

Research in Practice

Story, Emotion, Motif

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Proposed Question for Independent Inquiry: How does art affect us all as individuals?

I'm going to be exploring the 3 keywords Story, Emotion and Motif. As a Surface Pattern Design student these are 3 keywords which I feel interest me the most particularly when I am researching and exploring artists and designers work because when I look at a piece of artwork my initial thoughts are why? - Why did they create this piece? what is the story behind it? what colours have they used? what do the colours make me feel, did they choose that particular colour palette to evoke emotion? And lastly what would that piece look like as a motif and in a repeat pattern? How would it look? What can it be used for?

For my first keyword I have chosen 'Story'. The word story in Latin is 'Storia' which was originally formed as an abbreviation of the Latin word for history- 'Historia' which then translates back to English as 'History' (Oxford Languages). I find it very interesting how these words link together because history tells a story in itself. For example, to tell a story you would be talking in the past tense perhaps maybe about a personal experience or an experience on somebody else's behalf and the past has happened before meaning it is therefore history. As a creative student I am drawn to artists and the meaning behind their work as I believe every piece of art tells a story even if they aren't intentionally made to tell a story when people view the artwork, they make up their own story to figure out why? And what that piece of work tells them personally.

The artist Tracey Emin is well known for winning the Turner Prize award in 1999 for her exhibition of her messy bed in New York and Japan called "My Bed". The installation piece was her un-made, messy bed which had dirty laundry, empty alcohol bottles, cigarettes, rubbish and much more clutter arranged beside it. Which had people questioning why? And how is that 'art'. However, Emin's work had an influencing and personal narrative behind it and was her way of showing the reality of depression and heartache in the view of the fact that the artist had gone through a laborious break-up. Due to the overwhelming state of emotion and heartbreak, her bed then became her safe place of which she did not leave. The article on Artsy stated: "When Emin finally left her sheets, she examined the mess she'd created. Crumpled tissues, period-stained clothing, cigarettes, empty vodka bottles, a pregnancy test, lubricant, and condoms surrounded her bed. She decided it was a work of art." (Cohen, 2018)



Figure 1:

Tracey Emin, My Bed 1999 Tate
Photography (Heathcote, 1999)

Once viewers heard about the story behind Emin's installation they began to appreciate it much more and realise that it is a highly interesting and rewarding piece of art. This shows that using art to communicate a narrative can be a creative way of capturing the attention of others just as this artist did to raise awareness of the realism of depression.

Having said that, Marcel Duchamp is a complete opposite example of narratives within art as in 1917 he placed a urinal in a museum with no meaning, story or explanation. Duchamp's creation left many people confused and had them question what exactly makes art, art? There are various different theories online, some may argue that it is not art because he didn't craft it with his hands, others believe that it is in fact art whether or not he created it himself due to it being his idea to place it there and that's what makes it art whereas people argue against this. For example, PHAIDON stated in their article "Duchamp did not select just any ready-made object to display. In selecting the urinal, his message was clear: "Art is something you piss on." PHAIDON (unknown).

Although there may be a personal reason as to why Duchamp placed a urinal with the signature 'R.Mutt' there is no confirmed narrative behind this installation. At the same time, multiple people have come up with their own narrative as to what they see when they look at this artist's creation and although they don't all agree I personally believe that this makes the work even more inspiring as it has the audience left with many questions.



Figure 2:
Marcel Duchamp, Fountain (Tate,
1917)

In relation to my first keyword, I decided to research in to 'Emotion'. The word emotion in Latin is translated to 'motus' which translates back to English as Motion/Movement which is where the term 'a stir of emotion' originates from (Oxford Languages). Emotion is shown within the creative industry in various ways some of which include: Art Therapy, drawing from an emotional experience, playing music and painting in a way of which that music makes you feel, using certain colour palettes to create an effect of a certain mood and many artists also create work which is personal to them which again can cause a stir of emotion for both themselves and also their audience. An artist who produces emotional work is Phillip Toledano. In summary, the photographer's father had short term memory loss, so he began to photograph his memories of them both together and document it as a journal which once his father had passed away, he then decided to publish it as a book which is called 'Days with my Father.' (Toledano, 2010, p.1)

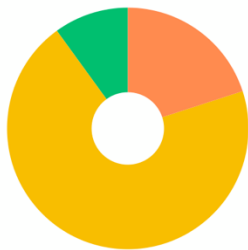


Figure 3:
Toledano, 2010, book cover.

There are numerous psychological effects of colour and how certain colours may trigger certain emotions. Out of curiosity I created a quick survey where I asked 10 different people from different age groups to participate in. The results I gathered were surprisingly all similar which proves that colour does trigger certain feelings.

SHOWING: 10 of 10 Responses

1. Which colour relates to sadness?



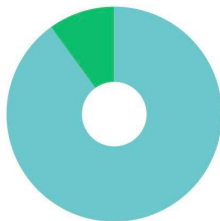
Skipped: 0 Answered: 10

Yellow	10%	1
Orange	0%	0
Blue	70%	7
Red	0%	0
Black	20%	2

7 out of 10 people said that blue relates to sadness.

SHOWING: 10 of 10 Responses

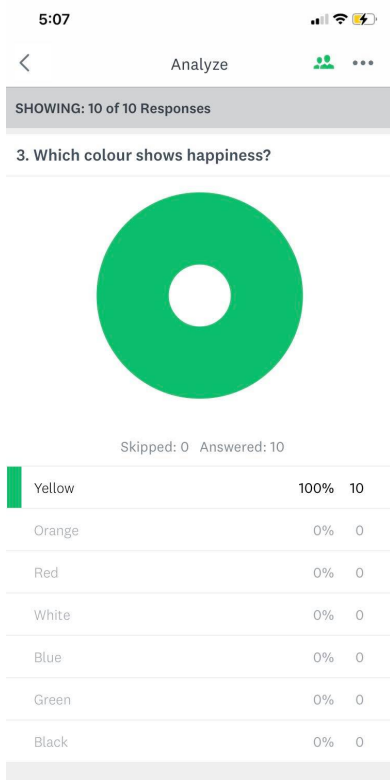
2. Which colour symbolises danger?



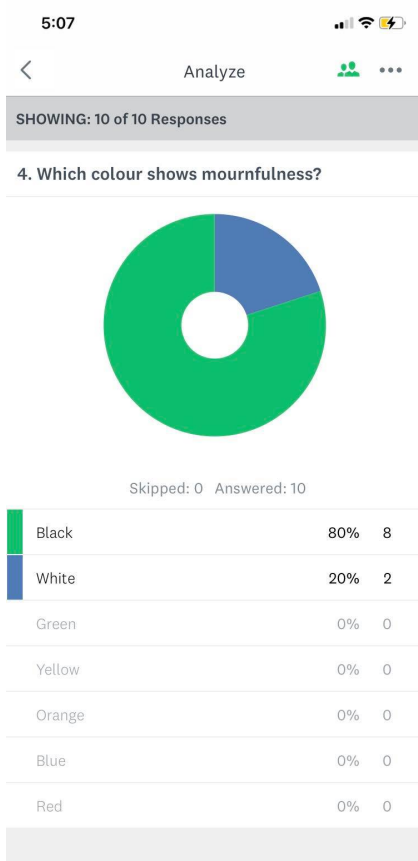
Skipped: 0 Answered: 10

Black	10%	1
White	0%	0
Green	0%	0
Red	90%	9
Blue	0%	0
Yellow	0%	0
Orange	0%	0

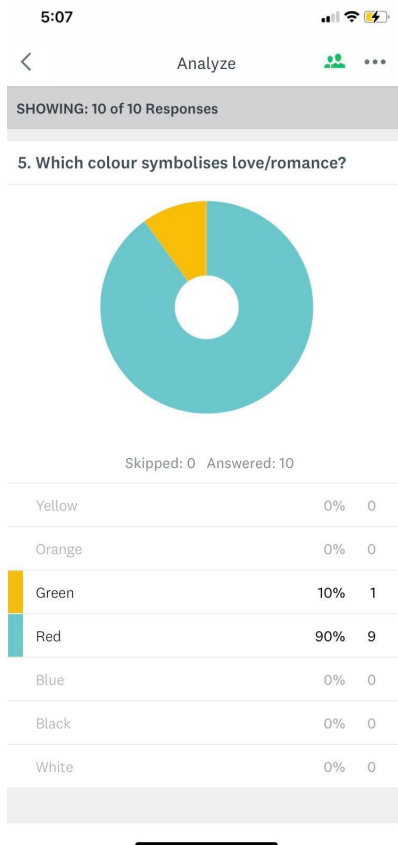
9 out of 10 people said that the colour red symbolises danger.



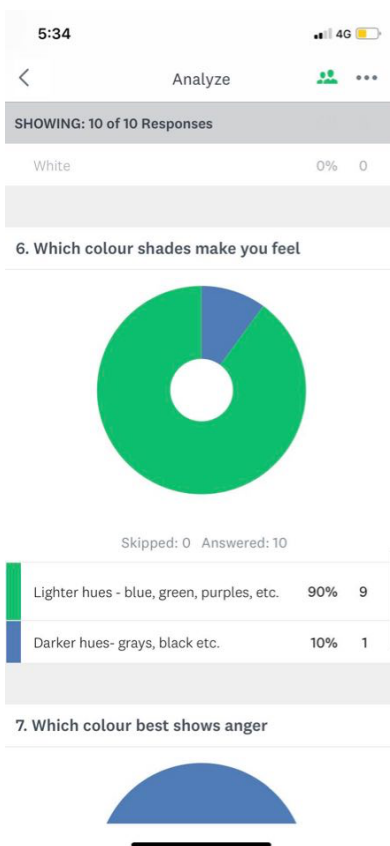
All 10 people said that the colour yellow shows happiness.



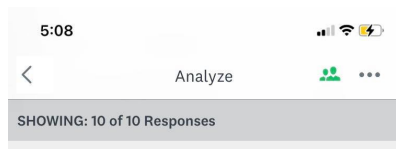
8 out of 10 people said that the colour black shows mournfulness.



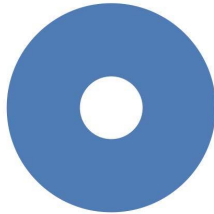
9 out of 10 people said that the colour red symbolises love and romance.



9 out of 10 people said that lighter hues make them feel calm and relaxed.



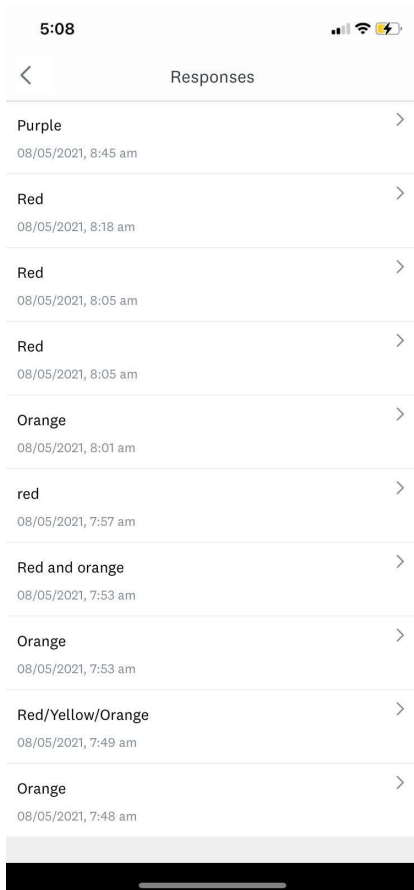
7. Which colour best shows anger



Skipped: 0 Answered: 10

White	0%	0
Red	100%	10
Green	0%	0
Blue	0%	0
Black	0%	0
Orange	0%	0
Yellow	0%	0

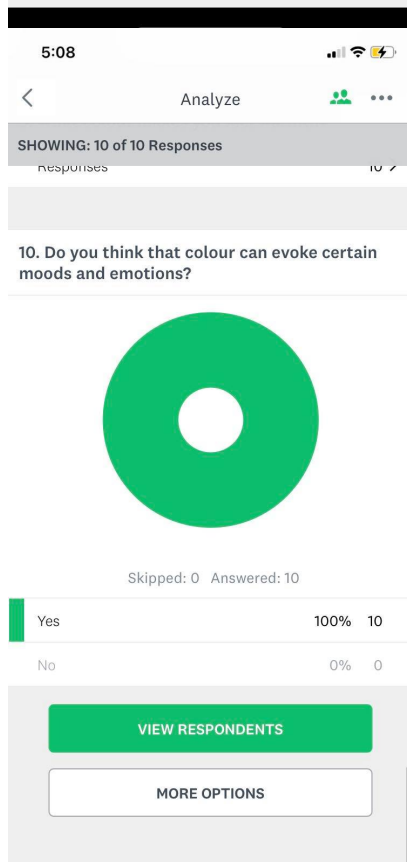
10 out of 10 people said that the colour red symbolises anger.



9 out of 10 people said that the colours orange and red make them feel warmth.

5:08	
Responses	
Black	>
08/05/2021, 8:45 am	
Blue or white	>
08/05/2021, 8:18 am	
Blue	>
08/05/2021, 8:05 am	
Black	>
08/05/2021, 8:05 am	
Grey	>
08/05/2021, 8:01 am	
blue	>
08/05/2021, 7:57 am	
White	>
08/05/2021, 7:53 am	
Light blue	>
08/05/2021, 7:53 am	
Blue/White	>
08/05/2021, 7:49 am	
White	>
08/05/2021, 7:48 am	

6 out of 10 people said that the colours white and blue make them feel cold.



All 10 people think that colour does evoke certain moods and emotion.

In clothing, interiors, landscape, and even natural light, a colour can change our mood from sad to happy, from confusion to intelligence, from fear to confidence. It can actually be used to “level out” emotions or to create different moods Aves & Aves, 1994, p.120)

Although people use certain colours to perhaps follow a trend, create a certain mood or maintain a colour palette. A study was undertaken by psychologists where they tested certain colours on students to identify how these colours influenced their mood and why. The results they found show that the way we as individuals choose to use particular colours is due to the wavelengths within the colours. When we look at certain colours our eyes will adjust accordingly which then triggers our brain and allows us to feel emotion to these individual colours. “Red, the longest wavelength, requires the most adjustment to look at it, and therefore appears to be nearer than it is, while green requires no adjustment whatever, and is therefore restful.” (Kurt & Osueke, 2014, P2) So, due our eyesight having to adjust in a more complex manner when we view the colour red this puts a strain on our body resulting in us making a negative connection with strong feelings to the colour such as: being angry or in danger. Whereas, because the colour green has a short wavelength and doesn’t require our eyes to adjust, we relate it to a more relaxed, natural, calmer feeling which is why 9 out 10 people on my survey stated that lighter hues make them feel more relaxed. This is called ‘Colour Psychology.

The last keyword I have chosen to discuss is ‘Motif’. The word motif originates from France which is translated in English as ‘Pattern’, Motif has various definitions in the dictionary for example: a pattern/design, a theme or idea that is frequently repeated (throughout literature or music) and it can also mean a distinctive idea. (Oxford Languages) In surface pattern, we use the key word ‘Motif’ to describe a piece of artwork that we will be repeating or that we have repeated. In addition to this a motif can also be known as a symbol, semiotics is the study of signs and symbols whereby they investigate the image/motif and discover what gave it that particular image or meaning. Being aware of semiotics teaches us how to perceive things differently and, in more depth, this is important in everyday life as well as in the art industry. “Semiotics can translate a picture from an image into words.” (Ferreira, 2007). Whether people are aware of it or not when we look at artwork, we use semiotic analysis to break down and figure out what the piece of work is trying to tell us. As discussed in both my keywords we do this by looking for the narrative behind it- why did they produce this? Was there an intentional reason like Tracy Emin’s work or was it unintentional like Duchamp’s work and

also what are they showing us not only through imagery but how do the colours make us feel- maybe they used that specific colour palette for a meaningful purpose.



Figure 4:
Magritte,
1929,
Painting

Rene Magritte's painting of a pipe is one of the most popular examples used when discussing the relationship between semiotics and art. This piece shows a painting of a pipe (the signified motif) with text below it in French saying "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" which translates in English to "This is not a pipe" (the signifier). The signified and the signifier then creates a 'sign/symbol' so when people see this painting, it will require them to dig deeper for the meaning behind because when they first look, they will see just a painting of a pipe with a statement in French below but when they think about it they'll realise that the text says it is not a pipe because it isn't a pipe but it is a painting of a pipe. "Everything we see hides another thing, we always want to see what is hidden by what we see" (Rene Magritte, 1972). This quote refers to the artists intention of inspiring his audience to delve deeper because everything has hidden qualities.

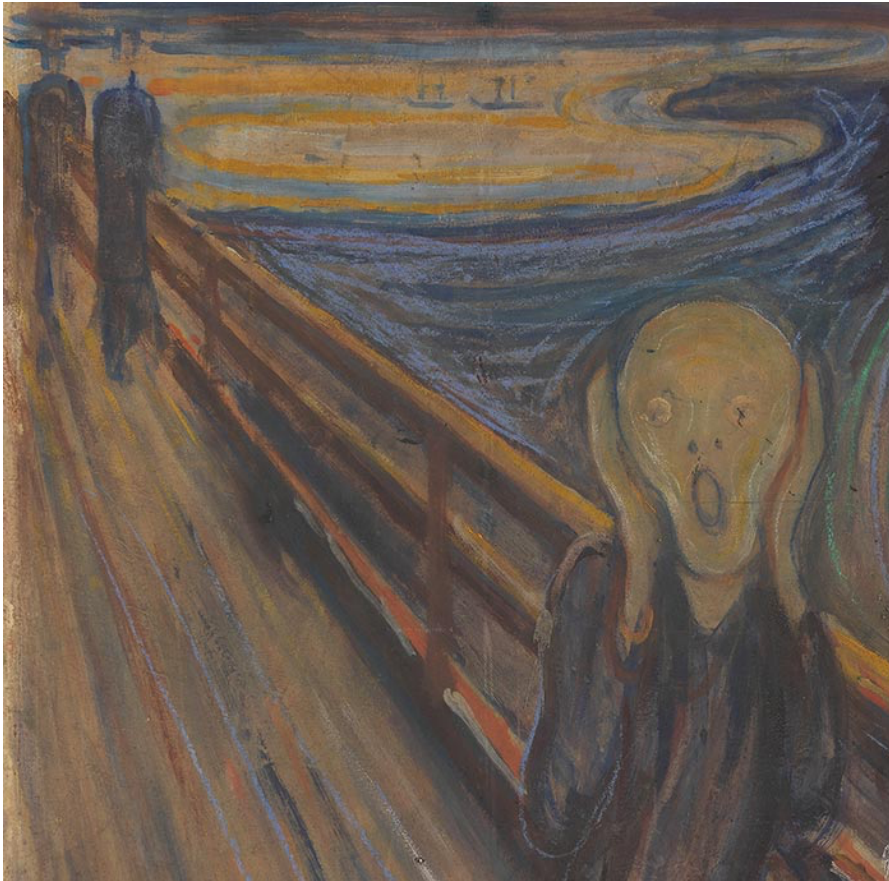


Figure 5: Munch, 1895,
The Scream

Moreover, another example of an art piece which has shook everyone is Edvard Munch's Pastel on Cardboard 'The Scream'. The artist produced his work as a mechanism to deal with his feelings which is now an art term we know as 'Expressionism'. The Expressionist created this famous piece after sadly losing both his mother and his sister, however many people have analysed this art piece and there's various different opinions and theories of what is actually in this oil pastel piece. Some of which include: Due to Munch going through two family losses and being diagnosed with depression the dark gloomy colours could suggest that 'The Scream' is his state of mind and he's trying to show it through his artistic skills. Others believe that the image of 'The Scream' is actually not a self-portrait or a portrait of a human face but actually a golden retriever, some have picked up on the background piece as being a 'sunset' while others have pointed out the boat shaped silhouettes in the background and are now arguing that it is the sea. Adding to these theories, other people have analysed that Munch posted a poem on one of the frames of his prints which copied ... "I was walking along a path with two friends – the sun was setting – suddenly the sky turned blood red – I paused, feeling exhausted, and leaned on the fence – there was blood and tongues of fire above the blue-black fjord and the city – my friends walked on, and I stood there trembling with anxiety – and I sensed an infinite scream passing through

nature.” (Munch, 1895). There are much more theories and examples online through how people have used semiotic analysis to create a whole narrative just by viewing a motif which shows how important meaning is and how the creative mind works.

To conclude my essay, I have encountered several ways of identifying and reflecting on artist’s work. I have done this by discussing how there will always be a narrative behind the work whether it is a meaningful story, a made-up story by the audience or a visual story showing simply the journey of the piece itself. In addition, I also identified the importance of colour and how certain colours can evoke certain moods through colour psychology and lastly, I have discussed the meaning of Motif and the significance of symbols through semiotics. In reflection, exploring these three keywords has inspired me to want to research within the deeper meaning of words and how to analyse and discuss artwork in different ways. Further, as a result I now am going to think more critically when producing and making work myself I will do this by analysing through the colours I use, the meaning behind it, what inspiration I gather and what I want the outcome to achieve. Despite the fact that when not thinking about what you are doing you can unintentionally produce better work and happy mistakes making a connection and diving deeper to challenge my creativity will allow me to become happier when achieving work which I have thought more carefully about. This will also be a skill I will need in my future career when working on products or prints to fit up to a customer’s needs as I will need to think about what I need to achieve and exhibit. From researching these three keywords it has led me to the question: How does art affect us all as individuals? Whereby I will be investigating into the psychological effects of art.

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