



*Unknown* by Unknown (ID: #3743)

Print, 23.25" x 16"

Perception and Analysis of *Unknown* Work

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When picking this piece, the first things that stood out were the colors, the abstract nature, and the interesting take on portraiture. In this literature review, many studies are examined that delve into the perception elements of each of the key aspects of this piece, beginning with color, moving on to abstract Gestalt perception and finishing with portraiture.

Numerous studies have been conducted examining the intersection of perception and color. The first color related paper examined for this particular art selection was a study done by Piotr Zieliński (2015). This study was an extension of many other previous studies done to examine different aspects of color (Zieliński, 2015). Zieliński (2015) was particularly interested in the trends changed by hue, brightness and saturation (Zieliński, 2015). Many other studies show increases in many responses to colors with high saturation (Zieliński, 2015). In his study, Zieliński (2015) examined self-reported arousal ratings along with physiological reactions to a variety of color stimuli. This study used female participants who were shown a color stimuli on a screen (Zieliński, 2015). In the first experimental phase, participants rated the colors on two scales, pleasant to unpleasant, and calming to arousing (Zieliński, 2015). In the second experimental phase, participants were connected to systems to monitor physiological reactions, especially skin conductance (Zieliński, 2015). For both self-report arousal ratings as well as skin conductance, this study found that more saturated colors were more arousing (Zieliński, 2015).

This study draws interesting conclusions about our reaction to various colors that further previous research to back up our self-reported arousal with actual physical arousal. This study in particular can be connected to my chosen art piece because of the colors used. This piece has several colors in it, but all with very high saturation. This is element is not only arousing for the viewer of the piece, drawing their attention to it, but also adds to the thematic nature of the piece. This piece portrays a love story between two figures, coming together to form one whole, and

then later reproduce. This relationship inspires arousal in one another, but with the use of saturated colors, inspires the feeling of arousal in the viewer as well.

The next color study, Dael, Perseguers, Marchand, Antonietti, and Mohr (2015), examined the specific intersection of emotionality and color. This study extended previous studies comparing emotional valence to color, using physical expression of emotion through the use of pictures of actors (Dael, Perseguers, Marchand, Antonietti, & Mohr, 2015). In this study, participants looked at photos of actors' physical expression of two emotions, either elated joy or panic fear (Dael et al., 2015). These images had the faces of the actors blurred and the color of their clothing muted as to not bias participants to emotional or color responses (Dael et al., 2015). After viewing each image, participants were able to select a color which they thought best fit the expression (Dael et al., 2015). After running numerous statistical tests, Dael et al. (2015) found that both color elements, especially brightness, and hue were connected to emotional expression. They observed that brighter and more saturated colors were used more often in connection with elated joy (Dael et al., 2015). They also observed that red-yellow hues were used more often for elated joy emotional expression, whereas cyan-blueish hues were selected more often for panic fear expression.

This study extends further analysis on the art piece selected in terms of meaningfulness of saturation and brightness, as well as connecting the specific colors in this piece to possible emotional valence. This piece includes colors along both spectrums from this study, red-yellow and cyan-blue. This could pose a number of possibilities for artistic analysis and the emotions that this piece elicits in viewers.

Expanding further upon color interactions in this piece, connections can also be made to other elements of perception, such as depth. In their study, Dresch-Langley and Reeves (2020)

sought to examine the role that color plays into our perception of depth within abstract art pieces. They mainly focused on the historical elements of this field, looking at aspects such as relative size, linear perspective, and luminance contrast (Dresp-Langley & Reeves, 2020). This particular perception study also plays into the Gestalt art theory. Gestalt artistic theory is defined by the way in which our perception of an art piece focuses on parts of an image to make it into a whole (Columbia College Chicago). Dresp-Langley and Reeves (2020) gave participant stimuli blocks which had a border color and an inner color. The inner color was either placed on a dark background, “black wall”, or a light background, “white wall” (Dresp-Langley & Reeves, 2020). They also tested several hues of the inner circle to see the interactions between both hue and contrast (Dresp-Langley & Reeves, 2020). First, their results showed that the characteristics of “bigger” and “nearer” were connected with both the black wall and white wall backgrounds (Dresp-Langley & Reeves, 2020). This means that participants perceive things that are nearer to be bigger and vice versa (Dresp-Langley & Reeves, 2020). Their next results looked specifically at contrast between background and foreground, finding that when squares were placed on backgrounds with a large contrast, the inner squares had the lowest rating for “bigger” and “nearer” perception (Dresp-Langley & Reeves, 2020). Finally, they examined their color variables, and found that red hues had bigger probability for being perceived as “bigger” and “nearer” when compared to blue hues (Dresp-Langley & Reeves, 2020).

This study is interesting in combination with this particular art piece because of the way that the piece’s sections mimic the stimuli presented in this experiment. Color is clearly a very important aspect of this piece, and we can analyze the color choices beyond the emotionality and look more closely about the way these colors are perceived. The colors positioned in the foreground and background pose interesting questions about what we consider to be closer to the

viewing or farther back from the viewing, and how this perception of contrast and hue plays into the narrative meaning of the work.

Another fascinating perspective on this art piece comes from examining the abstract portraiture nature of the figures. This particular aspect can be analyzed in a variety of ways. One study that looks at portraiture and face recognition are the studies done by Tree, Horry, Riley, and Wilmer (2017). This study sought to test face recognition ability and see if there were differences between artists and non-artists (Tree, Horry, Riley, & Wilmer, 2017). Their first study compared face recognition memory between control participants and participants who had taken an introductory college level art course (Tree et al., 2017). In their second study, they furthered these results by comparing recognition of pictures, words and abstract art between very experienced artists and control participants (Tree et al., 2017). In both studies, the results showed no noticeable improvement in face and word recognition between the control participants and the artists, both elementary and experience levels (Tree et al., 2017). Although for face and word recognition, control and artist participants had the same level of recognition, experienced artists specifically showed slight recognition improvement when it came to the abstract art pieces (Tree et al., 2017).

This is a fascinating study, especially in comparison to this particular art piece. Although this work is considered to be more abstract, which may be harder for the average observer to recognize, because it features the elements of portraiture, this makes the faces more recognizable to the average consumer of the art piece. Face recognition is also especially important for portraying the narrative story line of the figures in this work. Although some of the features on the figures change, for example eye color, we are able to still make the narrative recognition and connection between each frame to tell the bigger story of the piece itself.

Another interesting study worked on analyzing both the portrait and gestalt concepts that are seen in this art piece. In this study, Pinna and Deiana (2018) outline and further investigate the historical analysis on portraiture. The first historical lens through which faces are observed is the canonical perspective, which describes faces as being perceived in a diagnostic way from other objects (Pinna & Deiana, 2018). It is also said to be “the most representative image of an object that first comes to mind when associating it with a name” (Pinna & Deiana, 2018). The next method is holistic processing, which looks at faces specifically as a whole made up of its individual features or pieces, however, simultaneously have been reported to not be able to be built in perception just from pieces of the whole (Pinna & Deiana, 2018). This particular theory of face perception fits into Gestalt art theory very well. In this particular study, the researchers sought to more deeply examine these theories to see if “canonical perspective and holistic processes really effective for face perception” (Pinna & Deiana, 2018). The participants completed three task in order to evaluate these perception theories, a description task where they were asked to describe what they saw in an image, a free pictorial task in which they were asked to draw what they were asked, and a pictorial reproduction task where they were told to copy what the stimuli they saw (Pinna & Deiana, 2018). The procedure for each task was detailed and extensive, with numerous types of stimuli including abstract portraiture paintings and photographs of objects (Pinna & Deiana, 2018). Pinna and Deiana’s (2018) most important conclusions came from the free drawing of portraits, in which most participants depicted their person facing the front, even after being shown photos and are pieces from multiple angles. Their findings weaken the previous theories about face perception, but rather suggest that faces and bodies are nothing more than a sum of their parts, or the icons, that stand out as being features on the face or body (Pinna & Deiana, 2018).

This paper calls out interesting facets of the art piece I have chosen. Extending previous abstract and gestalt theory pieces, viewers of this artwork are able to discern that these abstract shapes are figures because of the iconic features of a face a body which we are able to use for categorization, for example, eyes, arms, and hair. Another way this study influences the perception of this piece is through the orientation of the figures. They are furthermore identifiable as people because of the way they are all orientated to face the front, even in the segments of the print where the people should be traditionally facing one another (squares one, two and three from left to right and top to bottom). Since these images match the orientation and iconic perception of figures, even in their abstract style, these shapes are determined to be people.

It is clear that this piece can be examined and analyzed in a variety of ways, not only through personal analysis, but also through the lens of artistic perception. When looking into the perception of this piece in particular it is important to hear about the elements especially present in this piece, such as color, abstract Gestalt artistic expression, and portraiture.

## References

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