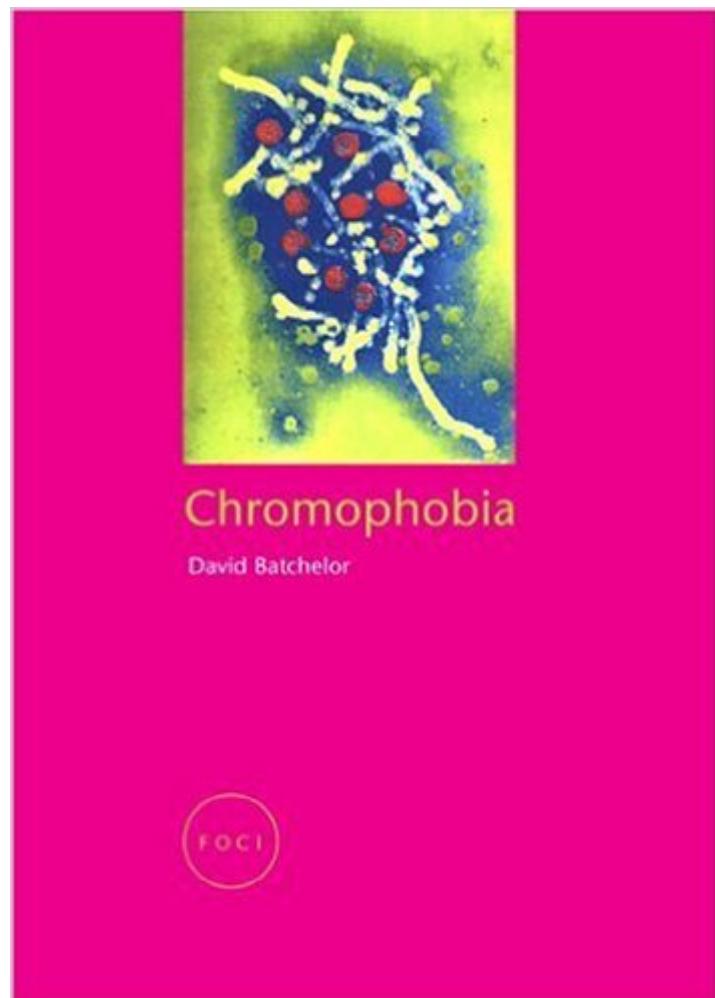


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# Chromophobia (Focus On Contemporary Issues)



## Synopsis

The central argument of Chromophobia is that a chromophobic impulse - a fear of corruption or contamination through color - lurks within much Western cultural and intellectual thought. This is apparent in the many and varied attempts to purge color, either by making it the property of some "foreign body" - the oriental, the feminine, the infantile, the vulgar, or the pathological - or by relegating it to the realm of the superficial, the supplementary, the inessential, or the cosmetic. Chromophobia has been a cultural phenomenon since ancient Greek times; this book is concerned with forms of resistance to it. Writers have tended to look no further than the end of the nineteenth century. David Batchelor seeks to go beyond the limits of earlier studies, analyzing the motivations behind chromophobia and considering the work of writers and artists who have been prepared to look at color as a positive value. Exploring a wide range of imagery including Melville's "great white whale", Huxley's reflections on mescaline, and Le Corbusier's "journey to the East", Batchelor also discusses the use of color in Pop, Minimal, and more recent art.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Color as chaos. Color as other: feminine, strange, dangerous. Color as cosmetic, therefore superficial and vulgar. Color as corruption. This is the mindset behind chromophobia. In his book, which defines and takes this term as its title, David Batchelor sets out to present his argument; namely, that Western culture, from nearly its beginning, has held a prejudice against color for all the various reasons listed above. This prejudice has supported the marginalization of color and has left

discourse on the subject of color in art lacking. In fact, Batchelor notes on a 'color-blindness' not too uncommon in art history, be it in the discourse concerning the work of the architect Le Corbusier or in the over-eagerness to associate of Minimalism with white. Batchelor is well read and clearly knowledgeable about the topic of color, pulling examples from across literate, philosophy, and popular culture, in addition to art, to illustrate his point. He glides seamlessly from discussing the long-held artistic tradition that values line over color (line is rational, color emotional, chaotic) to commenting on the relationship of narcotics to the intensification of color. While color in this scenario can be blissful and beautiful, it is nonetheless the cause of a Fall from grace, reality, nature...however one may look at it. Color is the cause of corruption, but there is no way around it. "We are color ourselves," Batchelor gleefully states. This, of course, doesn't stop the attempt of those who fear color to control it. Newton, while not necessarily a chromophobe, designed the color wheel, systematically creating a hierarchy of color that would become the very bases of Western color theory.

In *Chromophobia*, David Batchelor discusses a phenomenon many of us are unaware exists--the fear of color. He claims it is prevalent in Western societies. Basically, the color white stands for "good" and all other colors encroach on "goodness," threatening a fall into "evil" and "immorality." Color has been the object of our prejudice despite us being oblivious to our own impartiality. This could be due to the fact that ancient philosophies and texts, from which we still derive many of our core beliefs, seemingly reveal apprehension of color. Batchelor points to evidence of this in both the Bible and the writings of Aristotle. Ever since the 1960s, the boundaries of art and design have been continuously challenged with intruding "corruption" through color in different forms and from previously scorned sources such as paint from industrial paint cans. After reading this book, it is up to us to decide if we will continue running away from color. Batchelor contextualizes the history of chromophobia--fear of contamination through color--using his exhaustive knowledge of art theory, criticism and pop culture. He opens our eyes to the reality of "bright" color prejudice (after all, white is a color). The book begins in a "white room" environment, placing the reader into a bare-bones home of a modern collector filled with things but empty of color. "All the walls, ceilings, floors and fittings were white, all the furniture was black and all the works of art were grey" (11). This room represents the isolation from color that most of the Western world accepts; it is as if Batchelor believes us to be trapped by our own doing in a colorless bubble.

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