

Invoking rainbows

Chromophobia is a 'fear of corruption through colour'¹. According to David Batchelor this phobia has fuelled our Antiquity-old behavior of demoting colour to 'other' (children's toys, Mardi Gras, Ken Done from 1975 until today) and lacking conceptual seriousness². The aesthetic allure of colour is often viewed with a skepticism not dissimilar to that directed at 'beauty' or 'craft', with little critical worth lying underneath its seductive surface. Maybe doubt begins when we unlearn a world of ten million shades to understand it as a 'fiction of light'³, easily overpowered by darkness or the fallibility of the human eye. Colour's dazzle, in light of such fear and rationalisations, dulls and then fades into ordinariness.

But think of a rainbow. Those arcs of soft ROYGBIV curving across the sky render the world momentarily extraordinary - with colour. This phenomena is beamed in from the universe and lifts us beyond our Earthly concerns of refracting light or the significance of white, and briefly beyond ourselves. There is a little bit of magic in such an encounter, enhanced all the more by a rainbow's unforeseen arrival then propensity to fade. This fleeting power of colour, as beheld in a spectrum of light, is the kind of magical moment Jessie Lumb honours with her art practice.

Lumb reveres in the surprise. On Hindley Street numerous unwitting pedestrians have stumbled upon her 'small gestures'⁴ of generosity, gasping when realising that swathes of grimy gum-riddled pavement has been transformed into bursting pastel dots. As well, Lumb has filled concrete cracks with rainbows, paused dappled rays of sunlight, repaired chipped pavers, coloured waterfalls and puddles, 'found' jewels in rocky urban-scapes, and more. All of these acts, small but immense with their careful accumulateness, use familiar materials like chalk, plasticine, paint, food colouring, and most importantly, time. Lumb's art is about noticing, then bringing to notice with colour, the extraordinary potential of the unkempt and unkept in non-places where shades of beige, grey, and white reign and where a dust of drabness has settled. Like rainbows, her spectrums of colour will fade, but for moments, and sometimes for months of moments, her colourings create a little light magic.

¹ David Batchelor, 'Chromophobia//2000', reproduced in *Colour*, (ed. David Batchelor), Documents of Contemporary Art series, MIT press with Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2008, p. 221

² *ibid*

³ Tacita Dean states that these realisations are 'monstrous things to understand, even for my adult mind'. (Tacita Dean, 'Magic Hour//2007', reproduced in *Colour*, (ed. David Batchelor), Documents of Contemporary Art series, MIT press with Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2008, p. 235.)

⁴ Extending from the idea by Nikos Papastergiadis who writes 'what transpires across and within such seemingly small gestures is the larger expression of a desire for connection'. Nikos Papastergiadis, 'Spatial Aesthetics: Rethinking the Contemporary', *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor, and Nancy Condee (eds), Duke University Press, London, 2008, p. 369.

The brilliant texture of small town life, by Lumb's reckoning, is an anomaly in her practice as it appears in a space inviting with experiential expectations⁵. Yet through Lumb's quiet noticing the unexpected happens; immersion within a rainbow and being amidst tiny mountains of rainbow dust are uncommon experiences, but it is rare that such attention is given to gallery white walls. With her chalky rainbow Lumb uncovers the very texture of the walls intended to be invisible. If we think of time spent in spaces of white, concrete, and other supposed invisible surfaces, time not noticing the real texture of life around us, then Lumb's invoking of rainbows has deep significance. These acts of generosity offer spectrums of light in the darkness.

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⁵ Jessie Lumb in interview with the author, May 30, 2014.