Color Psychotherapy And Painting In The Satellite-expanded Field

2009

Katherine Urban
University of Central Florida

Find similar works at: https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd

University of Central Florida Libraries http://library.ucf.edu

Part of the Art and Design Commons

STARS Citation

https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd/4041

This Masters Thesis (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact lee.dotson@ucf.edu.
COLOR PSYCHOTHERAPY AND PAINTING IN THE SATELLITE-EXPANDED FIELD

by

KATHERINE URBAN
B.S. Florida State University, 2006

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in the Department of Art in the College of Arts and Humanities at the University of Central Florida Orlando, Florida

Spring Term
2009
ABSTRACT

My work deals with the subconscious pairing of colors from an instinctively chosen color palette into molded forms. My emotions drive these pairings. As I visualize these different emotions, I ask the viewer to formulate their own perceptions and connections (both physical and emotional) in relation to my own. This allows the viewer to explore the emotional twists and turns of my imagination by their own unique associations in correspondence. Painting allows me to visualize the inner depth of my imagination. My work becomes concrete through the subconscious pairing of colors and shapes and evolves with viewer interaction.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my father for getting me to enter the annual K-Mart Easter coloring contest and my professors for the wisdom and knowledge that they have shared with me over the years, which together have made me the artist I am today.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................................................... vi

INTRODUCTION .............................................................................................................. 1

INFLUENCES .................................................................................................................... 2
- Abstract Expressionism .................................................................................................. 2
- The Fauvist Movement ................................................................................................... 2
- Stained Glass ................................................................................................................... 3

PROCESS AND METHOD ............................................................................................... 5
- Application ...................................................................................................................... 5
- Idea of Landscape ........................................................................................................... 6
- Influence of the Figure .................................................................................................... 7
- Exploration of Light ........................................................................................................ 8

COLOR PSYCHOLOGY VS. COLOR THERAPY ........................................................ 10
- Angela Wright ............................................................................................................... 10
- Color Therapy ............................................................................................................... 10
- Rorschach Inkblot Test ................................................................................................. 11

DEPENDENCIES ............................................................................................................. 12
- Subjective Interpretation ............................................................................................... 12

THE SATELLITE-EXPANDED FIELD ......................................................................... 13

CONCLUSION ................................................................................................................. 14

REFERENCES ................................................................................................................. 15
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Stained Glass ....................................................................................................... 4
Figure 2: Orange Diptych ................................................................................................... 6
Figure 3: Dinoscape ............................................................................................................ 7
Figure 4: The Body ............................................................................................................. 8
INTRODUCTION

Color can have physical and emotional effects on human behavior. These effects can vary depending on the time, place, and the culture in context. When we see the color red, our minds usually associate the word stop or warning, just like yellow can make us feel happy or remind us of a sunset or sunflower. These color connotations may be common but are not shared by all. The individuality of the viewer creates commonalities and differences in the perception of art. This is what stimulates my process of painting.

When starting a painting, no preliminary drawing is used nor do I sketch out anything on the canvas. The colors chosen are contingent upon specific mood or aura and then in combination are enhanced by my surroundings. This in turn makes the palette a direct reflection of my innermost secrets and unconventionally relays them into the amoeba-like forms that appear in my work. These forms are created by the sheer physical act of moving the paint around on the canvas. I connect these shapes like a puzzle in a space-conscious manner, dividing the canvas up until it looks just right in my head from all angles.

I love it when the viewer makes a connection to these forms deeming them a certain recognizable object (which may or may not account for an emotional or physical reaction). The viewers response to my paintings may also make me see or feel something I hadn’t intended originally and since each piece is a reflection of myself, this interaction helps me understand the intricacies of my persona; my own “psychiatry” if you will.
INFLUENCES

Abstract Expressionism

One of the biggest inspirations for creating my art has been Wassily Kandinsky. His paintings captivated me since the first time I came across *In Blue, 1925*. Having learned how to play numerous musical instruments as a child provided a unique way of how Kandinsky addressed the spirituality of color in his work. The experiences of my childhood are also inferred through color but in a different way in my paintings. When I see color, I see emotion. When Kandinsky saw color he interpreted music. His concern with the intensity of color and analysis of a more theoretical approach in art helped me generate what I wanted to achieve with paint, my own form. The dominant trends that attracted me to his work were the morphing shapes of intertwining melodies of color. I am even more intrigued by the deeper message hidden within his compositions.

“Of all art, abstract painting is the most difficult…it demands that you know how to draw well, that you have a heightened sensitivity for composition and for colors, and that you be a true poet. This last is essential” (Boddy-Evans, 2008).

The Fauvist Movement

Henri Matisse has also definitely impacted my work. Like Kandinsky, Matisse was also concerned with color. Wild brush strokes and bold vibrant colors are dominant features in almost every one of his paintings. My love for his style is reflected in the color palette most used when I paint. By incorporating these colors I am not intentionally going
against what society deems unattractive like the Fauves, it’s just a reflection of self at the time and a reaction to my environment.

**Stained Glass**

As my style evolved I noticed how much past experiences seem to affect my work, one especially. When I was little I used to watch my mother do stained glass. Bits and pieces of odd-shaped split glass of all colors radiating so vibrantly when the sun shone through stands out clear in my memory. I was fascinated by the process of construction; observing the illuminating colors of light that shone so brightly through the translucent spots of irregularity in the glass; having to fit and solder these jagged pieces together just so; the thick and deliberate outline of solder. I was mesmerized. These memories helped stimulate a new and distinct way of thinking for me. They changed the way I thought about process. Keeping this in mind, I established a new method of how I approached the composition. I would split up the canvas with color and piece it back together with emotion.

I found these feelings and emotions from my childhood experiences to be true inspiration for creating work that could connect with the viewer on either the same level, relating my frame of mind, or indirectly, recalling an experience they hold true to their own. These reactions could be both a physical, and or a psychological response.
Figure 1: Stained Glass
Oscar Wilde said, “Mere color, unspoiled by meaning, and unallied by definite form, can speak to the soul in a thousand different ways.” My work most heavily relies upon complex viewer interaction physically and emotionally to both color and shape.

The color combinations I choose are direct to a certain mood or feeling that I am trying to invoke within the painting. By consciously choosing the color palette, I therefore am providing a direct link inside my psyche. This process conveys my psychological being at the time of creation. In this sense I am predicting the viewer to interpret or react in the most probable way by directly revealing my frame of mind. However, I can only control this to a point. We as individuals don’t always see things in the same way. It is these unique characteristics of interpretation that I wish to focus upon.

What attracts me to this process is this random differential equation to each viewer’s unique physical and psychological associations they make to these forms embedded within my paintings. These associations may range from a physical reaction such as an increased heart rate, blood pressure or sudden hunger to a psychosomatic connection the viewer makes in reminiscent to a well-known conventional object, trend, or connection to a childhood occurrence.

To show depth in the painting I will occasionally leave spaces of open canvas almost like a stained glass window. I like to use a black line to bring out a push and pull effect which ultimately reinforces the structure of the painting like a steel wire. These shapes are not limited to the rectangular shape of the canvas but are meant to exceed beyond.
Each piece is a cutout of the bigger picture. The picture can extend out beyond the original canvas by adding a new one on any side on any part of the canvas. The paintings have the possibility to be never-ending.

Figure 2: Orange Diptych

Layering and reworking the canvas allows transformation and acceleration to what I may not have wanted initially. Most importantly it allows my paintings to evolve and constantly change into something new.

**Idea of Landscape**

It has been brought up to me that different landscapes have been seen inside my paintings. I played this off by incorporating different shapes that would allude or suggest a landscape but did not draw a specific correlation to it or state it directly. This is most prominently seen in my *Dinoscape* painting. I used texture to imply different parts of the environment. The title only hints at what might be seen inside the painting. What I
interpreted as a stegosaurus tail was also seen as a patch of Easter eggs. The title is meant to be as ambiguous as the painting is.

![Dinoscape](image)

**Figure 3: Dinoscape**

**Influence of the Figure**

I first started painting with watercolors, mainly floral landscapes. Then through high school, I graduated to acrylics -- mostly painting still life. When I came to college I wanted to try something that has always intimidated me: the figure. As I developed this body of work, I began to be intrigued with the human body. Painting from life and capturing a moment in time greatly impacted the way I approached the canvas. Splitting up the body into muscles with pools of color corresponds to the same process that I use when dividing up the canvas in my abstract paintings. All of my shapes have relationships just like the muscles in the body. They play off of each other. I cannot deny
the essence of the human figure in the forms found in my work but I assure you that it is an unconscious act.

Figure 4: The Body

Exploration of Light

Wanting to take my paintings to the next level, I decided to experiment with colored light and sculpey. I wanted to pay more attention to the push-pull eluded in my forms and make them take on a life of their own. By making my colored forms reflect other light and shadow it allows for the whole composition to have a second life.

“Many people think that color is just a matter of how things look and it is often dismissed as being purely cosmetic. However, the truth is that Color is light - the source of life itself; there is nowhere that Color does not exist and our instinctive, unconscious response to it is a vital element in our survival” (Wright, 2007).
The way we see color fascinates me. By employing this process I wanted to view my paintings like a prism of light and see them in a whole new dimension.
COLOR PSYCHOLOGY VS. COLOR THERAPY

Angela Wright

According to the theory of Angela Wright in the Colour Affects system, it is believed that, “Every person or entity – such as a piece of packaging, an interior environment, a corporation or product – has a personality that is best expressed, and supported, by a specific palette of colors” (Wright, 2007). This system rides on the right balance of colors viewed in combination enhanced by their many tonal properties varied tone. It also speculates that these different personalities view these color harmonies in a predictable fashion. In some my work, different color combinations are meant to entice specific personalities, thus in a certain way anticipating how they might respond. My paintings also use color in a more therapeutic way, employing color therapy.

Color Therapy

Color therapy suggests, “physiologic functions respond to specific color,” and different colors have different known effects. Black is suggested to evoke self-confidence, power, and strength. Blue is calming, lowers blood pressure, and decreases respiration. Green is said to alleviate depression, relax the body physically and mentally and can subdue anxiety and nervousness. Violet can help migraine pain and also helps suppress appetite. Pink is used in diet therapy as well as relieving tension – it gives off a soothing effect. Yellow can actually stimulate appetite and increase energy and is also said to improve memory. Orange also increases energy and stimulates the digestive system. Red stimulates brain wave activity and can increase heart rate, respiration and blood pressure.
(Vandermark, 2002). Using this method of color interpretation, like the Colour Affects system allows me to predict how one might respond to the colors found within my paintings, but not in full. Hinting at something allows for speculation, and speculation allows misinterpretation, and with misinterpretation a dialogue is made. This dialogue allows my paintings to be successful.

**Rorschach Inkblot Test**

The Rorschach inkblot test was originally conceived by Hermann Rorschach in 1921. It is a means for psychological assessment. It provides a way to evaluate personality traits of individuals by monitoring behavioral responses. There are ten official inkblots that are used; five black and white, two black and red on white background, and three are multi-colored. Interpreting the results varies on the scoring system. The Rorschach scoring system was revised by John E. Exner, known as the Exner system and is most widely used in the United States. It entails that the individual being evaluated is examined not only on their verbal responses but any and all reactions subconsciously made during the test.

The person’s emotional responsiveness to the Rorschach inkblot test is much like the relationship the viewer has with my paintings. It considers not only what they think they thought they saw but also how they physically and emotionally react, consciously or not. Each inkblot can also be rotated just like I rotate the canvas. Different angles can produce different visual effects. Reactions that also occur seem to be dependent on there variables such as environment, time of day and mood. So in a way my paintings can provide incite into my own persona, but the character of the viewer as well.
DEPENDENCIES

Subjective Interpretation

My work would not be nearly as successful if not for viewer participation. Having a close relationship to the viewer allows my paintings to progress and evolve with or without me present. How the viewer might react when viewing my painting can be most likely predicted by the relative frequency notion of probability. However, individuality sticks as the only variable. Establishing a dialogue with the viewer allows free exploration into the mind providing a connection that makes the piece successful in its own right.
THE SATELLITE-EXPANDED FIELD

In my last stages of research at the University of Central Florida, a new discovery was made in my work. I needed to break free from the spatial limitations of the rectilinear canvas along with the burdensome traditions that have persisted in abstract art for nearly 100 years. My earlier paintings only imply the notion of infinity. The viewer could only vaguely perceive the painting to extend out beyond the edge in their imagination.

I had always wanted to truly reveal this effect in my paintings but I just wasn’t sure how. I realized that my paintings had always been executed on a typical canvas, having both standard height and width and even though I intentionally eluded my colors and forms to go beyond these edges, the conventionality of the canvas prevented me achieving any success. The “fields” could only be imagined—I never truly reached beyond the edge.

After careful analysis of my prior work, I finally attained this extension with the invention of a new concept and form which I call the satellite canvas. These canvases are extensions of the primary canvas itself. They can be placed anywhere outside the field of painting to expand into the installation space of the entire room. Now my colors and forms are not just imagined, they are revealed visually, they are revealed literally.

Taking my painting into this new direction also allows much more freedom in their placement. I now have the flexibility to break free from not only the edge, but the traditional rule of the 57 inch center. I can now hang them anywhere according to my own aesthetic sense.
CONCLUSION

In my work, my goal is to communicate expressive meaning through color, shape and form, to stimulate the imagination, and to open the unconscious mind; a window for self-discovery that allows us all to see something we hadn’t or to see things completely differently than the time before. The therapeutic values of interpreting color can benefit our health and well-being and allow a breakthrough for innovation and creative influence in art.
REFERENCES


