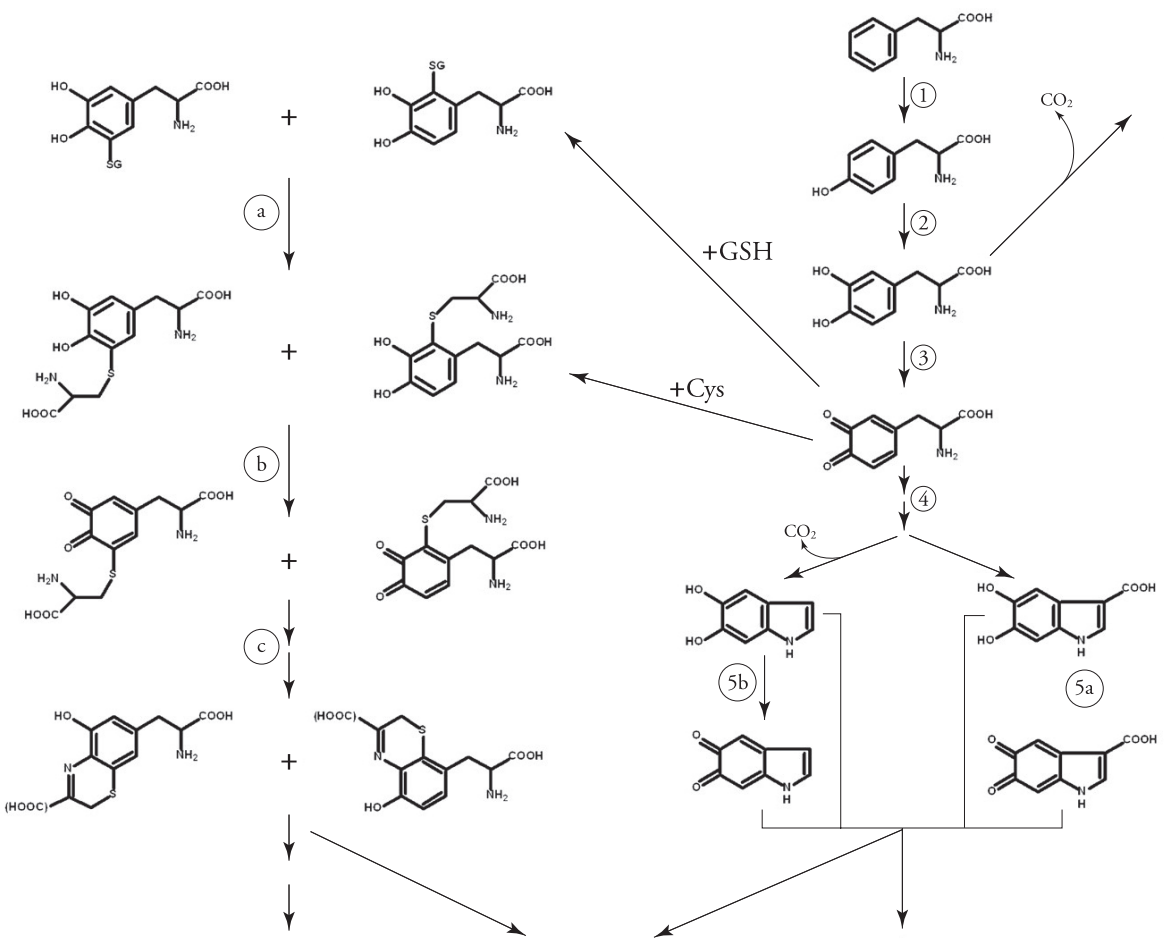
SHADES OF WHITE



The color of hair, skin, and eyes in animals mainly depends on the quantity, quality, and distribution of the pigment melanin. Melanocytes are responsible for the synthesis of melanin within membrane-bound organelles (melanosomes) and the transport of melanosomes to surrounding epidermal cells (keratinocytes). Melanocytes in mammals and birds produce two chemically distinct types of melanin pigments, the black to brown eumelanin and the yellow, reddish, and blue pheomelanin. Source: Shosuke Ito and Kazumasa Wakamatsu, *Quantitative Analysis of Eumelanin and Pheomelanin in Humans, Mice, and Other Animals: A Comparative Review*

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SHADES OF WHITE

GERALDINE ONDRIZEK, ARTIST PROJECT SPACE, JORDAN SCHNITZER MUSEUM OF ART, THE UNIVERSITY OF OREGON, SEPT 2 - DEC 14, 2014

GERALDINE ONDRIZEK: SHADES OF WHITE

In the 1927 case *Buck v. Bell*, the United States Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of involuntary sterilization. The plaintiff, Carrie Buck, an inmate at a Virginia state mental institution, had been ordered to be forcibly sterilized for being "feeble-minded." Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, referring to Buck, her mother, and her daughter, infamously penned the lines, "Three generations of imbeciles are enough."[1] Carrie Buck was just one of more than 60,000 state-sanctioned sterilizations performed in this country from the early 20th century through the 1980s. Shockingly, this practice was hailed by one of the country's major newspapers in the 1930s as a "protection, not a punishment."[2]

The "eugenics craze" of the Progressive Era provided the cultural climate necessary for *Buck v. Bell* to end in Carrie Buck's sterilization. Eugenics, a pseudo-science developed in the 19th century, sought to improve the so-called genetic quality of the human population through encouraging reproduction by people with preferred genetic traits and discouraging reproduction by people with less desirable traits. This was accomplished through abortions, forced sterilizations, and—at its most horrific extreme—euthanasia and genocide. Although these practices are most often associated with Nazi-era medical abuses, the United States was equally culpable for instating discriminatory laws that targeted individuals based on supposed links between genetics and moral fitness. In Oregon alone, more than 2,600 sterilizations were performed between 1917 and 1983. It was not until 2002 that Governor John Kitzhaber publicly apologized for what he described as the "misdeeds that resulted from widespread misconceptions, ignorance, and bigotry" and declared December 10th Human Rights Day in Oregon.[3]

For many years, Geraldine Ondrizek's art practice has explored personal and political issues related to genetics, ethnic identity, and disease. Now, in this special exhibition created for the Artist Project Space at the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, she responds to the history of eugenics in the American West with *Shades of White*. Using steel and silk—two of the most significant materials in shaping world history—she reinterprets the "Gates Skin Color Chart" used by proponents of eugenics in the mid-20th century. In doing so, she critiques the practices made possible by the pervasive employment of eugenics, such as the forced sterilizations that began with Carrie Buck. Rigorously researched and thoughtfully executed, Ondrizek's installation invites viewers to look through the silk panels, designed to approximate variations of skin pigmentation, and consider their own ideas about race and identity. Her appropriation of this eugenic device to facilitate a discussion of human dignity is poignant and timely. We at the museum are deeply grateful to Geraldine Ondrizek for sharing her perceptive work with us.

June Black, Associate Curator, Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art

1 *Buck v. Bell* 274 U.S. at 207 (1927).
2 Fred Hogue, "Social Eugenics," *Los Angeles Times (Sunday Magazine)*, Jan. 19, 1936, quoted in Alexandra Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 83.
3 "Full Text of State's Apology Regarding Eugenics," (Oregon) *Statesman Journal*, Dec. 3, 2002, quoted in Stern, *Eugenic Nation*, 1.

BIOGRAPHY

Geraldine Ondrizek received her BFA from Carnegie-Mellon University and her MFA from the University of Washington. She has been a Professor of Art at Reed College in Portland, Oregon, since 1994. For the last twenty years, she has created architecturally scaled works that house images and forms inspired from medical and biological information. Ondrizek's work aims at questions of life's origins, life cycles, ethical issues related to genetics, as well as the possibility of unraveling genetic conditions.

Ondrizek is the recent recipient of a 2014 Hallie Ford Fellowship. She has received two Career Opportunity Grants from The Ford Family Foundation through the Oregon Arts Commission, as well as support from the Mellon Foundation, the Levine Foundation, the Houston Foundation, 4 Culture, and UNESCO. In 2006, Ondrizek won the Oregon Arts Commission Individual Artist Fellowship. She has been an artist in residence at CAMAC in France; Gasworks in London; the Women's Studio in New York; Kunstseminar in Schwäbisch Hall, Germany; the Mattress Factory in Pennsylvania; and the Anderson Arts Center in Colorado; and has lectured at Cal Arts; Columbia College in Chicago; the Royal College of Art; Goldsmiths College; Hamilton College; the University of Washington; and the International Conference for Art and Society in both Venice, Italy and Budapest, Hungary.

Ondrizek has had 30 solo exhibitions and numerous group shows at venues including the Portland Art Museum; the Detroit Institute of Art; the Sheldon Museum; the Western Washington Gallery; the Sheehan Gallery at Whitman College; the IMSS Chicago; the Miller Gallery at Carnegie-Mellon University; the Hillwood Museum in New York; Pyramid Atlantic; the Wiesman Museum; the Baltimore Museum of Art; the University of Houston Clear Lake Gallery; NASA; and Florida International University. Her work was presented at the National Museum of Women in the Arts and the Third International Conference on Transdisciplinary Imaging at the Intersections of Art, Science, and Culture in Istanbul, Turkey.

Reviews of her work have appeared in the Chicago Tribune, Art Week, art ltd, Art News, Surface Design, Textile: A Journal of Cloth and Culture, the New York Times, the Oregonian, the Sudduetch Zietung, and Lancet Medical Journal.

Ondrizek's web site: http://academic.reed.edu/art/faculty/ondrizek/

DIVIDING HUMANS: GENETICS, RACE, AND DISABILITY IN MID-CENTURY AMERICA

A lecture by Dr. Alexandra Stern
Tuesday, October 14, 2014 at 5:30 p.m.
In conjunction with Geraldine Ondrizek's exhibition *Shades of White*, professor and author Dr. Alexandra Stern speaks about her book *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America*.

FROM EUGENICS TO GENETICS: TRACING VISUAL CATEGORIZATION IN 21ST CENTURY ART

Saturday, November 8, 2014 at 2:00 p.m.
Artist and Professor of Art at Reed College, Geraldine Ondrizek talks about her installation *Shades of White*.

COMMEMORATE HUMAN RIGHTS DAY IN OREGON WITH FREE ADMISSION TO THE JSMA

Wednesday, December 10, 2014 from 11:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

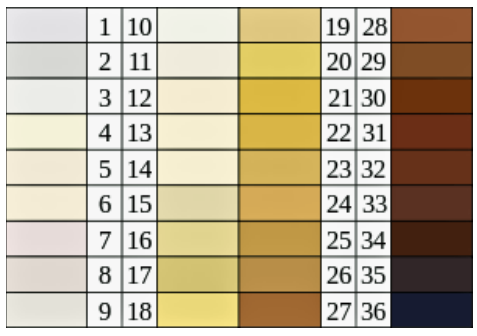
JORDAN SCHNITZER **MUSEUM OF ART**
1223 University of Oregon - Eugene, Oregon 97402-1223

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Shades of White, an installation created for the Artist Project Space at the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, is the result of years of research. The work represents the "Gates Skin Color Chart," a tool used by geneticists and anthropologists in the mid-20th century for racial classification. It is based on the research of Dr. Alexandra Minna Stern, a medical historian at the University of Michigan. Stern researches the history of eugenics and its attendant genetic and racial discrimination as practiced in the United States from 1900-87.

Stern's books, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (2005) and *Telling Genes: The Story of Genetic Counseling in America* (2012), explore racially discriminatory practices—such as the forced sterilization of individuals supported at the public's expense, including children in orphanages, patients in mental health facilities, and prisoners—in the United States (and in the American West, especially). I felt it was important to create a work that would make these events visually accessible. Just as Stern's work exposes the deeply problematic charting of physical and mental anomalies and skin color by medical professionals in her books, this installation visually critiques the results of eugenics. I reproduced the "Gates Skin Color Chart," a tool created by geneticists at the University of Michigan that attempted to typologize race by color, with labels ranging from "African" to "Caucasian." These charts had practical and material effects, as they were used to determine the adoptability of children in the care of the state. These inequitable practices haunt us today. In fact, it was not until 2002 that Governor Kitzhaber asked forgiveness from the victims of discriminatory sterilization in Oregon's orphanages and other state institutions.

Although I have done similar genetic research-based projects, I have not previously taken on such racially controversial material. This project exposes the genetic discrimination at play in the United States beginning in 1900 and links it to the practice of eugenics aimed at achieving racial hygiene in Nazi Germany. As Stern points out in *Eugenic Nation*, the top eugenicists in the U. S. collaborated with and followed the same practices as their Nazi counterparts in 1930s Germany. In fact the "Gates Skin Color Chart" is based on a similar chart dating to 1905 created by Felix von Luschan, which the German Society for Racial Hygiene utilized in selecting the victims of the forced sterilizations performed in that country.



Felix von Luschan's Chromatic Scale (pictured at left) was used to establish racial classifications of populations according to skin color. Named for its inventor, Felix von Luschan, the equipment consisted of thirty-six opaque glass tiles that were compared to the subject's skin, ideally in a place that would not be exposed to the sun regularly, such as the underarm. Source: Institut für Kulturgeschichte der Antike der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften Institut für Klassische Archäologie der Universität Wien.

R. Ruggles Gates created a skin color chart used from 1940 to 1960 to determine the racial identity of newborns at American medical institutions and adoption agencies. His chart was nine squares ranging form dark skin tones to white.[1]

Using organic natural dyes on a variety of silks, *Shades of White* recreates the genetics of skin color as determined by melanin (see illustration on reverse). The work is a very direct critique of the von Luschan and Gates skin color charts as determinist systems of measure. Although we use the words black and white to describe human skin color (and people), no one is actually black or white. The pigmentation that makes up our skin color comes from our genetic heritage and the geographic location of our ancestors, which gives each of us various types and levels of melanin.

The melanocortin 1 receptor gene (MC1R) is primarily responsible for determining whether pheomelanin and/or eumelanin is produced in the human body. Pheomelanin produces the light skin values, which are reds, pinks, yellows, and blues. Eumelanin, which produces the darker skin values, is a blend of black, brown, and red. Because so many of us represent a mixture of ethnic backgrounds, it is not uncommon for individuals to have a blend of both pheomelanin and eumelanin. This work is meant to point out the astonishing variety of "shades" that comprise each of us and to point to the fact that no one is pure white or pure black—we are all a spectrum.

Working with the architecture of the Artist Project Space at the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, I designed twenty-four thin steel boxes of various sizes to encase the different shades of silk. As a whole, the piece looks like a matrix of grids. As one looks through the layers of steel boxes reflecting the silk colors and moves deeper into the space, one experiences a blending and buildup of tones or pigmentation. In mixing the chemistry for the dyes and timing the silk dying, I made sure that no two pieces of silk are the same, just as no two people are the same.

1 Dr. Alexandra Stern, *Genetic Counseling in Modern America: Gender, Race, Risk and Biomedicine in the Twentieth Century* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012)

MATERIALS

Using steel and silk was of particular importance for this project. These two materials had enormous effects on the global economy, human relations, and our genetic inheritance for centuries. **Boxes:** 18 gauge mild steel. **Silks:** 100% reeled natural silk from China, 100% hand-reeled silk filament from Uzbekistan and India. **Natural dyes:** Brazilwood sawdust, from violin bow manufacturing, from Brazil (red to dark blue); Indian Lac, from the cochineal bug, from India (deep shades of red); Longwood, from Mexico (shades of purple, black, and green); Fusticwood, from the Caribbean Islands (yellow, gold, and orange).

THANKS

I would like to thank Dr. Alexandra Stern for allowing me to use her research and for the important work she is doing in this field; June Black and Jessi DiTillio, co-curators of the exhibition, for their patience and support during this long process; and Jim Schmidt for his work on the steel boxes. A huge debt of gratitude goes to my studio assistant, Cylvia Davis, to Emily Johnson for her work on the gallery guide, and to Dan Kvitka for photography.