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Introduction

The three chosen keywords are colour, stained glass, and expression. These words were chosen as they relate to my work. Along with ink work and digital art, stained glass is one of the primary mediums I use. Unlike the other two mediums, stained glass is a new medium to me so it is important to research it as part of my journey as a glass artist. Expressionism is the key approach to my art and I like to use colour as it is a visual way to represent emotions, personality and create a certain feel to the work.

The key theorists that will be applied in this are Hina Azeem for applying psychology to artworks, and Irina Crina Anca Sandu et al. for colour theory.

The key artists are Edvard Munch, Francis Bacon, Van Gogh and Charles Rennie Mackintosh.

Expression

Azeem (2015) states that “art has long been an outlet for self-expression” (p. 51). du Plessis (2021) expands on this idea by stating that “art has long been a source of solace for many to express the complexities of human life that are unutterable” (du Plessis, 2021). As expressionist art is about the inner self, it does not depict reality as it is but shows the emotions and responses of the artist. This is often done through distorting or exaggerating shapes, using fantasy-like images and primitivism, which is a way of returning to a simpler way of being. Expressionism is deeply personal to the artist as it expresses their own point of view or feelings (Britannica, 2026).



Figure 1: *The Scream*, Edvard Munch (1893)

One popular expressionist artist is Edvard Munch. A well-known work of his is 'The Scream' (1893). There are four versions of 'The Scream' including a pastel drawing which has the inscription "*could only have been painted by a madman*" (du Plessis, 2021). 'The Scream' has been described as "a symbol of modern spiritual anguish" (Watson, 2026). Azeem (2015) points out that the way an artist expresses themselves can be affected by their psychological state. Munch had a lot of struggles in his life, including bereavement and mental illness from a young age. Munch kept written journals and painted as a way to explore his emotions and feelings about his struggles. Through his use of colours and characters, Munch's early works exhibited a lot of pessimism, such as themes of death and depression. When he painted 'The Scream' his work had moved more towards expressing his anxiety. It was part of a series of paintings which included themes relating to a range of difficult human emotions, including despair, death, jealousy, sex and infidelity (du Plessis, 2021).

The brushstrokes themselves are expressive. The swirls and lines are more expressive of his internal state than the external environment. The red sky and unnatural colours of the skin in are symbolic of what Munch called a 'deranged mind' (Munch cited in Sandu,

et al., 2026 p.53). Many people interpret the painting as a symbol of his inner turmoil, but Munch claimed that he painted what he thought was the whole of nature screaming while watching a sunset. “I felt a great, unending scream piercing through nature” (Munch cited in du Plessis, 2021). Azeem (2015) asserts the image did not depict what everyone else was seeing, but was “a reflection of the way his psychological state made the world appear to him” (p.52). This shows how expressionist art can be a lens to view the mind of the artist. Munch’s works went through various stages depending on his own state of mental and physical health.

Another example of an artist who expresses himself through art is Francis Bacon. Bacon had a unique approach to using colour and representation as a form of expression in his disfigured portraits. His art is dark and gritty but there is beauty in the abstract nature of his pieces. Bacon developed his own style by rejecting the traditional forms of abstraction and moving towards ‘a disturbing realism’ (Pinnington, 2026). Having lived through two World Wars, Bacon’s art could be an expression of some of the horrors of war, and his troubled relationships with his parents.

Bacon painted a series known as ‘Screaming Popes’ including *Study after Velázquez* (1953). Bacon wanted to produce a painting that expressed loudness. The painting is not only loud because of the image of a pope screaming, but also in the brush strokes and colours used. “*Study after Velázquez* is a merging of experience; a coalescing of sensation, a whorl inward and backward. It is painful to look at and painful to listen to” (Chare, 2005, p. 136). The choice of using a pope as his subject could be an expression of his distaste of religion. Arya (2008) argues that the symbol of the pope screaming is multilayered. “It denotes not only the death of the papal symbol, but the death of an art historical tradition, the ‘death of God’ and the death of the self” (p. 34). The scream is a key part of the image but the yellow paint marks also give the impression of the pope being imprisoned. This could be seen as an expression of rage against the Catholic Church, which is something Bacon had discussed.



Figure 2: Study after Velazquez's Portrait of Innocent X, Francis Bacon (1953)

These are two different examples of how artists have used art to express emotions or ideas. The next keyword is 'colour'. Colour is also a useful tool for artists to express themselves by using colours linked to emotions, or alternatively, colour can be used to present the world as it is.

Colour

The main area of colour that will be explored is how colours can represent emotions and feelings. The idea that colours are powerful tools of communication and trigger emotional reactions was first noted in 1810 by Johan Wolfgang von Goethe. He also introduced the concept of warm and cool colour temperatures (2012 [1810]).

Culture can affect how people react to colour as colour meaning varies in different parts of the world (McCandless, 2013). Colours can also mean different things to artists, with one artist using a particular pigment to represent one emotion or personal connection to the subject, and another artist using the same colour to express something different (Sandu, et al., 2026). The understanding of colour is also tied to the time in which it was used as meanings change over time.

Leonardo Da Vinci discussed colour principles, identifying white, yellow, green, blue, red, and black as the six simple colours that are the buildings blocks of all visible hue (Discovering Da Vinci, ND). Issac Newton expanded on colour theory by introducing the idea of primary colours; red, yellow, blue. This influenced the invention of the colour wheel by Moses Harris 100 years later in 1766. Johannes Itten expanded this further in the 20th century to include secondary colours that fall between the primary colours (Sandu, et al., 2026). These are orange, green and purple. Tertiary colours are the various shades between primary and secondary colours.

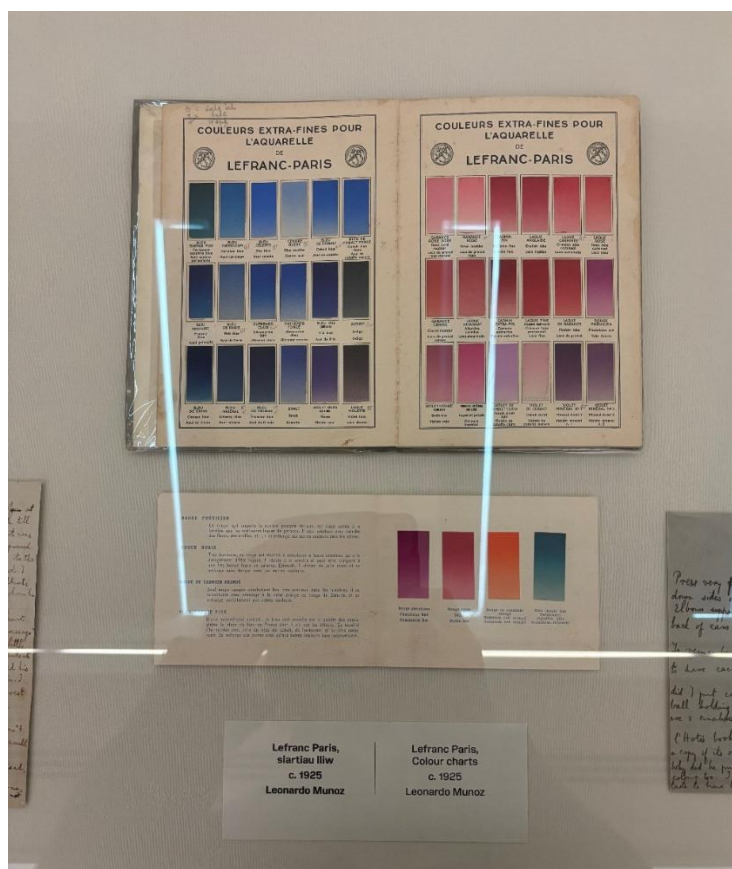


Figure 3: 20th Century colour charts, Cardiff Museum, Own photo

Traditional painting uses colour theory to understand which colours complement each other and which colours contrast or clash. Complementary colour pairings are the opposite colours on colour wheels. Artists usually avoid directly mixing complementary colours because they cancel each other out. Pairings such as yellows and blues, or reds and greens, become neutral when mixed, creating a grey or muddy brown, losing the vibrancy of the original colours (Westland, et al., 2007). This is why painters have been taught for centuries to use complementary colour carefully for balance, or keep them separate.

Vincent Van Gogh's *The Night Café* (1888) is a good example of where complementary colours are used, with red wall complementing the green ceiling [fig. 4]. In a letter to his brother, Van Gogh described the colours in the painting. "The room is blood red and dark yellow with a green billiard table in the middle". The lamps were described as 'lemon-yellow' with an orange and green glow (Van Gogh cited in Sandu, et al., 2026 pp. 33-34).

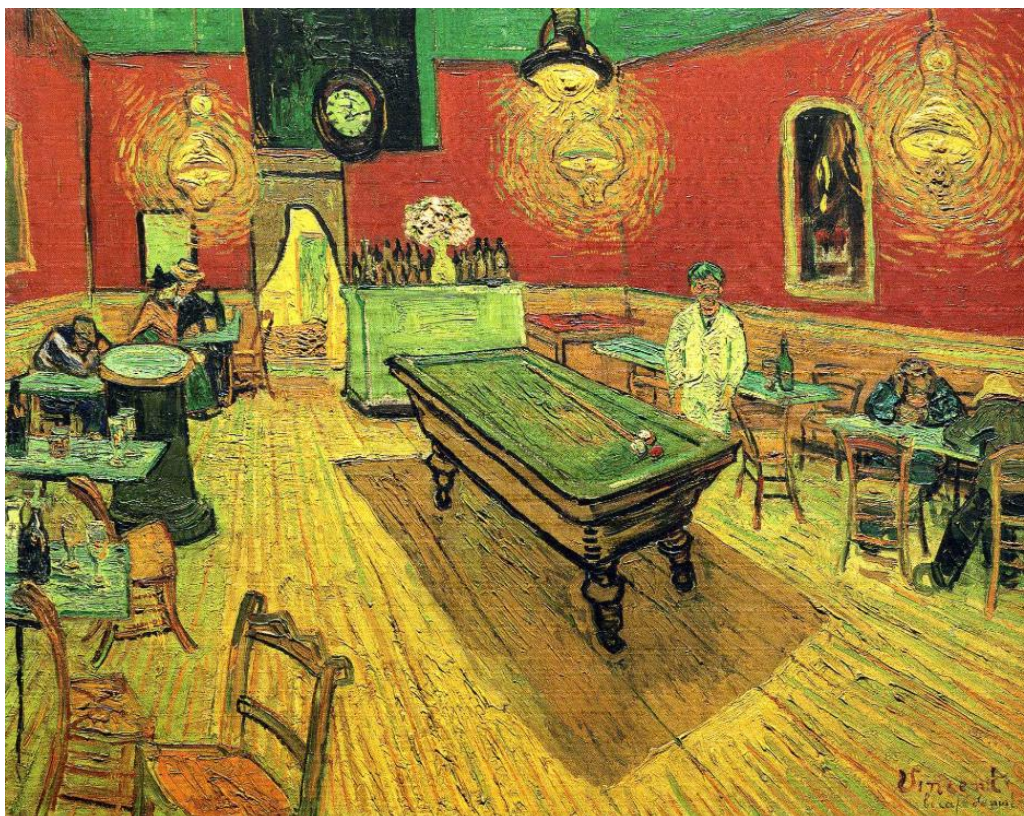


Figure 4: *The Night Café*, Vincent Van Gogh (1888)

The tables use a softer turquoise colour, making them different from the greens in the painting but in the same colour family. In isolation, the landlord's clothes are green, but the yellow light from the fire makes us perceive it as a soft white. The green colour is used throughout in small lines on the floor and around the lights, and outlining the landlord. Although this is not a natural colour to find in these spaces, it does not look out of place. Van Gogh also uses darker shades of the same colour to show what is in shadow.

According to semiotic theory, red is often associated with danger, anger, love or passion (Lagopoulos & Boklund-Lagopoulou, 2020). The red in *The Night Café* does not seem to represent any of these feelings, but is more likely used to contrast against the green that is used throughout the painting. However, in his *Sunflowers* (1888), Van Gogh uses yellow to represent hope and friendship, which aligns with most interpretations of yellow in the western world, as a joyous colour (Sandu, et al., 2026).



Figure 5: Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion, Frances Bacon (1944).

Sandu et al. (2026) noted that “the relationship with colours is ever evolving, and our experience of works of art changes accordingly. Learning what a colour meant to the artist who used it transforms our understanding and perception of both colour and the artwork” (p. 33). Francis Bacon is a good example of how colour relationships evolve. He rejected colour theory rules as a way to create unsettling colours that refuse to work in a comfortable harmony, creating tension through colour. Bacon’s paintings deliberately

use bruised purples with oranges and sickly greens with reds, creating uncomfortable flesh tones as shown in his *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (1944). He tends to use a colour pallet of dark reds, browns and purples, reminiscent of blood and bruises. Bacon's work shows how breaking the rules of colour theory can create emotional intensity (Eckersley, 2025).

These artists have provided some examples of the use of colour as a way of creating meaning or invoke a feeling. The next keyword moves on to an art form that is usually associated with colourful windows.

Stained Glass

Stained glass is often associated with windows in churches and cathedrals, that often tell stories from the Bible and Christian folklore. However for this keyword the focus will be on stained glass as art. The main area of research will be on Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Art Nouveau.

Mackintosh is a well-known stained glass artisan from the Glasgow Art Nouveau movement. His work uses a unique blend of Art Nouveau and Art Deco. As well as being a glass artist, Mackintosh was an architect. One of his more famous designs can be seen in Glasgow School of Art, which he was commissioned to design and include his stained glass work in the windows. "The building features Scottish baronial architecture, braced windows with floral and geometric motifs, and a modern, industrial ambience" (Scottish Stained Glass , 2026). Mackintosh was not only part of the Art Nouveau movement with his glass work, but his work was also helped to achieve prominence for Glasgow and an artist centre of creation (Bardin, 2019).

Mackintosh's art is displayed in various locations around Glasgow as well as elsewhere in the world. One example The Willow Tea Rooms in Glasgow. This was designed by Mackintosh and completed in 1904. It had been sold to several commercial businesses over the years and its original state had been altered, but restoration began in 2016 to bring it back to its original state (Visit Stained Glass, 2026). This was completed in 2018 and includes the original stained glass window [fig 6].



Figure 6: Charles Rennie Mackintosh, (1903), Mackintosh at the Willow, Glasgow.

Unlike Charles Rennie Mackintosh whose glass has been preserved in its original location, glass artist Harry Clarke had his work rejected for being controversial. Irish artist Harry Clarke moved towards stained glass after illustrating designs for stained glass. Like Mackintosh, he was influenced by Art Nouveau styles as well as Art Deco and French Symbolism. His work is characterised by his use of precise, intricate details and combining the fantastical with the macabre (Mayer, 2024). An example of this can be seen in one of his most famous works; the Geneva Window. This was commissioned for the International Labour Court in Geneva in 1926 (Meyer, 2024). The design of the stained glass incorporated scenes from Irish literature. The window is “a fascinating symbolic and storytelling work packed with wit, humanity and allusive detail” (Dalley,

2024). Some of his choices were controversial because he included Liam O'Flaherty who was banned for writing negatively about the Catholic church, and Patrick Pearse who was executed for his part in the 1916 Easter Rising (Dalley, 2024). Despite the incredible artwork and intense colour, the piece was rejected by the International Labour Court for its controversial imagery including sex, nudity and alcohol.

As well as the Geneva Window being visually interesting for the imagery used, it is also intriguing for the different techniques he used, including acid etching, painting, and stippling (The Wolfsonian, 2026). Stippling is scratching fine details into the paint with a needle. In the panel in fig. 7. It looks like he used a combination of coloured and black paint for the main images, and painted onto layered flashed glass and used the stippling technique to create the background effect.



Figure 7: Close up of bottom corner of the The Wayfarer, Patrick Pearse panel, Geneva Window, Harry Clarke, (1926)

Another artist who turned to stained glass, using a unique process was Henri Matisse. Although he is better known as an abstract artist, Matisse was also a stained glass artist. Some of his works includes a windows for the chapel at Vence in 1951, and a stained glass window commissioned by Life Magazine for their headquarters in New York in 1952. Matisse had a sculptural approach to making the cut-outs for the shapes in his windows. Instead of cutting out complete shapes he assembled smaller shapes together to create the shape he wanted. "The deceptively simple aesthetic of his later

work conceals the careful processes used to achieve specific effects” (Hidden Gallery , 2021).

The examples in this keyword section show the huge variety of styles of stained glass and the different methods used. There are also different ways to display stained glass. A lot of the examples discussed have been windows which is usually how stained glass is seen, but stained glass can also be displayed as a standing piece or wall hanging with backlights.

Conclusion

I chose these keywords as they all relate the areas of practical art I am interested in. Doing this research has further increased my interest using colour or absence of colour as part of self-expression in stained glass. It has given me a better understanding of colour, which I believe can improve my practical application of colour.

For my work next year, I would like to develop all three of these areas and how they relate to each other, focusing on stained glass artists who use colour as a form of expression. Some artists I would like to analyse further are Harry Clarke, Kehinde Wiley and Raúl De Nieves, who I researched as part of my Stimulus and Response module. One aspect of expression that I came across when researching was the idea of art as therapy and how art can improve brain function. This is an area I would like to look at next year as part of my research about stained glass and colour.

My practical work for next year will link in with this research as I aim to continue with stained glass, as a form of self-expression using colour. I also want to look at how colour effects mood. Other art forms I want to experiment with are fabrics and wallpaper printing. As my stained glass challenges assumptions about what stained glass should be, using dark, personal themes rather than traditional religious iconography or colourful mosaics, I am interested in doing the same with wallpaper and fabrics. Instead of using delicate, pretty images in repeats, I am interested in having my work on a large scale using this medium.

Potential title: Stained glass and colour and a form of expression and therapy.

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