



Blue: In Search of Nature's Rarest Color

Kai Kupferschmidt

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Human beings have been obsessed with the color blue for thousands of years, and in *Blue*, science journalist Kai Kupferschmidt travels the globe to discover why it has always been so special.

Strange as it may seem, science is only beginning to understand blue. The rarest color in nature, its perception is an intricate collaboration between a human being and what is being looked at. Kupferschmidt draws attention to just how special that collaboration is, in the hopes that people will learn to look at the natural world with fresh eyes, appreciating “the beauty, fragility, and sheer improbability of our blue planet and the responsibility we bear toward it.”

Central to the book is chemist Mas Subramanian’s 2009 accidental discovery of the first new blue pigment in two hundred years. Dubbed “YinMin” for its components (yttrium oxide, indium oxide, and manganese oxide (YInMn)), its stunning, pure color thrilled artists, entrepreneurs, and industry people alike.

But this text is not all about happy coincidences. From the earliest cave paintings to the tombs of Egyptian pharaohs to Japanese scientists’ current obsession with creating a blue rose, the book tracks the good, the bad, and the ugly about blue. The same pigment component that allowed Van Gogh to create his star-filled sky is also a cruel poison, hydrogen cyanide, he says. And there are many other surprises along the way: that ancient sculptures and buildings thought to have always been white were once colorful; that birds can see ultraviolet light; and that sea mammals, like whales, cannot see blue light, though they are surrounded by it.

Kupferschmidt’s global quest follows his lifelong obsession with blue, taking him to the core of what it means to be human.

KRISTINE MORRIS (May / June 2021)

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