

GALLERY GOING

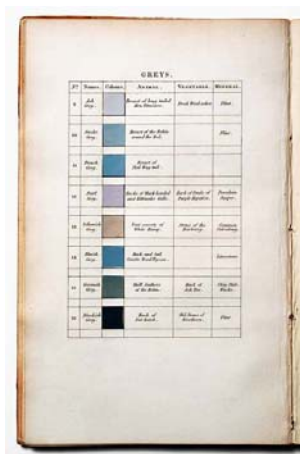
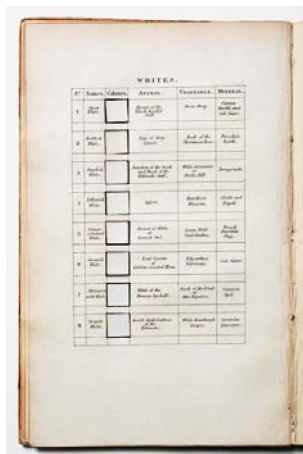
Colour revisited – in an orderly fashion

By GARY MICHAEL DAULT, The Globe and Mail

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Arnaud Maggs at Susan Hobbs Gallery

Until Oct. 22, 137 Tecumseth St., Toronto; 416-504-3699



At 79 years of age, Toronto artist Arnaud Maggs is as edgy and avant-garde as if he were about 25. More so, probably.

He is internationally known for his poetic but relentless serial photographs of everything from other famous artists (his multiple portrait of the late Joseph Beuys is a modernist classic) to French hotel signs, black-edged Victorian bereavement cards, and other forms of printed ephemera. Maggs is a kind of photo-anthropologist or cultural historian, employing his camera as a way of reclaiming and re-presenting aspects of the retrievable past. For this latest exhibition, Werner's Nomenclature of Colours, now at Toronto's Susan Hobbs Gallery, Maggs is showing a selection of the large colour photographs he made by shooting every page of a famous book by naturalist Abraham Werner (1750-1817), the full title of which is Werner's *Nomenclature of Colours, arranged as to render it highly useful to the arts and sciences*. It was first published in Edinburgh in 1814. Maggs seems to have somehow got hold of a copy reprinted in 1821.

And "highly useful" the book appears to have been. Charles Darwin was keen on it, for example, and praised it in a number of his letters from the field. What the book offered was page after page of colour charts arranged in categories, with listings of the colour's appearance in other forms in nature. On a page devoted to grey, for example, Werner – whose lyrical descriptions of colour are a delight – notes that the particular grey he is categorizing finds its equivalent in the animal realm as the "breast of the long-tailed hen titmouse," in the vegetable realm as "fresh wood ash" and in the mineral realm as "flint." And so on, through all the colours and their shades. Handy, yes?

For Maggs, the appeal must have been huge: It surely spoke to his love of classification, his fondness for the mechanism of the chart, for the activity of ordering, for the triumph of the summary. It also allowed him the no doubt slightly perverse pleasure of having to make photographs of 19th-century hand-painted colour samples, and having to keep the colour right.