

X2

Week 8 Discussion: Color and Social or Political Purpose

What did **Matisse** mean by saying: *“When I put a green, it is not grass. When I put a blue, it is not the sky.” Does color have a social or political purpose?*

Please reply to one other student's post as well.

Matisse did not view his use of color as right or wrong. The colors he used were always “right” to him even if they did not convey the likeness of the

subject/form he painted. From his perspective the colors he chose represent his subjective inner vision for the forms.

In my opinion, colors can absolutely have a social or political purpose via a hue's association or context. The two largest American political parties, for instance, are associated with particular colors to designate the states won by the presidential candidates. The Democratic Party is tied to the color blue and The Republican Party is tied to the color red. What's interesting to me is that for the American political party current hue associations come from an accident of media history rather than ideological association. The media history and evolution of the color associations is discussed here: <http://theconversation.com/red-state-blue-state-how-colors-took-sides-in-politics-93541> (Links to an external site.)

Thanks for posting the article, Amy. I never would have guessed that color TV had such influence on our political color associations! I love learning stuff like that.

What an interesting article! Thanks for sharing! I always assumed there was a more historical reason the political parties have been associated with their colors. This is a great example of how different countries can determine different color associations, and the primary influence seems to be social.

I read Matisse's quote as an invitation to see beyond our personal associations with color. The sky is blue, but that does not mean that blue is always the sky. This also ties into Krause's lesson on establishing the structure of a piece in greys before applying color. If you have your value and form set, then can enhance the piece in a multitude of ways, rather than define the piece.

It's a bit of a semantic trick, but color does not inherently **have** a political or social purpose; rather, it can be, and is, **used** for political and social purposes. This is why colors have different associations in different cultures, because at some point people assigned these meanings. I think we can even trace this back to the Matisse quote because artists and designers can choose to challenge or alter those associations by using color in unexpected ways.

I agree, Megan that Matisse's quote points to seeing beyond personal association with color. I also thought that by removing the regular association of color Matisse forces the viewer to more deeply examine form, composition and the relationship between the two.

Megan, I love how you described color being used for, but not inherently having, social purposes. It's a great description of how color works. I totally agree with you.

Matisse is commenting on how people tend to automatically associate certain colors with common objects, especially things found in nature, like grass and the sky. I believe he was trying to change people's perceptions about how color can be used in ways that are not realistic or symbolic to the masses. I believe he was inviting people to look at color relationships, moods, and emotions tied to color.

Color definitely has a political or social purpose. Color can bring up emotions.

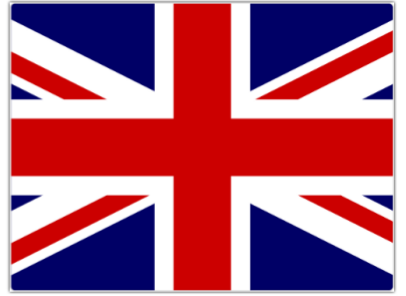
Color can unite and/or divide people but only if the people in question choose to believe in the values that are associated with a specific color. If people do not understand the meanings behind colors they can be outright confused. Take for example traffic lights in most countries. The lights and meanings are similar: red=stop yellow/orange=slow down or caution green=go. What about Japan? They have a teal or blue color in their lights. <https://www.rd.com/culture/heres-japan-blue-traffic-lights/> (Links to an external site.)

Color also helps people communicate with each other quicker.

Examples of color used in social and political ways:



Maps. The above example is probably the opposite of what Matisse was mentioning lol. Green = grass/land, Brown or tan hues=land/dirt, Blue = well, in this case, water. It's important to note the white and black text, and the red border line, and the white longitude and latitude markings are another form of communication and are not realistic but representational of concepts.





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Thanks for showing different amazing examples which can prove color's social and political purpose. I agree with what you mentioned, as color can bring up emotion, represent concepts and more importantly, help people to communicate with each other more effectively. I'm impressed by your example using a map where hues used in the map have solid presentation (Green = Greenery, Brown = Land, Blue = Water). It effectively shows that color has a social purpose as it can help people to understand an abstract concept easily by associating the objects found in our real life.

Cheers,

Stacy

Matisse thought that color was one of the most important components in a work, and its meaning in his work transcends beyond social or political purposes. I feel like Matisse used color in a methodical and experimental way, always striving to use hues in the most effective ways possible. To Matisse, it was more important that the colors in his art be chosen for their visual characteristics, rather than their social characteristics. It was most important that his colors be complementary or fully saturated—or whatever visual effect he was aiming to achieve—and the political or social meaning of those colors was a secondary thought.

Color absolutely does have social and political purposes, and it can have a powerful significance and influence. It can be challenging to separate color from one's personal associations, but in his artwork, Matisse breaks down this barrier by disassociating color from its social and representational meaning in his artwork. He reminds us that color has more than one purpose, and it can be celebrated on a surface level for its beauty and visual characteristics.

Whitney, that's a very good point. It does make sense that he would choose colors primarily for their visual characteristics, and not social ones.

Matisse employed color as his tool for his artistic intention and expression. When using color to create art, he was not limited by the idea of only imitating the natures accurately. Instead, he used color to project a reality he would like to create, and interpreted natural scenes in his own way. From his works, I can see that he liberated bold, saturated hues when portraying natural scenes, while eliminated all shadows and defined forms. Creatively, he used color in his works to exert a reality with no solid shapes.

I think color definitely has social or political purpose in different cultures or context, where specific hues are often associated with a social issue or theme. For example, when we think of LGBT community (an initialism that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender), we think of the rainbow flag as it's the theme item of the community during their parade event. When we talk about the LGBT issues, even an image with only the solid hues as below, we

can immediately associate it with the highly saturated, bright rainbow flag. Color for sure can help to deliver and impact a social purpose.



Another example I can think of is the Breast Cancer Awareness campaign. Pink ribbon knot is commonly known by the public as the theme of the campaign. In the following image, even though there is no defined form of an actual ribbon knot, with just the pink hue and the heart shapes gathered, one can immediately associate with the campaign's theme.





For political purpose, we can take a look at the following poster. The red hue in this poster delivers the implication of war and blood scene to the viewers, even though there is no actual war-related image included. The black hand with different gun shapes as the fingers contrast with the red background to leave strong visual impact to the viewers. Red color used in this poster projects the idea of danger, war, blood, injured and death associations.

Hold Hands
Not Arms



Stacy, I can't agree more, your choice really exemplify how colors can impact people on a visceral, social, and political level. Each one in its own way is a powerful statement showing that color transcends words.

I take three things from Matisse's quote:

First, I believe he means his colors are used subjectively, not objectively. He wants to represent his artistic vision and not the object in its literal form.

Besides that, it also reminded me of our lessons from the past weeks where we see how colors found in nature and all around us aren't always what we expect: the sky is not always blue and the grass is not always green, it heavily depends on light, shadow, weather, and so much more. We should train our eyes to actually **see** the colors how they are and not how we expect or assume them to be.

And the third thing is that I think color choices can also be made for a social and political purpose. They can go beyond realism or artistic expression and convey bigger ideas to the audience. For instance, if I choose to paint the sky red in a composition, it could be because I mean that a revolution is coming, or because I'm criticising an ongoing war and all of its bloodshed. Another good example of that is how all political movements employ colors to make themselves recognizable and reliable.

Hi Lilia, I like how you used the shades and tones of the color to describe the different ways we see color. When I think of a green I take the color of the rainbow, as well as blue.

I agree with all of three of these statements. It is wonderful how color can have many different hats :)

Often from a young age we associate colors and letters with a certain noun. For example when learning the ABCs teachers use a letter to describe a certain animal, A Alligator, B Bird, C Cat. Similar to color we associate them with the things we are familiar with. Matisse was trying to oppose this stereotype. Saying the colors I chose are the colors I want whether or not they have any correlation to a person, place, or thing. This creates a new look to color to take away their associations and simply use it because that person enjoys it. Color is used, I believe both socially and politically. Republican Red, Democrat

Blue. Socially to express yourself through a color could be through the clothes you wear, color of your room, even a phone case.

Matisse revolutionized the use of color and form, and refused to accept that color must reflect the real world. As an artist, Matisse continued to search for new ways to create and challenge preconceived notions of color.

80% of human experience is filtered through the eyes, and the choice of color is critical. Even though colors may not have the same connotation to everyone from a religious, cultural, political and social standpoint, it's important to remember that for the most part, their defining traits evoke universal emotions.

The color emotion guide is a perfect example of the psychology of color and regardless of one's social and political background humans can find common ground in its influence and power.



a wonderful job of explaining this statement very well. I agree with the consensus that Matisse was trying to make a statement on how we as a

society view color and it can be up to us as individuals to not always associate something that might be familiar, i.e. green grass or a blue sky. This concept can be discussed in almost any topic, not just color. Therefore, maybe his reference to color is acting as a metaphor here. In any case, does color have a social or political purpose? Most of the time, but not always.

Especially in advertising, brands tend to choose colors to target a specific audience. I always find myself falling in the box of some targeted audience and recognizing that, and usually purchasing the product anyway. However, we could talk about why Facebook is blue- Mark Zuckerberg is color blind and blue is what he sees best. This is a bit of an extreme example, but I wanted to find one to play devils advocate.

In conclusion, I think color has the amazing ability to be used in thousands of different ways, and whether we realize it or not, we are registering a reaction to color based on its continued uses. I think Matisse was just trying to make us aware that yes, some colors are ingrained in us to be associated with one thing, but that doesn't mean there's no wiggle room for creativity.

As others have explained, Matisse's statement rejects the idea that a color should be associated with any specific object or idea. Of course it is true that most humans would associate green with grass and blue with the sky, but Matisse's statement suggests that the human mind is much more flexible than that. If you believe that objects don't have to be any particular color, you have much more freedom to create any mood you want with your artwork.

I thought this was an interesting point in light of what we've learned about the different qualities of color and composition. We've been told that hue is not the most important quality in terms of being able to discern what we're looking at. Value is. As long as we can tell what we're looking at, it doesn't matter what color an object is. I would certainly recognize a sky even if it was green. It seems like Matisse knew this and was therefore free to use color for other purposes. I would guess color associations matter even less in abstract art.

Since we are so good at associating colors with things, colors definitely do have social and political purposes. However, I think it's important to remember that many of these are context-dependent.

Carolyn, thanks for bringing up the different qualities of color and composition. It is interesting to think of how properties of color theory were interpreted by the "masters" and how it reflects how color is used in our art and designs.

Yes, it does have a social and political purpose – it has social purpose because there are uses of color that are understood in the world, but it can be limiting. Matisse's point illustrates how green does not always mean grass and blue does not always mean the sky. He is explaining how colors are socially and politically packed to represent a majority but should not always carry the majority stereotype. For example, there are afternoons of an orange sky and there are fields of purple grass. On a larger and more social/politicized scale, color can be reflected in ways that are not the norm. For example, when you are limited in your use of color, people can unconsciously be socialized into using specific colors for specific things. Like, when people continued to use "skin tone" for Band-Aids and how that has become a social movement that people of color want to be involved in by urging Johnson & Johnson to create Band-Aids that represent more complexions. Societal norms can stunt creativity and the use of color can either create fear or spark a sense of freedom and opportunity.