

Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts Doctoral School

LINGUA SPECTRA

Colour Consciousness and Light Sensitivity in Contemporary Abstract Painting

DLA thesis

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In my doctoral dissertation colour and light are defined through the term of colour consciousness and light sensitivity in contemporary art.

As I am a painter, *colour and light - as phenomenon and means of artistic expression* – are studied parallelly in my dissertation. I establish that the terms ‘*colour consciousness and light sensitivity*’ I use include the term of *colour studies*, however, they differ in their content and role. The term that I use is about the material of information-bearing colour, the nature of faraway energy, its consistent and conscious but inventive and sensible application in fine arts, the possibilities for painterly expression of colour and light and their teaching. In my paper I present those works and artistic situations where aiming experimentality can be grasped together with an art teacher’s attitude and mentality. With my dissertation and masterworks in close connection with it I answer the question whether the painter mixes paints, colours or light.

I.

Brief summary of events preceding my choice of subject

The subject of my study has been determined by my activities as a teacher, a colour theorist and mainly as a painter. I have shown great concern about the question how I can paint ‘*the picture*’, the picture of the world as I see it. Coincidence had also played a role in my decision to carry out a *painterly experiment* in which paint (the material) laid on shaped canvases of abstract geometry and ‘minimal’ meets and interacts with light. Out of the result of this theoretical and practical work lasting for two years an exhibition: *Illumination 3D* opened in Kassák Museum, Budapest in 2009.

The subtitle of my dissertation is based on the fact that in 2011 with a Fulbright artist-researcher scholarship I spent three months in New York City, at the Art Department of Hunter College, The City University of New York.

II.

Goal and structure of the dissertation

The main goal of my thesis is that after forming theoretical bases I demonstrate the actual existence of visual communication via *lingua spectra* by practical examples. In the dissertation I analyse the visible range of the electromagnetic spectrum from three viewpoints:

1. General or theoretical approach: based on the results that clarify the circumstances of the origin of light, the colour and vision sensation and perception process considering electromagnetic radiation as a universal code, a measurable entity which has become the major sensory modality of human beings during evolution.
2. Special or practical approach: while introducing art productions and their creators I put forward the hypothesis that colour conscious and light sensitive painterly mode of expression and its education do exist and seem to expand massively again in contemporary abstract art.
3. Self-reflective approach: I articulate the outcome of my painterly light-colour experiment based on remission, the so called '*non-Newtonian spectrum*', my presumptions in connection with my series of paintings, which are 'site and part-of-the-day specific' and my conclusions concerning the results, which bear out my conception.

III.

Major theses of my dissertation

1.

Having already assumed in accordance with my former studies, in my dissertation I conclude that the Art Department at Hunter College, The City University of New York keeps alive a distinguished tradition of teaching not only modern painting and sculpture or contemporary art history but also artistic colour studies. Former teachers like Robert Motherwell, Robert Morris, Ad Reinhardt, Ray Parker, Tony Smith, Tony Milkowski and Doug Ohlson and their work in this field are highlighted. I discuss at greater length that Sanford Wurmfeld, Vincent Longo, Robert Swain, Gabriele Evertz, contemporary American painters, who embody the term of 'colour conscious and light sensitive painter', continue this tradition.

2.

In *colour consciousness and light sensitivity* I mean an artist-teacher attitude, when besides the deep knowledge of artistic colour studies the creator produces unique, characteristic and inventive works of art, from which colour and light interconnections, presumptions, consequences, in some cases new systems and most of all new conclusions can be reached. In my opinion an artist should prove his knowledge in this field not only during experimental creation but verbal interpretation. In my conclusion, it is exemplary if the piece of art in its

uniqueness becomes curricular interpreted and classified by its creator. I state that just those works are able to achieve this whose viewer gets into a visually active, psychophysically stimulating and sensually touched state besides the interaction of colour and light. This effect can be convincingly demonstrated by Wurmfeld's abstract *Cycloramas*, Swain's *Untitled* and Evertz' large-size *Spectrum* series.

3.

Abstract painters in the 20th century started again to be keenly interested in the Sun and Newton's spectrum. Primer light: *the radiant energy* became the subject matter. In my dissertation I establish and with my 9-piece masterwork, *Illumination 3D+* I prove that in case of the reflected light from the colour-bearing surface of my pictures the phenomenon we see on the wall, the reflected rainbow, is merely similar to the iris created by a prism. I say that on my 'colour-pieces' the incident white light suffers remission, scattered light reflection. During remission out of white light only those wavelengths are 're-reflected' which are reflected by the pigment of the relevant paint-colour in accordance with its material structure. Thus physically existent and visible light gets on the wall. On the illuminated and colour-bearing surface of the paintings interaction between light and paint (material) comes to light, whose result becomes visible on the wall. White light polyphony is transformed by the material structure of the paint into the spectrum that appears on the wall. I, as a painter, call it *non-Newtonian spectrum* and come to the following conclusion: what we see on the wall is the light and the material of the Fifteen Milliard Years.