



2.35 Split complementary system.



2.36 Georgia O'Keeffe, *Jack in the Pulpit No. V*, 1930. Oil on canvas, 48 × 30 in. (122 × 76 cm).

yellow-orange bands and one broken orange line, the overall composition is both energetic and serene.

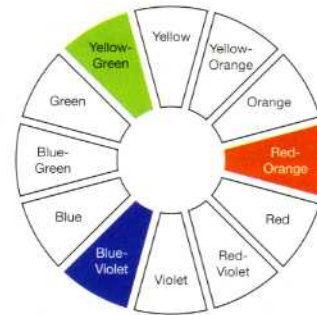
Each complementary pair has its own distinctive strengths. Violet and yellow provide the widest value range, while orange and blue provide the widest range of variation in temperature. Red and green are closest in value and create extreme agitation when placed side by side. By mixing two complements plus black and white, we can create a range of colors that begins to suggest the power of a full spectrum.

Split Complementary Color Schemes

An even wider range of possibilities is offered by the **split complementary** color scheme (2.35). Rather than pair colors that are in opposite positions on the color wheel, the artist completes the scheme using the two colors on either side of one of the complements. Georgia O'Keeffe's *Jack in the Pulpit No. V* (2.36) is dominated by rich greens and violets, with accents of yellow at the top of the composition and a vertical line of red just to the left of the center.

Triadic Color Schemes

The **triadic** color scheme pushes the choices even farther apart, so that they are now located in a triangular position, equally spaced around the wheel (2.37). This scheme is often used when variety and a strong impact are essential. In a brochure for the *UCLA extension open house* (2.38), variations



2.37 Triadic system.



2.38 Tin Yen Studios, *UCLA Extension Open House*.

on yellow-green, red-orange, and blue-violet bring energy to the design, while the white areas provide openness.

Chromatic Grays and Earth Colors

While the basic color wheel can help us identify many kinds of relationships, two important types of colors are not included: chromatic grays and earth colors. A **chromatic gray** is made from a mixture of various hues, rather than a simple blend of black and white. The result is both subtle and vibrant. In *The Magpie* (2.39), the grays vary widely, from the purples and blue-grays in the shadows to the golden-gray light in the foreground and the silvery grays for the snow-covered trees. This is not a dark, sullen winter day. Through the use of chromatic grays, Claude Monet made the warm light and transparent shadows sparkle in the crisp air.

Earth colors, including raw and burnt sienna, raw and burnt umber, and yellow ochre, are made

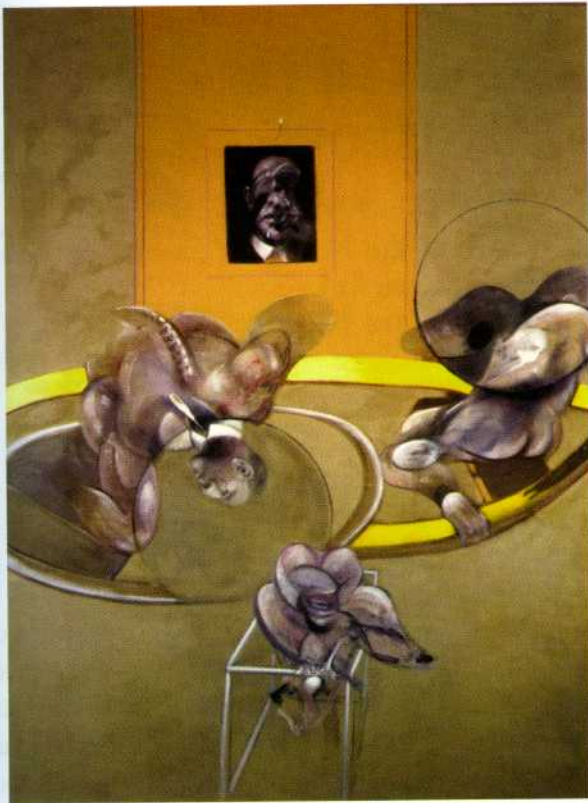


2.39 Claude Monet, *The Magpie*, 1869. Oil on canvas, 35 × 51 in. (89 × 130 cm).

generally from pigments found in soil. Often warm in temperature, when used together they create a type of analogous harmony. For example, browns, oranges, and tans accentuate the gestural energy and organic shapes in *Bush Cabbage Dreaming at Ngarlu* (2.40), by Australian artists Cookie Stewart Japaljarri, Alma Nungarrayi Granites, and Robin Japanangka Granites. This acrylic painting was inspired by traditional aboriginal artworks,



2.40 Paddy Japaljarri Stewart, *Bush Cabbage Dreaming at Ngarlu*; Yuendumu, Central Australia, 1986. Acrylic on canvas, 47½ × 93½ in. (120.5 × 237.5 cm).



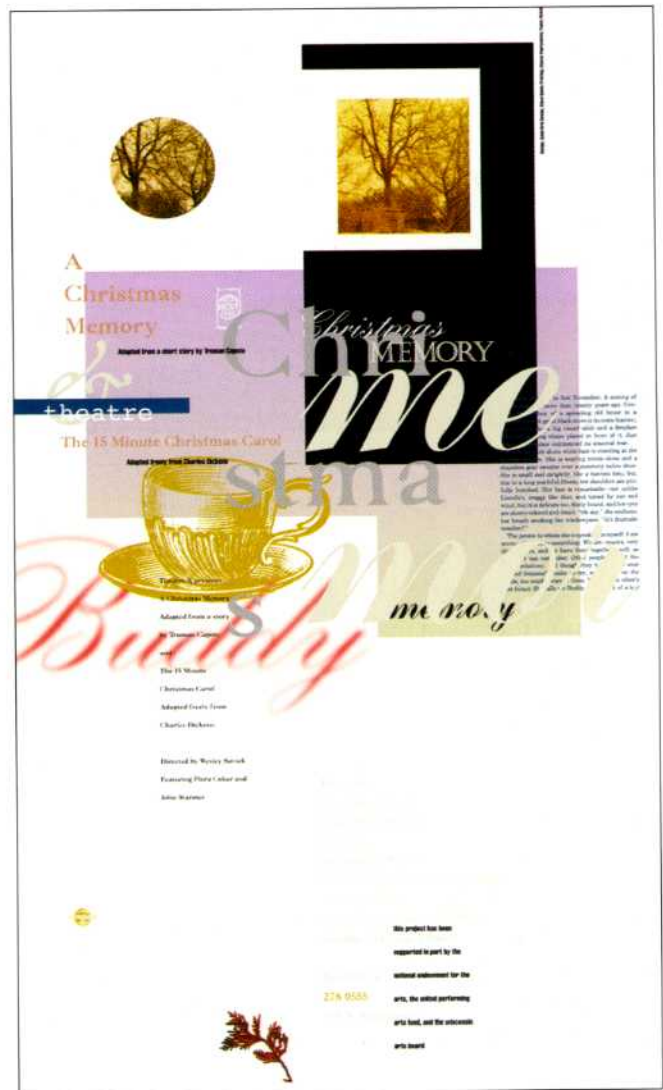
2.41 Francis Bacon, *Three Figures and Portrait*, 1975. Oil and pastel on canvas, 78 × 58 in. (198 × 147.5 cm).

which are literally made from earth colors. When used alone, earth colors can unify even the most agitated composition. When used in combination with high-intensity colors, they can provide an elegant balance between subdued and louder, more overt colors.

Using Disharmony - Guerilla Girls

Selecting the right colors can make the difference between a visual disaster and a visual delight. As a result, color harmony is the subject of endless books offering advice to artists, architects, and surface pattern designers. Monochromatic, analogous, complementary, split complementary, and triadic systems are traditional forms of color harmony.

However, cultural definitions of harmony are as changeable as popular music. In a search for eye-catching images, designers in all fields invent new color combinations each year. For example, the pink, gray, and black prized by designers in one year may seem passé in the next. Consequently, definitions and uses of color harmony are actually quite fluid.



2.42 Steve Quinn, *A Christmas Memory*, 1991. Photoshop, 11 × 17 in. (27.94 × 43.18 cm).

Furthermore, when skillfully used, color **dis-harmony** can be as effective as color harmony. Disharmony is often used when the subject matter is disturbing or when an unusual visual approach is needed. In figure 2.41, Francis Bacon used tans, grays, pinks, orange, and blacks to produce a painting that is as disturbing as it is beautiful. The colors in the body suggest disease, while the areas of black, yellow, and gray create a room that is agitated and disorienting. Using similar pinks, gray, black, and yellow-orange, Steve Quinn created a gentle evocation of memory in his Christmas poster (2.42). Here, the words and images shift back and forth in space, as fluid as a dream.



2.43 Guerrilla Girls, "Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum? Less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female," 1989. Poster, 11 × 28 in. (27.9 × 71.1 cm).

A third example is shown in figure 2.43. Bright yellow and hot pink add pizzazz to an eye-catching poster. Designed to call attention to a disparity in the number of exhibitions granted to male and female artists, this poster had to compete with other information displayed on walls around New York City. A witty image combined with jarring colors was just right in this case.

As these examples demonstrate, the degree and type of harmony used must depend on the ideas behind the image and on the visual context in which an image will appear.

Key Questions

HARMONY AND DISHARMONY

- What are the advantages of each of the traditional color schemes?
- When a limited palette is used, how can a few colors produce the greatest impact? When a full palette is used, how can the colors become harmonized?
- What happens when your composition is dominated by earth colors or chromatic grays? How does it change when an intense color is added?
- Which is more suitable for the idea you want to express: traditional color harmony or some form of disharmony?

COMPOSING WITH COLOR

Composition may be defined as the combination of multiple parts into a harmonious whole. The effect of color on composition is profound. Color can shift visual balance, create a focal point, influence our emotions, and expand communication. In this section, we will consider four major compositional uses of color.

Creating the Illusion of Space

Pictorial space is like a balloon. When we "push" on one side, the other side appears to bulge outward. Through our color choices, we can cause various areas in a composition to expand or contract visually. In most cases, cool, low-intensity colors tend to recede, while warm, high-intensity colors tend to advance. In Wolf Kahn's *The Yellow Square* (2.44), the greens and violets defining the exterior of the barn gently pull the viewer into the painting, while the blazing yellow window inside the barn pushes out as forcefully as the beacon in a lighthouse.

This effect can play an even more important role in nonobjective paintings. As described by painter Hans Hofmann, the "push and pull" of color can be a major source of energy in a nonobjective composition. For example, a large block of intense red dominates Hofmann's *Magnum Opus* (2.45). The blue rectangle at the left side pulls us inward, while the crisp yellow shape on the right pushes outward.

Weight and Balance

The effect of color on visual weight and balance is equally dramatic. In *Icarus* (2.46), Henri Matisse



2.44 Wolf Kahn, *The Yellow Square*, 1981. Oil on canvas, 44 × 72 in. (112 × 183 cm).



2.45 Hans Hofmann, *Magnum Opus*, 1962. Oil on canvas, 84 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 78 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (213 × 198 cm).



2.46 Henri Matisse, *Icarus*, from *Jazz* series, 1947. Stencil print, 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (43.6 × 34 cm).



2.47 Nancy Crow, *Double Mexican Wedding Rings 1*, 1988. Hand quilted by Marie Moore. 72 × 72 in. (183 × 183 cm).



2.48 Willem de Kooning, *Door to the River*, 1960. Oil on canvas, 80 × 70 in. (203.2 × 177.8 cm).

visually tells the story of the boy who flew too close to the sun, melting his wax wings and plunging into the ocean. The heavy black body “falls” into the blue background, while a vibrant red heart seems to pull the figure upward, away from death. Six bursts of yellow surround the figure. Equally suggestive of the stars above the boy and of light shimmering on the water below, these simple shapes add energy to the composition and meaning to the myth.

Distribution and Proportion

Through careful distribution, even the most disharmonious colors can work together beautifully. Four rectilinear gray shapes dominate Nancy Crow’s *Double Mexican Wedding Rings 1* (2.47). Gradated values extend outward, creating a subtle glow. Four small multi-colored squares accentuate the edges of the four large squares, and eight colorful rectangles frame up the composition as a whole. In most compositions, the earth colors, chromatic grays, and high-intensity reds, blues, and yellows would clash. In this composition, an even distribution of colors creates a unified composition.

Proportional variation is another way to harmonize seemingly incompatible colors. Willem de Kooning’s *Door to the River* (2.48) is dominated by a large mass of brilliant yellow. Five patches of blue-gray provide a subordinate **accent color**. Vigorous strokes of olive and grays create essential connections between major compositional shapes, adding both energy and unity to the design.

Color as Emphasis - Guerrilla Guide

Graphic designers often use color to emphasize critical information in a composition. The subway map in figure 2.49 provides a good example. Cooler areas of gray, green, and blue, placed on a black background, provide basic structural information. The bright yellow lines show the path through the subway. Red, which is used at only one point in the diagram, clearly locates the viewer on the map. A single color can make



2.52 Andrew Wyeth, *Wind from the Sea*, 1947. Tempera on hardboard, 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 27 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (47 × 69.9 cm).



2.53 Richard Diebenkorn, *Interior with Book*, 1959. Oil on canvas, 70 × 64 in. (178 × 163 cm).

EMOTION AND EXPRESSION

Colors are never emotionally neutral. The subtle browns and greens in Andrew Wyeth's *Wind from the Sea* (2.52) suggest the sepia color of a nineteenth-century photograph and evoke the slow pace and serenity of a countryside at rest. Richard Diebenkorn's *Interior with Book* (2.53), painted just 12 years later, provides a very different interpretation of a similar interior scene. The intense yellows and oranges in the background push toward us, while the solid blocks of blue pull inward, flattening the image. The tension and power thus generated create a California landscape that is a world apart from Wyeth's New England. The color in Sandy Skoglund's *Radioactive Cats* (2.54) creates yet another interpretation of an interior space. The gray walls, furniture, and clothing suggest a world that is lifeless and coated in ash. In contrast, the lime-green cats glow with an inquisitive energy that may be toxic!

Color Keys

A dominant color, or **color key**, can heighten psychological as well as compositional impact. The blues that dominate Joseph Spadaford's *Illustrated Man* (2.55) suggest both magic and melancholy. Based on a book by Ray Bradbury, Spadaford had to suggest the torment of a man whose tattoos come to life at night. At the other extreme, in Egon Schiele's *Portrait of Paris von Gütersloh* (2.56), the flaming orange around and within the figure places the anxious man in an emotional electric chair. Designers also use color keys. Blood red dominates Chaz Maviyane-Davis's *Our Fear Is Their Best Weapon* (2.57). The soldier's face is tightly cropped, highlighting his fierce red eyes.



2.55 Joseph Spadaford, *Illustrated Man*, 1998. Acrylic.



2.54 Sandy Skoglund, *Radioactive Cats*, 1980. Cibachrome print, 30 × 40 in. (76.2 × 101.6 cm). © 1980 Sandy Skoglund.

The powerful slogan, presented in faded black letters, is almost consumed by the red background. As



2.56 Egon Schiele, *Portrait of Paris von Gütersloh*, 1918. Oil on canvas, 55¼ × 43¼ in. (140.3 × 109.8 cm).

Don't be intimidated
Use your vote and be counted.

Our fear is
their best
weapon



2.57 Chaz Maviyane-Davis, *Our Fear Is Their Best Weapon*, 2002. Offset poster.

the text says, the voice of the people will be lost if fear is allowed to prevail. When color surrounds the viewer as in Hiroshi Senju's installations (2.58), the emotional impact can be profound. When immersed in color, we enter an alternate world. In each case, color was used to heighten emotion rather than represent reality.

Symbolic Color

Colors are often assigned symbolic meaning. These meanings may vary widely from culture to culture. In *The Primary Colors*, Alexander Theroux writes:

[Blue] is the symbol of baby boys in America, mourning in Borneo, tribulation to the American Indian and the direction South in Tibet. Blue indicates mercy in the Kabbalah and carbon monoxide in gas canisters. Chinese emperors wore blue to worship the sky. To Egyptians it represented virtue, faith, and truth. The color was worn by slaves in Gaul. It was the color of the sixth level of the Temple of Nebuchadnezzar II, devoted to the planet Mercury. In Jerusalem a blue hand painted on a door gives protection . . . and in East Africa, blue beads represent fertility.²



2.58 Hiroshi Senju, *New Light from Afar*, exhibition at Sundaram Tagore Gallery, 2008. Fluorescent pigment on rice paper on board.



2.59 **Butterfly Maiden, Hopi Kachina.** Carved cottonwood, 13½ in. (35 cm).

In Hopi culture, colors symbolize spatial location and geographic direction. The Kachina doll in figure 2.59 represents Butterfly Maiden, a benevolent spirit. Red represents a southerly direction; white, the east or northeast; blue or green, the west.

Symbolic color also plays a major role in *Flag* (2.60) by Jasper Johns. Part of a series of images based on the American flag, this print presents a reversal of the usual colors at the top. If we stare at this flag and then shift our attention to a white sheet of paper, we will see the familiar red, white, and blue. In this painting, an afterimage was used to suggest the contradictory nature of patriotism.

The Power of Color

Color and value each have unique strengths. A group of self-portraits by Käthe Kollwitz demonstrates three possibilities. The black-and-white value study on cream-colored paper (2.61) has a simple eloquence, while a more developed value drawing (2.62) adds drama and definition to the figure. The last portrait (2.63) places the warm figure against the cool background and makes her seem more accessible.



2.60 **Jasper Johns, *Flag*, 1968.** Lithograph, printed in color, composition: 34% × 25% in. (87.9 × 65.7 cm).



2.61 **Käthe Kollwitz, *Self-Portrait in Profile, Facing Left, I (detail)*, 1889.** Lithograph, 5% × 5% in. (15 × 15 cm).

Color can increase the power of a given shape, shift compositional weight, and create a focal point. It can enhance the illusion of space, suggest volume, and heighten emotion. Well used, color is one of the most expressive elements of art and design.

Key Questions

EMOTION AND EXPRESSION

- Will deeper space strengthen your composition? If so, what colors might you choose?
- Will a shift in coloristic balance improve your design?
- Will a dominant color key increase the emotional impact of your design?
- Considering the ideas you want to express, which is more effective: an even distribution of color or focused use, as a way to emphasize a particular shape or word?



2.62 Käthe Kollwitz, *Selbstbildnis und Aktstudien (Self-Portrait and Nude Studies) (detail)*, 1900. Pencil, dark gray ink wash, with white and yellowish highlights, on heavy brown paper, 11 × 17½ in. (27.8 × 44.5 cm).



2.63 Käthe Kollwitz, *Selbstbildnis im Profil Nach Rechts*, c. 1900. Pastel on laid paper, 19 × 14¾ in. (46.8 × 36.5 cm).

SUMMARY

- Color immediately attracts attention. Its emotional and physiological impact strengthens communication and heightens expression.
- Red, green, and blue are the additive color primaries. Blue, red, and yellow are the subtractive color primaries.
- The three basic qualities of color are hue (the name of the color), value (its lightness or darkness), and intensity (its purity).
- Using a monochromatic, analogous, complementary, split complementary, or triadic color scheme can increase harmony in your design.
- The level of color harmony must match the expressive intent. In the right context, disharmony can be more expressive than harmony.
- In a composition, color can enhance the illusion of space, shift visual weight and balance, and help emphasize compositional details.
- Distribution and proportion can help unify disharmonious colors.
- Colors are never emotionally neutral. A dominant color key can heighten psychological impact, while a symbolic color provides a cultural reference.

KEY TERMS

accent color
achromatic
additive color
afterimage
analogous
Bezold effect
chroma
chromatic gray
color harmony

color interaction
color key
color overtones
color theory
complementary
composition
disharmony
earth colors
hue

intensity
monochromatic
opponent theory
primary colors
process colors
saturation
secondary colors
shade
simultaneous contrast

split complementary
subtractive color
temperature
tertiary colors
tint
tone
triadic
value

STUDIO PROJECTS

To apply the concepts from this chapter in the studio, check out the Projects page in the Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/stewart4e. The following is a sample of the chapter-related assignments that are described in step-by-step detail.

Concealing/Revealing #3. Color and communication.
Expressive Color. Exploring meaning through color.
Sun and Substance. Exploring shape and color as metaphors.