



AIC LISBOA 2018  
colour & human comfort

## Chromophobia in contemporary art practices

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### Abstract

Color, a visual and expressive element with a tremendous transformative potential, simultaneously strange and seductive, unverifiable and unlimited, has meanings that are anything but universal or transversal to distinct areas of knowledge. More than interdisciplinary, color emerges as a powerful tool with its own and autonomous value that does not allow itself to be disciplined, although centuries of cultural history tried to attribute powerful symbolic meanings to this expressive force. In the field of visual arts, specifically, perhaps the possible knowledge and understanding of color resides in experience and in the act of doing things, experimenting and transforming.

The investigation I have been developing as a visual artist that privileges color as a fundamental composition element that transforms spaces, questions what happened to color after the theories that have tried to systemize it, for these have yet to provide an unequivocal and irrefutable knowledge, generating instead further possibilities of disruption and reinvention. It seems that, nowadays, color is more associated to a fluid randomness field, to chance and intuition, than to its scientific and systematic aspect of an orderly management of principles and rules. So, today, artists themselves are writing a color history through the artistic objects they add to the world, talking about color in and through practice, even though this more or less privileged use of color may not be recognized or valued.

This paper, using a personal artistic and research experience as background and context, intends to reflect on the role of color in contemporary art, questioning if chromophobia, a concept advanced by David Batchelor, contaminates contemporary practices, as well as the critical mass and agents that influence the art world. In *Chromophobia* (2000), Batchelor argues that color has been the object of extreme prejudice in Western culture, systematically marginalized by generations of philosophers, artists, art historians and theorists since antiquity. Batchelor tells us of a fear of being corrupted or contaminated by color as a superficial, decorative, excessive and ornamental element and argues that we are still dealing with the often-unspoken or questioned belief that seriousness in art and culture is a black and white issue.

With an effective clear reduction of the discussion on the subject of color after the 1960s between art historians, critics and artists, it is interesting to note, at the same time, and as Briony Fer (2008) stated, that art history was slow to recognize the importance of color at key moments in the practice of some artists, such as the recognition of Donald Judd as one of the great colorists of the twentieth century.

As a painter who works with color in a recidivist and assumed way, I recognize the effects of this chromophobia, in certain contexts, agents and platforms of dissemination of contemporary art. It is worth reflecting on the possibility that chromophobia influences the understanding of the place of color in contemporary art and, on the other hand, how it is interleaved with the apology of color, as it has been through several moments of history, often surprisingly.

**Keywords:** *Color, prejudice, chromophobia, contemporary art, painting*