





Lindberg punches staples into the wall, the taut fibres oscillate, echoing the distinct pacing of the threads being walked back and forth and the repetitive communication between the artist and her team.

Lindberg's work and process dialogue with scientific theories of light, energy, and sound, which can be modelled via mathematical waves. The oscillations of the taut fibres call into consciousness the wavelengths, amplitudes, and frequencies that underlie so much of our empirically understood world. However, alongside this scientific engagement, *what color is divine light?* simultaneously brings into question more emotional, intuitive understandings of cycles and energy. For instance, the artist only considers her work complete once a viewer engages in it, and The George Washington University Museum and The Textile Museum facilitates this engagement through music, poetry, meditation, prayer, and conversation. One cannot help but envision the vibratory harmonics of a string instrument causing Lindberg's threads to oscillate and dance or feel the energetic shifts and breakthroughs that occur during discussions on faith, love, and humanity.

Just like these moments, Lindberg's work itself is inherently ephemeral; coming alive in the same space it will eventually get cut down. The artist carefully plots density graphs on the walls and computationally renders the work, but when it comes down to it, her installations are site-specific, and their dynamism is created in real time. In this way, Lindberg's thread-based installations create a space where science's calculated rigour and objectivity explode into the emotional intuition of art. We are left with an altar-like assemblage that confronts the questions we, as humans, most strive to understand: the laws of the universe, emotion, light, divinity, and ourselves. Whether we approach these questions through scientific calculation, colour on canvas, or spiritual communion, ultimately, our questions are the same: why are we here, and what does it all mean?

These questions can be uncomfortable and overwhelming, yet they can also be liberating and connecting. Patrik Reuterswård's 1971 essay "*What Color Is Divine Light?*" the exhibition's namesake, asks if divine light is even describable at all. Sitting with this question, "What is the divine to you?" the artist states, "I can't say, I don't know, and maybe that's the point." Lindberg's work, resting in a comprehensive and perceptive impossibility space, suggests that not knowing is the only eternal truth. The threads to her represent "this idea that nothing is fixed, just like life." ... **Kelsey Bogdan**
***what color is divine light?* 4 February–1 July 2023, The George Washington University Museum The Textile Museum, museum.gwu.edu**

Photo by Derek Porter

Images: Anne Lindberg (American, b. 1962), *what color is divine light?*, 2023. Cotton thread, staples; 2 x 200 x 43 m. Site-specific installation at The George Washington University Museum and The Textile Museum.

photoreceptor cells in our eyes cannot physiologically process in our eyes. According to the opponent process theory of colour sensation, the same cell that activates when you see red will deactivate in a green light, which prevents us from seeing a “greenish-red,” for instance. One might be able to imagine a “greenish-red” or a “yellowish blue,” but when physically confronted with these colours side-by-side, the result is a fleeting, almost white glow of optical confusion.

In *what color is divine light?* Lindberg activates this phenomenon by stretching thousands of complementary blue and yellow strands between two delicately curved lavender walls. The result is an unparalleled somatic sensation where glints of “impossible colours” radiate between each thread. The experience could be compared to an optical illusion, but rather than looking at a two-dimensional image that seems to move or jump from the page; the viewer is instead transported into the illusion itself, losing a sense of time,

space, and even self. The work may be most overwhelming as one walks toward it; the threads begin to bend around the peripheries of the visual field, enveloping the body in this abyss of moving lines and colour. The intricately curated lighting and shadows work alongside the optically vibrating complementary hues to create a sense of dynamism in both colour and form. As one traverses the space, new colours appear, and forms shift and bend, making the piece feel alive, humming with energy.

This vibratory presence is birthed out of an installation process that is highly rhythmic and cyclical. The production has a distinct cadence as Lindberg orchestrates the movement of thread back and forth, utilizing round crown staples to affix the fibres to the wall. These staples, typically used in electrical work, are raised from the surface, allowing the thread to move through freely, granting the artist control over the tension and density of the piece. As ▶



A FINE THREAD

Anne Lindberg's impossible colour

Anne Lindberg first travelled to Washington, DC, after completing a BFA in printmaking and fibres at Miami University in 1985. Uncertain of the next steps in her career, Lindberg approached The Textile Museum, which then stood in the Kalorama neighbourhood on the northwest side of the District. With no internship positions available, the museum instead pointed a young and eager Lindberg to the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, where she secured an internship studying West African strip-woven textiles in the newly accessioned Venice and Alistair Lamb Collection. She analyzed and photographed these objects daily, documenting their provenance, weave structure, pattern, and Z or S spun threads. Working amongst these intricate textiles confirmed to Lindberg that she wanted to create, prompting her to pursue an MFA in the Fiber Department at the Cranbrook Academy of Art.

This origin story perhaps makes Lindberg's work at The George Washington University Museum and The Textile Museum so significant today. The artist returns to the city that played a pivotal role in her career, ripe with the conceptual underpinnings of light, rhythm, and colour she first observed in those West African cloths decades ago. In her newest installation, *what color is divine light?*

Lindberg has hand-strung over 4000 cotton tating threads wall-to-wall on the museum's third floor, creating a three-dimensional, immersive installation. Through the deliberate use of light, colour, and space, Lindberg's work seeks to confront the limits of human perception. Central to *what color is divine light?* is the neuroscientific concept of impossible colour. Generally, impossible colours are defined as hues that the

industry.



Photo by Cara Taylor/the George Washington University.