

# A Self-Exploration of Geometric Abstraction Through Color Theory

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## Abstract

*This series serves as a display of my own self-exploration into an art style that has helped me contemplate problems dealing with space, non-representative subject matter, and color theory. These are problems which I never would have gotten to challenge myself with had I stayed in my comfort zone of my former art-making ambitions. When I entered middle school, I became strongly interested in how to make something look realistic. I would always associate my 'success' at artmaking with technicality and realism being the main components of a piece. My drive was to always make sure art looked real, felt technically sound, and was easily understood by viewers. If my artwork did not meet those requirements, I felt as though the work should not be viewed as successful. Since starting my studies at Millersville, however, my studio classes challenged me to explore techniques and styles of art that varied greatly from my initial values. Through different assignments, different semesters, different influential artists, and different mediums, I ended up culminating a collection of works that I value and find success in, even if they do not fit my initial requirements for 'success.'*

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The work that I have chosen to display all has been made in a state of discomfort, where I was forced out of a place of consistency in my artmaking that led to complacency. I became settled into a routine of creating where my work would need to fulfill certain requirements to have personal value to me. These pieces possess qualities that prior to my higher education, I would view as 'unsuccessful'. This series focuses on my own self-exploration into finding value in artwork that I had closed myself off to because of my discomfort in trying something new.

All of these pieces were assignments that focused around ideas of abstraction; an art style which I never tried. Abstraction is the polar opposite style of realism, as the goal is to create work that is non-representational of anything seen in life. Viewers are then led to their own interpretations and connections with the art. The specifics of the assignments for each piece varied, as they were produced over three semesters in three different courses, but underlying similarities show through. My first semester, I painted my first abstracted work titled *Red* (Figure 1). As I started to work with abstraction, I found

myself subconsciously selecting geometric shapes as my subject. Depth became an important characteristic for my work, so through the use of color theory techniques such as placing cool colors in the background and warm colors in the foreground, I was able



Figure 1. Photograph of *Red*. Mills, H. (2019). *Red*. Acrylic on canvas.



Figure 2. Photograph of *Tank #1*. Mills, H. *Tank #1*. Acrylic on canvas.

to create a sense of space. In *Red*, I was hesitant in my mark-making, sticking to simple shapes and following the color theory rules of warm colors in the foreground and cool colors in the background exactly.

In the following semester, I became more comfortable with the idea of being uncomfortable about what I produced. I had learned that when working with abstraction, I challenged my intuition, understanding of color theory, and composition. Though possible in other styles of art, abstraction became the most successful style for me to be able to do this. I started to develop my focus more, adding elements of layering into the work to heighten the sense of depth in my paintings *Tank #1* (Figure 2) and *Mountains* (Figure 3). Instead of limiting myself to the basic rules of color theory, I decided to experiment with layering of cool colors on top of warm colors. This caused an interesting ‘push-and-pull’ effect since the warm colors were forced to the back but still fighting to be in the foreground.



Figure 3. Photograph of *Mountains*. Mills, H. (2019). *Mountains*. Oil on canvas.

My final and most recent piece, a pastel drawing titled *Transitive Space*, was created in a state of ‘positive discomfort’. This was the first time which I embraced the possibility of a work not looking how I wanted it to, while also fulling focusing on

experimentation and exploration of space, composition, and color. I relied on my own judgements while also testing different color relationships, textures, and layers of the overall subject matter.

By allowing myself to leave my consistent art habits behind, I was able to get myself out of a complacent state of creativity. Though I still find value in works that I make that

aren't abstract, I view the opportunities to make this kind of work in a positive light. I enjoy the chance to work on art that makes me uncomfortable because I know that I will be able to benefit from the learning experience and strengthen my overall abilities as an artist.

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