Vision and Color in the Landscapes of Roger Toledo

Francesca Bolfo

"I would say I am a colorist," Roger Toledo remarked, standing in his Havana studio on a rainy afternoon last fall, "an artist focused on color and structure."[1] Candid and sincere, the young Cuban painter offered this self-reflective designation in characteristically straightforward and unembellished terms that belie the formal, technical, and conceptual complexity of his sustained engagement with color. Over the course of his nascent career, Toledo has explored the manifold properties and applications of color through a wide array of abstract practices. Imbued with this chromatic and abstract sensibility, the landscapes of **Soy Cuba** (2018-19) represent a fusion of the abstract and the pictorial, the formal and the organic, and the rational and sensuous. In these paintings, Toledo employs a recently developed technique that allows him to build up a painted relief pattern across the canvas, resulting in a geometric, surface texture that profoundly complicates the mixing and application of colors to the relief and the background, respectively. By applying a single, uniform color to each element of the relief pattern, he preserves the integrity of these discrete units, thereby producing the larger image through a vast network of color relations. In his paintings, Toledo reconceptualizes Cuba's literal and symbolic topography through these unique formal means, generating new perspectives on the national landscape and the historical and sociocultural connotations imbedded therein. More specifically, the works' multivalent optical field engenders a perceptual ambiguity, encouraging new modes of apprehension and cognition beyond the space of the painting. Consideration of the color theories of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Joseph Albers provides the analytical means with which to explore the complex color operations at work in Toledo's paintings, and how his unique painting vernacular is employed to articulate a new commentary on vision itself.

The **Soy Cuba** Series

The five landscapes of Toledo's **Soy Cuba** series comprise a complex interweaving of temporal and spatial signifiers. While each depicts a different vista, the fixed positioning of the horizon line across the uniformly 300 x 200 centimeter canvases (a 3:2 format) generates formal similitude within the series as a whole. They unfold across the span of a day, moving from the aerial space above the island (*Aterrizando / Landing*) to the rising sun over the mountains (*Amanecer En El Pico Turquino / Sunrise At Pico Turquino)*, the midday heat of the swampy coastline (*Ciénaga De Zapata / Zapata Swamp*), dusk along the marina (*Al Anochecer / At Dusk*), and finally under water (*Hacia El Canto Del Veril / Towards Veril's Edge*). The three sites nestled between the timeless space of sky and sea are, notably, ones of historic import in Cuba's fraught history: Pico Turquino, the highest peak within Cuba's Sierra Maestra mountain range, was the stronghold of Fidel Castro during the revolution; the Zapata Swamp, better known as the Bay of Pigs, the setting for the failed U.S. invasion in 1961; and the northern shoreline near Havana, the backdrop for the many Cubans who attempted the flee the island during the Special Period that followed the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.

[1] Roger Toledo in conversation with the author, October 7, 2018; Havana, Cuba.

Building in Paint: The Processes of **Soy Cuba**

In order to fully unpack the complex color operations at work in the **Soy Cuba** series, it is first necessary to examine the process through which they are realized. Because the formative stages of this process are primarily conceptual, Toledo executes the majority of this work long before paint is put to canvas. One might even say that his authorial agency primarily resides in the ideation of the work, manifesting both a cerebral and technical virtuosity. He begins with one or more photographs of the site that will eventually be rendered in the painting. While he himself has not taken all the reference photographs, he has been to each of the sites they depict. Moreover, he does not reproduce them in the paintings, but rather uses them as preparatory images with which to map out his formal color compositions. Although he ultimately manipulates them to enhance the overall composition, he considers the content, preexisting composition, and perhaps most importantly, the perspective when selecting the representative images for each painting.[2] This sometimes involves using more than one photograph to create an idealized pastiche, as evidenced by the reference images for *At Dusk*.

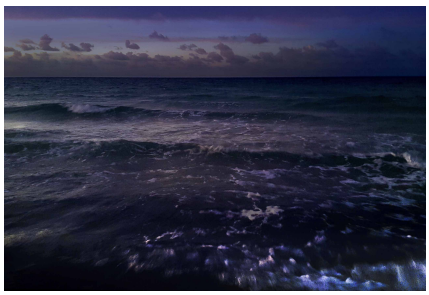

Fig.1: Digitally manipulated image

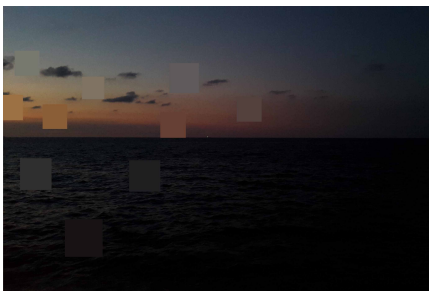

Fig.2: Color guidance for the sky.

Fig.3: Color guidance for the lighter hues.

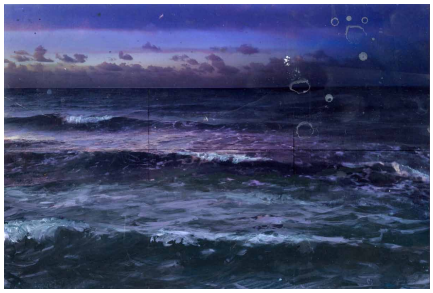

Fig.4: Printed and painted photo /Sketch

The studies for *At Dusk* also demonstrate how Toledo will often generate details by hand, as with the series of gentle diagonal waves in the top study (fig.4). Photoshop allows him to alter or enhance the image's values (lights and darks), colors (hue and saturation), and the overall composition (fig.1). Compare, for example, the studies for Al Amanecer en el Pico Turquino (figs.9-10) with the finished painting. When discussing the process of composing the reference images, Toledo notes that he was drawn to the colors of the initial photograph (fig.11), but that its dimensions did not meet the 3:2 format of the paintings, requiring him to widen it digitally. In both references, the intermittent foliage in the foreground creates a compositional imbalance, and he ultimately extended this vegetation across the entire bottom of the canvas.[3] This manual

[2] While most aspects of an image can be manipulated, the spatial depth and focal point remain relatively fixed by the camera. It is, in fact, possible to alter perspective in Photoshop, but the process typically involves a radical restructuring of the overall frame that tends to compromise the harmony and balance of the image.

and digital manipulation, coupled with the fact that certain photographs were not taken by him, speaks to a fundamental shift in the ontological status of the painting. Because he conceives of them as subjective, rather than mimetic, representations of the landscape, these alterations and adaptations are in fact necessary to realize an image that is representative a memory rather than an illusion.

Fig.5: Original photo

Fig.6: Digitally manipulated image

Fig.7: *Sunrise at Pico Turquino*

Toledo generates the rich, textural surfaces of his landscapes through an exacting, multi-stage process that requires constant adjustment. Due to the immense time and labor involved, he employs two studio assistants—Toledo will mix the colors that comprise the texture, which the assistants use to build up the overall pattern. Although Toledo selects the thickest possible acrylics, he adds small amounts of modelling paste to increase the viscosity of the paint. Relatively translucent, the paste nevertheless lightens the colors when dry, requiring him to create a wet mixture that anticipates this lightening.[4] The actual pattern is determined by industrial, perforated, metal screens (fig.8), which his assistants lay flat across the stretched canvas, fastidiously applying paint to the surface to ensure that it only passes through the latticed holes without seeping underneath. Seepage does, however, occasionally occur (fig.9), requiring retouching of the background and the edges of the textural elements. Because this step requires one to work horizontally, Toledo is forced to create the larger painting out of six smaller canvases so that he can manipulate them across a table or on the floor. After each layer dries, his assistants will carefully sand the surface of the textural relief in order to achieve an even and uniform surface before realigning the screens and applying additional layers. The process is repeated—typically four to five times—until there is an approximately two to three-millimeter relief, perceptible here in the oblique view of *Landing* (fig.10).[5]

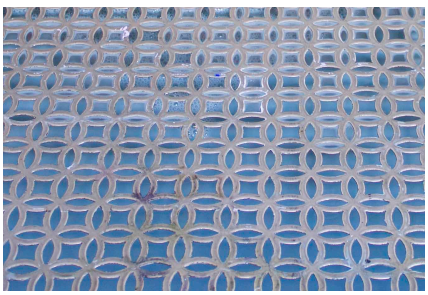

Fig.8: Metal template

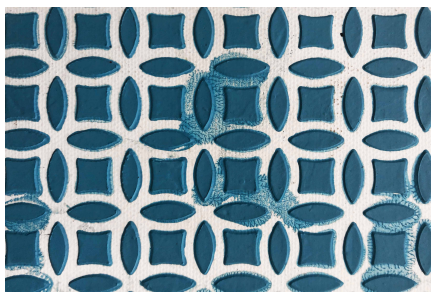

Fig.9: Seepage during the texture making

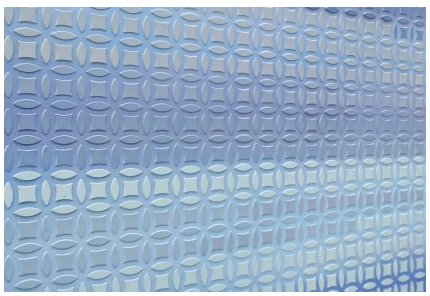

Fig.10: Detail of *Landing*

[3] Roger Toledo in conversation with the author, October 6, 2018; Havana, Cuba.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.

Only after the preparatory images have been rendered, their attendant color maps drawn, and the textures built up can Toledo exercise his skills as a colorist. As the photograph of his work table shows (fig.11), the color mixing is an extensive and exhaustive process. He generally tries to remain true to the colors he has established in the studies, many of which bear the marks of paint daubs applied to test the relative accuracy of his mixtures. The diagrammatic color map for *Al Amanecer en el Pico Turquino* (fig.12) illustrates the complex, often mathematically driven process through which he develops these mixtures, designating various sets with numbers, letters, and Roman numerals. Working under the natural light of his studio's terrace, a single batch of colors will take up to three days to properly mix. Once he has created them, he then indicates which colors belong to each section of the painting itself (fig.13) as a guide for his assistants, although he himself will paint the majority of the sectional details. The process is repeated time and time again, until Toledo is satisfied with the overall chromatic composition. Whenever working on the surface of the painting, both he and his assistants use metal screens that have been cut down to a more manageable size, laying them atop the relief in order to preserve the distinctions between texture and background.[6]

Fig.11: Colors for *Sunrise at Pico Turquino*

Fig.12: Guidance for *Sunrise at Pico Turquino*

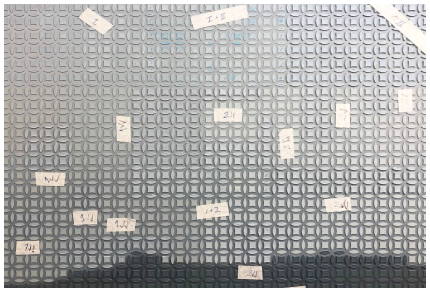

Fig.13: Color map for *Sunrise...*

The **Soy Cuba** landscapes are fundamentally premised on a pointillist technique—what is known as spatial or optical color mixture—wherein two or more pigments placed adjacent to each other in an array of small dots will, when viewed from a distance, coalesce into an apparent, third color.[7] The implied mixing of the two parent colors in fact occurs within the eye, such that our brains cognitively registers the apparent color, even though it does not actually exist on the surface of the canvas.[8] Toledo thus renders the landscapes by exploiting the relative color of two basic interactions: (1) the relationship between the individual units of the surface texture and (2) the interplay between these units and the background. For the most part, he uses the first to generate forms, then subsequently models these forms—creating the illusion of volume, dimensionality and spatial depth—using the second. Remarkably, each representational detail of the landscape is rendered strictly through the color interactions between these two features of the painting surface; there are in fact no self-contained lines, only the illusion created by the continuation of a color or similar colors across multiple relief units. If, for instance, one views *At Dusk* from two to three meters away, there appears a lyrical repetition of soft horizontals echoed through the crests of the waves, the horizon line, and the two registers of clouds in the sky. Yet as the magnified detail of the upper center reveals (fig.14), there is only the illusion of a distinct line generated by adjacent relief units of similar color. As later analysis will reveal, Toledo achieves many of these effects through the conscious deployment of relational colors.

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[6] Roger Toledo in conversation with the author, October 7, 2018; Havana, Cuba.

[7] Dorothea Jameson, "Some Misunderstandings about Color Perception, Color Mixture, and Color Measurement," Leonardo 16, no. 1 (Winter, 1983): 41.

[8] Toledo adopts the basic logic of optical mixing, but profoundly complicated the process by not only introducing the variable background color but also enlarging the size of the individual color units and the distance between them.

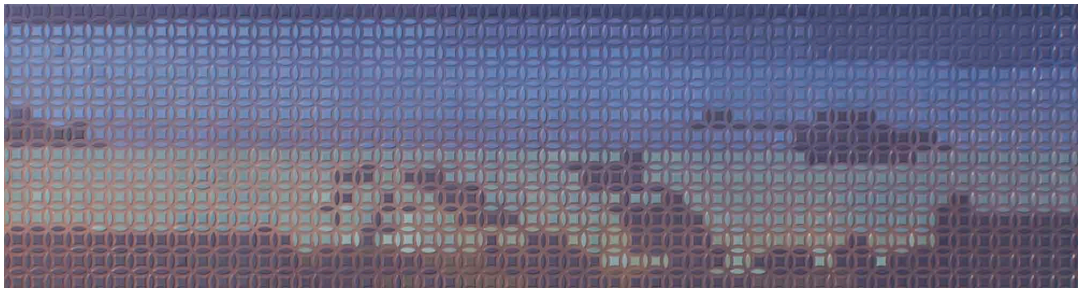

Fig.14: Detail of *At Dusk*

Theories of Color

The study of color has a rich and diverse history across manifold disciplines. A principle concern for the visual arts, critical examination of color and its effects first appear in the fifteenth century writings of Leo Battista Alberti and Leonardo da Vinci.[9] Since the early eighteenth century, however, the science of color and its relation to human perception has been an evolving field of study within the natural sciences, psychology, and philosophy. Because Toledo's paintings are fundamentally premised on the juxtaposition of color elements, theories of color interaction prove especially useful in understanding how these optical effects alter the production of visual meaning. In particular, the theories of philosopher Ludgwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) and artist Josef Albers (1888-1976) supply key methodological tools with which to expand upon the conceptual operations at work in Toledo's practice.

The Indeterminacy of Lived Color: Ludwig Wittgenstein's Remarks on Color

Wittgenstein's color theory offers a constructive philosophical lens through which to analyze the inherent subjectivities involved in our perceptual apprehension of the world and subsequently assess how the Soy Cuba series constitutes a deeply personal and subjective mode of representation. This particular reading relies heavily on scholarship by Marie McGinn, which, in analyzing Wittgenstein's engagement with typical considerations of color relative to his philosophy at large, differs from most other interpretations of his theories.[10] In his Remarks on Colour (1950), Wittgenstein asserts that although the apprehension of color is a basic facet of our perceptual apparatus, color itself is in fact a deceivingly complex concept— as plainly states it, "the logic of the concept of colour is just much more complicated than it might seem."[11] Engaging in the longstanding philosophical debate surrounding color, he counters objectivist theories that assert that objects in the natural world possess a true or set color.[12] Rather, Wittgenstein contends that color is not an absolute entity but instead entirely dependent on two primary conditions of apprehension at any given moment: what McGinn describes as the "perceptual equipment of the viewer" and the

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[9] See Leon Battista Alberti, On Painting (Reprint, New York: 1991), and Leonardo da Vinci, A Treatise on Painting (Reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 2005).

[10] Darby English, 1971: A Year in the Life of Color (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 230, fn 60.

[11] Ludwig Wittgenstein, Remarks on Colour, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe and Linda L. McAlister (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 29e, §106.

[12] According to these theories, different conditions of light affect a subject's perceptual apprehension, contributing to variations in the perception and description of colors that are nevertheless constant entities; such variations are thus the result of our language-grammar rather than actual shifts in color itself.

"circumstances of observation." [13] As such, the logic of color exists exclusively within linguistic discourse as described by the viewing subject. Wittgenstein notes, however, that prevailing concepts of "inherent" or true color have resulted in a discourse generated by the scientific study of the color wheel, which markedly differs from the language grammar through which we tend to describe colors in the lived environment. In other words, we utilize a different grammar to describe objects in the world than that "grammar of color" generated by the array of flat, monochrome segments arranged in relation to one another in the color wheel. [14] He equates the language-game of these color wheel concepts to a "mathematics of color," an abstract system of logic in which a fixed set of samples determines a constant set of structural relations.[15]

For Wittgenstein, the central problem in our color logic arises when we conceive of our "ordinary language-game"—that which we use to describe entire scenes in the natural world—in terms of the isolated elements of the color wheel. In response, he attempts to solve this problem by illustrating the conflict between an ordinary language of color and that of the color wheel. McGinn suggests that by working through Wittgenstein's logic,

> We shall gradually come to a more adequate picture of our ordinary languages, one that preserves rather than legislates away, the indeterminateness and lack of precision inherent in our ordinary colour descriptions… [revealing] that our ordinary colour concepts have little or nothing to do with the idea of a monochrome patch of colour, or with the ideas of pure or saturated colour.[16]

According to McGinn, then, Wittgenstein encourages us to embrace such indeterminacies as intrinsic to the ordinary language-game of color concepts and not as a failure of perception. That is, subjective apprehension of color produces a multiform descriptive logic of color unique to each viewer and the circumstances of each viewing.

Such indeterminacy is inherent to Toledo's practice; when examining it through this analytical lens, it is as if he reverses Wittgenstein's perceptual process, isolating colors in the natural world and re-presenting them in discrete monochrome units across the overall surface texture of his paintings. At stake, then, are the subsequent meanings engendered through this process of color extraction, mediation, and re-presentation. The perceptional and conceptual gap that occurs during this transferal can never be entirely closed, such that the ultimate stage of his process, the finished painting, can never, and is not meant to, stand in for the original. This constitutive gap, which Toledo widens in the process of creating these landscapes, provides the formal and conceptual space for his deliberate insertion both his and the viewer's subjectivity. The intermediary stages of his painting process are formal intercessors in such representational transposition, through which he alters colors via his own perceptual apparatus and through his aesthetic judgment of the value of the color field. Toledo's process, then, is complementary to McGinn's reading of Wittgenstein as a whole: there exist no "true" colors inherent to objects in Toledo's world, but rather his and the viewers' individual perceptions of color that are themselves in a constant state of flux, since they are relative to the environmental circumstances in which objects are apprehended. One might argue that the **Soy Cuba** series occupies an interstitial space between original and referent, as with each brushstroke Toledo articulates his

[13] Marie McGinn, "Wittgenstein's 'Remarks on Colour'," Philosophy 66 (October, 1991): 440.
[14] Ibid., 443.
[15] Wittgenstein, Remarks, 18e, §10.
[16] McGinn, "Wittgenstein," 446.

his subjective perspective of not only the color's values, saturation, and tones but also the laden sociopolitical and cultural signification of its content.

A Life of Color: The Work of Josef Albers

Within the vast body of knowledge comprising color theory, the work of Josef Albers is central to a coloristic examination of the Soy Cuba landscapes. Because Albers's work grew out of both scientific study and practical experimentation, it provides an epistemological bridge between Wittgenstein's theory and Toledo's artistic practice. Particularly valuable is his instructional treatise Interaction of Color (1963), which elucidates an array of key theoretical concepts that facilitate analyses of the perceptual effects of Toledo's formal strategy. Immensely influential at the time of its publication, Interaction of Color remains an enduring theoretical model of the relational properties of color, and Toledo himself attests to its impact on his approach to painting.[17] He notes that although color has always been a primary focus in his work, the complex coloristic methodology of Soy Cuba was conceptually influenced and formally shaped by Albers's theories (fig.15).[18]

A brief overview of Albers's life provides insight into the formative influences on his theoretical approach to color. Renowned as an artist and educator, Albers spent a lifetime exploring color and its relationship to perception in both his art and the classroom, producing an extensive body of two-dimensional works and theoretical texts that had a profound impact on the development of postwar American art and modern arts education. He was well-versed in the science of color and perception—from its technical properties to theories of gestalt and cognitive psychology—but strongly believed in putting practice before theory, perpetually refining his conception of color through constant experimentation.[19] This conviction is exemplified by his best-known series, Homage to the Square (1950-1976) (fig,16), which comprises more than one thousand paintings that, in employing the strict formal parameters of the square, demonstrates the limitless potential of relational color.

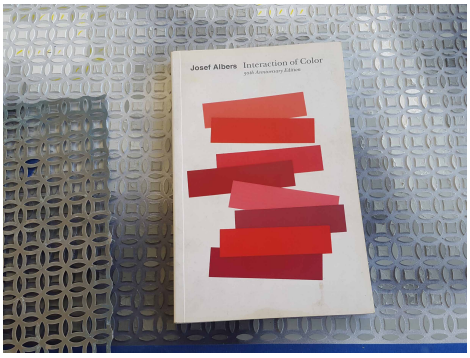

Fig.15: Toledo's Spanish edition of *Interaction of Color* in the studio.

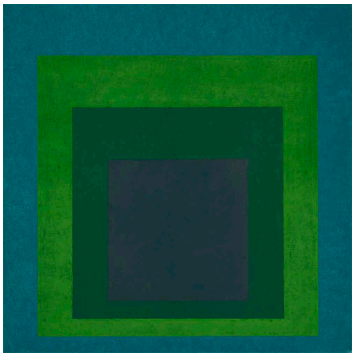

Fig.16: Josef Albers *Homage to the Square: Soft Spoken*, 1969.

[17] By early 1968, Interaction of Color had completely sold out. That its publishers decided nearly half a century later to produce an interactive app version is a testament to its continued relevance and use today. Frederick A. Horowitz and Brenda Danilowitz, Josef Albers: To Open Eyes: The Bauhaus, Black Mountain College, and Yale (New York; London: Phaidon, 2006), 77.

[18] Roger Toledo in conversation with the author, October 7, 2018; Havana, Cuba.

[19] Albers states: "the aim of such study is to develop—through experience—by trial and error—an eye for color. This means, specifically, seeing color action as well as feeling color relatedness…This book, therefore, does not follow an academic conception of 'theory and practice.' It reverses this order and places practice before theory, which, after all, is the conclusion of practice." Josef Albers, Interaction of Color (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1.

Born in fin-de-siècle Germany, Albers became a central figure in the modernist vanguard associated with the Bauhaus.[20] When increasing pressure from the Nazi regime precipitated the school's closure in 1933, he emigrated with his wife and fellow artist Anni Albers to the United States to teach at the at the recently established Black Mountain College in North Carolina. An experimental art school founded on John Dewey's principles of progressive education, the college was a crucible of interdisciplinary avant-gardism. Although Albers had studied color at the Bauhaus—its foundational "Basic Course" (Vorkurs) centered on learning the "contrasting effects" of forms, colors, and materials—it was here that he developed the rigorous, quasi-scientific approach to color for which he would come to be known.[21] And indeed, the visual exercises in Interaction of Color—which he employed to illustrate the perceptual effects of color mixing, measurement, and spatial relations—were largely adapted from those used in his teaching curricula at Black Mountain College.[22]

The progressive ethos of the school had a profound impact on not only Albers's theoretical work but also his broader philosophy of perception as a socially, psychologically, and thus ideologically charged aspect of cognition. Like Wittgenstein, he understood perception to be a subjective process rather than a direct, unadulterated apprehension of some 'true' visual data in the lived world.[23] Albers, however, was primarily interested in how the "perceptual equipment" of Wittgenstein's viewer might be influenced by the kinds of external forces that shape the historical subject. This notion of perception as cognitively and ideologically malleable is also indebted to work of gestalt and cognitive psychology such as Edgar Rubin and James J. Gibson. Both Rubin and Gibson developed theories of vision that proposed a more fluid relationship between the apprehending self and the apprehended other, affording far more agency to the singular subject than had heretofore been theorized. Rubin posited that the act of seeing consisted of not only external, visual apprehension, but also a cognitive mediation of that which is perceived—that, in other words, perception is influenced by the subjective.[24] He famously demonstrated this idea through an exercise using ambiguous figure/ground illusion, now known as the "Rubin vase" (fig.17); while some viewers see as a white vase on a black ground, others register two black faces on a white ground. Varied interpretations of ambiguous visual stimuli such as the Rubin vase, he concluded, are the result of an individual's "perceptual set:" those preexisting interests, biases, and information stores about familiar forms (such as vases and faces) that influence how the brain deciphers this equivocal data. Although Gibson did assert there existed a scientifically verifiable "literal perception" of the lived world, he too acknowledged the inherent subjectivity of seeing. He formulated the concept of "historical perception" to account for the subjective viewing habits of the observer, who as a historical subject is conditioned to certain visual forms and subjects more than others. [25]

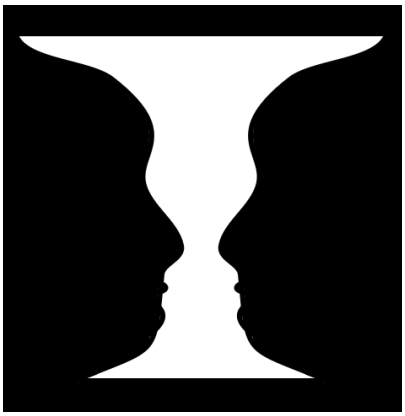

Fig.17: Example of a Rubin Vase

[20] Notably, Albers began his career working in glass, providing an intriguing point of intersection with the stained glass (vitrales) tradition in Cuba.

[21] Horowitz and Danilowitz, Josef Albers, 51.

[22] Eva Díaz, "The Ethics of Perception: Josef Albers in the United States," The Art Bulletin 90, no.2 (June 2008): 263-65.

[23] Albers would have been familiar with Wittgenstein from his time at the Bauhaus. The logical positivist philosophy of the Vienna Circle (which emerged from Wittgenstein's work) strongly aligned with Bauhaus ideology, where Otto Neurath and Rudoph Carnap even lectured in the later 1920s. Diaz, "Ethics of Perception," 275.

[24] Kurt Koffka, Principles of Gestalt Psychology (United Kingdom: Routledge, 1999), 181-83.

[25] Ibid.

For both Rubin and Gibson, then, vision is a socially informed cognitive process in which perception of lived sensory data is mediated by habituated modes of seeing, and thus the socio-historical forces shaping those habits.

Building upon these broader trends in psychology, Albers's appreciation of the subjective element of seeing shifted the role and positionality of the viewer in relation to the work of art, and proposed that art had the capacity to cognitively retrain individual perception away from authoritative meaning. The relativity and optical flux of color interaction could, he maintained, activate a form of "direct seeing" that would not only expose the socially constructed nature of most perceptual cognition but also encourage new modes of apprehension.[26] As art historian Eva Díaz has argued, "Albers presented the methodology of the experimental test as a forceful corrective against stagnant perceptual habits in the culture at large…[and] in combating forces of social reproduction, that is, the tendency of dominant cultural values to be reproduced as the privileged traditions of society."[27] Albers thus conceived of his work as more than cultural or pedagogical; it was an immensely powerful social tool through which sight, and perhaps consciousness, could be reoriented in order to enact change.

The Interaction of Color

Albers begins the Interaction of Color by illustrating what Wittgenstein is at such pains to explicate logically: the inherent mutability of color within the perceptual field. As he famously notes, "the purpose of most of our color studies is to prove that color is the most relative medium in art, that we almost never perceive what color is physically."[27] In other words, the only constant feature of color is its inconsistency. Among the many studies enumerated in the text, there are three of particular value to this study of Soy Cuba: (1) The Relativity of Color, (2) The Bezold Effect, and (3) Equal Light Intensity.

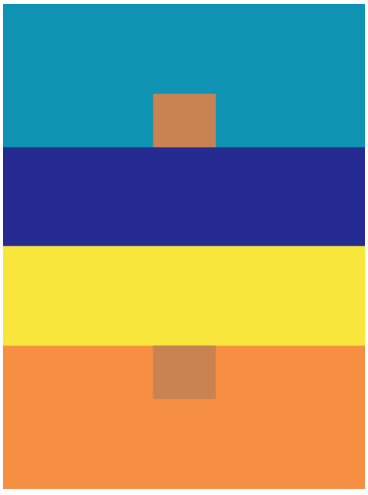

Fig.18: Josef Albers
Color Study IV-1 (Relativity of Color), 1963

1. The Relativity of Color

The most valuable of Albers's visual exercises is arguably his most basic. This now famous image (fig.18) demonstrates the profoundly relational character of color: the small square at the top of the diagram appears far lighter than that in the lower, but, as Albers says, "it is almost unbelievable that…[they] are part of the same paper strip and therefore are the same color. And no normal human eye is able to see both squares alike."[29]. When considered in relation to the **Soy Cuba** landscapes, the exercise illustrates how both adjacency (the individual relief units) and background (the texture and background) alter the effects of color. This simple study is also valuable when considering Wittgenstein's overarching claims. Albers's statement that every individual, regardless of perceptual equipment or environment

[26] For more on cognitive retraining, see Jörgen L. Pind, Edgar Rubin and Psychology in Denmark: Figure and Ground (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2014).
[27] Díaz, "The Ethics of Perception," 260.
[28] Albers, Interaction, 71.
[29] Ibid., 76.

circumstances, will see the two squares differently provides a definitive, scientifically based insight to help navigate the profoundly equivocal realm of Wittgenstein's color logic. That is, he visually illustrates for the viewer how color mutability, and thus subjective indeterminacies, are a fact of our lived environment.[30]

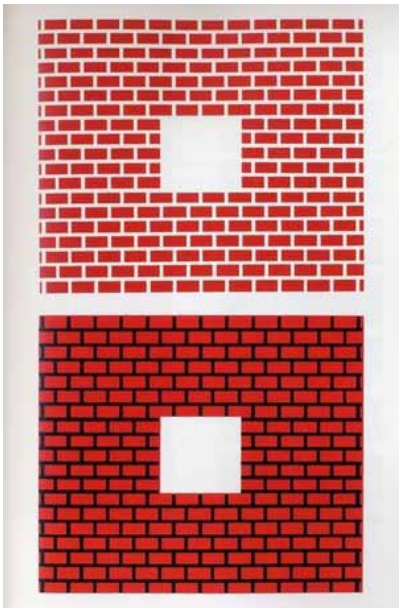

Fig.19: Josef Albers
Color Study XIII-1 (The Bezold Effect), 1963

2. The Bezold Effect

Albers writes that the Bezold Effect (named for the German scientist Wilhelm von Bezold) constitutes the same kind of optical mixture—better known as a pointillist technique—employed by Toledo.[31] It thus provides the greatest insights into the color operations at work in his paintings. A cursory examination of any of the **Soy Cuba** landscapes alongside Albers's visual exercise (fig.19) underscores the degree to which Toledo can exploit the background to produce remarkable effects across the surface of the painting. Toledo's use of adjacent textural units to produce the illusion of line—discussed in the section on process—can be further fleshed out in relation to the Bezold Effect. In *At Dusk,* Toledo is able to enhance the spatial depth of the painting by darkening the farthest edges of the ocean through not only the color of the water but also the resulting contrast between texture and background along the edge of the horizon line. Comparatively, the upper register of the painting has a much softer transition between clouds and sky. If one returns to the detail cited earlier (fig.14), it becomes evident that this transition is facilitated by the lighter background that lays behind both the clouds and the sky—as the Albers exercise illustrates, the pigmented colors of the texture become paler with respect to the lighter tones of the background.

3. Equal Light Intensity

The last of these exercises is highlighted here to demonstrate how Toledo uses light intensity to soften the distinctions between texture and background in key areas of his paintings. Consider *At Dusk* and *Sunrise at Pico Turquino* (fig.7 and 14), which depict dusk and dawn, respectively. In both instances, spatial depth is realized through tonal effects, one light, one dark. As the Albers exercise demonstrates (fig.20), differential edges between two distinct colors of equal light intensity will, when aligned, blend into one another. In *Sunrise...*, Toledo uses a range of grey-blues with equal light intensity to create the effects of atmospheric perspective. The result is a soft, hazy recession that imbues the scene with the sense of a potential that comes with a new dawn.

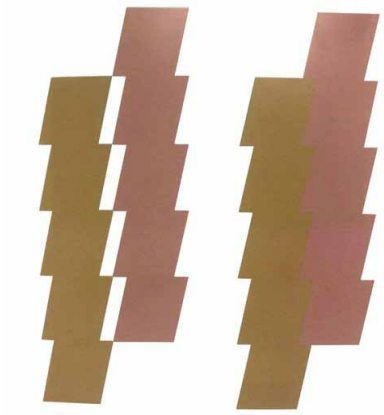

Fig.20: Josef Albers
Color Study XXIII-1 (Equal Light Intensity), 1963

[30] It bears noting, however, that Albers arrived at the same fundamental conclusion as Wittgenstein regarding color recollection and visual memory: he writes, "if one says 'Red' (the name of a color) and there are 50 people listening, it can be expected that there will be 50 reds in their minds. And one can be sure that all these reds will be very different." Ibid.
[31] Ibid., 124.

The Implication of the Viewer

As Albers's exercises make clear, Toledo's prowess as a colorist transforms the **Soy Cuba** landscapes into a rich network of color relations, but as both he and Wittgenstein remind us, their register is always dependent on the viewer. Yet, one could argue that Toledo, well aware of this fact—having read Interaction of Color himself—in fact emphasizes the perceptual ambiguities in his paintings to further implicate the viewer into the process of meaning making. When discussing the role of the texture in his paintings, he observed, "I really like the idea that the pattern is two-dimensional and uniform [in size] across the surface…I stress the idea of the two-dimensional on the surface then try to break through the technique and give the illusion of three-dimensional space."[32] Here, Toledo underscores yet another valence of the relief pattern: the perpetual, irreconcilable tension it generates within the optical field of the painting. It simultaneously produces illusion through its facture while undermining that same illusion through its form. This visual relay between the tactile, textural surface and the appearance of depth draws attention to the act of perceiving itself, what Svetlana Alpers has designated "pictorial equivocation:"

> An experience of ambiguity is part of the process of perceiving. Our mind works, albeit quickly, from multiple and conflicting visual clues to work out the place, shape, and identity of what it attends to. Pictorial equivocation has been entertained by painters before the seventeenth century. By equivocation I refer to the possibility of the painter representing the perception of a thing, and representing it for viewers, in such a way as to encourage the mind to dwell on perceiving it as a process: the painter's experience of an object as coming into its own, distinguishing itself from others, taking shape.[33]

This notion of "perceiving as process" shifts meaning away from the artist and towards the viewer, away from that which is seen to the act of seeing itself. This inducement towards self-reflexivity prompts the kinds of direct seeing championed by Albers—habituated, socially informed (perhaps even imposed) modes of perception are dismantled, allowing for new perspectives to be formed. So what, then, is Toledo suggesting? A commentary on the cultural isolation and specter of oppression in contemporary Cuba seems too one-dimensional. It seems more likely that, in deliberately producing these perceptual ambiguities, he is activating not only the surface of the painting but also the eye and mind of the viewer. Thus, the **Soy Cuba** landscapes are both culturally specific and universally accessed, deeply subjective and pictorially open, all while embracing and accounting for the indeterminacies of our lived color concepts, their variable apprehension, and their multiplicity of meanings.

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[32] Roger Toledo in conversation with the author, October 7, 2018.[31] Ibid., 124.

[33] Svetlana Alpers, "The Studio, the Laboratory, and the Vexations of Art," in Picturing Science, Producing Art, ed. Caroline A. Jones and Peter Galison (New York: Routledge, 1998), 409.

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