



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

De-co-lor
From the Low Pressure Between Two Anticyclones,
One Gold, One Yellow

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It is incorrect to say that any phenomenon is produced by chance; but we may say that two or more phenomena are conjoined by chance . . . meaning that they are in no way related through causation.

John Stuart Mill: *Logic* III, xvii, § 2 (1846).

Decolor

[dee-kuhl-er]

–verb (used with object)

to remove the color from; deprive of color; bleach.

De

[duh; Fr. duh; Sp. de; Port. di]

–preposition

from; of (used in french, spanish, and Portuguese personal names, originally to indicate place of origin)

Col

[kol; Fr. kawl]

–noun, plural cols

2. Meteorology . the region of relatively low pressure between two anticyclones

Or³

[awr]

–noun

1. the tincture, or metal, gold: represented either by gold or by yellow.

Summary

Through different perceptions of colour, from the black, through the grey, to the indefinable colour of flesh I will introduce my work and explain the nature of my process, the themes that interest me, and I will give examples of artists with which I share common ideas and similar approaches. The images and photographs have an important role in the text, they not only illustrate but they complement the words.

Keywords

colour
abstraction
figuration
form
a recipe for an off hand book
chance
personal themes
daily life experiences
encounters
humour

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About Black

"The simplest, most indefinable quality has too much content, in relation to itself, in its heart. That black against my foot, it didn't look like black, but rather the confused effort to imagine black by someone who had never seen black and who wouldn't know how to stop, who would have imagined an ambiguous being beyond colours. It *looked* like a color, but also... like a bruise or a secretion, like an oozing - and something else, an odour, for example, it melted into the odour of wet earth, warm moist wood, into a black odour that spread like varnish over the sensitive wood, in a flavour of chewed sweet fibre."¹

No. Black is the smell of poured asphalt, mixing somehow with the heavy air saturated with exhausts. It is the colour of the mixture that repaves the damages, that creates jobs, that dirties, blunt-blasé workers, taking time, smoking and tanning. Where are you from?

One hollow place in a solid body or mass is repaired.
 Out of so many, it is absurd.
 Spring is always a nostalgic time.
 Summer is distracting.
 My work can be characterized as autobiographical.
 There are so many blacks.

"...color is understood by Chevreul basically as a result of relation, of difference and oppositions, the idea of a pure primordial color loses its foundation. Chevreul thinks about colors as if they were language. However a logical application of his system has a predictable but catastrophic consequence. Contrasts can produce an innumerable amount of hues. Chevreul published a catalogue of colors that included 14,400 chromatic tones. Their sheer number exceeds dramatically the ability of any language to deal with them."² colours are their own untranslatable language. There are not enough words to describe a precise colour. The only way to grasp it by looking at it.

Add a bit of white.
 Titanium or Zinc.
 Curious that titanium and zinc are also metals, grey in colour.
 Henry Miller starts *Quiet Days in Clichy* talking about Payne's grey.

"It is the same hour, the same sort of day, and yet even the word grey, which brought about the association, has little in common with that *gris* which, to the ears

1 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea* (New York: New Directions, 1964), 171.

2 Mikhail Iampolski, *"Color as a Language"*, *RE: The Rainbow*, ed. Aris Fioretos (Lund: Propexus, 2004), 27.

of a Frenchman, is capable of evoking a world of thought and feeling. Long ago, walking the streets of Paris, studying the watercolours on exhibit in the shop windows, I was aware of the singular absence of what is known as Payne's grey. I mention it because Paris, as everyone knows, is pre-eminently a grey city. I mention it because, in the realm of watercolour, American painters use this made-to-order grey excessively and obsessively. In France the range of greys is seemingly infinite; here the very effect of grey is lost. I was thinking of this immense world of grey which I knew in Paris because at this hour, when ordinarily I would be strolling towards the boulevards, I find myself eager to return home and write: a complete reversal of my normal habits. There my day would be over, and I would instinctively set out to mingle with the crowd. Here the crowd, empty of all colour, all nuance, all distinction, drives me in on myself, drives me back to my room, to seek in my imagination those elements of a now missing life which, when blended and assimilated, may again produce the soft natural greys so necessary to the creation of a sustained, harmonious existence."³

Payne's grey is also a mixture of ultramarine and black or of ultramarine and sienna in a spectrum of different proportions. Payne's grey is many things, Pantone has a number for it but that doesn't explain it, it classifies it.

Save a bit of the grey, add cadmium red, a lot more white and some cadmium yellow. "The more complex and complete a mixture of light with matter is, the more difficult it is to grasp a resulting color. This is why the color of flesh is chaos, in contrast to simple colors [...] Simple colors could be named, therefore they presume verbal thinking. They are expression made verbal. The complex colors, like the color of flesh, cannot be named. They are expression remaining ungraspable, mysterious."⁴

3 Henry Miller, *Quiet Days in Clichy* (United Kingdom: Oneworld Classics Limited, 2007), 3.

4 Iampolski, "Color as a Language", *RE: The Rainbow*, 23.



Against Me, Against You

My work often deals with imprecise abstract feelings, atmospheric settings, multiple metaphoric narratives and subjective interpretations.

My work deals, some other times, with very concrete but somehow insipid events that fill our everyday life. These touches of absurd lightness going as far as, per example, having as a subject the dipping of a bag of tea in hot water.

The painting *Against Me, Against You* is about a specific part of the process of making soup: the cutting of the onions. It is a disagreeable action that happens in the beginning of the cooking process. Onions cause a dramatic expression which contrasts with the importance of the action itself. Therefore it is very humorous. But there were many things going on thorough my mind while painting, as painting sometimes takes time, to dry. I was thinking about Picasso and his gaudily named periods and their colour choices: The Blue Period with “the cool, sombre tones”⁵ when he was going through hard times and the the Rose Period with “cheerful orange and pink colours”⁶ when things turned out to go better. I have also thought about Picasso's idea of painting against the pictures that count for you⁷, painting against yourself, *Guernica* as an anti-war symbol, symbols and interpretations. But “...this bull is a bull and this horse is a horse... If you give a meaning to certain things in my paintings it may be very true, but it is not my idea to give this meaning. What ideas and conclusions you have got I obtained too, but instinctively, unconsciously. I make the painting for the painting. I paint the objects for what they are.”⁸

I enjoyed painting the onion rings and the checkered pattern. The repetition, the abstraction. “For a long time I thought that the objects were really important. And I thought that was the point of the painting. I loved the way a light bulb looked, I liked the variety of them. I liked the way the little filament was held by the base and the way that the glass rose up above it to contain it. And...But I think, in the end, it was more what the object made me feel that...that was the important thing.”⁹

5 Richard J. Wattenmaker, Albert C. Barnes, and Anne Distel, eds., *Great French paintings from the Barnes Foundation : Impressionist, Post-impressionist, and Early Modern* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 194.

6 Ibid.

7 André Malraux, *La Tête d'Obsidienne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 124.

8 *Guernica: Testimony of War*, television series (Stoner Productions Inc, 1999).

9 "Lisa Milroy", *theEYE*, Documentary Tate Liverpool (Illuminations, 2004), 8:47.

About Artists/ Tables

The creative process is kindred to writing a poem. I work on multiple projects at a time, from imagination, in combination with what environs me and I avoid analysing what I work with in the early stages. I gather different materials, make many sketches and drawings in preparation. I start by approaching an idea, a theme, an object, a situation or video footage with a very open mindset, in an intuitive way. I very much like Dieter Roth's recipe for an off hand book as I see many similarities between this strategy and my artistic process:

“go to a place
 (be invited for instance)
 have impressions there
 take things from the places where you have impressions
 (take really or mentally)
 bulbs from lamps,
 candy from stores,
 symbols from visions in dreams
 symbols from visions in places
 colours from clothes
 [...]”¹⁰

10 Emmett Williams, *My Life in Flux – and Vice Versa*, Edition Hansjörg Mayer. (Stuttgart and London, 1991).





Dieter Roth had a lot of tables. Wooden boards on wooden trestles. He had many lights, at each table, he sat down a lot. That is how I imagine him. I think in general tables and chairs are important to us humans, but some occupations make use of them more than others.

In the collaborative installation *Table – A Point of View Issue*, that Steven Ladouceur and I exhibited in November 2009, we were analysing our relation to tables, a table and its chairs. The installation plays with the contrast of a conceptual idea or an experiential medium incapsulated in a traditional format such as a still life, a portrait or a landscape and vice-versa. At numerous times depicted in paintings, tables and chairs are classical objects serving the composition when representing inanimate objects and human figures, mostly in an interior setting. We wanted the table to be the subject, the character, the question. The visitor, coming from the outside the gallery would step inside and then could, in a way, step “outside” within the installation in the gallery. The entrance door faced a large wall of timber, reminiscent of a shack that had its own entrance. The gallery was divided in two parts by this wooden construction separating the strongly lit section, in which the viewer first stepped in, from the rest. The rest was a dark landscape for which the visitor was offered access through the opening in the barn-like wall.

In tropical forests the night is not silent. Eyes need time to adjust to differences in light. Perfect, these seconds of blindness are invaded with smell. Something on the edge of being possible: an escape into a hot night, elsewhere. Air was heavy, humid, herbal scented, dry leaves contrasting the cold fresh air of November. The installation is total.¹¹ Eyes adjust. Now it is possible to see in the obscurity, here she is blue, with long thin legs, waiting, two chairs around like babies. Birds never stop singing.

The darkness transforms the artificial; it homogenizes the big blue heater, the noise of the fan, the big cooking pan where a mixture of different herbs and tea slowly evaporated, the ipod plugged to speakers, the animals that never existed...the chirping that was an edited recording of my own whistling, monkey screams, insects buzzing and puma noises.

11 Claire Bishop, *Installation Art* (Tate Publishing, 2005), 14.

Golden Prison

Byrdes of on Kynde and Color Flok and Flye Allwayes Together is a series of bird cages painted on top of existing canvasses which I found and never knew the author. This project has been developed for a group exhibition at the City Museum of Gothenburg under the title of Trust+Mistake.

When I started painting on the abandoned canvases I had an uncontrollable feeling of doing something wrong, somewhat like burning a book, throwing photographs away or dismantling an old camera. The collector in me felt guilty. However by almost entirely covering up the canvases that were bound to end in the garbage, they were then re-contextualise in the museum. We trust the museum to show us the truth, the history, the real art object, the good taste. But a mistake can infiltrate. It can be a mistake not to question, not to keep in mind the subjectivity of a story.

The empty cages are the portrait of the museum, a comment on the need to collect, preserve for the future. The process of painting became an exploration of possible grids, of systems of allocation, leitmotifs to follow. And from a pictorial point a view what could seem as a tedious time consuming task became an enjoyment of colours and abstraction. The original oil paintings appear through the bars of the cages, making it difficult to decipher what exactly was painted underneath while obvious that something, perhaps important, was erased (forgotten). Then again, maybe that something unimportant, unworthy was there somewhere, nevertheless hanging on the walls of the museum.



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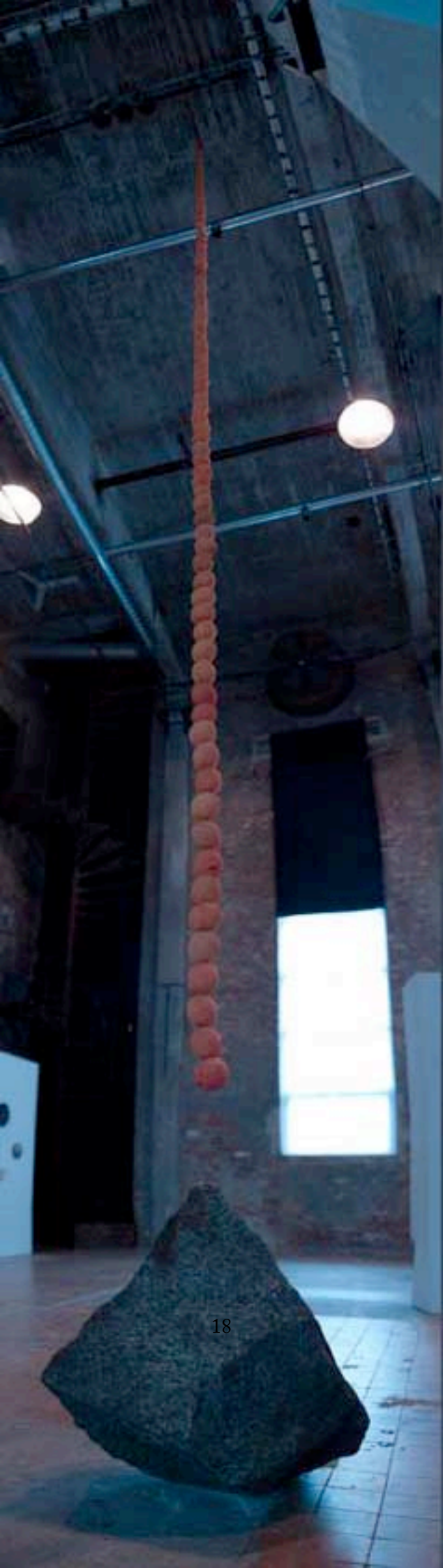
About the Rest(love)/Coded Love Letter

I talked with my grandmother on the phone just before her flight, that evening. Connection was good. By habit of bad telephone connections: we talked very loud.

- I have made a portrait of you, Buni.
- How are you. Is everything good?
- I have made a portrait of you, for my graduation.
- How did you remember how I looked exactly? (flattered)
- I made an abstract portrait. It is abstract, I will send you a picture. I will call you, when you get home. When will you get to Alba Iulia?

My grandmother has an adamant personality. She can disrupt her schedule for days, waiting for a phone call and I forgot to call at the promised time. I called one day after, and we talked.





“More than [the whole country] of China, my home town has informed my work. I am interested in mining the microcosm of my culture for symbols that can be universally understood.”¹² My work makes use of personal themes, daily life experiences, encounters. Sharing with the others but with the wish be understood without explaining. It is wanting to communicate through a language but not wanting to teach it.

I made a portrait of my grandmother because missing her very much slowly infiltrated my mind leaving no space for another subject. Art is “an inspiration, a curious communication between me the creator, and you the re-creator of hidden patterns and secret suggestions, art is a coded love letter and a private plea: to retrieve from the river of blood and time what's irresponsible and mutual.”¹³

Oranges for me are directly connected to childhood. Over the years the same sensations persist. In general oranges are evocative. Evoking oranges, at a certain place and time is political. The work extends beyond the portrait and quietly refers to the shortage of food and the long queues during the communist years in Romania. Stores were empty most of the time, basic supplies were rationed, exotic fruit were so rare that people didn't even know how to eat them. However, when the visitors encounter the work, they are not informed of specific historical events in any explicit way, no text accompanied the work during the exhibition and the clues came from the title itself. In the title I used the possessive adjective "my" to indicate that the portrait is of a specific person, alluding to a specific generation and referencing my background. In spite of that, I mainly wanted the sculpture to evoke the tension of waiting in a general manner, open to multiple interpretations. Portrait of My Grandmother Queuing for Oranges could be anyone's portrait. Each has waited at some moment, for a short or longer period for oranges. The tension between the eleven meter long strand of oranges and the heavy immobile stone, speaks of the determination to patiently wait in line while revealing the absurdity of the situation of having to, or even wanting to, queue for something as simple as a few oranges.

I exploit abstracted figurative elements to explore plasticity. Formalistic concerns prevail in my work. I try to create meaning by considering composition, colours, relation between shapes and scales, texture, lines etc. From matter and sound we created language. “Art making requires a different form of intelligence from that of a literal narrative nature. It is kinetic, coming through the body reviving other dimensions, making imprints of all that is known but difficult to speak of.”¹⁴ I first started working with oranges and clementines because their color and their shape. I replicated them in different materials. “I work thinking

12 Dana Friis-Hansen, *Cai Guo-Qiang* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2002).

13 Ibid., 19.

14 Medrie Macphee, *M/E/A/N/I/N/G: An Anthology of Artists' Writings, Theory, and Criticism*, ed. Susan Bee and Mira Schor (Duke University Press, 2000), 196.

about the experience of color and space—what things are going to look like visually and the excitement and impact there is in that for me. Afterwards I can put words to what I'm doing."¹⁵ "I used a lot of oranges because they're orange! Here they were in this birdcage. And I like that they're orange and they have a beautiful color and that they're so luscious- almost a cliché of beauty and sexuality...still lifes and Cézanne. Oranges immediately bring all of that up. And for me they are also like electricity on the walls. Though they're participating in the work like a still life, in fact they're degenerating and changing, and they're fluid."¹⁶ Jessica Stockholder explains like this why she used oranges in her work "Sweet for Three Oranges"¹⁷ My sculpture doesn't reference Stockholder's installation, as I learned about the installation after the exhibition, from a friend. But I think there are probably many more artists that have used oranges for similar reasons. That leads me to believe that for many viewers oranges can be evocative. The idea of an orange, my associations and the exploration of different sculptural ways of recreating an orange, fused with the longing for my grandmother and memories of times spent with her. It is through this process that the thought to make the portrait of my grandmother in a specific setting emerged.



"Sweet for Three Oranges", Jessica Stockholder

15 Susan Sollins, Sara Simonson, and Eve-Laure Moros Ortega, *Jessica Stockholder, Art:21—Art in the Twenty-First Century* season 3, episode "Play", Documentary (PBS, 2005).

16 Ibid.

17 Jessica Stockholder, "Sweet for Three Oranges" Installation at Sala Montcada de la Fundacio la Caixa, Paint, approximately 40 Christmas trees, oranges, 4 bird cages, brick wall, air craft cable, butane heaters, rope, roofing paper and roofing tar, lightbulbs, yellow electric cord, 1995.

I am conscious of a common visual language that is culturally constructed or informed by art history. It is a very wide context that can also be called western civilization. By western civilization I broadly mean what surrounds me : history, ethical values, traditional customs, religious beliefs, political systems or more specifically a political system, art and technologies. I imagine that these factors shaped my experiences. What I think and who I am depend mostly on this environment. It is the culture I know the most. I have not yet lived outside of it so I inevitably can't place my work elsewhere with certitude. Except that I can place it deeply in my own internal universe, and intuitively hope that there is enough similarities between it and someone else's, some sort of a universal language, a cosmological humour. a conference on animation in Switzerland, we were served coffee, fruits and something that looked like some local Swiss sweet bread. I don't know how many people at that time were surprised by the fluffiness of that bread, but Yuriy Norshteyn, was the only one that did not hesitate to express his surprise when the slice got squished in between this two fingers, by pretending it was a bow-tie and fooling around disturbing the conversations at his table. That was certainly a great moment, a “kinetic, coming through the body reviving other dimensions”¹⁸ moment and possibly universally humours.

The granite rock delivers reality with force, making the imperfect moulded plaster believable. There is a great aspect of chance. I have made this long sculpture because of winter. Oranges are a winter fruit, for people living where oranges don't grow. In summer oranges are not on focus. They are dry. In competition with strawberries, cherries and peaches they lose. “Take things from the places where you have impressions”¹⁹. Oranges from stores, a big rock from the forest. In a short way I can say I work from observation, as looking is an important aspect of my art practice. More than the whole country²⁰, my hometowns inform my work. Gothenburg is memorable for its rocks. Rocks shape the landscape, they shape the people, they inserted themselves in my drawings. It goes without mention that the possibility of using a twelve meters high space has infiltrated in my drawings as well, making this sculpture possible and somewhat space specific.

My work is sculpture, video, painting, drawing, light, sound, found objects, collage, performance, photography, etched plates, inked plates pressed against moist paper, paper. Everything can be a medium. Humour is part of my work in an indirect manner. Chiefly meaning arises out of the interaction and combination of different elements. I am exploiting principles of the Kuleshov effect when editing a piece or assembling different elements of an installation, considering the order of appearance, the alternation and succession of elements, etc. Some other times I

18 Macphee, *M/E/A/N/I/N/G: An Anthology of Artists' Writings, Theory, and Criticism*, 196.

19 Williams, *My Life in Flux – and Vice Versa*.

20 Friis-Hansen, *Cai Guo-Qiang*.

play an exquisite-corpse game²¹ with myself and leave a bigger place to automatic mechanisms which may sprout from my unconscious.

21 André Breton, "Le Cadavre Exquis: Son Exaltation exhibition catalogue," in (presented at the La Dragonne, Galerie Nina Dausset, Paris, 1948).

It is too soon
for conclusions.
When men have died
they enter history.
When statues have died
they enter art.
This botany of death is
what we call culture.”²²

²² Chris Marker and Alain Resnais, *Statues also Die*, documentary, 1953.

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Image Index (by page)

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Photograph of clouds
Romania
2008

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Photograph of asphalt
2008

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Against Me, Against You
2009
90 cm x 145 cm
acrylic on linen

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Table – A Point of View Issue
(in collaboration with Steven Ladouceur)
2009

Installation
wood, heater, tea, water, sound, dry leaves, light

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Photograph of my grandmother and I, on the train
(photograph taken by Steven Ladouceur)
Alba Iulia- Geoagiu Bai
2008

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Portrait of My Grandmother Queuing for Oranges
2010
12m high
plaster, gouache, granite, glass

17, 18, 19

Byrdes of on Kynde and Color Flok and Flye Allwayes Together
2010
71cm x 106.5cm, 66cm x 87cm, 97cm x 78.5cm
acrylic and oil on canvas

