

Aspen Art Museum
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Educator Notes



Installation view: *The Blue of Distance*, 2015. Photos: Tony Prikryl

The Blue of Distance

April 10–June 28, 2015

About the exhibition

Blue is a color often associated with longing—for example, the blue at the far edge of what can be seen, the color of the sky, or the color of the ocean. The exhibition uses this cool color as a metaphor for the distance between us and the object of our desire. Exhibition curator Courtenay Finn draws the title from a phrase penned by writer and historian Rebecca Solnit, from her book *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*.

How can we explain something that cannot exactly be measured? How is the color blue related to uncertainty and unknowing? The cyanometer was invented in 1789 by Horace-Bénédict de Saussure in order to measure the blue of the sky, reflecting our quest to understand the immense unknown of the world we live in.

Through a variety of media—including photography, drawing, sculpture, and sound—the artists in the exhibition *The Blue of Distance* reflect on the very dimension of the color blue, exploring its relationship to absence and desire.



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About the artists

Vija Celmins was born in Riga, Latvia, and lives and works in New York. She works across various media, often exploring limitless spaces.

Jason Dodge was born in Pennsylvania and lives and works in Berlin, Germany. His work *In Transylvania Zsuzsanna Sipos wove woolen yarn and hemp the color of a storm at night, and the length from the earth to above the weather* is an example of his interest in seemingly familiar objects taking on fantastical potential through their titles.

Felix Gonzalez-Torres was a Cuban-American conceptual artist. He created sculptures and installations that necessitate visitor interaction, such as the work *“Untitled” (Blue Mirror)*.

Roni Horn was born in New York, where she continues to live and work. Horn is interested in place and landscape, and created a “Library of Water” during a residency in Iceland. Her work *Untitled (“It had grown cold in the night but he was numb with other weathers.”)* weighs 1,800 lbs and is solid cast glass.

Marie Jager is a Danish artist who lives and works in Paris. Her sound piece *L’heure bleue* refers to the moment of silence before dawn when night birds have gone to sleep and day birds are not yet awake.

Catherine Opie was born in Sandusky, Ohio, and lives and works in Los Angeles. Her series *The Blue of Distance* shares the title of the exhibition and its focus lies in that which is poetically close, yet out of reach.

Paul Ramírez Jonas was born in California, raised in Honduras, and lives and works in New York. His work *Paper Moon (I create as I speak)* refers to the ancient Aramaic translation of “abracadabra,” and reflects the artist’s interest in text, reading, and public interaction.

Cy Twombly was born in Lexington, Virginia, and died in Rome, Italy, in 2011. He was an important contributor to the abstract-impressionist movement and used dynamic brushstrokes and markings that mimic handwriting, such as in the work *Untitled (Roman Note)*.

Sara VanDerBeek was born in Baltimore and lives and works in New York. Working in assemblage and photography, her piece *Turned Stairs/ Stars* combines an inverted staircase-like form with a photograph of the night sky beneath dark blue glass.

Cerith Wyn Evans was born in Wales and lives and works in London. His neon work *Things are conspicuous in their absence...* provokes us to think about perception and what is discernable to whom and when.

Questions for discussion

- | What do you imagine when you think of the color blue?
- | If you could travel anywhere, where would you go? What would it feel like to get there?
- | In Paul Ramírez Jonas's installation *Paper Moon (I create as I speak)*, the artist used repetitions of the familiar term "abracadabra" (which can be translated as "I create as I speak") to form an image of the moon. What is a phrase that you would repeat to create something magical or ephemeral?



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For more information, please contact the Education Department at 970.925.8050 ext. 133 or email education@aspenartmuseum.org.

Suggested activity

Biography of Blue

- | Have students create a list of all the adjectives, nouns, and verbs that they associate with the color blue.
- | Next, give students ten sheets of paper of equal size. Distribute a large amount of blue acrylic or tempera paint along with smaller amounts of black, white, yellow, and red. Ask students to create ten different shades that can still be classified as blue by subtly mixing in various colors.
- | Finally, have students match their various swatches of blue with any of the words they identified in the earlier brainstorming session. Students can also write an essay to accompany their pairing of colors with descriptors, creating biographies and stories to accompany the different hues of blue.

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