

On Loops

In 2001 a pair of astronomers announced they could reveal the actual colour of the universe: turquoise. They determined an average colour by extracting and analysing light properties of over 200,000 known galaxies, converting them to values discernable to the human eye. A year later however, the astronomers issued an embarrassed correction. Their data crunching had misattributed a certain hexadecimal code and produced a false result: the universe wasn't turquoise, a colour talismanic of good fortune and holiness in many cultures; it was beige. They called the colour Cosmic Latte, which to me makes a strong case for why scientists shouldn't be allowed to name things.

In a small moment of serendipity I learned this, via Maggie Nelson's poem *Bluets*,¹ shortly before Kenzee Patterson told me he had begun introducing colour into his work, which had recently become - without his direct intention - noticeably achromatic. He too was interested in the 'false colours' used in images of deep space. Familiar images of celestial bodies – brilliantly, even luridly, coloured – are actually illustrations of imperceptible wavelengths, a calculated speculation designed to inspire wonder in the viewer.² Turquoise, as opposed to beige, was wishful thinking.³ As Kenzee began to figure out a logic for looking at and depicting colour, he found it kept looping and recurring, finding unexpected resonances and reflections. Just as repetition unmoors words from their meanings, Kenzee's careful manipulations test and loosen the physical and conceptual boundaries of objects.

One such manipulation is seen in *A Journeyman*, a modest arch made from an aluminium ruler. The ruler is stripped of its measures and instead bears an electroplated surface, its iridescence mimicking the impact of heat on metal. Released from its purpose under this pressure, the object's material value hovers closer to the ephemeral joy of a rainbow but remains stubbornly

¹ Maggie Nelson, *Bluets*, Wave Books, 2009, pp. 89-90.

² From email correspondence with the artist.

³ For more on this, read Anya Ventura, "Pretty Pictures: The Use of False Color in Images of Deep Space", *InVisible Culture: An Electronic Journal for Visual Culture*, Issue 19, 2013. <http://ivc.lib.rochester.edu/pretty-pictures-the-use-of-false-color-in-images-of-deep-space/> Accessed 15 May.

earthbound. It's an object literally bent over backwards and yet quietly, perversely, cheerful.

Money Spinner (Infinite Extent) presents another inversion. In dense institutional yellow, a coin donation funnel rendered non-functional becomes an abstract object. Video of a coin circles endlessly, never dropping, performing a useless function on an infinite precipice. The coin depicted is an Australian 1966 50c piece, circular - rather than the dodecagon we know, minted the year decimal currency was introduced. It was only in production briefly before a spike in the price of silver drove the market value of the coin's precious metal content beyond its face value. Another miscalculation yields unexpected results.

The bare wall, the blank page, the empty screen, also destabilises the space between the object and its surrounds. The tiny buttons are replicas of Kenzee's own irises, handmade by an ocularist from acrylic and meticulously painted from life. The particularly observant will notice that they are slightly different colours. Despite her office's artificial light, the sun had set over the long afternoon the ocularist had observed and worked - usually a person requires only one prosthetic eye. The iris, here unbound by the sclera, or the white part of the eye, acts as an aperture stop for the pupil and controls the amount of light that reaches the retina. In Greek mythology, Iris is the messenger between the gods and humanity. Another loop: Iris is the personification of a rainbow.

Infinite Focus performs a similar act of translation. The infinity focus symbol from the lens of Kenzee's camera scanned and scaled up, it has an echo in the accompanying photogram created by the object's presence. The process by which the photogram is created is captured within the object itself, which is cast in silver refined from the silver halide crystals leftover from photographic processing. The size of a pair of glasses, it is as though looking through the infinity symbol will reanimate the images created in those processes. Stationed on opposite sides of the space, the object and the photogram are locked in a mutually held gaze, unable to exist without the other. Like

Nabokov's 'miracle of a lemniscate' left by bicycle tyres on wet sand,⁴ it is infinity on a human scale.

So much of looking relies on upholding what you expect to see. The brain fills in the blanks, even when the object of the gaze is invisible (such as with wavelengths) or unfathomable (infinity). Looking at colour is notoriously subjective, even frustratingly abstract. At once elemental and emotional, it contracts and expands to fill the space it is assigned, animating the values with which it is invested. Of all the infinite possibilities, a beige universe is a failure of imagination. We had grander expectations.

Eleanor Zeichner

⁴ Vladimir Nabokov, *Pale Fire*, Everyman's Library, 1992 (first published 1962), p. 29.