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Amanda Williams

Run Together and Look Ugly After the First Rain

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In 1927, George Washington Carver (b. 1864, Diamond, MO, d. 1943) patented a formula for a Prussian Blue pigment that was never realized to its potential. Over the last two years, Amanda Williams (b. 1974, Evanston, IL) collaborated with chemistry and research students at The University of Chicago and Xavier University in New Orleans to rekindle and catalyze Carver's process. Williams' debut exhibition at the gallery, titled *Run Together and Look Ugly After the First Rain*, actualizes her version of the pigment, called Innovation Blue. A new series of paintings on panel and collages on paper resist the margins of the color blue in a meditation on Blackness.

In a topographical study of medium, Williams and Carver sourced (a century apart) Alabaman red clay soil to produce their unique blue pigments. The soil and ingredients for a traditional chalk gesso binder are mixed and methodically applied as a foundation to wood panels laid horizontally on the floor of Williams' Chicago studio. Using distemper, casein and watercolor to diffuse the pigment's opacity while preserving its purity, Williams frames Carver's integration of local soil into his recipe for Prussian Blue within a lineage of invention. Prussian Blue, the first modern synthetic pigment dating back to the early 1700s, bridged art with commerce and influenced major art historical evolutions, from Rococo to Cubism.

Restrained pours of paint saturate gradations of red clay panels like rain pooling on dirt grounds, embodying the exhibition's title—*Run Together and Look Ugly After the First Rain*—an excerpt from a series of instructional bulletins Carver published in the early 1900s. Carver's "Bulletin 21" encouraged farmers in the Tuskegee University area to use the natural resources of the landscape to beautify their homes with fresh paint. While most of Carver's bulletins centered on agricultural practicalities, Williams was struck by the emphasis on beauty as a fundamental need for rural Black life. Despite his ingenuity, racism served as one of many formidable barriers to Carver's version of Prussian Blue. The color was never commercialized or widely distributed and, until recently, his formula was largely forgotten.

Drawing from Joseph Albers' theories on color relativity, Williams' studio-based works consider the implications of the simultaneity of color as a chromatic and social signifier of Black identity. For this series, Innovation Blue pigment appears in varying viscosities as bodily and abstracted shadows on the edge of a discernible image. Joint panels are tilted to sway the flow of pigment, spilling from one section to the next in a process acutely tied to color field painting—from Helen Frankenthaler's soak-stains to Frank Bowling's pours—while shades are controlled with the sensitivity of a blueprint exposed to light. In a thorough exhaustion of the relationship between soil and pigment, several works posit blue as both background and foreground. Williams' blue-on-blue exchanges recall the silhouettes of Susan Weil's blueprint collaborations with Robert Rauschenberg (1949-51) and the corporeal impressions of David Hammons' body prints (1968-79). As progenitor innovators, happenstance meets an economy of means.

With a distinguished background in architecture and public art, Williams identifies the collective potential of colors inherent to predominantly Black spaces. Past painting series reveal this internal logic: Saccharine hues in *CandyLadyBlack* (2022-23) celebrated the local "candy lady," a fixture of urban neighborhoods, and the dark tones of *What Black Is This You Say* (2020-24) marked a formal response to #blackouttuesday, while questioning the subjectivity of the color black. Her study of the interplay between color and value crystallized in 2014 with the *Color(ed) Theory* series, a site-specific public project that drew from the color-coded hues of Chicago's Southside to repaint a group of houses marked for demolition. For Prospect.6 in New Orleans last year, Williams painted a shotgun house at the New Orleans African American Museum and the exterior of Xavier University of Louisiana's Art Village with her Innovation Blue pigment.

Williams continually uses paint to mark communal signifiers of liberatory space. As a symbolic nod to this public practice, she shrouds opposite sides of the central freestanding wall within the gallery with red clay gesso and Innovation Blue pigment. A series of collages on paper mine material and formal concerns. Williams combines flakes of untreated clay and raw pigment as a way to examine the fragile tension between preservation and loss; temporality and timelessness; memory and sustained erasure of Black identity. In reviving a method for creating color, Williams renews a commitment to innovation as a path to autonomy.