

In an attempt to cohere a workable theory of color in 2021, I keep coming back to the failed Fyre Festival of five years prior. *Stay with me*. For those unfamiliar with scam lore, the story goes like this: NYC con man and millennial blowhard Billy McFarland over-promised and cartoonishly under-delivered on a much-hyped luxury music festival in the Bahamas. The results were disastrous—every single act pulled out, and rich kids found themselves thousands in the red with only FEMA tents and boxed cheese sandwiches for comfort. Online, a flammable schadenfreude response ignited in real time, and the frantic complaints of hyper-privileged influencers were meme-ified to the point of near-abstractness. McFarland’s wasteful opulence and logistical delusions turned him into a mascot for his generation’s big-eyed avarice; a year into the Trump administration, it appeared that the neoliberal hegemonic project, fueled by borrowed money, stolen data, and a shaky relationship to facts, had made casualties of even its shiniest participants. McFarland went to jail for six years and was ordered to forfeit \$26 million, although he swindled investors out of numbers far to the north of that. A couple of bad documentaries on the subject debuted soon after. Then, the world moved on.

That notion of scrolling away, of *moving on*, was actually central to the scandal’s initial marketing strategy. FuckJerry company, the Instagram-minted media agency McFarland hired to promote his scheme, developed a simple and hauntingly effective means of hijacking potential clients’ feeds—they deployed a text-free, neon-orange tile, and asked tens of high-profile celebrities to post it simultaneously. FuckJerry reified the tenets of “disruption innovation,” an economic theory popularized by Silicon Valley, in visual terms, exploiting algorithmic optics through slick, strategic saturation. This is how orange, the color of holy Buddhist robes and prison jumpsuits alike, became a glowing harbinger of greed gone digital.

I harp on the orange tile not because its symbolism functions all that well outside the realm of its narrative milieu, but because it typifies the way colors can stain the stories we assign them. David Batchelor’s 2008 book, *Chromophobia*, made a case against the literal white-washing of contemporary aesthetics, arguing, quite rightly, that our burgeoning popular taste for post-Minimalism was a Victorian hangover steeped in fear. Bright, joyful color had for so long been associated with all things Other, inessential, or forbidden, that it became ethically necessary to question the link between artistic sterility and white supremacist apologism. We live in an era more or less defined by the “culture wars,” wherein glaringly racist history is refracted through the fun-house lens of internet engagement and untrammelled lobbyist influence. In it, color features centrally, both as a phenotypal feature of socially grafted taxonomy, and as an outgrowth of virtualized experience, the “modern” body less a Harawayan cyborg than an ideological waiting room. When historian Anna C. Chave called into question the original Minimalists’ “brutal rhetoric” of perceived neutrality, she set the stage for our current minimalist backlash, one that eviscerates the classist, environmentally hollow monochrome of the downsizing craze. Barthes’ hope that authorial identity could prove irrelevant fell flat, it turned out. Rote formalist whiteness stood a large-scale re-evaluation.

Still, these ontological siloes often fail us in the macro. In an increasingly phygital landscape, color’s relationship with late capitalism is inextricable from the tokenistic hierarchies it inhabits. There’s the chemical angle, for instance—that FuckJerry tile owed its punch to the first commercial release of orange pigment in 1809. The Abstract Expressionists couldn’t have spilled and splashed and dribbled with such abandon without the mass production of color and plasticization of pigment.

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The rise of “identity political” art has absolutely coincided with an increased public appetite for color, but that correlation doesn’t account for market-driven expectation or individual artist branding. Even visual art with explicitly political intentions cannot escape the attention economy—color, even color carefully chosen as a form of protest, celebration, or resistance, has to court audience metrics. Art writers often remark upon the dichotomy between formalism and figuration, but that binary ignores the stylizing hand of the artist. To invoke that former tech-addled “disruption” lexis, then, it’s possible that in 2021, aesthetic subversion might thrive through a more *withholding* paradigm, one prepared to wrest the nuance of a Minimalist monochrome from the jaws of white masculinity.

In a 2020 interview with *BOMB*, Jennie C. Jones spoke to the political futurity of Black Minimalist praxis: “The labor of gesture and mark-making filling a space and then the real work of “removing the hand” from that surface are, kind of, ironically, a maximalist process. I don’t like the term “reductive” which was used often in the origin narrative around Minimalism. Reduced from what?...There are social and political ramifications to rejecting “subject” and embracing “object” — as an African American woman, much more is at stake. **Minimalism becomes a radical gesture empowering a refusal to sell my narrative or bodies.**” This notion of refusal, of maintaining visual boundaries, not only promotes radical subjectivity by reinscribing viewer agency, but acknowledges the material conditions of that formal generosity. *Glow in the Dark* builds upon this expository alterity by centering community and questioning institutionalized forms of signification. This exhibition is not a manifesto, but an alternative attempt at world-building, a hopeful bridge to makerly impulse unburdened by the limits of shock or “disruption.” *Glow in the Dark* eschews the orange tile in favor of a decentralized poetics of choice. It is up to you when, and how, you move on.