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## COLOURED PHENOMENA AND AESTHETICS OF RECEPTION FOR CONTEMPORARY FILTER ART

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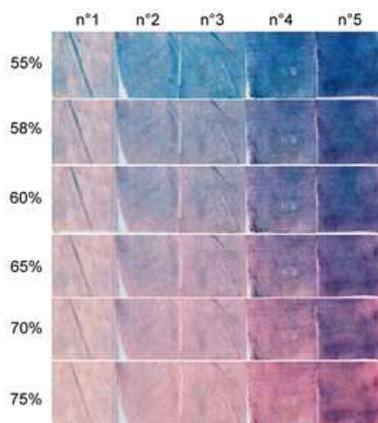
### **Abstract**

*The main topic of the present study is to explore the progression of the mind, from perception to interpretation, to understand the relationship between the colour of the art object and the viewer. Our research is based on our own artistic activity. The originality of this work lies in the three ways in which colour is manifested. We have discerned two kind of perception. The first is immediate and sensual. The second one is cognitive. Will we know how the appropriations and the interpretations are anticipating, amplifying, erasing? Should the work of art meaning's web weave that way, shouldn't it?*

### **The question of colour reception**

If, as Malevitch<sup>1</sup> asserts, optical perception is the real tool of the painter, then the appearance of colour is the material of a work of art. The creator seeks sensory and technical knowledge in order to organize the material's design properties: linking the physical properties to properties that can be perceived by the human eye. The artist produces a work of art that must be shown in a way of appearing. Colour is a physical phenomenon perceived by the biological connexion between eyes and brain and also by our own cognitive abilities. So colour is a subjective perception of our mental universe. How can perceptions, imagination and knowledge fit into each other? The creation of a work of art depends on an individual, social and cultural environment, but so does its reception. The main topic of the present study is to explore the progression of the mind, from perception to interpretation, to understand the relationship between the colour of the art object and the viewer. We refer to Hans Robert Jauss' concept of "aesthetics of reception"<sup>2</sup>: in which he considers the viewer as an active participant in the creation of the work of art. Can different stages be distinguished in the appropriation of the creation by the receiver?

### **Coloured phenomenon and environment**



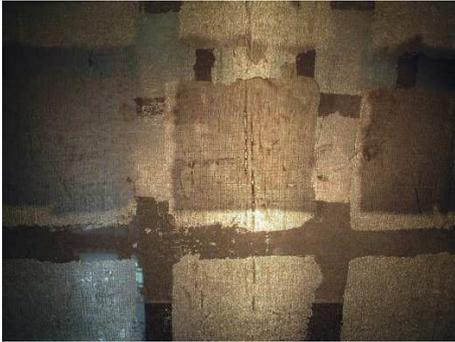
*Doc.1 – Make-up testers*

Our research is largely based on our own artistic activity: we create flexible, translucent, vertical pieces that have certain similarities with mural arts such as tapestry and stained-glass windows. Their colours are modulated not only by the nature of the incident light but also by the humidity of the surroundings.. The originality of this work lies in the three ways in which colour is manifested. The first one is connected with the nature of the colouring material used. Sensitive to the humidity of the air, the tonality passes gradually and reversibly from pink to sky blue (as the ambient humidity decreases) (doc.1). The chromatic intensity of the colour also changes: at each variation of shade, the colour becomes

*Doc.2 – radiance principle*



more intense before fading progressively (doc.1). The second feature is the actual colours<sup>3</sup> resulting from the light passing through the object. They are generated by the *radiance principle* of Viollet Le Duc<sup>4</sup> (the effect produced by the light passing through the colour) (doc.2) and by the *primordial phenomenon* defined by Goethe<sup>5</sup> (the effect produced by the light passing through a turbid medium) (doc.3). The third effect is the production of colour projections, also known as *shadows* (doc.4). They are secondary images cast by the object in the surrounding space. They are a



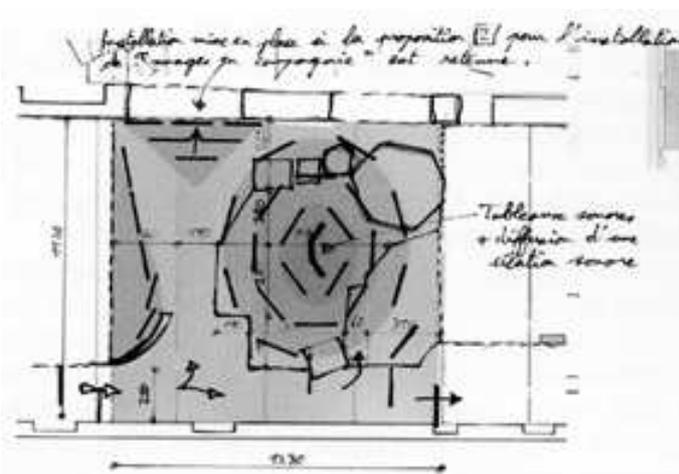
*Doc.3 – primordial phenomenon*

50 years old, 84% of whom were women. The second context concerned works of art installed in a living space. The people living there were interviewed, sometimes one year after the object's purchase and installation. The interviews were oriented by questions (15 in all) intended to structure a free dialogue and allow emotions and feelings to be expressed. All the people interviewed were already known to us.

### Appearance and interpretations

In the context of the temporary exhibition, the visitor discovered the work of art in a short time (some hours) (doc.5)<sup>7</sup>. The plastic and spatial universe of the object was perceived through the information provided to his senses by the movements and positions his body and eyes were able to achieve. In the same way, he built up a psychological meaning (in the abstract, in the phantasmagorical, in the affective). The colours of the work of art *made sense* and *gave meaning* to all the other information that his body perceived. It gave material to the words. But the word that identified the colour was not named directly. The terms used evoked atmosphere, feelings, and inspirations. Associations of ideas took similar forms : "It reminds me, alas, of a difficult sea voyage", "Between sky, earth and sea" (doc.6). Sometimes olfactory sensations were generated by the colour in its context: "The smell of the seashore at low tide", "Smell of the sea". Could this questionnaire (put to the visitor on the site of his perception) have revealed traces of a *primary state of consciousness* of the colour of the work of art that words were powerless to express other than through the evocation of something already known? At the present moment colour is perceived with much subjectivity as possible because it is given *in the effect it delivers*: an immediate and sensual experience that needs

*Doc.5 – temporary exhibition's plan*



result of the strength and the nature of the light passing through the object. Their appearance depends on the proximity of the object to its surroundings and the absorption and reflection qualities of the material making up these surroundings.

Two types of context were considered. The first concerned works of art installed in temporary exhibitions, or more precisely, an exhibition which took place in the south of France in September 2004<sup>6</sup>. A questionnaire was drawn up to obtain the visitors' feelings about the work of art's appearance in itself, in the space in which it was installed and in its interpretation. Short answers were requested. Questionnaires were filled in anonymously by people aged between 26 and

*Doc.4 – colour projections*



our own previous experiences to be translated (anecdotes and sensations already named and identified). In this context my physical presence given me the opportunity to hear and talk with a lot of viewers. From now the work of art is delivered in a human relationship: it is the main topic of the conversation. The work of art is re-created thanks to the exchange between the viewer and the creator. Inevitably, the viewer's interpretation is modified. Once again it happens when I give lecture on my aesthetic requirements, realisation and installation modalities. Here again further meanings are given.

In the context of installation in living spaces, colour doesn't mean by itself but through its reversibility. Using the expedient of its own progressive mechanism it makes an analogy with clouds. The viewer's perception of the work of art's colours intervenes in everyday life and lasts in time too (contrary to temporary exhibitions). We can doubt about a physical influence of the art object's colour but some people talk about psychological one: "Anne. [...] I like when the colour change. It's never the same. It's really restful, really quiet... But when it's blue! Because when it has another colour, it doesn't give me



*Doc.6 – temporary exhibition's atmosphere*

the same sensation [...] and according to the colour it has, I say to myself: "it's blue... it will be a good day". When it's a little... between... blue and pink, when it approaches grey, I think: "It might be a bad day". Because my mood depends on the weather. When it's grey, I'm sullen. So is it with your creation...". "Gilles. This object, considered as a light filter, may fill the place in changeable colours and then generate a kind of dreaming. I can see myself lying down in a room filled by its filtered light, a room flooded by a certain colour... This particular atmosphere may force the daydreaming the same way you stare at the sky. It is like looking under a tree the leaves in movement, or looking at the clouds passing by." (doc.7).

Colour's work of art takes time to change. It determines two kinds of perceptions: the first is about duration because of states' sequences. The second is about the local weather because of tonal gradation. This mechanism it gives the consciousness of temporal progress. Sometimes it could happen quickly. The viewer try to perceive how one tonality evolves another one, how long it is during and if it corresponds to the weather. "Anne. [...] I love in summer because when it's really hot they have a sky blue colour. But if suddenly they become red, sorry "pink", in that moment you can be sure that ten minutes later the weather will turn to storm. Valérie. There's a special colour when it's shower of rain, not already storm but April shower or something like that... It changes quickly." Because of the large colour range, the viewers think that they have never seen some colours: "Valérie.

*Doc.7 – installation's atmosphere in living spaces*



[...] I look at it every mornings ... At least I look at it one time a day. When I go to bed, when I wake up, or when I'm going to work on my desk, at home. [...] sometimes it has got a colour that I never seen before [...]. It call out to you. "Gilles. [...] I'm waiting for its reaction: what is its colour? Is the weather going to be dry or humid... I look at it like a barometer. It's like an obsession because it changes all the time ... there's no day, no time in a day, that I don't want to see it ... It's never the same... It's always in movement." "Anne. People can't really understand the nature of the modification even if you explain it. They have difficulties to imagine the colour modulation. One friend

of mine comes to the shop three times a day. He said to me: "I'm coming to see the colour !". The viewer perceives threshold, stabilisation stages or speed and clear alterations. It's on a *pictorial time* that the viewer look at. In that context, colour gives "an *evolving*" to the physical and psychological meaning of work of art : it should be tamed and domesticated.

### Perceptions and work of art meaning

The way of appearing lead different stages into the perception and appropriation. "The colour is given in *the effect it delivers*. It's connected to the "looker" background, it happens to him. The colour involves tastes, feelings, sensitivities, fantasies. The colour calls up to the non rational, senses and pleasure. But especially it gives identity to work of art.

We have discerned two kind of perception. The first is immediate and sensual. It can be interpreted and explained only with close concepts, because: it can be explained with words (what is already an intricate interpretation). In this context, is the transition from the perception to language short cut?

The second one is cognitive. It's changing according to repetitive phenomenological experiences and perception contexts. It can be modify by creator personality and aesthetic requirements.

Perceptions and knowledge process, the way the viewer takes to think work of art, must be explored. To continue this work we want to interview voluntaries groups of viewers before and after exhibitions. Will we know how the appropriations and the interpretations are anticipating, altering, changing, amplifying, erasing? Should the work of art meaning's web weave that way, shouldn't it?

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### References

<sup>1</sup> **Malevitch, Kazimir Severinovich.** *Ecrits*. Translated from Russian to French by Andrée Robel-Chicurel, introduced by Andrei B. Nakov. Paris : éditions Champ Libre, 1975, p 419.

<sup>2</sup> **Jauss, Hans Robert.** *Pour une esthétique de la réception*. 1978. Translated from German to French by Claude Maillard, preface by Jean Starobinski. Paris : éditions Gallimard, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> **Albers, Joseph.** *L'interaction des couleurs. (Interaction of color, 1963)*. Translated into French by Claude Gilbert. Paris : éditions Hachette, 1945. The object in appearance mode is defined by the actual plastic.

<sup>4</sup> **Viollet Le Duc.** *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XIe au XVIe siècles*. Paris : A. Morel éditeur, 1868. Neuvième tome, article *Vitrail*. **Jean-Claude Merlin.** *Pigments et colorants de l'antiquité au Moyen Age. Teinture, peinture, enluminure, études historiques et physico-chimiques*. Colloque international du C.N.R.S. Département des Sciences de l'Homme et de la Société, Département de la Chimie. Paris : édition du C.N.R.S., 1990 p44.

<sup>5</sup> **Johann Wolfgang Goethe.** *Traité des couleurs. (Zur Farbenlehre. Didaktischer Teil, 1810)*. 1883. Paris : édition Triades, 1993 p 123 et 124.

<sup>6</sup> Exhibition title : *Du rêve à la réalité*. Mazères sur Salat, « l'Usine d'art et d'essais », Haute Garonne, France, septembre 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Three installations were presenting : The first included five pieces one (three meters high). It generated atmospheric colour linked to radiance principle. The second one (three pieces five meters high) shown primordial phenomenon and colour projections. The last was a twelve pieces installation (three to six meters high). It was created in three dimensions to be articulate into two concentric curved in successive stratifications.