

COLOR AND EMOTION: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL APPEAL OF COLORS



A study on how a variety of hues tend to affect us emotionally and how to use color and emotion effectively in your art

We talk about the technical attributes of [capturing color](#) a lot on the Breathing Color blog, but we often take for granted the powerful influence of color.

In art, color is used not only to represent the truth of an object, like trees are green for instance, but also to influence how viewers feel when looking at their work. Color is linked to emotional response.

Let's look at these links between color and emotion by viewing this painting in different ways:



This was originally created using classic golden tones to enhance the classic beauty of the woman. A touch of turquoise provides color contrast making it more interesting than a monochrome, but keeping it lowly saturated prevents it from drawing too much attention away from

the subject's head and shoulders area. Gold and brown are rich and earthy making causing viewers to feel like they are looking at something timeless, rich and connected to them as the earth is below their feet. This was a creative choice, however and if we explore this image in pure primary and secondary colors, we can see how our emotions can be directed by the use of color.

Let's start with yellow:



Yellow is a high intensity color, energetic and intelligent. It creates an almost electric excitement when seen in high saturation and even delicate misty yellow landscapes provoke energy rather than tranquility. Because it is the closest color to pure white, it also asks for a lot of visual attention, so be careful when and how you use yellow because it will be an important element of the finished piece.

Next up is orange:



Orange is the happiest and most festive color. It is created using equal parts of yellow and red. It contains a balance between the energetic

excitement of yellow and the warmth and passion of red. Use orange when you want to spread a little joy and festivity around in your work

Moving on to red:



Red is the warm and friendly color that I use a lot of in skin tones in order for viewer's to respond warmly to (like) the portraits. I delicately work it into the shaded sides of skin, dot it around the eyes and use it for accents here and there. When red is viewed in high saturation as it is in

this painting, it becomes quite passionate and depending on how it is used, it can become hostile, violent and bloody.

Experiencing purple:



... is like looking at royalty. It is elegant, regal, modern and healthy. Purple also has mystical, magical inferences so it's a great choice for adding seductive mystery to imagery. In lighter values it adds freshness and vitality to portraits of children and elderly people.

Let's look at blue now:



Blue, like red, is a color that can lead the viewer to different places depending on how you use it. Blue is cool, relaxed and contemporary. It is a peaceful color when used in peaceful images, like a photograph of bride in the moonlight. However, it enhances cold, loneliness and bitterness if the subject or environment is leans in that direction.

Green is uplifting:



It is the color of hope and immortality. It is fresh, full of life and renewing, like new growth in the spring. Use it lavishly in the outdoor backgrounds of family portraiture – or everywhere that wants to be alive, growing and looking forward with hope and faith in the future.

Even monochromes affect emotions.

The following illustrations are gray scale and brown toned, popular choices in photography.



Notice that the gray scale feels more modern and more aloof than the brown tone. The brown tone is friendlier and projects a sense of antiquity.

And, saturation also affects how viewers feel:



Richly saturated colors make our imagery intense, brave and bold. Pastels are innocent, youthful, gentle and delicate.

By understanding basic elements of art like value, contrast, color, detail, composition, perspective, line, shape, space, texture an artist can design images that are compelling, interesting and memorable. It's not important that every image contains every element. Some images rely upon color for the message and have no need for details. Others lean on value and contrast and have no need for color. There is a lot of science and math in art but ultimately it's the aesthetic and emotional appeal that sells the message and that is more subjective.



The important thing is to understand what one is doing when creating art and why some things work and others don't. It makes it easier to work through the challenges inevitably encountered when expressing oneself through creativity. We "see" things in our minds that are sometimes challenging to put out into the material world.

Take advantage of the pondering, meditations and discoveries of others that have gone before you. Ponder them, meditate on them, and discover your own wings. Fly high!



Jane Conner-ziser is an award winning photographer, digital artist, premier educator and independent consultant. With over 25 years of experience, 19 of them in digital imaging and evolving technologies, the techniques Jane developed for facial retouching and enhancement and portrait painting from photographs are widely emulated by photographers and digital artists worldwide through her classes, online training and educational products. You can learn more on [her website](#).