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*Theater 7*

Oil on Canvas

My final project is centered around the relationship between color and memory. I have always been really interested in how childhood affects us and I also knew that I wanted my final project to be full of colors, so I combined the two. My research ranged from color theory to how color changes and tricks our perception of reality. This inspired me to create a piece where my memories are examined and given a color to represent the moment.

The seven characters in my painting are all versions of me from different core memories I experienced and the colors are an expression of how I was feeling in that moment. I didn't show the faces of each memory because it makes the emotions harder to read and more ambiguous, leaving more work for the color to explore. I also used flashes of light to cover the faces because it reminds me of a camera flash, which is how each memory has been remembered. It reminds the viewer that the characters are unreachable as they are only figments of the past now.

# The Color of Memories



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OS47

*Writer's note: Over the course of this project I dived deep into the relationship between color and memory. I asked the question "how do the messages associated with color impact how we perceive this world?" The research I did gave me specific and interesting takes on the different ways the topics intersect and I thought that the best way to showcase this relationship was through my own personal experiences in the form of poetry along with a short research recap with the facts. Each poem in this collection focuses on a different color and they all play off of the associations that each color has to create a window into my childhood others can peer into and relate to.*

## **I. Research Recap**

Color is and always has been a key tool to understanding the world around us. Color associations provide insight into how different colors are perceived differently and how that is used in society. In many parts of the world, colors evoke different emotions and experiences depending on the culture's history and stories involving the color. So while color itself is unchanging, its connotation is determined by the society we live in. This is especially true in art. Using inferences from color and where the artwork was created can help us achieve a deeper understanding of an artwork's hidden meaning.

Color is also intertwined with memory. A study discussed in *The Influence of Colour on Memory Performance: A Review* showed that the more colorful something is, the more likely it is that the subject will remember it. This can be applied to childhood memories. The more colorful and intense a moment was, the more vividly you remember it.

In addition, color can distort reality. In a journal by Grace Adams, they discuss an occurrence called imaginal overlay in which color and memory combine to change the perception of reality. The paper outlines 3 separate times when a subject observed the world and at first saw

one scene and after further examination realized that what they were looking at was something completely different. The saying that one sees what they want to see is actually not that far off and an example of this is written about in the paper. It was an instance when a subject was walking down the street in the rain and mistook a woman's umbrella for a sword. This seems like such a different object that it's strange they would see this but the subject had been thinking about a sword lately because they were wondering if their son took a family sword up to his room. This combined with the lighting caused an imaginal overlay and once their perception was righted it can't be seen again.

## **II. My Red**

My red is a lonesome chair.  
Full of crevices to sink into,  
enveloping me in the  
comfort of invisibility.  
Hidden from the world,  
I become the observer.

My red is one big shirt,  
with little pom-poms going  
all the way down back.  
Lost in the folds I'm quiet,  
There is nothing here.  
I become nothing here.

My red is quiet,

My red is resilient.

It stacks upon itself,

like lego bricks

Always one moment away

from tumbling

down

down,

down.

My red is weak sometimes,

I'm learning to be ok.

### **III. Orange Juice on the Balcony**

The wind flutters through the open balcony doors,

dancing its way through the undisturbed room.

It flutters across my skin, mingling with the sheet draped over me.

An orange tint fills the room from the steady rising sun.

Waves crash against the sand, signaling the start of a new day,

another chance to exist, to live how I want.

Each morning here brings an adventure to the shop next door.  
With clinking coins in our pocket, my sister and I run barefoot downstairs.  
The first chance to be all grown up makes us giddy with laughter.

The oranges here taste like affectionate glances and soft embraces.  
Our small fingers grip the porous rind as we juggle three oranges each,  
jumping over cracks in the pavement, dancing to the music in our heads.

We deliver the prized oranges to the kitchen where strong hands take over.  
Five minutes later there are four equal glasses of orange juice on the balcony table.  
We drink together in loving silence. I've never been so happy.

I'm learning to love the small things here.  
The way the stars reflect on the ocean,  
nighttime walks along the beach,  
morning orange juice on the balcony.

Life is good.

#### **IV. Poem 3 - Yellow:**

Two feet and a fist cast in plaster  
lay upon a sliver of wall.  
Once white frames

are speckled with yellow spots,  
signs of age showing through.

A wooden desk  
decorated with scribbles,  
moments in time frozen in place,  
reminders of what once was  
and what will be.

A toy stuffed phone,  
lost in a bucket of memories.  
The maker now lost as well,  
a call left unanswered.

Objects become reminders,  
stuck in time,  
a memorial for the person we once were.  
You too are a reminder,  
of the person I once thought you were.

We move through time and now I am grown.

The age has shown through.

Autumnal leaves turn,  
from green to yellow.

## **V. Spring Flowers**

Winter frost numbs sense,  
leaving us stranded,  
blindly stumbling around  
looking for a purpose,  
but the frost has frozen that too.

The only green in winter  
is that of sickness.

Life goes underground  
And there is silence again.

But time prevails.

The first seedling erupts  
from the ground.

Hues of green saplings follow,  
littering the ground with color.

A signal of hope,  
a sign that life is alive.

My hand unfurls

like a fern,  
towards the light in the sky,  
as my fingertips sway in the wind,  
dancing to the melody of the breeze.

Rejoice, for the flower blooms.

## **VI. 8,296**

Blue are the tears in my eyes,  
plunging down my face  
as I watch you leave.

Blue is the endless ocean,  
the shimmering barrier between us.

Ever expansive,  
ever elusive.

Blue is the sky you flew away in,  
Airplane jets become white noise.

Blue is the skype icon on your computer,  
your face reduced to pixels,

red,

green,

and blue.

I can't hug you through the screen.

Blue is your promise,

"I'll come back soon".

How long is soon?

Eight thousand,

two hundred,

and ninety six miles

between you and me.

Please come back,

I miss you.

## **VII. 10/30/2012**

The sky was purple that night.

The storm,

a wild beast,

inklings of black and blue

dripped

down,

like streaks of paint,

becoming rain as it fell.

The tempestuous wind screamed into nothingness  
picking up the droplets in its rage,  
slamming them against window panes.

There is a sense of urgency in the air,  
a change is coming.

One being becomes two.

The darkness of the night subsides  
as midnight becomes early morning.

Candle flames match the rising sun.

The indigo sky blooms into orchid purple.

You were only five minutes old when I got to hold you,  
your delicate skin matched the shades of purple up above.

So gentle you were,

So fragile you were,

So peaceful you were.

In the middle of the storm

You were the eye of the hurricane.

## Works Cited

**Adams, Grace Kinckle. “An Experimental Study of Memory Color and Related Phenomena.”** *The American Journal of Psychology*, vol. 34, no. 3, 1923, pp. 359–407. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1413955>. Accessed 27 Nov. 2022.

In this journal by Grace Adams, they discuss three occasions in which color and memory intersect to change the perception of reality called imaginal overlay. The first occurrence appears when the individual experiences a moment in which they perceive something in one state but only later realizes that they had falsely perceived and now feel their perception changing, the imaginal overlay is lifted. The example used in the study is when the subject sees a bath mat where a triangle section is a dark color which they assume is because it is wet. When they go to pick up the mat, they realize that the dark triangle is actually a shadow from a reflection in the window. The color and their unconscious assessment of their surroundings and past history with the bath mat led them to assume the patch was water, showing how color and patterns can change our view. The next occurrence was when an individual views a scene where some information is missing. Their unconscious mind fills in some of the blanks for them but in fact it can actually change the way they see the scene and when the missing information is given to them, the false perception is ended. An example given was when a subject saw a bright red truck through the shrubs in their yard. When they saw the truck it was perceived as the brilliant scarlet that is the color of fire trucks, but after a moment they realized that it was not a truck at all that they were seeing but red leaves from a tree. After this realization the color darkened to a brownish-red and despite their efforts they could not get their mind to visualize that bright red on the leaves again even though they had just a moment ago. The third instance is when a subject saw a woman holding an umbrella and at very first glance mistook it for a sword because of the way the light shone. There was also a willingness in the subject to see a sword because they had misplaced a family sword in their home and had been wondering if their son had taken it up to his room. The combination of unconscious searching for a sword and the way color and light change images lead to a changed perception in reality.

**Brownlee, Peter John. “Color Theory and the Perception of Art.”** *American Art*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2009, pp. 21–24. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.1086/605706>. Accessed 27 Nov. 2022.

In this source, Peter Brownlee documents the history of color theory and how that has changed the perception of art over the course of time. The journal documents topics such as the market economy of pigments, systems for colors such as the primary colors, prismatic light, and the comparisons between color and other areas of art. Brownlee brings up Helmholtz’s essay “On the Relation of Optics to Painting” which changed the way color was used in painting by letting the viewer be eased into the artwork. Adding to this, Ogden Rood’s *Modern Chromatics* create the foundations for color theory for years to come.

**Dzulkifli, Mariam Adawiah, and Muhammad Faiz Mustafar. “The Influence of Colour on Memory Performance: A Review.” *The Malaysian Journal of Medical Sciences* :**

***MJMS*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, Mar. 2013,**

**[https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3743993/#\\_\\_sec4title](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3743993/#__sec4title).**

Dzulkifli and Mustafar outline the connection between memory and color and how this can be applied in everyday life in this scientific journal. They bring up a study done by Frank Farley and Alfred Grant in which two presentations were given to a group of adults. Results showed that participants remembered information from the lecture where color was used in a dominant manner as opposed to the one in black and white. It was also found that within the color spectrum, warm and bright colors attracted much more attention than dull and cool toned colors. Another study on color and memory is by Donald MacKay and Marat Ahmetzanov where they tested a person’s ability to remember the details about a selection of colored shapes. When members of the study were asked afterwards what color and shape the objects were, they remembered the color much more often than the shape. This same theme showed up in all other studies cited in the paper and showed a clear sign that memory and color are linked.

**Elliot, Andrew J. “Color and Psychological Functioning: A Review of Theoretical and Empirical Work.” *Frontiers in Psychology*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2**

**Apr. 2015, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4383146/>.**

Color has always been a crucial aspect of how we perceive the world. The associations we have with each color tell us different things about how we are meant to feel when we see that color. While the color itself is unchanging, each connotation it has is created by the society we live in and means that most cultures associate different emotions and experiences with different colors. One section of the paper contemplates why different colors have the meanings and effects that they do. Some scholars theorized that it had to do with the wavelength of colors, shorter wavelengths being cool and larger wavelengths being warm. Others proposed that it had to do with skin tone and how colors like blue and green in skin indicate sickness whereas red can convey anger or excitement and energy. A table in the paper showed a list of studies done on color and what the findings were. Most were based on the color red with some on the color blue and showed a multitude of ways the associations with this color could negatively and positively affect someone. Red was able to invoke anger or increased energy and someone wearing red could be found more attractive than average. The color blue was routinely seen as more trustworthy and calm than other colors. This shows that color can affect how we see someone or something in a different light because of the colors associated with them.

**Gilbert-Rolfe, Jeremy. “Color as Metaphor.” *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 2, 1981,**

**pp. 104–06. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20166670>. Accessed 27 Nov. 2022.**

Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe discusses the role of color in paintings as a metaphor and as a simile and how they can change the dynamic of a painting. Gilbert-Rolfe starts the paper by differentiating the difference between how metaphors and similes appear in artworks. Due to the nature of painting as a visual art, all insinuations of literary aspects can be confusing and hard to differentiate, however due to the nature of metaphors and their consistent air of ambiguity, they are much harder to point out from a viewer's perspective than similes are. The author remarks on how in many paintings, the artist is not painting the subject but rather the idea of the subject which in some cases leaves the viewers to pick up visual cues in order to fill in the thematic blanks. An example of this is in many of Henry Matisse's paintings he uses color in such a way that the viewer can infer the idea that the painting is trying to display while still being able to balance an artificial sense to the artwork, reminding the viewer that the scene before them is not real. From this we can see that color creates a theme and changing the colors of the same image creates different moods and feelings that would be attached to them.

**Ronnberg, Ami, and Kathleen Martin. "Color Symbolism ." *The Book of Symbols*, Taschen, 2010, pp. 658–656.**

*The Book of Symbols'* section on color symbolism outlines clearly each color's connotations in both history and modern day society and why. The book goes through all the colors of the rainbow and black, white, and gray. The writing helps to explain why certain associations came about and how those change between cultures. This is a helpful key for understanding deeper meanings in artworks by finding the symbolism for each color that was used and can lead to another layer of understanding and thought.