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Research in Practice ADAD5004

BA Design Crafts

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Colour, light and time.

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Colour, light and time, are my three chosen words. They are both separate and together.

Connected, united, close, yet far away and distant. Discombobulated yet full of clarity.

Possibly similar to the mood in the world at the moment perhaps.

Colour.

The etymology of the word colour comes from the Anglo -French word culur, coulour, from the early thirteenth century and was first used to define the shades/hue or variations of complexion. Looking at key thinkers including Goethe, Berenson, Newton, Da Vinci and Rustkin we can begin to decode and better understand the psychology of colour.

Exploring the theory of colour which involves, the use of colour and the set of guidelines of how this manifests itself in the world of art.

Whilst looking at colour there are many different elements, working simultaneously- aesthetic, (emotional response) Visual, (what enters the individual's eye/brain.) and Psychological, (influence on individuals physical/mental state).

Perception of colour.

It is documented that colour can affect our emotions, in fact “In art, color is a vehicle for expressing emotions and concepts as well as information, and it is a very powerful element of design.” (Zelanski and Fisher, 1989, p.12).

Bright reds, oranges and yellows tend to act as a stimulus, with blues and greens having the opposite effect, having a calming influence. This makes colour a very powerful tool which can be utilised in many ways, such as expressing emotions and communicating feelings. Influencing mood, or possibly manipulating and evoking a desired reaction. In many hospitals the walls are often painted in greens and blues for this reason, in the hope of creating a calmer more relaxed environment in often a highly charged emotionally anxious, stressful situations.

There are both warm and cool colours. Our association with reds, oranges and yellow being warm as we connect them with fire, a heat source, and the warmth of the flames. “Physiological research indicates that our bodies secrete more adrenalin, increasing our blood pressure and our rate of breathing, and actually raising our temperature slightly.” (Zelanski and Fisher P.37)

On the opposite side of the spectrum, the coolness of greens and blues, and our association and connection with them with trees and water have the opposite effect, again physiological research shows that green or blue lights will slow our heartbeat, decrease our temperature, and relax our muscles.

On Newton’s (1660) colour wheel (Gage, 1999) the hues are often referred to as warm and cool, with the darker being hotter and more intense, graduating in shades to the lightest being colder.

Therefore, even in one colour the intensity can vary greatly, radiating a different aura completely. A

Consideration must be given on how the exact same colour can have a varied response from one person to the next, having a completely different effect both aesthetically and physiologically.

Colour has been historically utilized in Art and documented as from around “17000 years ago”

(Finlay, 2014 p.8)

Discovered in the Lascaux caves, were images of animals, including horses, stags, bison and a bear.

They were painted in red, yellow, black, white and brown, understandably as they were found in nature, from red and yellow ochre which is found in the ground where iron is present. Black which is made from the burning of wood to create charcoal. White from chalk and brown from the earth.

(Finley, 2014 p.9)

It appears people had the compulsion to express and breathe life and movement into their images, with a desire to tell a story and communicate both with themselves and others. To decorate their homes with aesthetically pleasing colours, creating visual imagery showing common objects and documenting scenes /aspects of life at that time.

“Late- antique writers like Palladius in the fifth century and Isidore of Seville in the seventh listed thirteen horse- colours in Latin, some of which are rare and highly specialized terms.” (Gage, 1993 p.79) An early example of record keeping for horse breeders and traders, showing the importance of using colour as a form of measurement.

In the Tiwi islands which are at the tip of northern Australia, there is a group of people who believed they were the only people in the world. They developed a system using colour to prevent marrying someone too closely related to them. (Finlay, 2014 p.12) Perhaps they got their inspiration from nature as Goethe himself acknowledges “All nature manifests itself by means of colours” (Eastlake, 2012 p.1)

Another use of the colour system was they made funeral poles decorated in different patterns, which had their own messages, like the red meaning volatile and dangerous.

In many Roman religious building's red was used as the colour of light, like the example of the wall 'Edifice' of Eumachia in Pompei. (Gage, 1993 p.25) Red in history has a wide range of representations which vary with time and culture. "By trial and error, colour can be used to evoke a visceral reaction antecedent to words." (Gauguin, 1967, p. 788)

In Welsh traditions the red dragon on the flag, a powerful dominant fire breathing strong intimidating figure. Homers "wine -dark sea" (Ball, 2002) in the Odyssey depicts the many shades and hues of red. Indeed, even before written language the Incas using quipu a messaging system used the colour red to depict armies linking it to where a battle had taken place and soldiers had died. (Finlay, 2014. P. 50) Colour has the power to "Colour awakens a corresponding physical sensation, which undoubtedly works upon the soul." (Batchelor, 2008 p.57) To influence and convey information at a visceral or subconscious level.

In the bible's book of Revelation, the four horsemen of the Apocalypse, each ride a different colour horse, each carrying its own message, war, famine, pestilence, and disease. The white symbolising to conquer, red-war and bloodshed, black-famine, and the pale-death-by the sword, hunger, disease, and the beasts of the earth.



Fig.1: The Four Horsemen.

Light

The beauty of light, both ascetically and the bearer of life, without which there would be none.

Now and again he is a sight still more wonderful, when his colours change under the light, altering a little and turning to a different kind of loveliness. This happens to him chiefly in the circles that he has in the tips of his feathers, each of which is ringed with a rainbow. What was previously bronze has the look of gold when he shifts a little, and what was bright blue [kuanauges] in the sun is bright green [chlorauges] in shadow, so much does the beauty of the plumage alter with the light. [The Hall 11, trans. Harmon] (Cage, 1993, p. 14)

Natural light constantly changes, therefore something that has not been changed is by light alone.

Something ordinary can be transformed by the way it is illuminated, from a simple object to a landscape. The mood can be altered by this element alone.

This is what I was aiming at: First of all, I wanted to be true and accurate. For me, a landscape does not exist as landscape, since its appearance changes at every moment; but it lives accordingly to its surroundings, by the air and light, which constantly change. (Zelanski and Fisher, 2006, p. 31)

Joseph Priestley's, *History and Present State of Discoveries Relating to Vision, Light, and Colours*

(1767) almost blinded him with his observation of the sun, scientifically and artistically. (Bluhm & Lippincott, 2000, p 20). Paintings by J. M. W. Turner and Casper David Friedrich captured the movement of the sun, with the light dancing from the water, through the air in their work, resulting in beautiful romantic, dramatic masterpieces.

Light has many meanings, not only from a literally perspective, we as human beings look towards the light as a positive notion, as an almost goodness, to be bathed in. It is often depicted in many religious paintings, with Jesus reaching out with his arms laid openly stretching towards it, as if to embrace and capture its very essence. The light at the end of the tunnel, that glimmer of hope, without which the human spirit fades and sinks into darkness.

Motto taken from Lucretius's *De rerum Natura*: "O you who first amid so great a darkness were able to raise aloft a light so clear, illuminating the blessings of life, you I follow." (Bluhm A & Lippincott L, 2000, p 72)



Fig.2: Shade and Darkness.

The divine light, signifying heaven and life beyond death, in Christian religion the place that your spirit will go if you believe in god and ask for his forgiveness, a blessed place, where in harmony your

eternalised without suffering and hardship. The opposite end of the spectrum, the darkness, a place of doom and gloom, as shown in J.M.W. Turners painting 'Shade and Darkness'.

Turner contrasts the dark prelude to the biblical Deluge and its brilliant aftermath, when the sun brought prismatic bubbles to the surface of the Flood. (Gage J 1999, p.166).

Blackness portraying the pits of despair, the unknown, a black hole, sinking and feeling of a great weight and heaviness. Leonardo Da Vinci observes that "a light object relieved on a dark ground appears magnified." (Eastlake. 2012, p.6)

Time

Through visual imagery, from everything, perhaps from a small ceramic pot, a tool, a sculpture, a picture, we can learn so much about a specific time, even more so in some ways than the written word.

Roland Bathes acknowledges "The space of writing is to be ranged over not pierced; writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning." (Seymour. 2017, p60)

An object can tell a story, in many ways, from the materials it is derived from to how it was constructed, crudely or finely for example, the speed it was made, the attention to detail.

Many artefacts offer a wealth of information with regards to the time they were produced, from a vast range of how people lived in these periods and what they endeared in life, the cultures, the

politics, revealing fragments of a popular society at that particular time. Through the exploration of these we can discover elements of our history, therefore our human need to create something physical, records a moment and captures a mood in a different way in which words are interpreted, and each piece may have a different meaning to the viewer, depending on their own experiences, everything being open to interpretation. Maybe this need to create is subliminal as we know we are not here for ever and another physical form can remain long after we have gone.

In the painting, *The Night Café* by Vincent Van Gogh he ambitiously attempts to capture a time and convey an emotional situation through colour.

Van Gogh writes in a letter with reference to this painting “I have tried to express the terrible passions of humanity by means of red and green” (Gage J 1999, p.205).



Fig.3: The Night Café.

Our lungs fill with the air that is invisible, but also the very air that changes colour before our very eyes. Leonard Shlain "Color is the subjective perception in our brain of an objective feature of light's specific wavelengths." (Zelanski P and Fisher P, 2006, p.23).

Currently, the time of isolation, the time of social distancing. A time of uncertainty. The shadow of death and darkness, threatening, dwelling and looming invisibly amongst us.

A line in a poem by William Blake named To Venetian artists,

"That God is colouring Newton does shew – And that the devil is a black outline, all of us know."

(Blake.1908).

The colour red used to amplify the danger, used in the images of the Corona virus cell, which invades our bodies and our way of life. Like the red weed in the science fiction novel, War of the Worlds.

(Wells. 1897).

A time of tribulation.

Our hope to survive, along with our loved ones, feelings of uncertainty, fear and trepidation. Our appreciation of the key workers, tirelessly fighting, displayed through imagery, many of which are rainbows, as in history symbolising belief and hope.

Contemporary artist Banksy's piece called Game changer, which depicts a young boy playing with a toy, which is a nurse superhero, he holds her up as if she is flying, her cape soaring behind her, her face covered in a mask, and a red cross upon the chest of her apron, the only colour in the image.

Written on a note he left for hospital workers "Thanks for all you're doing, I hope this brightens the place up a bit, even if it's only black and white." (Banksy. 2020)



Fig.4: Game Changer.

“The pure present is an ungraspable advance of the past devouring the future. In truth all sensation is already memory.” (Bergson. 1896).

Time slowing down, some having more free time, and being able to appreciate the little things, re-evaluating what really matters, which of course differs at different times and from person to person.

Which again is forever changing, nothing stays the same. “Or, since that hope denied in worlds of strife, be thou the rainbow in the storms of life! The evening beam that smiles the clouds away, and tints tomorrow with prophetic ray!” (Byron, 1814)

The Genesis story starts with the words “Let there be light.” (Moses, 1400)

Light and darkness cycles are needed for living things to grow, us included. Like the changing seasons, Summer and Winter continually rolling, like the ocean tides, the wind blowing, wave after wave, the same, but not. Time stops for no one, it is one of our most valuable things, maybe our most valuable.

A chicken will lay her eggs depending on the hours of light. Something so precious, a miracle itself.

The beginning of a life, sustenance for another. Everything is linked, interconnected, and joined somehow. We as humans entwined and woven into this very existence, for now.

Yet since we have been here there has always been an immense spectrum of emotions and beliefs.

Beauty and turmoil twisted together, Is this simply our nature?

In the light of the present time, what colour is the future?

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(1530-1532) *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. [unknown] Available at <https://publicdomainreview.org/collection/the-four-of-the-apocalypse> (Accessed 3 June 2020).

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(1843) *Shade and Darkness*. [Oil on canvas] Available at [//www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-shade-and-...](https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-shade-and-...) (Accessed 3 June 2020).

Figure 3.: Van Gogh, V.

(1888) *The Night Café*. [Oil on canvas] Available at [//www.vincentvangogh.org/the-night-café.jsp](https://www.vincentvangogh.org/the-night-café.jsp) (Accessed 3 June 2020).

Figure 4: Banksy.

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