

A Life Full of Colour

That we can experience colour has always seemed a miracle to me. There have been quite a few books about colour, and I've read a number of them on individual colours, too. But I love the section in John O'Donohue's book, *Beauty: The Invisible Embrace* about colour.

"The presence and experience of colour is at the very heart of human life. In a sense, we are created for a life full of colour."

When we attend to colour and light, our souls are fed.



The winter is pretty long in Edmonton, at latitude 53. The only months where it reliably doesn't snow are June, July, and August. But who knows with climate change....

So after all the white and drabness of the other season, suddenly we arrive at summer. It can be overwhelming. I wake up often when the [sun rises at 5am](#). ([Sets about 10pm](#)). My eyes fly open. Which honestly, I'm grateful for. In the winter, it's not so easy to get up at 5am.

O'Donohue says, "colour is the language of light." He says, "Light is the greatest unnoticed force of transfiguration in the world: it literally alters everything it touches and through colour dresses nature to delight, befriend, inspire and shelter us. The miracle of colour is a testament to the diverse, precise and ever surprising beauty of the primal imagination." He quotes Goethe, who said, "the eye needs colour as much as it needs light." And he notes that "In a world without colour, it would be impossible to imagine beauty; for colour and beauty are sisters."



In my photography of late, I've been a bit obsessed with using a black background, as you may have noticed in other posts. And O'Donohue talks about the "secret life of black," too. He says:

“In terms of physics, black occurs when an object is absorbing all of the coloured wavelengths. This is why nothing is reflected back. Black represents pure hunger for colour; it exercises no generosity, the eye receives nothing.”

Again, he quotes Goethe, who says, “colours are the deeds and sufferings of light.”

I like that he mentions ink. “Black is also the colour of ink. Books are printed in black ink. There is again some irony here: the most colourful worlds, characters and adventures live inside lines of black narrative. In contrast to prose, a poem leaves more room on the page for the white silence and space to intensify the black lines where the music is distilled.”



Here is a truth that painters will often mention:

“...every colour tends to change in the vicinity of other colours.”



The Russian painter Kandinsky on colour:

“Colour is the keyboard, the eyes are the harmonies, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand that plays, touching one key or another to cause vibrations in the soul.”

Paul Klee:

“Colour links us with cosmic regions. In this it is similar to music. Colour can take on, in the same manner as musical tones, myriad possible shades from the first small steps to the rich flowering the coloured cord.



There is so much we still have to learn about colour. How it affects our souls, how it permeates our bliss, and enlivens us or dampens us.

My painter in the basement talks about colour very frequently, still challenged and engaged with mixing colours on a daily basis, after 30+ years of doing so. He talks about how when he started out it might have taken him half an hour to get the colour he was searching for, and now he's very deft, able to concoct the colour he wants very quickly.



The colours we paint our walls and the colours we surround ourselves with set a tone to our life, I think. The paintings we hang in our houses – obviously I'm biased in this regard, but I think they are extremely important. Which is why this is amusing to me:

“Imagine someone pointing to a place in the iris of a Rembrandt eye and saying: ‘The walls in my room should be painted this colour.’” – Wittgenstein



The photos on this post are from one morning in my backyard. Everything is coming alive in that early light. Which reminds me of the line from the W.S. Graham poem:

“Listen. Put on morning.
Waken into falling light.”



I have really kept close to my heart the advice O'Donohue gives in his book via Blaise Pascal, who said, "In difficult times you should always carry something beautiful in your mind."



In the cold and white winter, I carry the colours and light and the flowers in my backyard.

But also, in the brightness of summer, I carry the beauty of the smooth white snow in my mind. The calm and clarity of it. The silence. The lovely quiet coming down, thousands upon thousands of blessings, blissings.



June 17, 2019

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Transactions with Color (website)

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