

Pink! - BFA Honors Capstone

Circa 2009 – Restructured in 2020

Since the beginning, Pink has been a significant part of my life. It has always been my favorite color... even in sixth grade when Pink was no longer "cool." I blame it on my mother who dressed me exclusively in frilly, pink dresses when I was little (my father had to beg to get me into something yellow!). As I grew and developed, so did my love of Pink. In kindergarten, when the children were asked what their favorite animal was, most replied with a general "dog" or "cat"... a couple of boys chose a "snake." Not me... the teachers were tickled that "pink flamingo" was my response.

As I grew older, my little crush with this intangible entity never wavered. I investigated Pink through my art hoping to better understand it. Pink is not palpable, nor is it a living thing. Pink, like any color, is a way for objects, entities, situations, and people to masquerade in. It is a tool to provoke a specific sensation, mood, or atmosphere.

But why has something like a color become so important to me? Pink has been one of few constants. Growing up, my childhood felt tumultuous. . Pink felt consistent and reliable. It wasn't going anywhere and that felt safe. Thus I desired a close relationship with the color; leading me to the study of pink historically, symbolically, and what it's meaning to me is.

The Birth of Pink

The history of color is chock full of symbolism. Color has been a part of art going far back as the dawn of paintings. Some colors are older than others, however. Reds, browns, and blacks are the eldest colors used in the ancient times of cave paintings.

Pink is a comparatively recent discovery. It wasn't first recorded as an individual color until the seventeenth century. It was used to describe the pale red color of the Dianthus flowers known as Pinks. It included the colors of pale red or pale orange- what we now regard as peach. Peach (first recorded as an English word in 1588 after the fruit) and pink is often put into the same category; pink leaning more towards reddish hues while peach is more yellowish. Other colors often put into the pink category include rose, magenta, and fuchsia.

The Family Tree

In order to fully understand pink, one needs to understand its relatives. Pink is achieved by combining red and white. We therefore need to take a look at both colors' meanings and history to fully understand Pink in it of itself.

White

The color white has many different meanings all over the world. In Christianity and western culture, the color symbolizes themes such as holiness, purity, cleanliness, weddings, innocence, clarity, peace, and forgiveness of sin. A white knight is regarded as good and just; he is there to triumph over evil through righteousness. Doctors and nurses wear white uniforms to emphasize cleanliness and health. A white flag signals surrender and a white dove symbolizes peace. White-collar jobs are considered the upper crust of the work force and white lies are thought of to be innocent or harmless.

Brides traditionally wear white wedding dresses in western culture to represent purity and virginity, though this tradition did not originate from Christianity. In biblical times, the brides traditionally wore blue to represent the Virgin Mary (she is always depicted in blue when incorporated into classical paintings). It was originally a Greek tradition to wear white. The Greeks used white to symbolize youth, joy, and purity and the Greeks wore white to ensure pleasant dreams. It wasn't until the Middle Ages when Anne of Brittany made white wedding dresses popular in 1499.

Some brides also wear white in Japan, though traditionally the Chinese and Japanese consider white to be a color of death, mourning, and sickness. It is often worn at funerals. A stark contrast to western culture where black is the color of mourning. In China, white also symbolizes metal, the west, and autumn. In Siam, white elephants are considered sacred and in India, white is for holy men and for women. In Native American traditions, white symbolized the south, the summertime, peace and happiness. When men would try to woo a woman, he would describe himself as a "white man," saying that all was well where he was.

The first white pigment ever discovered is lead carbonate made from the metal. This pigment is also known as flake white because it forms white flakes on the grey metal. Breathing, ingesting, or even touching the flakes is dangerous as lead poisoning is very harmful to the body. Unfortunately, the

toxic substance was often incorporated into women's cosmetics for centuries. Women used flake white for their base make-up and was raved about for its effectiveness in making women look youthful in Europe and eastern countries such as China and Japan. Unfortunately, the affects were too good to be true and came at a terrible cost. Lead poisoning would eventually set in and make the women using it sickly and weak (and unfortunately more beautiful to the European society who fetishized the idea of frail women). Strangely enough, this highly toxic substance was still used in cosmetics well into the nineteenth century. It was banned from the European Union in 1994 in all but a few paints that were considered special conditions. One of these exemptions is artist's oil paints.

Flake white is one of the earliest artificially manufactured pigments recorded. It wasn't until the mid 19th century that Europeans started using other forms of white. The next white that came to be was zinc white, also known as Chinese white and permanent white. It has a slightly cooler or bluer tone than the other whites and is more transparent. There were a lot of benefits to zinc white. Unlike lead white, zinc white is not poisonous and it does not yellow when coming into contact with sulfur fumes. The pigment is created by vaporizing zinc metal under oxidizing conditions to create zinc oxide. It was first created in the late eighteenth century, but didn't become a well-known white color until 1834 when *Winsor and Newton* came out with an improved, denser version for watercolor. They called it Chinese white, possibly after the Chinese porcelain that was popular in Europe at the time. George H. Backhoffner argued everywhere that lead white was the superior of the two, but when *Winsor and Newton* published their response, the new white took off. In 1844, a better zinc white was created for oil painting. Zinc white is more brittle while lead white is more flexible and it also takes longer to dry. During the late 1890's and early 1900's, many artists who used zinc white as a ground to paint on or who used the color straight, had issues with their whole paintings cracking after only a few years. When mixed with other colors, there are little problems with zinc white and despite these issues, is still used.

Today, artists mainly use titanium white made from titanium oxide. It was manufactured for paints in 1921 and is usually blended with zinc white to keep from drying to the spongy quality it can have. Titanium white is so popular because it removes the issues of its brothers; it eliminates the toxic quality of lead white and the cracking issues of zinc white

Red

Red has been a powerful color in history. Red has often been a color associated with passion. Because passion can swing to opposite extremes, red has both positive and negative connotations. On one hand, it's the color of fire, blood, and rage. It was the color of the Greek and Roman gods of war, Ares and Mars. On the other hand, it is the color of warmth, love, and romance. The red rose is almost universally known as the flower used for romantic gestures. In eastern cultures such as Japan, brides wear red on their wedding days. In ancient times, red was the color of femininity or Mother Earth. In Christianity, red is the color of man because God created him from the red earth. In the Bible, words spoken by God are often written in red.

Red has caused some troubles throughout the ages. In 1884 the people of Great Britain complained that the green mailboxes were difficult to see so the post office decided to paint them all red. They chose vermilion, because it was fairly resistant to fading... that is unless the paint is in direct sunlight. Unfortunately for the person who made that decision, most public mailboxes are located outside in open areas where the sun beats down on them all day. Only three years later, the post office started receiving letters of complaint by the public that their post boxes had all faded to almost white. There were several suggestions of new pigments to use by residents and naval officers alike. New, synthetic reds eventually replaced the vermilion.

Not only does the aforementioned vermilion give problems when put in direct sunlight, but it is also a very dangerous pigment to collect. Vermilion is manufactured from cinnabar. According to lore, cinnabar resulted from a grand brawl between a heavy elephant and a yellow dragon. The result ended up with both their deaths as the dragon coiled around the elephant while the elephant crushed the dragon. The combination of their blood became cinnabar. This is an excellent metaphor if you consider Cinnabar is created by combining equal parts Mercury (the heavy elephant) and sulfur (the yellow dragon). The biggest mercury mine is in Almaden and a form of punishment for prisoners in the sixteenth century was to send them to the Almaden mines. Most would die after only a few years of working twelve-hour days with no ventilation due to mercury poisoning.

Carmine red, or Spanish red, has a history almost as zealous as the color is itself. The color carmine is from a small, white insect that inhabits the Prickly pear cacti in Mexico known as the cochineal. It was initially discovered by the Spaniards in 1499 when colonizing the new world. The dye became admired among Europeans for cloth and paint; and it was a roaring success amongst women as the ultimate cosmetic. As this new red became more successful and popular, people demanded to know its source. However, the Spanish strictly ordered the colonists keep its origin a secret. It stayed hidden for a few centuries until the late eighteenth century when a Frenchman by the name of Nicolas Joseph Thierry de Menonville entered Mexico on his own despite warnings from his family and friends and with his intentions kept from the Mexican peoples. He learned that not only was it used as a pigment to beautify textiles and people alike, it was also known as a medicine to Central Americans. Despite being banished by the governor, running from the authorities, and facing terrible hardships he discovered that cochineal was not a berry, nut, or fruit, but a bug. The French government rewarded de Menonville with the appointment of *Royal Botanist* for his hardships and great accomplishment.



Cochineal

The Many Sides of Pink

Though, pink is just barely a pre-teen compared to its parents, it is an incredibly loaded color. Pink is a mixture of colors, therefore the meaning of pink cannot be pure. Part passionate, erotic red and another part innocent, peaceful white. So what do we get when we mix those very different meanings? Pink evokes a number of diverse feelings depending on the shade and mixture of colors.

Light pink is said to be relaxing and calming. Some prisons have been known to paint special cells pink for particularly aggressive inmates in order to calm their state of being. Artists, Bigert and Bergstrom, did an installation based on this concept called *Bubblegum Pink*. They painted a whole room pink for observers to walk through.



Bigert and Bergstrom - *Bubblegum Pink*

Light pink is also considered peaceful. To symbolize the first soviet tank to come to Prague, A Czech artist named David Cerny painted a Soviet tank pink contrasting this very dangerous object with an unassuming quality. In response to this idea, the Czech army, finding the artwork offensive, took it upon themselves to paint the tank back to olive green. In the end, Parliament stepped in. They repainted the tank pink again and demanded that it be left alone.



David Cerny - Pink Tank

Light pink can also in today's society be considered sweet, cute, and girly. Pink represents little girls in today's culture, but it wasn't always that way. Up until the early 20th century pink, being the pastel version of red, was considered a little boy's color while blue, the color of Virgin Mary, was meant for girls. It wasn't until about the 1940's the colors reversed roles and pink was considered a girl's color. The reason for this remains unknown.

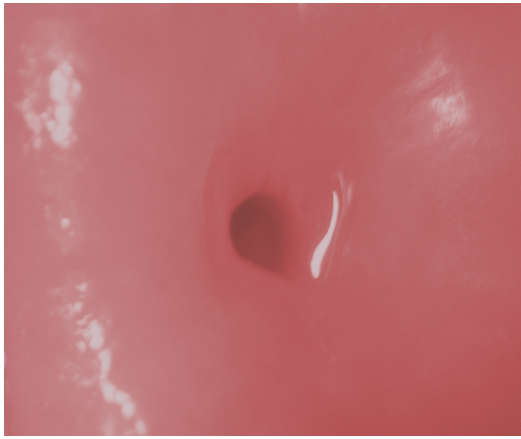
Pink or Blue Toys for Girls and Boys



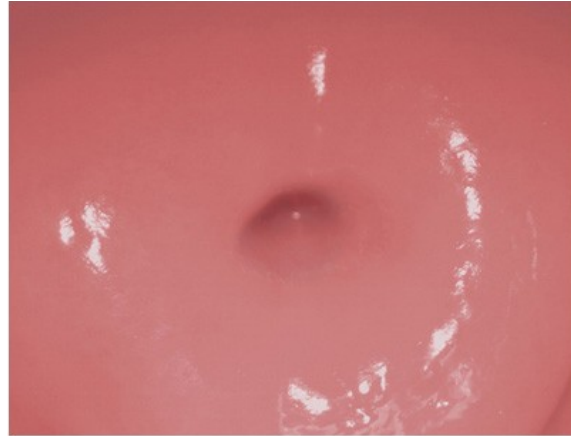
JeongMee Yoon, Jeeyo 2007



JeongMeeYoon, Kihun 2007



Emiko Kasahara – *Pink 1*



Emiko Kasahara – *Pink 2*

People often associate pink with sexuality and sexual parts such as the lips and female genitalia (often compared with the look of a blooming flower). It is also linked with the action of blushing. Blushing is commonly coupled with women when they get the notion that a man is interested in her. The artist, Cindy Sherman explored this concept even though she did not specifically use the color pink (she only used black and white stills from movies). She does an excellent job at capturing society's ideal of the moment when a woman knows she is vulnerable or the object of desire.



Cindy Sherman – *Untitled Film Still #13*

The Japanese culture uses the color pink extensively due to the importance of the famed and celebrated cherry blossoms. The falling of the cherry blossom petals symbolize the souls of fallen soldiers killed in battle, at the peak of their fitness. The blossoms at their peak represent the beauty and fragility of women. The color pink is very sexual in Japan. Pornographic films and magazines are called pink movies and pink magazines and places where prostitutes station themselves are known as pink corners.



Regula Dettwiler - *Cherry Blossom*



Hiroshi Yoshida - *Azalea Garden Tea House*

Particularly hot pink has been historically associated with the gay community. During World War II in Germany, those labeled as homosexuals were forced to display a pink triangle just as the Jewish population was required to wear a yellow Star of David. Today, some organizations have turned the color pink into a symbol of power rather than one of repression. In the UK, *Pink News* is an online newspaper and *Pink TV* is a cable channel both catering to the LGBTQ+ community. In the year 2000, Doug Krick founded a North American gay rights organization known as the *Pink Pistols* promoting the right to bear concealed weapons. The *Pink Pistol's* motto is, "Armed gays don't get bashed," and their logo is an upside-down, light pink triangle with someone pointing a gun.

Hot pink or shocking pink is found to be incredibly irritating to look at. It's loud and obnoxious and can be painful to look at. It is full of energy and demands attention, and yet overwhelms the viewer's eyes. The term "*shocking pink*" was coined when Leonor Fini used a bright pink color for the box of the 1937 de Schiaparelli perfume called *Shocking*.



Shocking perfume bottle designed by Leonor Fini

Pink is very fleeting. In nature, it is seen in the sky only at sunsets and sunrises. On the ground, it's in blossoms that die quickly after their appearance, unlike green leaves. In regards to nudity, pink is rarely seen as it is unacceptable in to show one's nakedness in most cases. Pink can only be enjoyed for a short period of time, making it even more desirable to the individual.

Pink and Me

My art is mainly introverted. Although while I am not specifically addressing issues such as feminism or politics, I invite the viewer to consider these possibilities through the loaded symbolism that Pink carries. My paintings range from pattern, to graphic images, to chimeras incorporating the flamingo. I investigate the anti-cliché of Pink by creating evil, demonic, three-headed flamingos and exploring their personality through painting and printmaking. I have also discovered the effects of Pink overwhelming people through installation.

When I began my education as an artist, coming up with ideas could be a struggle for me and I was stubborn about trying anything other than something working towards realism. That's what I enjoyed so why would I do anything else?



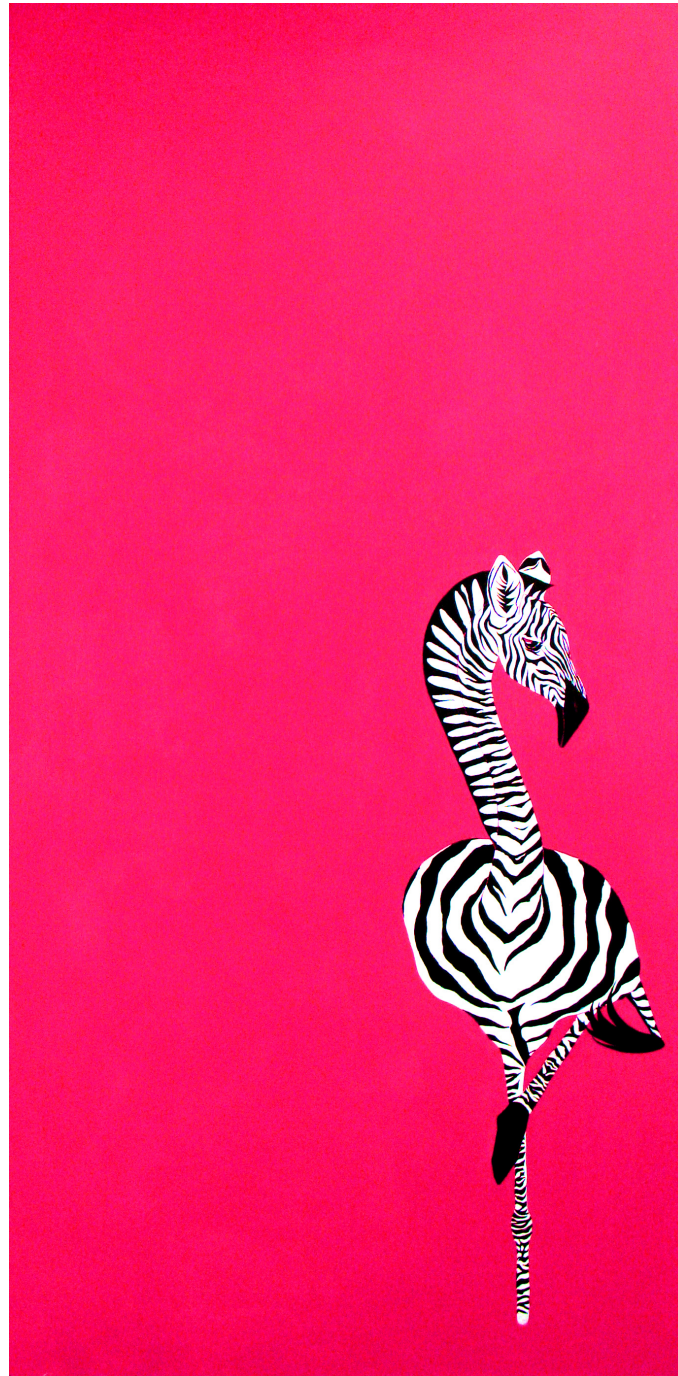
Self Portrait



Pink Rose

At one point, my professors insisted I try something else for a while. I was given an assignment to incorporate what I felt represented me. I became increasingly forlorn as I could only think of one thing to associate myself with... the color pink. With a little soul searching and borrowing an idea I thought up in high school with putting a surface from one thing onto something unexpected, I finally cooked up an idea that I could feel excited about. I painted a three by six-foot canvas solid pink and in the corner I placed a graphic flamingo clad in

zebra stripes. The *Zebringo*, as I called it, was a roaring success in critique and sparked the beginning of a series. The empty space and graphic qualities were new and exciting to me and to top it all off, I got to use my favorite color!



Zebringo

When I felt that I was running out of steam with the chimeras, I was again thrown into a conflicted state of not knowing what to do. I fought and wrestled with where I could go to next but nothing came to me except for pink... So that's what I painted.

Mimicking a zigzagging pattern on a blouse of mine, I mixed as many shades and tones of pink I could. As my pattern slowly crawled down the canvas, it became increasingly difficult to control. It no longer looked exactly like the pattern on my shirt. So in accepting that I am not a machine, I played with the morphing and emphasized the skewing by pushing and pulling the points.



Detail of Pattern

In the fall 2008 semester, a friend of mine requested I participate in a Halloween show she was curating called *The Creatures of Garden Street*. The only requirement was to submit something scary. After much thought and a few failed attempts, the Hydringo was born. I put down an eerie mossy green and black background, and on top, floating dead center with three crooked heads, two sets of spindly wings, and no legs was the almost blood red, toothy mouthed bird, staring at you with a malicious grin. It was not by any means realistic, but it had more form than the other chimeras and was slightly, ghostly transparent so the background glowed through. It was creepy and ghostly and I loved it.



Hydringo

I now had three very different tracks that my artwork was going in. I couldn't quite see how they all came together. I ended up landing on the idea that pink was the tie. The realization helped me find a sense of peace. I learned to embrace pink rather than merely include it.

By borrowing Bigert and Bergstrom's Bubblegum Pink idea, I decided to observe the effects of fluorescent pink in the viewer. I did this by creating a four by four by eight-foot tall room and painting the entire interior fluorescent pink and placed a white wall outside of the doorway. The experiment worked perfectly. I created a space that would completely engulf the participant. The eyes are so completely overwhelmed by the color, and work to correct this oversaturation. When this happened, the viewer finally became more comfortable with the color, however when he or she exits and looks directly at the white wall, they are now seeing through a green film until their eyes adjust to normal colorization.

After this experiment, I decided to delve into the anti-cliché of pink by using the character of the Hydringo. Pink is so often considered a happy, innocent, sweet color... So what happens if we try to make it scary? I liked the idea of the Hydringo getting its color from its food source like the real flamingo... Except instead of eating shrimp, it drinks blood. I enjoyed exploring its personality.

I have discovered much about Pink through my artwork and research and I've also discovered a lot about myself in turn. I believe I will gain an even better comprehension and appreciation for it as my journey continues. I don't see myself getting bored with it any time soon!

Works Cited

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