

Week 3 Discussion: How does cultural or national background influence color choices?

We could also ask, in relation to the above question: apart from the artist's use of color, do you think that each viewer's cultural or national background influence the way that they view or create a work of art?

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

P.S. Critical thinking here. Try to be contentious and play 'the devil's advocate,' even if you don't agree with the stance. Possibly, taking an oppositional opinion, to challenge your own thinking.

One way in which cultural or national background influence color choices, besides just the traditional differences in color association (I.e White as a color of purity in one country, mourning in another) would also have to do with time period and political climate, especially in the United States. For example, a work of art with a red, white, and blue color palette would likely be perceived as patriotic. If it was from 2001, those colors may seem unifying and proud—today, an overtly Americana theme might have more divisive connotations. How the person perceives the work of art might depend on the time period/sentiment with which they identify more. Similarly, depicting a woman in a white blazer means a lot more after 2016: in a good way or bad way might coincide with a viewer's vote. This might not be the case for people in other countries, but our association with colors can be in many ways uniquely American.

Color is about the feeling it evokes in a person. It can cause one reaction in one person and a different in another due to culture, national background and their prior associations or memories.

In the western world a lot of times the color red for example is associated with danger and fire- it is a sign to BE CAUSIOUS! In the eastern world, the color red is associated with prosperity and happiness and in some countries brides will wear red - something that you will not see (or less of) in the western world.

Therefore, I do think that each viewer's cultural or national background influences the way that they view or create a work of art. The colors

that they see or use to create are used from their memory and the association that they have been raised on.

You are not born with an opinion but the culture you are born into will make you prefer to use one color over the other and interpret the art in a different way. Being said that, there are some that will want to let go of these associations.

"Art is in the eye of the beholder, and everyone will have their own interpretation"

E.A. Bucchianeri

One thing I find interesting about the different associations with colors is that though they might have varying connotations, those are often based on different interpretations of the same qualities in a color. In your example, red, those are very different associations—but below the surface, both are probably due to the fact that red is bold and relatively rare in nature. That makes it both eye catching danger!/caution!, and special. I think we could probably figure out connections like that with many colors, based on human/natural associations. (Though I still think that those differences indeed impact how art is created/perceived)

Hey Abigail,

I liked your explanation about colors being used in terms of time periods, I haven't thought of that. It is true that 10+ years ago an image with red white and blue would be a symbol of patriotism and pride whereas today it may elicit "divisive connotations".

With that in mind I also agree with Oran when she said "You are not born with an opinion but the culture you are born into will make you prefer to use one color over the other..."

I come from a background peppered heavily with middle eastern cultures and traditions. Our food is flavorful, bold, and colorful. Weddings and family affairs are extravagant and vivacious, and we don't shy away from color. I think growing up in an environment like that sets the tone for "the sky is the limit" meaning it's ok to be bold and as creative as you want to be without hesitations. Again, like Oran

said, some will want to let go of these associations. However, I find it easier to start off a career path in design where color is not the enemy rather a thrill, vs the other way around: where being afraid to explore color can lead to a more challenging road to breaking out of that mold.

I love the quote Oran mentioned "Art is in the eye of the beholder, and everyone will have their own interpretation".

I believe is the same with colours, everything is very subjective. It definitely has to do with our background, feeling we had when we were little, colour of wallpaper in our grandmas dining room, flowers we saw on our vacation... Our feelings about colours change over the years too as we get inspired by trends and our taste change.

One thing I noticed and found interesting regarding colour after many years of travelling and coming back to my home - Czech Republic is that people here do not experiment much with colour, specially older generations. When you are in a subway it feels somehow that people are only wearing dark black coats, comparing with London or New York where people like to express their personalities vividly it feels like the Czechs are trying to blend in. I believe it has still a lot to do with our communist past regime (ended 1989) when it was dangerous to stand out or have a different opinion.

Hi Nicola! Thanks so much for sharing your personal experience in the Czech Republic and how the country's relationship with color reflects its communist history. I've traveled to other countries but never thought about how the colors that people will wear or display relate to their historical backgrounds. Now that will be something I'll intentionally look for and learn about!

Hi Nicola and Kim,

I also found what Nicola mentioned very interesting and even though we put the words on paper, that every culture uses color in a different way, I will pay more attention to this while traveling (once the pandemic is over) and I'm sure I will be fascinated by the meanings of color.

Thank you for sharing.

Great quote Nicola! Everyone have their own interpretation, and as we change with time, we grow and develop a liking for different colors, preferences and of course education helps to discover new ways of interpretation.

Color is part of our daily lives and I really believe in the power of color in describing intangible ideas, emotions and feelings.

However the reaction to colors and their symbolism is more a result of a cultural conditioning instead of instinct.

Color symbolism refers to color's ability to signify meaning to a viewer.

There are some universal associations but symbology is often socially integrated. Color meanings differ from culture to culture

Culture could be defined as a mix of the attitudes, values, ethics, norms, customs, beliefs, rituals, scriptures, doctrines and all the art forms accepted and practiced through generations by a certain group of people.

There are cultural influences that affect one's view of a specific color: political and historical associations (flag colors, political parties, political ideology), mythological and religious associations (references to color in spiritual texts), linguistic associations (idioms, proverb and expressions) and tradition associations.

There is great diversity in the use of colors and their associations between cultures and even within the same culture in different time periods. Color symbolism is context-dependent and influenced by changes over time.

People living in different cultures can appreciate different things and think in different ways, which also affects emotions and how people perceive colors. Culture affects our daily lives, as it is reflected in our decision-making, behavior and communication. Culture impacts the way we act, think, feel, speak and believe.

On the other hand color plays an important role in setting expectations for a product and communicating its key characteristics. Color is one of the most important element that allows consumers to identify brand packaging.

Having said that is important to keep in mind what said before when you are choosing the right color for your client and in relation to your client's target audience.

Really great point about taking into consideration the clients audience and it's so important to rely the right message to the target audience.

and their cultural background influences the way they respond to and correlate color schemes. And not just one's background but also with what's trending at the moment culturally and in the media around them. The most current example right now for me and with the upcoming holidays, is the association of red and green and Christmas. Even though I don't even identify as a Christian, Christmas has become such a big cultural event in America and red and green has become synonymous with the Christian holiday due to decades of Western marketing. Images of Santa in a red robe and red and green holly are always pushed in advertising from November through December. Although the combination of red and green is used in many other identifiable landmarks (such as national flags) and other celebrated holidays (for example Kwanza), the correlation has been embedded in my psyche and whenever I see the combination of red and green anywhere I immediately think of Christmas. And because of this, myself and others with the same background may then also intentionally choose to avoid the color combination in their art, clothing, or advertising if they don't want the connotation of the holiday.

Hi Kim, as a big Christmas lover coming from Ireland I really loved your example. I never thought about how using the combination of red and green together could put a brand off due to its recognition with the holiday period but I can see completely why you think so and why it could have this effect on businesses. Really great point and thank you for sharing!

If I remember correctly, I might have heard that Santa Claus's suit was originally green, but Coca-Cola changed it to red.

Color is a very powerful communication tool. Colors have the ability to evoke emotions and beliefs.

For example, blue is a positive color and can be considered as one of the world's safest colors. In the North America and Europe blue represents authority, trust and security and this is why in banks in the United States often use blue as the main color of their company logos. However, in some countries blue represent sadness and loneliness, hence, "you get the blues".

Green is another color with opposite meanings between cultures. In the western world, green is associated with jealousy, greed, wealth, environmental awareness, spring, freshness, nature, and luck.

I'm from Ireland and the green in our flag symbolizes the Roman Catholics, while the orange in our flag represents the Protestants, and the white centre represents peace and union between both. Green also represents luck and the green hills of Ireland. When I think of home I think of green, the hills, the fields, the nature. It gives me a real sense of comfort and longing to return home.

However, green in Asian cultures, represents new life, youth and fertility and in Israel green symbolizes bad news.

It's interesting hearing about the Irish flag, I wasn't aware of the significance of those colors. I guess color associations can have religious/political origins. I wonder why the Protestants got orange?

I believe art itself is completely subjective. I feel the point of art is for the viewer to think through what he or she is seeing, and then explore what they see and how it relates back to personal experiences. This goes hand and hand with cultural or national backgrounds because they are direct influences of personal experiences. I also think background does not necessary have a lasting impact on how people perceive things. I believe someone can move to another area and be influenced by new experiences which can change perception. For example, in Western cultures the color red symbolizes danger, shock and pain. Yet in China, red symbolizes good fortune, happiness and luck. These adjectives are complete opposite of each other and yet the same color brought upon these words.

Hi Paige,

I agree with what you said that background does not necessary have a lasting impact on how people perceive things. People can change their perception and expose themselves to new ones.

Hi Paige - you make a great point about the difference in color meanings in varying cultures.

I agree with you, I think we are already influenced by our roots but we can move to another place or live in and different culture and be influenced by new experiences which can change perception, for me that is the best way to open our mind a create new things.

I definitely think that peoples' cultural and national backgrounds influence color choices and perception, but just to play devil's advocate.... You could argue that while an individual's unique cultural or national identity informs how they perceive and ascribe meaning to individual colors, creating / viewing a work of art is a much more complex experience than showing someone a single color like red, and then asking them what that color conveys. More often than not, a work of art depicts scenes and images that are universally shared, understood and experienced. There are different styles of art, of course, that could impact color choices, but it wouldn't be your cultural or national background that would influence you to choose green / yellow shades for trees and grass, or blues for the sky and water.

In Ella's post, she mentions that in Asian cultures, green represents new life, youth and fertility while in Israel green symbolizes bad news. Yet because green is a common color present in many universally shared imagery / scenes, I would argue that someone in Israel would not look at a piece of art depicting a green mountain landscape and think of a dark omen, nor would an Israeli painter who is painting a mountain landscape be deterred from using the color green just because culturally, the standalone color symbolizes bad news.

Works of art are often nuanced and complex enough to transcend cultural interpretations of individual colors.

For example, I doubt most Americans would create or look at a painting of a fruit bowl filled with red apples, green apples, tomatoes, and avocados and automatically think of a Christmas-themed work of art. They would likely interpret that piece of art in the same way most people in most cultures would - as a fruit bowl. And brands like Seven-Up and Mountain Dew have green / red logos because they are lime-based drinks (and green limes are universally understood), while red is green's complementary color and they work well together. Very little cultural influence there. Similarly, the imagery associated with Disney (castle against a vivid blue background with fireworks) defies cultural interpretations of blue - which could be sadness, peacefulness, or authority, etc. because the blue depicts the sky (a universal constant) and the castle and fireworks and stars add enough nuance to the art so that it conveys excitement and magic, and individuals across cultures would not pick

out the blue sky specifically as they're processing the image and say, 'wow there's a lot of sadness and serenity because of the dark blue they chose to use for the background.'

Because works of art are often composed of so many different colors and are grounded in or depict shared human experiences, you could argue that cultural and national background influence color choice and perception much less than you would expect them to.

* I thought it was easier to respond to the other posts in the context of my general post, so my replies are contained in the above answer ^!

Hi Elle, interesting point you bring up! I agree that the context of the work one is creating is an important factor that influences color choice. Cultural and national background is certainly important to keep in mind when creating something that is public facing across different countries but it's not always the deciding factor.

Like language and words, different colors can come predefined with different meanings depending on the culture.

As others have mentioned, in Western culture, we associate white with purity, innocence, newness. Therefore, we wear white clothing to weddings, baptisms, and New Years parties. Wedding invitations are almost always in white.

In Japan however, white is connected to death, ghosts, the pallor of illness. I'm guessing that at a Japanese funeral, mourners might be more prone to wearing white clothing. If a kid showed up at school wearing all white, their classmates might find it very goth, or that someone in the family has died. In India, widows will also wear white.

In Western culture, red can signify passion, love, sex. On Valentines Day, you see a lot of people wearing red. In sex toy and lingerie shops, one may see many products and packaging in red.

In Asian cultures, such as China and India, red means purity. Quite unlike the associations European culture has with red light districts for example. Bridal garments in some Asian cultures will thus often be made in red.

It's interesting how we take the symbolism of these colors for granted. So much that many of us might think that meaning is inherent to a color,

inseparable. But apparently one color can mean completely opposite things, depending on culture.

I believe culture plays a determining role in the way color is perceived, and thus the way it is used or deciphered.

I recently came across an essay about culture & reality construct by historian Ernst Gombrich in which he explained the relationship between both with a very simple example: in certain regions of Alaska, Eskimo girls have the habit to accompany the stories they tell each other by drawing pictures in the snow. They carry special tools to always be able to illustrate their ideas. But this custom exists only in one area, neighboring settlements do not draw in the snow. This difference in habit, however, does not reveal a radical difference in heritage or character. So it could be said that snow-drawing influences the mentality of the tribe, just as much as the mentality influences the snow-drawing habit.

I think this example can be used to illustrate the relationship between color & culture too. Certain meanings and associations were given to colors by each culture, and the more those associations are present in culture, the more they get reinforced throughout the generations, often in an unconscious way. This doesn't mean color perception is permanent: of course, they can evolve as new contextual meanings are given to them.

I like this idea that our understanding of color is a cultural feedback loop that can be broken or reinterpreted. While I think it would be difficult to break some associations, like green with nature, and that most communities reinforce their own understandings, it also makes sense to me that cultures and individuals are in a slow but constant shift in their relationships to different colors.

I agree that culture influences our perception of color. Each culture is incredibly unique and as a result, each color holds different meaning that evokes emotions, beliefs, and positive & negative connotations. Cultural influences like politics, religion, and history all affect color associations and influence how we view and create works of art. Although color associations are passed down in each culture from generation to generation, color symbolism may change over time. These associations determine our understanding of what message a work of art is trying to convey, how a

company wants to be perceived through branding, etc. It also guides our color choices when we create.

The depiction of religious scenes and figures is good example of where one can find contrasting color associations influenced by religious culture. In Latin America, blue is heavily associated with Mary to symbolize grace and divinity. While in Hinduism blue is associated with Krishna, who embodies love and joy. Green symbolizes Catholicism in Ireland and is sacred in Islam because Allah is present in nature. It's fascinating and exciting that each culture perceives colors differently -- the world would be immensely dull if we all assessed color the same way.

I remember being in a class in college and being struck by a conversation about wedding dresses. It was a class on gender and my teacher was from India. She spoke about how in the US, wedding dresses were white because brides were expected to be pure and virginal and inexperienced. This was confusing to her since where she was from women wore red because it stood for fertility and prosperity. Women were not meant to be demure on their wedding days, they were powerful and full of life. I feel like this represents a huge aspect of why different colors are used for the same thing in different countries. It's not that red and white both just stand for marriage in different places, it's that marriage stands for something different in different places. These two colors communicate two totally different things about the same ceremony on purpose, because the cultures view the event differently. I imagine this happens frequently. Many colors can have universal meanings because of their associations with the natural world, and while I imagine that some differences come from regional expressions or historical references, I also imagine some of these differences in color interpretation come from having a totally different understandings of the same world more than having different understandings of color.

Apologies for the late post! Crazy week.

I most definitely think that culture and national background influence color choices. At a bigger glance, I think it is safe to assume that we develop our

own personal interests and opinions based off of the world that surrounds us. Naturally, the things we see most often tend to become the things that create a sense of comfort for us. To translate this into a design application of thinking, for me, I grew up in a very green, town, in a Victorian style home. When creating my own personal pieces and creations, I find myself drawing inspiration from the color palettes of my upbringing; often, these are earthy but rich tonal palettes.

I find myself drawn to color palettes from my upbringing as well!

I also apologize for the late response! I loved reading everyone's replies and was especially struck by the conversations about Christmas colors. I have always loved the color blue and my home is decorated predominately in blue. So when it came to decorating my Christmas tree, I've always kept to a blue/white/silver color palette to coordinate with my home. It's been interesting over the years to see how many guests in my home have mentioned that my tree feels like a Hanukkah tree. It's something I never thought of when choosing my color palette, and of course I don't mind at all, but interesting to see how many people are struck by my decisions NOT to use traditional red & green at Christmas time. I do believe people are strongly influenced by their background. In thinking about my choice of non-traditional Christmas tree decor, my parents have (and I grew up with) an Under-the-Sea themed Christmas tree (fish, whales, mermaids, shells, starfish, etc), so I guess the apple doesn't fall far from the tree in deciding to break the red/green Christmas mold.

A person's taste in color generally changes with age, and as we grow we develop a liking for different colors, we can also note that color preference also changes with education, researchers still argue about whether reaction to color is fundamental or learned... but they do consider that the color consciousness is associated with meaning and that the preferences change with culture.

As we know colors have the capability of affecting human psyche, colors always move according to the way we feel and create composition and excitement, that's why it is important to consider the influence of the area or roots, as they reflected in the differing tastes according to symbolism and perception, what we feel with the color combinations is that makes it beautiful or more familiar to our eyes. In terms of meaning, the innate individual

preferences and environment (cultural) are important factors that influence our interpretation and sensation.