



Chazen Museum of Art

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## The Color of Iron

January 14 to March 19, 2006 | Mayer Gallery

*The Color of Iron* will explore the relationship between art and science and feature works in painting, ceramics, glass, and photography at the Chazen Museum of Art January 14 through March 19, 2006. This unique presentation will showcase the commonplace yet extraordinary element of iron and the range of colors it can produce by fusing an understanding of chemical techniques with applications in art. The exhibition is organized by the Chazen Museum and curated by Joe Skulan, a scientist at the UW–Madison Geology Museum.

Iron is a surprisingly versatile element that exists in many chemical forms and in a protean array of colors. Aquamarine, amethyst, and emerald all obtain their colors from iron. These natural colors are mirrored and magnified in art, in which chemical techniques—some of great antiquity—are used to make iron blossom into an amazing spectrum of colors, from red ochre to Prussian blue. *The Color of Iron* will feature the work of four artists; ceramic artist John Britt, painter Sandra McPherson, glass sculptor Scott Shapiro, and photographer Mike Ware, who use the chemical effects of iron-based materials to produce color in their art. These artists all possess in-depth knowledge of the chemical reactions that occur when iron is combined with other elements such as water and oxygen. The presentation will also include a collaborative installation titled *The Alchemist's Workbench*, featuring devices and materials that demonstrate the full spectrum of iron-based color. The exhibition and related educational programs will be presented to the public free of charge.

### EXHIBITION DETAILS

Ceramic artist John Britt's work will show the effects of iron in glazes fired at high temperatures, including the creation of stunning reds and jewel-like blacks. Britt's "oil spot" glazes are created by the thermal reduction of iron. When heated in a kiln to Cone 10 (2,350°F), the red iron oxide undergoes a chemical change that leaves a rough black or "oil" spot on the glaze surface that is a different color than the surrounding glaze. Britt's expertise in the chemistry of high-fire glazes has earned him a reputation as a teacher, writer, and artist. Based in North Carolina, he is the author of *The Complete Guide to High-Fire Glazes* (Lark Books, 2004) and has written articles for *Ceramics Monthly*, *Ceramics Review*, and *Clay Times*.

San Francisco-based artist Sandra McPherson's paintings showcase the varieties of ochre pigments produced by iron. She traveled to Wyoming as part of a UW–Madison Geology Museum expedition to collect raw materials containing iron to create earth-toned pigments for her paintings. McPherson describes her work as "an exploration of natural forms and processes, the expression of a passionate curiosity about nature, the sciences, and human experience. Working largely in series, I translate dialogues with my subjects into physical acts of painting. Surfaces are painted, marked, dripped, sanded, and glazed, using oils, wax, mediums, and various drawing instruments on canvas or panel. The process of alternating multiple glazes, dripping, and brushwork with selective sanding results in complex surfaces."

Scott Shapiro is a local glass artist and graduate student in the UW–Madison's Department of Art. His work includes luminous relief works, fiberglass sculptures, abstract hand-blown glass vessels, cold cathode wall reliefs, sculptural works with light, and paintings of light that incorporate neon and photographic images. In order to make colored glass, artists add dissolved metallic oxides in small amounts to the clear-glass formula to produce greens (iron), or ambers and browns (iron and sulfur combined). Saturation of color through the use of iron pigment brings out the transparent qualities of glass. For the exhibition, Shapiro will create four hand-blown glass vessels that demonstrate the different colors iron pigment can produce, and he will also create a luminous sculpture made from hand blown glass that will serve as a centerpiece of the exhibition.

Since 1981, artist and scientist Mike Ware has exhibited his photographic work in galleries in Europe, Australia, and the United States. As he indicates, "photography, for me, provides an ideal meeting ground for science and art: I find my raison d'être in the endeavor to bridge the notorious gap between C. P. Snow's *Two Cultures* by employing chemical science to enhance the art of photographic expression." An honorary fellow in Chemistry at the University of Manchester, England, Ware is an internationally recognized expert on the

science, history, and art of alternative photographic processes, including cyanotypes, platinotypes, and chrysotypes. His work with cyanotypes, a photograph rendered in Prussian blue (iron hexacyanoferrate or ferric ferrocyanide) will be featured in *The Color of Iron*.

*The Alchemist's Workbench* installation will consist of an intricate "curiosity cabinet" of natural examples of iron-colored minerals (emerald, amethyst, and aquamarine), crystals in suspensions, scientific glassware, and an iron vapor discharge lamp. While the four types of artistic media represented in the exhibition (ceramics, glass, painting, and photography) will show some of the colors of iron, the workbench will present the full spectrum of iron-based color to expand on the artistic examples on view. The name *Alchemist's Workbench* reflects the spirit of the exhibition. An ancient predecessor of chemistry, alchemy organized chemical knowledge according to what are now known to be nonscientific principles. Although alchemists failed to achieve their goals, they did succeed in improving chemical techniques and processes.

#### **RECEPTION**

A free public reception will be held on Thursday, January 19 from 6:00 to 7:30 p.m. Entertainment by John Chimes playing blues piano. Refreshments and a cash bar will be available. The public is welcome.

#### **EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS**

Curator Joe Skulan will give a lecture on the exhibition on Thursday, January 19 in Rm. L140 at 5 p.m. while artist and scientist Mike Ware will travel to Madison to present a lecture on his work with cyanotypes on Thursday, February 23 at 5:30 p.m. in Rm. L140. The museum will also organize a glassblowing demonstration by artist Scott Shapiro on Thursday, February 9 at 5:15 p.m. that will be open to the public and held at UW–Madison Department of Art glass lab, 630 W. Mifflin Street, located six blocks from the museum. The demonstration is free, but pre-registration is required by calling: 608-263-4421.

#### **FUNDING**

Generous support has been provided by the Hilldale Fund, Brittingham Fund, Dane County Cultural Affairs Commission with additional funds from the Endres Mfg. Company Foundation and the Overture Foundation; Northern Engraving Corporation, Eugenie Mayer Bolz Family Foundation, and Wisconsin Arts Board with funds from the State of Wisconsin.

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#### *Return to Current Exhibitions*

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The Chazen Museum of Art is open Tuesdays-Fridays 9-5 pm; Saturdays and Sundays 11-5 pm; closed Mondays and major holidays. Admission to galleries and educational events is free. The museum is located at 800 University Avenue on the campus of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and is accessible to wheelchairs from the Murray Street (north) entrance. Parking is available at the city of Madison's Lake Street and Frances Street ramps, University Lot 46 on Lake Street between Johnson and University Avenue, University Lot 47 on Johnson Street between Park and Lake streets. Evening and weekend parking is also available under Grainger Hall with entrance on Brooks Street between University Avenue and Johnson streets. The Chazen Museum of Art will provide sign language interpreters for associated programs by three-week advance request to Anne Lambert, Curator of Education, weekdays, 608-263-4421 (voice).

**"The Color of Iron"**

Lecture

Related to "The Color of Iron"

Joe Skulan, guest curator and Geology Museum scientist

January 19, 2006

From 5:00 PM to 6:00 PM

Lower Level, L140

**Public Reception**

Related to "The Color of Iron"

Entertainment by John Chimes playing blues piano

Refreshments and a cash bar

January 19, 2006

From 6:00 PM to 7:30 PM

**"Elemental Pigments in Glass Color"**

Demonstration

Related to "The Color of Iron"

Scott Shapiro

February 9, 2006

From 5:15 PM to 7:00 PM

UW-Madison Glass Lab

630 W Mifflin St, Free, pre-registration required. Call 608-263-4421

**"Ironing Out the Blues: A Spectrum of Ferric Fantasies"**

Lecture

Related to "The Color of Iron"

Dr. Mike Ware, University of Manchester

February 23, 2006

From 5:30 PM to 7:00 PM

Lower Level, L140