

How Color Works: Color Theory in the Twenty-First Century
Pamela Fraser

About the Author

Pamela Fraser is an artist and educator. She has exhibited her work for over twenty years at significant galleries and museums throughout the United States, Europe, and Japan. Fraser is co-editor of the book *Beyond Critique: Contemporary Art in Theory, Practice, and Instruction* (2017). She is an associate professor of studio art at the University of Vermont.

About *How Color Works: Color Theory for the Twenty-First Century* (bullet points)

- Organized around color use in both historical and contemporary art and design.
- Encourages students to think critically about the intellectual history of color.
- Provides definitions of theoretical color concepts and their contexts.
- Contextualizes color theory within a contemporary context and provides definitions of relevant movements, such as formalism, conceptualism, modernism, and postmodernism.
- Features a broad array of over 100 full-color illustrations, including many significant contemporary works.

About *How Color Works: Color Theory for the Twenty-First Century* (summary)

The study of color is often considered to be entirely objective and scientific. *How Color Works: Color Theory for the Twenty-First Century* demonstrates that while there are perceptual laws and predictable behaviors that we can learn, there are also many aspects of color that are mysterious and about which there is little agreement. The book begins by illuminating color's history of discovery and invention, including the mechanics of light, of material color, and the laws of color perception. Common color conceptualizations are historically contextualized, so that color's rich, fluid, and ever-changing nature is clear in both perceptual and cultural terms.

How Color Works then guides readers through a practical use of color, using a process-primary color-mixing system. Formal color interaction in terms of contrast, harmony, changing appearances, and the description of form are covered in detail in works of art and design in a wide variety of media. While many books in this genre focus on formal color problems, color use within the diversity of contemporary practices is highlighted, and the function of colors in interpretation and overall meaning is emphasized.

Each suggested activity is designed to teach a specific color problem and to allow readers to pursue creative projects with an individual focus while absorbing lessons and executing colorful work.

List of Major Concepts, by Chapter

Chapter One: Color as Theory

- The Discovery of Color as Light/Energy
- The Importance of Perception and Subjectivity
- The Role of Romantic Thought in Color Concepts
- Systemization and Industrialization in the Nineteenth Century
- Color and Pragmatism in the Twentieth Century

Chapter Two: Defining Color

- Color Theory Terminology Explained
- Differences Between the Colors of Light and of Material
- How Color Perception Works in the Eye and Brain
- What are Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Colors?
- The Three Major Attributes of Color and How to Use Them
- Complementary Colors: What They Are, and Why They Are Important
- Color Illusions: Contrast Effects, "Weights," and Temperatures

Chapter Three: Sources of Color

- Material- and Light-based Media Distinguished and Elucidated
- Classification of Colorants into Organic, Inorganic, and Synthetic Categories
- Political and Environmental Impacts of Colorant Production
- Types of Colorants and Their Uses
- Historical and Recent Color Use in Types of Light-based Media
- Atmospheric Color

Chapter Four: Colors in Combination

- Different Ways to Mix or Create the Appearance of New Colors
- Ways to Compose with Color Effectively
- Ways to Use Color to Create Pictorial Depth
- Traditional Ideas About Color Contrast and Harmony, with Examples

Chapter Five: Color and Ideas

- Color Is a Carrier of Culturally Specific Associations
- Is Color a Language or Code?
- Can Color Be a Metaphor?
- Examples of Individual Basic Colors as Carriers of Meaning
- Ideas About Color Are Continually Changing