

Aspects of Colour

Lecture Course, St. Albans School of Art

March 3, 1969.

It is a keen pleasure to me to have the opportunity in so distinguished a course of lectures to tell you about the work we have been doing on the study of spontaneous reactions to colour in different country a wide range of individuals.

We British are in some ways a strange people - when in deadly danger, unavoidable and terrifying we become, as individuals cheerful, full of initiative, bright eyed and with a kindness and helpfulness to each other which keep the fires of life alive. During the war my ordinary duty took me driving from London to Kent with bombed buildings blocking the roads and incendiaries scattered over them. Then the generosity, the kindness and the humour came into evidence, as men and women around me spontaneously pushed the car here and there, found possible routes for me, supported my falling spirit and sent me off with a cheer of encouragement.

Not so today when, in a time of transition, surrounded by new demands and developments, we sometimes seem to lose our belief in ourselves and in our own powers, and tend to become the prey of those who would sell us gimmicks instead of truth. So, striving to be equal to what is offered us, we get bullied into attempting to believe that what is commercially sold us is what we ought to like, and on forcing ourselves to do so, we lose contact with our own centre of being and with the life that is in us.

Lectures on Aspects of Colour

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| February 10 th . | “The Physical Properties of Colour”
F.J Heath, F. Phys S. Member of Colour
Group of Gt. Britain (Lecturer: The Tintometer LTD) |
| February 17 th | “Goethe’s Theory of Colour” Prof. G.A Wells
MA PhD BSc (Department of German: Birkbeck Coll.) |
| February 24 th | “Television and the Visual Process”
Prod. W.D. Wright DSc. DTC (Prof of Applied Optics: Imperial
College of Science of Technology |
| March 3 rd | “Action & Reaction Between Personality and Colour” Dr.
Margaret Lowenfeld MRCS LRCP (Director of Training, The
Institute of Child Psychology). |
| March 10 th | “Colour Reproduction in Photography, Television and Printing”
Dr. R.W.G Hunt (Kodak Research Laboratories) |

March 17th

“The Effects of Defective Colour Vision in Art”

Prof. R.W Pickford MA PhD DLitt (Department of Psychology:
University of Glasgow).

For colour is both life and truth and it is a privilege indeed to have the opportunity to put before you some of the knowledge of the power of colour to awaken potentialities in ourselves and our delight in life, that people all round the world have been finding in direct and spontaneous experiment with a new approach to colour and form, and it is their name I am speaking to you tonight.

Trained as a scientist, the original stimulus to this work arose out of boredom with routine work long ago in an international setting in Geneva. Watching the different national groups in their specific national dress, dance and music, it occurred to me to wonder whether these lovely differences were just a survival of old convention and tradition, or whether they had their roots in something real about the human spirit.

Switzerland was a good place to start work to answer this question as its Museums contain exactly what is needed. Gradually, out of many hours looking at, measuring, analysing and comparing colours and pattern in European folk design, there emerged a formula which appeared to be dependable.

So, returning to Britain I set to work to precipitate what I had found into basic elements and to get these incorporated into a closely integrated tool.

Slide 1. This was composed of five shapes and six colours. They are two basic forms, the square and the triangle, each growing organically out of the other, expressed in six colours. The shapes are such as are present in the basic elements of form - why these colours? The answer is fundamental to the concept of the tool. It was the world we were setting out to study, and what we sought were true colours found everywhere and in objects from the earth. Therefore, what I chose were the jewel colours - ruby, sapphire, emerald, topaz and black and white, and with these we set to work.

Then followed a number of years of struggle to find how best these should be presented, in what numbers and in what form.

Slide 2. Here is how the material finally emerged. For some years these were made of Wood painted by a Special process, and Dr. Margaret Mead in America and Dr. Madeline Kerr in Britain and Jamaica and many colleagues working in close correspondence cooperation, began to experiment with them.

The mode of use was always the same - to present the material to the subject with the single instruction - "Here are sets of shapes and colours, each shape in six colours, take as many or as few of them as you wish and do something with them, whatever you like upon this paper." Only after a number of years did it become clear to us that for real profundity of response, the use of the stimulus material must be limited as spontaneous action is limited in life by environment.

Slowly the second element of the apparatus emerged - a wooden tray measuring 31 ½ x 26 cm, its edges formed by a raised rim, upon which is laid a piece of exactly fitting white paper. Every design, when made is reproduced with care either by coloured photography, as in the slides you are going to see, or as in the day to day work by drawing around the edges with a pencil, filling in the initial letter of the colour for later colouring in full.

By this time only my Danish colleague, who had taken her Diploma at the I.C.P. after a distinguished career in her own country in work with children, had joined me, and is with me tonight coping with the slides. By now a very large number of designs had been collected and it had been found that the material was attractive to all ages and all types of people, whether normal retarded or disturbed. Bit by bit, these were analysed, compared and sorted into categories and in 1951 discussed with a Conference called by the professor of Psychology at a Washington University of all psychologist and psychiatrists working with the L.M.T in the Eastern States of America.

Working together with senior members of the staff of the I.C.P. a textbook 'The Lowenfeld Mosaic Test' was written in 1954, published by Newman Neame. In that year Dr. Mead came to Europe, bringing with her, her collection of 71 collection of 71 designs, made by the Manus people of New Guinea.

This was the first opportunity I had for testing the factual reality of the categories of 'design' we had made. Working blind on the floor under Dr. Mead's eagle eye, I separated the painted paper reproductions of the Manus designs into the basic theoretical categories, marking each with a private symbol and bound each group up. The next day the names on the back of each bundle were listed by an independent worker and delivered to Dr. Mead. These lists were translated by her into their basic human category of each name – man, woman, child, married, single, above a certain age or below a certain age, and expressed in standard anthropological formulae.

We held our breath as Dr. Mead and I slowly compared lists. Although my grouping had been rapid and done under pressure and the designs were badly reproduced, 90% of the separate bundles of designs I had made turned out to corresponds to an anthological group. We felt that we were standing on firm ground.

Since then the L.M.T. has come to be widely used in Britain, in the U.S.A., in Africa, India and in countries in Europe for exploratory studies of people of all ages and types. It has three recommendations. As has been said, it appeals to everyone – children and adults alike; it can be used an indefinite number of times by the same individual; it can be permanently recorded, and with its help we can begin to build up a science of action and interaction between people and colour, and a large literature has grown around it.

Let us now look at what kind of responses people make, and in honour of my colleagues we will begin with a Scandinavian. As all here tonight are adults we have selected mainly adult designs, but this material gives valuable and useful results with

children, especially in relation to changes in development, either those of growth or of changes under treatment.

L.M.T SLIDES

Kaleidoblocs

During the war convalescence from an illness gave time for father meditation and it occurred to me to ponder on the possibility of exploring responses to three-dimensional instead of two-dimensional colour and form. Out of the experiments then made Kaleidoblocs emerged, instructions for their use being the same as for the L.M.T. and with the same advantages.

Kaleidoblocs Slides

Poleidoblocs

Work with Kaleidoblocs brought, as you have seen, some surprising results, and these together with work of a different nature being carried on at the I.C.P., started me thinking about children's introduction to mathematics in primary schools.

Children have fresher minds than adults and are more keenly interested in shapes and colours. I set out to see if this interest could be drawn upon to give opportunity for exploration of children's possibility of their ability, supporting suitable material were given them, to discover mathematical truth for themselves. This is what emerged -

Poleidoblocs Slides

3rd March 1969.

Slides shown with Dr Lowenfeld's lecture on Aspects of Colour.

1. Single pieces & text
2. Box & pieces (tray missing)
3. G.B.'s triangle
4. Scandinavian Grieg's piano concerto
5. Scandinavian tiger
6. Luo boy age 14 (Africa)
7. British symmetrical intermediate pattern
8. British young man age 20 Patrick
9. Nigerian boy age 10
10. Manus leading male, age 40
11. Very gifted American young wife
12. Middle aged successful business man (Anglo-Am.)
13. British woman (M.B) ideational pattern
14. Danish wife, mother & hostess to many artists

15. Circle (before tray), male; depression
16. " Scandinavian woman (VA)
17. Boy, development under treatment I
18. Boy, development under treatment II

Kaleidoblocs

1. Box and pieces
2. Boy age 6.5, consultation (station)
3. Boy age 10 under treatment, enuresis
4. Girl age 9 consultation LMT
5. Girl age 9 consultation Kalcs
6. Adolescent girl, LMT
7. Adolescent girl, Kalcs

Poleidoblocs

1. Box A & G
2. Single components of Polcs G (Polish Artist)
3. Composition from front
4. Composition from end
5. Composition from top layer removed
6. Composition from middle layer removed
7. Boy age ? low IQ (65?)
8. Boy age ? low IQ (65?) Dr. McSorley's
9. Boy age ? low IQ (65?)
10. Students at R.C.A., London
11. "
12. "