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.

Cultural and national background have a huge effect on color choice in my opinion. In Oaxaca, Mexico they still dye fabrics with colors that are produced by insects and plants from their surrounding areas. Perhaps, in that sense, color choice was historically something that was limited by an artist's surroundings, but I believe it has just as much of an impact in modern times.

Most of my favorite artists create work that either tells a story of their cultural history and/or express an opinion of the current state of their culture- Frida Kahlo, Basquiat, even abstract artists like Hilma af Klint. When they tell stories of their culture, the colors are naturally the visual story being told.

I am naturally drawn to colors from the fundamental years of my life- or cultural background. The first beautiful things I ever saw are permanently engrained in my memory and bring about a warm feeling of nostalgia when I see them now. In Maslow's hierarchy of needs a sense of love and belonging is one of the most important aspects of our well-being. I believe that a lot of artists are drawn to colors that resonate with the core of who they are. It is natural to surround yourself with nostalgic colors that remind you of a place where you can feel a sense of belonging.

Hi Katie! I've spent a lot of time in Oaxaca this past year and love their approach to dyeing.

Its so cool, right?!

I like your point of view. If I have to represent Brazil in colors - I would definitely use the whole color wheel. Although below I commented that my personal color choices are more minimalistic, due to the weather - my core memories of my country are surrounded by happiness and colorful landscapes. I miss the energy, the parties, the music..., oh yes, I miss those colors so much!

I think that you have an interesting point that nostalgia can definitely influence color choice and preference. Oddly enough, I loved being in my grandmother's kitchen - it was warm, cozy and always had the most delicious food on the table. However, even as a young child, I thought that the pea green/olive cabinetry was super ugly and certainly not in vogue (perhaps the color was popular in the 1950s when her house was built). To this day, I still abhor pea green and would never opt to use it in a piece of my art or design, despite the nostalgia I feel for my grandmother's kitchen.

I completely agree with your viewpoint. Its impossible to think that culture has no influence on color choice!

Agree with what you said about core determining color preferences. I think some of what draws us really comes out of early childhood associations.

I think our cultural background might affect our color choices but only to a certain degree. I grew up in Mexico, surrounded by color in the food, the culture and our clothing and that maybe made me be more open to embrace color. But I think what really influences our color choices are our experiences, personality, state of mind and maybe even our upbringing.

For example, my mom always told me not to dress in black because "it looked like I was going to a funeral", so I grew up associating wearing black with

sadness and tended to avoid it as a color choice. It was until I grew up and started to get really interested in fashion that I realized wearing black could also transmit elegance and minimalism. But honestly, if I'm feeling happy, I do tend to dress a lot more colorfully, and this is where the part of our state of mind comes in play when selecting a color.

I feel the same can be said as to how we see or what we feel when seeing a work of art. I have always been a "girly girl" and I tend to gravitate towards more colorful feminine pieces. For me, art with lots of saturated and vivid color transmit happiness whereas I tend to avoid designs with more muted colors.

That's really interesting about the color black. A friend of mine worked at Vogue for a moment and said Anna Wintour insists on a not wearing all black all the time policy. She said it was too easy and wanted to challenge her colleagues to find more color and express themselves with it.

You have a nice point of view and I also agree with personality playing a significant role in color choices.

Interesting discussion! Black, white and grey are my favorite outfit colors. I like to dress very minimalistic. BUT, even coming from Brazil (the land of mixed cultures, rhythms, flavors, landscapes, carnival), I tend to believe my color choices for a long time were influenced by the weather. In the South is chilly, it rains all the time, and we have a lot of grey sky. Although I am from a very colorful culture, the weather plays a bigger role on my decisions. Now, living in Indonesia (unfortunately not in Bali but still very hot), I tend to choose more pastel colors. Again, the weather commanding my personal choices....! It's not only me, obviously, in your own city or in your travel destination, if it is Summer or Winter, the color code difference is immediatly noticed. Rain, chilly? Everyone takes the black coat out of the closet. Warm? Who doesn't have flowers or colorful stripes in the summer shelf? This is the weather prevailing culture, and influencing our mood...! Changes how we feel, so the colors we choose ;)

Hi Leticia! You touch on very interestions aspects of colors which I completely agree with. Seasons attire vary and can impact our outfit color choices and even mood. When it's raining, I tend to gravitate toward darker color like dark olive green, dark blue or black. It's the opposite for the summer, when the sun is shining and all I want to wear is happy and bright colors like yellow, white or even violette. It is definitely depending on our state of mind and mood.

I am guilty of what Anna Wintour says not to do haha! I do find that Black is a safe and easy color. Having a few little black dresses with cuts is essential but also boring. Great point to use different colors outside of our comfort zone to express ourselves, so true!

Manar, I ALWAYS try to pick something different than black, grey and white....! I catch myself forcing to turn around my fav colors in a store - but the problem is, they fit so well :D right? Its so hard to get out of the comfort zone. Recently I have been betting on red lipstick to break the sadness ;)

Agreed - in Manhattan sometimes it feels like a uniform of black and navy! But on grey days I sometimes pull out at least a pop of color just because we need it!

Leticia,

OMG, it is good to know I am not alone. Almost every time I decide to get something colorful to wear, I fail. :) Black and grey is almost always my choice for outfit. I feel like living in NYC definitely mark on my color choice.

Yeay! Team black and grey!

The city where I live now is an spectacular work of art. New Orleans has a multicultural heritage of many influential architectural styles of Frech,Spanish and Caribbean.The

architecture represents the magic that is displayed in the colorful creole cottages,shotgun, and double gallery houses with hues of yellows, pinks, blues, greens and many more colors.

Personally, I think New Orleans is one of the few cities of the United States that has a very unique personality with bright Caribbean colors.
New Orleans preserves the architectural styles of the city and most of the people love the touches of bright colors in furniture and on art decor. When staging houses, I like to add picture frames of New Orleans landscapes and architectural buildings.

How lucky you are to live in New Orleans. I totally agree that it is one of a few US cities that exudes such a strong coloration in the architecture. Living in NYC, the predominate colors in my surrounding architecture are black, steel and metallic grey. As such, I am always so excited to travel to cities and islands where a pastel green or pink house isn't an anomaly. I was recently on the island of Anguilla and literally each home and building were brightly colored - I saw lime green homes and flamingo pink groceries stores - what a visual treat.

Yes! so reading your submission made me think about my time living in NYC. I am a person who loves muted colors and neutrals, and New York has PLENTY of that in addition to black and grey's. But, I grew up in South Florida where its all bright blues, green (everywhere), and beautiful tropical flowers! So its interesting that NYC and SFlorida are vibrant in different ways: one is vibrant in its presence of colors and one is vibrant its absence of colors.

So true. Florida has this strong latin-tropical vibe. The NY colors, for me, are strongly associated with bricks (different charm). Unfortunately I have never been to New Orleans....! From what I see in pictures, its lovely! Feels like it is a hand painted city. Picturesque and romantic.

I believe that cultural/national background can influence color choices, but only to an extent. As we discussed earlier in the term, color can have different meaning based on your nationality or religious upbringing - while white dress is culturally acceptable and almost preferred in the US representing virginity

and purity, it would be frowned on in other countries. However, I think that people are intrinsically inclined to prefer some colors and palettes over others despite their nationality. I believe that it is this personal preference that generally influences color choices. I, for one, have never liked orange or yellow and many shades of green. I doubt my upbringing in the Midwest of the United States has any bearing on this. Moreover, there are probably many people with similar cultural/national backgrounds to me who like these colors.

However, I do think that the viewer's cultural/national background certainly influence the way that they view and perceive a work of art. It is quite possible for viewers to have completely different reactions to specific works of art. While I may love a Rothko's dark and moody color palette, my husband might think that the same painting is gloomy and sad. Some of this is personal preference, but I certainly think that it is also based on his cultural upbringing.

Hi Marcie,

I like your focus on individualism here; something to be said about people sharing a similar background and having completely different experiences with color/art/music/you name it.

I'm curious if you think there is a discrepancy between attributing your husband's dislike of Rothko's work to his cultural upbringing, but your dislike of orange and yellow to personal preference? Playing devil's advocate ;)

Of course cultural and national background have a strong influence on color choices. Colors that we have been exposed to growing up carry a huge meaning as we age. This goes for people hundreds of years ago to now. I think that it is something that we mostly subconsciously decide especially in todays times.

Hundreds of years ago when there was no technology or photography and travel was limited, people could only use the colors that were around them. So in the Amazon there was probably lots of green, red, brow, yellow, and pinks used for example and in Qatar there was probably lots of brown, beige, red and white used. These were completely different colors but it was all they had access to! In terms of cultural influence on color the culture that comes to my mind is the Chinese culture. Red is everywhere and it has such an

important meaning that has remained prominent to this day. I know there are other cultures with the same color connections and I think that is so interesting!

With the question of if an artists use of specific color influences the viewers experience with the specific art I think that is often the case! So often when I'm traveling the homes or hotels are decorated to fit the culture. For example, in the Seychelles the interiors are whites and blues and browns which fits the culture and environment. Whereas in Mexico City there are interiors that have a mix of bright reds, blues, and greens. Although both interiors are beautifully designed, I personally prefer the colors of the Seychelles because I grew up on the beach in Florida.

Perhaps historically speaking cultural differences had a stronger impact on color perception and associations. Nowadays however, I feel that connection can be overstated. Not only are we experiencing a higher rate of globalization, but also an increasing prevalence of cultural code switching, so I would argue that 'cultural' norms are becoming more muddled. I was born in Bulgaria and have lived all over Europe and subsequently the US, so in my personal experience color significance has evolved based on life experience, professional background, and more exposure to a wide variety of people. There is a sense of homogenization of societal norms – obviously not across the board and at the same pace globally – but rather than around one dominant (read Western) structure, perhaps a new, amalgamated, set of values.

I think cultural and national influences can play a big role in our color choices and how we see art. In America for example, blue and red figure prominently in political clothing – ties and dresses etc - partly I think to project dominance and strength (red) and trust and establishment (blue) but also because they are our national colors. But our early childhood influences also have a great impact. For me, I grew up by the ocean – and the watery blues and greens have always stayed with me, the art in my apartment is almost exclusively in that color scheme! I also love warm neutrals – sand earth tones, I find them very calming :) . So I think what others here have said here about our core influencing color is very significant. We also had an au pair during a couple of summers when I was a baby who had gingery red hair – I don't remember her at all but I must have liked her because that is also a favorite color of mine

and I always felt like that was why! I think maybe not just national/cultural but our general exposures during those early years - especially before we had language and impressions can go straight to the subconscious without any filter – can play a big part in our color preferences today.

I think also color (like music) - because it goes to a space that is deeper than language - has the power to transcend cultural or national influences. So maybe color in context can move us past a national or cultural lens.

I came across a few articles detailing how psychologists are developing theories of how the language we speak shapes our perception of reality in many different ways (specifically, by a woman named [(Links to an external site.)](#) Lera Boroditsky), including the way we perceive art - so I think you bring up a very interesting point when you talk about the impressions and experiences that we get during our early years, before we have language. It is probably too hard to differentiate until what point our culture / language shape our preferences (including colors) and when our individualism begins to take over.

This week I was in Beijing (China) for the first time, and while walking in the city, I observed a massive application of red, and some yellow, in all signs of traditional business – from fashion to gastronomy. Although I don't understand mandarin to correlate the name with the symbols, it is clear that there is a meaning behind.

My first assumption would be that they are very patriots and use the China flag colors, but after investigating a little bit with our guide and some people we met along the journey (if there is any colleague from China please correct

me if I am wrong), that red means prosperity, luck, while yellow was the emperor color and means royalty.

Even if the shops don't have yellow – they will always have an object in red, for example, the dress of the manequin.

Comparing to my culture, I don't recall a color that represent such a strong symbology – except in the new year's eve, when most of the population wears white. For us it means peace and I guess this is not different in many places.

But it is also white, because its the color we should wear to make offerings to Yemanja, the queen of the sea. It is beautiful to see the white wave of people at the beach, moving in the direction of the water (this belief is our cultural heritage from Africa, present in the Candomble religion | we follow the ritual even belonging to other religions).

Other than that, I don't recall any other cultural color application in my country, or any other country I have ever visited (a part from World Cup and Olympic Games, when we use our flag all over the place).

See you!

In general, there is no doubt that cultural and ethic background affect our perception of color. Even in similar situations/rituals, color will hold different

meanings around the world. For example, white can be associated with celebration as well as with death and mourning. Therefore, designers, artists, and marketers often use color to influence the user and it's important to consider the cultural associations that color might have.

However I must say that I am a supporter of what is called an individualistic approach. So many factors can affect your perception and choice of color: not only your cultural or ethic background, but also your life style, education, and even a particular life event associated with a particular color. Also a color choice depends on its application (your choice for interior design can be totally different from your color choice for clothes). It is more complicated that we can even imagine.

Living in NYC for the last 10 years definitely marked on my color preference. About 80% of my clothes are black, gray or navy, not because I have no imagination and no taste, but because its very convenient for NYC hectic life style. However my apartment' colors are white, green-blue and light grey.

Funny story. Just recently I went to Miami with a group of girlfriends for a bachelor party. Everyone with different cultural background but currently living in NYC. The first day we went out, without any arrangement of any kind – EVERYONE was wearing black, including a bride. :)

Yes, I do think that culture or national background influence the way art is created. Culture has a huge impact on how people perceive, express and appreciate art. Growing up with my childhood friend, who was from India, I got exposed to the rich culture and traditions of India. From the elaborated bollywood movies that include singing and dancing, to their beautiful colorful saris, their rich dishes, the famous Taj Mahal , their well known festival of colors and Diwali customs. All of their celebrations and movies include lots and lots of color, each with their distinctive meaning and representation.

In my opinion, an artist's/viewer's cultural and national background most certainly influences their use and perception of color.

Broadly speaking, there are colors that hold significant weight culturally (red is attached to fertility and good fortune in China, and marriage in India for example), and historical references like the Egyptian currency example used in this week's reading. Around the world, everything from food to clothing to architecture is influenced by localized and historical references to color.

On a more personal level, there are stored memories that must certainly affect how an artist or viewer sees, reacts, or portrays color. For example, growing up in the 80's and 90's, the pastel interiors of my childhood home are something I'll never forget when I look at a pale peach or muted teal. Growing up in nature may subconsciously influence my work or explain why I gravitate towards earth tones (terracotta, stone, sand) and cool colors (ocean, trees, sky).

When looking around the world, it is easy to connect culture to color. In Oaxaca, Mexico, artisan weavers dye yarns using locally sourced flowers and insects, and ceramicists use red clay sourced from the nearby land. Women in India or Uganda, wear vibrant oranges, pinks, blues, and yellows – colors that mimic the tropical climate around them and react beautifully with their skin. In the mountains of northern Ethiopia, where Christianity is a very important part of life, and where the mornings are very cold and the days very hot, all white cotton scarves and blankets are wrapped around men, women, and children from morning to night, both at church and in daily life.

Or, are these things simply correlations we as viewers (or artists) make when observing art in the context of 'place'. Perhaps our own preconceived notions or emotional experiences cause us to draw the most familiar or obvious connections to color.