CHAZEN MUSEUM OF ART
University of Wisconsin–Madison
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Chazen Museum of Art

PRESS RELEASE
For immediate release

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The Color of Iron

January 14, 2006-March 19, 2006, Mayer Gallery

The Color of Iron exhibition 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* exhibition will feature the work of four artists; ceramic artist John Britt, painter Saundra 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 Saundra 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'etre 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, *Ironing Out the Blues: A Spectrum of Ferric Fantiasies*, 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

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The Chazen Museum of Art is open Tuesdays-Fridays 9am-5 pm; Saturdays and Sundays 11 am-5 pm; closed Mondays and major holidays. Admission to galleries and educational events is free. The museum is located 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 ramp between Lake and N. Frances streets, 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 at UW Lot 83 under Fluno Center: enter on N. Frances Street and UW lot 7 under Grainger Hall: enter on Brooks Street. The museum will provide sign language interpreters for associated programs by three-week

advance request to Anne Lambert, Curator of Education, weekdays, 608 263-4421 (voice). Information is also available by visiting our web site at www.chazen.wisc.edu

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