



COLOR CONSTRUCTIONS

CORY W. PEEKE



Figure 1. *Betsy's Linen* (2004) by Cory W. Peeke, polaroid transfer, encaustic, and mixed media on paint sample (6.5" x 4")

Collage is the vehicle by which I explore social and cultural conceptions of identity. Through direct appropriation from a variety of sources—including health manuals, child-rearing texts, how-to and vintage children's coloring books, as well as found photographs—I construct evocative and often humorous juxtapositions of text and image in order to illuminate our society's reactionary and often ridiculous relation to identity stereotypes.

Color can be both a formal concern and conceptual matter in a work of art. In collage it is more often than not a byproduct of the found elements of the work rather than linked directly to its conceptual agenda. Color, however, is central to both the formal structure and conceptual ideation of my work.

Whether related to race, personal style, gender distinction, or socio-political movements, color has historically played an active role in the construction of these identity concepts. Color is enduringly linked with nearly all of the better-known racial and sexual prejudices. As David Batchelor (2000) writes in his book *Chromophobia*:

...colour is made out to be the property of some 'foreign' body—usually the feminine, the oriental, the primitive, the infantile, the vulgar, the queer or the pathological (22-23).

My interest in color and its relationship to classification and identity, coupled with my love of discarded materials, has led me to work with paint samples, the kind available at most any hardware store. The samples act as a nod to both the act of appropriation (sampling) and the element of decoration inherent in the work. The experiments with found color allow me to investigate its use as a nearly subliminal communicator of meaning. The paint swatch pieces, though more subtle and less focused on sexual identity than my earlier work of the late 1990s, are, however, a natural evolution of my investigation of sexual identity. The paint swatch series subtly acknowledges and contends with ideas of sexual, gender, racial, and class stereotyping associated with particular colors as well as certain design professions. The use of mundane discarded minutia—such as found photographs, tags, children's coloring book images, etc., elegant little remnants of the everyday—allow the work to be viewed not only as art but as vestiges of our daily existence.

My intent with these five works is to examine the relationship between color and gender stereotypes, specifically in relationship to the implied link between the commercial name of the paint sample and its reference to the actual hue. (See Figures 1-5.)



Figure 2. *Honey Milk* (2004) by Cory W. Peeke, polaroid transfer and mixed media on paint sample (5.5" x 4")



Figure 3. *Kennebunkport Green Dress* (2004) by Cory W. Peeke, mixed media on paint sample (8" x 8")



Figure 4. *Parisian Mist* (2004) by Cory W. Peeke, polaroid transfer and mixed media on paint sample (5.5" x 4")



Figure 5. *Sweet Annie* (2005) by Cory W. Peeke, polaroid photo and mixed media on paint sample (5" x 4")

Reference

Batchelor, D. (2000). *Chromophobia*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd.

About the Artist

Cory W. Peeke is director of the Nightingale Gallery and assistant professor of art and art history at Eastern Oregon University in the College of Arts & Sciences. Correspondence regarding this art essay should be addressed to the artist at cpeeke@eou.edu

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