



Koan Cuts II by Liliane Lijn

Dimensions: 31 x 22 in

## Analysis of Koan Cuts II Through the Lens of Color & Cognition

In terms of art, people often say that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, however, many individuals experience common reactions to most paintings. This occurrence is enacted intentionally by the artist through the various aspects of the painting. The phenomenon is explained by human cognition along with human's shared experiences. This paper will analyze Koan Cuts II, an art piece by Liliane Lijn, by focusing on the aspect of colors and how it influences the viewer. Psychological research and experiments will be presented as evidence to support the theorized general human reactions to the work of art. As Koan Cuts II is an abstract piece comprised of many bright and vibrant colors, the aspect of color will be the most likely aspect to evoke a reaction from the viewers.

In daily life, often times the more colorful the object, the higher likelihood it has of capturing an individual's attention and remaining in their memory. Koan Cuts II contains nine different colors which are very bright. The association between amount of color and level of visual attention and memory was addressed in a 2010 study by Kim. The study included 36 participants who were asked to take two computer-based tests: "Box Shooting" and a memory recall test (Kim 2010). For the first task, participants had to stare at a piece of art in the center of their screen and simultaneously shoot, by pressing the corresponding key, at red boxes that popped up around the image. This task contained the three types of artwork: black and white, partial color, and full color images. The second task tested the participants recollection of the different types of art. The goal behind the two tasks was to assess the type of painting that accrued the most visual attention and remained in the participants memory best.

After assessment of the results, Kim found that "full color images more significantly [remained] in people's working memory" (Kim 2010). Black and white and partially colored

images were more difficult to recall than the full color images. These results relate directly to Koan Cuts II, because the piece is in full color that are solid and brilliant which grab the viewer's attention. In alignment with Kim's findings, Koan Cuts II is more memorable and commands more visual attention than other less colorful pieces of art.

Color preference greatly influences the way art is viewed and deemed appealing. As many people have a favorite color, a study was conducted in 1974 by Gotz and Gotz to assess the color preferences of over 300 individuals. The goal was to assess which colors could be deemed pleasant or unpleasant. The study required participants to rank colors on a scale from 1 to 7 with 1 being the most pleasant and 7 being the least pleasant. The participants were not given a list of colors which prompted them to conjure up colors from memory ensuring an authentic like or dislike of colors. The study included two different samples of participants, approximately half were art students and the other half were regular college students. The two groups agreed that blue and red were two of the most significantly preferred colors, however, university students also preferred orange whereas the art students did not. As for the most unpleasant colors, both groups significantly disliked gray and pink. Nine other colors were listed; however, they were not significantly preferred or disliked.

In relation to the real world, the different groups replicate the various types of art viewers and their level of experience in art viewing. Art students are more likely to have a keen eye towards color as opposed to regular students who most likely do not view art as frequently. The relevance of the Gotz and Gotz study to the Koan Cuts II piece, there are many vibrant colors that can catch the eye of the viewer. Among those colors is red, blue, and orange, the three colors labelled most pleasant by the university students. Colors that are not present in the art are pink

and gray which were the unpleasant labeled colors. Because the artwork contains appealing colors, it is likely that Koan Cuts II will appeal to many viewers.

Continuing the conversation of color preference, colors often retain symbolic meaning that subconsciously creates preferences within an individual's minds and can be a determining factor in attractiveness of art. A study by Boyatzis and Varghese assesses these associations between emotion and color in children. The study included 60 children from grouped in two cohorts for age: 4 to 5 years old and 6 to 7 years old. The children were shown nine colors which were as follows: "pink, red, yellow, black, gray, green, blue, purple, and brown" (Boyatzis and Varghese 1994). These colors were grouped into bright and dark colors with pink, red, yellow, green, purple, and blue being bright, and the others labeled dark. With each color, the children were asked what emotion the color evoked and why. The potential answers were labeled as either a positive or negative emotion toward the color. Based on the responses and reasonings behind the children's feelings toward certain colors, the researchers found that it was clear that the children related the colors to objects and images which shaped their perception. The main takeaway from the study was the association of brighter colors with positive emotions. In looking at Koan Cuts II, a positive association between bright colors and happier emotions implies that the art will be received in a positive light because of the many bright colors it contains. As the categorization of colors by emotion occurs early in life, it is likely that these associations persist into adult years, though they are subject to change with age.

Following the idea that colors evoke specific emotions and create preferences, some individuals also retain color aversions and view certain colors as less appealing or anxiety inducing. In a 1975 study by Jacobs and Suess, research on the connection between colors and anxiety was conducted. The study included 40 participants who were tasked with assessing

anxiety after exposure to a certain color. Each participant viewed each color on three separate occasions for three different lengths of time: 5, 10, and 15 minute periods. The colors focused on by the study included: red, yellow, green, and blue. To assess the participants' level of anxiety after viewing the color, they were asked to fill out an anxiety test called the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (A-state). The A-state scorings for each color were averaged and compared to assess which colors caused the highest perceived anxiety.

Results from the study showed the colors red and yellow as significantly more anxiety inducing to the participants than blue and green. The stark difference in anxiety level implies that art viewers on average would prefer to view art that incorporates the colors blue and green. In relating the Jacobs and Suess experiment to Koan Cuts II, the art piece may be slightly anxiety inducing. On the same vein, the art also contains shades of the colors blue and green which were not seen as an anxiety inducing colors. It is possible that this mixture of anxiety inducing colors and calming colors may intrigue viewers into observing Koan Cuts II for a longer period of time in an attempt to assess their feelings toward the art.

As color preference can attract an individual to certain works of art, it is important to note that color preference can vary by culture. This concept was identified in a study by Ishii and others in 2014, where the researchers had two groups rate the harmony and uniqueness of different colored patterns. The two groups consisted of European Canadians and Japanese participants to assess whether the groups would prefer colorings from children of their same culture or the other culture more. The researchers utilized scales of harmony which was associated with Eastern cultures and uniqueness which was associated with Western cultures to measure the two groups' color preferences in relation to culture. Each participant was shown images colored by children from the two different cultural groups and given a list of potential

feedback responses. Three of the responses were associated with harmony, three were related to uniqueness, and one was a neutral statement only complimenting the image. The participants were asked to rate the responses from most likely through least likely to say to the child who colored it. The purpose of rating the responses and having several relating to each culture, was to see if there was a significant preference for either harmony or uniqueness.

Ishii and others found that the Canadian participants rated the statements using uniqueness as a characteristic as their more likely feedback responses. Similarly, the Japanese participants rated the harmonious feedback statements higher than the uniqueness ones. As expected, the two groups prioritized the characteristics that were promoted within their culture. From this, it is evident that culture influences color preference. Because each culture can retain different color preferences, not all cultures will appreciate art in the same way. As one may associate a color with happiness, another may believe the color is taboo. In looking at Koan Cuts II, it is likely that the European Canadians would have taken a stronger liking to it because of its uniqueness.

Overall, the countless studies on color and perception show the importance of color choice by an artist. Not only do people prefer certain colors, the colors of artwork can evoke emotion and memories and even demand an individual's attention. Through assessing Koan Cuts II through the lens of color, it is clear to see the artist's intentional use of bright and vibrant colors to attract viewers and conjure positive emotions within the viewers. An artist's use of color is intentional and can often have a targeted audience in mind. People sometimes say that art speaks to them and the reality is that that was the artist's goal.

## Works Cited

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