

Most of my emotional epiphanies and episodes have occurred in bed - even this series of self portraits was conceived while in my safe space. Each self portrait is painted on a bed sheet or pillowcase, portraying the vulnerability and privacy of these emotions. I cultivated and harbored my own emotional color palette in a series of self portraits reflecting what emotions I tend to bury, and what emotions tend to overwhelm me.

I want to reclaim the stigmas around the “negative” emotions of anger, depression, despair, insecurity, fear, and happiness because though they can be troublesome, they are actually vital tools for the human experience

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As a growing artist, I notice the details in everything. From color detail to intricacies in designs, nothing is safe from my eye. I love being an artist, I love having a definite outlet to release my creativity with. It is the highest form of my personal self expression. It's hard to pinpoint an exact moment when my obsession with art and subsequently with color began in my life, but it was a very specific common theme throughout. I was always known as the "art kid" during elementary and high school, and embraced the title with open arms.

My early years of high school were an integral part of discovering and evolving my artistic persona. I experimented more with different mediums and materials while also growing up emotionally. This period of self discovery seemed to narrate itself with advancing style and more mature art. No longer was I just making art to kill time, I was taking the talent seriously, and making art to explain parts of myself that words could not. Each stroke of color had underlying purpose, I was making statements about events in my life in the only way I knew would be effective for me. I was documenting heartbreak, mental illness, death and questions about existentialism in my most raw form. I felt more comfortable using color to express myself than I did talking about what I was experiencing.

But does every culture view colors the way I was brought up to? And if they didn't, how had it changed over time? What were the differences, the similarities? For example, "In Western cultures, green represents luck, nature, freshness, spring, environmental awareness, wealth, inexperience, and jealousy...In Indonesia, green has traditionally been forbidden, whereas in Mexico, it's a national color that stands for independence. In Eastern cultures, green symbolizes youth, fertility, and new life, but it can also mean infidelity" ("Cultural Color." Empowered By Color). Color symbolism is different from country to country perhaps because of each culture's unique heritage and history.

And although emotion and self expression range different for each person, there are some universal truths to colors. Red is symbolically considered the color of life and the human experience, and I couldn't agree more. With a color as passionate as red, covering an array of different human emotions, it seems most fitting to follow us throughout birth until death. It emits radiant energy, increases muscle tone, breath rate, and blood pressure. Red pigment was buried with bones of the dead in hopes for renewal of life. It stands out and begs for attention, just like anger.

Blue seems to follow me around, and I tend to prefer most things covered in a blue hue. It's common knowledge between artists that cool colors represent a sort of calm and subdued feeling. It blends into the background and like it's name, gives the false feeling of cold. "It is not quite of earth, this blue, which apart from sea and sky is the rarest color in nature. Blue is linked with eternity, the beyond, supernatural beauty, religious transcendence, the spiritual and mental as contrasted with the emotional and physical and with detachment from the earthly" (Taschen, The Book of Symbols). It's a theme that blue is considered to represent the elite and the most valued. Blue ribbons, blue-chip stocks, and even blue blood which was used to describe the veins showing through the skin of fair-complexioned aristocrats. A color that was one of the last to be identified and perceived, many early works of art simply omit the color due to the pigment's expense and lack of raw materials. Seeming almost to be the polar opposite of red, blue slows the heart rate, lowers blood pressure. A color used to describe an entire musical genre devoted to sadness, it's the midway between despair and clarity, suggesting detachment and depth.

Although these colors have a heavy symbolic history, they are also used heavily in media to manipulate our emotions. Branding is detrimental to a company, and in the article titled

Impact of Color on Marketing by Satyendra Singh it explains that “up to 90% of snap judgments made about products can be based on color alone (depending on the product).”

It's why Target's interior is largely painted red, as red triggers that snap judgement reaction. And I found that hilarious, the fact that I just realized the reason for Target's color scheme. As an easily influenced consumer being overstimulated by today's color oriented marketing scheme, I was still blind to just that, the marketing scheme. I'd never truly contemplated why the inside of a sophisticated clothing store was predominantly white and smooth as opposed to REI's rugged wood and green furnishing. It's the assumption of cleanliness versus ruggedness, catering to two different audiences who have the desire for chic and the desire for the outdoors. Influential color in fast food restaurants, red and yellow being the most common combinations of colors because it suggests excitement and happiness (two things fast food will probably not give you). They're designed to catch our eyes and start a neurological reaction that we aren't aware is sending manufactured thoughts to us. Once again, on that opposite spectrum of emotion and color, blue is used for most social media websites to calm us. Apps such as Skype, Facebook and Twitter all use a similar blue layout to reduce the stress of the user and blend into the background. Many designers consider blue the “trusting” color, considering many banks, financial companies and medical companies use it as their most dominating color. It manipulates us to feel safe and secure, which becomes ironic after hacks into bank accounts and financial security compromises.

But companies using color to manipulate our feelings and our thoughts isn't just limited to mainstream brands, it's also widely used for storytelling. “In Eric von Stroheim's *Greed*, we follow a man who has won the lottery. The film is shot in black and white aside from the color tinted gold money. By the end of the film as the man's possessiveness grows, the entire film is engulfed in yellow symbolising the man's complete consumption in the use of color alone” (Channel Criswell). This perfectly executes symbolic color theory, using yellow to symbolize greed and sin taking over the man's life by first only exclusively coloring the money and moving on to dominate the entire screen. Another prominent example of this is *The Wizard of Oz*, as Dorothy is plucked from a bleak, sepia toned canvas and placed into a painting lush with a diverse palette. Whether the tone of the story is cold and hopeless (blues) or gritty and dangerous (browns and yellows), the color serves that purpose to storytell. Although there is no set guideline on how to use color, understanding the cognitive effects does help tremendously for evoking emotion through a story and through art. Perhaps that is why Wes Anderson movies boast a constant color scheme of vibrancy, it gives an air of playfulness, and that not much in the movie should be taken seriously. And the change in color correlating to the mood of the story doesn't have to be as obvious as *Greed* or *The Wizard of Oz*. In the infamous TV show titled *Breaking Bad*, the main character's shirt changes to darker tones as he follows a path of corruption and evil throughout the series. Ultimately, that's the best use of color in a story, to drive the plot forward, noticeable or not. And just like paintings, these scenes using color correctly can create excitement, sadness, and unease. It drives us toward compassion and repulsion, because color is delicate and powerful.

Obviously color affects my brain, just like everyone else, but color has been an integral part of my life. Being an artist has trained my eyes to pick up on detail that otherwise goes unnoticed, and to deeply root myself in my artwork by giving a part of myself to each piece. My familiarity with each of my emotions, to the point where I know where each one affects my body, and to the point where I can clearly associate a color with each one. Michaela Doucleff conducted research in an NPR article titled ‘Mapping Emotions On The Body: Love Makes Us

Warm All Over' and found where heat manifests or leaves our body with different emotions. Obviously heat congregates in our head, chest and hands with anger, and we are almost completely devoid of heat and instead are pretty much hollow with depression. It's pretty fitting that a feeling identified strongly with red conjures up the most heat in our body, and the most "blue" feeling leaves a giant hole in our center with cooler colors crawling up our legs and arms, as if holding us captive.

Happiness mapped on the body is heat all over, with the most being up in the head and in the chest area. It's all yellow, the most commonly connected color with happiness (re. unhappy fast food restaurants). Similarly to the heat map, I feel the happiness behind my eyes and in my cheeks, sparking in my throat and in my stomach. But yellow for me isn't the color of happiness, alternatively, it's blue. Perhaps it's the color's calming nature and ability to reduce heart rate and create a sense of tranquility. Happiness isn't always the excitement of yellow, but rather the feeling of contentment and calmness that comes with the color blue. I find it too intricate of a color and it makes sense that it best describes my most intricate emotion. Because I am prone to these episodes of depression, happiness seems almost unattainable at times. And maybe because of this mental affliction, I don't view happiness as the overstimulation that yellow portrays but rather a calm and subdued feeling that brings peace and serenity with it.

Of course there are other emotions I feel. I'm not simply restricted to happy, sad, angry all the time (all though it sometimes feels like it.) Fear is purple and suffocating, and on Doucleff's heat map, it resembles anger to an extent. It's not as concentrated as anger is, but covers most of the same areas and extends into the stomach. Anxiety is a constant plague of mine, causing me to become fidgety and nervous and end up with bloody fingers and lips from picking at them.

Michaeleen Doucleff also wrote that "The scientists hope these body emoticons may one day help psychologists diagnose or treat mood disorders." Mapping out the heat stimulation in the body was definitely an interesting, unique, and innovative approach to understanding our emotions better and where they manifest most prominently inside of us, and how that heat (or lack of) manifests physically.

Even Chakras are color coded. Chakras are known as the wheels of energy throughout the body that are opened through meditation. Each wheel corresponds to large nerve centers in the body, and there is a great importance to keep these wheel passageways clear and unblocked so energy can flow freely throughout our entire being. The first chakra (Muladhara) is located at our base and preaches safety and fearlessness while the last chakra (Sahaswara) is located at the crown of our head and gives us enlightenment and spiritual connection. Each of these wheels is color coded, beginning at red and ending up top at purple. Chakras are color coded according to the wavelength of the color itself. The Muladhara chakra, or the red chakra, is the first and densest chakra, therefore claiming the densest color. On the opposite side of the spectrum, the purple Sahaswara chakra uses the color that is hardest to see and relates it to its overall meaning of awareness and spiritual awakening by making the chakra one of the hardest to obtain. And yet, despite long complicated explanations of color wavelengths, it all relates back to the symbolism of color that is used at the base of all media and advertisement. Red represents safety and survival, orange represents creativity, yellow represents intellect and happiness, green represents compassion, blue represents inner peace and self expression, and purple represents inner wisdom and intuition.

Without color, I would have no way to fully express what words cannot. Even from culture to culture, different forms of media, religious practices, color finds a way to integrate itself throughout history symbolically.

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