

88 - FROM BOLT TO BULB



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If you were touched by lightning and lived to talk about it, you could show off your Lichtenberg Figure, a spray of branching, rose-quartz-colored burn marks named after German scientist Georg Christof Lichtenberg. A typical figure forms a tree that extends from a thick central trunk, zigzagging in every direction as each branch withers to nothing. The marks arise when capillaries burst following a strike. They appear remarkably lightning-like. It's as though the electrical shock of the strike reveals the corresponding circuitry hidden deep within the body, leaving behind something of a tattoo, or, considering that the marks fade after a few days, more of an electrical hickey. An image of a figure found on the Internet shows what appears to be a bad case of sunburn. Sampling the mark with the Photoshop eye-dropper tool returns the color code EB4747.

In German, Lichtenberg translates to “lit mountain”—a rather unbelievable coincidence. Lichtenberg, an experimental physicist before the letter, has become famous for his extensive collection of notebooks containing personal philosophy, scientific theories, and aphorisms. [...]

EB4747, the particular red sampled from the image of the lightning strike victim, is one red among many millions of reds, and only one of a hundred million colors a screen can display, but it is not the entire picture. The image is made from thousands of different color pixels, each with its own corresponding number. 6A4242, for example, is a kind of swampy maroon, while BE9FA4 could qualify for the equally murky designation of beige. Type in EB4748 to see the color closest to EB4747, a red virtually indiscernible from its neighbor. Though the codes seem random, they derive from a common source: *hexadecimal* notation.

—“EB4747,” Mathew Kneebone, Bulletins of The Serving Library #7, 2014

Mathew Kneebone,
From bolt to bulb, 2014,
pencil drawing on paper, 41.5x 31.3 cm