

## Spatial Colorism

*Written by Constant, originally titled "Spatiaal colorisme," and published on the occasion of the Voor een Spatiaal Colorisme exhibit at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1952*

In a reaction to the 'building' of the nineteenth century, where form was often buried under decoration to such an extent as to render the content unrecognizable, the modern architect has ended up concentrating primarily on spatial form, regarding color as secondary and making it subordinate to form.

The architect sees size, proportion, and structure as the basic elements of 'pure' spatial form. It is chiefly these elements that underpin an architectural design in which space is conceived as colorless.

The execution of a design based primarily on form begins with a conflict: the conflict between idea and matter, between form and color.

The architect is inclined to keep color passive: he minimizes the number of colors and avoids intense colors. But color is unavoidably introduced by way of material, finishing, and furnishings.

This color, added at a later stage, is a chance element as far as the design is concerned, and does not make any real contribution to the spatial plasticity.

As a consequence, color's enormous space-creating potential is reduced to a matter of chance and because of this the spatial effect itself is always deficient.

Eliminating color, which is just as important a determinant of space as architectural form, precludes unity of form and color.

### **The realistic spatial conception is the conception of space in color.**

It goes without saying that the spatial use of color has nothing to do with the use of color for decorative or 'functional' purposes.

Nor can the use of color as a means of correcting a defective size or form by means of optical illusion be counted as a plastic use of color because in this instance form remains passive with respect to color. Nonetheless, the use of color as a corrective carries an implicit recognition of its three-dimensional qualities.

Spatial form and spatial color can only form an indissoluble unity if they develop at the same time and in relation to one another.

What holds for painting on a flat surface also holds for the spatial conception of color:

**Color is nothing but the color of the form and form is nothing but the form of the color.**

So a spatial conception of color entails more than the use of color in the creation of architectural spatial effects. The absolute unity of form and color, in other words the purely plastic use of color, takes the architect into the domain of painting.

The result, however, is an architecture based on a visual reality in which form and color are one, rather than on abstracted formal elements; and painting in which the color is not used for personal expression but is systematically used for immediate plastic effect.

Spatial colorism is therefore a totally new plastic art with its own independent laws, and with a potential far outstripping that of both architecture and painting. Spatial colorism elevates the schematic form to physical form and is for this reason an indispensable expressive factor in the human creation of space in the broadest sense of total human settlement.

Even the concept of color plasticity familiar in painting acquires new meaning in space. The spatial conception of color not only puts an end to centralized composition but also to the 'simultaneity' of color effects: the experience of color plasticity will take place in time.

Moreover, the 'scale,' the ratio of color to human dimensions, becomes crucially important when the closed character of the painting is replaced by the space around us.

The development of spatial colorism as a spatial conception and the realization of space in color, demands close contact between painters and architects.

Furthermore it is important that, rather than remaining specialists in their own carefully circumscribed field, they should work together as a 'team' in pursuit of a common goal.

This goal is not the amalgamation of architecture and painting, as in the baroque, but a higher order of three-dimensional reality that surpasses both and in which color and space are inconceivable one without the other.

**Spatial colorism is not a theory but a practice.**

## **BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE**

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