TOMB III – CADMIUM (2021)*

Digital drawing by David Rudnick, presented as: (1) 4650 × 4650px sRGB IEC61966-2.1 png file, minted as an NFT, 7 April 2021; and (2) 3,000 offset printed reproductions, 350 × 235mm, published in Tomb Index book (Terrain, 2022). Digital file prepared with terrain6 custom calibrated six-colour profile and printed on Gardapat Art 200gsm paper by Musumeci SPA, Aosta, Italy.



* David Rudnick's Tomb Series contains 177 identically-composed and highly-coloured digital drawings of MiniDiscs, a commercially defunct optical media storage format. Forgive the abstraction, but the reproduction of one of these works featured on the facing page cannot convey the specific colouring of its original. Making no contact with the surfaces of printed paper that you are holding, *TOMB III – CADMIUM* resides elsewhere, in two equally remote and inaccessible realms of colour at once. The light-emitting brilliance of its display on digital screens is categorically beyond the physical properties of ink to recreate; while its original printed form is artfully rendered inimitable by the use of a stylised, proprietary colour profile, comprised of six inks and achieving a gamut beyond that which is possible in a conventional "full-colour" (CMYK) printing process, let alone in the two-colour process used here. If, as Kane (2014) claims, 'whether optical or algorithmic, … colour is not exclusively about vision', but is rather 'a system of control used to manage and discipline perception and thus reality', *CADMIUM*'s two native realms of colour are *territorially* demarcated, existing outside the technical scope of the present, modestly-specified pages.

We know that practitioners of book illumination in medieval Europe chose their colour pigments according to complex codes of signification. Bucklow (2014) uses infrared imaging to demonstrate how the unidentified artist who illuminated the so-called Metz Pontifical in early fourteenth century France carefully deployed two types of blue pigment for different purposes. Blue tones in the backgrounds of the illuminations were painted in azurite (copper carbonate), an inexpensive "terrestrial" pigment; while the holy monk's robes were painted in ultramarine (lazurite), a "celestial" pigment (according to contemporaneous lore), which would have been exponentially more expensive for the artist to acquire. Bucklow explains these pigment selections as being 'intimately linked to traditional cosmologies'. To the unaided eye, the Pontifical's two blues were indistinguishable, yet, as material commodities, their connotations were worlds apart. Ultimately, the presence of ultramarine might not have been intended to be perceptible to any viewer except the artist, their patron, and their God.

Image below: Cornelius Norbertus Gijsbrechts, *The Reverse of a Framed Painting*, 1670.

The name *CADMIUM* itself refers to a classification of yellow, orange and red pigments of great art historical importance, derived from the compound cadmium sulfide, and noted for their durability and visual brilliance. The definitive twenty-first century reference work, the *Routledge Pigment Compendium*, documents the celestially suggestive *aurora yellow* and *radiant yellow* among popular historical names for the brighter cadmium formulations used by artists. According to this cosmological parlance, we might describe *CADMIUM*'s intense orange hue as *anti-Kryptonite*, *orange Mons*, or, to bring it back down to earth, perhaps, as *Original Lucozade metallic*.

Two further abstractions are apparent. *CADMIUM* is a *virtual drawing* of a *non-existent* object. The word "drawing", in this context, denotes what kind of artistic procedure exactly? The Tombs are technically neither renderings, of the kind familiar from marketing images of technological devices derived from CAD files, such as would have been used in the design and manufacture of a particular model of MiniDisc itself; nor are they *scans*, made directly by imaging an actual, physical disc with a lens. Instead, the Tombs are the product of considerable, computerised, graphic labour: composed, according to the artist's self-proclaimed constraints, 'using Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator CS3, and the trackpad on a 2012 MacBook Pro. No 3D or additional rendering software is used in their composition'. *CADMIUM* is, therefore, a montage, drawn from a repository of individually produced graphic components, surface textures, software blending effects and colour overlays. The absence of any particular *physical* referent in its depiction—what we see as an object exists only in its black void of virtual, pictorial space—alludes, in the tradition of the *memento mori*, to MiniDisc's obsolescence as a commodity object and carrier of cultural data. It is this aspect of the work that qualifies the name *Tomb*. Introduced in the early 1990s as a successor to the Compact Disc, MiniDisc promised reusability and durability. Its commercial production, however, lasted only two decades, its market obsolescence already foretold by the emergence and rapid capitalisation of online music sharing in the early 2000s, and the subsequent transformation of the networked distribution of media into the centralised edifices of today's content streaming platforms. In retrospect, MiniDisc is an archetypal *boundary object* (Star and Griesemer, 1989): a receptacle for heterogenous narratives of an accelerating technological transformation of reality and its cultural consequences.

Presenting yet another threshold of abstraction, *CADMIUM*, in fact, shows the back of its subject. Each of the Tombs fictionalises its own facade in this way, a conceptual gesture decidedly reminiscent of Cornelius Norbertus Gijsbrechts's extraordinary work of trompe-l'œil virtuosity, *The Reverse of a Framed Painting* (1670). This painting, commissioned for the Royal Danish Kunstkammer in Copenhagen, is a meta-image: a hyper-realistic depiction of the back of a typical artist's canvas, including the grain of its wooden stretcher, a fictional inventory number, some believable patination of age, and a skilfully modelled effect of depth. To reinforce its wicked illusionism, Gijsbrechts's painting was apparently displayed on the floor, leaning informally against a wall, as if inviting the viewer to be irritated by its seeming state of unpreparedness, only then to exaggerate their delighted disbelief as it discloses the true, meticulously crafted, nature of it surfaces. *CADMIUM* makes no such witty, conceptual concessions. It occupies its graphic black picture plane with resolute flatness: all perspective and lighting effects are decisively neutralised. Furthermore — to admit one final abstraction — we see the disc's (potentially) data-inscribed surface only indirectly, through its translucent, tinted casing. The surface of the optical disc itself is fully concealed behind the protective clip visible at the centre-left of its composition. On a physical MiniDisc, this clip would be mechanically withdrawn during the insertion of the disc into a MiniDisc player, a system designed to expose the fragile disc surface only in the protective environment of the player's sealed interior. As Rudnick tantalisingly tells it, 'an optical disc is read by light—a laser—but must therefore be encased to be used. We can never see the data being seen'.

Out of gamut, out of context, out of production, its facade fictionalised, its content hypothetical: Tomb *CADMIUM*, continually being abstracted, is a mournful graphic object.

Gilbert Again, 2022

References

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