

David Batchelor Is Colour

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Margaret Lawrence Gallery
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David Batchelor

Colour Is

In his projection work *Colour Is*, David Batchelor presents a series of quotes about colour by artists, writers, critics and curators. Batchelor has been collecting one sentence statements about colour since about 2005 and his anthology is continually expanding. The quotes are presented as a looping PowerPoint display. There are no special fonts or slick animations – just sequences of words on coloured backgrounds that collectively form a quasi-manifesto on the complexity of colour.

The purpose of this essay is not to examine the individual statements presented in *Colour Is*, nor is it to discuss Batchelor's anthology. The text itself reveals much about the debate and discussion about colour by artists, writers, curators and academics. Batchelor states clearly that his aim in collecting the quotes is *'to show something of the diversity, divergence and sheer contradictory nature of much writing on colour. For every sentence that says 'x' there is another that claims 'y'. For every sentence that declares a love of colour there is another that loathes it. There is insight and prejudice, subtly and stupidity, doubt and dogma, brilliance and banality; expressions of delight and disdain and certainty and confusion. Such is the nature of writing on colour.'*

The purpose of this essay is to unpack some of Batchelor's specific choices associated with *Colour Is* and to speculate. Given the depth of his explorations of and influences on thinking in the area of colour, if Batchelor was to insert PowerPoint slides of his own statements into *Colour Is*, what might they say?

Possible PowerPoint Slide 1 Colour is immersive and invasive

The colours of the back grounds are not confined to the wall upon which the work is screened – it exceeds its allocated space. The coloured light of the projection spills onto the floor and the other walls of the gallery. Viewers are immersed in it – they stand in it and they breathe it in. It is not only something that happens outside of the body, it is also something that saturates the body and becomes one with it.

Possible PowerPoint Slide 2 Colour is only ever experiential

Colour Is highlights the critical gap between the discussion of colour and the experience of colour. When the quotes are presented as text on a page, viewers can only ever be engaged with the concept of colour. Upon seeing the same text in *Colour Is*, viewers are engaged with colour itself – said another way, reading about the phenomenon of colour is distinct from the experience of it. This is not to suggest that the experiences that *Colour Is* generates are definitive. On the contrary, the extensive nature of Batchelor's colour palette points towards an unending range of experiences and interpretations.

Possible PowerPoint Slide 3 Colour is decisive

In *Colour Is*, Batchelor highlights the symbiotic relationship between colour and word. He creates specific colour contexts for each quote. Implicit in this construct is the idea that the quote could have a different resonance when presented with a different coloured background and, of course, that the colour could have a different resonance depending upon the words presented against it. In this light, colour can be understood as a/the decisive context that influences the ways in which viewers experience their experiences.

Possible PowerPoint Slide 4 Colour is about learning and teaching

Written by a range of leading thinkers, the statements in *Colour Is* can be connected to the lineage of learning and teaching about colour in which Batchelor is embedded. Batchelor's search for the statements suggests an exploration of the existing body of knowledge about colour. The sequencing and presentation of the statements in *Colour Is* can be understood as an articulation of where (if at all) he might contribute to or fit in with this body. The use of PowerPoint to present these statements further echoes ideas of teaching and learning.

So, what then does *Colour Is* teach us? Possible learnings are: The infinite combinations of background colour and text can be connected with the infinite meanings generated by the work. The variety of statements and sources implies that colour is elusive – there is no single truth about colour – just a constantly expanding group of opinions based on highly subjective experience.

Colour Is reveals Batchelor as a kind of curator – deeply curious about selection and display – he presents the ideas of others via a highly personal experience of colour. The result is an articulation and demonstration of the relationship between word and colour, between idea and experience. Whilst its principles are simple, the implications of *Colour Is* are profound. *Colour Is* evokes a range of responses and associations, it highlights the experience of *being* in colour (and indeed the world) and it signals that investigation into the generative nature of colour is an endless pursuit.

David Sequeira

1. Notes by David Batchelor sent to David Sequeira 18.04.18
2. Notes by David Batchelor sent to David Sequeira 18.04.18
3. It is also appropriate to speculate on the colour Batchelor might use if he inserted his own statements into *Colour Is*. This speculation is left to the reader of this essay.
4. Since its invention in the 1980s PowerPoint has become one of the world's most used teaching tools. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2001/05/28/absolute-powerpoint>

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