

Psychology of Colour in Art



R Alspach. *Hummingbird*. 1972.
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Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Search Terms and Call Numbers](#)

[Books](#)

[Journals](#)

[Databases](#)

[Websites](#)

Introduction

The choice of colour in art is laden with symbolism and cultural connotation. Perception of colour is affected both by these factors and by visual reception. Artists use colour in many ways, for example, to explore visual perception and effects, or to represent or evoke an emotion. For the Impressionist painters, the creation of colour takes place in the eye of the observer. To use a simple example, red and blue dots placed side by side and interspersed looks, from a few paces away, like the colour purple. The eye of the observer “mixes” the colours.

The psychological effects of colour have been studied in a variety of contexts, and have been described as having tangible effects on the viewer, such as calming or stimulating properties. This pathfinder serves as a guide to help you to source for information on the psychological aspects of colour in art. Materials listed are available at National Library Board libraries as well as on the Internet.

Search Terms and Call Numbers

For library materials, a corresponding Call Number is given for every search term. These Call Numbers are assigned based on the Dewey Decimal Classification system, which the library uses to categorise its books. Below is a selective list of subject headings that can be found in our catalogue that will help you locate materials on this topic:

Search Terms	Call Numbers
Color, Psychological aspects	152.145 155.91145 535.6
Color in Art	701.85 752

Books

You can use the search-terms listed above to search for library materials at our Web Catalogue, which is accessible at <http://vistaweb.nlb.gov.sg>. Listed below are some recommended works to help you begin your research. These are available in the National Library Board's network of libraries.

Title: **Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation**
Author: Gombrich, E. H.
Publisher: London: Phaidon Press, 2002.
Call number: RART 701.15 GOM
Description: *This wide-ranging book covers all aspects of pictorial representation including the role of colour.*

Title: **The Art of Color: The Subjective Experience and Objective Rationale of Color**
Author: Itten, Johannes
Publisher: New York: John Wiley, c2002.
Call number: RART 752 ITT
Description: *Discusses the two approaches of understanding colour, namely subjective feelings and objective colour principles.*

Title: **Chromophobia**
Author: **David Batchelor.**
Publisher: London: Reaktion, 2000.
Call number: RART 701.85019 BAT
Description: *Discusses the attempts throughout history to purge colour from art, and the reasons behind it.*

Title: **Color: The Secret Influence**
Author: Fehrman, Kenneth R. and Cherie Fehrman
Publisher: Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000.
Call number: RART 701.85 FEH
Description: *A basic introduction to colour theory and the various influences on human psychology.*

Title: **Color Choices**
Author: Quiller, Stephen
Publisher: New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 1989.
Call number: RART 752 QUI
Description: *A manual of colour theory for artists.*

Title: **Color perception: Philosophical, Psychological, Artistic, and Computational Perspectives**
Author: Davis, Steven ed.
Publisher: New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
Call number: R 152.145 COL
Description: *These papers from a Cognitive Science Conference cover a wide range of topics on the nature and perception of colour.*

Title: **Colors Demonic and Divine: Shades of Meaning in the Middle Ages and After**
Author: Pleij, Herman
Publisher: New York: Columbia University Press, c2004.
Call number: R 155.91145 PLE

Description: Investigates the uses and perception of colour in medieval European society.

Title: **Colour and Meaning: Art, Science and Symbolism**

Author: Gage, John

Publisher: Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, c1999.

Call number: RART 701.85 GAG

Description: Discusses various topics including optical mixing, colour symbolism and colour languages.

Title: **Dimensional Color**

Author: Swirnoff, Lois

Publisher: New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1992.

Call number: RART 701.85 SWI

Description: Deals with the effect of colour and brightness on 3-dimensional space.

Title: **Principles of Color: A Review of Past Traditions and Modern Theories of Color Harmony**

Author: Birren, Faber

Publisher: West Chester, Pa.: Schiffer Pub, 1987.

Call number: RART 701.85 BIR

Description: An introductory book on colour harmony and the psychology of perception.

Title: **Theory of Colours**

Author: Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von

Publisher: Cambridge (Mass.); London: M.I.T. Press, 1970.

Call number: RU RCLOS 535.601 GOE

Description: Published in 1810, this work documents Goethe's subjective approach to colour phenomena and aesthetics.

Journals

Title: **Leonardo**

Publisher: Oxford, England; New York, U.S.A.: Pergamon Press, c1968-

Call number: RART 705 L

URL: <http://mitpress2.mit.edu/e-journals/Leonardo/index.html>

Description: Leonardo is the leading journal for readers interested in the application of contemporary science and technology to the arts.

Databases

Art Full Text and Art Index Retrospective

Art Full Text offers indexes (from 1984), abstracts and full text (from 1997) of articles from an international range of art periodicals covering subjects such as Advertising Art, Architecture, Art History, Contemporary Art, Costume, Graphic Arts, and Photography. Expanded coverage includes Asian, Canadian, Latin American and other non-Western art. Art Index Retrospective allows users to search 55 years (1929-1984) of art-related articles from periodicals, select yearbooks and museum bulletins. This database is available from the multimedia stations in the libraries.

Grove Art Online

Grove Art Online provides web access to the entire text of *The Dictionary of Art* (1996, 34 vols.) and *The Oxford Companion to Western Art* (2001). It offers ongoing additions of new and updated articles, over 1,500 thumbnail art images and line drawings displayed in the text of articles, extensive image links, and sophisticated search and navigation tools. This database is available from the multimedia stations in the libraries.

Xreferplus

Xreferplus is an online reference library that provides you with access to the full text of a selection of reference books. Xreferplus includes encyclopedias, dictionaries, thesauri and books of quotations, plus a range of subject-specific titles covering everything from art to accountancy and literature to law. This database is available from the multimedia stations in the libraries.

Websites

There are a number of useful resources about the psychology of colour available on the Internet. This list includes selected website resources to assist you in further in-depth research on your own. This list was last accessed on 22 June 2005.

Title: **Causes of Color**
URL: <http://webexhibits.org/causesofcolor/>
Description: *An introduction to the ways colour is formed and perceived.*

Title: **Color Matters**
URL: <http://www.colormatters.com/>
Description: *The concept of color can be approached from several disciplines: physiology, psychology, philosophy, and art. This web site provides some starting points for an exploration of color.*

Title: **ColorAcademy**
URL: <http://www.coloracademy.co.uk/>
Description: *The ColorAcademy website offers information on the history, psychology, meanings and values that people have attributed to colours. It centres on colour as a means of communication, especially for those interested in Arts & Humanities.*

Title: **PsyArt**
URL: <http://www.clas.ufl.edu/ipasa/journal/index.shtml>
Description: *PsyArt is a peer-reviewed, archived journal focusing on psychological studies of the arts: literature, film, visual arts, or music. Some articles on colour in art are included.*

Title: **The Science of Vision and the Emergence of Art**
URL: <http://webexhibits.org/colorart/>
Description: *An introduction to colour theory and visual perception.*

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For further assistance, please ask the Librarian.

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