

# 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.

I think color absolutely has a political and social purpose--it's often one of the first ways in design we can signal mood, tone, allegiances, etc. I am a reporter and there's much ado made among us not to wear red or blue every time Election Day comes around because no matter what we might be saying, the first thing a viewer will notice is the color we're wearing. In St. Louis, where I live, we were also very eagerly anticipating the unveiling of details of our new Major League Soccer team--while people had a lot to say about the name (City SC), people were equally thrown by the color choices for the kits: navy blue and red are about equally used, but the red is kind of pink--some people say it's more pink than red. Is it because it's the first women-owned MLS franchise? Is it to differentiate from one of the other big teams, the Cardinals? Is it a nod to millennials who are "making soccer happen" in the Midwest right now? Team leadership says it's red, the end. They won't entertain ideas of it meaning more, but fans' reaction says otherwise.

I've always been fascinated by the colors of soccer teams. Those scarves and hats and things can really rile people up, causing fights and riots, and people being trampled upon and crushed to death against wire fences!

I believe color has a social and/or political purpose.

As we have learned, colors are associated with people's backgrounds and culture, but color also has the ability to connect people socially and politically in order for them to feel a part of something greater than themselves.

Throughout the years color became a way to unify. When seeing the color pink on a group of people, for example, some will associate this to breast cancer awareness. Same for political views, soccer groups, holidays- a lot of people can feel the holidays approaching when the streets and stores are decorated with the colors and themes that are associated to it. It is a way for others to know what you are connected to as well.

Another example of how color has a social purpose is by targeting specific populations and how that also changed throughout the years. Instagram's logo is bright and colorful, colors that young people would feel appealed to.

For conclusion, color is influencing the viewer whether consciously and subconsciously.

Oran, great point about how colors can subconsciously affect how people think and feel. It's important to keep in mind the effect that colors can have on people and we should be extra cautious on how we decide to use them.

I'm guessing that Matisse, in this quote, stated a kind of manifesto regarding his use of color in painting. In a lot of his work, Matisse didn't use color in a realistic way, but more subjective. So far as he was concerned, colors need not be restricted by how they occurred in the natural world, but could be used however way he wanted.





In a way, Matisse was declaring the independence of color. It can convey meaning and emotion on its own without needing to realistically depict something in the natural world. A color can be its own character, not just dressing or beholden to representation.

Given that, color can definitely serve a social and political purpose. I think we all know this. As Abby mentioned, US politics divides between red and blue. These two colors have become very volatile lately when used in this context, and can have very physical manifestations, whether a march or demonstration, or a shooting.

Probably the next obvious question is, what is it about color? It seems a color can cause an immediate reaction in a person, often emotional. Maybe this is because of two things:

1) since a color by itself is more symbolic rather than descriptive, the brain connects it more instantly to an emotion, or idea. There is no process of perception required. When a person sees a color, the brain is probably not asking "what is this?" but rather "how does this make me feel?" And emotions can be more potent than thoughts.

2) since the color is not depicting anything, but rather standing in for an emotion, or idea, the color is like a blank canvas upon which a viewer can project whatever is going on in their head. So the color sparks something, and then the viewer fills in the rest. This is a really powerful mechanism, powerful in the sense that people are easily prone to this kind of thing.

Furthermore, when a person makes that connection between outside color and inner world, they feel validated in a way. And thus can be roused to action, just by seeing a color.

I've noticed that people can be pretty attached to the narratives in their own heads, and are often reluctant to let go of them, me included. It takes a lot for a person to recognize something outside of her or himself. But, hahah, now I'm really taking off into another conversation.

Point is, color is a powerful tool by which by which to both affect and effect people, such as for social or political purposes.

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I love the second point you made about color "sparking" things in people. I believe the observation of color is such a personal experience and can evoke different things in each viewers.

Well said!

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I agree with your idea about Matisse's intention with his quote, as he does take a lot of liberties with his color choices as well. I think it is also interesting to consider the subjectivity of color, and what we have discussed in this course previously about how colors are interpreted based on the colors surrounding them. The colors individually play a

role, but the bright colors paired together, even in an unexpected way, also inform the way the artist wants us to feel.

I believe color has a social and political purpose. This goes back to the first week of readings when we discussed how cultural differences impact the way color is viewed. Observation of color is a personal experience. This links directly with the social or political arenas. I think Matisse meant that his color schemes were created so artistically that they can be interpreted in so many ways. Yes, can blue and green represent the sky/grass but they don't always HAVE to. Color is just as subjective as art is. Color has purposes across the board when it comes to humans. Whether it be social, religious, political or cultural - color can always be used as a tool to connect individuals with those views or purposes.

Reading your analysis suddenly reminded me of that often-used phrase, "The personal is political."

I totally agree with you, observation of color is a personal experience. Or at least starts that way. When color is used with a political or social intent, however, seems like that's a situation where the personal becomes something bigger than just personal.

With this assertion Matisse want to point out that Art express its own reality. Matisse 's imperative was to "interpret nature and submit it to the spirit of the picture".

Color is a tool of the painter's artistic intention and expression. The choice of colors is related to the sensations the sight of something evoke to the painter. Is a subjective choice of the painter , it is a personal color association related to his subjective vision and state of mind in that precise moment. Colors could be very vulnerable. Sometimes the choice of certain colors could be considered un-natural or non -representational. But is it not. Colors is always right. Because it respond to an artistic perception.

Said that, color can definitely be use to represent a political ideology, movement or party and it is considered part of color symbolism but even in this case, the use of colors can vary from country to country.

In regard of clothing, color has long been used to signify social and political status and to covey specific messages. For example, during the Byzantine era, royal families dressed themselves in purple robes, which were highly

expensive to produce at that time, as a way to express their standing. In the Middle Ages, red was thought to be symbolic of the blood of Christ and was worn by kings to pronounce their majestic power and declare their god-given right to rule. But again each hue has been used in a distinct way over time.

Color is a way to communicate a mood or political view without saying a word. Color has power.

Good point about how the meaning and use of color in clothing has evolved over time but has always been historically used to denote power and status

I agree with everyone here and think what Matisse was saying was that art is subjective and we have the right to interpret the world as we want. Regardless of how realistic his subjects were Matisse let the color in his art speak for themselves. As we've learned over this entire course, different colors evoke different emotions and artists like Matisse use color as the driver in communicating their message.

Color is powerful and because of this it has definitely become a key player in many social and political movements. Color is also an easy way for the masses to come together and show solidarity. A first example that comes to mind is how white became a symbol of the women's rights movement. White symbolizes purity and was worn over a century ago during the Suffrage Movement and was recently worn again in solidarity by women in Congress. Another example is how a rainbow has become a symbol of the LGBTQ+ movement. The multiple colors of the rainbow symbol represent diversity and acceptance. Movements like these have been so influential and because color has been such a big part in supporting their purpose, there will forever be these social and political connotations associated with them.

I defiantly agree with you that color is a way of people to come together and connect with each other and your example of how rainbow is a symbol of the LGBTQ movement and what it represents.

You make a really great point, color is an important tool for identity and uniting people under a shared ideology.

I think with this quote Matisse began to question descriptive view of colours and showed new attitude towards colour thinking. I think he was pointing out that colours have their own reality and different meaning for each of us, he wanted us to open minds about different perception of the same thing.

What I found interesting learning about him is that with his forward thinking he had a particular influence on my favourite abstract expressionists, who were inspired by his use of colour and the ways that Matisse created the illusion of space in his work. He has been named as an influence by a number of artists including Lee Krasner, Mark Rothko and Kenneth Noland.



20 Open Windows, Collage, 1905. Oil on canvas, 51.5 x 48 cm (21 1/2 x 19 1/8 in.)



We already had a discussion about the social and political purpose of colour, how it means something else in different countries and cultures. But there are some common things - same everywhere. Which political party comes to your mind when you think about red? What do you think about when you see a rainbow flag? What do you think people are supporting when you see crowds in pink? Choice of colour is definitely a message and it can have a big social and political impact.

I think Matisse was stating that his color choices are a representation of his unique vision. Color is subjective and can certainly have a social and political purpose. They are a tool without limitations that can represent or help express a point of view or state of mind. As we learned early in the semester, colors have inherent meaning which can vary depending on the country or culture. These meanings have a direct impact, consciously or subconsciously, on the way one perceives an object, work of art etc. Colors are also a simple way of identifying complex and abstract ideas. An example of this is evident with political parties, religion, and social movements around the globe.

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Beautifully said. Color is definitely subjective and I've always felt that way. However I think the exception to that in this day and age is when it comes to politics. We saw this year with a new election that just passed how deep a meaning the color is red and blue represent! You said it as well, they have a direct impact.

Matisse's use of color wasn't constrained by reality - he allowed himself to intuitively use colors to convey his personal emotions and subjective sensory experience.

Color indisputably plays a huge role in social and political dynamics, and this isn't unique to humans. I majored in psychology and cognitive science / neuro in college, and the evolution of color vision is an extremely crucial field of study when it comes to understanding animal evolution and behavior (homo sapiens sapiens are animals too!). Fundamentally, color is an important socio-sexual signal that animals use as visual indicators of a prospective mate / competitor's health, fitness, and desirability. It informs their behavior. Male birds of certain species with brighter plumes or beaks, for example, are seen as more desirable, physically fit mates by females. And some theories hypothesize that the reason hominids like neanderthals and consequently, homo sapiens sapiens, evolved to have less fur/hair on our faces / bodies is because having more visible surface area to reflect color changes (blushing when attracted to someone, blue / red veins popping out when scared or

angry, sallow skin when ill) was extremely beneficial to group social dynamics - and in those days, if you weren't part of a group or were banished by your group - you were going to die.

I think in modern day society we intuitively think of colors' role in social and political dynamics in regards to clothes, symbols, and other man made stuff. But it's really important to realize how fundamental and essential color is to basic social communication and socio-sexual signaling for all animals, since the beginning of life.... In fact, the very reason animals like humans and great apes have eyes that have evolved to perceive color is BECAUSE color serves a social purpose. If it didn't, we wouldn't see color - evolution rarely selects for traits that don't provide its species with benefits.

Matisse was part of Fauvism, a movement of art that often used colors that did not coincide with reality. The objective of the images was to communicate the feeling of a space, person or scenario, not to represent it realistically. While its easy to recognize that a specific object, person or place can provoke a certain reaction, colors can work in a more subconscious, but equally intense way. This allows color to communicate as an entity unto itself and to have influence on how identifiable objects make us feel. Matisse took advantage of this fact by steering away from realism and challenging color usage in order to communicate the abstract emotion elicited by the sky or grass instead of a literal representation the sky or grass.

With this understanding that color has a life of its own, divorced from any specific setting, it would be impossible to posit that color doesn't have political and social implications and uses. If colors have meanings separate from any particular usage then they can be used to communicate ideologies with or without context. The most obvious way I see this happening is with flags. In the US, red, white, and blue is associated with America whether it is on a flag or not. Red and Communism and inextricably linked. The rainbow is synonymous with the LGBTQ community. These associations have taken on lives outside the confines of the flags they originate from and have carried these ideologies along with them outside the restraints of specific symbols. You can see similar effects with color choices made by sports teams, schools, and products. Color schemes speak beyond their original intended use and have a life of their own in the people that see them and internalize them. They can therefore communicate ideologies and feelings beyond the objects or settings that they started in and have a larger impact on people's political and social existences.

I definitely think color has a social and political purpose.

Color can carry weighty connotations, but the meaning attached to different hues is usually culturally constructed, it is ultimately a visual language we all take part in shaping. Still, when it comes to spreading significant political or social agendas, color can be an effective and democratic way to transcend access barriers.

As we have discussed before, it seems like there may really be something to color psychology, but the important thing to understand is that colors don't have universal meaning. It's only in specific contexts that a color carries a particular meaning.

However, when certain colors become overused (for example commercial marketing campaigns) they tend to lose some of their luster, giving way to the next big color trend — a never-ending cycle.

With social media feeding the influence of imagery, color will continue to play a key part in fashion activism as a way to bring communities together and spread critical messages across the globe.

Matisse never felt beholden to painting realistically. He took liberties with his use of color and sought to convey emotion and excite the senses through his unique representations. Turning to politics, but keeping in mind what Matisse sought to convey through color, I subscribe to theory that politicians (and their first ladies), seek to convey a certain emotion or excite the senses through their clothing and color choices. An example that comes to mind is FLOTUS Melania Trump's choice to wear powder blue on her husband's inauguration day. In 1999, when Melania was just dating Donald Trump, she revealed in an interview to the *Times* that she had aspirations to be like former First Lady Jackie Kennedy, who was a fashion icon and beloved by the American people. Fast forward to Donald Trump's inauguration day, Melania wore a nearly identical powder blue dress/coat that Jackie had worn on her husband John F. Kennedy's inauguration day. Many believe Melania hoped to win over the



American people by becoming the next Jackie Kennedy.

Like stated by some of my peers, I think Matisse was trying to reclaim color as a tool of self expression. Up to that moment color had followed form, but Matisse departs from this approach. By introducing colors in a non-naturalistic way he is able to create works that go beyond the purely descriptive, to also convey the artist's feelings or point of view on a specific topic. I imagine what might have made it more shocking at the time is the fact that his subject matters were still representational (portraits, interiors, etc) so the disruptiveness in the use of color becomes even more pronounced.

As for color the use of colors for social or political purposes, I wouldn't say color has a political or social purpose per se, but that's one of the ways we've embedded it in our culture. I believe it all comes down to the core idea of identifying a specific collective. Color is a great tool to do that. Because of this, it has been used throughout history to identify political parties, social movements, sports teams, minorities, etc.

I believe that color definitely has a social or political purpose whether conscious or subconsciously noted. With this year's most heated presidential

election to date, We saw clearly how big a statement and impact it was to wear blue or red and what those colors represent.

Matisse is suggesting that color is subjective to the eye of the beholder. Based on this quote and expressions through his artwork it is clear that he has an open mind, and wants the viewers to have the same mindset when looking at his work and even the world around them. Color can take on its own meaning. This is also reminding me about last week's class when we discussed Josef Albers. He focused on looking at colors not directly but rather its surrounding colors. This has a completely different take on interpreting the mood and message of art, which is how I feel when looking at Matisse's paintings.

, "When I put a green, it is not grass. When I put a blue, it is not the sky," can be directly related back to our basic understanding of color theory. Over the period of this course, we have learned the strong emotional associations our society has come to connect with certain colors. When picking their color palettes, artists first create a message that they are looking to convey through their work, and then choose the proper colors the best represent that message.

In society today, the most apparent example seen on a day to day basis is the connection between blue for the democratic party, and red for the republican party. Throughout our developing history, each political group has taken to owning each color for their visual identity, therefor, engraining it in the American people.