
Chasing
Blue
Hiya Gajjar
On Colour
Culture
and Meaning

**Chasing Blue**
On colour, culture and meaning
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**“I am forever chasing that blue which is in the blue.”**

**Joan Miró**

# All you see isn't all there

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“All you see isn’t all there is”

is a gentle reminder that life is *deeply layered*, appearances rarely tell the whole story. What we witness on the surface whether in people, situations or even ourselves it is *only a fragment of a much deeper truth*.



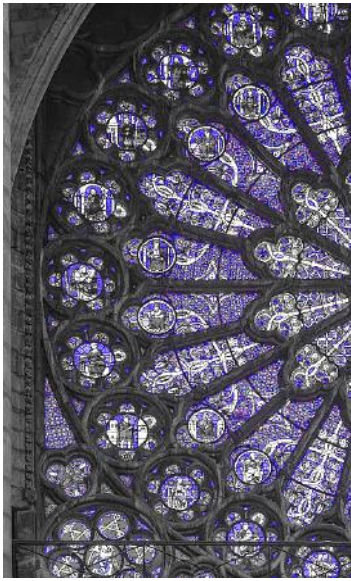
At first glance, blue might appear simple, color we name when we look at the sky or the ocean. But like life itself, *it holds layers far beyond what the eye can measure*. Blue is calm, yet it can be sorrowful; it is vast, yet it can feel intimate; it is steady, yet it carries mystery. In the same way, people and moments are never only what they seem. A smile might hide grief, silence might hold unspoken stories and even the smallest shade can carry centuries of history and meaning.

*To study blue is to understand every shade has depth and stories that cannot be captured in a single glance.* In life too, what is visible is only a fraction of what exists; *the truth often lives in what is hidden and felt rather than seen*.



# Diving into the history of Blue

It's easy to believe blue has always been loved. After all, it surrounds us every day in skies, seas and screens! But here's the twist: for most of history, blue was the outsider colour. People avoided it, mistrusted it, even mocked it. Only later did blue become the most popular colour on Earth.



In the Palaeolithic and Neolithic periods, the favoured palette consisted of earthy reds, blacks and browns. *Blue was absent* from the earliest artistic traditions.

While Western traditions distrusted blue, other cultures revered it.The ***ancient Egyptians*** adorned their gods with blue and the hindus depicted ***Krishna*** in radiant blue skin.

In 12th century *Abbot Suger*, a visionary of Gothic architecture, saw ***divine light*** in colour. During the reconstruction of *Saint-Denis Abbey*, craftsmen perfected the *use of cobalt to create luminous stained-glass windows* that flooded sacred spaces with deep, ink-blue light.



The ancient Greeks and Romans celebrated a stark triad of black, white, and red. Blue, carried an aura of ***barbarism***. Roman writers noted that *Celtic warriors* dyed their bodies blue before battle and Pliny the Elder even accused women of *staining themselves blue before* ***orgies***. It is a color associated with mourning & misfortune.










Around the same time, depictions of the ***Virgin Mary*** shifted, she was shown in *bright blue robes* instead of somber mourning clothes. As Marian devotion grew, so too did the prestige of her chosen colour.

From the Middle Ages onward, two substances defined the destiny of blue- ***Ultramarine*** and ***Indigo***. Ultramarine, was the most coveted pigment of all, rarer than gold. Indigo, extracted through the laborious fermentation of plant leaves, became equally prized in fabric dyeing. *Their rarity fuelled a cycle of desire & expense.*



By the late 12th century, the French royal family adopted the *gold* ***fleur-de-lis*** *on an* ***azure background*** *in honour of the Virgin*, setting a trend across Europe's nobility. By 1400, nearly one-third of all coats of arms contained blue. Later, the navies embraced the shade, giving rise to the enduring "***Navy Blue***."



***This is journey of blue***:
from "*barbaric" & mournful to royal, divine and powerful*, today culminates in its modern dominance as people's *favourite colour*.

# Baby Blue



Soft, delicate and instantly familiar, baby blue carries with it a sense of ***innocence*** and ***openness***. Today it is often linked to baby boys, yet its name comes from an different source.

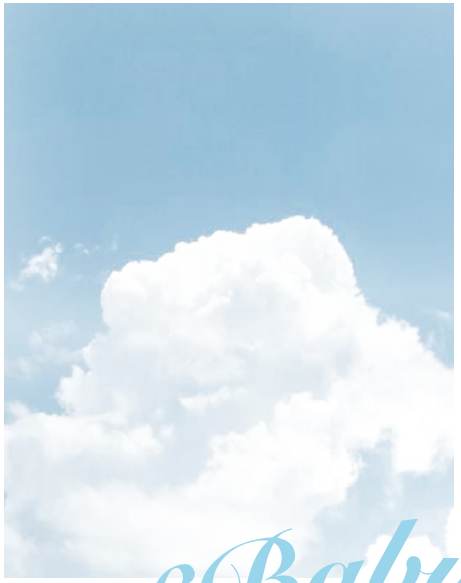
In the 1860s, a poem printed in American newspapers described "***eyes of baby blue***," reflecting the then-common belief that most infants were born with blue eyes. Regardless of sex, these tender eyes inspired the color name *forever tying baby blue to themes of new life, purity and hope.*

The color of delicate eyes that see the world for the *first time.*





Blue hydrangeas, symbolising grace, elegance & heartfelt emotions.



es of Baby Blue.

After World War II, baby blue became a visual shorthand for cultural recovery: ***Christian Dior's 1947*** "New Look" with its nipped waists & voluminous skirts rejected wartime austerity and reintroduced a luxe,hyper feminine ideal in soft pastels. ***Disney's Cinderella*** translated that same language into animation with a baby-blue ballgown that signaled purity, grace and renewal. *Together they used pale blue's dual associations to reassure a world craving beauty with Cinderella.*

A philosopher named ***Alan Watts*** suggested painting ***San Fransico police cars*** baby blue and white and it was implemmented. He also thought police officers wearing baby blue would be less likely to commit violent acts.



Disney's Cinderella, 1950




San Fransico Police Cars, 1970s

# Powder Blue

Powder blue, as delicate as the ***morning sky*** carries a history rooted in both practicality and symbolism. In the mid-17th century, the term referred to *powdered smalt a deep cobalt* glass ground into fine pigment.

This substance was widely used in laundry to brighten white fabrics, its *subtle bluish tint adding elegance to textiles*. Over time, as smalt faded from use, the term powder blue evolved in meaning, first recorded in 1894. It had come to describe the much lighter, *pastel toned hue* we know today.

Its softened tone aligns with a growing cultural desire for ***calm, emotional safety and quiet clarity***, making it prevalent in modern interiors, wellness branding, fashion and digital interfaces.




***1961 Jaguar*** E-Type



***Jasperware*** , is a type of pottery first developed by Josiah Wedgwood in 1770s. Usually described as stoneware, it has an unglazed matte" finish popularly known for it's pale blue as "***Wedgwood blue***" like powder blue.

By the 20th century, powder blue rose in popularity in fashion and interior design, prized for its ***calming sophistication***, it became a versatile shade. The evolution of powder blue reflects cultural change: what began as a utilitarian pigment transformed into a color of ***softness and serenity***.







In medieval Europe, brides often wore blue gowns at their weddings as a symbol of ***fidelity & constancy*** a tradition inspired by the *association of blue with the Virgin Mary*. Long before white became the color of weddings, it was blue that stood for *purity and devotion*.

A typical of ***Haussmann-era*** buildings in Paris, especially in districts like Le Marais.



Greek goddess, Iris

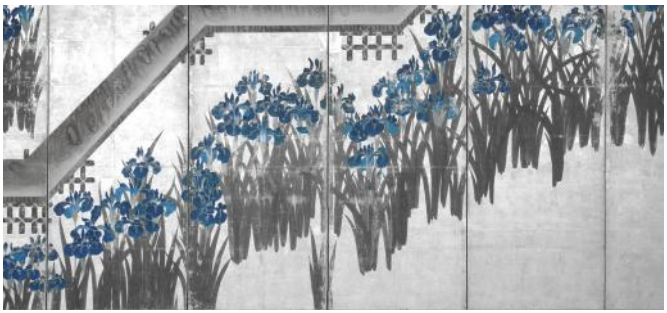
# Iris Blue

The blue iris carries within it the language of faith, wisdom and renewal. ***A promise of light after sorrow***. Its name comes from the *Greek goddess Iris*, messenger of the gods, personification of the rainbow, who journeyed between heaven and earth to deliver divine messages and *guide souls to the afterlife*.

This belief gave rise to the tradition of planting irises on graves. In this duality of grief and grace, the blue iris came to embody both ***mourning and transcendence.***



Iris planted by the grave



*Ogata Kōrin's* Irises at Yatsuhashi



"Iris" by *Osuga Yuichi*

Through centuries, the blue iris has been a muse to artists and poets alike. In ***Japanese woodblock prints***, such as Ogata Kōrin's Irises at Yatsuhashi, their petals unfold with poetic restraint, symbolizing beauty and the harmony.



Painted during his stay at Saint-Rémy, Van Gogh's Irises ***carry the weight of a man suspended between despair and hope***. Its vivid, restless blues embody fragility and resilience, a flower surviving against suffering a symbol of his inner turmoil. The blue iris was not merely botanical; it was emotional- a symbol of *vulnerability, longing and the faint but stubborn promise of renewal.*

Vincent Van Gogh— Irises (1889)



In Giverny, the blue iris shifts from inner turbulence to ***quiet harmony***. Bathed in soft, diffused light, Monet's iris blue is gentler brushed with subtle lavender and *air a meditation on impermanence rather than pain*. Each petal dissolves into atmosphere, capturing the fleeting ***calm after a storm.***

Claude Monet — The Artist's Garden at Giverny

Iris blue holds a dual soul one of ache and one of calm. ***In Van Gogh's blue iris burns, Monet's breathes.*** It is a blue caught between melencholy and renewal.

# Maya Blue

Around the *8th century CE* in Mesoamerica, a new blue emerged vivid, enduring and sacred. Known today as Maya Blue, it shimmered across murals, pottery, sculptures, codices and offerings. More than a color, it was a ***bridge between the earthly and the divine***.

The hue of ***Chaac***, the rain god, and of ritual sacrifice. *During droughts, human offerings painted in this sacred blue were presented to Chaac in hopes of summoning rain*. In 16th century accounts from Chichén Itzá, sacred cenote describe victims stripped, painted and offered on stone altars their hearts still beating as prayers rose skyward.

The pigment's creation was as ingenious as its meaning. *Maya and Aztec artisans* fermented leaves of ***Indigofera***, blending the dye with ***palygorskite clay***, a magnesium-aluminium silicate whose fibrous structure captured indigo molecules when heated.

The fusion produced a pigment unlike any other insoluble, chemically stable and eternal. *It resisted time, sunlight, acid, and even modern solvents, preserving not just color but belief itself.* Patches of this radiant blue still cling to temple walls and pottery, whispering the worldview of a civilization that painted its faith into permanence.



Bonampak Murals: Room 1 East Wall, Procession of Musicians



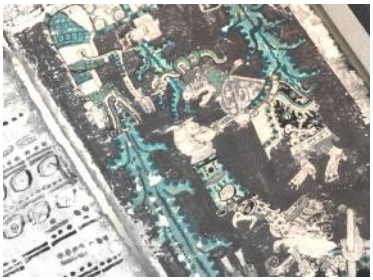
Bonampak Murals, showing the scarificial process.



Sculpture of Chaac, the rain God coloured in maya blue to represent water.



This 4.5-inch-high figurine ‚Jaina Island Maya Late Classic period from 600 to 900



The ***Dresden Codex***, primarily dealing with astronomy, calender, prophecy etc



The Madrid Codex, dealing with astronomy, astrology and divination.

The Mayan codices are ancient folding books painted on bark paper, recording astronomy, rituals, and the sacred calendar. Once used by priests as guides to time and destiny, only four survive today were painted with enduring pigments like Maya Blue.

For centuries, its secret recipe lay hidden. Only in the 1960s did chemists decipher its components: indigo and palygorskite, bound by heat. Clues surfaced from an ancient *ritual bowl dredged from the Sacred Cenote of Chichén Itzá,* a natural well once used for offerings. The bowl, dated around 1400 CE, held *traces of incense mixed with flecks of blue and white.*

Under a scanning tunneling microscope, these revealed themselves as the very clay and dye that created Maya Blue. Born in fire and faith itself, produced during ritual burnings where incense, clay and indigo fused in sacred smoke. The color washed from offerings into the cenote, formed a 14-foot layer of blue sediment, *a veil of illusion resting on water.*

Even today, the pigment's unyielding brilliance feels otherworldly. Its endurance mirrors the concept of Māyā in Sanskrit and Hindi- ***illusion***, a reminder that what appears eternal might itself be a trick of perception. Maya Blue stands as a paradox: the color of both creation and sacrifice, permanence and delusion, beauty and death.

It endures, not just on stone, but in spirit - ***a color that refuses to die,*** still holding within it the silence of rituals, the shimmer of smoke, and the illusion of eternity.



# Robin's egg Blue



Robin's egg blue a soft, luminous blue with a whisper of green takes its name from the delicate shells of the ***American robin***. In nature, such blue pigments are rare; the shell's hue comes not from minerals but from *biliverdin*, a pigment deposited during egg formation, giving the eggs a *jewel-like glow*.

The colour robin's egg blue is so iconically tied to ***Tiffany & Co.*** a box in this colour is instantly recognized, its presence enough to opened. Tiffany transformed robin's egg blue from a natural curiosity into a symbol of luxury, sentiment and ritual the promise of something precious within.



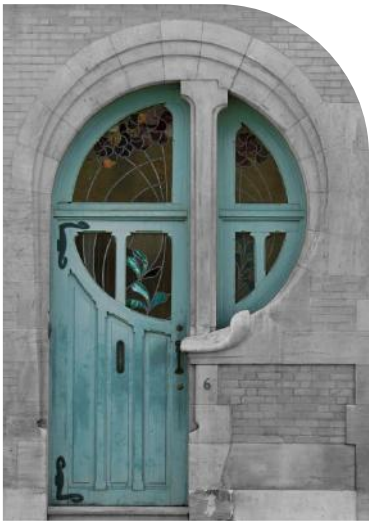

Tracing its origins reveals *a poetic symmetry*. The colour's first home was the egg itself — a delicate shell protecting the life inside. Later, its most famous manifestation became another form of container: the Tiffany box, cradling jewels, love tokens, and milestones. Both serve the same purpose ***to hold & protect what is Precious***.







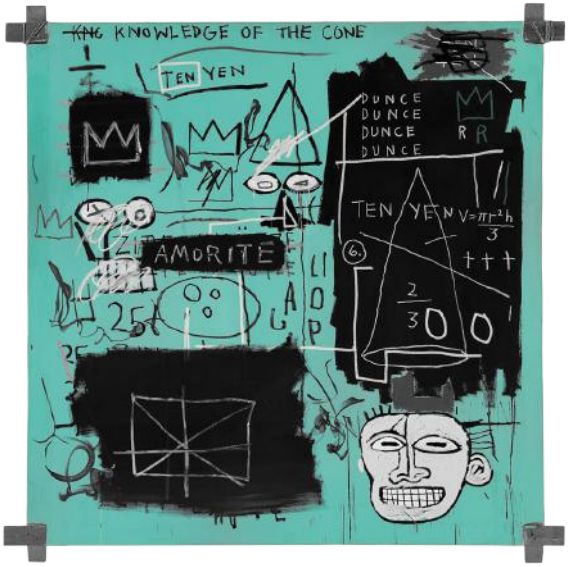

1955 Ford Thunderbird convertable



Art Nouveau Architecture



Swiss Art Deco vases glazed in tranquil blue-green a hue achieved through cobalt and copper oxides, chosen to evoke serenity and modern elegance, echoing the calm sophistication prized in early 20th-century design.




A 1983 painting by American artist ***Jean-Michel Basquiat,*** where the colour's softness played against his raw, layered imagery, a striking fusion of elegance and urban edge.

# Turquoise

Turquoise a luminous blend of blue and green is among the world's oldest known gemstones, its story stretching back to around 6000 BC in ancient Egypt. The name comes from the *French* ***turquois*** ("Turkish") as the stone reached Europe through *Turkish trade routes*. Across civilizations, turquoise has symbolized *protection, peace and divine connection.*

The ancient Egyptians treasured it for royalty and sacred ornaments, adorning tombs and treasures with its celestial glow. In ancient Persia, it was believed to represent heaven, its radiant shade inspiring the turquoise domes of mosques and palaces, to ***dissolve the boundary between earth and sky.***

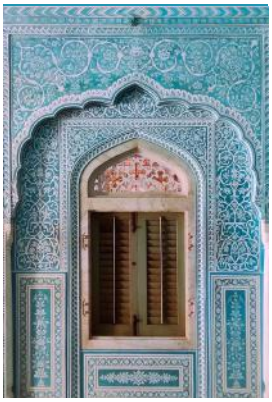






For Native American tribes, turquoise held deep spiritual significance. Revered as the "***fallen sky ston***e," it was crafted into amulets and jewelry to guide warriors safely, ward off evil and honor Mother Earth. Tibetan & Mongolian cultures saw it as a symbol of life and renewal, while in China, turquoise was placed in burial masks to protect the soul in its journey beyond.







In Vincent van Gogh's ***Almond Blossom*** (1890), the turquoise blue background carries deep symbolism. Painted to celebrate the *birth of his nephew, the serene turquoise evokes renewal, hope and the promise of new life*. The color transforms the blossoms into more than just flowers they appear to float in a heavenly expanse. Drawing from cultural meanings of turquoise as a bridge between earth and sky. Against his own turbulent life, the turquoise symbolizes a wish for peace, joy, and divine protection.

In the Victorian era, brides gifted their bridesmaids turquoise *dove-shaped jewellery, the stone symbolizing devotion and good fortune, while the dove conveyed peace and enduring love.*



Leila's blue betta fish represents the cyclical nature of life and death, the idea that time is neither linear nor finite.



# Electric Blue



Electric blue did not come from earth or stone, but from ***energy*** itself. The term entered English in 1845, taking its identity from *electrical discharge the blue glow produced when air is ionized, when oxygen and nitrogen are violently excited and release light.*

This glow had always existed in nature, though science was needed to name it. *Lightning, sparks and the eerie phenomenon known as* ***St. Elmo's fire***, a bright blue sometimes edged with violet appeared on ship masts, church spires and aircraft during storms. Sailors met it with awe, reading it as both warning and omen. The colour marked moments when the atmosphere destabilized, when energy overtook form.



It flourished briefly alongside early attempts to domesticate electricity, to turn current into light. *Even then, electric blue became shorthand for the future a visual promise of progress.*

That promise darkened in the twentieth century. On April 26, 1986, nuclear engineer Alexander Yuvchenko witnessed the catastrophic failure of Reactor 4 at ***Chernobyl.*** Through steam, collapsing walls, and burning graphite, he stepped outside and saw a column of light rising into the sky—"light bluish, very beautiful."



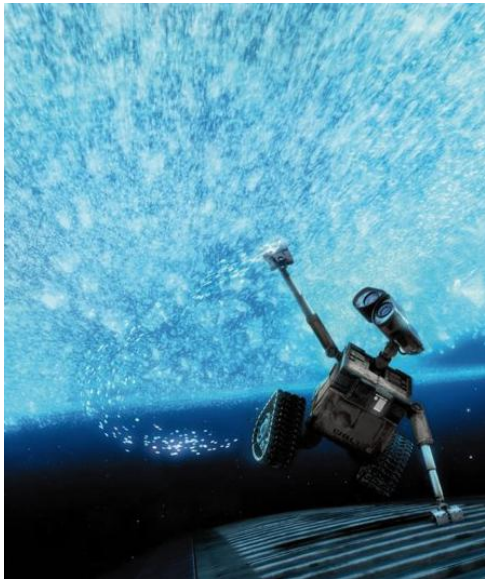
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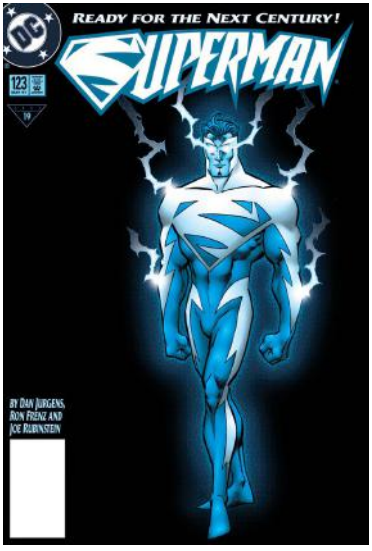
It caused by the ionization of air above the exposed nuclear core. In that moment, electric blue revealed its most unsettling truth: *the same glow that signifies innovation can also mark devastation.* ***Beauty and danger shared the same wavelength.*** Despite this, electric blue never lost its association with modernity. It returned forcefully in the late twentieth century, saturating neon signage, synthetic fabrics and digital aesthetics.It became the colour of interfaces, grids and glowing edges, *suggesting worlds governed by code rather than nature.*



Electric blue persists because it does not pretend to be timeless. ***It belongs to moments of transition*** to thresholds between stability and collapse, control and excess. Unlike other blues, it does not soothe. ***It vibrates. It signals power made visible, energy caught mid-flight.***

The colour mirrors its broader cultural symbolism: electric blue is not nature derived, but energymade ***synthetic, efficient and luminous.*** In WALL·E, it becomes the *quiet glow of survival,* suggesting that even in a mechanised, post-human world, intelligence and empathy can still spark, flicker and endure.





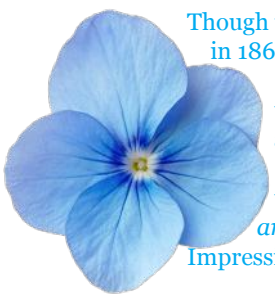

Electric Blue Superman marked a moment of disruption, Stripped of his physical form and rendered as pure energy, the ***colour signalled instability, excess power,and a break from the hero's timeless identity.*** Here, electric blue becomes a symbol of transformation pushed too far, revealing how raw energy, when ungrounded, can fracture even the most enduring icons.

# Cerulean Blue



"Impression, Sunrise" Claude Monet.

Cerulean blue began not in nature, but in a laboratory. Swiss chemist ***Albrecht Höpfner*** created it by combining *cobalt compounds with calcinated tin salts and silica*, producing a pigment unlike any blue before it, ***stable, bright and touched with a gentle green undertone***. It felt like daylight made solid: the colour of clear sky held still. It became a staple on the artists' palette quickly after. *Cerulean blue paint was particularly popular in skyscapes,* like in the impression, sunrise where he didn't paint a real sunrise but the feeling of it, symbolising the hopeful recovery of france after war.



*Forget-me-not flower*, symbolize true love, remembrance and endurance.

Though the pigment had existed earlier, it was in 1860 that English colourmaker ***George Rowney*** introduced it commercially under the name ***Coeruleum***. Once available, it spread quickly across artists' palettes. Unlike Prussian blue or ultramarine, *cerulean remained light, calm and consistent*. This is why the Impressionists and Post Impressionists embraced it.



La Gare Saint-Lazare



***Oscar de la Renta*** Summer collection

Pantone nominated it as their
***Color of the Millennium*** in ***1999***

*"Psychologically, gazing at a blue sky brings a sense of peace and tranquillity to the human spirit. Surrounding yourself with cerulean blue could bring on a certain peace because it reminds you of time spent outdoors on a beach, nearthe water associations with restful, peaceful, relaxing times."*

Cerulean eventually stepped beyond the studio and entered the world of fashion, where it took on a cultural life of its own. Its appeal lay in the same qualities artists admired: clarity, freshness and effortlessness. Unlike navy, which signaled authority and uniformity or cobalt, which demanded attention, cerulean felt approachable polished without trying to be.

Emotionally, cerulean occupies a different register from other blues. If ultramarine is solemn and Prussian blue is commanding, cerulean is spacious.
It evokes ***optimism, possibility and the quiet confidence of clear weather.***



Édouard Manet's 1878



***The devil wears Prada***

# Azure



*Azure carries the weight of both **earth & sky***. Its name begins in *lazhwárd*, a Persian place famed for its veins of lapis lazuli , a gemstone once more precious than gold. The name traveled as the stone did, crossing deserts and seas, until it softened into *French as azur and later into English as azure*. *Geoffrey Chaucer* used it in 1374, writing of "*a broche, gold and asure*" a jewel given in love, its blue gleam echoing devotion and transcendence.Long before that, the color was already revered. As early as the seventh millennium BC, *lapis lazuli* was mined, traded and crushed into pigment a fragment of the heavens captured in mineral form. When Giotto painted the *Scrovegni Chapel in Padua*, he covered its vaulted ceilings in pure lapis, *turning the walls into **skies that never dimmed***.







Giotto's frescoes in ***Scrovegni Chapel***



Symbol of the ***Azure Dragon***



Today, it lives on in the jerseys of ***the Azzurri*** (italian football players)worn with the same devotion and pride, *uniting a nation beneath the timeless shade of sky.*



Azure became a language of the divine ,infinite, luminous and serene. Across cultures, it held different forms of guardianship. In Japan, the ***Azure Dragon*** watched from the east, *protector of Kyoto and symbol of spring's renewal.* In China 'qīng' the word embracing blue, green and turquoise, stood for life's freshness. Psychologically, azure embodies clarity, peace, and optimism a color that *opens the mind like an endless horizon.*

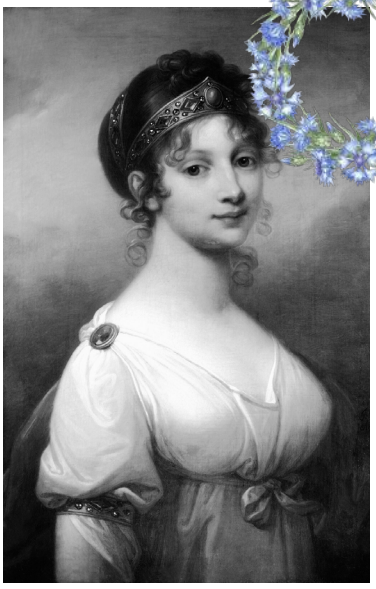
In Europe, azure became a banner of identity and pride. ***Savoy azure*** (azzurro Savoia) also known as Italian blue, traces back to June 20, 1366, when *Amadeus VI Count of Savoy,* ordered that on his flagship a blue flag be raised beside the red banner with the silver cross of Savoy. That flag carried across seas and centuries, gave birth to *Italy's national hue a blue of loyalty, courage and grace.*

# Cornflower Blue



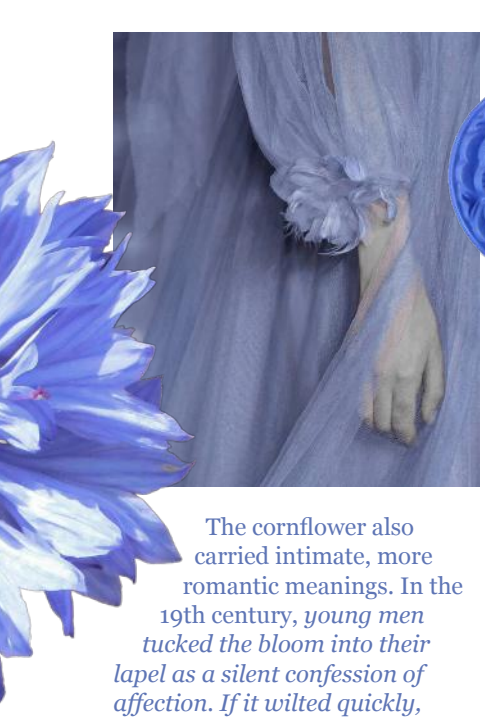
Cornflower blue sits in a rare space between brightness and softness, radiant enough to catch the eye, yet gentle enough to soothe it. Its name comes from the ***wild cornflower*** (Centaurea cyanus), once scattered across European wheat fields,growing freely and unexpectedly among everyday harvests. *What many saw as a weed became a flower steeped in meaning myth and quiet symbolism.*

The earliest traces of the cornflower appear in ancient Egypt, *preserved in art and burial offerings dating back to the Stone and Bronze Ages*. Its vivid, unlikely blue made it precious in a world where such pigment was hard to find. Centuries later, the flower would take on a new identity in Europe, becoming woven into the cultural fabric of German history.



One enduring story dates back to the Napoleonic Wars. When Napoleon's army forced ***Queen Louise of Prussia*** to flee Berlin, she is said to have hidden her children in a *field of cornflowers*. To calm and entertain them, *she wove the blossoms into wreaths*. The memory of this moment lingered, and when Germany was unified in 1871, her son Wilhelm honored her by adopting the cornflower as a symbol of unity. Today, it remains the ***national flower of Germany.***

Queen Louise of Prussia





Bachelor's Button

The cornflower also carried intimate, more romantic meanings. In the 19th century, *young men tucked the bloom into their lapel as a silent confession of affection. If it wilted quickly, it was said the love was unreturned.* This tender ritual earned the blossom its enduring nickname: ***bachelor's button.***

Yet the story of cornflower blue continues beyond meadows and folklore. In the late 1800s, *deep in the of* ***Kashmir***, miners unearthed sapphires of great clarity and hue stones so luminous they were compared to the petals of the cornflower itself. These gems became legendary, their color defining the term ***cornflower blue sapphire***, now one of the most coveted and rare in the world.



# Steel Blue

*Steel blue is forged, not found.* Born from the bluing of steel, when heat coaxes a thin oxide veil to guard the metal from rust. Its tone being a quiet blue-gray, carries the integrity of its namesake: steel- *dependable, enduring and steady*.

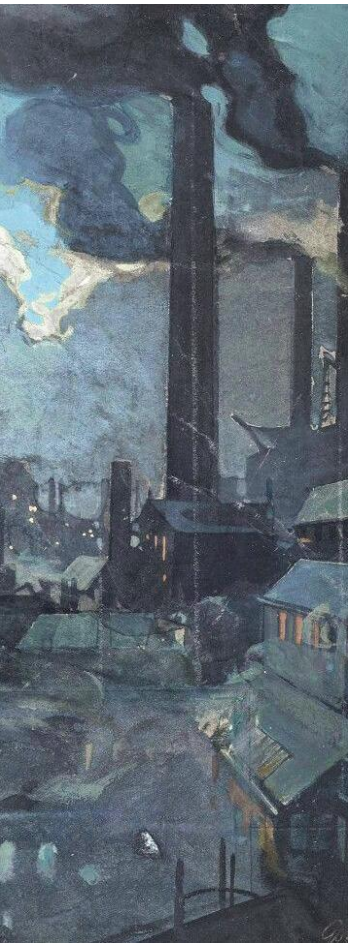
First recorded in 1817, it emerged in the ***age of iron and industry***, when cities were rising from smoke and machines began to define the rhythm of life. Steel blue became the emotional tone of modernity a blue touched by smoke, steel and human ambition.

It mirrored the mood of the early 20th century: *mechanization, urban fog and the muted optimism of progress*. Its presence stretched from the glint of ship hulls to the uniforms of workers and fleets, symbolizing order, trust and resilience. In that way, it reflects the *spirit of those who built, endured, and continued even when the world around them was still learning how to move forward.*





In ***Georgia O'Keeffe's Industrial Skyline at Night*** (1909),Steel blue veils the city in a calm, metallic melancholy. The



hue softens smokestacks and rooftops into silhouette of quiet strength beauty forged in industry's glow, paradox of modernity.

In the *modern imagination*, steel blue has come to tint the future itself. In films like *Blade Runner*,it paints a world of glass, artificial rain, a future envisioned through the *cool melancholy of progress*. It endures because it speaks softly: strength without spectacle, endurance without noise.

In T.S. Eliot's "Preludes" (1917), the ***city breathes in shades of steel blue,*** *smoky evenings, lamplight on wet streets, the quiet fatigue of modern life*. Like the hue itself, the poem captures strength subdued by melancholy.

*The winter evening settles down*
*With smell of steaks in passageways.*
*Six o'clock.*
*The burnt-out ends of smoky days.*
*And now a gusty shower wraps*
*The grimy scraps*
*Of withered leaves about your feet*
*And newspapers from vacant lots;*
*The showers beat*
*On broken blinds and chimney-pots,*
*And at the corner of the street*
*A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps.*
*And then the lighting of the lamps.*

***Preludes***
-T.S. Eliot(1917)



***Blade Runner 2049*** (2017), steel blue becomes the color of the future.

# Cobalt Blue



is a vivid, stable pigment with roots stretching back to antiquity, when *cobalt containing ores were used in production of glass and porcelain*. Although ancient artisans used cobalt  but it was in *1742 that Swedish chemist* ***Georg Brandt*** isolated cobalt as the source of the color. It's *stability in extreme heat* made it one of the few blues that could survive kiln firing. Across continents, it became both a *technical marvel and a cultural symbol, adapting to each region's artistic voice while maintaining its unmistakable brilliance.*



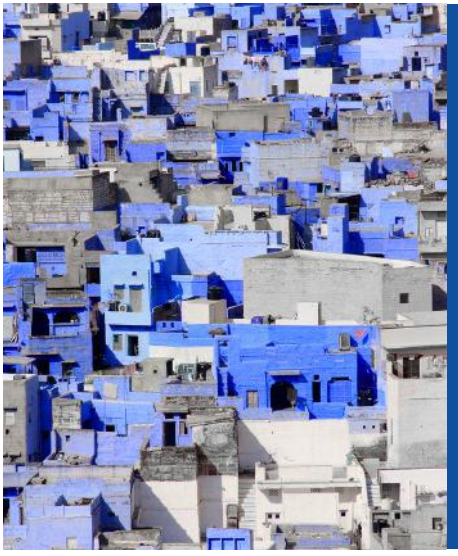
Chinese porcelian tea cups



Iznik plate with tulip motis.

Chinese porcelian with dragon motif





In ***China***, cobalt decorated the famed blue-and-white porcelain of the Ming and Yuan dynasties crisp *motifs of dragons, clouds and florals painted*. These porcelains became popular global luxury. In ***Turkey***, the *Iznik potters* of the Ottoman Empire use cobalt *with turquoise and red in arabesques and* ***tulip motifs*** *that adorned mosques and palaces*. And in ***Indian*** *Jaipur Blue Pottery,* a craft born from Persian techniques perfected Unlike most pottery, *it used a quartz-based, low-fired glaze rather than clay*.

In the ***Netherlands***, *Delftware* borrowed directly from Chinese imports but translated them into *local idioms of dutch windmills, ships and pastoral scenes*. In ***Persia***, *Kashan lustreware* shimmered with cobalt outlines layered *beneath metallic sheens of gold and copper,* reflecting the region's fascination with light and luxury.

In ***Japan***'s *Arita* kilns and ***Korea***'s Joseon dynasty, the blue turned *minimalist and delicate landscapes and calligraphic gestures floating on white, symbolizing purity and discipline*. Further west, in ***Mediterranean*** *maiolica* & ***Portuguese*** *azulejos*, these *hand-painted ceramic tiles have been used to decorate buildings for centuries.*

Together, these forms reveal what cobalt blue came to mean beyond pottery *a color of endurance, cultural dialogue and emotional value*. In contemporary life, cobalt continues to stand for *trust and transcendence* a color that ***feels both ancient & modern, both earthbound & celestial.*** It is a hue that has never faded, because it has *always held more than color, it holds stories.*

Chhawi Niwas, Jaipur



Azulejos tiles



Delftware







Japanese Arita

Jaipuri blue pottery

In art, the pigment's lightfastness, stability & compatibility with other colors made it indispensable. In the early 20th century, American illustrator *Maxfield Parrish* embraced it to such a degree that the hue became colloquially known as "***Parrish blue***," forever tied to his *luminous, dreamlike skyscapes.*



"Daybreak" by Maxfield Parrish (1922)

# Royal Blue



Royal blue's history is intertwined with British royalty and *a dress making competition in the late 1700s*. A shade of blue, ***brighter than indigo and richer than azure***, was created for *Queen Charlotte and subsequently named "royal blue"*. The colour embodies *royalty, luxury and sophistication*.

In France, it was the color of the Royal Guards' uniforms, later *adopted by the entire French Army from the Musketeers through the Napoleonic era and WW I*.

Interestingly, the shade has evolved over time. Prior to the 1950s, it was considered a much darker hue. It wasn't until the late 1980s that the *World Wide Web Consortium* standardized a brighter version, complete with its corresponding RGB code, establishing the modern digital interpretation of royal blue.

Today, several variations of the color exist, including ***Queen Blue***, a medium-toned version and ***Imperial Blue***, a much darker shade.



Royal blue dart frog, *the jewel of the rain forest known for warning, fragility and beauty.* ***A Royal itself !***



Illuminated miniatures

Historically, colour served as a ***marker of social class.*** While the working classes typically wore earthy tones such as brown and green, royalty and nobility favoured blue to signal their elevated status. In a late-15th century French illumination of Louis XII , the king kneels on a blue silk cushion and even his sword is adorned with blue an unmistakable indicator of the hue's regal significance.




Illuminated miniatures
from the Hours of Louis XII (1498-99)



*Royal blue continues to symbolize luxury and sophistication. Its rich depth conveys authority and elegance, whether in fashion, design, or ceremonial contexts.* The color retains its ***regal associations***, reminding us that even in modern forms digital or textile it carries the weight of tradition and refinement.

# Ultramarine

Ultramarine, from the Latin *ultramarinus*, meaning "***beyond the sea***". The earliest traces of the pigment appear in the 6th–7th century cave paintings of *Afghanistan's Bamiyan Valley*, born from the region's lapis lazuli mines. This luminous blue stone, prized above gold, traveled along the Silk Road by donkey and camel, through Syria and Venice, before reaching the palettes of Europe's greatest painters.

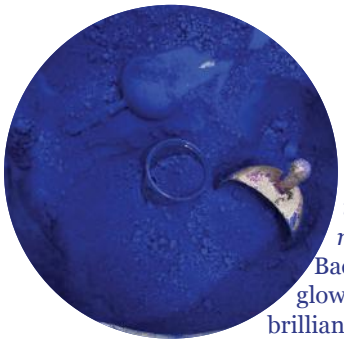
Ground from lapis lazuli, a mineral mix of lazurite, calcite and flecks of pyrite, ultramarine was difficult to produce. The blue had to be extracted from impurities through heat, kneading and washing in lye, *yielding only a few grams of* ***pure pigment***. By the Renaissance, it adorned only the *most sacred subjects* like the robes of the Virgin Mary; the skies of paradise, ***its heavenly tone reserved for divine light and elite patronage.*** Cennino Cennini called it *"Illustrious, beautiful and most perfect, beyond all other colors."*



Giovanni Sassoferrato's The Virgin in Prayer



IKB swimming pool (1957)



*Venetian artists, closest to the supply, used it most lavishly*: Titian's Bacchus and Ariadne(1523) glows with its star-strewn brilliance. Elsewhere, it was luxury rationed by contract as seen in the commissions of Filippino Lippi and Pinturicchio, where funds were set aside solely reserved for a ***Venetian pigment expedition.***

Even *Albrecht Dürer*, the foremost printmaker and painter of the German Renaissance, used it occasionally, but never without complaining bitterly of the cost. When buying pigments in Antwerp in 1521 he paid almost ***100 times more for ultramarine*** what he paid for some earth pigments. In ***1824*** the SEIN in France offered *6,000 francs to anyone who could create an affordable synthetic ultramarine*. Four years later the prize was awarded to ***Jean-Baptiste Guimet***, a French chemist.



Titian's Bacchus and Ariadne (1523)



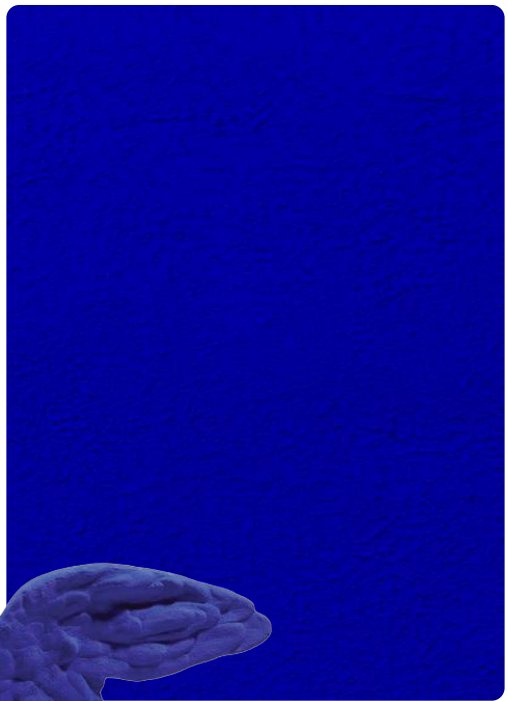
Giovanni Bellini's Madonna and Child (1480)



When *Dante Gabriel Rossettiand Edward Burne Jones* were painting this set of murals in the library of the *Oxford Union in 1857*, a ***potful of ultramarine was stolen*** leaving the patrons horrified.

In 1959, ***Yves Klein*** turned ultramarine into revelation. Fascinated by the color's sacred lineage and ties to the infinite sky and the divine, *he sought to make blue itself the subject of art*. Dissatisfied with how traditional binders dulled the pigment's radiance, Klein collaborated with *chemist Édouard Adam* to develop a new synthetic resin that preserved ultramarine's raw brilliance. The result was ***International Klein Blue (IKB)***, a hue so vivid it seemed to hover between the material and the immaterial.

For Klein, IKB was not a color to depict the world but ***a world unto itself***, a pure experience of sensation and space. His monochrome canvases, stripped of form and line, invited viewers into meditation, where blue became both void and fullness. He described it as "*the most perfect expression of blue*," a color that could dissolve the boundaries between body and spirit, matter and infinity.





Victoire de Samothrace IKB



*"Anthropometries"*- living Brushes series by Yves Klein



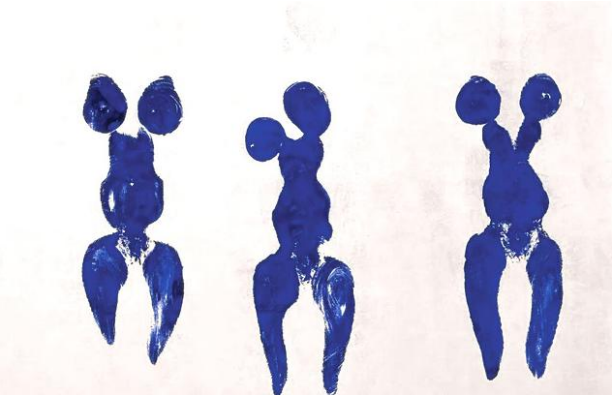
Avatar 2009, bioluminescent world of Pandora

In the Avatar franchise, ultramarine transcends its traditional connection to the sea to become *the color of the unreal, a portal to the imaginative and the otherworldly*. The luminous blue of *Pandora's Na'vi* & its bioluminescent landscapes transforms ultramarine into a symbol of ***life beyond human reach.***





In fashion, its power persists. Designers like ***Stéphane Rolland*** drape it across sculptural gowns like molten light, a modern relic of the divine. Ultramarine, *once ground by hand for saints and queens, now flows as silk and movement commanding reverence not by brightness, but by depth.*



# Persian Blue



The ***Imam Mosque*** of Isfahan still stand as hymns to this vision, their domes and minarets glazed in Persian blue tiles that mirror the heavens.



*Islamic star tile*, which was a common decorative element in architecture.



Over centuries, this hue came *to represent the very essence of Persia*, now Iran. Persian Blue is a hue that carries the weight of sky and sea, deep as twilight, serene as prayer. It draws its roots from lapis lazuli and indigo. Lapis lazuli, mined from the Badakhshan mountains of present-day. Afghanistan, once shimmered brighter than gold. Its powdered form travelled along ancient trade routes, tinting manuscripts, ceramics and sacred walls with the color of infinity. Often mistaken for ultramarine, a term tied to the European use of lapis, Persian tilework blues instead emerged from cobalt, turquoise glazes, and local innovations.

In Persian culture, blue was never mere pigment, it was transcendence made visible. It bridged the earthly and the divine, cloaking mosques and palaces in a celestial glow.



Persian Carpet



Through kashi, the intricate art of Persian tilework, artisans transformed architecture into meditation, where every curve of turquoise and cobalt reflected cosmic order.

In textiles, this same devotion to color found expression in Isfahan and Tabriz carpets, where Persian blue and gold threads intertwined to form balanced, star-like geometries woven constellations for the floor. Even in pottery, blue remained a guardian hue. The traditional blue pomegranate motif, symbolizing fertility, abundance, and life, echoed the same sacred devotion found in mosques and manuscripts.

Persian Blue endures as a symbol of cultural memory  a color that holds the divine within the human hand. Whether in tiled domes or silk brocade, continues to whisper the same truth Persia always knew: that blue is not merely seen, but felt the color of devotion.



Ceramic Ewar
(13th century) Iran



The *traditional blue pomegranate motif*, symbolizing fertility and life



Illuminated folios of The ***Shahnameh***, Persia's Book of Kings,blues outline epic battles and divine destinies, binding myth and faith in strokes of celestial pigment.



Persian blue tilework mirroring the cosmos on earth.

# Egyptian Blue

***Iryt*** *(artificial)* ***hsbd*** *(lapis lazuli)*, Egyptian blue is the ***world's oldest synthetic pigment***, first appearing in the around 2500 BC. It symbolized the *sky, the Nile, creation and divinity*. Its chemical name is $CaCuSi_4O_{10}$, and the raw ingredients used in its manufacture were *chalk or limestone; a copper-containing mineral*, such as ***malachite***, *which gave it the blue color* and sand. These were likely fired together, to create a brittle, glassy solid that was ground down and then refired to produce *an intense blue that was long-lasting*.

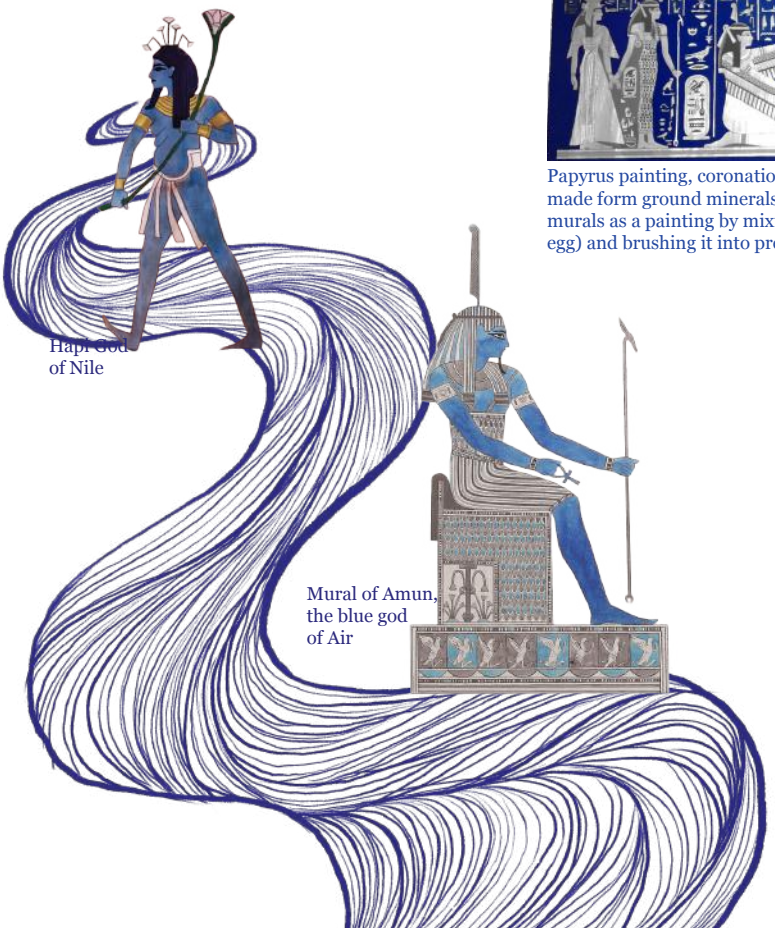
The *consistency* of the result of this experiment was also incredible, the pigment is *exactly the same chemical in tombs built across nearly 3000 years*.

Scientists discovered in 2009 that when visible light is shined on them , Egyptian ***blue molecules*** ***emit infrared radiations*** *making it identifiable in ancient artifacts even after thousands of years*.

Its unique fluorescent properties make it a potential candidate for biomedical applications, such as optical contrast agents.



Papyrus painting, coronation of Queen Nefertari. The pigment, made form ground minerals heated togather, was applied to murals as a painting by mixing powder with a binder ( like gum/ egg) and brushing it into prepared wall surface.



Hapi God of Nile

Mural of Amun, the blue god of Air



This iconic blue *coated the skin and hair of gods in temple reliefs, the robes of pharaohs and sacred objects.* ***It was paired with gold to unite the eternal sky and sun***. It also adorned protective amulets notably the ***Eye of Horus*** believed to shield the wearer from harm. In Egypt, ***the wedjat*** eye was placed on amulets and tombs as a sign of healing and safeguarding.A similar protective motif appears in *Greek and Ottoman cultures* as the ***evil-eye charm***. Although the materials differ Egyptian blue in ancient Egypt versus colored glass beads in evil eye amulets the symbolic function a watchful, blue eye to ward off harm remains consistent."



The Wedjat

Evil Eye Charm



This is a royal cartouche from ancient egypt, inlaid with egyptian blue, gold, shown here as part of a funerary object.





Pahroh of Tut



ancient amulet for protection





***Blue Alchemy***, Siba Sahabi It aims to revives 'Egyptian blue' and take the viewer to an ancient pottery workshop that served as a laboratory for alchemical experiments.

Ancient manuscripts reveal that ***eye makeup*** *containing blue pigments and lead-based compounds* was thought to *channel divine protection from Horus and Ra, warding off illness.*

This belief had practical roots: *the lead compounds may have* ***helped prevent or treat bacterial infections*** *like conjunctivitis,* common in the marshlands along the Nile.

# Prussian Blue

*Discovered by accident* in Berlin around 1706, Prussian Blue, first known as *Berlin Blue* emerged from a failed attempt to make red pigment. Pigment-maker ***Johann Jacob Diesbach*** and alchemist ***Johann Conrad Dippel***, found that contaminated materials transformed his mixture into an intense, stable blue. Cheaper and more lightfast than ultramarine, it quickly revolutionized European art, textiles and printing.

By the early 18th century, it had become the *signature blue* of the Prussian Army's uniforms, a color that embodied *discipline, precision and order*. The shade remained a symbol of authority and endurance, still present in ceremonial use until World War I. Today, about *12,000 tonnes are produced annually*.





A Prussian general's uniform 19th century

Once the steadfast hue of Prussia's military uniforms, embodied ***discipline, order & precision*** qualities mirrored in the choice to restore, Big Ben's clock faces to the same shade. In both contexts, the color functions as a ***silent disciplinarian.*** *On the battlefield, it maintained formation; on the clock face, it maintains rhythm.*

Together, they reveal how color can act as infrastructure, shaping behavior, instilling order and sustaining systems that demand *unwavering consistency*.



Great Clock of Westminster, Big Ben







Blueprints, technical drawings

In 1842, British scientist ***John Herschel*** used Prussian Blue to develop the ***cyanotype process***, the blueprint technology that transformed technical drawing and early photography. Chemically, it is formed by the reaction of *an iron(III) salt with a ferrocyanide salt, creating ferric ferrocyanide,* a complex whose lattice gives it both depth and stability.

Unexpectedly, Prussian blue found a place in modern medicine, that same structure allows it to bind radioactive cesium and thallium, making it a ***modern medical antidote for heavy metal poisoning.***



***Cynotype*** stands for *Precision*, capturing exact lines and measurements, embodying the 19th century's faith in science, progress and order. Anna Atkins began using it to record plants and algae, it became a form of visual preservation, a quiet blue memory of life and structure.



In art, Prussian Blue first appeared in *Entombment of Christ (1709)*, the earliest known painting to use the pigment. Later in 1831 it gave *depth to The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, its imported hue shaping one of most iconic prints.



*Hokusai's The Great Wave off Kanagawa*


*Werff's Entombment of Christ (1709)*



# from INDIA GO

The word indigo comes from the Greek ***indikón*** "from India." It's a fitting name, for the story of indigo begins in the Indian subcontinent, where traces of the dye have been found in textiles dating back over 5,000 years to the Indus Valley Civilization. Known locally as *nila*, the pigment soon became one of India's most prized exports, so valuable it was called ***blue gold.***

From these ancient vats of dye grew an empire of color. Extracted from the leaves of ***Indigofera tinctoria***, indigo required patience and precision. *The leaves were soaked, fermented, and oxidized until the liquid deepened into a sediment of pure blue.* Once dried into solid cakes, it journeyed along trade routes from Bengal to Cairo, from there to the looms of Africa, Europe and Japan.

By the 17th century, indigo had become one of the world's most profitable commodities, fueling the rise of the British and Dutch East India Companies. From royal robes to sailors' uniforms, the same pigment united the fields of Bengal with the wardrobes of empires.



Indigo Plant

For centuries, indigo was the ***color of privilege***, a pigment too laborious, volatile, and time-bound for ordinary hands. In royal courts from India to Europe, this deep blue came to signify not only wealth but knowledge: mastery over process, chemistry and time. Pharaohs were buried in indigo-dyed linens believed to offer *protection in the afterlife*, while Indian rulers commissioned jamdani, kalamkari, and silk textiles saturated in its depth. In Europe, indigo-laden velvets and silks were worn by scholars and nobility.

As maritime trade routes expanded and colonial demand intensified, indigo slipped from courtly exclusivity into everyday life, yet it never lost its symbolic density.In West Africa, among the Yoruba, indigo gave rise to ***adire***, textiles created through hand-painting and resist-dyeing using cassava starch, raffia ties, and wooden stamps. Each pattern functioned as visual speech: concentric circles invoking womanhood and fertility, linear grids mapping lineage and social order, broken motifs marking migration and memory. Adire was not fashion alone; it was a mnemonic system, preserving oral histories through cloth.

In Japan, ***aizome*** evolved into both craft and worldview. Samurai favored indigo-dyed garments not only for their subdued elegance but for indigo's natural *antibacterial and insect-repellent qualities* a functional armor beneath metal. Farmers and laborers wore noragi and boro. Japanese dyers understood indigo as a "***living blue***" (aoi ai), sustained through fermentation and constant attention.



Blue silk taffeta evening dress,1855





Adire textile



Aizome wall hanging

Europe's cool climate made cultivating Indigofera tinctoria impossible due to the climate conditions. In its absence, dyers sought alternatives. They turned to plants like Amorpha fruticosa, producing a pigment known as false or ***bastard indigo***. It became a practical solution during the height of global demand for blue dye.



Amorpha fruticosa plant, bastard Indigo



The maritime republic of *Genoa emerged as one of its most significant importers*. Local weavers used this more accessible dye on sturdy cotton fabric made for laborers sailors, fishermen and dockworkers. The cloth became known as *bleu de Gênes,* "**the blue of Genoa**." When the name traveled across borders and languages, bleu de Gênessoftened into a new word: ***Jeans***. What began as an imitation dye quietly reshaped textile history, shifting the color blue from elite rarity to working-class necessity. Bastard indigo democratized the hue long before denim carried meaning it made blue belong to everyone.

In 1897, synthetic indigo entered the market, replacing natural dye almost entirely. What once relied on climate, soil and season could now be produced in laboratories, making blue not only democratic but effectively limitless.

The museum at FIT, "Denim: Fashion's Frontier." Men's jeans. Blue Denim. Circa 1840, USA.



If indigo once clothed the elite, by the 19th century it had found a humbler, more democratic form denim. ***Denim*** itself is a warp-faced twill, woven from blue-dyed warp and undyed white weft threads. Its distinctive fade comes from indigo's unique behavior: rather than penetrating the fiber, the dye clings to its surface, wearing away slowly over time. The traditional rope-dyeing process — where yarn bundles are repeatedly dipped into indigo vats and lifted into the air to oxidize builds that unmistakable depth of color layer by layer.

While modern denim now comes in countless colors and weights, traditional selvedge denim, woven on shuttle looms from the 1940s, remains a mark of authenticity. *Once a utilitarian fabric for miners and railway workers, denim evolved into a global symbol of rebellion and freedom.* After World War II, American youth adopted blue jeans as an ***emblem of defiance*** a quiet protest against conformity. Icons like James Dean and Marlon Brando turned indigo blue into the color of cool.



A rare woman's denim jacket from the late 1800s reveals how the fabric crossed gender lines. Shaped with cinched wrists and a fitted waist, hourglass silhouette.



**"Not a single chest of Indigo reached England without being *stained with human blood*."**

EWL Tower, district magistrate of Faridpur, 1860

# Navy Blue

Navy Blue takes its name from the dark uniforms introduced for officers of the *British Royal Navy in 1748 a choice both practical and symbolic*. The deep hue hid stains from long sea voyages, *while indigo dye resisted sunlight and salt*, embodying endurance itself. Over time, the color transcended its maritime origins to become a ***global symbol of authority, discipline and reliability***, values deeply tied to naval tradition. Later adopted in military, police and formal uniforms worldwide.

Culturally, its depth carries *spiritual and philosophical meaning*. In the Indian flag, the navy blue Ashoka Chakra stands for the *infinite nature of* ***truth and dharma****, mirroringthe vastness of the sky and sea*.



*Ashok Chakra in Indian flag*

In fashion and design, navy blue embodies ***timeless elegance*** offering the elegance of black with a softer, more approachable tone. It is often choosn for its timelessness, adaptability and subtle power.It's the hue of trust and professionalism in corporate identity, the sophistication of a tailored suit, and confidence that never goes out of style.





*The Royal Navy Officers' Uniform, Illustration*



*Friedrich's Monk by the Sea* (1808–10) is an austere seascape where a solitary monk stands before an expanse of deep, desaturated navy blue sea and sky merging almost indistinguishably. The monk's small, upright figure against this immense horizon evokes the humility and obedience demanded by nature's laws. This ***visual restraint mirrors the discipline and order of the ocean itself.***

*More than a color, navy blue represents the meeting of* ***depth and order the discipline of the sea*** *and the poise of the human spirit.*



# Midnight Blue

Midnight blue carries the ***quiet mystery of a dream***. It is the color of the night just before sleep fully takes hold, when the world feels suspended and imagination stirs. In art, from van Gogh's swirling skies to deep-toned canvases, it evokes a sense of *floating between reality and possibility*.

The color has appeared in formal uniforms, some ceremonial attire, and national flags, often associated with authority, dignity and sophistication. In fashion and design, midnight blue continues to be chosen for its *elegance, offering a depth and subtlety* that black cannot always provide.

Midnight blue carries a quiet intensity, ***mysteriously alluring*** It evokes reflection and introspection, suggesting the space between day and night, the known and the unknown. It becomes a color that communicates depth, restraint and understated beauty.





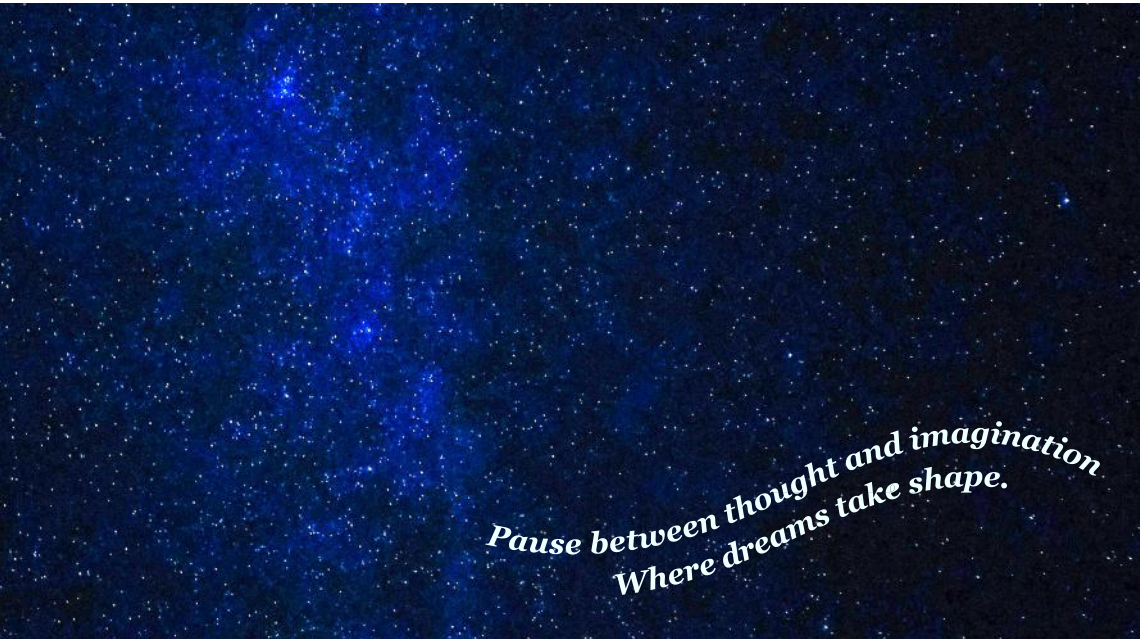




***Café Terrace at Night***
Vincent van Gogh's (1888)



***Starry Night Over the Rhône***
Vincent van Gogh's (1888)












***The Starry Night***
Vincent van Gogh's (1889)

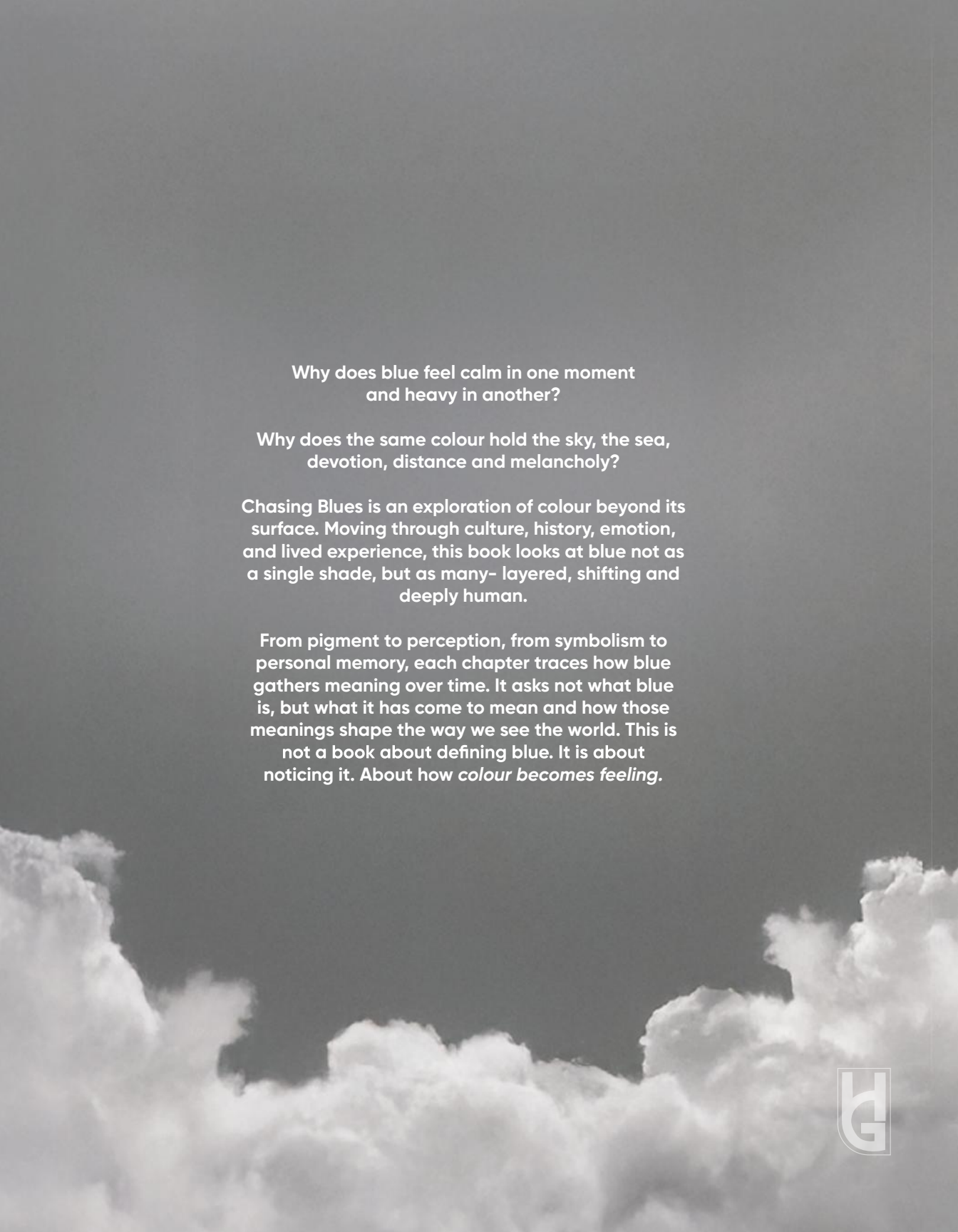
“ But in the end, blue resists certainty.
It is a question, not an answer
a horizon that moves every
time you name it. ”

This book exists because of many hands, minds and moments that shaped it along the way. I am deeply grateful to my faculty and mentors at the GLS Institute of Design, whose guidance, critique and insistence on clarity helped me push beyond what I thought I understood about this subject. Thank you for challenging the way I see, read and create.

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**Why does blue feel calm in one moment and heavy in another?**

**Why does the same colour hold the sky, the sea, devotion, distance and melancholy?**

**Chasing Blues is an exploration of colour beyond its surface. Moving through culture, history, emotion, and lived experience, this book looks at blue not as a single shade, but as many- layered, shifting and deeply human.**

**From pigment to perception, from symbolism to personal memory, each chapter traces how blue gathers meaning over time. It asks not what blue is, but what it has come to mean and how those meanings shape the way we see the world. This is not a book about defining blue. It is about noticing it. About how *colour becomes feeling.***