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Color Worksop Presentation Johannes Itten: Elements of Color

1888-1967

Two deep breaths
Stretch
Shake out arms
Shake out legs

These might be ways in which Itten would have begun his classes. He believed that the experience of creating encompassed the mind, body and spirit. He would often begin his classes with physical exercises.

Painter, Sculptor, Designer, Teacher, Writer & Theorist

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Show his paintings and his sculpture

Studies were heavily influenced by old masters
Studied under Adolf Holzel, and furthered Holzel's development of the color wheel.
Holzel was directly influenced by Goethe and the mathematic principles of the Golden Section.

Most recognized for having being a founding member of the faculty at the Bauhaus during 1919-1923.

Worked under Walter Gropius, as well as with other Expressionist painters and artists who experimented with color. EX. Paul Klee, George Muche.

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Itten, who believed that art and design were about individual expression, was asked to leave the Bauhaus because Gropius chose to support a more modernist aesthetic and structured the Bauhaus education for the purposes of mass production.

Chemistry, involving the molecular structure of dyes and pigments
Physics, involving the way in which the eye and brain perceive color

Believed that color should not only be understood physically but also psychologically, in the form of: Impression (visual), Expression (emotional) and Construction (symbolic).
Itten believed that the aesthetics of color have an effect on our mind and spirit.

Chroma: Colors

Achromatic: Black, White, Grey

Itten describes a 12-hue color circle:

Primary colors (Slide)

Secondary colors (Slide)

Tertiary colors (Slide)

Believe in a 12-hue color wheel because it could be accurately visualized by an artist at any given time. He compared his color wheel to the twelve tones of a musician's chromatic scale.

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Itten believes that the eye is always trying to seek a balanced or harmonized color scheme. Balance is equivalent to a neutral grey

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Neutral grey can be achieved by mixing black and white, all of the primary colors (red, yellow, blue) or pairs of complementary colors (ie. blue & orange).

The Seven Color Contrasts

Contrast is important as a point of comparison between two colors. It is difficult to analyze a color's characteristics unless it is placed next to another color for comparison.

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The most extreme contrasts are Black and White.

Itten believed: (quote) "we can detect seven different kinds of color contrast. Each is unique in character and artistic value, in visual, expressive and symbolic effect; and together they constitute the fundamental resource of color design."

1. Contrast of Hue

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Colors appear in their most intense luminosity displaying extreme contrast of hues. The most intense hues are red, yellow and blue, the three primaries. Each subsequent color mixture weakens in character.

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When each hue is separated by black or white, their qualities become even more distinctive. White tends to make colors appear darker and weakens their luminosity. Black causes them to seem light and more luminescent.

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Artist examples: Matisse, Mondrian

2. Light and Dark Contrast

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Neutral grey has no character and takes on qualities based on the colors that surround it/influence it. Its subtleties can only be detected when it is compared to other shades of grey.

The goal of this example is to create comparisons between different shades of grey. the point is to cultivate the perception of light-dark gradations and contrasts.

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Some complexity arises when the tonal gradations of different hues are compared. It is important to compare colors of equal brilliance.

(Slide of highest brilliance)

This shows how each color attains its highest brilliance at a difference level. This is useful in order to understand how a color can be perceived at its brightest and how it can be subdued.

Spacial effects also relate to the use of light and dark
Light tones on a black background advance, dark tones recede.
Light tones of a white background recede, dark tones advance.

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Examples: Rembrandt, Francisco de Zurbaran

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3. Cold-Warm Contrast

The color wheel is divided in half. Left=cool. Right=warm.

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Coldest color is blue-green
Warmest color is red-orange
Always true

But other mixes of warm and cool colors are relative to the colors that surround them. So depending on what it is next to, a color may give the impression of being warmer or cooler. Red-violet seems warm in fig 18 and cool in fig 19.

Cold colors tend to recede and warm colors advance. So this is important to consider when choosing colors for a design.

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Examples: Monet, cold/warm contrasts

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4. Complementary Contrasts

Complementary colors are opposite each other on the color wheel.

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Two complementary colors mixed together as pigments create grey.

Two complementary colors mixed together as light yield white.

Side by side=enhance each other's vividness, but when they are
Mixed together=neutralize/grey.

When complementary colors are used in the correct proportions they have a stabilizing or balancing effect.

Also, each complementary pair has unique qualities.

Red/Green: Equal in brilliance. (fig 1)

Yellow/Violet: Extreme light and dark (fig 2)

Red-Orange/Blue-Green: Extreme warm and cool (fig 3)

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EX: This week's assignments.

5. Simultaneous Contrast

As I have already mentioned, for every color that is represented, the eye seeks out its complement in order to achieve balance and harmony. Therefore the use of complementary colors is always essential to consider.

In this example, the center grey box should appear tinted purple.

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In this example, the center grey box should appear tinted yellow. This occurs because the eye is seeking the color's complement

This effect is most visible between grey and a strong chromatic color.

Also occurs between two colors that are not quite complementary or with split complementary pairs, side by side.

Simultaneous contrast occurs most intensely when the two hues are of equal brilliance and is diminished when light/dark contrasts are added

This can also cause a vibrating effect and dynamic activity, which may be good or bad because the eye will tire of this strain and colors will begin to lose their intensity. This effect should never be used with typography as it will become difficult to read.

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EX: Van Gogh

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6. Contrast of Saturation

This study relates to the degree of purity of a color. Therefore it's a comparison between colors that are pure hues versus dull hues.

Changing the saturation of the color changes many of its characteristics.

Colors can be desaturated by several means:

- a) color can be diluted with white to create different tints
- b) color can be diluted with black to create different shades
- c) color can be diluted with grey to create different tones
- d) color, as we discussed, can be diluted with its complement. These mixtures can be lightened with white to produce interesting tints.
- e) Also, a dull effect will be produced when any amount of yellow, red and blue are combined. The resulting admixture will veer towards whatever color holds to dominant ratio.

Spacial effects: luminous/vibrant colors advance and dull colors recede.

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EX: Matisse

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7. Contrast of Extension

This effect can be describe has a contrast of proportion and the different between more and less.

In order for this theory to apply, colors must be of equal lightness and brilliance, which can only be correctly evaluated against a neutral grey background.

Itten did not rely on the mathematical equations described by Goethe but believed that the eye was a better judge of color balance.

Figures:

How colors are balanced based on ratios.

yellow/violet: 1/4: 3/4

orange/blue: 1/3:2/3

red/green: 1/2:1/2

When colors are used in the proportions it creates a static and stable effect. When the balance does not correspond to these defined ratios a contrast of extension is achieved and the effect is expressive.

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The color in minority appears more intense as though it is defensively fighting for attention. The result is a luminosity and excitement in the composition.

This not only occurs in contrast of pure hues but also with light and dark color extension.

Color choices with regards to use in proportion should be determined based on hue, saturation, brilliance and contrasting effects.

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EX: Pieter Bruegel