

# FOUND STANDARDS

Jon Malis

## ABSTRACT

Traditionally, photographic tests and calibration charts confirm that images match the scene in which they are captured. This ensures that the camera and lenses are performing to their maximum ability and that images and their inherent colours accurately represent the location and photographer’s intent.

Many of these charts have expiration dates stamped into them, and it has become general practice to replace them regularly because the reference tiles may change due to age and environmental factors.

Through collecting and documenting so-called “retired” and obsolete charts, I wonder how perceptions and understandings of photography have changed throughout the technological development of the medium. What does “photo-accurate” mean – and is it still relevant? Between the modern ubiquity of (digital) photography, social media ‘image enhancement’, and especially AI-generated content, these relics question how and if the photographic medium be trusted in the same ways it was once used for technical and scientific documentation.

## A POINT OF VIEW

Traditionally, photographic tests and calibration charts confirm that images match the scene in which they are captured. They ensure that the cameras and lenses perform to their maximum ability and that images and their inherent colours accurately represent the location and photographer’s intent.

As tools and objects of calibration – definitions of an ‘absolute standard’ – such test charts play a critical role in photo-documentation and commercial photographic processes. But what happens when the test chart itself deviates from their defined standard? Moreover, how have modern technologies re-defined the standard in a way that calls earlier images into question: Is ‘red’ from a 1950s photographic card the same as ‘red’

in a 1970s TV pattern test generator or the same as ‘red’ in the most recent MacBeth Color Chart SG? How does a contemporary photographic lens’ resolving power perform when coupled with a test chart from the 1960’s? Or vice-versa?

As the most iconic of these test charts – the Macbeth ColorChecker – approaches its 50th birthday (as described by McCamy et al., 1976), this body of work celebrates and interrogates this staple of photographic reproduction.

Many of these charts have creation and/or expiration dates stamped into them, yet even with complete documentation, these test charts can change over time: dyes fade, metrics change,



Figure 1



Figure 2

Figure 1: Color Wheel, The Photography of Colored Objects, Third Edition. Eastman Kodak, 1919 (2024) by Jon Malis. Digital Pigment Print, 140mm x 140mm  
 Figure 2: Cyan and Magenta (no Yellow) with Black Overlay, Hanson Engraving Company Color Process Guide (2024) by Jon Malis. Digital Pigment Print, 390mm x 400mm

printing stock yellows and dulls; age and use fundamentally alter test charts in unpredictable ways. The document has lost its value as a dictionary, but as an object, the developing patina proffers questions about what photo accuracy truly means. Offering a glimpse into the moment in which they were developed and published, obsolete and outdated test charts document the history of the medium through this lens of photo accuracy, prompting questions about how recent developments, such as the modern ubiquity of (digital) photography, social media ‘image enhancement’ (such as Facetune and other filters), and especially AI-generated content, impact our trust of the image against the same ways it was once used for technical and scientific documentation.

Considering common perceptions of accuracy within the photographic image, my creative research is focused on developing a (visual) understanding of how the physical medium of photography contains its own unique structures, properties, and definitions. These invisible structures – colour, pixel, resolution, compression - form the backbone for all photographs and digital images, yet typically remain unnoticed or understood by most those viewing or interacting with photos.

As I see it, this contradiction within - that of imperfect accuracy – embodies the photograph’s power in its most fundamental form. For a medium obsessed with and striving for technical perfection, these images remind us that the photograph is anything but that neutral observer we think it to be.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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Jon Malis is an interdisciplinary artist investigating the representation and display of visual content, focusing on how various methods of presentation and production can alter the viewer’s interpretation, and experience of visual culture. He has been recognized with the National Photography Award from the von Lebig Art Center, grants from the Maryland State Arts Council, DC Commission on the Arts & Humanities, semi-final nominations for the Lumen, Sondheim and the Trawick prizes and a Panavision New Filmmaker’s Grant. He currently serves as Program Director for Photography at Loyola University Maryland, Baltimore, MD, USA.



Figure 3

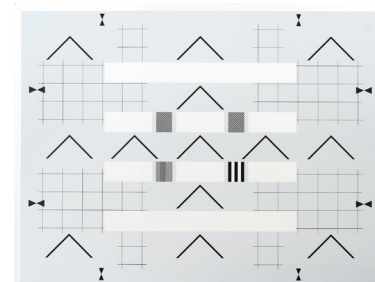


Figure 4

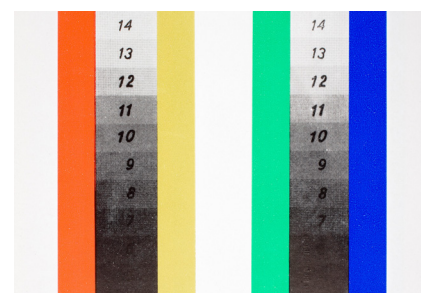


Figure 5

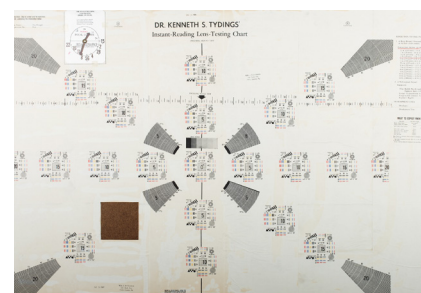


Figure 6

Figure 3: Logarithmic Reflectance EIA Standard, Accu-Chart Video Test Chart System For Field and Studio Use by Vertex Video Systems, 1983 (2017) Jon Malis. Digital Pigment Print, 317x241mm  
 Figure 4: Ikegami Camera Registration Test Chart (2023) by Jon Malis. Digital Pigment Print, 594x457mm  
 Figure 5: Wedge According to TGL 143-403, ORWO Wedges & Boards for Sensitometric Purposes (2023) Jon Malis. Digital Pigment Print, 140x190mm  
 Figure 6: Dr. Kenneth S. Tydings' Instant-Reading Lens-Testing Chart, 1964 (2017) Jon Malis. Digital Pigment Print, 1067x686mm

IMAGE GALLERY



Figure 1: Color Wheel, The Photography of Colored Objects, Third Edition. Eastman Kodak, 1919 (2024) by Jon Malis. Digital Pigment Print, 140mm x 140mm

Figure 2: Cyan and Magenta (no Yellow) with Black Overlay, Hanson Engraving Company Color Process Guide (2024) by Jon Malis. Digital Pigment Print, 390mm x 400mm

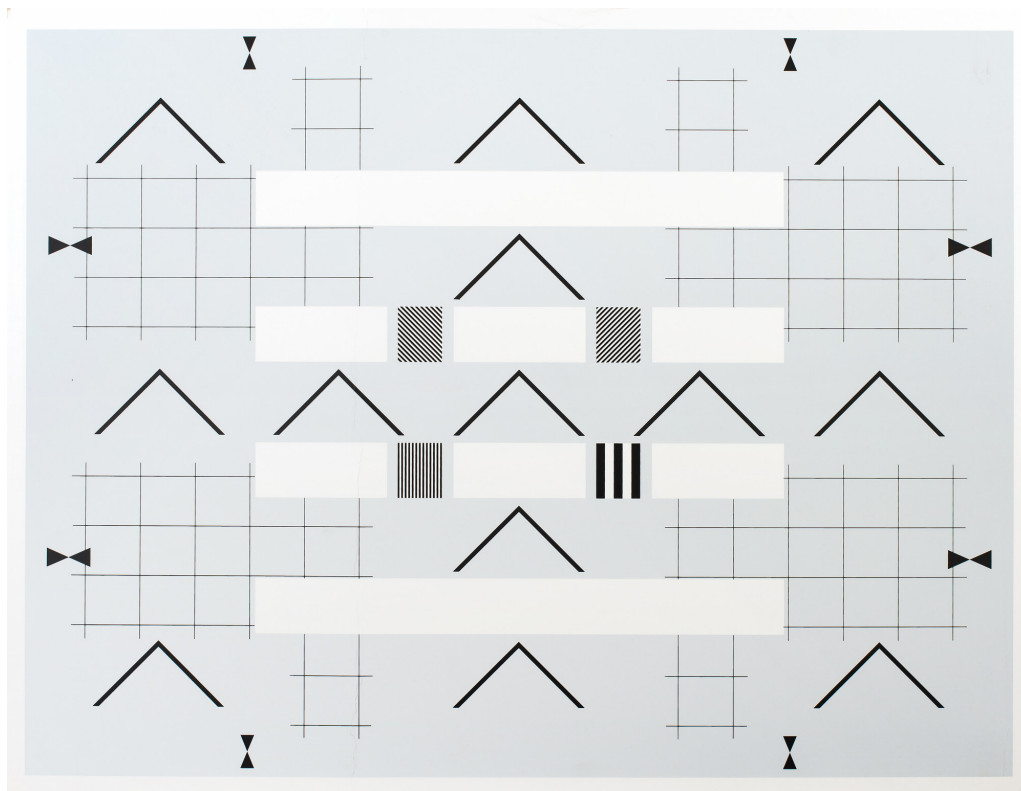


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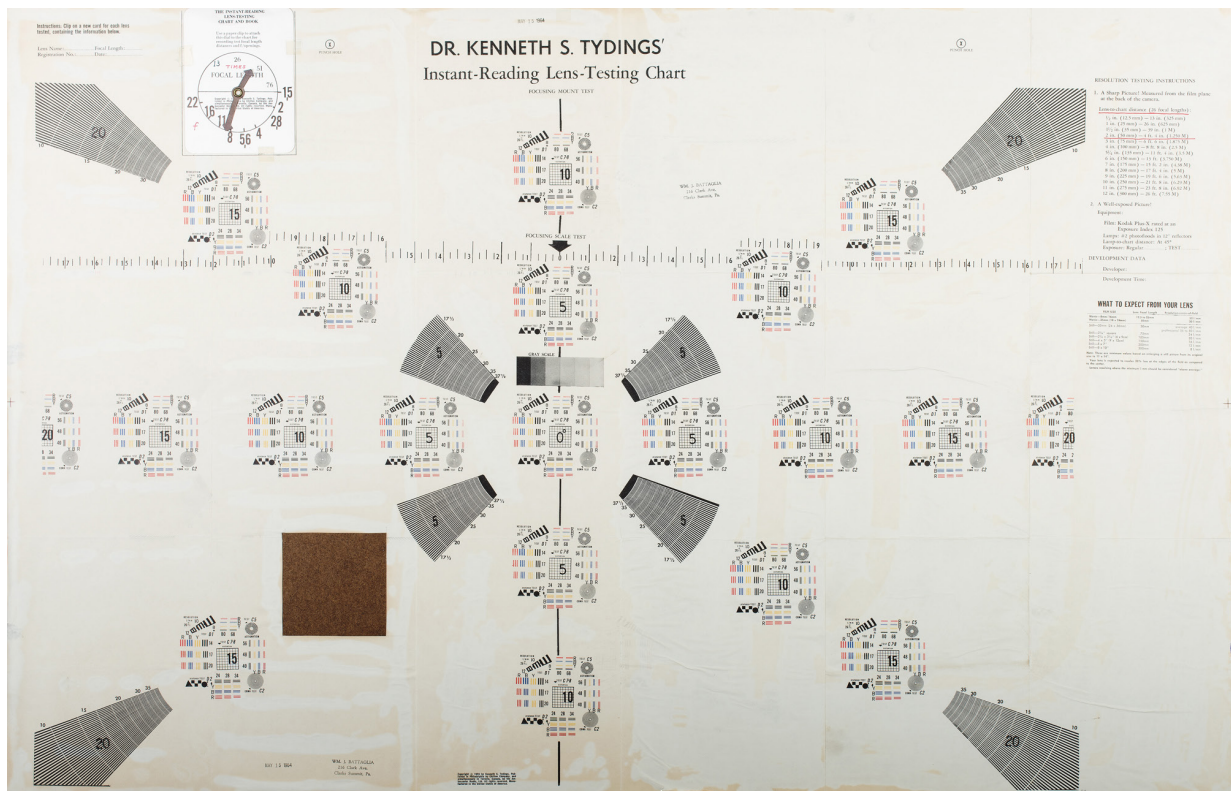
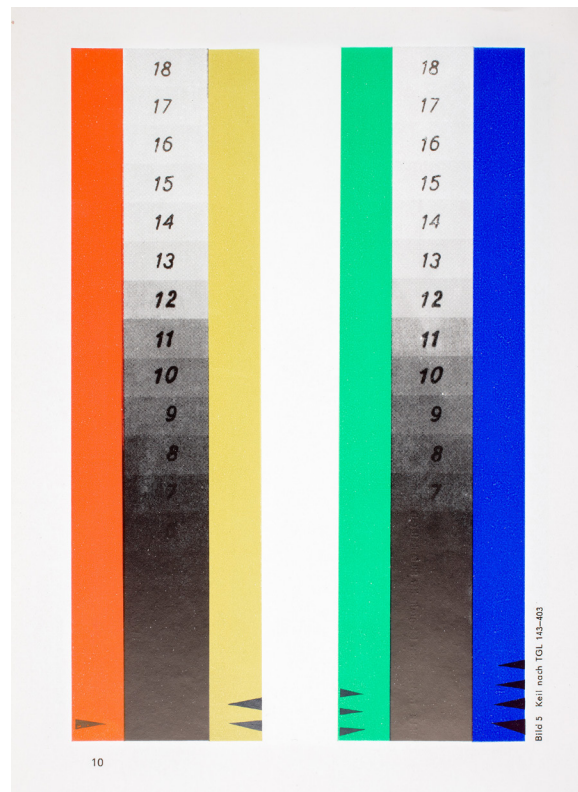


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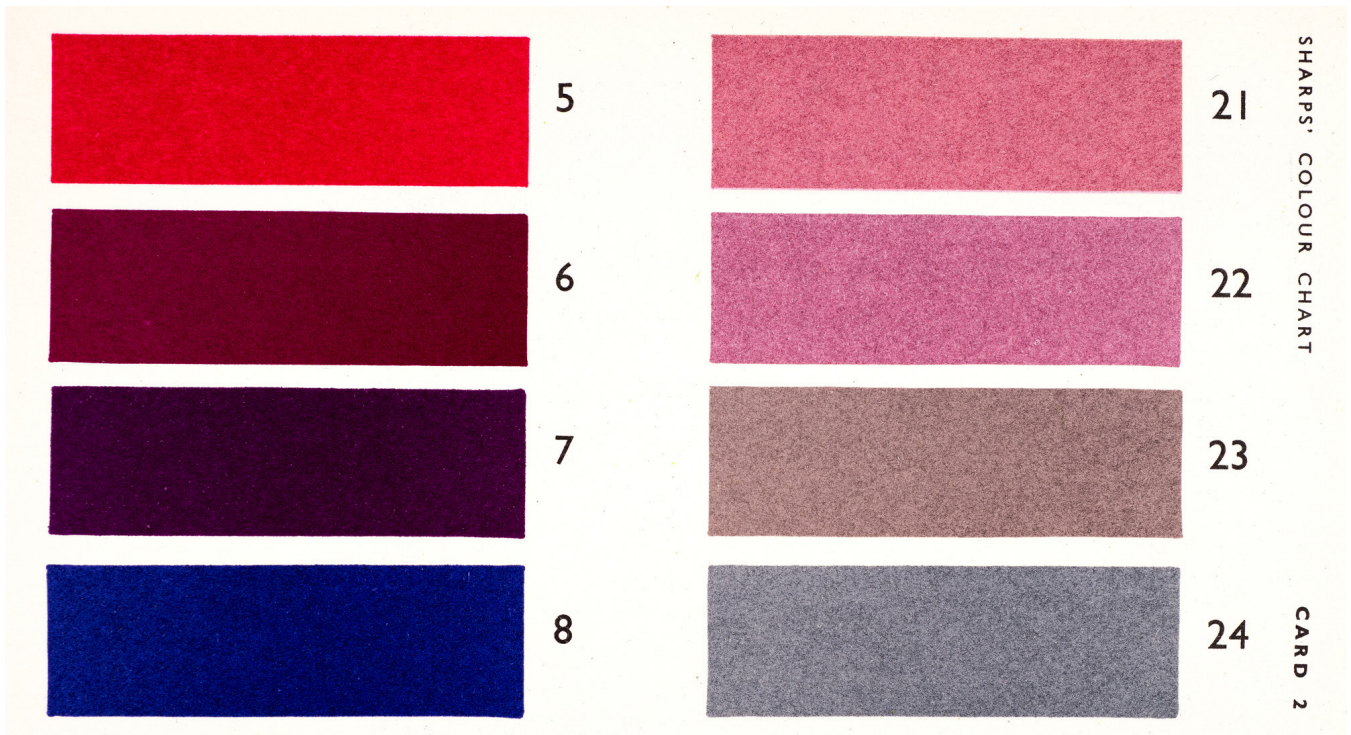
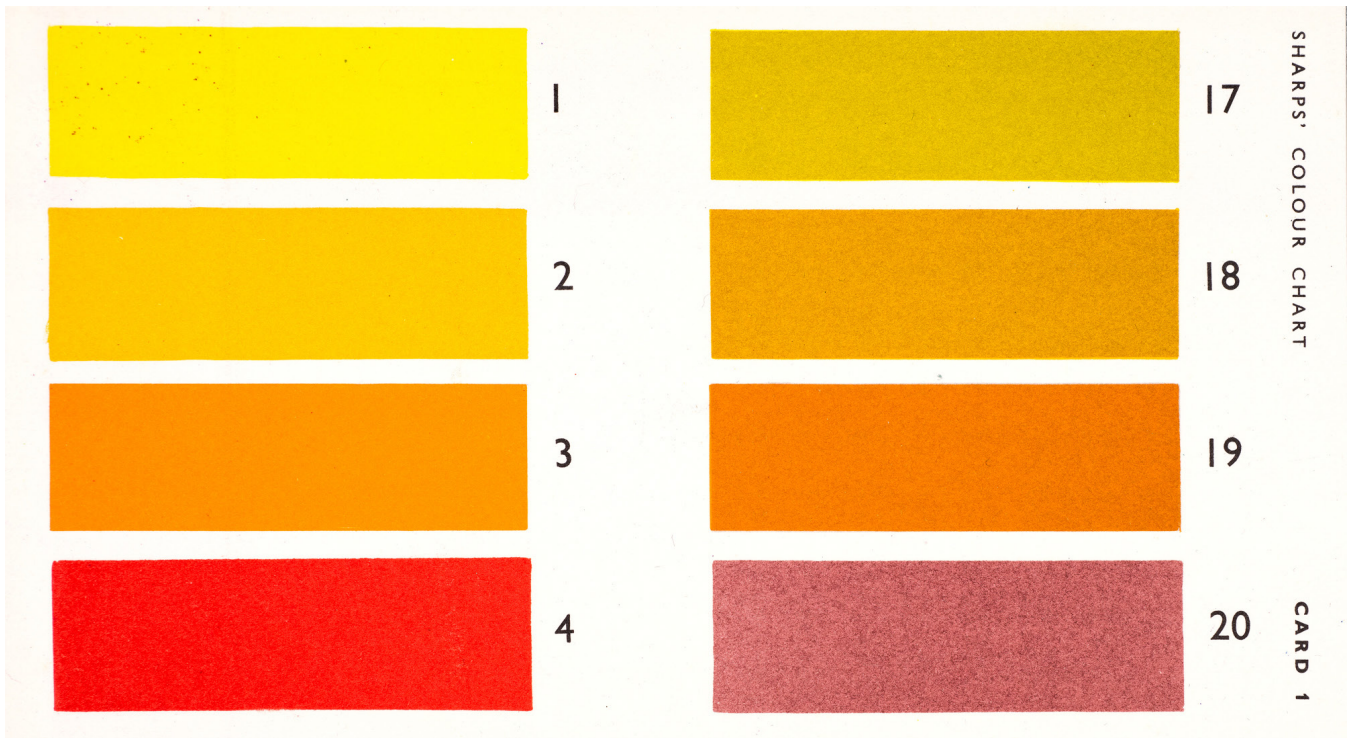


Figure 7: Colour Card #1, Sharps' Colour Chart For Cinematography and Photography, 1956 (2017) by Jon Malis. Digital Pigment Print, 203mm x 111mm

Figure 8: Colour Card #2, Sharps' Colour Chart For Cinematography and Photography, 1956 (2017) by Jon Malis. Digital Pigment Print, 203mm x 111mm

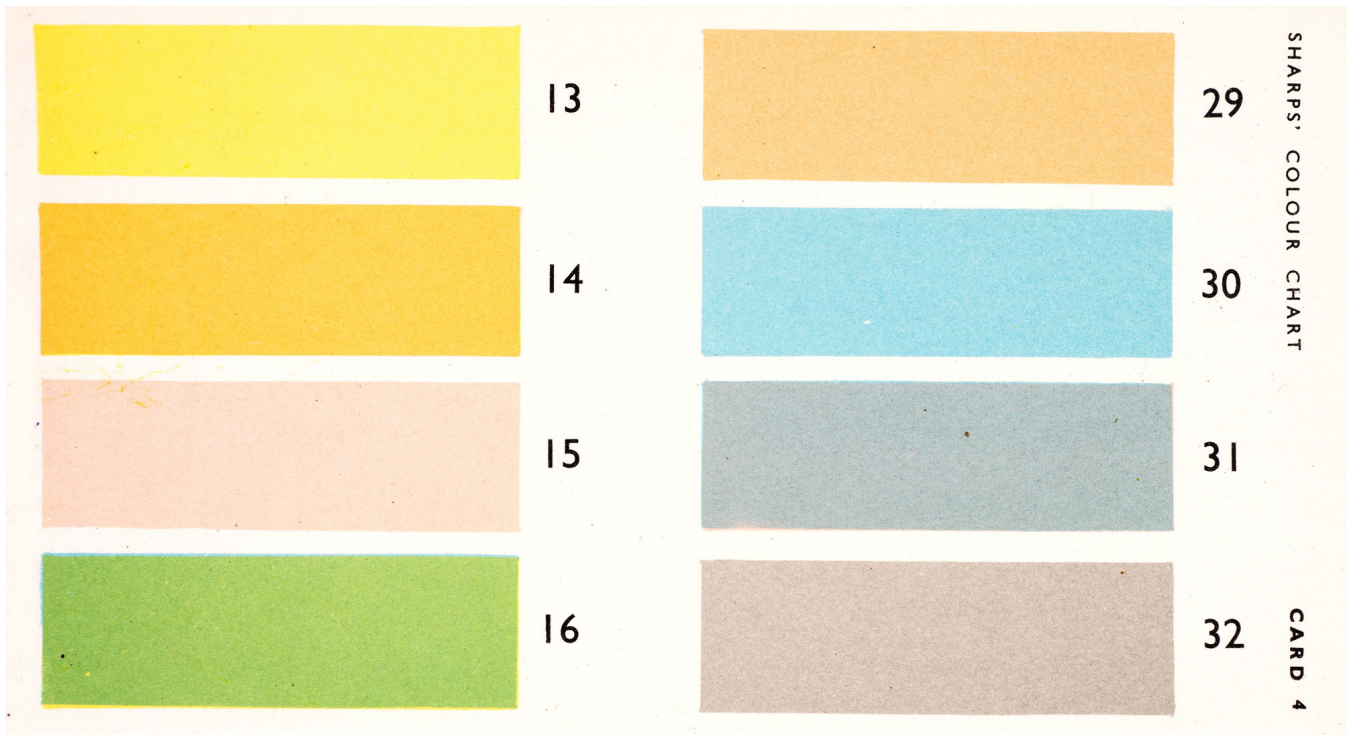
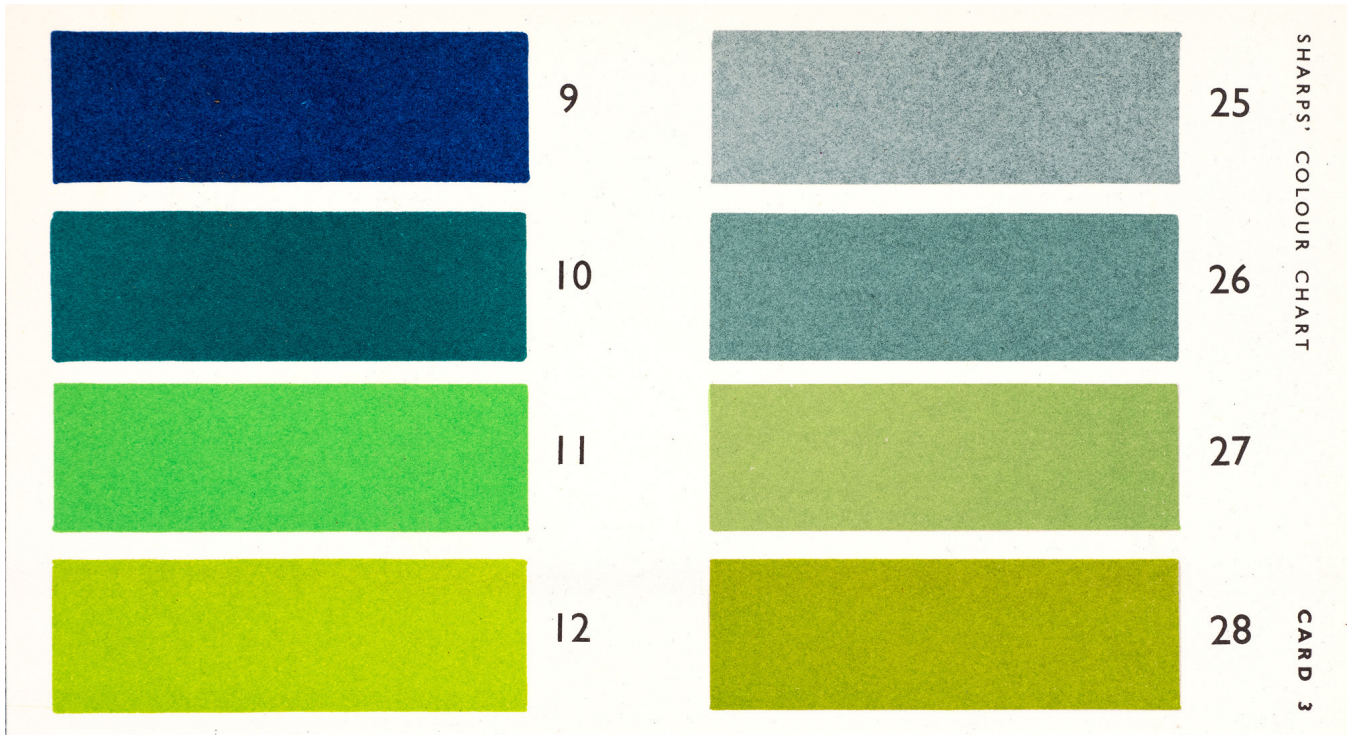


Figure 9: Filter Test Chart, Eastman Kodak Company (2024) by Jon Malis. Digital Pigment Print, 105mm x 235mm

Figure 10: Grayscale and Color Control Patches, Kodak Color Dataguide Revised 6th Edition, 1978 (2024) by Jon Malis. Digital Pigment Print, 127mm x 220mm