

Department of Fine Art

BA Project in Fine Art
Statement and Thesis

Ludvík á Brekku

BA Project in Fine Art

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Spring 2019

Department of Fine Art

FOUR ARTWORKS

BA Project in Fine Art - Statement

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When starting work on my thesis I was very interested in all sorts of styles and genres of painting, which is still the case, but it was especially abstract art in general that captures the interest. So to be able to convey a certain personal meaning in my artworks I quickly found that I had little other choice than to boil it all down to its essence concerning color in general and what effect it had, not only on me or the viewer, but also how one color can affect and influence another color. I was especially intrigued by Joseph Albers color experiments as in the way one color can morph into a completely different color or color grading, all depending on what color it stands next to.

I hadn't had enough opportunity to paint much the first half of the third semester, because of all the theoretical courses, which all ended with a smaller or bigger writing assignment. So when starting to paint again, I tried more of a traditional approach within my comfort zone. I painted landscapes and figurative art at the start of last semester, since I felt this classical approach to be a necessity if you will, as a way of working through art history, working mainly on composition and depth. However, I quickly found out that this was by no means the way forward. More drastic measures were needed when it came to my new approach, so I ditched my oil paints for other mediums, such as spray paint and different painting enamels. This changed my painting approach drastically.

Earlier I had been more dependent upon original methods of the old masters and was walking in their footsteps tied to their rules and held down by their restrictions. The theoretical courses and all the writing in the past semester had really opened my eyes to a new approach. No longer did I have to follow old traditions but could finally break free from all these chains I had put upon myself. Instead of slavishly following a sketch that would dictate what I was supposed to do, I could now do whatever I wanted. This was a freedom in itself, and it gave immense creative pleasure. Instead of being dictated and forced by the image of the preconceived plan, I accepted being guided by the creative impulses of the artwork as it progressed.

The new painting mediums wanted something of me. Something that was more than just a pretty or well painted picture. Something that went way deeper. The new paint had a certain uncontrollability within itself, since it was much thinner and therefore more unruly and demanding. It therefore forced me to work in different ways, sometimes I had to have the canvas on the floor, so that the painting wouldn't run off or down the canvas.

When it came to the colors of the paintings I wanted to use as few as possible to get a more direct approach. As a good Japanese haiku poem can convey the same feeling and message as a thick novel, or even better, if not at least more direct, so should an abstract painting with a limited palette be able to stand on a par with a classical painted artwork.

Not only was it important what palette I choose for my paintings, but also how the paint was laid on the canvas. This was done with strong strokes and splashes of paint and sometimes only with spray-paint. At this point in the process there was no way back, and no room for mistakes. As in a watercolor one can't redo anything, since the paint is thickly applied. This is when the painting is demanding something of the artist, instead of vice versa. As our nightly dreams, the painting also has a will of its own, and one is therefore just following what the painting dictates. By following one's gut feeling and intuition, the image is slowly appearing, like an old friend, out of the mist. And all of a sudden there it is, staring one straight in the face.

In my collection of Oil paintings I was trying to convey the unseen that everyone of us encounter during our daily lives. These are the forces of nature. May it be a howling wind or a storm. Also what is of the utmost interest to me is the light and how it can drastically change from one minute to the next. By working with a limited palette, I've tried to boil daily images down, into something more abstract. Getting to the core of an image is not just photographing it, but finding out what the motive is all about, by researching the structure of an image both thematically but also when it concerns colors.



“Untitled”
Mixed Media 2019



“Untitled”
Mixed Media 2019



“Untitled”
Spray paint 2019



“Untitled”
Mixed Media 2019

Department of Fine Art

THE DIVERSITY OF COLOR THROUGH COLOR THEORY

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BA Project in Fine Art - Thesis

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Abstract 1

Ever since Sir Isaac Newton made giant leaps in color science with his theory on primary colors, people and scientists alike have been intrigued by the power of colors and what different meanings they bring to our culture, heritage and daily lives.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's "Theory on Colour" took it a step further and broke with Newton and Romanticism, which Goethe had originally been part of.

Later Joseph Albers spearheaded the Bauhaus school with the likes of Wassily Kandinski and Paul Klee. By his interest in how one color can affect another color Albers revolutionized how we are able to see colors, and how color can trick the viewer's brain into thinking it is a different color or just a different hue than the original color really is.

By making color tests he would come to the conclusion that color can affect color, and that color can change in the viewer's eyes, all depending on what color chart was shown. An artist myself I know how working with paint and blending colors can be a struggle. I have therefore become especially intrigued by Albers' theory on how one color can affect another in the onlooker's perception. I would like to show how diverse one color can be. And by narrowing it down to the color green I'm able to refer to three different artworks. The first is my own, the second is one of Edvard Munch's famous paintings, and the third is an outdoor installation by Ólafur Eliasson.

To narrow it down it's important for the viewer to get a firm understanding of what color really is capable of, and not just take it for granted or as a one dimensional flat surface, but more as a flexible interchanging entity.

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Introduction

In this thesis I want to examine the relationship between color and emotion. I shall focus on Goethe's book "Theory on Colors", Wassily Kandinski's book "Concerning the Spiritual in Art", and Manlio Brusatin's book "A History of Colors". By using these books as cornerstones I want to get a better understanding of the relationship between color and emotion. What can a color make us feel, and is a color really able to make us feel different things, depending on the context it is showed in. These are some vital questions to be researched.

By gathering different theories I should be able to narrow it down to one color of my choice to see the wide range of diversity that one color is able to produce. To set an example I have chosen one of the primary colors, which is green. I have chosen three completely different artworks, yet of the same color, one of them being my own artwork that I shall relate with the other two. I shall also discuss why the artist has chosen a certain color, in this case green, as his dominant color, and what effects and emotional reaction is he looking for.

Finally I shall discuss if color is really that important or if it has lost its value in our modern society. I shall also discuss why it's important for me to illustrate color and emotion and the diverse power and dominance color might have in our daily lives.

Newton and the Primary Colors

When the kings stopped being sovereign rulers, Sir Isaac Newton first published his theory of colors, which dealt with the basic colors. Newton based these theories on his color experiments around 1664. This was about the time when painters in Paris and Rome were in dire need to find some theoretical basis to get a deeper understanding of color in their art. By the end of the eighteen century and well before Romanticism, Newton's reading was seen as something essential for artists and especially landscape painters who were seen by some as natural philosophers.

The French Academy of Arts was the spearhead in setting the rules for all the other academies in Europe in the eighteen century. It wasn't only concerned with proportions and draftsmanship, but also what one would call art theory. It was here that

Newton's theory on color played a major part, though it was not the central concern for painters at the time.

But the question is why Newton was so important to the painters of his age, when most of the basics of color blending had already been experimented on for the past hundred years before Newton made any assumptions on color.

Robert Boyle stated in an article in 1664 how much it helped and made a painter's job easier to know the primary colors when he was painting. By knowing the primary colors one is able to blend and mix these colors together to produce any other color on one's palette. Robert Boyle called the colors *basic* or *primitive*. These colors were: black, white, red, yellow, blue.

It was by reading Boyle's article that Newton got interested for the first time in making his color studies. In his first article about color published in 1672 Newton made the confusing statement that there were as many basic, primitive, or primary, colors as there were rays of light and that even white and yellow can both be primary colors, and the effects thereof. Newton was one of the first people to talk about color principles.

In 1704 Newton wrote an article called *Optics* with a drawing of a color wheel which was made up of seven primary colors.¹ How much every color in the wheel filled was a mathematical formula depending on the blending of each color. Newton even made his own color called mouse white. Today it would be called raw white. Newton's color wheel became widely acknowledged by many painters in the eighteenth century, even though they had a hard time figuring out what exactly Newton was on about.

Brook Taylor who was a Cambridge mathematician took Newton's ideas about mixing colors to the next level in his book *New Principles In Linear Perspective* in 1719. He talks about hue and saturation, and he also found out in his studies that when it comes to desideration or breaking colors, then white is far more dominant than black in desideration. But Taylor concluded that the result of the mixed paint never was a hundred percent accurate because of the impurity in most pigments. He finally concluded that he would leave the rest up to the artists themselves.²

¹ See in appendix. Image 1.

² John Gage, *Color and Meaning. Art science and Symbolism*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999) p. 134 - 138.

In the year 1666 Newton would make a huge leap in color research when he turned Galileo's telescope on its head when looking through the opposite end. This was the first step in the invention of the telescope. With the telescope he could have foundational proof about how the light reacts to shadow and vice versa. This revolutionary hypothesis suffered a backlash, since the public weren't ready for what he had invented.

There was much protest and many observations made about his new found idea. The main topic of the discussion that arose from his hypothesis was mainly that light and shadow were more or less physical or material. Newton was completely dumbfounded by people's negative reactions, and this off course affected him negatively, so that he started losing sleep by the whole ordeal. He even stated that he had never guessed that he would lose sleep by a little shadow.³

Goethe and the (Theory of Colours)

In 1810 a German poet named Johann Wolfgang von Goethe published his book *Farbenlehre* (Theory of Colours), which is seen by many as the most comprehensive book about colors even to this day. The book discussed the polar interactions of light to dark. It also criticized Newton's color theories. Many people became angry about Goethe's critique of Newton as Goethe was a poet criticizing a scientist who was held in high regards in the eyes of the public and literary circles.

Goethe's theory on the interaction of light and darkness has become increasingly more popular through the years, and even today, his color theories and hands-on approach about color, the fact that everything is shadow, and that without darkness there is no light and vice versa. He postulates that colors meet between brightness and darkness, night and day. His writings are to this day much used both in philosophical and scientific debates. Goethe even made a color chart to investigate colorblindness before it had become a scientific term.⁴

Goethe was first and foremost a poet widely known for his poetry and plays, one of his most popular being the play *Faust*, which has been made into movies and musicals

³ Manlio Brusatin, *A History of Colors*, (Paris: Shambhala Publications, 1991) p. 90.

⁴ John Gage, *Color and Meaning. Art science and Symbolism*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999) p. 169 - 170.

and is still to this day a popular play in theatres around the world. He was one of the first persons who went against the Enlightenment and its romantic, dreamlike view of reality, even though he first sprang out of its inner circles. Goethe would fight for rationality at any cost, and was radically opposed to Newton's *Optics*. He didn't agree on the term white light and instead focused on the subjectivity/objectivity of the viewer. He also focused on the parallels of physical colors and the colors created through chemistry.

Goethe became so obsessed with his theory on colors that his book on the subject became a trap for him. He felt more passionately about the subject matter than anything else he had previously worked on, and since *Zur Farbenlehre* (1808), was such a struggle for him to write, he felt that he had to defend it and its theories at any cost, and therefore he was stuck in his own assumptions. The critics of the time mostly downgraded it as a work of someone's special interest. But even after the harsh criticism Goethe's book got, it became a color bible for the Romantic Movement, since they were immensely interested in the movement of color.

It also became one of the first critiques of the positivism of the Enlightenment. One of the lines saying this can be read in a statement Goethe made that he did not want to build a fortress around romantic irrationality. He is quoted saying: "Classicism is health, romanticism is sickness."⁵ A book like *Theory of Colours*, could not have been more well timed as a critique and a scientific study on colors for its time.⁶

The book would later go on to inspire artists such as Wassily Kandinsky, who was one of the first abstract painters and one of the founders of the Bauhaus School.⁷

Kandinsky and the Bauhaus Movement

When Wassily Kandinsky returned to Germany, he was offered a teaching position in 1921 at The Bauhaus School of Art by the school's founder Walter Gropius. The school was different than other art academies as it combined architecture, sculpting and painting, all in one.

The new ethics of the school was made because Gropius wanted to break down the walls of prejudice, class differences, and snobbery that divided the other schools. He

⁵ Barbara Gail Montero, *Thought in Action*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) p. 28.

⁶ See in appendix. Image 2.

⁷ Manlio Brusatin, *A History of Colors*, (Paris: Shambhala Publications, 1991) p. 101 - 111.

thought that by breaking down these barriers he would create something new, where students from these three different fields could work together to create something extraordinary.

The word Bauhaus translated to English means House of building. This coining of the school makes perfect sense in a constructional way. If you build a house, you will need experts with different skills. When Kandinsky started teaching in the painting department in 1922, he was greeted by his old friend and acquaintance Paul Klee who also had a teaching position at the school. Gropius had not only chosen Kandinsky and Klee, but many of the brightest and most innovated minds in Germany.

Kandinsky's most productive period teaching at the Bauhaus school was between 1923-1925. He was teaching students to penetrate the image, to see the meaning of an abstract painting. His most famous class was a course in color, where he would use earlier studies and color theories.⁸ Through his teachings he came to some remarkable results that culminated in him making up new theories concerning how we view color.⁹

How color can affect us psychologically

When a grown person looks at a painting full of many colors, he is enchanted and delighted by all the bright and pretty ones. But this only lasts for a little while if the painting doesn't have any other substance except pretty colors. If there are images the man knows, he is pleasantly intrigued a bit longer than he would be if it was only color. But this also only last a little while, and then the picture loses its value to him, since he has seen an image of a figure or a landscape before. The image and its forms aren't foreign anymore, the mystery is solved, and therefore the painting loses its value in the eyes of the beholder, since he can assimilate and compare the image with thousands of other images he has seen before.

It is a bit similar to a little child that sees a flame for the first time. The flame fills the child with excitement and wonder, making the child want to touch the flame. The problem arises when the kid touches the flame, it will get burned, and therefore gain fear and respect to the flame.

⁸ See in appendix. Image 3.

⁹ "Bauhaus" <https://www.wassilykandinsky.net/bauhaus.php>. wassilykandinsky.net, 2008 - 2018

Later in life the kid learns that the flame isn't only a fear factor of something dangerous, but that fire also gives warmth and light, and is able to extend the day inside as well as outside. But as the child has become a grownup, it has got used to the flame or light in general and takes many things for a given. A dog can bite, a cat can scratch, a horse run fast, and a car can go faster. All these things have become a part of the person's daily routine. But in any case certain colors can remind a person on their previous experiences and therefore leave an imprint on the soul.

Lemon yellow may put a certain strain on an individual, since it may remind the person of the time he or she took a bite of a sour lemon, though this of course depends on the certain individual. A warmer yellow or even a warm red can remind one of the warmth of the flame, which stands in spiritual harmony with one's soul and memory, while a darker red can remind one of blood and something gory, maybe a horror movie or a slaughterhouse. A person learns that their reflection in the mirror isn't another human being. One could call it a physical sensation that works on the nerves or even the soul of the certain individual.

Not only is it possible for you to be able to taste a color, but you can even compare it with sounds or tones in music. As a listener you would immediately associate one color or more with certain tonal values. You could for example compare a bright yellow with a high note, while dark blue/cobalt blue you would naturally compare with a deep bass tone or a baritone.

Color can even have a texture, for example ultramarine has a smooth quality to it, and then we of course have all the warm and cold colors, which have the same effect they are associated with. Colors can have such a strong psychological effect on a person, that it can change them mentally and physically.

Some doctors have done research with Chromotherapy, where they have done tests with colored lights on patients. In a certain case of the Chromotherapy color experiment, the use of red caused an immense excitement in the patient and a rising of the heartbeat, while the use of blue made the patient go into temporary paralysis. The tests that were made only concluded the doctor's theory but didn't end up as a medical fact.

Doctors have tried color therapy on plants and animals without any certain results, and therefore color probably has more of a psychological effect on us humans than a

direct physical effect, one has to conclude. The question about how detrimental or progressive the effect of color can have on humans is still unanswered and therefore an unexplored mystery.

Kandinsky is said to have believed, that color has the power to directly move and influence the soul.¹⁰

Josef Albers's Theory on Color

The Bauhaus School's main purpose was to revolutionize the way we look at art, sculpture and architecture. Nonetheless there was also a strong emphasis on how we look at color.

It was especially color as a subject matter which fascinated Kandinsky and Klee, but also one of the Bauhaus pupils named Joseph Albers (March 19, 1888 - March 25, 1976). Through the learning's from his teaching, Albers would go on to make some revolutionary experiments which changed the way we look at color. Through his studies he found out that color would have an effect on other colors.

He made different color charts to prove his color theory. One of these color charts he had divided into two sides, one yellow and the other gray. In the middle of both sides there was a green square. The green square seemed greener on the yellow side than on the grey side, even though it was the same shade of green on both sides. Albers example shows us how color can affect another color in different ways. It also shows how easily color can deceive the eye of the beholder.

Albers was famous as a celebrated artist and poet, and students remember his lectures vividly as an engaging experience. It was in 1963 that he gave out the ground breaking book *Interaction of Color*, which with its color optical illusions and visual exercises still stands as a monumental milestone in the way of seeing and perceiving color.¹¹

Albers was a teacher at the renowned Black Mountain College which would teach and inspire the likes of such brilliant sound students as John Cage and painters as Robert Rauschenberg. Albers was convinced that color is the most important piece of the puzzle

¹⁰ Wassily Kandinsky, *CONCERNING THE SPIRITUAL IN ART*: (New York: Dover Publications Inc,1977), p. 23 - 26.

¹¹ See in appendix. Image 4.

we call art since color is never really perceived by the human eye as it really is, which therefore makes it the most relative medium in art.

One shouldn't merely think that there is one way of reading a color since one color can be read differently, depending on what color it is next to. One can also make two different colors look alike by manipulating how they affect each other.

Albers was not trying to give us rules on color but tools of understanding colors. His book unlocks the magic of understanding the wide range of color behavior. He had an interesting way of teaching in his color course at Black Mountain. Since he didn't believe in a strict way of teaching, his classes changed every year depending on how original his students were in his classes, so many students that took his color course for four years had four different years of learning. He made for example some students go out and collect leaves or cigarette butts and assemble them so they wouldn't look like what they were originally intended to look like. He would encourage his students to assemble the objects, thus creating a new whole.

It was a new form of collage. The most noteworthy student who had taken this method to heart was Robert Rauschenberg, who used this method in his paintings as well as in his sculptures and performance pieces, and thereby blurring the lines of what an artist was supposed to do or what was expected of the individual.^{12 13}

A Philosophical Approach on Color and Sound

When Goethe talked about the psychological effects of colors, he compared it with the harmony of music. It was a ground-breaking theory for its time, even though it was already mentioned in 1786 by Johann Leonhard Hoffmann, when he had compared visual arts and music in his writing on the aural and visual phenomena. These writings were deliberately made by Hoffmann on Goethe's theories on color, since Goethe didn't take music into consideration or as Hoffmann critique on Goethe's deafness to musical effects.

¹² Maria Popova, "The Magic and Logic of Color" *Brainpicking*, August 16, 2013.
<https://www.brainpickings.org/2013/08/16/interaction-of-color-josef-albers-50th-anniversary/>

¹³ See in appendix. Image 5.

The philosopher Immanuel Kant agreed with Hoffmann's theories and took it a step further when he said that dance, music and poetry were inferior to architecture and sculpture since the latter arts were instantaneous in the way they had a direct effect on the viewer. Kant was one of the forerunners of the Enlightenment and stood in opposition to the values that Romanticism had stood for, a more direct and instantaneous approach, and wanted to be moved directly.

Kant thought that it took more of a progressive transport of passions and emotions to listen to a symphony or a theater piece. He strongly believed that for something to be of the highest art, it had to evoke a slow response and demand something from the listener/participants. Even though Kant criticized Goethe's book "Theory of Colours", they weren't that far apart since Goethe had already discussed the matter on special and temporal arts in his perceptual psychology.

The problem of their theory is still very evident and erupts when it comes to the blending of colors and music. Blending the two together sounds very easy when it's thoroughly explained, but it still falls short when it comes to some vital questions. While a bright color like lemon yellow could be a high note and the color black could be a bass note, what note could a shadow be except a long pause? The problem became really apparent when colors fade into other colors, and tones fade into other tones. The different material worlds of esthetics clash, and the colors can end up creating terrible orchestral music played backwards.

Kandinski's theory on hot and cold as in yellow and blue is a great stable theory that hasn't been rivaled since he wrote it decades ago. He also stresses in his writing that white is of course silence but not silence alone but with other bright colors surrounding it. Black is of course the bass, but also resembles sickness and death. Black and white are like yellow and blue, in that they are a hot and cold pair of colors. Some of the colors stand in opposition to each other, and as with a well written piece of music a great painter knows how to work the opposing colors up against each other to create a disturbing yet pleasant resonating attack on the gazing viewer.

Kandinsky was so obsessed with combining music and color that he created two theater pieces to show the public what his research on the subject matters was all about. One was called *The Sound Yellow* (1912) and the other one was called *Violet* (1914).¹⁴ Kandinsky strongly thought that by believing in the magic of color, it has the capacity to free us from emptiness, shallowness and death. Like when God turned on the light in our before so dark universe. He thought if we just put some will into it, we can go a long way in believing in the power color can bring to our lives either through sound or on its own.¹⁵

My relationship with color as a medium

As long as I can remember, I've had a fascination with color as a medium. As a kid I was always drawing when I wasn't playing outside. Even in school I was drawing things or caricatures of my fellow students or teachers. I got a lot of positive comments when I was able to make a drawing resemble something from real life. But I was never told that I should go to art school, since this is not something that people in the Faroe Islands usually do, partly because we do not have an art academy.

Many in my family are teachers, so I enrolled in teacher's college, as teaching is a practical and reasonable occupation to have. And this worked well for two years. I would also paint and have yearly exhibitions while enrolled in a teacher training establishment.

The third year it became evident that I didn't have time to paint, if I wanted to pursue my teaching goal, and these two things that had worked to begin with had come in conflict with each other and left me with two choices: either teaching or painting. So I chose the latter, which has always been my main passion in life.

My dad who has always supported me in my artistic endeavor respected my decision when I quit teacher training school. So I worked one winter to earn money and then went to a preparatory college for a year before enrolling in The Icelandic Academy of Fine Arts.

This is not a decision I have regretted. Even though art is not the safest occupation economically, it is the right career in my case. Ever since I was a kid scribbling something on a blank paper and then magically making images and forms appear in all

¹⁴ See in appendix. Image 6.

¹⁵ Manlio Brusatin, *A History of Colors*, (Paris: Shambhala Publications, 1991) p. 135 - 143.

the colors of the rainbow, it is still to this day captivating, and I hope that will never change. My biggest hope is that I'll be able to spread some happiness with my colorful paintings, and the more I'll study color theory, the more I'll be able to do just that.

Different ways of working with color

As I have discussed in the previous chapters, color can be viewed differently, all depending on what color it stands opposite or next to and what color is the most dominant or submissive. In my home country, The Faroe Islands, the weather is often very wet, bleak, windy and grey. This might be the reason why the locals find it so important to paint their houses in different, bright colors, to show their individuality, but also to put some color in their daily lives.

But now it is no longer enough to paint your house a bright color, you could call it a tradition to decorate ones living room with renowned Faroese artists. It has become an integral part of the culture and nationality of the Faroese people. It is not only a way of showing off, but also a way of showing that you are a cultured person and that you prioritize such expensive and original decoration.

I've always been fascinated by the effect color has on the eyes and nervous system. How our senses react to different color combinations in various ways. I think the ever changing Faroese weather also plays a strong part in the way we can have almost all seasons in one day. It is a way to fight the bleakness of a drab winter day when you paint a picture in strong, vibrant colors. There is also an element of drama in the process and the end result.

I like to capture the strong contrast of the weather with strong contrasting colors, without letting the colors dominate too much, since it can also be a weak point. If you have a painting in strong colors only, you get an over-abundance of color, and this may result in the painting becoming exaggerated and inflated with nothing more than bright pretty colors fighting for their space in the picture. This can make the painting uneven and weak to the viewer since there's no contrast or compliment and therefore no resting point for the eyes. Instead I have focused on contrasts in the painting, and as few colors as possible to tie the painting together and give the eye a place to relax.

By reading about Goethe, Kandinsky and Joseph Albers' theories on color I have gained a whole new insight into the subject matter, which I couldn't put words on before, and hopefully I can use their groundbreaking theories in my future studies and career as a performing painter. I'm now able to put words to feelings and my instant reactions when it comes to the power of color.

My artwork *Three Sisters*

In my painting *Three Sisters* I have chosen to paint three girls from head to chest. The work of art is painted in oils on a canvas. At first glance the three girls look identical and could be triplets, but after a second look most viewers ask me if it depicts the same girl or different girls. This is no accident since the main purpose of a painting is to create pleasure with confusion, arresting the gaze of the viewer for a longer period of time. A push and pull effect if you will.¹⁶

This effect was first used in the Mona Lisa by Leonardo da Vinci who knew that people are attracted by opposites and confusion. The resting point lies in the eyes of the painted subject or the lips, also called the Mona Lisa smile. While the background reeks of chaos and havoc. A wasteland if you will. On the right there is streaming water that looks like a flood, and the mountains are higher on the left side. You have both sides contradicting each other. This is nowhere more evident than in Mona Lisa's face, where she seems somber on the left side, but smiling on the right side. Her eyes are also smiling more than her mouth, perplexing the viewer, and her mood is different depending from which angle you look. The painting is full of contradictions like these, and this might be the wonder of the painting, the sole thing that creates an awe and excitement from the viewer's point of view.

The misty, hazy and smoky effect da Vinci is able to paint also gives the picture an immense depth. Da Vinci used a glazing method to create depth and it took him seven years to paint. That has off course under the master's hands and eyes created an immense depth of eternal mystery and wonderment.¹⁷ I didn't use seven years for my painting but only a couple of months so (for that reason and our different levels of talent) the depth of

¹⁶ See in appendix. Image 7.

¹⁷ Alicja Zelazko, "Why Is the Mona Lisa So Famous?" Britannica, January 5, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/story/why-is-the-mona-lisa-so-famous>

the picture is of course not the same. But I work with the same frictions as da Vinci did with his masterpiece. The green background color is layered with a thick green impasto technique, a forest green to resemble nature and spring.

From Kandinsky's viewpoint, the green also inspires stillness and is therefore very good for people who are tired or in desperate need of a rest. The problem with green is that it can become dull after a while, like a fat immovable cow eating grass.¹⁸

The third sister is turned on her head. This is to create a friction with the stillness of the picture, turning a traditional painting into a blend of classicism and surrealism, since it is impossible for the third sister to hang by her feet with her head down without the hair hanging downwards and her to be redheaded from hanging upside down.

As an autodidact I haven't had much theory when it comes to painting, and that is probably why I have become so keen to learn how to paint professionally. One can't just start where Picasso left off, but one has to work oneself through the whole history of painting. I would like one day to be able to paint abstract pictures, but I don't feel ready for that chapter in my brief painting career yet.

Figurative painting has always fascinated me, and since most painters in the Faroes paint landscapes, I feel a strong need to represent the figure in Faroese art. My painting *Three Sisters* is of three siblings in full bloom. This is another reason why I choose the green as a background color. The girls are like nature on a spring day, in full flower.

The colors on the sisters' faces are vibrant and gushing with youth and life. This is represented in the many nuances of color in their faces. I was very aware to tone the colors down for a maximum effect, since I have become more aware of not inflating a painting with bright and strong colors. These last couple of years I have had few deaths in my family, and it evokes certain emotions and become part of one's maturing process.

By using different variants of colors, both somber and bright, as musical notes in a piece of music one is able to cope with the absurdity and interaction of life and death. As birth is white, which is the color of innocence, and youth is full of bright colors, old

¹⁸ Ekaterina Smirnova, "Basic Color Theory by Kandinsky"
<https://ekaterinasmirnova.wordpress.com/2012/08/06/basic-color-theory-by-kandinsky-44/>

age is darker tones, and death is black, our life is a resemblance of the whole color spectrum, from the womb to the tomb.

When I gave a talk on *Three Sisters* early in 2018, I was met with harsh critique from a neo-feminist in my class, who asked why the women seemed so passive and weak, like still objects standing there only for the viewers' pleasure. But I also got a compliment from another feminist, who asked the other girls, why they couldn't just enjoy the painting for its esthetics. Then one of them replied that women have been objectified by men for centuries and that this was a very dangerous path of toxic masculinity.

I was a bit taken aback by the negative critique, since it wasn't my intention to show the female form in a negative objectifying light. After that I have studied the male gaze to know a bit more about the subject matter and have learned a lot since then about objectification of the female form, by seeing the documentary by John Berger.¹⁹

The Resemblance of the “Three Sisters” to the three Norns

The reason why I chose to paint the *Three Sisters* is because the number and figure of three has personal significance for me, as I have three sisters. But this is not the only reason since the number three is very evident in most religions and is known as the three deities. In Christianity we have the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In Hinduism we have Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, and in Nordic mythology there is Odin, Thor and Freyr. But the three Norns figure prominently in the collective Nordic tradition.

The three Norns lived by the well Urd in Asgard, where the gods lived. Their names were Urd, which means: what once was, Verdandi: What is coming into being, and Skuld: What shall be. One of their daily routines is spinning the thread of life, which means the fate of every human being in the world. They resided at the roots of Yggdrasil, which was believed to be the tree of life. They would place a rooster on the top of the roots, which would crow at the break of dawn to wake up the gods and goddesses in Asgard.²⁰

¹⁹ John Berger, “Ways of Seeing”, Episode 2, 1972, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1GI8mNU5Sg&t=1478s&ab_channel=tw19751

²⁰ See in appendix. Image 8.

People of the Viking age revered the Norns and would give a woman who had just given birth to a child some porridge. The porridge was called Norn porridge, since it was seen as an offering to the Norns, who always were in close proximity when a child was born. Even though the Norns were admired, there is no evidence that they were worshipped like other gods, and therefore they are not like the three deities that I mentioned earlier.

One of the Norns' other duties was to carry water from the well Urd to water Yggdrasil, so it would stay green and in bloom. It was called the tree of life because people believed that it kept the earth and everyone living of the land alive. The main reason why I chose the color green as a backdrop to my *Three Sisters* is that green also symbolizes openness and hope.²¹

Edvard Munch's use of Color

The Norwegian painter Edward Munch is most famous for his Painting *The Scream* and his morose figures either embracing as lovers or staring into the empty void of a Norwegian seascape. His figures are boldly painted, and their expressive gestures make them even more dominant in the murky Scandinavian landscape.

He is seen as the first expressionist and a major influence on German Expressionism and abstract art, especially cubism, since he most often overlooked reality for the feeling our surroundings make us sense. This made him tower over other painters of the 19th century, who were still trying to create realistic paintings of "reality". One thing that is often overlooked when one sees his works is his mastery of colors, and how they make us feel.

This is no coincidence, since Munch was reading about and diligently studying different experiments with color. Munch read not only manuals on color, but also science and color theory. He was especially interested in how color can have an effect on the viewer mentally and physically. Since it is evident that red is one of the strongest and warmest colors, he has used it in many of his most notable works from the blood red sky

²¹ H.R. Ellis Davidson, *Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe*, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1988) p. 164.

of *The Scream* (1893), to the *Vampire* (1895), where the woman's long crimson hair covers her hopeless victim.²²

Munch's use of green in "The Sick Child"

Edvard Munch's masterpiece *The Sick Child* (Norwegian: *Det Syke Barn*), is a painting of his older dying sister Johanne Sophie (1862 - 1877) sitting in a chair, confronting her hopeless situation with her grieving aunt Karen, who is bent over and praying by her side.

Sophie looks out the window at the strong daylight, bravely ready to meet her impending fate. The curtain represents for some viewers an escape from the pain, with her impending death. Munch made six versions of the painting and stated that it was his departure from realism. The painting was his first masterpiece and virtuosity in brushwork and the handling of paint. The painting was a technical and personal cathartic way to confront the deeply traumatic experience, and that's why Munch painted as many as six different versions of the painting from 1885 - 1926.

This was a way for him to capture the fleeting moment of his dying sister fading away in front of him. This was his way of encapsulating the trauma, keeping her from also fading out of his memory and making the painting as bold and emotionally realistic as possible. One can see this on the slight adjustments that he makes in each painting. He's working in bold and wild strokes, scraping off paint, and then etching with the opposite end of his brush into the wet paint.²³

In my opinion *The Sick Child* is Munch's best work to date. His way of working with colors as a mood factor is unbeatable. He uses somber tones to tone down the painting with some highlights on Sophie's face and the pillow she is leaning on. In one of the later versions of the painting he has removed the flowerpot in the window to keep the viewer focus free of distractions from the main subject. He uses pale yellow as a color of sickness, but this is even better illustrated in the way he uses the color *emerald green*.

²² Henri Neuendorf, "How Edward Munch's Pioneering Use of Color Science Put Art on the Road to Abstraction" Artnet, July 18, 2017, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/edvard-munch-color-science-1017026>

²³ "The Sick Child, 1885 by Edvard Munch" Edvard Munch, 2017, <https://www.edvardmunch.org/the-sick-child.jsp>

The Painting is mostly painted in bleak and dreary grays, greens, and black and white colors.

The color green often symbolizes freedom, nature, frankness, sympathy, hope and health, as I clearly stated when describing my painting of *The Three Sisters*. But Munch's painting of *The Sick Child* stands in stark contrast to my painting and to Kandinsky's color theories, where I use green as something refreshing and hopeful, like a bright summer's day.

Munch on the other hand uses dark green to symbolize sickness and despair. The green encapsulates his painting like a deadly sickness that in one way oozes out of the painting. If he had not had a refined knowledge and an innate talent for understanding color theory, it would have been impossible for him to turn such a positive color into something completely different. It is not strange that his first masterpiece of his sister created such a stir in the art world and divided critiques so radically.

Luckily Edward Munch reached a high age, unlike his contemporary, the Post-Impressionists Vincent van Gogh, and Paul Gauguin, who died dirt poor far too young, and therefore were never able to reap the fruits of their labors.

Ólafur Eliasson Green River Project

From 1998 to 2000 Ólafur Eliasson and his team of assistants used a water-soluble and non toxic material called Uranine to color different rivers green. Four of these rivers were located in Bremen, Stockholm, Los Angeles and Tokyo. Uranine is usually used to color and measure water currents. Eliasson thought it had become a problem that urbanites would take the cityscape for a given, and most of the cities inhabitants would simply ignore their urban environment.

Eliasson believes that this is especially the case in urban areas, and nowhere was this more evident to him than in Stockholm where the downtown river looked picture perfect like something from a postcard. The main reason why Eliasson colored the river green was because he wanted to wake people up from their walking slumber.

Nowhere did his plan work so well as in Stockholm where it shook its inhabitants to their core. Everyone started to see the river as an entity streaming through their main capital, as a jugular through a human body. The green river ended as front page news on

most of the local newspapers. Some journalists even proclaimed that it was a sewage leak, though it wasn't the case. The whole ordeal ended well. Everybody in the end found out that it was an artwork and the artist's way to open people's eyes to their environment, that most of us take for granted. By coloring the river a strong green Eliasson took something as ordinary as a river and turned it into something hyper real and a flowing force of nature that people couldn't take their eyes of.

Eliasson has done the dynamic water color installation in many cities around the world, and every time it happens, the river flows and colors the water. He doesn't want to tell people beforehand what he is about to do, since that would just create a prenotion in the minds of the public, and then it wouldn't create the media storm and the interaction it was intended for. In every city there is a different reaction from the blending of the green antitoxic material with the water.²⁴

But it definitely creates a dialogue about what is going on by the public and the media. And this is the main purpose of the artwork. To create something we ignore into something we can't look away from. By bringing his artwork out of the somber museums and into the public Eliasson raises awareness of art and our daily surroundings.

Eliasson said that the cities where he poured his green liquid into the river became real, at least for the moment. He said that his Green River Project was all about the past and the present and how we react to the then and now. His reason was to make us more conscious of our surroundings, and for that project the color was green, but the whole point of the artwork wasn't The Green River. The point was how the public reacted to the river before and after, and in my opinion this was another great way to use green to its fullest effect on the masses.²⁵

²⁴ See in appendix. Image 10.

²⁵ Artspace Editors, "Green Imposes Its Discomfiting Mood" Artspace, April 11, 2017, https://www.artspace.com/magazine/art_101/chromaphilia/chromaphilia-green-54704

Conclusion

How can a color affect other colors in different ways, not to forget the viewers' perception of certain colors? It has become evident that color is timeless and can affect the viewer depending on what color we choose to focus on, and it is also a question of what image the color helps to portray or exaggerate. The image or format affects the dialogue, but the color can be as dominant as the image itself. This is evident in abstract art, where the color is as dominant as the lines or form of the painting, helping the final image to reach its expressive peak.

What I found very captivating was Joseph Albers way of doing his color tests. The way one color can be affected or affect another color or even becomes a different strength or hue of color, all depending on what color it stands side by side with, or is surrounded by. I had no presumption that color could change itself by our perception in strength or even color, all depending on the light or other colors.

All the different ways we can perceive one color is both enigmatic and is mind-boggling to me. I had never thought that color could be a science in itself, and like music color can be used as a language. The merging of colors and sound is nowhere more evident than in Kandinski's theory on colors. Before reading about Kandinski's ideas, and starting to write this thesis, I had no idea how evident it was that color can be seen as music without sound.

One movie that particularly comes to mind is Walt Disney's movie *Fantasia* (1940) in which there is only color and sound, and where both music and image compliment each other from start till the end of the movie. All through the movie, they are in a constant dance with each other.

Although the movie was a commercial flop, it has since reached cult status. *"There are things in the music,"* said Disney, *"that the general public will not understand until they see the things on the screen representing the music. Then they will feel the depth in the music."*²⁶

²⁶ Jay Gabler, "Disney's 'Fantasia' at 75: Why there's still nothing like it" classical mpr, Jan 30, 2015, <https://www.classicalmpr.org/story/2015/01/30/disney-fantasia-75>

Other movie producers have tried this later, but I don't think any other movie has achieved the same effect it so elegantly and efficiently as that particular movie. Disney must have had a keen understanding and interest on what Kandinski was talking about, when it came to understanding color and music. Since Joseph Albers' color theory, it is evident that color works in the same way as sound or music for that matter, in the way it can change its hue like music changes its notes or tonality. Therefore color can be for the eyes what music is for the ears, which is a delight or fright for the senses, either or, all depending on how the artist chooses to use colors on his palette.

I have chosen to focus on the diversity of the color green. One example is my own painting of the *Three Sisters*, which shows the viewer how refreshing green can be in all its naturalistic glory and fruitful splendor. The second example is *The Sick Child* by Edward Munch, which stands as a bleak and dramatic contrast, where the master uses green to symbolize sickness. Last but not least is Ólafur Eliasson's *Green Water Project*, where the artist used green to call the public's attention to their surroundings and nature in general. Eliasson does this from a different and geopolitical point of view and manages to raise our awareness from the blissful ignorance of our surroundings and from a metropolitan point of view.

The three above mentioned artworks use the color green as their main color, even though they represent three completely different moods and viewpoints, and this just shows how one color can be used in different ways to achieve its fullest potential, be it hopeful, sad, lethal or geopolitical.

Talking about the power and diversity of color in general, I can't resist mentioning Ives Klein, who was so happy about the power of ultramarine blue that he wanted to make it into his own color, and called it IKB which is short for *Ives Klein Blue*. His paintings are extremely strong in color and powerful to look at since he used a very strong pigment powder, which he laid on his canvases in a very thick layer. But it is still Ultramarine blue, if you ask me.²⁷

Anish Kapoor, who is a modern, conceptual artist, has taken it a step further and bought the rights to a color called *Vantablack*. from a laboratory called "Surrey

²⁷ See appendix. Image 12.

NanoSystems”, which have given Kapoor the sole rights as an artist to use and experiment with their product Vantablack.²⁸

I do not agree with these two artists on that matter since I believe very strongly that color is for everyone to use and enjoy. And I have a faint idea that the scientists Newton and Goethe, and the artists Albers and Kandinski would agree on that matter, as the world would be a very poor, drab and sad place without any music or color to spice things up.

²⁸ Claire Voon, “Anish Kapoor Gets Exclusive Rights to the World’s Darkest Material”, Hyperallergic, February 29, 2016, <https://hyperallergic.com/279243/anish-kapoor-gets-exclusive-rights-to-the-worlds-darkest-pigment/>

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Images

Image 1 A. Sir Isaac Newton. *Newton's color wheel*. 1665. Ink on paper.

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Image 1 B. Claude Boutet. *Boutet's 7-colour and 12-color color circles*. 1708.

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Image 2 A. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Goethe's symmetric colour wheel with associated symbolic qualities 1809.

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Image 2 B. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. The rose of temperaments (Temperamentenrose), 1798/9.

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Image 3. Wassily Kandinsky. Kandinsky colour theory and angles. Concerning the Spiritual in Art. New York: Dover Publications. June 1, 1977

Image 4 A,B,C. Joseph Albers. Interaction of Color. Yale. Yale University Press; Revised edition. September 10, 1975.

Image 5. Robert Rauschenberg. Rebus. Collage. 1955. Moma.

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Image 6. Wassily Kandinsky, *The Yellow Sound*. (Der Gelbe Klang) Photograph, 1912.

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Image 7. Ludvík á Brekku. Three Sisters. Oil on Canvas. Private Collection. 2018.

Image 8. Ludwig Burger. The Norns Urd, Verdandi, and Skuld under the tree of life Yggdrasil. Etching.1882.

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Image 9. Edvard Munch: The Sick Child. Oil on canvas, 1885–6.

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Image 10. Olafur Eliasson, Green River Project . Uranine and water, Strömmen waterway, Stockholm, 2000.

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Image 11. Walt Disney. Fantasia 1940. Cartoon.

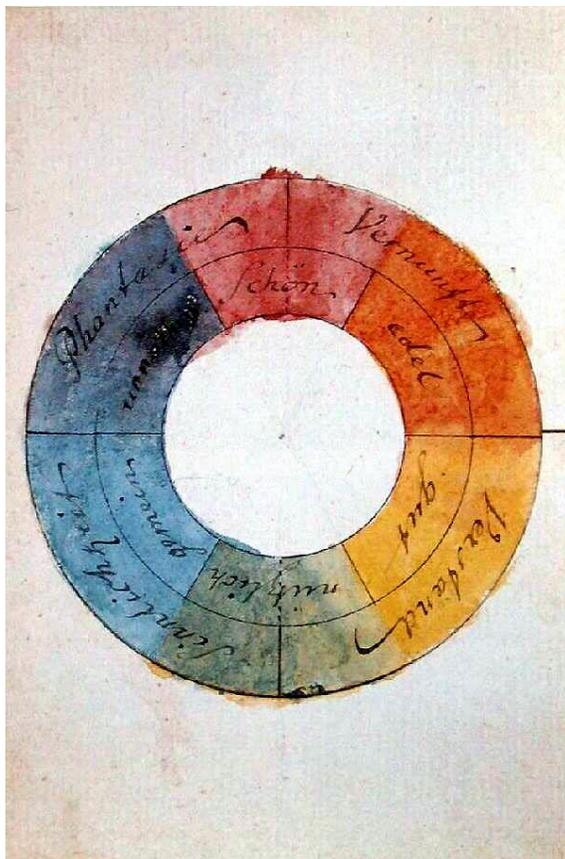
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Image 12. Yves Klein. *IKB 79*. Tate. 1959.

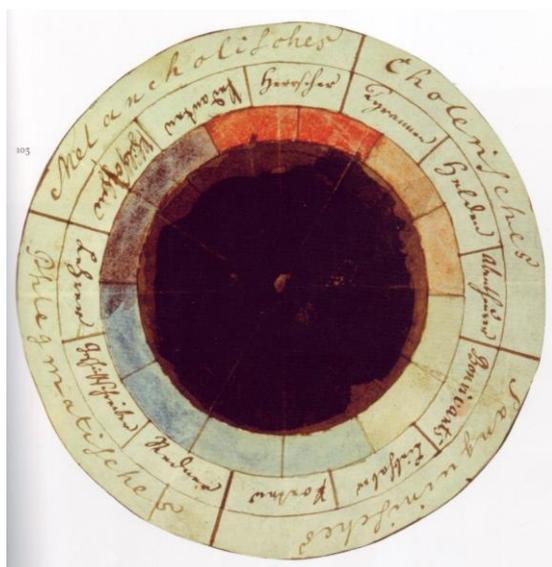
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Image. 13. Anish Kapoor. Vantablack 2.0. 2017.

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Picture 2 A. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. *Goethe's symmetric colour wheel with associated symbolic qualities* 1809.



Picture 2 B. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. *The rose of temperaments (Temperamentenrose)*, 1798/9.

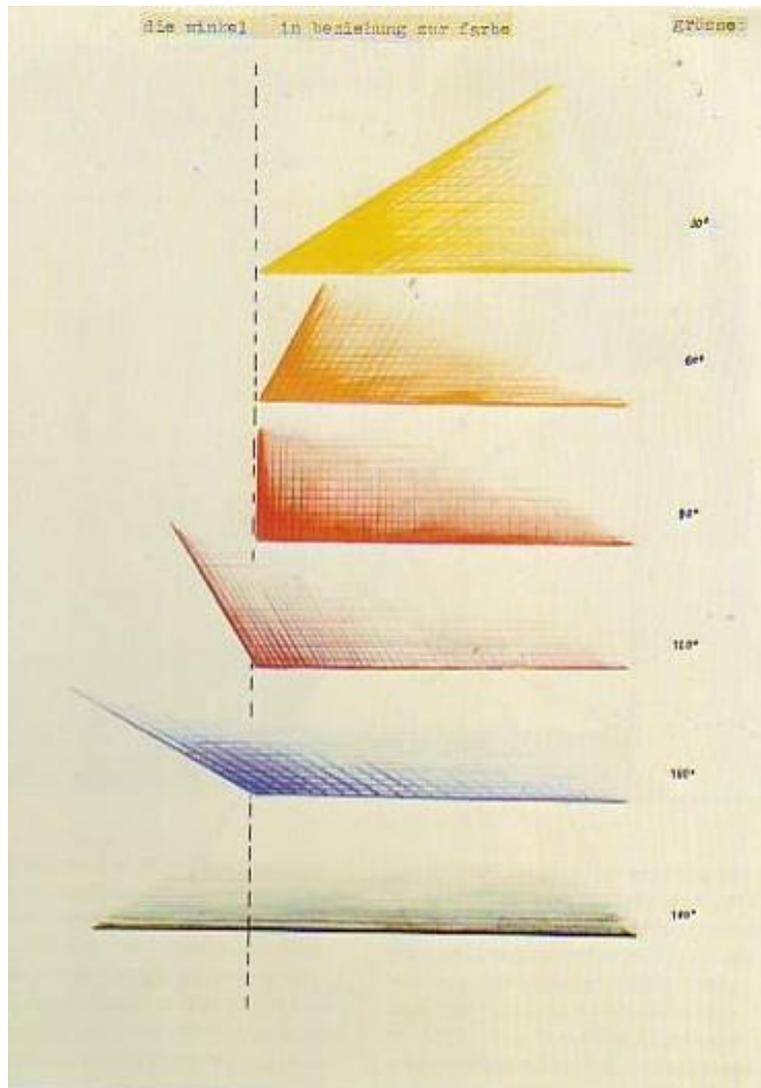
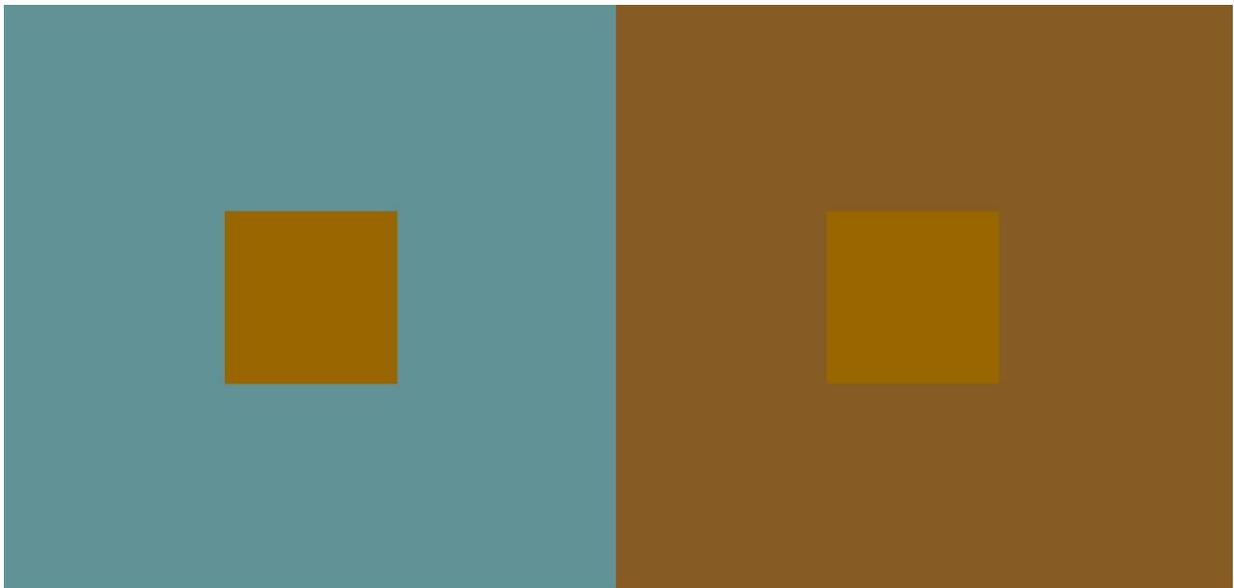
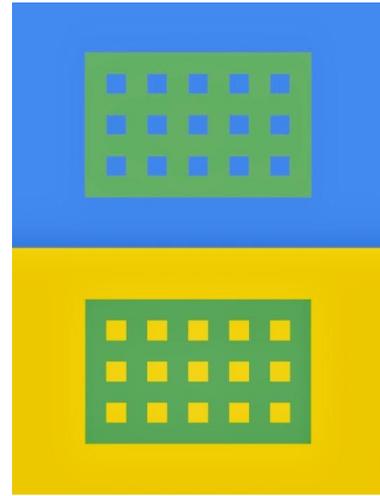
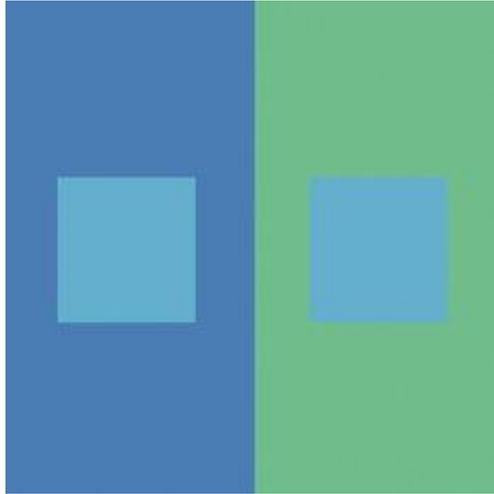


Image 3. Wassily Kandinsky. *Kandinsky colour theory and angles. Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. New York: Dover Publications. June 1, 1977.

(Yellow is the strongest color on the chart, and has therefore the strongest angle).



The two small squares are exactly the same colour

Image 4 A,B,C. Joseph Albers. *Interaction of Color*. Yale. Yale University Press; Revised edition. September 10, 1975.



Image 5. Robert Rauschenberg. *Rebus*. Collage. 1955. Moma.



Image 6. Wassily Kandinsky, *The Yellow Sound*. (Der Gelbe Klang) Photograph. 1912.



Image 7. Ludvík á Brekku. *Three Sisters*. Oil on Canvas. Private Collection, 2018.



Image 8. Ludwig Burger. *The Norns Urð, Verdandi, and Skuld under the tree of life Yggdrasil*. Etching. 1882.

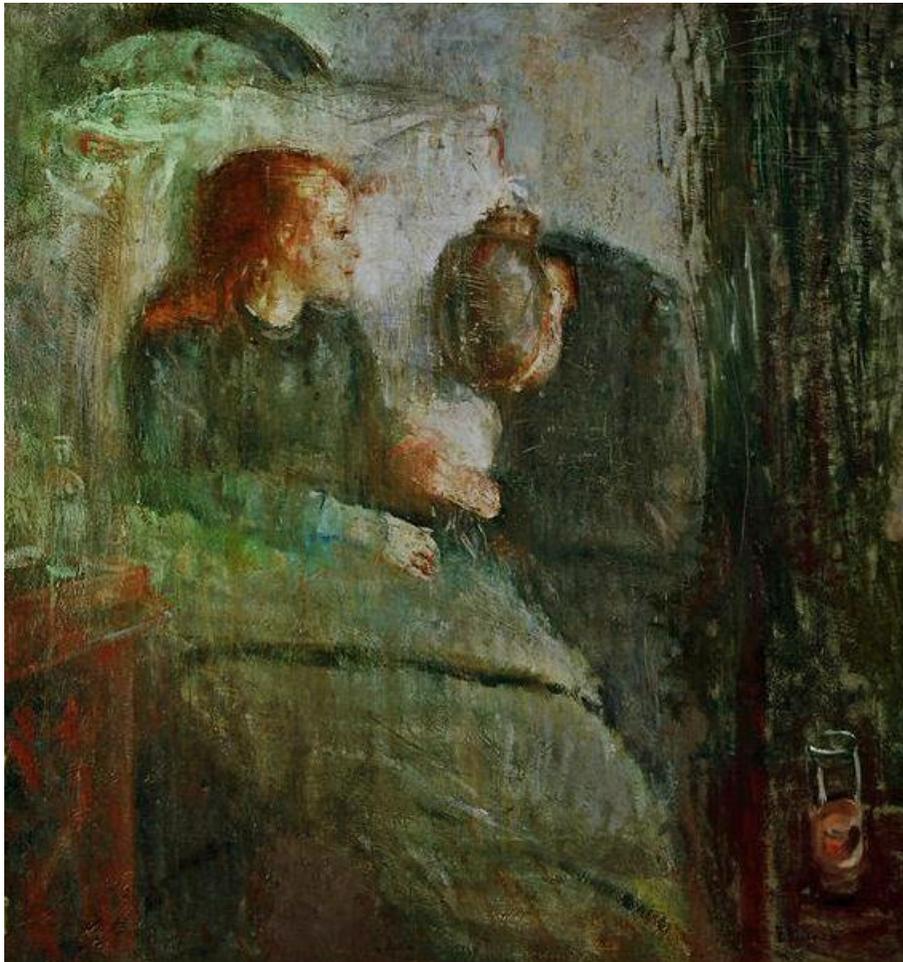


Image 9. Edvard Munch: *The Sick Child*. Oil on canvas, 1885–6.



Image 10. Olafur Eliasson, Green River Project . Uranine and water, Strömmen waterway, Stockholm, 2000.



Image 11. Walt Disney. *Fantasia*. 1940. Cartoon.



Image 12. Yves Klein. *IKB 79*. 1959.



Image. 13. Anish Kapoor. *Vantablack 2.0*. 2017.