



# Analyzing the Aesthetic Components of Color in the Works of Coffee Shop Painters

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**Abstract:** *The coffee shops paintings, in general, are the reflection of desires, interests, myths, and national and religious beliefs; meanwhile, they represent the ruling cultural spirit of the middle class in the urban community in Iran. This kind of painting has got its own special features and components which should be investigated in its own place, separately. One of the important aspects of these features is the aesthetic one which the current paper attempted to investigate. That said, the main purpose of the current study was to investigate the aesthetic features in the paintings of Hossein Gholler Aghasi. The main research questions were: How did the coffee shop painters use color to create artistic works? Did the painters pay attention to the concepts and effects of colors in their work? What colors have been used in coffee shop paintings and for conveying which concepts? How did the coffee shop painters use color and which components were included in their paintings? Moreover, in the current study, the combination of colors, the harmony of colors, the cold and warm colors, and their concepts, as well as the ratio of the function of colors to objects and geometric shapes were examined. The results of this thesis show that Agassi has a full understanding of the components and principles of linguistic, the concepts of colors, harmony, and the combination of different colors. Accordingly, in each of the types of coffee houses (Religious, Martial, and lyrical), the right harmony gives geometric shapes with appropriate colors and a decent character has been done through any color.*

**Keywords:** *Hossein Gholler Aghasi, Coffee Shop Painting, Aesthetic, Color*

## INTRODUCTION

Owing to its themes, the coffee shop paintings can be divided into three general groups including martial, lyrical, and religious. The most portion, in this regard, is devoted to religious paintings which are about the themes of Ashura and events related to the Karbala. However, apart from these three general themes, examples of other themes, such as aspects of everyday life of people, are sometimes the subject of these paintings. Though these narrative folk paintings have been developed for the first time in the Constitutional Revolution, one can trace them to the earlier arts and history of this land (Talbert et al., 2007). Researchers often attribute the history of religious folk painting to the Safavieh era although, in some cases, one can refer to other influential factors which are regarded as the pioneer ones. They also point out that the life of the primitive human being was affected by two factors which were beyond their control: darkness and light; the night and day. The night which creates an environment that stops human activity and the day in which human work and do activity. In paintings in all periods, the colors are similarly conceptualized, sometimes moving, and sometimes residing; in some parts with hope and in some parts with failure. Moreover, all of the

color uses are based on knowledge and awareness of the impact of color on contributing to reach the purpose. In this research, it was tried to examine the position and role of color in the works of coffee shop painters.

#### **Related Studies:**

Narges Zaker Ali (2015) in his book "The Drawing of Coffee Contemplation of National and Religious Culture", focuses on the influence of Iranian culture on the effects of national and religious culture on the art of coffee house painting.

Bazaran Ismailzadeh (2012) in his article entitled "The Impact of Traditions on Coffee Painting", investigated the cafe painting and its origins in the mourning, narratives, proverbs and ta'zieh traditions.

Hasan Isma'ilzadeh (2015), in his book "Hasan Ismael Zadeh School Cafe Painting", has studied painting in the tradition of a coffee house.

#### **Methodology**

In terms of purpose, this article is part of a development study aimed at enhancing knowledge in the field of "Analyzing the Aesthetic Components of Color in the Works of Coffee Shop Painters" In terms of the nature of the data, it is a component of qualitative research and its method is descriptive-analytical, which has been based on library and documentary studies.

#### **Results and Discussion**

"Aesthetics" is referring to a word meaning beauty. An idiomatic meaning can be found by referring to the world's most reliable encyclopedias. The Wikipedia encyclopedia states: "Aesthetics in the broad sense of the word is a theory about beauty which has both the meaning of beauty: Natural beauty and artistic beauty." Moreover, the Britannica encyclopedia in the explanation of this term, wrote: "aesthetic is referring to the exact form, the theory of beauty or, to a much broader degree, expresses the philosophy of art."

The traditional enthusiastic to aesthetic was spread extensively in the 18th century to the extent that it reached a lofty place. Since 1950s, and later on, some of the concepts of aestheticism have been spread to the discussion of literature. They were expanded with the precise analysis of the artistic aspects that are being replaced. The focus on the aesthetics that appears in this paper was based on these recent advances in modern times (Yousefian, 2000).

Therefore, after studying a variety of ideas about aesthetics and its concepts and questions, we will talk about the value of the aesthetic experience and its diversity. Before we go into the issues that separate the field of art from pure aesthetics, we focus on fundamental concepts. This opens the way to some of the basic meanings of art.

The rationale for choosing this issue to investigate was that the coffee shops' paintings have completely Iranian characteristics. Moreover, they are directly coming from the painters' mind without the use of foreign themes. It is the lack of accurate attention to anatomy and perspective which peaked in late Qajar and early Pahlavi. The main issue, absolutely, the main purpose of this study was to explain how the consciousness evolution (aesthetic) was developed and how to adapt the motive governing its creation process and the aesthetic components. Furthermore, the question is that what similarities can be found among the methods of using color by the coffee shop painters and how these concepts are formed.

Until now, no independent works have been done about it. However, in the myriad works on paintings and related topics, there has been a talk concerning the function of colors, the concepts of colors, and also their symbolic concepts of colors. There are also works on the paintings of coffee shops, including the book "Coffee Shops Paintings, a Demo of National and Religious Culture" by Narges Zaker Ali. In this book, she uses an Iranian cultural perspective to investigate the effects of national and religious culture on the paintings of coffee shops. The book consists of four chapters, "Coffee Shops Painting", "How the National and Religious Culture Affect the Formation of Coffee Shop Painting", "Repetitive Issues in Coffee Shop Paintings" and "How

the National and Religious Culture Affects the Repetition of Issues". Additionally, the paper of the influence of traditions on the coffee shop paintings by Kheizaran Ismaelzadeh investigated the coffee shops' paintings and the roots of its formation in the traditions of mourning, narration, Pardehkhani, and Ta'ziyeh. In the works of painting in all periods, the colors of the paintings were similarly conceptualized. Moreover, they sometimes show the movements and stillness; and sometimes hope and failure. All of these issues are due to the ways in which colors are conceptualized to convey the ideas.

What makes research important regarding the issue is the position and role of color in the painting of the coffee shops which needs to be examined. More often than not, every color is psychologically meaningful. The color has always been a means of expressing and communicating feelings and ideas, so that one can speak in the language of colors. In a specific social system, one color may have a meaning which is in opposition to other systems. For example, in some Mozambique societies, black is a color of joy and happiness. The color of red almost everywhere implies the power because it is the symbol of blood which in its own place is the symbol of life.

The things which are most important regarding colors are the psychological and conceptual contents of them. Everyone knows the warm colors (red, yellow, orange) and cool colors (blue, green, purple). The warm colors are stimulating, causing movement, and leading to joy and happiness. While cold colors, on the contrary, cause passive states of stagnation, immobility, and incitement to sadness.

These values can be discussed in three categories:

1. Visual beauty of colors
2. Sensual beauty of colors
3. Symbolic beauty of color

The beauty and the mental state of color are roughly dependent on the artistic education, architectural, and commercial projects. These beauties, both qualitatively and intrinsically, are only understandable to those who are conscious and sympathetic to the colors and their features. Moreover, people who have a good connection with the colors in order to see these qualities by looking at them can understand colors. The color reveals its aspects and appearances to all; however, it reveals its mysterious characteristics only to people who love it.

Among the ancient societies, people used colors only for the values which the colors have symbolically. They utilized the colors to recognize each social, cultural, or religious class having their own color which symbolizes the class.

Without the variation in the symbolic features of the colors, the visual works do not have emotional power of imitative and vulgar works. The works in which the focus are only on emotional aspects, with no content and without visual aspects, make the work merely a matter of feeling. The colors are obtained by decomposing light on the prism, which is the result of this color separation, can be placed in a circle known as the Etinger cycle. The color is most powerful tool of an internal designer and decorator. Color can also bring the atmosphere of the area in which you live into your room, reconstructing certain conditions in space, and inducing humans.

In all spaces, the first thing that attracts human attention is color. We can extend or limit the space with colors.

### **Objectives of the study**

1. Investigating the peculiarity of the works of coffee shop painters
2. Investigating the role of color in the works of coffee shop painters

### **Main Research Questions**

1. How did the coffee shop painters use color to create artistic works?
2. Did the painters pay attention to the concepts and effects of colors in their work?
3. What colors have been used in coffee shop paintings and for conveying which concepts?
4. How did the coffee shop painters use color and which components were included in their paintings?

Instructing some Iranian painters in Europe led Iranian paintings to be more influenced by European techniques and styles. This caused to destroy the national painting style that existed before (e.g. Herat style, Tabriz or Isfahan styles) (Bently, 1997). This process began at the end of the Safavieh period, and extends during the Zand and Qajar periods. Naturalism had got its lofty place in the middle of the 14th century. Moreover, the multiplicity of choosing subjects of paintings were very widespread and evident. It was the characteristic of the eclectic method and elapsing through the stage of traditional painting (Bently, p. 78).

Although there was no state art school in the Qajar period, there was a kind of socioeconomic classification which went beyond local boundaries among the painters of this period. First, there were the painters in the court and politicians who painted oil paintings, lacquer paintings, artistic and copywriting, and visualization for the magazines, journals, and travelogue of the king.

The second group referred to the painters who provided their works for sale on the market, and also they prepared some of their featured works for lithography. The third group served as industrial advocates. They produced various designs for tile industry, as well as architects. The painters of coffee shops and curtains belonged to this category.

Religious oil paintings often had painted in large sizes. They were called generally as "coffee shop painting", "imagination", "Pardehkhani", "Darvishi curtain", "narrating", reading icon" None of these colors have been selected without purpose.

At the beginning of the Qajar period, and because of the feudal conditions and structure of the society, the customers of artistic goods and artists' supporters were mainly from the highest class of the society, and the artists clearly perceived their artistic life as dependent on them. Hence, most works were produced in the form of formal art. Color variation was quite evident. However, with economic developments and the emergence of reformist thought, gradually in the late Qajar era, most of the customers, who had previously been dependent on the government, had a more independent role. Although the recruitment of the small business class as a social class failed to fill the gap created by the collapse of the court's supporters and royal workshops, it brought more limited and cheaper orders to popular subjects for artists. Additionally, the presence of this kind of art in the society and the popular folk painting with epic-religious themes had become widespread.

The coffee shop paintings started to emerge with the Constitutional movement based on the traditions of religious and folk art and created by the artists who did not go school. It got its lofty place in the Pahlavi era. The researchers considered the history of religious folk painting in Iran to the Safavieh period - when Shi'ism spread. For example, in the walls of Imam Zadeh Zeyd (Isfahan), some scenes from the Karbala incident had been depicted (Iyazyan et al., 2002).

The main feature of these works was that they were very far from the atmosphere and the tastes of the court. It is only in the style of clothes which the Safavieh court was reflected in these paintings.

It is certain that, over the past few centuries, a variety of styles of painting inspired by rural culture, along with formal art, and court grew. However, the painting, called coffee shop, is a different and recent movement. This kind of painting of national aspirations and interests, religious beliefs, and the spirit of the culture of the particular layers of the urban community opened up some more recent phenomena than other folk art forms including Pardehkhani, wall painting of the holy shrine, glass painting with religious themes, and so on.

Ferdowsi's Shahnameh, Nezami's Khamsay's stories, Karbala's events, Quranic stories and folk tales are the main themes of these paintings. The painter depicted these issues in accordance with a description of the language of the narrator, the hypocrite, the Madah, and the Rudz-khan; as depicted in the minds of the people of the society (Pourhosseini, 2015).

Since this type of painting was often displayed at the coffee shops, and simultaneously, it was ordered there; the act of painting was done there too. Given that, the coffee shop was the venue for the painters and their colleagues. Hence, this name was given to this group of artists (Ostovar et al., 2012).

The coffee shop was the center of the economic activities of the underprivileged classes and the place for solving their problems. It belonged to all peoples and markets, and most of the issues of society were discussed there. It was a place for narration, citing poems, and rhetoric. Moreover, it was the place which workers and the employees met each other and issue their contracts.

The coffee shop painting, in general, reflects the interests, ambitions, myths and beliefs of the national and religious rulers on the middle and lower classes of the urban community of Iran. The illustrated paintings of the coffee shops have, generally, religious or literary origins.

Nowadays, coffee shop painting is called "imaginative painting". Because this painting is painted based on the imagination of the artist on the screen. The painter does not have a model, s/he hears or reads part of the story, and then paints. For example, part of the story of Ashura is depicted in a narrative form.

The coffee shop painting shows us three cultural dimensions: First, the religious themes from the early days of Islam to the present day, the epic of Ashura and the Qur'ān's stories, and other materials related to each of the Imams (AS). It is not also like a painting which is painted on small boards but it is painted on large curtains with oil paintings, which they call it reading the curtain. To draw these boards, the pencils with a width of 4 cm to two zeros and zero are used.

Second, the epic pieces from Ferdowsi's Shahnameh show the stories of Rumi and the great poets. It is the coffee shop painter who creates Iranian cultures with great curtains, like a film on the screen of the cinema. A coffee shop painting is different from the painting of naturalism and realism. Naturalism and realism may provide visual pleasure, but coffee shop painting shows the style of the coffee shop of Iranian civilization and culture to the world.

Third, the Iranian traditions are depicted through coffee shop paintings. For example, Sangak bread (an Iranian bread) sale, pilgrims returning from the pilgrimage, the ceremony of sacrificing the sheep, etc. These traditions are kept alive by these curtains.

Coffee shops paintings, in general, are the reflection of desires, interests, myths, and national and religious beliefs; meanwhile, they represent the ruling cultural spirit of the middle class in the urban community in Iran. Many of the coffee shop paintings consist of religious pictures with a look toward the important event of Ashura.

The features of such pictures, both in curtain and tiles, in terms of meaning are related to their characterizations. It is so because the main character of the event is always more important (bigger) than the sub-characters.

The hero of the event is advocated the best and most space in the configuration.

The configuration of the pictures was very complex, and it was due to adding the subsidiary meetings to the main one.

In the characterization, the painters used certain visual contracts to emphasize the positive or negative aspects of the characters. The painter's efforts in representing the scenes and displaying the apparent and innate attributes of individuals are heavily influenced by painter's favor on the forces of goodness and one cannot see the failure in his/her face, ever. In characterization, the goal of the painter was the clarity and simplicity of expression in order to influence the audience at most. More often than not, they wrote the name of the character beside the image and color was the main element to do so.

The painter's carefulness, verboseness, and hardworking are evident in the paintings of motifs. The painter has used more outstanding techniques of exhilaration. However, at the time of creating the work which was influenced by religious concepts, the painter did not pay attention to the rules. Although the vast majority of the coffee shop painters were not academically instructed and learnt it through experimenting it, they were skillful in using the color in particular places.

The painters who were aware of the Maqatl (copies of Ta'ziyeh), knew all the historical rumors of myths and traditions related to the events in Karbala. They used the folk culture and beliefs of the people to draw the curtains. While adherence to the narrative of events was very important, it was not prevented the

imagination and allegory creation of the painter. In the paintings of a coffee shops, the face of Seyyed-al-Shohada (AS) and Imam Sajjad (AS) had always been covered, and the rest of the characters, including the men of the family, and Imam's followers, and Ashqya were apparent. However, from the middle of Qajar era, the painters tried to make the face of Imams apparent. From this time on, the painters had no uncertainty about either covering or uncovering the faces (Lerner, 2007).

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The second group referred to the painters who provided their works for sale on the market, and also they prepared some of their featured works for lithography. The third group served as industrial advocates. They produced various designs for tile industry, as well as architects. The painters of coffee shops and curtains belonged to this category (Alexander et al., 2002).

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The coffee shop paintings started to emerge with the Constitutional movement based on the traditions of religious and folk art and created by the artists who did not go school. It got its lofty place in the Pahlavi era. The researchers considered the history of religious folk painting in Iran until the Safavieh period - when Shi'ism spread exponentially. For example, in the walls of Imam Zadeh Zeyd (Isfahan), some scenes from the Karbala incident have been depicted.

The main feature of these works was that they were very far from the atmosphere and the tastes of the court. It is only in the style of clothes which the Safavieh court was reflected.

It is certain that, over the past few centuries, a variety of styles of painting inspired by rural culture - along with formal art and court - grew. However, the painting, called coffee shop, is a different and recent flow. This kind of painting of national aspirations and interests, religious beliefs, and the spirit of the culture of the particular layers of the urban community opened up some more recent phenomena than other folk art forms including Pardehkhani, wall painting of the holy shrine, glass painting with religious themes, and so on.

Each color is the product of a reflection of a range of white light to our eyes. For example, all the colors of the white light spectrum are absorbed when reflected upon a rose flower except the red color which is reflected in our eyes. Perhaps, we are surprised to think differently about the diversity of colors in nature, but we will be more surprised if we know that the origin of all these colors is only three colors. In the traditional theory of color, red, yellow, and blue are the main colors because their origin is not obtained from the combination of

any other color. On the contrary, all the other colors come from the different combinations of these three colors.

Colors can be symbols and signs of appropriate life, thinking style, and beliefs of different societies. Sometimes, some interpretations of colors will be taken place which are rooted in our relationship with the colors in the nature. Moreover, this can be the result of the effects which the colors have directly and indirectly on our minds.

**Yellow:** Yellow is the brightest and shiniest in purity, and its types are also found in nature. Bright yellow is a symbol of knowledge, human understanding, spiritual illumination and light. The orange yellow color shines sharply, and when placed besides the red color, it is added to glory and splendor. Shining of yellow over blue makes it splendid and increases the purity and depth of water.

**Red:** Red reflects the extreme inflammation and internal energy. It is a symbol of life, emotion, power and revolutionary uprising. A charming red color which illuminates youthfulness and vitality, is a sign of fierce love and an overwhelming desire to live. In contrast to the passion and inflammation that erupts from the red, it is a smooth, blue light which can be seen. The blue color is an intrinsic and cool color, but it is spiritually deep and respectful.

It has a celestial force which can invite its audience through internal reflection.

**Green** is the color of spring and the nature. Green is the color of hope and new life. This color, which comes from the combination of yellow and blue, shows knowledge and spiritual faith.

**Orange** reflects puberty, youthfulness and cheerfulness. This is an exciting, motivating, and joyful color that is not easy to tolerate. However, when it is put besides the other colors, it adds to their vitality and creates a lot of visual energy. The orange heat reaches its peak alongside the water. It provides a cold and warm contrast with an undeniable quality.

The violet is a mysterious and ambiguous color which opposes the clarity and brightness of the yellow with its vague darkness. When goes to purple, violet becomes frightening. Moreover, when, it goes to blue, violet becomes mysterious. Since the eighteenth century, aesthetic advocates tried to use scientific methodology as used in physics, chemistry, or biology. However, it was revealed that in contrast to the natural science, it has got emotional effect and could not be investigated experimentally as it could be done for other fields such as inanimate or living organisms such as rabbit.

For the time being, while aesthetics is not a new science, it has not progressed due to two barriers in its way. On the one hand, aesthetics, like psychology, has a direct relationship with internal worlds of human beings such as perception and affection, sadness, happiness, beauty, will and instinct. On the one hand, its concept and sentences are strictly relative; that is, each one or each group interprets aesthetic concepts to their own will and brings us to the principles or patterns that guide the process of creating art and accepting art. Although aesthetics scholars do not coincide with the criteria of beauty, they regard any object or phenomenon that is appealing to the art as beautiful, either having natural or artistic scope (Yousefian, 2000).

Objects are symbolic in paintings. Aghasi pays attention to geometric shapes including square and circle, and sometimes to the triangle. Triangles have an invasive, keen and explicit form. The triangle is a symbol of thought and light and is rapidly changing. A color that is appropriate to define characteristics of triangles and shows its character perfectly is yellow. These characteristics can be seen in objects which have triangle shapes above the tenets.

Furthermore, the effect of colors over the objects are well-illustrated. The yellow and red surfaces seem to be close to one another. To display the images, smoothly, Aghasi uses short wavelength colors (purple, blue, green) and shows the relax feeling through long wavelength colors such as (yellow and red). By using experience and recognizing colors, Aghasi tries to create visual balance and harmony among colors. In the paintings of the tea room, the use of the geometric shape of the circle and the curved lines in most architectural indices of the coffee shops is an infinite and immortal movement and creates a feeling of calm.

The effect of the symbolic shape of the circle is from the enamel dome of the sky. It is a symbol of the spiritual aspects which shows the depth of thought and stability.

Aghasi has somehow used yellow in a way that one can see its effect on animating the components of the painting (tea room). As the color of the sun grabs the attention of human, Aghasi has used this color to express the important role of the coffee shops in his era. Spacing is not realistic at all, and time and space collapse, the size of the bodies also changes frequently, and in different scenes that are temporally unrelated, the dimensions are also spatially small, with a small scene.

Aghasi has noted the color-geometric shapes' matching. For instance, the square, which is the symbol of matter, is in line with the red color, which in its place is also a symbol of materiality, clarity, and dignity. In Aghasi's paintings, there is no disturbance of colors and roles to each other. "The main feature or remarkable feature of his art [Aghasi] was his immense belief in adhering to the principle of the beauty and sweetness of the pen in the work of imaginative painting, to the extent that he said: If a red-flashing was fitted with the figure of the painting, it would have no difficulty to turn a lush plain to fire or to turn the fire into a green land. We are obliged to draw beautiful paintings. We have to tolerate cavils and problems at the expense of maintaining our taste" (Seif, 1990). In fact, the colors themselves speak to the audience and somehow describe the characters of the story.

The determining factors are the authorities, clothing or goodness. In designing the modes and movements of the authorities, the painter tries to create a state of relaxation and combine it with firmness. The main character of the event is always larger than the sub-characters, and in combining, the greatest space is allocated to the hero. Characters and their dependence to good and evil troops have been depicted with the clarity and simplicity of the use of symbols such as green and white colors to induce calm and beauty in the troops of good. Moreover, the painters use sharp colors and frightened eyes for the evil troops are fully characterized. Details and The peculiarities of this type of painting are influenced by the traditional Persian painting.

Naturalistic techniques such as perspective and prominence were partly recognized and used by the painter. However, they were often ignored for religious reasons. The type of perspective in Aghasi used is Maghami, which means that the main character is greater than the subordinates. For example, in the drawing of the real battle of Karbala, the heroes such as Hazrat Seyyed-ul-Shohada (AS) and Imam Abolfazl (AS) are painted more elaborately compared with other people. In fact, the ignorance of far and near distance (dimension) is considered as the basic principles and conventions of the imaginative paintings, which is also fully respected in the paintings of Aghasi.

## **Conclusion**

In his works, through devoid of the principles and methods of naturalization, Aghasi paints his meaning from the story and the situation in a way that easily grabs the viewers' attention into the depth of the story. In this regard, no deficiency can be regarded to this method, since it can grab the attention of the viewers and affect them on its own way.

In the paintings of Hossein Gholer Aghasi, as well as other coffee shop painters, there are always good and evil groups. The motifs related to the forces of goodness in the paintings of Aghasi are always portrayed as supporters and servants of the Shiite Imams, and usually the heroes of the stories, especially the Shahnameh Ferdowsi, go out with joy and glory from the battlefield and eventually become good.

The painter's carefulness, verboseness, and hardworking are evident in the paintings of motifs. The painter has used more outstanding techniques of exhilaration. However, at the time of creating the work which was influenced by religious concepts, the painter did not pay attention to the rules. In characterization, the main goal of the painter is the simplicity and clarity of his/her discourse to be able to have the highest impact on his/her audiences. Color is the main element to reach that goal.



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