

If you open your eyes, you will see a beam of light. It is the source of colour. Without light, colour is merely an idea suspended in the invisible, waiting to be revealed. Light is the condition that reveals the nature of colour, that which makes it real... just as it is also that which can destroy it.

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In 1704, Isaac Newton published *Opticks*, a revolutionary treatise in which he presented his crucial experiment on light: he arranged two inverted prisms with a lens between them, then caused a ray of sunlight to pass through the first prism, and the white light was broken down into a spectrum of colours. This chromatic beam, focused by the lens, then passed through the second prism and the colours recombined to form the beam of light. This experiment was a milestone in physics, demonstrating that colour exists within white light.

In 1800, William Herschel, whilst measuring the temperature of colours, discovered infrared rays, invisible to the human eye. A year later, Johann Wilhelm Ritter, using photosensitive plates, revealed ultraviolet rays, another form of light that escapes our vision.

Inspired by these ideas, in 1864 James Clerk Maxwell expanded on them by proving that light is an electromagnetic wave and that visible colours correspond to different wavelengths of that wave. In fact, colour does not exist. It is the result of a perceptual experience in which light is captured by the photoreceptor cells of the retina, known as cones and rods, and transformed into electrical impulses that the brain recognises as colours.

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During the nineteenth century, the interest in organising and explaining the fundamentals of colour led to its systematisation through graphical representations, such as Philipp Otto Runge's colour sphere, *Farben-Kugel*, from 1810. This was the first three-dimensional model for colours, which linked their variations in hue, saturation and brightness in a continuous gradient based on their pure representation at the equator of the sphere.

That same year, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe presented his *Theory of Colours*, a philosophical treatise which he defined as “delicate empiricism”. Goethe explored colour as a profound emotion born of the contrast between light and darkness, delving into its symbolic dimension. This work inspired several generations of artists.

Capturing the intense debate surrounding the perception of colour in his time, John Hayter painted *A Controversy on Colour* in 1823, an allegorical work that reflects the differences between scientific theories as interpreted by colour theorists and those practised by painters—that is, artists.

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Colours embody social and political codes. In the West, white represents purity and life, whereas in the East it is associated with death. Black in the West symbolises mourning, whilst in the East it evokes strength and protection. Historically, skin tone has been used to establish privileges and exclusions. In response, the artist Angélica Dass, with her work *Humanae*, confronts us with the extraordinary variety of shades found in the skin.

In art, colour had begun to gradually free itself from reality and form. The luminous atmospheres of Joseph Mallord William Turner, the light divided into pointillist particles by Georges Seurat and the abstract chromaticism of Wassily Kandinsky, charted its evolution towards autonomy. With Kazimir Malevich, colour became the supreme plane.

From this freedom, Yves Klein, with his “International Klein Blue”, created in 1957, conceived colour as an absolute experience in itself. Klein embraced blue in order to achieve immensity through it and immerse viewers in infinity.

Today, in art, colour has taken on the nature of an essential and fully autonomous principle, capable of asserting itself in our sphere of perception and opening another door to emotions.

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In 1979, Roland Barthes, referring to certain works by Cy Twombly, stated that colour is “above all, a pleasure [...] like an eyelid closing, a slight fainting spell”.

It must be seen.

Now, close your eyes. What colours do you see?