



## Artist of the Month: March with David Batchelor

Posted by curatingthecontemporary  
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We live in an image-led age. Bright, numerous, unavoidable images are part of our daily life. From magazines, to billboards and to social media, on a daily basis we're bombarded with an overwhelming quantity of visual stimuli to a point that – for the great majority – we don't even notice or realise they are all around any longer, especially in big cities.

This saturated environment, the urban environment, is the point of departure of David Batchelor's research into colour. Batchelor (b. Dundee, Scotland, 1955) has been concerned with colour since 1992. More than a commitment, his is a sheer interest in revealing how we experience colour in the city and a critical analysis of how we respond to it in an advanced technological age.

What he noted first at the beginning of his journey is that white always seemed to matter more than the colour. A symbol of purity throughout the ages, white is the counter part that excludes and diminishes the rest. In his famous series of *Achromes*, Piero Manzoni didn't want to achieve the purest shade of white, but rather he wanted to achieve the opposite, an undisputed, total absence of colour. He coined a new term for the title to point it out. Contemporary gallery spaces – the so-called white cubes – are an antiseptic environment ideated to block out the external chaos of colourful images and give the most possible prominence to their content. Batchelor calls *Chromophobia* the attempt "to purge colour from culture, to devalue colour, to diminish its significance, to deny its complexity."<sup>[1]</sup>

When Batchelor started reflecting on the rejection of colour, became fascinated with it and made it the reason of all his *oeuvre*. But differently than colourists, Batchelor – as we said – always takes into account the way, and the setting in which we experience it. He works with bold artificial hues, preferably acid green and bright pink, that cannot be found in nature but are typical of synthetic materials like plastic, petrol, neon, and acetate. Like signage in cities, Batchelor's works bare a great difference from one side to another: they're made to be viewed by more than one angle but the relationship retro-front and the clear difference between the two, is important to reiterate the artificiality of the experience. In nature, a tree would appear quite the same from all point of views – a neon sign of looming up from a building wouldn't.

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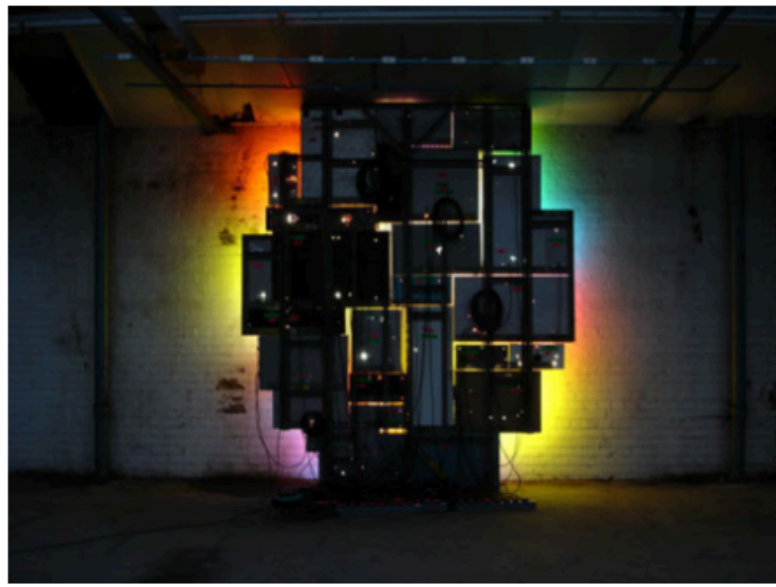
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In 2013 David Batchelor set aside his sculptural installations and, for the first time in his career, presented solely bi-dimensional works. The exhibition, titled *Flatlands*, ran at the Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh from 4 May to 14 July. Although drawings had always been at the heart of his work, they were never his favourite means of expression. Nonetheless, in the constant effort to give physicality to colour, Batchelor produced tautological works: the forms in his paintings, despite being mindful of European and American Abstract Art, reference nothing other than colour, to which the underlying rectangular pedestals give even more prominence.



David Batchelor, *Magic Hour*, 2004. © and Courtesy the artist.

His work *Magic Hour* (2004) is a three-metre tall and two-metre large structure made of restaurant lightboxes, which fluorescent lamps glare on the facing wall. The viewers sees only the back of the work, the wires coming out, and its silhouette framed by a hazy rainbow of lights. The title of the work is an homage to the sunset hour in Las Vegas, when the strong city lights alter the natural lighting. For Batchelor, the “relationship of colour and darkness is something very unique to the city”. In fact, we would only see colours in the daylight, but with man-made lights “the best colours come out at night and so darkness and the night sky is often the best backdrop for artificial colour”.<sup>[2]</sup>



David Batchelor, *Islington, London 01.05.99* (1999), © and courtesy of the artist.

The rectangular shape is almost ever present in Batchelor's body of work, it is the only vague memory left of the classic painting<sup>[3]</sup>, of the canvas, and exactly a blank square is the subject of another project the artists started in 1997 and has been bringing forward ever since. *Found Monochromes* is a photographic series to the pursue of abstraction within the city. It counts 500 photographs of blank, flat rectangles, an unnatural object that – as such- can only be found in a man-made environment. For the artist, these rectangular shapes are “almost like a little void, in an image saturated environment”<sup>[4]</sup> a sign or resistance and existence of abstract art in our everyday scenario. The series – exhibited in the form of a multi-screen installation at the Whitechapel Gallery, from 23 December 2014 to 3 May 2015 – started off with photographs taken in London, but soon Batchelor began taking pictures of blank squares wherever he'd go and find any around. The *Found Monochromes* ultimately reveal the artist's excavation of the everyday for the beauty of the overlooked or unimportant, likewise his *Series of Electrical Flex Balls* (2010) and his carelessness in showing wires and the back part of its installations as salient part.

For the month of March, every week CtC will present a works by David Batchelor on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

David Batchelor's *PSYCHOGEOMETRY* will run at [Matt's Gallery](#) from 26 April– 11 June 2017.



David Batchelor, *Blob o8 (yellow)* 28.03.11, 2011. Courtesy the artist, Galeria Leme, São Paulo and Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh. Photo: Thierry Bal. Private Collection, London.





Caterina Berardi

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[1] David Batchelor, *Chromophobia* (2000), FOCI, p.22.

[2] Artist David Batchelor talks Light Show, light boxes and Magic Hour, interview by Benjamin Judd, 23 April 2015 – <https://www.qthotelsandresorts.com/sydney-cbd/qt-blog/artist-david-batchelor-talks-light-show-light-boxes-magic-hour/> Last access: 23/02/17.

[3] TateShots: David Batchelor – Studio Visit, uploaded on 21 Aug 2009 – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sD7ZHwBH10I> Last access: 23/02/17.

[4] David Batchelor: Flatlands Remix – British Council Touring Exhibitions, published on 21 July 2015 – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T1d5KTIT9g> Last access: 23/02/17.

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