

# **Tauba Auerbach: Tetrachromat**

**22.03 – 02.06.2013**

# **WIELS**

## **Visitor's guide**

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**Curator: Solveig Øvstebø**

**The exhibition has been initiated by Bergen Kunsthall, and is a collaboration between Malmö Kunsthall and WIELS Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels**

### **The exhibition : Tetrachromat**

Tauba Auerbach is considered one of the most innovative painters of our time. In her work, traditional distinctions between image, dimensionality and content collapse. Surface and the larger issues surrounding topology have been central concerns in her recent paintings, drawings, photographs and artist books.

The title of the exhibition refers to a theory that there may be a small percentage of people – for genetic reasons, only women – who have a fourth type of color receptor on their retinas. Most humans are trichromats, with receptors sensitive to red, green and blue wavelengths of light which combine to create the visible spectrum. The tetrachromat would have an extra variable modulating every one of these colors, and would therefore see distinctions between colors that appear the same to the trichromat.

Although Auerbach draws much of her inspiration from mathematics and physics, her visual output intersects equally with the basic themes of art history. Her paintings raise fundamental issues in new ways, among them the depiction of three-dimensional reality on a two-dimensional surface, and the relationship between abstraction and representation. Auerbach interweaves discordant positions such as disorder and order, readability and abstraction, permeability and solidity – phenomena that are usually viewed as incompatible – into unified surfaces and volumes.

Since 2009, Auerbach has created a body of work she calls the *Folds*. In these paintings she twists and folds the canvas, ironing or pressing it so that the creases become embedded in the material. After some time, the creased canvas is spread out on the floor and sprayed at oblique angles with various colors of paint. The result – after the paint has dried and the canvas has been stretched flat – is an almost perfect registration of the previous three-dimensional condition of the same surface. The canvas conveys a *trompe l'oeil* effect, harkening to the tradition of mimetic painting – but in this case based on inventiveness rather than painterly virtuosity. By way of blurring the boundary between the two- and three-dimensional states of the canvas, these paintings can be understood as an analogy—raising the possibility of similarly eroding the boundary between three-dimensions and four (or more).

The *Fold* paintings directly address the technology of painting itself—where the mechanical qualities specific to the medium are exploited. At the same time, the works behave in ways we associate with other media. Recalling the photographic process, the painting is ‘developed’ over the course of its exposure to the spray. The pigment acts like directional light; contrasts and contours are intensified by a longer exposure or a more extreme angle. The image appears much similarly to photo developing in a chemical bath.

Tetrachromat also introduces a new series of paintings, the *Weaves*. In these works, the artist exploits two strategies—one monochrome, one bicolored. Building these paintings from the ground up, Auerbach uses only the weaving’s structure to articulate surfaces, spaces and images. In some of the works she depicts three planes meeting in at a corner, in others, rays of light, heat waves and surface ruptures. The monochromatic *Weaves* draw on the tetrachromat’s ability to see variety amongst colors that appear the same to the trichromat.

Auerbach often works in series where she uses both digital and older craft-based methodologies such as sign painting, cuineiform, or here, weaving —not for nostalgic reasons, but to bring ideas surrounding ‘technology’ into relief. So it is perhaps natural that the *Weaves* appear pixelated. The a hallmark of digital technology emerges in one of the oldest binary structures invented by man.

The central work in the show is a set of books, the *RGB Colorspace Atlas*. In this work, the artist has taken a commonly used spatial model for color—the RGB cube—and sliced it in each of the three dimensions in which it exists. Bound into books, one is able to thumb through the entire spectrum, to stand outside and manipulate the « color space » that trichromats occupy. Auerbach presents several other book pieces in this exhibition, all of which function as manuals for thinking about the project by constantly revolving around the question “How can we imagine that which is impossible to sense?” Taken together, the works propose a relationship between a sensitivity to a fourth range of color and the ability to experience a fourth spatial dimension. The exhibition ecstatically entertain the possibility of both.

Tauba Auerbach (b. 1981) lives and works in New York. Her recent solo exhibitions include *The W Axis at Standard* (Oslo), *Here and Now/And Nowhere* at Deitch Projects, New York,

Passengers at the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Art, San Francisco, and The Answer/Wasn't Here at the Jack Hanley Gallery, San Francisco. Her work has been included in Greater New York, PS1 MoMA, New York; 2010 The Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Exhibition Exhibition, Castello De Rivoli and "Younger Than Jesus", New Museum, New York.