

Seurat: Color theory

Chevreul was perhaps the most important influence on artists at the time; his great contribution was producing a color wheel of primary and intermediary hues. Chevreul was a French chemist who restored tapestries. During his restorations he noticed that the only way to restore a section properly was to take into account the influence of the colors around the missing wool ; he could not produce the right hue unless he recognized the surrounding dyes. Chevreul discovered that two colors juxtaposed, slightly overlapping or very close together, would have the effect of another color when seen from a distance. The discovery of this phenomenon became the basis for the pointillist technique of the Neoimpressionist painters.

Chevreul also realized that the 'halo' that one sees after looking at a color is the opposing, or complementary, color. For example: After looking at a red object, one may see a cyan echo/halo of the original object. This complementary color (as an example, cyan for red) is due to retinal persistence. Neoimpressionist painters interested in the interplay of colors made extensive use of complementary colors in their paintings. In his works, Chevreul advised artists to think and paint not just the color of the central object, but to add colors and make appropriate adjustments to achieve a harmony among colors.

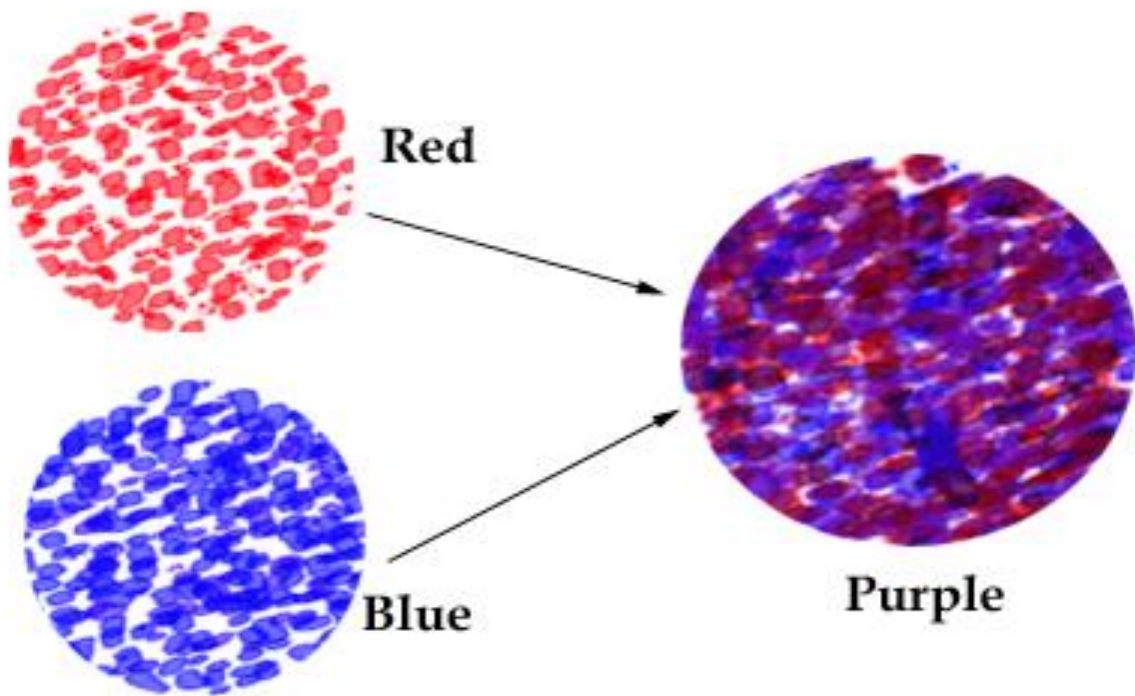
Seurat took to heart the color theorists' notion of a scientific approach to painting. He believed that a painter could use color to create harmony and emotion in art in the same way that a musician uses counterpoint and variation to create harmony in music. He theorized that the scientific application of color was like any other natural law, and he was driven to prove this conjecture. He thought that the knowledge of perception and optical laws could be used to create a new language of art based on its own set of heuristics and he set out to show this language using lines, color intensity and color schema. Seurat called this language Chromoluminarism.

In a letter to Maurice Beaubourg in 1890 he wrote "Art is Harmony. Harmony is the analogy of the contrary and of similar elements of tone, of color and of line, considered according to their dominance and under the influence of light, in gay, calm or sad combinations".

Seurat's theories can be summarized as follows: The emotion of gaiety can be achieved by the domination of luminous hues, by the predominance of warm colors, and by the use of lines directed upward. Calm is achieved through an equivalence/balance of the use of the light and the dark, by the balance of warm and cold colors, and by lines that are horizontal. Sadness is achieved by using dark and cold colors and by lines pointing downward.

Seurat's Pointillism

COLOR MIXING



Mixing Compliments for Shadows

