



David Batchelor's Dizzying Chromatics

At Compton Verney, the artist's first large-scale survey celebrates a career spent experimenting with colour

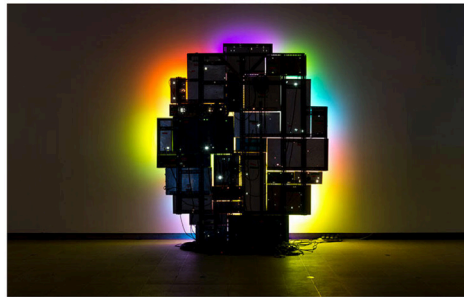


All too routinely in survey shows, moments of uncertainty are brushed aside in favour of a coherent trajectory. 'Colour Is', David Batchelor's first large-scale survey, foregrounds direct engagement with his practice by reversing chronology, layering works densely and utilizing the interpretation panels to establish candid, first-person conversations with the viewer. The wall texts become additional works in the rooms, underpinning how the exhibition draws from the model of the studio and the artist's primary sources of inspiration. With this intent, objects overlap in proximity, collating the diverse ways of making and writing that have taken place in Batchelor's practice, articulating the intersections present in a body of work produced over 40 years.



David Batchelor, 'Colour Is', 2022, installation view. Courtesy: © Compton Verney; photography: Jamie Woodley

The exhibition offers two routes: '2010–2022, mostly' and '2010–1980, mostly'. The route with the more recent works begins with 'Covid Variations' (2020) – a series of paintings made during the pandemic, in which greys, pinks, cadmiums and cobalts zigzag and bleed into each other on connected panels. Alongside, presented in a line on a shelf, are the sculptural bouquets of concrete and acid-hued Perspex of 'Inter-Concreto' (2019–ongoing). *Extra-Concreto 02* (2020) is placed freestanding in the middle of the room, the spray-painted crossing lines of its foraged materials echoes the paintings. Nearby, a monitor pulsates with assertions; *Colour Is* (2017) is an animation that collates sentences on colour, how it fades, deceives, imitates, acts superficially and holds its own meaning.



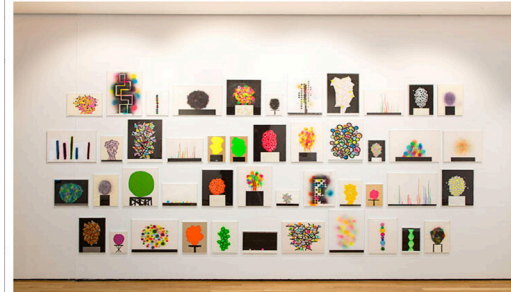
David Batchelor, *Magic Hour*, 2004–2007, found steel and aluminium light boxes, found steel support. Courtesy: © the artist and Compton Verney

The glossy acrylic sheets embedded on the found and scavenged dollies of *I Love King's Cross and King's Cross Loves Me* (2001) transform them into vehicles for colour. They are presented alongside a collection of neon-hued *Atomic Drawings* (1997–2016), proposals for yet-unmade sculptures. *Found Monochromes* (1997–ongoing) is a series documenting voids in public space, presented here as 500 digitized 35mm photographs screened on two monitors: one portrait, the other landscape. The works hold a consistent rule: the capture of abstraction in lived space, where its edges are resistant to the language of the city. The stills on the monitors cycle through in rapid succession: offers of cash withdrawals, 24/7 convenience, grating, bricks, wires, painted boards and unadorned hoardings.



David Batchelor, *Colour Chart 58 (red)*, 2012, gloss and matt paint on Dibond. Courtesy: © the artist and Compton Verney

In an adjacent room, *Magic Hour* (2004–07) has turned its back on visitors. An irregular grid of illuminated lightboxes placed close to the gallery's white wall creates a halo of multiple hues. Here, colour leaks out, a push-pull that plays with the desire to be enveloped in total chromatic saturation. On the reverse, the work's guts – the supports that hold it together, the massed cables – spill out onto the floor. You look through its gaps seeking that maximum colour fix, blocked by the structure.



David Batchelor, 'Colour Is', 2022, installation view. Courtesy: © Compton Verney; photography: Jamie Woodley

The exhibition concludes with Batchelor's early works from 1980 to 1997: collages, notes, folds and his first colour experiments. The room is unphased by the number of attempts it takes for a body of work to connect to its true intent. When it happens, you feel it. Placed in the middle of works is *Frame-Like 16* (1993), a small, framed panel completely covered in tape. It's a total pushing away of stasis. Aluminium, duct and electrical tape are layered in a frenzy of marks that annihilate the object beneath. It's a work that holds the room by itself, communicating the moment in which idea and material form a reality. This potential for innocuous and uncelebrated materials to form new conclusions is a continuum through the exhibition's fluctuations, shifts and returns, giving clarity to the depths held in Batchelor's dizzying chromatics.

David Batchelor's 'Colour Is' is at Compton Verney, Warwickshire, until 2 October

Main image: David Batchelor, *Covid Variation*, 2020, tape on Dibond. Courtesy: © the artist and Compton Verney



CATHY WADE

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TAGS

Cathy Wade, Compton Verney, David Batchelor