

## THE EMOTIONAL SYMBOLISM OF COLOUR



**by Eric Tatton**

Recently I was researching for a lecture I was to give about morality and as a result became very conscious of the way that colour influences our everyday life. Take for instance how colour has eclipsed black and white in the cinema, in photography and on television.

I find that it is also important to study the emotional aspect of colour. For example, it is recorded that the original Blackfriars Bridge in London when it was first opened to the public was painted black, but so many people committed suicide by jumping off the bridge that the City of London ordered it to be painted green which reduced the number at once. Was this because of colour influencing an emotional reaction? The reason for such an influence cannot easily be explained.

We talk of a coward having a yellow streak, an unschooled person a greenhorn, we say blue for a boy and pink for a girl. I suggest that the reason for this rests on the age old beliefs in the emotional power of colour.

All colour is found in the spectrum and represents the prismatic colours and the colours of the spectrum are of intense interest to us as they are the colours we see in a rainbow.

Of intense interest to us is the colour blue. We are told that blue is an emblem of universal benevolence and friendship, that it was regarded as the colour of importance by many religious orders even in ancient times. The druids regarded blue as the symbol of truth, the Egyptians regarded it as a sacred colour and to them it represented a peculiarly exalted and heavenly nature.

Think of blue as it is appreciated in everyday life. A clear blue sky is certainly the nearest we can get through our normal senses to an experience of infinity. We speak of a true blue friend, a person of blue blood and yet, paradoxically, we use blue to

indicate unsavoury publications. One is blue with cold, black and blue with injuries. In African American music, sad, introspective music is referred to as 'the Blues'. Some years ago it was announced that, strangely, cars painted blue were more likely to be involved in accidents than any other colour.

Let me quote from a book about the painter, Cézanne, in which a large number of pages are devoted to the colour blue.

*"Just as we gladly follow an agreeable object which flees before us, so we gladly look at blue, not because it advances before us, but because it draws us after it."*

Here is a list of colours which symbolise virtue and emotion:

**White;** (although not strictly a colour) is accepted generally as a symbol of purity and innocence.

**Blue:** universal benevolence and friendship.

**Purple:** symbolises union because it is the result of mixing red and blue. It conveys the idea of royalty, justice, fortitude and strength.

**Red:** symbolises dignity, fervency and zeal.

**Green:** as the chief colour of nature it is symbolical of abundance and hope, immortality of divine truth.

**Black:** (again not strictly a colour) symbolises grief and sorrow. In heraldry on the other hand it has an entirely different meaning, that of prudence and wisdom.

**Yellow and Gold:** these symbolise the sun, constancy and greatness of spirit.

**Silver:** colourless and associated with the soul.

**Orange:** represents pride and integrity.

I am sure you will agree that colour has a great influence on our emotional life.

**Eric Tatton**

## PORTRAIT ARTISTS MUST BE MAD



by Roland Arthur

**Look in the mirror, and what do you see?  
A portrait of you? Well, not quite, you'll agree,  
It's all wrong way round. What's left should be right,  
Your parting's on the left, and that can't be right.  
So how can we see, as others would see us?  
Two mirrors? OK. But it can be precarious.  
A photo? Ah yes! If "true you" is the aim.  
But will you be happy? "Not quite", you'll proclaim.**

Have you ever seriously considered self-portraiture? It's a tricky business. Most people initially would start searching for a mirror in which they could see as much of themselves as they can bear. Now that's fine in some respects.

Assuming that your artistic skills are reasonable, you'll probably be happy with the end result and declare that it is a fairly true likeness. However, when you show it, with pride, to others, it may be a different story. Why? It looks all right to you. Let's say that you always part your hair on the right. When you comb your golden locks each morning in front of the mirror, the person staring back at you actually has their hair parted on their left. So that is the way you normally see yourself and imagine yourself to look. When your Auntie Mary and Uncle Tom come round for a cuppa, they see you as you really are. To them your hair is parted on its true side. On the right. Put it another way, the image you have of yourself is wrong.

You always see yourself "opposite hand" to the reality when using a mirror. Even the most perfect face has irregularities. Film and TV stars included. This mismatch of left and right also applies to even the slightest of differences between the two sides of our faces. Eyes may be at slightly different levels. Ears can be at significantly different heights. A nose may be ever so slightly off centre. You must often have heard people say, "This is my best side", when someone is photographing them. Mouths are very often slanted one way or the other. It is partly what makes us "different" from each other. They are not usually "abnormalities", just differences. Put all these together and you can see how much our faces alter in mirror image. So, there's the dilemma. Should we produce a Self-portrait that satisfies ourselves or others? Most people would say the latter. You can't have it both ways. But it does mean that you will be better working from a photograph than viewing yourself through a mirror?

This therefore throws up a problem for the discerning portrait artist. Let's call him Fred. A customer, Helen, presents Fred with a photograph of her husband, Alec. It is a good photograph and the finished article is to be a surprise for Alec on his birthday. Fred sets to and produces the portrait well in time for the appointed day. He hasn't seen Alec. He doesn't need to as he has a perfectly good photograph to work from. When Helen collects the picture all framed and mounted, she is ecstatic. "Oh! That's marvellous. I'm sure he'll like it" and off she goes.

Two days after the birthday, Fred gets a phone call from Alec He's not happy with the picture. He's not quite sure what's wrong but there's something not quite right about it. He says that Helen thinks it is very good, as do other people he's shown it to. But after all it's a picture of him and he says that surely he should be the best judge. Fred has now to convince Alec that the money his wife parted with for the commission was in fact well spent and that Alec himself is probably the worst possible judge of his own portrait for the reasons given above.

So now you know why there are so few portrait artists !!!!!!!!!!!!!

## CONCEPTS OF ART



**by Roland Arthur**

A bathful of rancid spaghetti is not art. It may have helped the artist overcome some medical problems; and may be useful in promoting the sale of food, but is no more art than Tracy Emin's bed or the ludicrous light switch at the Tate Gallery. These belong in the realms of second hand furniture shops and a physics laboratory.

What was generally construed to be pleasing visual art, seems to have taken second place to the more bizarre works being favoured by art colleges. But why is this?

There is a vast range of art styles. These cover abstract work and "avant-garde" as well as the more traditional "realism". By far the most popular (and saleable) works are those which the public find pleasing to the eye. Over the years, styles change and what might be considered of dubious artistic value one decade might be all the rage the next. Salvador Dali, Lowry and Picasso have proved this. But surely the acid test is what stands the test of time? Will "conceptual and installation" art, (whatever that means) stand the test of time?

If we look back at art over the centuries, the works now revered by the world are those which indicate that the artist had developed some skill and spent some time learning the "trade" from experienced artisans. There may even have been, 200 years ago, people who tried to convince others that their unmade bed was a work of art. But I'm sure they would have been laughed at. And that is what we should be doing now; not taking it all too seriously. Those "non-artists" from times past have been long forgotten and, in a few years to come, so will our contemporary bed and light switch artists.

But why do baths of spaghetti get the publicity? The tutors and the media are always looking for something different; something that's not been done before. It gets limelight. The arguments that develop as to whether it is or isn't art, get people's names in papers. The artist likes it, the art college likes it and, of course, the media rouse public commentary.

I sympathise with artists striving to maintain traditional standards and admire their tenacity. They go where many a talented artist has previously trod. However, as in many walks of life, if you wish to make a name you have to be either a cut above the rest and produce exceptionally brilliant "traditional" work, or, find something so original and different that it shocks the public, and for that reason alone, get publicity from the media.

I'm certain the vast majority of people who appreciate art will find more interest in an eye-catching picture than a pair of wellies filled with green pasta. What a waste of good food!

## TRY YOUR HAND AT FRAMING



by Ted Holden

A frame has several purposes: To enhance and enclose a picture; to protect it; and to guard it, when necessary, against warping. For exhibitions it is usually asked that artistic works be suitably framed and glazed. Professional frame makers are skilled craftsmen who use sophisticated equipment. However, good frames can be made by the artist himself. A modest amount of equipment and workroom space is required, although practice is needed to cut well-fitting mitre corners and to give a wooden frame an appropriate surface texture.

The great advantage of a self made frame is that you can develop textures and colours which best suit your own paintings and drawings. Look out for old frames to put your pictures in. An inexpensive and convenient way of covering a moulding is with white emulsion paint tinted with powder colour. This is best applied thin and built up with a succession of coats or stipples, each being allowed to dry before the next coat is applied.

Securing the picture in the frame comes next, that is assuming that you have been accurate with measuring the picture. Always measure the four sides of a picture - follow the craftsman's advice, measure twice and cut once. Small canvases and panels can be fixed in a frame with panel pins. Larger ones should be secured with small strips of wood which are screwed to the back of the frame to overlap the canvas stretcher. Drawings and prints should be backed by thin (3mm) hardboard. Glass should be picture glass; it's clearer than window glass. Cutting glass should be left to the craftsman. You need the right equipment and the ability to apply the right amount of pressure and to draw the cutter across the glass at the correct speed. It's not easy, practice is required.

Oh, and don't forget, water colours, drawings and prints usually need a window mount to set them off. These provide a border around the picture and also keep it from touching the glass. Mounting boards come in a wide variety of colours and the choice is for you to make. The lighter colours I like the best and they don't distract from the colours in the picture you have painted. Mind you, I have tried the darker colours too, but take care, try your picture in different mounts, then you are sure. So have go and have fun, and take care.

If all fails, get on to your local picture framer!