

I PAINT COLOURS. FROM PAINTER TO COLOURMAN

by Claudia Marek und Stefan Muntwyler

Stefan Muntwyler from Windisch (Switzerland) is a painter and colourman. Over four decades he has acquired a sound knowledge of pigments, dyes, binders and recipes. He gathers valuable and interesting information on their various aspects: cultural, historical, chemical, technological, literary, anecdotal and artistic.

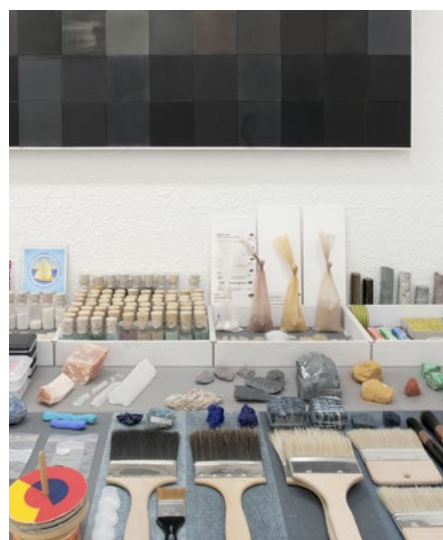
The Book

2010 – In cooperation with other experts, Stefan Muntwyler compiled his knowledge in the book *Farbpigmente Farbstoffe Farbgeschichten*. It has since become a standard work for art colleges and in the realms of art, art history, restoration, architecture, design and artistic craftwork. It's a magnificent encyclopaedia for dyes. Its centrepiece is a compendium of 317 pigments and dyes and corresponding colour samples. The book also includes detailed colour stories, pigment analyses of famous works of art, and a comprehensive glossary. 2012 – Muntwyler is awarded the Karl Miescher prize by the German colour centre (Deutsches Farbenzentrum, DFZ) for his outstanding achievements in «research and artistic work with colours».



In the Studio

The painter's studio does not match the cliché of the «creative chaos». Pigments are filled into glass jars, labelled and sorted by colour. Brushes, palette knives and other painting tools are arranged in a straight line. Drawers are numbered. In the cupboards there are materials and pieces of work, neatly arranged and stacked on top of each other: minerals, stones, soils, wood samples, and other raw materials for pigments, stored in boxes labelled in his characteristic hand. «It always looks like this. I am a perfectionist.» This characteristic defines him, along with his perseverance, meticulousness and toughness. Passion and commitment. Monochrome paintings are hung on the walls. Stefan Muntwyler doesn't do classical paintings anymore. He paints colours. «Colours itself are my subject.» It didn't use to be that way.



In Search of the Unknown

1978 / 1979 – preliminary course at Zurich arts school. Muntwyler submits graphically and technically accomplished works. One of the lecturers is not impressed at all and challenges him. «Useless: You are simply doing what you are good at already. Start looking for the unknown, dare to do explore new things, practise what you find difficult.» Muntwyler sets off on a journey. An inner as well as an outer one.

1979 – Otranto, Apulia. It's love at first sight. The town, the cathedral, the fishing port and the Apulian sky. On one of his rambles, equipped with his backpack and painting equipment, he discovers a bauxite pit, aluminium ore, that is strip-mined. He comes back the next day, equipped with cutlery and many plastic sachets. Sunday, no one is working. He climbs over the fence and enters a new world of colours.



A New World of Colours

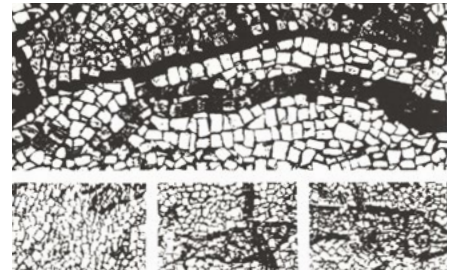
1979 – Red in various shades prevails, but there are also yellow, orange and brown ochres, various shades of grey, pink, chalky white and black. The young painter is overwhelmed by the beauty and richness of this vast range of colours. «Up to that point I kept my distance from earth tones. I perceived them as dirty – cobalt blue, cadmium red, chrome orange, bright, punchy colours, that was my thing.»

Muntwyler hacks, breaks, digs and collects material until he has 20 filled sachets in front of him. He does yet fully grasp the impact this first stay in Otranto will have on his artistic work. He mainly sees himself as a draftsman.



The Mosaic of Otranto

1984 – Otranto Cathedral is an artistic challenge: The enormous floor mosaic, created by the Apulian monk Pantaleone in the 12th century. During two months, Muntwyler is drawing for several hours a day. It's the time his 100 Ansichten über Pantaleones Mosaik are being made. Otranto is becoming his second home.



In Search of the Blue

1987 – Back in Otranto. By the sea. Full days, half nights he just sits there watching the sea and the sky. The translucent brightness of the Apulian sky and the bottomless depth of the sea are his latest subjects. In the studio he uses acrylic paint to realize his inner pictures. For the depth of the sea he uses dark ultramarine blue as a base for all his mixes. «I realized that mixes are only rough approximations and always create a certain dullness.»

Back in Switzerland he starts an extensive search. He buys each and every shade of blue he can find: coloured pencils, oil and soft pastels, drawing ink, tempera paint, enamel paint, watercolours and oil paint. He mixes colours, creates countless samples, and yet, he is not satisfied with any



of the results. That's when a friend and painter advises him: «Manganese Blue!» The magical blue for the bright, translucent, deep blue sky. «There used to be an oil paint version of it but it's no longer manufactured due to some production problems.»

As a pigment it's still available. Muntwyler buys as much as he can lay his hands on. «A feeling of pure happiness!» The first colour samples of Manganese Blue mark the beginning of his monochrome painting. And the beginning of his consistent work with pigments.

Monochrome Painting – a Portrait of each Colour

Otranto is the birthplace of his colour research, a passion that has stayed with him up to today. Stefan Muntwyler has become an expert in this field. He has been working with pigments for decades and has explored their specific properties, has produced 600 portraits of colours, produced from mineral and organic pigments and dyes.

He opens the door of a cupboard and takes out one of the many cardboard boxes: colour number 45700, purple. A small monochrome picture in a red-violet hue, made from precious mucus secreted by the spiny dye-murex snail. Written at the back is the portrait of this colour. «The result always looks simple at the end.» Not only the base, the format and the brush play an important part. Muntwyler tests each pigment with five to six different binders. «The shade of a colour changes depending on the binder used. When I apply the paint, I want it to look as similar to the dry pigment as possible», Muntwyler explains his aspiration. «Each pigment has its own unique character and thus requires an individual recipe.»

He is relentless. In several glazes he applies the paint – layer for layer.



40 Colour Plates

2010 – For his book he produced 30 boxes, each containing 40 colour plates across the range of colours. Painting these colour plates is pure meditation. The boxes are colour craft at its finest.



Eternal Blue

2006 – When the Catholic Church in Windisch (Switzerland) is renovated, Stefan Muntwyler is asked to do the artistic design of the Lady Chapel. It's clear to him from the beginning that natural ultramarine blue is perfect for this task. «There is simply no synthetic pigment that creates the same sense of depth as lapis lazuli, a valuable mineral pigment found in Afghanistan and Chile.»

Stefan Muntwyler applies 30 glazes of lapis lazuli. Visitors behold a calm, deep blue, a glimpse of eternity, a monochrome painting on a 25 square metres wood panel as well as a monochrome fresco of 8 square metres that provides the backdrop for the statue of the Virgin Mary.

«Mysteriously, natural lapis lazuli does not lose its qualities in the dark.



At nightfall, its intense blue does not die down, but starts to really glow from the inside», Muntwyler explains. When it's getting light, you can see myriads of little stars in the blue dawn. Tiny sparkling crystals of lazurite, pyrite, and quartz.

Watercolour box

2008 – Stefan Muntwyler has remained true to his love of Otranto. More than 30 years after his discovery, geologist André Lambert develops a detailed geological profile of the pit. In close collaboration with Thomas Rickert (Kremer Pigmente), Muntwyler produces the first watercolour box with eight different types of coloured soils from the pit.

2017 – The watercolour box «Aargau» goes on sale, including 16 colours that were mainly manufactured from local soils and minerals. Muntwyler and André Lambert have been working several years on this matter of the heart. The geological diversity of the canton is reflected in the watercolour box. «I wasn't aware of how much light there is in the Canton of Aargau», Muntwyler says enthusiastically.



Future

He is not tired of it. His large stock keeps inspiring new subjects. «A palette with shades of black might be an idea worth considering.» Muntwyler collects all kinds of fruit kernels: grape, date, cherry, yellow plum, prune plum, apricot, olive and fills them in small tin boxes. In a fire bowl in front of the studio he charcoal burns them. Temperature, burning time, level of burning and the manner of cooling down have a great impact on the resulting shade of black.

Muntwyler lets some charcoal burnt grape kernels trickle down from his hand. What shade of black can you get from this? «You never know beforehand. I mix each product with three different binders. You'll get a rich, varied palette of charcoal blacks. That's the beauty of my job: Surprises are part of the game, each day brings a new challenge.»



Stefan Muntwyler

Studio in Windisch, Switzerland – teacher training – preliminary course at Zurich arts school – painter, colourman, colour expert, book author – www.stefanmuntwyler-pigmente.ch The colourman and painter has been working as an artist and teacher in adult education for nearly 40 years. In 2007 he finishes a monochrome lapis lazuli pigment painting on a large wood panel for the Lady Chapel of the in Church Windisch. In 2010 he publishes his standard work *Farbpigmente Farbstoffe Farbgeschichten*. 2012 Karl-Miescher-award for his outstanding achievements in «research and artistic work with colours». 2008 Production of the first watercolour box with 8 coloured soils from the pit in Otranto. 2010 watercolour box «Zug», 2017 watercolour box «Aargau» with 16 colours.

