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Experiments in Dying: Queered Colors and Supersaturated Art Historical Vision

This paper has been written with the aim of promoting a new interpretation of the importance of color in Eakins's understudied portrait Professor Benjamin Howard Rand. I argue that the pink objects in professor Rand's portrait refer to a key development of nineteenth-century chemistry—the invention of chemical dyes. Notably, the portrait refers to the chemical development of the color mauve (seen in the glass vial on Rand's desk), which was subsequently feminized and queered. Though the connection between the portrait's subject matter and the historical development of chemical dyes is significant, there are two additional aims of this paper. First, to destabilize the discourse that genders our reading of the mauve objects in Professor Rand's portrait, and second, to question the disciplinary practices that sever the connections between 19th century American art and contemporary art. I do this by "chemically" mixing the portrait of Professor Rand in a solution with Dan Flavin's *Pink out of a Corner*—To Jasper Johns (1963), Jack Smith's performance *Orchid Rot of Rented Lagoon*, and Felix Gonzalez-Torres's *Untitled (Loverboys)* (1991). Ultimately, this experiment works to articulate a theory of a traumatized or supersaturated art historical vision that functions as a "solution" in which "precipitate" (particulate remainders) are able to appear. Precipitation reactions can be used for making pigments, but here they are used to challenge the fantasy of a stable disciplinary perspective.