

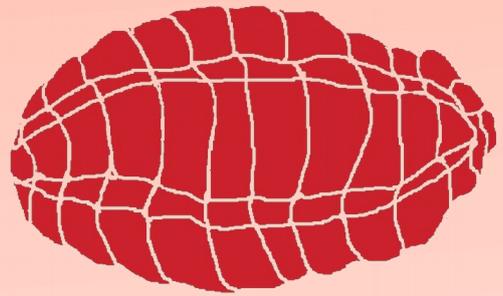
The cochineal (E120 / natural red 4) is a small insect native to tropical and subtropical South America and southern Mexico. It lives primarily on the prickly pear cactus, feeding on its nutrients and moisture. It does not move, but uses its tiny hairs to catch the wind to carry it from plant to plant.

It is the source of the natural dye carmine, obtained from carminic acid in the body and eggs which is mixed with aluminium or calcium salts to create carmine dye.

The cochineals are collected by hand- brushed off of the plant and dried before being powdered for pigment. They are primarily used as a food and lipstick colourant.

In brief, cochineals were first used as dye by the Zapotec and Mayan people as early as the 2nd century BC. When the Spanish invaded they were astounded by the red, having only managed comparatively dulled hues themselves. Cochineals became an important export good during the colonial period- Mexico's 2nd most valued after silver. The origin of the dye was kept a secret until the 18th century, at which time large scale production began in Guatemala and the Canary Islands, Spain and North Africa. After synthetic pigments and dyes such as alizarin were invented in the late 19th century, carmine dye production gradually diminished.

The absence of red after the last cochineal



In the early decades of the 21st century, religion in western society was being replaced with a dogma of the self seemingly situated in wellness and spirituality but in actuality, situated in commodity and the presiding belief system of capitalism and individualism. Under a latent cognizance concerning the detrimental affects of our activities and an inability to address them adequately without the impetus of those in power, the religion of the self was gladly accepted and the body as temple was adopted as a visual ideology. With this in mind, naturally there was an increased awareness of toxins, and a public desire to come in to contact only with organic, natural substances.

Another closely linked strand of public consciousness was the desire for authenticity, a trend again based in individualism and grossly mutated over time and commodification to be completely impractical and nonsensical, materialising in charcoal ice creams, sundial watches and eating out of miniature shopping trolleys.

The result of the meeting of these two ideologies meant that people looked again at cochineals as their preferred source of permanent red. The carcinogens in inorganic reds such as alizarin crimson, cadmium and vermilion became problematic in public consciousness, and as the choice of the knights of the round table, of nobility and religious icons, of communist parties and the lips of the bourgeoisie, its rich history appealed to our sense of self importance too.

As interest in cochineals was revived it became evident that the traditional methods of hand collection were not going to meet demand. Rampant consumerism and the destabilised climate disrupted their growth, and despite conservation efforts and attempts at factory farming, a decade down the line cochineals had more or less disappeared. Their extinction was hastened by Snout moths due in fact to a widespread disinterest in gluten. Grains being the main food source of the snout moth, decreased cereal production meant that cochineals became an important food source for them and consequently their life cycle was severely disrupted.

As the cochineals dwindled, reds faded to pinks as if blotted on tissue, simultaneously present and inevitably obsolete.

For a time, things were better. We enjoyed the novelty of pink, the passivity of it. We felt comforted in the face of disaster and disinterested in our spiralled politics. People slept more.

We were in fact, unwilling to engage in *any* serious matters, and cracks began to show in a number of areas. Personal and public debt crept up, sportsmen became more amicable, performance dropped in school and professional settings, windows were left smeared and hazy- a general sloppiness sunk in. We couldn't stop. Photographs had to be processed in darkness resulting in reports of chemical burns and a lot of memories faded to nothing.

Flags played a significant role in the upheavals, with national pride being twisted into the new fabric of nonchalant sarcasm. Men in pastel-shaded polo necks and alizarin faces stood around in circles disgruntled at their new found embarrassment in waving their flags. Unfortunately the time of pink was brief, but it is generally accepted that had it continued, right wing patriotism would have decreased to the point that prejudices would have softened and borders would have become easier to navigate- certainly in the case of traditionally popular countries of residence.

As the pinks disappeared as well, the span of colours was knocked out of balance, and we lost a great deal of warmth, a third to be precise. Being a little colder however wasn't wholly unfortuitous. The colours we surrounded ourselves with were more planetary, bringing us a little closer to the earth in our mind's eyes'.

Red still came fleetingly of course- with berries and poppies and intense sunsets, blood and embarrassment. But it was more nostalgia than passion.

We sewed it into stories to try and preserve the principles of permanent red, what it meant to us, in the hope of keeping it alive and perhaps even bringing it back when energy had built. But the echo could not carry the passion, we did not know it any more, and no one knew what they were missing.