



Raining at Sunset
Laura Kane, Framingham State University

Keywords: synesthesia, color hearing, applique, patternmaking

Purpose The purpose of this project is to adapt the garment design process used by creative design scholar Jessica Ridgeway into a new original garment design. Ridgeway’s previous design work titled *Color Hearing: Bridal Chorus* and *Color Hearing: Baby It’s Cold Outside* utilizes the process of psychomimicry in order to replicate the phenomenon of synesthesia (Ridgeway, 2017; Ridgeway, 2018) to develop original textile prints. In this project, titled *Raining at Sunset*, a similar method is used to create an original textile print, applique motif, and machine embroidery motif based on the song *Raining at Sunset* by mandolinist Chris Thile.

Context Psychomimicry is defined as the process of “mimicking” or replicating a psychological phenomenon through a physical outlet or expression (Jonsson, 2014). In the case of Ridgeway’s work and this project the psychological phenomenon being mimicked is synesthesia. Synesthesia is defined as a “phenomenon in which ordinary stimuli...elicit experiences like colors, tastes, and spacial recognitions (Lunke & Meier, 2018). In other words, synesthesia occurs when one experience like sound is interpreted in the brain as color or taste. In the case of this project and Ridgeway’s work, music is interpreted as color or patterns.

Synesthesia has frequently been used in creative fields to boost creative output, interpret psychological and cognitive behavior, and inspire artists (Lunke & Meier, 2019). Synesthesia has also been used to inspire other ITAA designers. For example, Sun Young Choi used synesthesia for their designs *Pronounced Illusion I* (2018) to create layered optical illusion prints.

Method Ridgeway’s design process utilizes a coding schema to transpose individual notes as colors. Each note in the song is assigned a color, and the print is developed by “playing” the song with each color. For this reason, she has used songs that are in the public domain, and sheet music is regularly available. For this project, the song *Raining at Sunset* by Chris Thile was used as direct inspiration. Due to there being no existing sheet music of this song, a new method was adopted to develop the print motifs.

Thile describes the song in his liner notes of his album “I was playing on the front porch of my parent’s house one evening as the sun went down when...well...you read the title! I tried to emulate the situation on mandolin and this was the result.” Thile used synesthesia to interpret the visual experience of a stormy sunset into music. In this project we reverse the process.

Rather than using the actual music notes, each instrument in the song was interpreted as a different color. The song contains a mandolin, fiddle, dobro, guitar, and bass. Each instrument was assigned a color to reflect the image of a stormy sunset. Each color was assigned based on the “warmth” of the tone and the “space” the instrument takes up in the song (both terms Thile uses to describe his songwriting process). The bass was assigned to deep purple, guitar a dusty blue, dobro a deep red, fiddle a warm orange, and the mandolin a bright yellow.

© 2021 The author(s). Published under a Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

ITAA Proceedings, #78 - <https://itaonline.org>

The song was imported into the Audacity music software so the entire soundwave of the song could be viewed. Using screen capture technology, the entire soundwave was turned into a photograph that could then be imported into Adobe Illustrator. The soundwave was loosely traced into a vector design using the pen tool. The jagged edges of the motif were rounded off slightly for ease of cutting and stitching the motif in fabric.

Process The silhouette of the garment and seaming details were placed to reflect an undulating wave, similar to the shape of the sound wave itself and also the flowing motion of storm clouds. The patterns of the garment were developed using draping and flat patterning.

The large soundwave on the bottom of the garment is a full size recreation of the entire song from start to finish. The song itself is broken up into various solos by each instrument, so there are distinct sections of the song where the instrumentation becomes lively and energized and then settles back down to begin a new melodic motif. The soundwave was vectorized in Adobe Illustrator and duplicated and scaled down for each color. Each color in the sound wave was printed off individually into paper templates using a Cricut machine. The templates were used to trace each motif onto suede which was then cut out by hand. The layers were then applied onto each other using free motion embroidery on a straight stitch machine.

In order to create the embroidered collar and cuffs a segment of the song was cut from the original sound wave vector and imported into the digitizing software Embrilliance Stitch Artist 2. The segment of the song used is the “Stuart and Edgar Show” as described by Thile in his liner notes for the song. This segment of the song takes place from 3 minutes 28 seconds to 5 minutes 48 seconds. The vector was traced by hand into the 5 different thread colors and stitched out on a 5x7 hoop on a Brother PE-800 embroidery machine on the navy blue suede.

The purple, dusty blue, red, orange, and yellow suede was also cut into hundreds of strips measuring 2.5”x 5/8” and sewn into a jagged strip of trim for the piping detail. Each stripe was alternated by the order of how the colors appear in the main sound wave motif.

The center back and front of the garment feature an original print design using the full soundwave of the song formed into a thin stripe motif. The print was created in Adobe Illustrator. The fabric was printed on ponte knit from Spoonflower.com. The garment itself is fully lined, features silk organza bishop sleeves, and an invisible back zipper.

Contribution This garment builds upon the work of previous ITAA scholars, specifically the use of synesthesia and color hearing by Jessica Ridgeway. This garment adapts her methods of assigning colors to notes by instead assigning colors to instruments. This garment also is unique in that the original song was written using synesthesia to interpret colors and visual experiences into music and this garment represents a re-interpretation of the song back into colors. Further use of this method will be applied to another song from the same album that is based on a specific geographical location.

Works Cited

- Choi S., (2018) “Pronounced Illusion I”, *International Textile and Apparel Association Annual Conference Proceedings* 75(1).
- Jonsson,S. (2014, January 25). Psychomimicry. Retrieved from Medium.com:
<https://medium.com/@stinajonsson/psychomimicry-bbc8c9a8eff2>
- Lunke, K., & Meier, B. (2019). Creativity and involvement in art in different types of synaesthesia. *British journal of psychology (London, England : 1953)*, 110(4), 727–744.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/bjop.12363>
- Ridgway J. L., (2017) “Color Hearing: Bridal Chorus”, *International Textile and Apparel Association Annual Conference Proceedings* 74(1).
- Ridgway J., (2018) “Color Hearing: Baby it’s Cold Outside”, *International Textile and Apparel Association Annual Conference Proceedings* 75(1).

