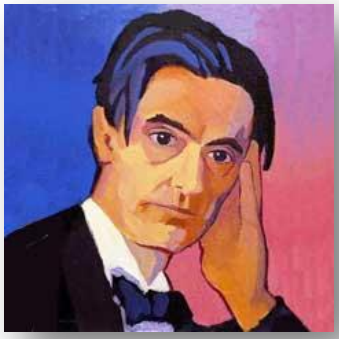
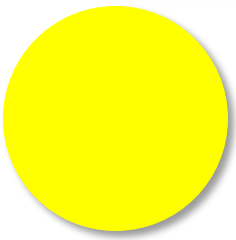
Rudolf Steiner's Color Theory



In his colour theory Rudolf Steiner brings color into a direct relationship to the human being. Color and soul are intimately connected. On this basis it is possible to have a science of color both as a foundation for understanding the role of colour in therapy and education and for a modern art of painting.

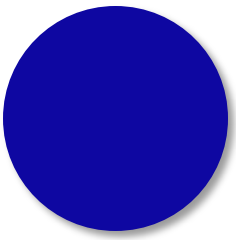


Polarity

(Polar Opposites)

Mother and Father of all spectrum colors. Yellow and Blue contain the potential to transform into the full spectrum through 'Intensification'

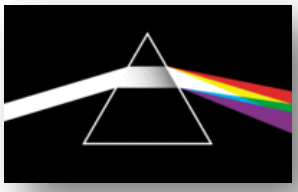
Steiner attaches universal natural and spiritual significance to this pair



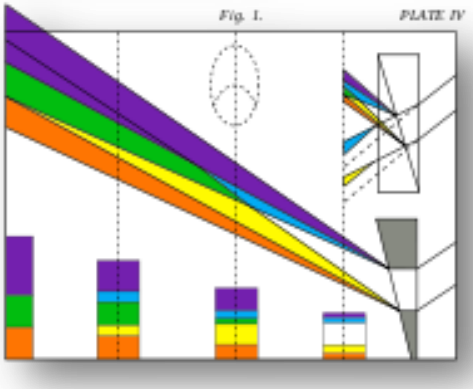
North Pole/ South Pole
Male/Female
Macrocosm/Microcosm
Good/Evil
Yin/Yang

Night/Day
Beauty/Ugliness
Heaven/Hell
Body/Spirit
War/Peace

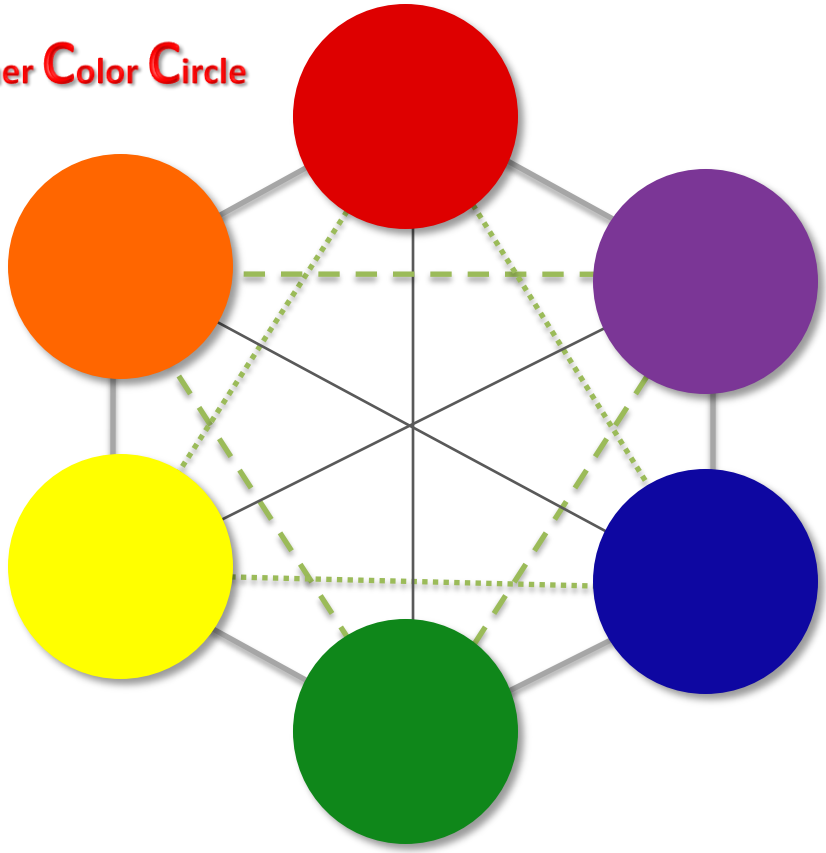
Sun/Moon
Love/Hate
Red/Green
Dark/Light
Wisdom/Ignorance



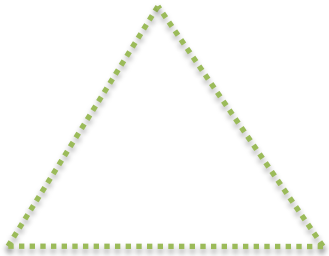
Border Spectra

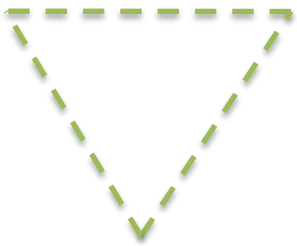


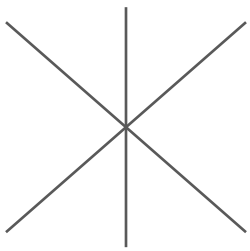
Rudolf Steiner Color Circle

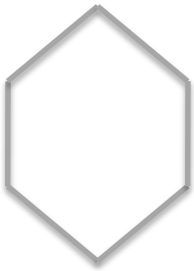


Breakdown of the Color Circle Into Pairs









Characteristic Combinations

Their aesthetic and emotional effects are consistent and universal.

Red/Yellow
Yellow/Blue
Blue/Red

Intermediate Characteristic Combinations

Their effects are consistent and ubiquitous.

Red/Yellow - Green
Green – Blue/Red
Blue/Red – Red/Yellow

Harmonious, Complimentary Combinations

also called
'After Images' or
'Simultaneous Contrasts.'

Red/Green
Red/Yellow - Blue
Blue/Red – Yellow

Inharmonious Combinations

Neighbors' in the color circle.
Too similar to create harmony

Red - Red/Yellow
Yellow/Red- Yellow
Yellow/Green
Green/Blue
Blue- Blue/Red
Red/Blue - Red

The Individual Colors

The most noble color; Red is the state all others strive to attain. Red occupies it's place at the apex of an upright triangle, reigning supreme over the other colors. Red neither advances nor retreats; instead it pulsates with life and energy. Blackened Red represents 'Base' emotions and Greed.

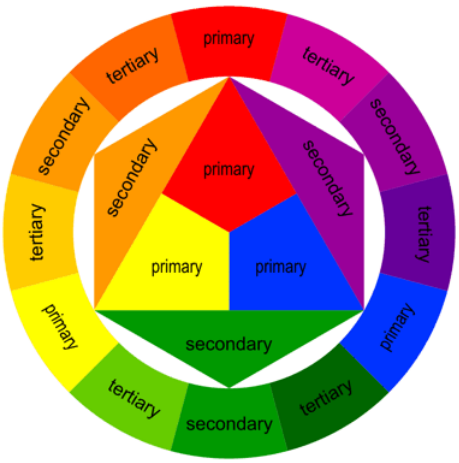
Powerful - Joyous
Luster color – light. One step from the zenith Red. Advances forward.
When sullied this color represents

Light – Spirit – Warm – Joyous. Advancing forward. Yellow dissolves and spreads into White. The color of Spirit, in its deepened form it becomes Gold. Except by adding White, Yellow can hardly be adjusted without changing into another color. Blackened yellow is grotesque.

'Image of Life' (Nature Plant Life). The Color of 'Perfect Repose'. It's effect is healing both for the mind and body. Green is the polar opposites neutralized. It neither advances nor retreats. In its blackened, negative form Green connotes extreme lethargy – an almost pathological stasis. Envy – jealousy.

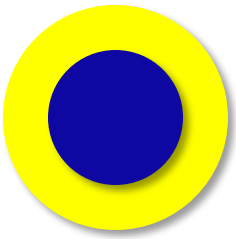
Dark/Cold – the color of Soul. Retreats away and inwards. Associated with sorrow, Blue is conducive to thought mire than emotion. Blue resonates with the human soul and draws the viewer in. Blue is a single step removed from the color of darkest space, Violet, yet it can also be light and refreshing.

Noble – Royal - Severe. Violet retreats away into darkness. This is adjusted by controlling the ratio of Red to Blue, and their relative strengths in terms pigment. Sad, heavy, preponderating- Violet can be serious to the point of severity: Hence its historical association with monarchies and Religion.

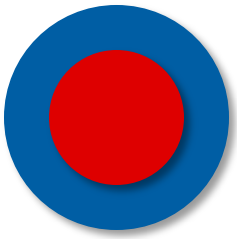


Characteristic Combinations

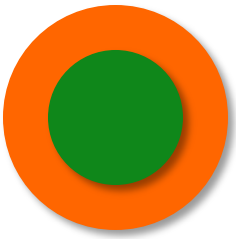
Power – Preponderance, Hot and Positive.



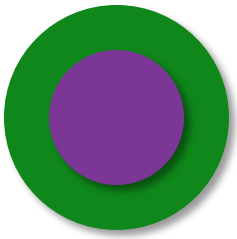
Two extremes, at first cheerful and attractive, but the mind/soul soon tires of this harmony, which has a hollow ring and appears superficial.



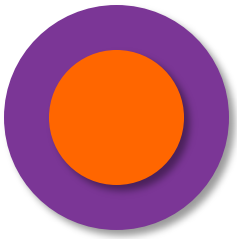
Red surrounded by Blue gains intensity, forcing it to coalesce into distinguishable shapes and forms.



Cheerful, light, airy. This harmony, seems to breathe.



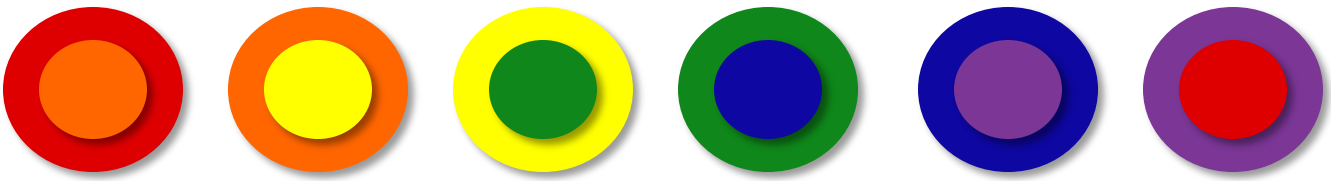
Green = repose, passivity, 'image'. Violet = extreme darkness, melancholy, retreat. The atmosphere is swampy, tropical, humid, and strange.



Both colors are one step from the zenith - Red. Hence, tension, expectancy, something impending.

Inharmonious Combinations

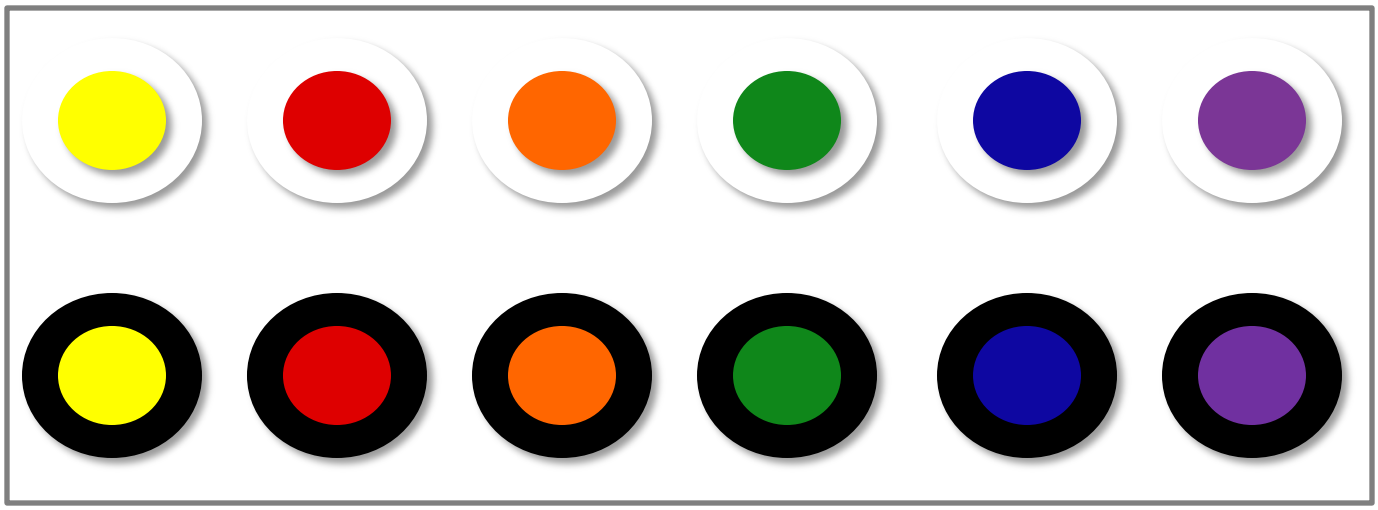
These are neighbors in the Color Circle.
True harmony is dynamic and based on opposition, difference.
A color enhances the other, i.e., accentuates the other's inherent nature.



These closely matched, limited combinations help artists to achieve intense mood and atmosphere. Picasso's Blue Period is a classic example. Various shades of Blue and Violet can plunge the viewer into a vast space or watery abyss. Apocalyptic, hellish scenes require Red, Violet and Red/Yellow.

Effects of Black & White on Colors

The light, warm colors lose power and appear darker when surrounded by white.
On the other hand these colors gain intensity and strength and appear lighter against black.
The dark, cool colors gain intensity against a white ground and lose power when surrounded by black.

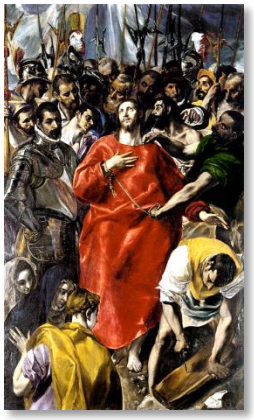


Examples of Artists

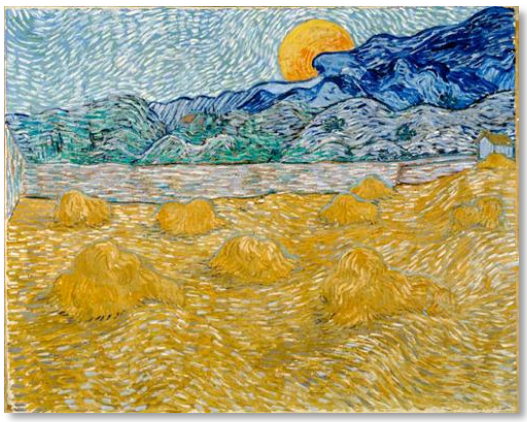
William Turner- Sullied color:
Black & Brown

Caravaggio – warm flesh tones against Black space

Minton – Red & Black



El Greco – Nobility and power of Red



Van Gogh – Complimentary combination
Yellow/Red - Blue

Siqueiros
Sullied colors of red

Monet- Inharmonious Combination – Blue & Green

Monet – Complimentary harmony – Red & Green

Kandinsky – effects of Black + Gray on warm & cool colors

Cover for the book - The Individuality of Color of Color – basically Red/Yellow & Violet

Van Gogh – Characteristic harmony – Polar Opposites Yellow & Blue

Mondrian- Red = power, the Zenith

William Turner – near perfect harmony - almost the complete spectrum

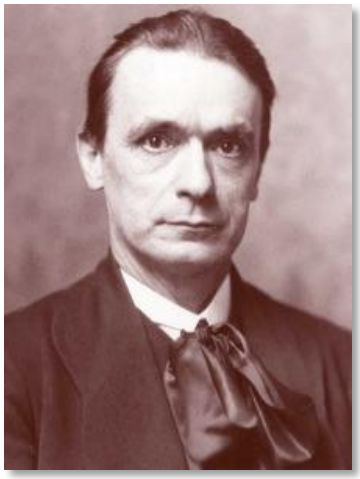
Mark Rothko – Inharmonious Yellow & Yellow/Red

In nature the rainbow is the expression of perfect harmony - the full spectrum

Picasso – Inharmonious combination – his Blues period

Raphael – Complimentary Harmony Red-Green plus flesh warm tones with Red representing splendor and spirituality

Rudolf Steiner



Rudolf Steiner was born on February 27th, 1861 in the Austrian countryside. The son of a telegraph operator for the Southern Austrian Railroad, Steiner felt a deep connection with nature from a very early age. In his autobiography, he reflected on when he was only eight years old, "…the reality of the spiritual worlds was as certain to me as that of the physical. I felt the need, however, for a sort of justification for this assumption."

Steiner's father sent him to the Realschule at Wiener Neustadt and the successful student later enrolled in the Technical University in Vienna. During this time, Steiner supported himself through scholarships and tutoring. He studied a large array of subjects, branching out beyond his natural science and mathematical emphases. However, of this time Steiner wrote that for him it was, "much more vital at that time was the need to find an answer to the question: How far is it possible to prove that in human thinking real spirit is agent."

As part of his studies, Steiner came across the writings of Johann Wolfgang Goethe, which remained influential in the formation of Steiner's own ideas throughout his life. In Goethe, Steiner found someone who realized the spirit in nature. Steiner published an introductory book to Goethe's scientific writings in 1886 called "The Theory of Knowledge Implicit in Goethe's World-Conception."

In it, Steiner presented a new perspective of Goethe's ideas, one that emphasized this spirit of the world. His impressive editing of Goethe's writings got him noticed by other Goethe scholars and he was hired to work in the Goethe Archives in Weimar when he was 29 years old. Steiner's writing on Goethe's color theory from this time would later become very influential to Kandinsky.

Steiner's own philosophy starting taking shape at this time. In expressing his ideas, Steiner did not want to come across as a purely subjective and irrelevant mystic but rather, with the sound support of a natural scientist. "By starting from the spiritual nature of thinking, Steiner was able to form ideas that bear upon the spiritual world in the same way that the ideas of natural science bear upon the physical." (archive) Steiner described his philosophy as the result of "introspective observation following the methods of Natural Science."

Sample Reading List

- The Mystery Wisdom of Color – Its Creative and Healing Powers, Gladys Mayer.
- The Individuality of Color – by Elisabeth Koch and Gerard Mayer.
- The Creative Power of Color – by Hilde Boos-Hamburger (a how to do it book - highly recommended)
- Conversations About Painting with Rudolf Steiner: Recollections of Five Pioneers of the New Art Impulse by Rudolf Steiner (translated by Peter Stebbing
- On Joseph Beuys and Anthroposophy - by David Adams
- The Individuality Of Color: *Contributions to a Methodical Schooling in Color Experience Forward by S,O. Prokofieff – by Elisabeth Wagner-Koch,*
Gerhard Wagner. ISBN 9781855842267 (Highly recommended)
- Understand Your Temperament: *a Guide to the Four Temperaments: Choleric, Sanguine, Phlegmatic, Melancholic. By Dr Gilbert Childs*