

Aspen Times Weekly: Out of the Blue

by Andrew Travers

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Jeremy Wallace/The Aspen Times |
Paul Ramirez Jones, "Paper Moon (I
create as I speak)"

If You Go ...

Where: Aspen Art Museum

When: Through June 28

More info:

<http://www.aspenartmuseum.com>



Why is the sky blue?

There's a scientific explanation, of course, but a new show at the Aspen Art Museum isn't interested in that straightforward of an answer. "The Blue of Distance," including 12 works from 10 artists, instead explores the color and its metaphorical connection to desire and uncertainty.

"The idea was about the distance between the things that we desire and our ability to obtain them," says curator Courtenay Finn. "No matter how far your eye can see on the horizon, it's not a place you can arrive at."

Some of the works in the show are literally quite blue. A few are not, but are ideas of blueness.

Cy Twombly scribbles blue crayon across a page in "Untitled (Roman Note)." Catherine Opie, best known for her photo portraits, here offers a series of eight photos of the Alaska landscape, shot in a single day on Glacier Bay, which, like the Aspen Art Museum show, borrows its title, "The Blue of Distance," from writer and historian Rebecca Solnit.

Felix Gonzalez-Torres contributes a stack of blue paper in "Untitled Blue Mirror)." But they're as fleeting as the horizon: viewers are invited to take a piece from the pile.

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Ceryth Wyn Evans' neon piece reads "Things are conspicuous in their absence." Its lights are reflected — literally — in Sara VanDerBeek's blue glass print of an inky night sky, "Turned Stairs/Stars."

Roni Horn's "Untitled ('It had grown cold in the night but he was numb with other weathers.')" is a glass cast sculpture of shimmering aqua blue.

Marie Jager's sound piece, "L'heure blue," brings the sound of a morning bird into the gallery (its name comes from a French expression for the time of day when birds of the night and day both sleep and are silent).

Jason Dodge's contribution is folded, tied pieces of burlap on the ground. Its title says it's "the color of a storm at night," which may or may not actually be blue.

The work that instantly calls for your attention, though, is Paul Ramirez Jonas' massive "Paper Moon (I create as I speak)." The participatory work includes a 600-plus page text, on which the sentence "I create as I speak" is written repeatedly. Pages on the wall form a 20-foot moon, with one page of it on a lectern beside a microphone. You're invited to read it silently or into the mic.

"That's something I'm always interested in," Jonas says. "How to make the spectator into an active participant."

The phrase, Jonas explains, is a translation of the magic spell incantation "Abracadabra," through which participants can help create a (yes, blue) moon. From across the exhibition, Jonas' work appears to be only that.

"When you walk in the gallery, you think you immediately understand what it is," says Finn. "Then when you get up close, it's totally different. So there's a distance that happens in this piece, that some of the other pieces are hinting at, that we think we know things. But as we move closer, we learn more and more."

This conceptually ambitious group show, in a downstairs gallery at the museum, is a multi-sensory, multimedia experience that — whatever you take away from it — will change the way you think about the blues.

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