CALENDAR 2023

From the innocuous marigold to the conch shell, from the deep sea to the bees, the birds and their complex abodes, to the intricacies of the human body, to the incredible geometry of the solar system, all things big and small in this universe reveal superlative design.

Injecting the rhythm, balance and harmony displayed in nature into the human environment remains a vital quest and one of the challenges of this millennium.

With over 30 years of collective experience in transformational research and communication, we at New Concept are geared to meet this challenge head on!

New Concept specialises in:

- Rigorous quantitative, qualitative and evidence-based research
- Analytical, policy and process documentation
- Supportive monitoring and evaluation, impact assessments
- Web-based monitoring systems, content management, resource centres, repositories
- Mobile-based tools for social communication, research, data collection, and monitoring
- Researching into knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of communities
- Developing and implementing effective communication strategies for social and behaviour change
- Supporting Risk Communication & Community Engagement (RCCE)
- Capacity building, quality assurance and supportive supervision for multiple layers of stakeholders
- Creating communication tools and knowledge products, and knowledge management.

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Colouring outside the lines

From 40,000 years ago, when humans decided to try their hand at using colours in painting images and decorating objects, they have been haunted by such questions like how colours are perceived, how they mix, contrast and match with each other, and what kind of messages and emotions they communicate.

To understand the full power of colours, we need to appreciate both the artistic and scientific concepts as well as the history of colour theory.

In this year's calendar, we have made a humble attempt to unravel such a complex subject.

In the January leaf, we try to explain if there is a logic why a particular colour or genre of colours is trending at a particular time.

When Earth was created 4.6 billion years ago, it must have looked pretty colourless. So, when did the colours of life blossom? The February leaf throws some light on this issue.

In the March leaf, we see how colours in festivals may symbolise different emotions, represent local mythologies, or venerate changing seasons.

The colours of the Ajanta frescos glow even today with a brilliant intensity. How did our ancient Indian artists achieve such mastery some 2000 years back? The April leaf reveals the science behind ancient Indian art.

In the world of colours, the colour gold has a special space reserved for it, or rather a controversial space! This is what we examine in the May leaf.

The June leaf is dedicated to the colour blue, which had turned out to be the most expensive colour in history, fuelling wars and the slave trade.

Where do humans stand with respect to the power of colour detection when compared to animals? The answer in the July leaf will baffle some.

In the August leaf, we discuss the phenomenon of camouflage, which is not only the technique of hiding but also being seen, whichever way to look at it!

Are black and white really independent colours? Artists, scientists and printers seem to have different answers. The September leaf sheds light on this controversy.

The October leaf poses the question why humans and plants have never quite cracked the evolutionary riddle that makes insects, fish and fungi to glow.

In the November leaf, we wonder whether the way we see colours has been 'coloured' by years of history, science and practice!

What drives trending colours?

What colours trend at a given time? Are they decided by royalty, celebrities, business houses or media?

Many think that colour trends are determined by the state of the economy, or the political climate or an emergency. They may not be altogether wrong.

In the early 1900s, minimalistic colours, such as beiges, whites and grays ruled the market. The world experienceda short recessionary period at this time.

In the 1920s, by contrast, hues such as gold, silver and ultramarine appeared to beome popular post the devastation of the First World War.

A few years later, a whole new visual vocabulary of colours for film posters emerged in the Soviet Union. Black-and-white artwork was being jazzed up with lively colour blocking.

Fluorescent or Neon colours, those extremely bright versions of blue, red, yellow and purple, which blink at us from untiring advertisements, emerged a favourite in the 1980s. Was it to do with a spurt in globalisation?

As we stepped into this millennium, muted hues like brown, pale yellow and gray-green were back again as favourites.

In the first decade of the millennium, earthly hues became trendy, perhaps as a reflection of the movement to save the environment. In the second part of the decade, they gave way to earthy hues with an eclectic combination of warm and cool colours. As the world goes through one catharsis after another, the colours also follow. However, there is another theory that when disillusionment gathers, colour trends buck up to raise sentiments for a future of hope.

So let's welcome warm colours—red, orange and yellow—to usher in cheer and hope this New Year.

January 2023

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If you have ever wondered why a particular colour or genre of colours is trending, then you are not alone. But then, trying to find the answer may turn out to be more than you bargained for.

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Colours of Life

Except in dystopian films, one cannot imagine a colourless world. Colour has become such an integral part of our lives that it makes us shudder if the world were to turn totally black and white. Yet, when Earth was created 4.6 billion years ago, it must have looked pretty colourless. It was only about 650 million years ago when an explosion of complex life occurred that colours of life started appearing.

Scientists have been investigating when that happened. Fossils tell us quite a bit about the size and shape of the life form, but what about its colour? Turns out that fossils do contain bits of colour. The oldest colour of life is a bright pink that has survived in 1.1 billion year-old rocks. The pink colour came from the chlorophyll of blue-green algae whose pigment molecules survived all these years.

From then on, with the evolution of complex ecosystems, where large animals, including humans, could survive, the colour palette of life started expanding.

So, for our forefathers to depict their life story in colours, there were enough subjects. Over 40,000 years ago, our ancient artists used a combination of chalk, soil, animal fat and burnt charcoal to form the earliest pigments for this purpose. This compound created a base of five colours which would be the foundation of art for centuries to come: black, white, red, yellow and brown. That was a flying start!

Exploration, experimentation, and scientific and technological advances led to the discovery and creation of new colours. By the way, scientists have deviced tools to deduce the colour of dinosaur plumage!

While the 7000-year old, unearthed statues of ancient civilisations, such as the Indus and Sumerian, are bereft of colour today, there is evidence that at one time they had resplendent colours. The colour pigments just wore off over time. Friezes describing mythological scenes had bright red and blue backgrounds and lifelike hues.

So, the next time we are in a museum, staring at the pale statue of the bearded priest from the Indus Valley civilisation, let us remember that the beard must have once been painted in a bright colour.

February 2023

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The next time we are in a museum, staring at the pale statue of the bearded priest from the Indus Valley civilisation, let us remember that the beard must have once been painted in a bright colour.

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Colour play

Can you imagine our Holi without its blaze of colours, or the Chinese New Year without red paper lanterns, or the colourful quirky outfits left out of the Rio carnival? Festivals without colours is like poetry without rhyme.

Holi is universally known as the festival of colours. However, it is not the only festival where colour takes the centrestage. There are numerous other festivals celebrated around the globe that are equally colourful.

While in India, Holi honours the arrival of spring with a kaleidoscope of colours, Japan's Hanami (or, The Cherry Blossom Festival) celebrates the arrival of spring by carpeting the streets and the sky with candy floss coloured cherry blossoms.

Every town across China and every Chinatown across the world explodes with a cacophony of colour and sound on the Chinese New Year. This colourful festival adorns homes with red paper lanterns, while unmissable colourful and bright dragon dances bring cheer to the streets.

In Spain, red colour underpins the fruity festival La Tomatina held in the town of Bunol near Valencia, where people hit the streets to hurl over-ripe tomatoes at one another.

The Rio de Janeiro Carnival in Brazil is arguably the world's biggest fiesta that brings two million people each day together onto the streets with an electrifying atmosphere, live samba music and bold, bright and extravagantly coloured costumes.

Colours in festivals symbolise different emotions, represent local mythologies, or venerate changing seasons. Whichever way, they lend joy and zest to festivals.

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Colours in festivals may symbolise different emotions, represent local mythologies, or venerate changing seasons. Whichever way, they lend joy and zest to festivals across countries and cultures.

March 2023

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Chitrasutra – The Ancient Indian Guide on Colours

Some 2200 years back, Buddhist monks retreating to caves during monsoons started dabbling with colours. Today, these murals are universally regarded as masterpieces of art. Very few have survived, the ones in Ajanta being the largest corpus.

Most famous among them are two astonishing images of the compassionate Bodhisattvas. Sublime in their other-worldly beauty and manifestation of enlightenment, their colours glow even today with a brilliant intensity: topaz-dark, lizard-green, lotus-blue.

How did these ancient painters master the use of colours, which even the renaissance painters of the 15th century would have envied? The artists of Ajanta were inheritors of an ancient tradition of decorating temples, palaces and caves. Among the many texts, the Chitrasutra is considered most significant. It provided a framework on ways to prepare walls and surfaces to hold the murals; preparation of paints; appropriate choice of colours; different ways of shading; and many other aspects.

The six limbs (anga) of painting narrated in the text include Varnika-bhanga. This section lays the ground rules for improvising colour combinations, tones and shades. It provides for the creation of lustre and irradiance, keeping in mind the overall subject, mood and setting of the painting.

Chitrasutra mentions five primary colours (mulavarna): white (svetha), yellow (pitha), black (krshna), green (harita) and red (raktha). While there is no limit to the number of finer varieties of tints that can be produced by the artists' imagination, the text warns that the colouring should be natural.

Manipulating colours, their density, tones, lines, light and shades was well within the ingenuity, imagination and skill of the ancient Indian artist.

April 2023

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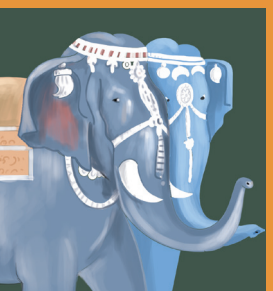
Most famous among the Ajanta frescos are two astonishing images of the compassionate Bodhisattvas. Their colours glow even today with a brilliant intensity: topaz-dark, lizard-green, lotus-blue. How did our ancient Indian artists achieve such mastery some 2000 years back?



The most controversial colour

In the world of colours, gold colour has a special space reserved for it, or rather a controversial space!

It is no surprise since for millennia, this hue has been a symbol of conflicting values—opulence, sacredness, power, greed and otherworldly spiritual splendour. But unlike other colours, this hue perhaps draws its greatness from the precious metal whose name it has taken. What will happen if the metal loses its value? Will the colour lose its classy status?

The colour does seem to have an existence even longer than that of the metal. The yellow ochre was one of the most popular pigments used in ancient times. The ancient Egyptians mixed a pinch of saffron to get the gold ochre shade.

Leaving aside ascetics, it is perhaps difficult to find someone who is not drawn to the colour gold. In art, design, fashion and products with a metallic finish, the colour holds its fort.

The Incas attributed the colour to the “tears of the sun”. For the Egyptians, it was “the flesh of the gods”. Indians have never tired of using the colour in their wedding fineries.

The colour does have a prestige and celebrated status of its own. But it has its supporters and detractors as well.

Many consider gold as a positive colour, inherently uplifting and enlightening, a sign of elegance, sophistication and wisdom.

On the negative side, it is associated with the ruling elite across millennia, a symbol of excessive greed and vulgar display of wealth.

Let us not choose sides, because it is after all a colour that has been popular from time immemorial.

May 2023

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The colour gold has an independent existence from the metal gold. So why should the extravagance attached to the metal influence our choice of the colour?

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The most expensive colour in history

Perhaps an abundance of blue in the sky and the ocean made the earliest human painter give it the last priority. But then, blue is a rare colour in flora and fauna. Only one in 10 plants have blue flowers. Among animals, blue is even rarer. But once the colour caught the attention of humans, all hell broke loose.

Ancient Egyptians valued the blue semi-precious stone, Lapis Lazuli, that was widely used in their language and clothing. Their weavers thought it fit to insert blue stripes of the stone as borders of plain linen cloth drapes around mummies. The mask of the Egyptian Pharaoh, Tutankhamun, is adorned with these stones. They were very popular in Mesopotamia and Egypt. In powder form, the stone was used as a pigment in such royal pursuits as Cleopatra's eye shadow. Artefacts using the stone, dating back to 9000 years, have been discovered at Bhirrana, the oldest site of the Indus Valley civilisation.

The vibrant blue of indigo became so coveted that it ignited trade wars between European countries, fuelled the African slave trade, and caused untold miseries to peasants in India from whom the Spanish and English colonial traders seized land to grow the indigo plant. The Indigo Revolt of 1859 in Bengal was a violent uprising of farmers against the British planters and the zamindars. It had such a high prize that it was termed ‘blue gold’.

If indigo was initially a part of Sir Isaac Newton’s colour spectrum, it was not surprising because once dyed, indigo is so colourfast that it lasted for millennia. Museums complain about the ‘blue disease’ because the only thing that remains of their ancient tapestries is the blue indigo! The plant was cultivated as far back as 5000 years ago by the people of the Indus Valley civilisation.

The story of the other embodiment of colour blue, the semi-precious stone Lapis Lazuli, is not so steeped in blood. Painters in Europe used it as a raw material for the colour ultramarine, literally meaning "from beyond the sea". Just like indigo, at one point, Lapis Lazuli was more expensive than gold. Even the great Michelangelo could not get enough of it for finishing his paintings.

June 2023

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The colour blue is rare among flowers, animals and humans. But it has fuelled wars and the slave trade, compelled Egyptian priests to use it to adorn the mask of their favourite Pharaoh, and bankrupted many European painters.

Colour sense

All of us would have watched movies where the hero (in some rare cases, the heroine) is desperately trying to defuse a bomb. As the timer races down, he keeps searching for that red wire to cut, among other wires of different colours.

Though we don not defuse bombs every day, colours have their importance in our daily life. Crossing roads would be as dangerous, if we do not watch out for the red signal. For early humans, colours told them which apple is ripe and which flower is poisonous. In the modern world, colour coding and branding have become a necessity for organised living. Even more than colours being useful or necessary, the world is not worth living without the resplendent hues of the sunset, the festival fireworks or the birds and bees.

Colour is actually a fantasy of the brain. Colour photons from the red apple enter the photo-sensitive part of the eye and get processed by colour detectors in the brain. A human eye can detect about 1 million different colours, that is, all the colours in the rainbow plus all possible combinations. But surprisingly, just three detectors, called cones, do all the work.

Most people, and some monkeys, have three cones. Some people have only two cones (sorry gentlemen, they are almost always male). Though we can call this condition ‘colour blindness’, they can still see thousands of colours, same as cats and dogs. We may feel pretty smug that we are better than cats and dogs, but there are some people who have four cones (hurray, ladies, they are all female!). So, when a woman ‘sees red’, it may mean a lot more hues than we imagine! Such women share this privilege with some birds.

But nothing to beat the mantis shrimp which can have up to eight cones. If the world looks colourful for the two-coned male, then just imagine how dazzling it would appear for mantis shrimp. It would be psychedelic!

The whole point, however, is that just do not send guys to defuse bombs with coloured wires.

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Dogs, cats and some men have two-colour detectors in their eyes. Most humans have three detectors and can distinguish a million colours. Some superhuman females and birds have four, but nothing to beat the mantis shrimp which has eight detectors!

July 2023

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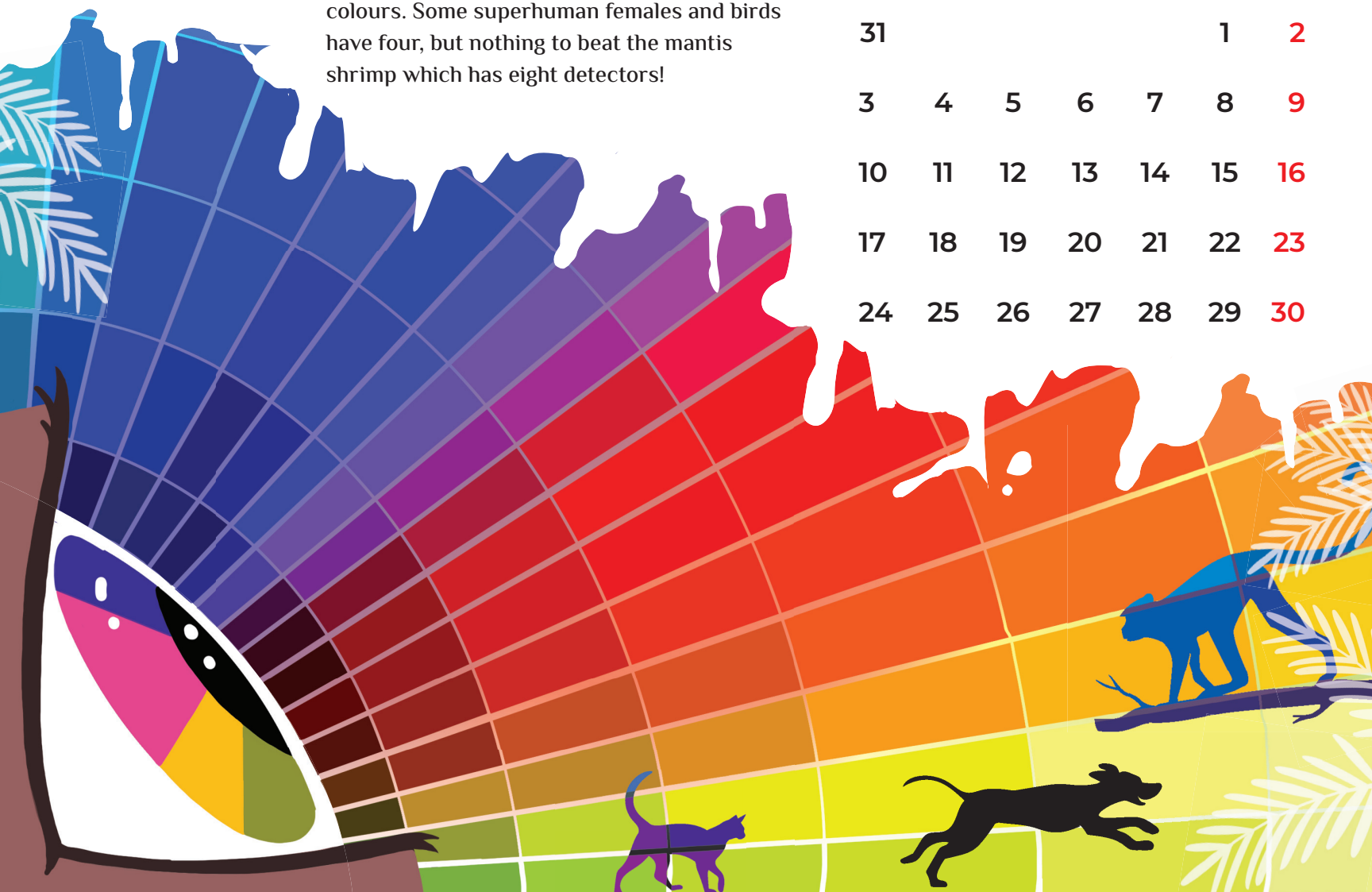

Subverting reality

Camouflage is both about hiding and being seen! It confuses the eye and subverts reality. Well before human beings began using camouflage to express their individuality, signal group affinity or be hidden from danger, plants and animals gifted with this natural phenomenon used it to blend into their environment, attract mates and food among other fascinating exploits.

Mother Nature taught us the technique of camouflaging. Do we know that even some blind animals can change colours to blend themselves into the environment?

Innumerable animals possessed coats and skins that mimicked the colours and patterns of their environments. Moths can match tree barks, frogs blend into moss, bugs have acted as dead ringers for leaves, and snakes mimic the tones of sand. They blend in with their surroundings so they do not attract too much attention. In the wild, both predators and prey use camouflage to their advantage. In the military, before camouflage fatigues were introduced, British soldiers wore highly visible scarlet coats, American soldiers wore blue uniforms, and French soldiers wore bright red pants. Clever soldiers had the smart idea to spread mud on their uniforms in order to go unnoticed.

A tremendous number of multi-hued camouflages now exist, imitating natural woodlands, jungles, deserts, rain forests, oceans, grasslands and more. Today, even civilians wear these camouflage fatigues since they want to stay 'in fashion'. They have become part of 'basics' that anyone must own.

August 2023

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Mother Nature taught us the technique of camouflaging, which is both about hiding and being seen! Do you know that even some blind animals can change colours to blend themselves into the environment?

Isn’t all black and white?

If you ask a scientist, they will tell you, “Black is not a colour, white is a colour”. If you ask an artist, they will tell you, “Black is a colour, white is not a colour”. What is the truth?

Black and white are supposedly not colours because they do not have specific wavelengths. Instead, white contains all wavelengths of visible light. Black, on the other hand, is the absence of visible light. There are numerous theories like additive and subtractive colour theories. However, when it comes to the human eye and day-to-day life, black and white are colours and often the stars of the show. A printer will always tell you that there is nothing more readable than black on white! For an artist, a white canvas symbolises a new start.

After all, colour, in terms of pigment, is every shade and hue found in a brand new box of crayons, and any combination you can make from them. However, colour is simply the range of visible light that humans can see. The human eye is capable of seeing only light with wavelengths between 380 and 750 nanometers.

Black and white are indispensable in our world. Different levels of black and white are common in our fauna and flora from dogs, cats, sheep, gorillas, zebras to naturally occurring gemstones like moonstone, quartz, opal, sapphire, pearl to rice, beans, pepper to lilies, roses and the list goes on and on. As the first pigment used by artists in pre-history and the first ink used by book printers, black and white played an important role in the development of art and literature.

But in the end technically, black and white are not colours – they are just shades. So say the experts! They augment colours. And yet, they do function like colours. They evoke feelings. Can anyone of the razzmatazz colour films of today stand up to Guru Dutt’s celluloid poetry in black and white?

September 2023

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A printer will always tell you that there is nothing more readable than black on white! For an artist, a white canvas symbolises a new start. A scientist, on the other hand, will say that black is an absence of colour.

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Hi, can you glow?

Humans and plants have never quite cracked the evolutionary riddle that makes insects, fish and fungi to glow.

That eery colourful gleam we see in underwater fungi, called fluorescence, is caused by ultraviolet (UV) light, which we cannot see. It is bouncing off an object emitting visible colours.

Fluorescence has shown up in unexpected places, in more species than we imagined, and in surprising ways that have interested the community of scientists.

Some mushrooms glow in the dark to attract insects, which can then pick up the spores and scatter them for reproduction.

The polka-dot tree frog is mostly green with red spots. But under UV light, the whole frog lights up with a blue-green fluorescence. It seems that these frogs need to see each other at night!

It is not uncommon to see coastlines light up with eerie streaks of colours. This is caused by a type of algae called dinoflagellates, which are capable of swimming! They cause an other-worldly spectacle of colours that attracts tourists to the beach at night.

Bees are attracted to blue, but flowers are not genetically made to have blue petals. So they evolved a halo made of reflective nano scales and emit a blue light which bumblebees find hard to resist.

The Atlantic Puffin's beaks are very colourful even under normal light. You have guessed it right. They need the colours to woo their mates. Even the ridges on their beaks have fluorescent properties.

It seems even scorpions glow to see better in the night!

Humans have been able to enhance colours, but they are still a long way off from recognising each other in the dark through fluorescence or lighting up their faces with colours to attract their mates!

October 2023

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Mushrooms glow in the dark, the polka-dot tree frog lights up blue-green, and the already colourfully-beaked puffin has fluorescent ridges. But, humans and plants have never quite cracked the evolutionary riddle that makes insects, fish and fungi to glow.

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Coloured views

We use English expressions like ‘green with envy’, ‘red with rage’, and ‘black sheep’. But then, they are limited only to the English-speaking world. When we look at colours from a historical perspective, we find that their meanings vary depending on culture, place and time. They have political, historical, mythological, religious and linguistic associations.

A few colours do convey a universal meaning. The colour red signifies defiance, sacrifice and revolution at least from the middle ages when warring ships hoisted red streamer flags to declare a fight to death. The banners of the Paris Commune of 1871 were red. It is also the colour of flags of communist parties and trade unions . Because of its association with oxygenated blood perhaps, red also stands for health and vitality.

Throughout history, white has been synonymous with virtue and purity and peace. But it has negative connotations as well. Widows in parts of India were made to wear white as a symbol of renunciation of worldly pursuits.

Black, considered as the absence of colour or white’s nemesis, is often linked with death, fear or sadness. But then black also stands for ‘right to dissent’ as many governments have realised in the modern world.

In many parts of the world, purple symbolised royalty and imperialism. In fact, from ancient Rome to Elizabethan England, ordinary members were forbidden from wearing the colour.

The colour blue has generally been associated with intangibles, such as calm, cool and truth. But in some cultures, it also means sadness and despair.

Green, because the planet is covered with so much chlorophyll, is indisputably associated with prosperity and the environment. But then, why does someone turn green with envy or why do aliens always have green blood?

November 2023

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Colours do not have the same meaning across cultures. The way we see colours has been 'coloured' by years of history, science and practice.

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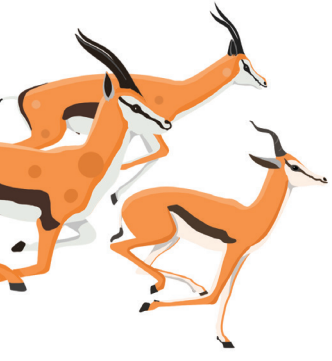
Inadequacy of human colour systems

There are about 10 million colours in the visible spectrum. This makes an awesome combination of some 18 decillion colours, that is, 18 followed by 33 zeroes. No wonder, man's endeavour to develop colour systems has resulted in limited and often disappointing outcomes.

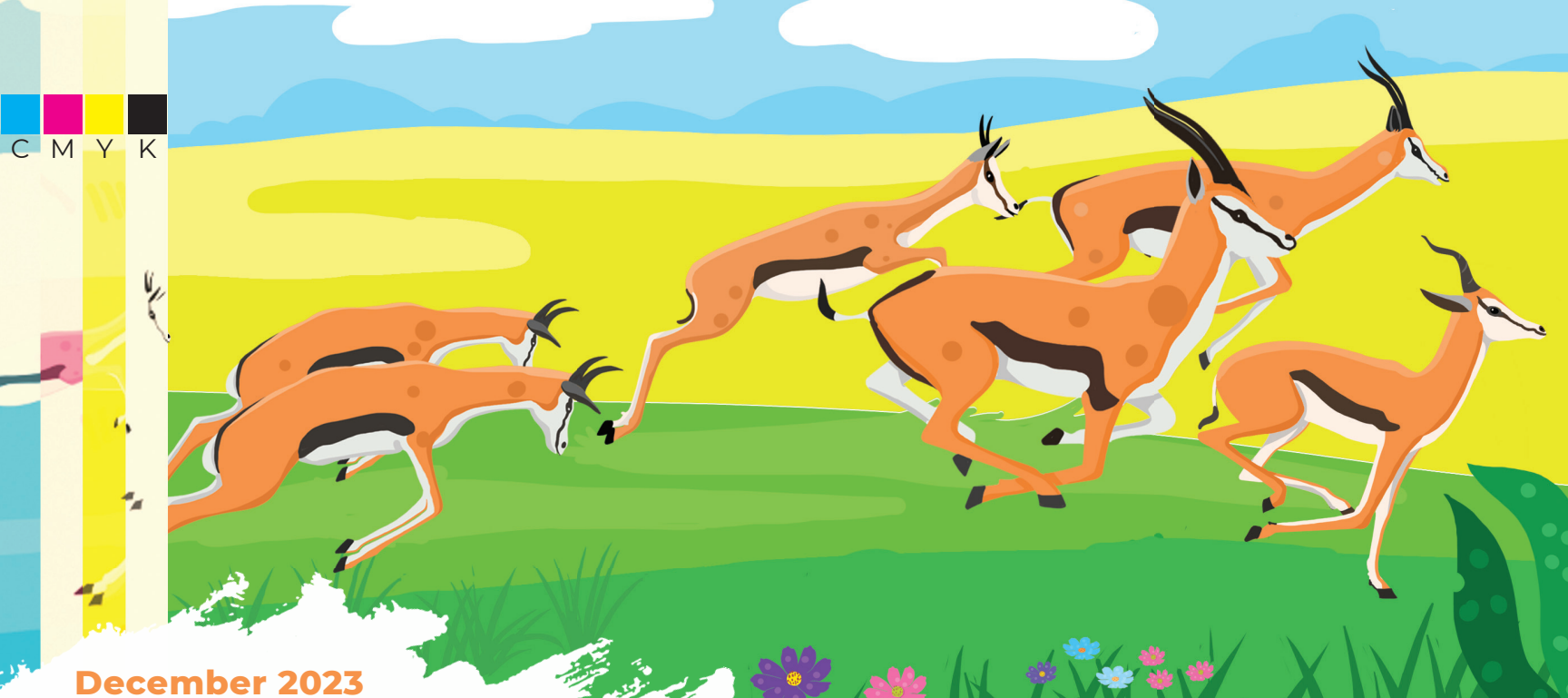
Human experience of colour is highly sophisticated and subjective. The way we see colours is affected by viewing conditions, such as lighting and other colours in the room. We may have observed that men and women view colours differently.

Scientists like Newton looked at colours in a different way from painters like Raja Ravi Varma. It is simply impossible to create a universal colour system to describe or predict colour contrasts and harmony. Moreover, a human being's response to colour depends on gender, age, mood, background and what others perceive. Colour systems have evolved, thanks to the work of Newton, Geothe and others. There are two or three major colour systems now. The additive Red, Green and Blue (RGB) model is a standard for computer screens and other light-based display technologies. By mixing these three colours, designers can get a huge range of colours.



For pigment-based printing, mechanisms use the subtractive Cyan, Magenta and Yellow (CMY) model. Again this particular set of colours can provide a wide range of acceptable colours. Printers add a black ink since these colours do not make a true black, making it CMYK. Another system of Red, Yellow and Blue (RYB) is preferred in the visual arts sector.

However, there is no unified colour theory about which colour combinations are best for certain scenarios. There lies the tale of the inadequacy of the human creative mind in front of nature's colour play.



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Although we have a basic understanding of the colour spectrum, developing colour systems is an infinitely complex task with roots in both science and art. When compared to nature's ability to combine and harmonise colours, human colour systems are grossly unsatisfying.

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2024

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MARCH					
MON		4	11	18	25
TUE		5	12	19	26
WED		6	13	20	27
THU		7	14	21	28
FRI	1	8	15	22	29
SAT	2	9	16	23	30
SUN	3	10	17	24	31

APRIL					
MON	1	8	15	22	29
TUE	2	9	16	23	30
WED	3	10	17	24	
THU	4	11	18	25	
FRI	5	12	19	26	
SAT	6	13	20	27	
SUN	7	14	21	28	

MAY					
MON		6	13	20	27
TUE		7	14	21	28
WED	1	8	15	22	29
THU	2	9	16	23	30
FRI	3	10	17	24	31
SAT	4	11	18	25	
SUN	5	12	19	26	

JUNE					
MON		3	10	17	24
TUE		4	11	18	25
WED		5	12	19	26
THU		6	13	20	27
FRI		7	14	21	28
SAT	1	8	15	22	29
SUN	2	9	16	23	30

JULY					
MON	1	8	15	22	29
TUE	2	9	16	23	30
WED	3	10	17	24	31
THU	4	11	18	25	
FRI	5	12	19	26	
SAT	6	13	20	27	
SUN	7	14	21	28	

AUGUST					
MON		5	12	19	26
TUE		6	13	20	27
WED		7	14	21	28
THU	1	8	15	22	29
FRI	2	9	16	23	30
SAT	3	10	17	24	31
SUN	4	11	18	25	

SEPTEMBER					
MON	30	2	9	16	23
TUE		3	10	17	24
WED		4	11	18	25
THU		5	12	19	26
FRI		6	13	20	27
SAT		7	14	21	28
SUN	1	8	15	22	29

OCTOBER					
MON		7	14	21	28
TUE	1	8	15	22	29
WED	2	9	16	23	30
THU	3	10	17	24	31
FRI	4	11	18	25	
SAT	5	12	19	26	
SUN	6	13	20	27	

NOVEMBER					
MON		4	11	18	25
TUE		5	12	19	26
WED		6	13	20	27
THU		7	14	21	28
FRI	1	8	15	22	29
SAT	2	9	16	23	30
SUN	3	10	17	24	

DECEMBER					
MON	30	2	9	16	23
TUE	31	3	10	17	24
WED		4	11	18	25
THU		5	12	19	26
FRI		6	13	20	27
SAT		7	14	21	28
SUN	1	8	15	22	29

new concept
Centre for
Development Communication

new concept
creativity & collective work transforms