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The Curiosity of Con, Petrified Breath, and an Accident known as Blue.

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The Curiosity of *Con*, Petrified Breath, and an Accident known as Blue.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Art in Sculpture + Extended Media at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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abstract................................................................................................................................4
fig. 1....................................................................................................................................5
fig. 2a-2h..............................................................................................................................6
Naming & Con (8:39 - 11:12)...............................................................................................7
HyCy Crystal Shop (12:14 - 3:22).......................................................................................8
Cc’d Romance & Petrification (3:36 - 7:18).........................................................................9
ABSTRACT

*The Curiosity of Con, Petrified Breath, and an Accident known as Blue.*

By Steven Randall, MFA

My thesis installation emerged from an interest in visualizing breath. The resulting work came to exist at the intersection between art, biology, and performance.

The unicorn tapestries were used as a generative point of departure to explore the preservation and transformation of images through time, by time, and with time. Reproductions of the six tapestries were each etched into paper and then submerged into solutions of Phenol Red dye, Ferric Ferrocyanide (also known as Prussian Blue), and various forms of sodium chloride. Exhaled breath was used to encrust these images of the tapestries into physical objects which gradually crystallized and changed colors in response to viewers within the surrounding space. An invasive plant species native to Richmond, Virginia was utilized as a catalyst to re-absorb carbonic acid from exhaled breath and convert the objects back to their original (or not so original) states. The final piece became the active remnants from an inquiry which quickly snowballed into so much more than I had initially planned.

The following text is written as a supplemental reading to trace some of my influences at the periphery of the piece while mapping my thought processes.

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fig. 1 *The Curiosity of Con, Petrified Breath, and an Accident known as Blue.* Ferric ferrocyanide (Prussian Blue), salt, water, Elodea plants, Phenol Red (pH indicator), etched paper, rope, milled polystyrene, cast polyurethane, steel, cast silicone, Plexiglas, plastic buckets, metal cart, steel work tables, aluminum pots, and burners
fig. 2a-2h *The Curiosity of Con, Petrified Breath, and an Accident known as Blue.* (details)
Ferric ferrocyanide (Prussian Blue), salt, water, Elodea plants, Phenol Red (pH indicator), etched paper, rope, milled polystyrene, cast polyurethane, steel, cast silicone, Plexiglas, plastic buckets, metal shop cart, steel work tables, aluminum pots, and burners
If I were you (and some days I really wish I were) I would begin by locating a hole in the wall. Scan for seams or splinters on the surface. Perhaps it’s a small hole (left no doubt by a nail by way of the force of the hammer), or a crack (typical of all things old), maybe even a window (which I suppose is a hole – just quite large and quite engineered). If it is indeed a window, try to look at it. (Not through it.) A surface on a surface reflecting. Everything in the reflection is always backwards.

Back worlds and back words. Backlash and backdrop. Blur your eyes.

Forget the wall. The wall was just a prop. Here’s a better backdrop and backdrop.

Prussian Blue was discovered entirely by accident (twice). Its coincidental creation was cultivated by way of chance contamination. Originally intended to be red, the mishap color mistakenly emerged using the shells of the cochineal beetle. Google says this particular beetle is unique in its hefty production of carminic acid which is utilized to produce brilliant shades of crimson and scarlet dyes. But as chance would have it (and chance did have it) an unforeseen extraneous impurity (salt) caused the red to become blue. And so red came before blue. Chance always has it.

Blue was the successor of red not just in its making but also in its naming. As with most things it went unseen until it was named. Or maybe it wasn’t quite that it was unseen – maybe it was just overseen (if there is such a version of perception). Blue may have just been so ubiquitous, that to name it would have been done right redundant. Nonetheless there is a gap of several thousand years when blue did not exist until it did. Sometimes (maybe to feel less alive or maybe more alive) I try to imagine a time before there were words and before there were names.

It is here that I would ask - Does the sky outweigh the ocean or does the ocean outweigh the sky?

I suppose naming proposes to offer a solution through distinction. But nonetheless is it:

conveying a matter of density?
Or concisely convening a density of matter?

Surely vey and vene are close relatives but they are connected and contradicted by the murky slipperiness inherent in their foremost con.

(If you are a quiet person, you always run the risk of being suspected of a shiftiness just like con.)

Blue masses concaving and mass blues convexing into constrictive black holes and concealing blue eyes, blackened. Always confiscating, conflating, and contracting into condensed concretized containers concocted either to condemn or to condone. A condition of constantly consuming the convictions of a contrived consensus.

One can get a concussion just conceding to such conventions. And I confess I’ve contracted more concussions than I can conceivably count. Not by way of conflicting confrontations but rather through constructions of conformance and confluence. It’s easy to get congested in this concurrency of conglomerated currents. Convulsing contortions and contaminations congealed in the very pulse of what I thought I once knew. (If not conceive - than conduct.) Consider consecrating the condensation of your own breath, so we could converge continually. Is it possible to conjure such foggy conduits?

Maybe its so slippery because “c” might just want to be “o”.
Searching for that little piece its missing to become a full circle.

But this is all off topic.
TOURMALINE to create joy and enthusiasm for life

SELENITE to awaken and increase intuitive knowledge

RUTILATED QUARTZ to stimulate brain activity, expand awareness, and develop telepathy

SODALITE to open the heart for love and friendship

ROSE QUARTZ to stabilize relationships

RHODINITE to uplift unconditional love

PINK TOURMALINE to create joy and enthusiasm for life

AMETHYST to develop intuition and awareness

AMETRINE to bring dreams to reality

AGATE to enhance courage, confidence, strength

AMAZONITE to increase will power and communication skills

AVENTURINE to balance erratic emotions

AQUAMARINE to reduce fears and mental tension

APOPHOOLYTE to facilitate attunement with body

APATITE to increase kindness, helpfulness, and friendliness

AVENTURINE GREEN to increase perception and foresight

CARNELIAN to enhance creativity and sexuality

CITRINE to raise self-esteem and bring good luck

CRYSTAL to provide clarity of mind and thought

DIAMOND to amplify energy

GARNET to open and activate heart

BLUE HOWLITE to enhance memory, intellect, and business endeavors

CALCITE to provide clarity of mind and thought

GALILEOITE to focus and strengthen the body and spirit

CRYSTAL to provide clarity of mind and thought

CALCITE to provide clarity of mind and thought

TIGER’S EYE to increase kindness, helpfulness, and friendliness

TIGER’S EYE to increase perception and foresight

TIGER’S EYE to increase will power and communication skills

AMAZONITE to increase will power and communication skills

FUCHSITE to provide self-reflection and self-healing

GARNET to raise internal fire and creativity

BLUE HOWLITE to calm anger

HEMATITE to seal the auric field against negativity

JADE to induce ambition

BLUE KIANITE to calm and bring psychic awareness

LABRADORITE to protect the aura and prevent energy leaks

LAPUS LAZULI to deepen wisdom and intuition

MOONSTONE to balance

MUSCOWITE to diminish anger and anxiety

MALACHITE to release suppressed emotions

BLUE OBSIDIAN to understand and face deep fears

OPAL to amplify emotion, insight and spontaneity

PEARL to purify the mind and heart

PYRITE to shield from negative energies

PERIDOT to release tension and initiate physical healing

TURQUOISE to uplift unconditional love

RHODINITE to attract love, heal the heart, and catalyze a fulfillment of life purpose

ROSE QUARTZ to open the heart for love and friendship

RUTILATED QUARTZ to stabilize relationships

SODALITE to awaken and increase intuitive knowledge

SELENITE to stimulate brain activity, expand awareness, and develop telepathy

SMOKY QUARTZ to enhance sexuality and fertility

TIGER’S EYE to bring order, stability and integrity

PINK TOURMALINE to create joy and enthusiasm for life

BLACK TOURMALINE to focus and strengthen the body and spirit.
3:36
Every time I go I like to people watch. Sometimes I’ll scour the bookshelves pretending to leaf through pages of obscure books on mysticism while I secretly eavesdrop on everyone within earshot.

3:49
“Hey, so and so, did you go to that thing where they did stuff? (Proper noun, verb verbing, noun verb nowning). “No. I was verbing adjective.” “Oh really? Did you know that Proper Noun (Insert crystal here) is good for feeling adjective.”

3:58
This community is not built around a source of salt or water. It is built around a source of searching (maybe like c). Coincidentally (or not) RHODONITE and ROSE QUARTZ are always in highest demand.

5:00
The last thing I remember was when you tucked a piece of waxy blue carbon paper in your pants pocket. The flimsy paper crinkled whenever you moved, smearing heavy with the impressed traces of your motion. Replicate remnants. Wrinkled residues. Repeat. Rub. Redo.

That’s one way to reproduce. (20% of our body mass is composed of carbon anyhow.)

I looked down between where legs should have been. What exactly is the difference between petrification and preservation anyway?

7:18
I envision preservation to be sleek and glassy like AVENTURINE GREEN (*note crystal chart above) whereas petrification might be decrepit, jagged, and hardened more akin to SODALITE (*again note crystal chart above).

Preservation is an active process. On going, mediated maintenance. Whereas petrification is past tense. Compressed fragility in a state of stasis.

Without a clock, we can only really rely on carbon. If you’re alive and you’ve eaten a thing that’s eaten a thing that’s eaten a plant (or maybe you just eat plants – either way) you’re consuming traces of carbon dioxide (and unlike us that shit just doesn’t die).

Everything is always stealing carbon because it casts such long shadows. I want my carbon to preserve something good. That’s why I’m breathing hot and heavy on things I like.

If I can’t preserve it – I’ll at least petrify it.