

Do abstract paintings feel cold or warm?

We found that people do associate what they see with their own eyes with a tactile sensation even in the absence of an obvious parallel. It would be no surprise to find that pictures of a sweater remind us of a woolly texture, but is there something about a picture itself that could cause a similar effect? We showed 60 abstract paintings and asked whether they evoked associations with textures, such as warm or cold, smooth or rough, light or heavy, soft or hard; we firstly showed them on a computer screen, changing the colours of the paintings, and presenting them with natural colors, with inverted colors, and in black and white, then face-to-face at a museum.

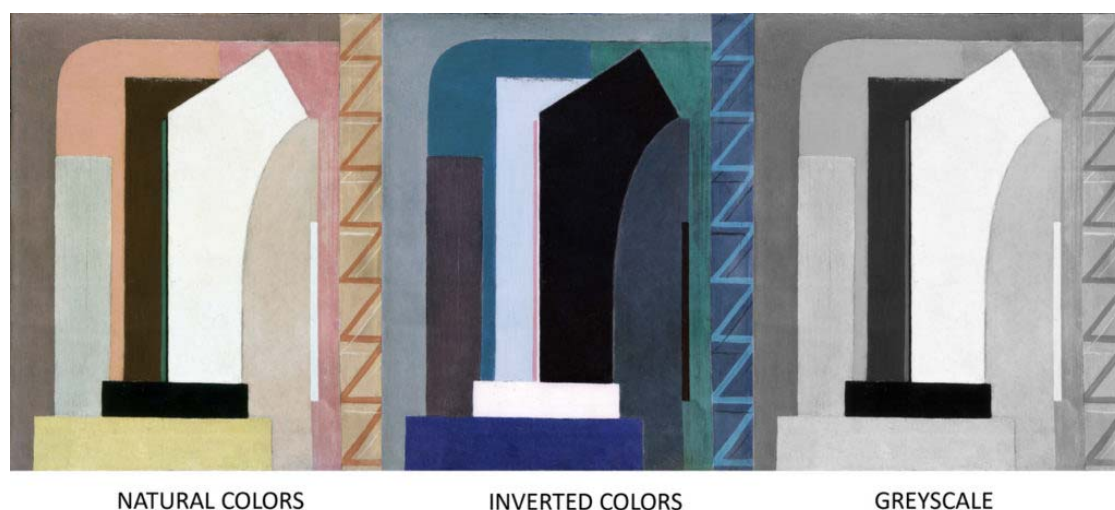


Fig. 1. Example of the stimulus (Ghiringhelli, *Composizione no 7*) presented in three different versions. Copyright MART – Archivio fotografico e mediateca.

Our findings include effects such as black-and-white images toning down sensations of warmth, while leaving associations with cold largely unaffected, and decreasing softness and lightness. The most powerful dimension in the association shows to be warm and cold.



Fig. 2. Example of the stimulus (Soldati, *Idoli*) presented in three different versions. Copyright MART – Archivio fotografico e mediateca.

These findings could be useful to those who wish to evoke specific feelings in the viewers of abstract or stylized drawings, such as logos, and to those who wish to reinforce, or at least not negate, specific reactions in the viewers of an image. For instance, designers of an advert for a summer shirt may wish to avoid using visual effects that are associated with sensations of heat, and may wonder whether the same effects are suitable on printed material and viewed online.

Liliana Albertazzi
*CIMeC (Center for Mind /Brain Sciences) & Department of Humanities,
University of Trento, Italy*

Publication

[The Tactile Dimensions of Abstract Paintings: A Cross-Modal Study.](#)

Albertazzi L, Bacci F, Canal L, Micciolo R
Perception. 2016 Jul