

This video installation displays the connection between the color red and how it is used as a device to translate emotion and meaning. I want viewers to consider the deep symbolism behind this color. In order to convey this, I researched the color red, its historical significance, and the emotional meaning it holds. Red has a physical effect on humans and animals. For example, it increases heart rate and blood pressure.

To express this, I used a combination of live action video, sound, and animation. The animation represents the physical effects one experiences. I moved from the physical effects to the contrast between life and death as a rose grows out of the bull's skull. I hope to evoke the range of emotions that red has come to signify.

Elana

## Seeing Red

Elana



The color red has been a symbol of emotion since the pigment was first invented in the stone age, by grinding ochre, a red clay, and using it to symbolically color bodies. Humans feel red on a different spectrum than just visually and the color has a physical affect on humans. Red increases muscle tone, blood pressure, and breath rate. The color can even sexually arouse animals. Men and women have both rated people more attractive when wearing red, as red grabs our attention first. Historically, Red has symbolized life. Its meaning relates to the human experience of blood and fire. In Primitive thinking, blood meant life. When the red blood leaves the body, it takes life with it. Red blood also serves as a warning sign. The red burn of fire also serves as a comfort, yet it is still out of control. Red also has a sexual and passionate side. The



red hearts on valentines, red slinky dresses, red lipstick and the Scarlet letter, and the scarlet-robed Whore of Babylon. We also “see red” when we are angry. Red has an enraged tone. In ancient times, the “red planet” Mars, was the God of war. In African culture, the warrior has red eyes. “...Red shows murder, anarchy, and war, fierce energy, and destruction.” I have been in love with the dark and passionate emotions that follow the color red, and the meanings it has. I am interested on how artists can portray these emotions and meanings through art.

Mark Rothko is an artist who used red primarily in his work to represent deep human emotions. In his painting, *Four Darks in Red*, (shown above) Rothko uses the color red to highlight what he thought were the the three basic human emotions- tragedy, ecstasy, and doom. “Mark Rothko's paintings are titled by color variations, and all consist of soft, rectangular bands of color stretching horizontally across his canvases. *Red, Brown, Black* exemplifies a kind of chromatic abstraction known as Color Field painting. Color Field painters were concerned with brushstroke and paint texture, but they came to view color as the most powerful communication tool. Rothko's interests in mysticism, religion, and myth hearken back to the Surrealists, and his blocks of color are meant to provide a contemplative, meditative space in which to visually investigate one's own moods and affiliations with the chosen palette. He sought to distill an essence, or true nature, out of codified hues.” Rothko used color as a way of expressing these interests he had in the world. Rothko once said, ““I'm not an abstractionist. I'm not interested in the relationship of color or form or anything else. I'm interested only in expressing basic human emotions: tragedy, ecstasy, doom, and so on.” He uses these colors for the sole meaning of them rather than the visual look of them. these paintings make one feel these emotions from the meanings of the color red,

instead of the scene shown on the painting. He simply translates these feelings through color. Another Rothko painting, *Red Over Dark Blue and Dark Grey*. This painting represents the grief and rage felt within the human mind. The red illustrates the anger and rage that a human feels. This same pattern, using color to translate a certain emotion and feeling shows up in literature as well. In old times, gothic literature often had many references to the color red, as well as newer literature.

Writers use the color red to enhance their writing and pique interest in the readers, and to symbolize different meanings. Red is often used to show strength, war, danger, or even passion and love. "According to a study published in 2004 by psychology majors in Alabama, red is a very dominant color which can have an exciting and stimulating effect. Based on circumstances, Gothic writers use it for drawing both positive and negative emotions. These include, typically, passion and warmth and aggression or intensity. Red is also the color of fire and blood and can symbolize energy, war, danger, strength, determination, passion, as well as love. Red is known to trigger and enhance appetite and metabolism, raise the rate of respiration and also increase blood pressure. It has high visibility and is used to symbolize danger." This proves that the color red has affect on readers and viewers alike. This proves that the color red has a physical affect on people, as well as an emotional and mental affect.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, by Nathaniel Hawthorne, red is used to portray the tones of adultery, evil and sin that are shown in the book. The term "Scarlet Woman" was thought to have been from this book, but it was actually created in the Bible, describing the Whore of Babylon, who wore scarlet and violet. The color red is worn by Hester in the scarlet letter because of its easily identifiable appearance of sin and evil, as mentioned earlier. The color red isn't only mentioned as the scarlet letter on Hester's breast, it was mentioned in a rose bush, outside of the community prison. "it's delicate gems, which might be imagined to offer their fragrance and fragile beauty... This rosebush, by strange chance, has been kept alive in history... it had sprung under the footsteps of sainted Ann Hutchinson, as she entered the prison door... It may serve, let us hope, to symbolize some sweet moral blossom... or relieve the darkening close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow," (Hawthorne, 42.) The red in this page serves as a pure and colorful spot in a sad tale, contrasting the red of the scarlet letter. "Pearl, seeing the rosebushes, began to cry for a red rose, and would not be pacified," (95.) "Red Rose, at the very least, judging from thy hue!" (97.) "The child finally announced that she had not been made at all, but had been plucked by her mother off the bush of wild roses that grew by the prison door." (99.) The red of the rose serves as a relief from the darkness and sin in the book. Nature offered a glimpse of hope and color to the prison, which represented sorrow and loss. The red reminds the prisoners that beauty still exists. The stimulating color of red is also often used in movies, often in Wes Anderson movies.

Wes Anderson frequently includes the color red visually into his films. In this context, it is used to display social interactions in between others. Filmmaker "Wes Anderson has developed a distinct aesthetic style that is easily recognizable through his use of striking color palettes. The purpose of this research was to draw conclusions about social stratification, social construction and the role of family as they relate to color palettes in Anderson's films. Relying on the auteur theory (the theory that the director is more the author of the movie rather than just the writer of the screenplay), the research related Anderson's personal experiences with those of his characters and aimed at discerning the importance of color as it connects to social structure." Wes Anderson uses his colors to show relationships, usually between parents and children, that reflected his own life at home. For instance, the color red represents the neurotic personalities

shown in the films. “Red seems to be a color of longing, having deep-rooted issues attached in the realm of fatherhood. In the case for these three fathers, they are a main source of conflict in their families. “Even more than most directors, Anderson uses costumes as an extension of his characters” (Mayshark, 2007, p. 125). Colors and costuming foil the neurotic personalities associated in his



films. The sense of self-importance garnered by these three fathers has caused them to be ostracized in some way by their families. Mayshark (2007) states that their emotional maturity lags behind their perceived triumphs in society (p. 116): Royal and Herman are wealthy businessmen; Zissou is a semi-accomplished marine documentarian. For them, red is a color of power and security, though it also evokes a sense of boyish enthusiasm. Red in *The Darjeeling Limited* appears most vibrantly in the father’s car – the

item about which he cared most (refer to Figure 2). After his death, his sons both covet and resent the car because of the void it represents in their lives and how they could never live up to the esteem of the vehicle itself.” Anderson Used these colors to illustrate the problems that came

up in a family dynamic quite often. Red being a vibrant color, it is used to draw attention to a certain object or moment in the scene. In terms of filmmaking, red has the meaning of anger, passion, rage, desire, excitement, energy, speed, strength, power, heat, love, aggression, danger, fire, blood, war, violence.



Artists have used the color red as an allegory and a way to translate emotion and feeling into something visual or work in literature. Wes Anderson uses red to highlight the social interactions in family members. Hawthorne used it to portray the conflicting emotions in *The Scarlet Letter*, and Rothko used red to display the connections and interactions in deep human emotions.

## Bibliography:

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter*. New York: Modern Library, 1950. Print.

Ronnberg, Ami, and Kathleen Martin. *The Book of Symbols*. Köln: Taschen, 2010. Print.

"Color Red Increases the Speed and Strength of Reactions." Color Red Increases the Speed and Strength of Reactions : Rochester News. N.p., n.d. Web. 08 Dec. 2016.

Park, Alice. "Do Women Really Not Like Other Women In Red?" *Time*. Time, n.d. Web. 08 Dec. 2016.

In Design, Film| February 25th, 2015 1 Comment. "Wes Anderson Likes the Color Red (and Yellow)." *Open Culture*. N.p., 5 Feb. 2015. Web. 08 Dec. 2016.