

**ROBERT SWAIN**

THE FORM OF COLOR

CURATED BY JEFFREY USLIP

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MAY 17 – AUGUST 23, 2014

SANTA MONICA MUSEUM OF ART

Curated by Jeffrey Uslip, Chief Curator, Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis

Robert Swain has devoted a lifetime to the study of color. The work on view at the Santa Monica Museum of Art is a massive network of pure paint, a comprehensive survey of a color system the artist began to develop in 1973. Swain’s color system is an index of 4,896 isolated chromatic units, accompanied by records of their evocative properties. Color has three attributes: Hue, Value, and Saturation. The multi-directional grids in **The Form of Color**, plotted according to value and saturation, are designed to intensify collisions and complements among hues and induce specific visceral responses. In Swain’s system, such responses take place when an individual pigment’s radiant energy—a factor of its wavelength in the electromagnetic spectrum—is transferred to the viewer.

**The Forms of Color: Statement by Robert Swain**

Color is a form of energy derived from the electromagnetic spectrum that stimulates perceptual processes and is instrumental in conveying emotions. In some instances, color is culturally encoded, projecting content through symbolism or association. The origin for such references are found in the way that the energy (wavelengths), from a particular color, generates feeling; a physiological change produced by the wavelength (energy), of a particular color or colors. The energy that emanates from green is different from the wavelengths that define red. In some cultures, pure red is associated with danger. Feelings and attitudes created by the aggressive, radiate energy, which is unique to the red part of the spectrum. When pure red is altered, its emotional attributes change, as in the stability associated with red earth colors, or the whimsical fluctuation produced by pink. In this sense, color transmits feeling(s) through the perception of energy (wavelengths) from the electromagnetic spectrum. Freed from cultural restraints, red can be experienced by itself as a phenomenon, which possesses substantial content. When red is placed next to green, the contrast is heightened and the experience resides in the energy generated by the convergence of these unique spectral wavelengths.

“One thing that fascinates me about color is that each individual color has its own connotation, which can be perceived as emotional or can affect the viewer in a particular way. One of the things I strive for is to bring out the uniqueness of color itself as an expressive force. Color is involved with radiant energy. It is not passive, and in that sense, when you look at color, it is actually transferring energy into your physical self. One of the things you try to do is isolate some kind of vehicle, some kind of configuration that allows color to speak of itself and for itself.”

— **Excerpt from an interview between Robert Swain and Matthew Deleget, Director of Minus Space, New York, 2010**

One of the most interesting examples of color effects is Baker-Miller Pink. Also known as “drunk tank pink,” this color has been used to calm violent prisoners in jails. Alexander Schauss, Ph. D., Director of the American Institute for Biosocial Research in Tacoma, Washington, was the first to report the suppression of angry, antagonistic, and anxiety-ridden behavior among prisoners. “Even if a person tries to be angry or aggressive in the presence of pink, he can’t. The heart muscles can’t race fast enough. It’s a tranquilizing color that saps your energy. Even the color-blind are tranquilized by pink rooms.”(Morton Walker),The Power of Color, Avery Publishing Group: New York, 1991, p. 50-52) In spite of these powerful effects, there is substantial evidence that these reactions are short term. Once the body returns to a state of equilibrium a prisoner may regress to an even more agitated state.

“The human eye is an energy converter. It has the ability to convert light energy into chemical energy which is transmitted from the eye to the brain via nerves. The eye’s color receptors are called cones simply because they are shaped like cones and the night vision receptors are called rods because they look like rods. There are three different types of cones. There are blue, red, and green receptors and from the combination of these three types of receptors we can see approximately 10 million different colors.”

—**Dr. Charles J. Simon, Newsletter 2010**

This exhibition is dedicated to my wife Nanny, always with me in my heart and mind. I would also like to acknowledge Frances and Ralph Dweck for their lifelong patronage.

The inspirational content for this exhibition originated from curator Jeffrey Uslip’s insightful understanding of the ability of color to express profound emotional content.

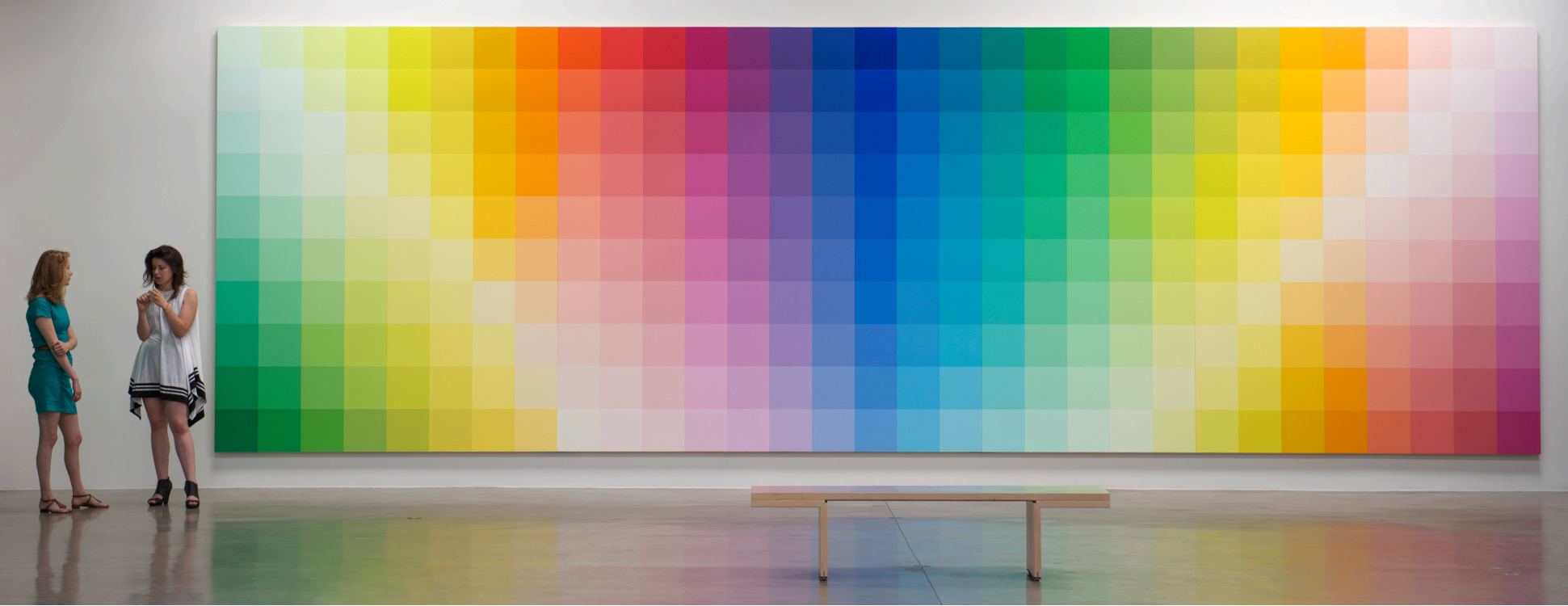
— Robert Swain, 2014



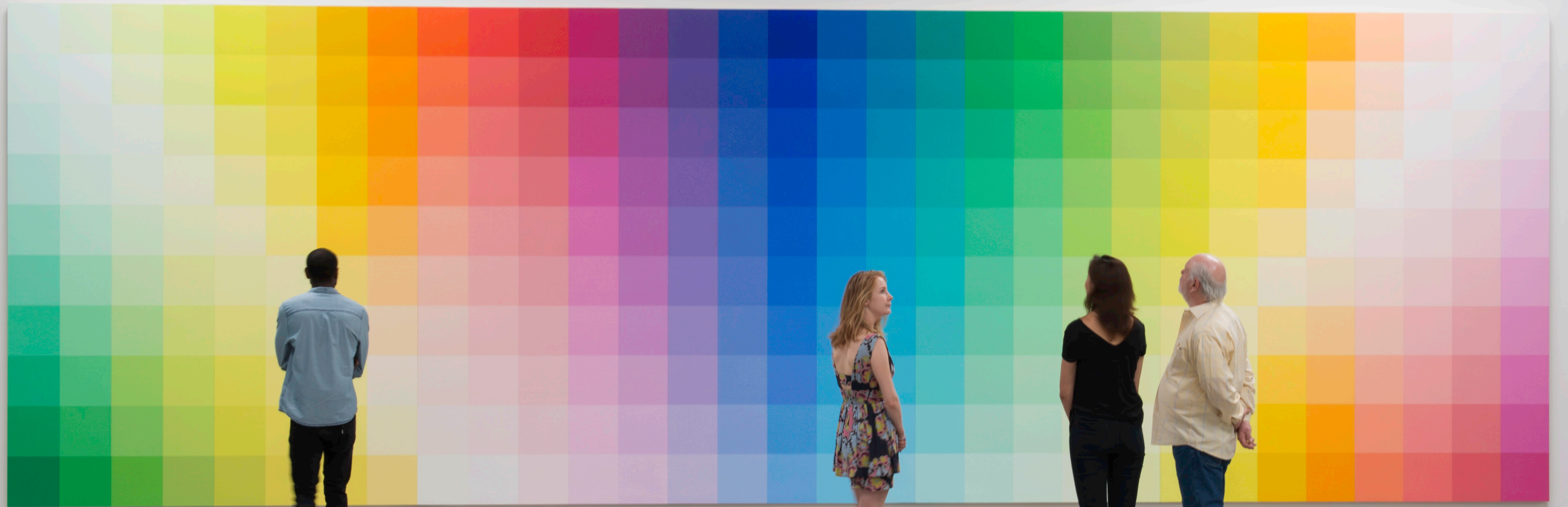
Untitled, 2014. Acrylic on Birch Panels, 10 x 70 feet

Following spread, left to right:  
Untitled (9x9-4A), 2014. Acrylic on Birch Panels, 9 x 9 feet  
Untitled, 2014. Acrylic on Birch Panels, 10 x 70 feet





Right and following spread:  
Untitled, 2014. Acrylic on Birch Panels, 10 x 31 feet



From left to right:  
Untitled, 2014. Acrylic on Birch Panels, 10 × 50 feet  
Untitled (9x9-3A), 2014. Acrylic on Birch Panels, 9 × 9 feet  
Untitled (9x9-4A), 2014. Acrylic on Birch Panels, 9 × 9 feet  
Untitled, 2014. Acrylic on Birch Panels, 10 × 50 feet

Following spread:  
Untitled (9x9-3A), 2014. Acrylic on Birch Panels, 9 × 9 feet  
Untitled (9x9-4A), 2014. Acrylic on Birch Panels, 9 × 9 feet







Right:  
Untitled, 2014. Acrylic on Birch Panels, 10 x 50 feet

Following spread, from left ot right:  
Untitled, 2014. Acrylic on Birch Panels, 10 x 70 feet  
Untitled, 2014. Acrylic on Birch Panels, 10 x 31 feet



Untitled, 2014. Acrylic on Birch Panels, 10 x 70 feet





Previous spread, left to right:  
Untitled, 2014. Acrylic on Birch Panels, 10 × 31 feet  
Untitled, 2014. Acrylic on Birch Panels, 10 × 50 feet

Right:  
Untitled (9x9-3A), 2014. Acrylic on Birch Panels, 9 × 9 feet  
Untitled (9x9-4A), 2014. Acrylic on Birch Panels, 9 × 9 feet  
Untitled, 2014. Acrylic on Birch Panels, 10 × 70 feet

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MORE INFORMATION CAN BE FOUND ON THESE WEBSITES:

Robert Swain: The Form of Color  
<http://www.theformofcolor.com>

Robert Swain: The Form of Color I SMMoA  
<https://smmoa.org/programs-and-exhibitions/robert-swain-form-color>

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