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The Emotional Palette: Understanding the Impact of Colours in Art Therapy

Colours are significant in art therapy and can significantly influence mood and emotions.

Research by Biren and Elliot demonstrates that colours are closely tied to various feelings and psychological responses (Biren, 1989; Elliot & Maier, 2014). Kassia St. Clair's "The Secret Lives of Colour" further illustrates how different hues have historically influenced emotions and perceptions (St. Clair, 2016). These works collectively highlight the significant impact of colours on our emotional and psychological states.

Red

- **Emotions: Passion, energy, anger, and excitement.**
- **Effect: Red can stimulate feelings of intensity and urgency. It may raise heart rates and evoke strong emotions, making it helpful in expressing anger or passion.**

Blue

- **Emotions: Calmness, sadness, and tranquillity.**
- **Effect: Blue often promotes feelings of peace and relaxation. It can help alleviate anxiety and create a sense of stability, making it suitable for calming artworks.**

Yellow

- **Emotions: Happiness, optimism, and creativity.**
- **Effect: Yellow is associated with cheerfulness and energy. It can inspire feelings of joy and can stimulate mental activity, making it beneficial for creative expression.**

Green

- **Emotions: Balance, harmony, and growth.**

- **Effect:** Green is often linked to nature and renewal. It can evoke feelings of safety and relaxation, helping reduce stress and promote well-being.

Purple

- **Emotions:** Spirituality, luxury, and introspection.
- **Effect:** Purple can inspire creativity and evoke feelings of mystery. It is often associated with deeper emotional experiences, making it useful for exploring complex feelings.

Orange

- **Emotions:** Enthusiasm, warmth, and encouragement.
- **Effect:** Orange combines red's energy and yellow's happiness. It can promote excitement and motivation, making it an excellent choice for uplifting artwork.

Black

- **Emotions:** Power, elegance, and sadness.
- **Effect:** Black can convey strong emotions, including grief or loss. It may also symbolise strength and sophistication, depending on the context of its use.

White

- **Emotions:** Purity, simplicity, and peace.
- **Effect:** White often represents clarity and new beginnings. It can create a sense of space and lightness, effectively conveying feelings of hope.

Brown

- **Emotions:** Stability, reliability, and comfort.
- **Effect:** Brown is associated with earthiness and warmth. It can create a sense of grounding and security, making it suitable for expressing feelings of comfort or safety.





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Pink

- **Emotions: Love, compassion, and nurturing.**
- **Effect: Pink often evokes feelings of warmth and kindness. It can be soothing and is associated with nurturing relationships.**

Understanding the emotional impact of colours can enhance the therapeutic process in art therapy. Participants can choose colours intentionally to express their feelings, explore their emotions, and facilitate healing.

By recognising how distinct colours affect mood, individuals can create more meaningful and personal artworks that resonate with their emotional experiences.

Full References:

- Birren, F. (1989). *Colour Psychology and Colour Therapy: A Factual Study of the Influence of Colour on Human Life*. New York: Citadel Press.
- Elliot, A.J. and Maier, M.A. (2014). Colour and Psychological Functioning: A Review of Theoretical and Empirical Work. *Psychological Bulletin*, 140(3), pp. 375-407.
- St. Clair, K. (2016). *The Secret Lives of Colour*. London: John Murray.