

Colour is a verb

David Batchelor
David Cross
David Sequeira
David Thomas

Introduction

When proposing a curated exhibition for Dominik Mersch Gallery I took advantage of the relatively rare opportunity for me to include my own work in the project. My work as an artist and curator has always been fuelled by my curiosity around colour. In addition to studio visits, reading and viewing exhibitions, much of my research in this area has been developed through my own studio practice.

Part of my fascination with colour is its connection with life and I continue to be amazed by the relationships that I have created through this interest. My connection with the other artists in this exhibition stems from my doctoral research *Some Kind of Bliss: Geometry, Colour and Contemplation 2007-2011*. I had not met Melbourne based David Thomas until we spoke about him supervising my PhD in 2006, the writings and work of London based David Batchelor were part of the proposed research and David Cross (then based in New Zealand) was one of the examiners. At the time, I had no idea of the sustenance that these other Davids would continue to provide for me nor the breadth of the terrain that our collective investigations would explore.

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At the heart of this project is an interest in the profound relationship between colour and action. More specifically, through this exhibition I want to suggest connections between colour, perception and gesture. Integral to the selection of works is an understanding of colour as an impactful spirited entity that encourages engagement and exchange. For me, these works extend the idea that colour exists on things and as part of things. Through *Colour is a verb* I want to explore the idea of colour as a kind of energetic force or presence. I am interested in colour as meaningless in its own right but embodying the capacity to conjure a range of associations and emotions because of its intimate connection with what people do with it and what it does to people.

Through his inflatable performance sculpture, David Cross creates opportunities for viewers (participants) to express intimacy – intimacy accentuated by colour. In *Trio*, Cross invites participants to view him through one eye and to negotiate keeping the structure inflated without speaking – colour is a vehicle for balancing scopic knowledge with haptic knowledge.¹ The *Stack* works encourage a consideration of the difference between reality and the representation of reality – photographic documentation of pieces of vinyl is pinned down by actual vinyl. For me, these works address the elusive nature of colour – that it can never be captured or replicated accurately – it can only be experienced.

Collectively, David Batchelor's *Atomic Drawings* demonstrate the idea of colour as an exploratory or investigative process. '*Everything I have written about colour has come out of working with colour in the studio.*'² Painted, cut, stuck, drawn and printed, Batchelor presents colour free of any subject matter other than itself. Often made from local discarded or humble materials, Batchelor hides nothing about his process, making direct links between his studio practice and the environment in which he lives. It seems that for Batchelor colour is something to be arranged, ordered, combined and organised and I have always been moved by his capacity to articulate its possibilities.

David Thomas thinks about his paintings as '*intervals in the world... their difference from the world of the everyday helps us to see what surrounds them, what connects them to the world and what separates them from it. They offer contemplative moments of direct encounter with realities. They provide times and spaces to become aware of how we construct meaning and feeling.*'³ For me, the gestural qualities of Thomas' paintings point towards the elusive nature of time and can be connected with ideas around transience and impermanence. Through the gesture of colour, Thomas articulates time as something that can be seen and experienced.

Much of my own studio practice explores the spaces between colours (and all of their tonal variations). I like to think about these spaces as infinite, undefined and limitless. Colour in *The Shirt Project* is used not to illustrate or describe an interaction, but rather as the subject of the interaction itself. Both men are dressed in colour – their bodies are warmed, protected, enclosed and decorated by it. In this work I address the experience of 'being' in colour by making it the context in which the two men physically connect. In the *Song* series, words such as chord, resonance, vibration and harmony are useful to describe the sorts of colour sensations that interest me.

Colour – its subtlety and nuance, volume and density, malleability and expansiveness - is inseparable from life. Whether presented as a device for generating connectedness in the sculptural performance objects of David Cross, a thinking process in the collected works on paper of David Batchelor, a moment of silence in the paintings of David Thomas, or a sensory context that heightens touch and sound in my own work, colour provides me with a unique access to the experience of reality.

Question: What have I learnt through the process of making art with colour, curating with colour and working with other artists dealing with colour?

Answer: The deeper my investigations into the phenomenon of colour, the more there is for me to learn. There is no end.

David Sequeira
Guest Curator

1. unpublished email
correspondence with David
Cross Friday 24 May 2019

2. [https://
romanroadjournal.com/
david-batchelor-colour-and-
chromophobia/](https://romanroadjournal.com/david-batchelor-colour-and-chromophobia/)

3. unpublished email
correspondence with David
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2019

Published on the occasion of
Colour is a verb
David Batchelor, David Cross, David Sequeira & David Thomas
31.05 – 16.06.2019
Dominik Mersch Gallery
1/75 Mclachlan Ave Rushcutters Bay Nsw Australia