaks in the rainbow, while language is based on divisions and conceptual units that contradict colour's natural tendency to "spread, flow, bleed, stain, soak, seep, and merge."<sup>8</sup>

## COLOUR IS



Colour is, but has not yet been named" since it is essentially resistant to nomination.<sup>10</sup> Colour rains down from the sky in the warmth of the sun and erupts up out of the earth as raw pigment and the hues of nature. Colour is awesome in its presence, it is in everything, on everything, everything is shot through with colour, colour shines out from a world of things, and in its shining brings a world into existence. Colour emerges from the obscure ground of things, from everything, it is all around like air. We are so immersed in it, that it is taken as granted, becoming unthought, a background phenomenon, until a sunset or a painting reminds us of its uncanny way of being surprising, awesome, astounding. "Colours are all at once the ground, 'the secret soul of what is below', the surface, and what sublimates the surface, 'the ideas', substance, figure, and 'general harmony', 'the life of God!'"<sup>11</sup> Colour is the beginning of an experience at the tip of my body that keeps on travelling through me, it goes from sensation to perception, to affect, to my sense of being in the world. In this movement from perception to affect and being, "colour cracks open the form-spectacle."<sup>12</sup>

Colour is not a spectacle or an element of form, but a necessary precondition to both. I try to express my feeling for colour in all sorts of allusions: it is luscious, exquisite, intimate, but colour is more than my sensory experience, it moves me to a place of ecstatic embeddedness. One way of remembering the forgotten of colour is through painting. In this state, touching colour as a maker, or being touched by colour as a viewer, is much the same thing. It begins with seeing colour, then really seeing colour, then touching colour, then feeling colour, then knowing colour, then being in colour, then in colour, being.

## COLOURIST

In the battle between idea and percept, idea will win out, as exemplified in the dominance of Conceptual art over Op art. Even in the way Andy Warhol's work generates lots of discussion about media and popular culture but not as much about his sensual use of colour, particularly industrial colours. Colourist artists are usually those associated with a kind of anti-realism, breaking with the natural colours of things, to make colour an expressive, affective or formal element as in impressionism, fauvism, abstraction, and colour field.

The nature of colour for a colourist changes with time and according to the presence of pigments and how they are harnessed. In the early 20th century colour came from earthy pigments captured in a tube, later on synthetic colours were produced in tins and made from laboratory concoctions, now colour is largely pixel based. The demand for colour in various non-art situations, house paint and industrial surfaces, pushed the nature of art making away from the accurate representation of flesh to the seductive presentation of colour that might compete with the spectacular materials of the modern world. To be a colourist today, well after Warhol and Judd, means thinking colour anew, specifically in terms of the ubiquity of coloured plastics and the plasticity of colour on an electronic screen. As Batchelor points out the difference between colour then and colour now is symbolised by the difference between the colour wheel and the colour chart.

**The colour wheel is historically steeped and scientifically justified in its hierarchies of colour, that rationalise the visible and makes it ready for representation. Whereas the colour chart is a "disposable list of readymade colour" in a "grammarless accumulation of colour units"<sup>13</sup> that strips colour free from colour theory and places it in an entirely autonomous zone.**

To find another concrete practice for colour requires another kind of making and thinking, that is on both counts, neologistic. Ultimately it involves refiguring the presence of paint and the object of painting itself. Thinking colour and making colour in an expanded form involves a radical refiguring of the presence of the painted image and the object based nature of painting. Riffing on painting, making colour in different painted materials, I leave things out and introduce new things that are not nameable as painting but nevertheless originate within the differential field of colour. While many aspects of painting fall away in the act of forming hybrid connections, one primary component continues to hold it together, namely colour. The medium of painting however deconstructed or expanded, has become the entity to "whom" the work of colour is addressed.

<sup>1</sup>Footnotes: 1.  $(red) + (yellow) + (blue) = (painting)$ . If  $r + y + b = p$ , then  $p + np = ep$ , when  $r = red$ ,  $y = yellow$ ,  $b = blue$ ,  $p = painting$ ,  $np = not\ painting$  and  $ep = expanded\ painting$ . In long form, if  $red + yellow + blue = painting$ , then  $painting + not\ painting = expanded\ painting$ . Therefore,  $p + np = ep$ . 2. Reaktion Books, 2009. 3. Batchelor *Ibid*, p.21. 4. *Ibid* p.29. 5. Umberto Eco, "How Culture conditions the Colours we See", in David Batchelor (Ed), *Colour, Whitechapel and MIT Press*, 2006, p. 178. 6. Paraphrasing his quote in Batchelor, *Chromophobia*, p.97. 7. *Ibid* pp. 85-8. 8. *Ibid* p.86.

9. Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, Chicago, 1987, p.169. 10. Stephan Melville, "Color Has Not Yet Been Named: Objectivity in Deconstruction", in Brunette and Wills (Eds), *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts*, Cambridge Uni Press, 1994, pp.33-48. 11. Michel Haar, in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, Northwestern University Press, 1993, p.185. 12. *Ibid* 188.

13. Batchelor, *Chromophobia*, pp104-105. **Images:** (front) Mark Titmarsh, *Library of Congress*, 2011, installation view, mixed media / (inside panel) Mark Titmarsh, Ralph Lauren, 2011, acrylic on paper (slip jacket), (centre page) Mark Titmarsh, *Book of Light*, 2011, acrylic paint on acrylic glass. All photos by Arthur Georgeson

# MARK TITMARSH

## COLOURISM

28 OCTOBER - 19 NOVEMBER 2011

OPENING 6PM  
THURSDAY 27 OCTOBER

*Clockwise from left as entering*

1. Library of Congress 2, 2011
  - a. Malevich and the American Legacy  
59 x 119cm, \$1250
  - b. Shoes, Toy, Knife  
19 x 61cm, \$250
  - c. Meine Welt  
200 x 120cm, \$2500
  - d. Racing in the Dark  
67 x 149.5cm, \$1250
  - e. Music  
120 x 80.5cm, \$1250
  - f. VirtualPolitik  
24 x 61cm, \$250
 all are acrylic on paper(dust jackets) on hardboard

2. Library of Congress 3, 2011
  - a. Thomas Hirschorn
  - b. On Kawara
  - c. Tom Friedman
  - d. Lorna Simpson
  - e. Cildo Meireles
  - f. Dan Graham
 each is acrylic on paper (dust jacket) on aluminium, 28.5 x 99cm, \$750

3. Big Pond, 2011  
acrylic on paper (dust jacket) on canvas, 210 x 332cm, \$7500

4. Library of Light, 2011
  - a. Book of Light 3 (yellow)  
8.5 x 12 x 4cm, \$350
  - b. Book of Light 4 (blue/magenta)  
15 x 18.5 x 4cm, \$750
  - c. Book of Light 5 (red/blue)  
19 x 15 x 4cm, \$750
  - d. Book of Light 6 (red)  
31 x 23 x 4cm, \$950
  - e. Book of Light 7 (blue/red)  
20 x 35 x 4cm, \$950
  - f. Book of Light 8 (green/magenta)  
18.5 x 15 x 4cm, \$750
  - g. Book of Light 9 (red)  
10 x 8.5 x 4cm, \$350

each is acrylic paint on acrylic glass

### Back Room

5. Chromo-man 1, 2011, DVD, 16:9, 4 mins  
(various materials), performed at Artspace, Sydney
  6. Chromo-man 2, 2011, DVD, 16:9, 3 mins  
(spray string), performed at Loose Projects and MOP Projects, Sydney
  7. Chromo-man 3, 2011, DVD, 16:9, 4 mins  
(bouncy balls), performed at Tin Sheds, Sydney
- each video is an edition of 10, \$750 each
8. Chromophilic 2.1, 2009, (fluro-green)  
acrylic glass, 59 x 68 x 47cm, \$3500
  9. Specific Paint, 2011  
acrylic paint on shelf, 120 x 25 x 4cm, poa

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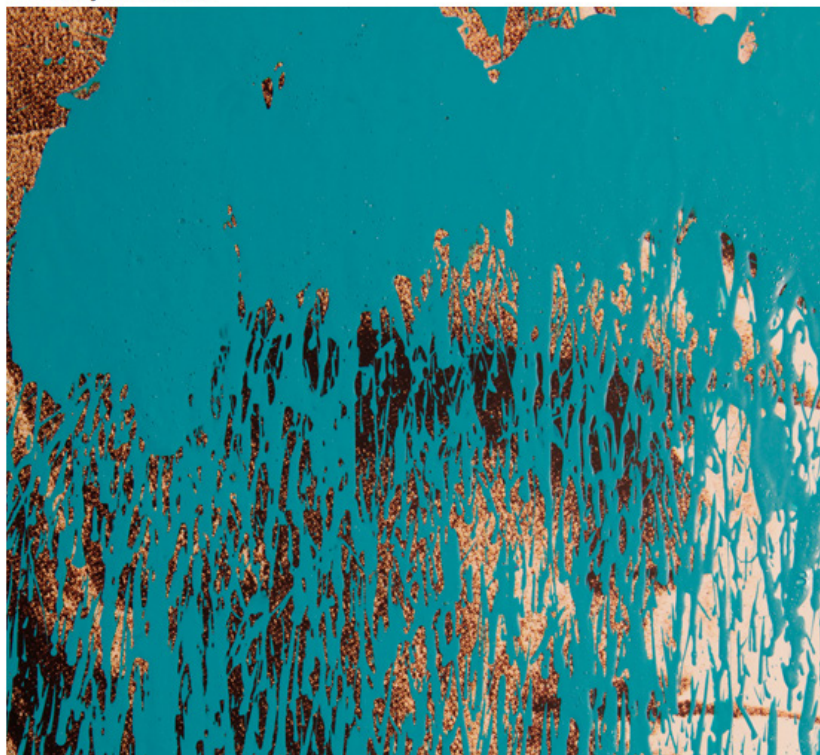
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Mark Titmarsh

Colourism

28 Oct to 19 Nov 2011

opening 6-8pm  
Thursday 27 October



 Open gallery

**COLOURISM**

For Mark Titmarsh, a painting is defined by an exploration of colour unconstrained by a canvas or frame. *Book of Light* (pictured) is perspex spattered with acrylic paint, a textural and sculptural experience as exacting as any minimalist masterpiece hung on a wall. Understanding what colour is and what it does forms the basis of Titmarsh's recent work and his objects, videos and even writings are all called "paintings". It's a practice enlivened by the artist's love of colour. *Until November 19. Thursday-Saturday, 1-5pm, Peloton, 25 Meagher Street, Chippendale, 9690 2601.*

**LIVING PATTERNS**

Emerging artists Phoebe Rathmell and Ben Norris team up for a show that looks at meditative and handmade qualities in sculptural objects. *Until November 5. Wednesday-Friday, 11am-6pm; Saturday, 11am-4pm, Kudos Gallery, 6 Napier Street, Paddington, 9326 0034.*

**PLUS**

**Imaginary Narratives**

Artists Bernhardine Mueller and Denise Scholz-Wulfing set sail across prints of land-locked imagery to explore life's mysteries and humour. *Until November 12. Tuesday-Saturday, 10am-5pm.*

1.

At Peloton in November: Mark Titmarsh *Colourism* and Yasmin Smith *Maybe it's the promise of water or being clean* 27 Oct to 19 Nov 2011 [View it in your browser](#)

**Mark Titmarsh**

***Colourism***

28 Oct to 19 Nov 2011

opening 6-8pm  
Thursday 27 October  
[Mark Titmarsh: Library of Congress \(detail\)](#)

Mark Titmarsh *Library of Congress (detail)* acrylic on slip jacket 2011

This solo exhibition by Mark Titmarsh explores the spectacular nature of colour and its importance in maintaining the presence of painting in its interface with other media especially sculpture, installation, performance and video. The show will include works on various materials including perspex, book dustjackets and videos of performances that show colour in the trans-substantiated form of coloured balls and spray string. The catalogue essay looks at the historical prejudices against colour and the ways certain artists are nominated, colourists, indicating an historical relationship with colour from pigments of the earth, to synthetic laboratory colours to screen based pixel colour.

Mark Titmarsh's work is made under the rubric of 'expanded painting', painting about painting, or painting that dissimulates into objects, videos and texts. Recent work has included paintings on industrial materials, environments of fluorescent string and video works for mobile phones. In early 2006 he was a cofounder of the artist run space, Loose Projects.

Mark is currently a tenured, part time lecturer in the Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia, where he has taught Image Making and Screen Media Production in the Visual Communication Program since 1999.

His paintings and filmwork are currently held in public collections across Australia, and in private collections in Europe and the United States.

2.

**peloton**



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EXHIBITIONS / COLOURISM

27.10.2011 to 19.11.2011

This solo exhibition by Mark Titmarsh explores the spectacular nature of colour and its importance in maintaining the presence of painting in its interface with other media especially sculpture, installation, performance and video. The show will include works on various materials including perspex, book dustjackets and videos of performances that show colour in the trans-substantiated form of coloured balls and spray string. The catalogue essay looks at the historical prejudices against colour and the ways certain artists are nominated, colourists, indicating an historical relationship with colour from pigments of the earth, to synthetic laboratory colours to screen based pixel colour.

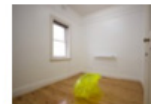
Click an image to view an enlargement



*Book of Light*, 2011  
Mark Titmarsh



*Colourism (installation view)*, 2011  
Mark Titmarsh



*Colourism (installation view)*, 2011  
Mark Titmarsh



*Colourism (installation view)*, 2011  
Mark Titmarsh

3.

**MARK TITMARSH**  
**Colourism**

Supporting evidence

1. Sydney Morning Herald review by Andrew Frost
2. Peloton press release
3. Peloton website

Weblink:

Peloton archives