Unconventional Color

how contemporary artists use color to express ideas about nature, contradiction, meaning, and representation.

Ohio State University, M.A. in Art Education

Ask students if they know any rules that we have at the art museum?

1. Do not touch the art (or get too close)
2. No food or drink in the galleries
3. No flash photography

Bill Hughes, Canyon Passages, 1991

• Today our theme for the tour is Unconventional Colors.
• Does anyone know what conventional means?
  o Accepted, used, or practiced by most people.
  o Based on customs usually handed down from a previous generation.
  o Following or agreeing with established form, custom, or rules.
  o Common, Everyday, Traditional, Classical
• Knowing that, what does unconventional mean?
  o Deviating from commonly accepted beliefs or practices.
  o Not bound by traditional ways or beliefs.
  o Contemporary, Different, Unique, Unusual
• In our tour today, we are going to be looking at artworks that use colors in different and unique ways that you would not normally expect. But, I wanted to start by looking at a painting with conventional colors.
• Are the colors in this painting how you expect to see them in a real canyon passage?
  o This painting is hyper-realistic, paying close attention to accuracy to real life.
  o The water is blue, the rocks are brown, and the trees are green.
• Why do artists use colors that are accurate to real life?
To recreate a scene as it is in real life. It document a specific moment in time that would be hard to capture otherwise. To connect with the viewer in a familiar way.

**Frederic Remington, Coming to the Call, c. 1905**

- This piece is in a special exhibition that does not allow photography at all, tell students on your way in.
- Frederic Remington was one of the most important artists who created pieces based on the American West.
  - He originally was an illustrator who was focused on including many details in his work.
  - As he got older, his artwork became more loose, less worried with details, and expressionistic. (Art movement in the early 1900’s that was focused on emotion, feeling, and loose brushwork).
- Wall label, “This is arguably one of Remington’s best and most recognized paintings. The vibrant colors are dazzling and pop off the canvas, in what could be described as a “minimalist” composition. In 1903, Remington observed, “Big art is a process of elimination, cut down and out – do your hardest work outside the picture, and let your audience take away something to think about – to imagine… what you want to do is just create the thought – materialize the spirit of a thing, and the small bronze, or the impressionist’s picture, does that.””
- Are the colors in this painting how you except to see them on a real river bend?
- What colors are unconventional? How is that color used in a new way?
  - Sometimes we do see yellow in the sky, but this yellow is very **saturated**. This is another way of saying that a color is intense, usually a color is most intense right out of the paint tube without being mixed with anything.
- What colors do we normally think of when we think of a sky? A river?
- The river bend is very dark. Do you like how it looks?
  - I love the abstract nature of this piece.
Willem Volkersz, *Looking Back*, 1939

- Are the colors in this painting how you expect to see them on a real canyon?
- What colors are unconventional? How is that color used in a new way?
- What colors do we normally think of when we think of a sky? A canyon?
- Why do you think the artist chose to use neon lights?
- Is there anything else unconventional about this art piece besides the colors?
- What emotion or feeling do you think the artist is trying to express in this painting?

Research:

- Websites says themes he is interested in his art are autobiographical work, use of collected objects, diptychs, landscape and urbanization of the west, produce/service names, and small sculpture (Volkersz, Images of Works, 2013).
  - “Visual vocabulary…tells the stories of his boyhood, emigration, travel, and life in the West” (Volkersz, Home, 2013).
- Refers to works as narratives with painted images as backdrops to the neon sculptures (Volkersz, Studio, 2013).
- He is inspired by illustrations, coloring books, **paint-by-number paintings**, postcards, and kitschy travel souvenirs (Volkersz, Home and Images of Works, 2013).
- He is from Holland. “Enamored with American popular culture. Over time, he documented 1000’s of billboards and neon signs, examples of eccentric vernacular architecture and folk art environments” (Volkersz, Home, 2013).
- The neon has an “expressive fluidity” that Volkersz’ highlights (Koga, 2002, p. 3).
  - Sees neon as a defining object in American culture.
- “Volkersz’ figures are often facing away from the viewer, unrevealed as they walk in their experiences, thus intensifying the feeling of mystery” (Koga, 2002, p.4).
  - “…Intrinsic separation from nature. A contemporary experience of nature has become an “idea” rather than a true experience. Therefore, these sculptures cannot be viewed as accessible affirmations and embodiments of our culture.” (Koga, 2002, p.4).
- “Some sculptures are idealizations of overwhelming storybook happiness. Figures…are typically generic, stylized, or romanticized. …Disbelief and an ominous feeling about man’s relationship with the natural world. …strangely unrelated” (Koga, 2002, p.5).
Fritz Scholder, *Indian with Aura*, 1977

Fritz Scholder, *Dartmouth Portrait #14*, 1973

Are the colors in this painting how you except to see them on a real portrait?

- What colors are unconventional? How is that color used in a new way?
- What colors do we normally think of when we think of a sky? A canyon?
- Is there anything else unconventional about this art piece besides the colors?
- What emotion or feeling do you think the artist is trying to express in this painting?
  - Spiritual, other worldly, tension

Research

- “Scholder’s most influential works were post-modern in sensibility and somewhat Pop Art in execution as he sought to deconstruct the mythos of the American Indian” (Wikipedia contributors, 2018).
- “Scholder painted Indians with American flags, beer cans, and cats. His target was the loaded national cliché and guilt of the dominant culture. Scholder did not grow up as an Indian and his unique perspective could not be denied” (Wikipedia contributors, 2018).
- “Scholder’s dark, energetic, and unsettling paintings of Native people combined realism and historical images with abstract expressionism and pop art. In such haunting works as Indian with Beer Can, Monster Indian, and Massacre at Wounded Knee, Scholder addressed head-on uncomfortable truths about the lives of contemporary Indians. Alco - holism, poverty, historical and contemporary injustice — Scholder’s images presented the issues in a bold, direct style that offered no easy solutions” (indian not indian, p. 2).
- “Scholder’s work became increasingly introspective and spiritual. The enigmatic, sometimes semi-human figures in his American Portrait and Painted Man series expressed solitude and transition. Increasingly, he incorporated images from shamanism and the occult, world mythology, and his own dark visions of personal relationships” (indian not indian, p. 3).
Dartmouth is a college that has an unofficial Indian mascot during the time that Fritz was an artist in residence at Dartmouth.

Larry Pirnie, *Ride to Win*, 1997

- Are the colors in this painting how you expect to see them on normal cowboy painting?
- What colors are unconventional? How is that color used in a new way?
  - Blue/purple horse!
  - How many different colors do you see in the horses?
- What colors do we normally think of when we think of horses? People?
- Is there anything else unconventional about this art piece besides the colors?
  - The board that it is painted on give a 3D effect. The way it is painted is loose.
- What emotion or feeling do you think the artist is trying to express in this painting?

Research

Carrie Fell, *Crazy Mountain Saddle Slickers*, 2005

- Are the colors in this painting how you expect to see them on normal cowboy painting?
- What colors are unconventional? How is that color used in a new way?
  - Pink/Green horse!
  - What materials do you think the artist used?
- What colors do we normally think of when we think of horses? People?
- Is there anything else unconventional about this art piece besides the colors?
  - The way it is painted is simplistic.
- What emotion or feeling do you think the artist is trying to express in this painting?

Research:

“Carrie Fell’s compilation of works depicts the traditional icons of the Western landscape with a thoroughly modern twist using vibrant colors and fluid forms. This is the New West – the west as a “state of mind” – a place of change with an attitude of boldness. Carrie’s artwork is free spirited – her paintings and designs offer a sophisticated, yet fresh, style that appeals to the maverick within each of us. Using the high country as a source of inspiration, Carrie’s art does not attempt to portray a western lifestyle but rather an illusion. Her evolving artistic expressions are both prolific and progressive whether it be her quintessential subjects, the more modern social scenes or the contemporary abstract works. Carrie’s multi-faceted approach to her artwork includes fluid techniques in mixed media on both paper and canvas and has expanded to include a new collection of bronze sculptures” (Fell, 2018).
Amy Watts, *Past History*, 2011

- Are the colors in this painting how you expect to see them on portraits?
- What colors are unconventional? How is that color used in a new way?
  - How many different colors do you see in the horse?
- What colors do we normally think of when we think of portraits?
- Is there anything else unconventional about this art piece besides the colors?
  - The background is on different everyday items.
- What emotion or feeling do you think the artist is trying to express in this painting?

Stan Natchez, *Four Powers*, N.D.

- Are the colors in this painting how you expect to see them on portraits?
- What colors are unconventional? How is that color used in a new way?
  - Usually skin tones are varying shades of brown. This artist chose to use bright, vibrant colors for the portraits.
- What colors do we normally think of when we think of portraits?
- Is there anything else unconventional about this art piece besides the colors?
  - The background is on different everyday items.
- What emotion or feeling do you think the artist is trying to express in this painting?
Are the colors in this sculpture how you expect to see them in scenes like this?

Try to imagine if this sculpture was painted with all the colors that would normally be in this scene. How would it look different? Would it be better or worse?

Is there anything else unconventional about this art piece besides the colors?
  - The material! This is a paper sculpture. It is made completely from handmade paper that is pressed into molds.

What emotion or feeling do you think the artist is trying to express in this painting?
References:


Koga, K. (2002). Domestic Neon, Willem Volkersz. The Emerson @ Beall Park Art Center, Montana.


