



The Mind's Eye

by Margie Deeb

March 2005

How tricky the mind's eye can be. I'm always trying to understand the chameleon-like effects of simultaneous contrast better, trying to understand how this visual chicanery plays with my perception.

Simply put, when the eye cannot find the balance it seeks, it manufactures a color to achieve it. The spontaneously generated color exists only in the mind. We call these color shifts we experience "successive contrast" and "simultaneous contrast." To understand simultaneous contrast, let's look first at successive contrast.

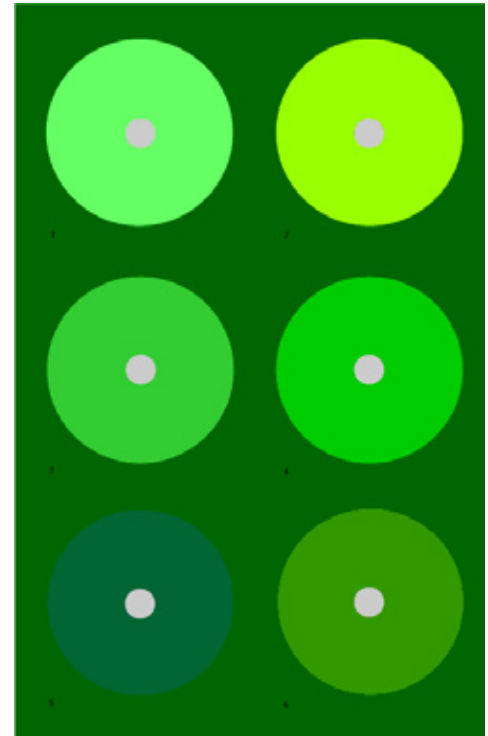
Remember back in elementary school how thrilled we were, after staring at a black square on white paper, to then see on the inside of our eyelids a white square on a black background? Or better yet, seeing a bright green square after staring at a red square! The phantom color we see behind closed lids is produced by our equilibrium-seeking eye. Like a judge who has weighed and settled the case, it orders the complementary color to appear to balance the situation. This is called "successive contrast" because the balancing act is completed in sequence, successively.

Simultaneous contrast is the sleight of eye the mind plays when you look at more than one color simultaneously. One color can force another to seem to change shades. Again, the eye wants balance, so it will see nuances of color that don't actually exist.

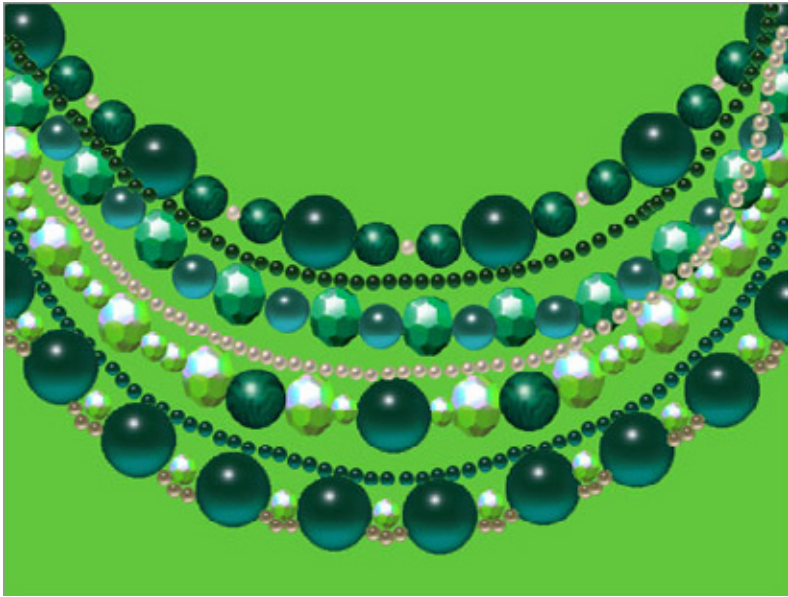
In *The Art of Color* Johannes Itten writes of how costly this trickery can be:

"Some years ago, the manager of a weaving mill called my attention, in desperation, to some hundreds of meters of costly tie silk that would not sell because a black stripe on a red [back]ground looked, not black, but green. This effect was so pronounced that customers insisted that the yarn was green."

Though I know the theory of such dupery, I'm not always aware when it's happening to me. It's hard, if not impossible, to know when the mind's yogi, who is constantly seeking inner balance, is tipping the visual scales- unless you can measure the colors objectively. So I like to keep my eyes on a steady workout routine, training them not only to see better, but to also perceive what they may not want to perceive.

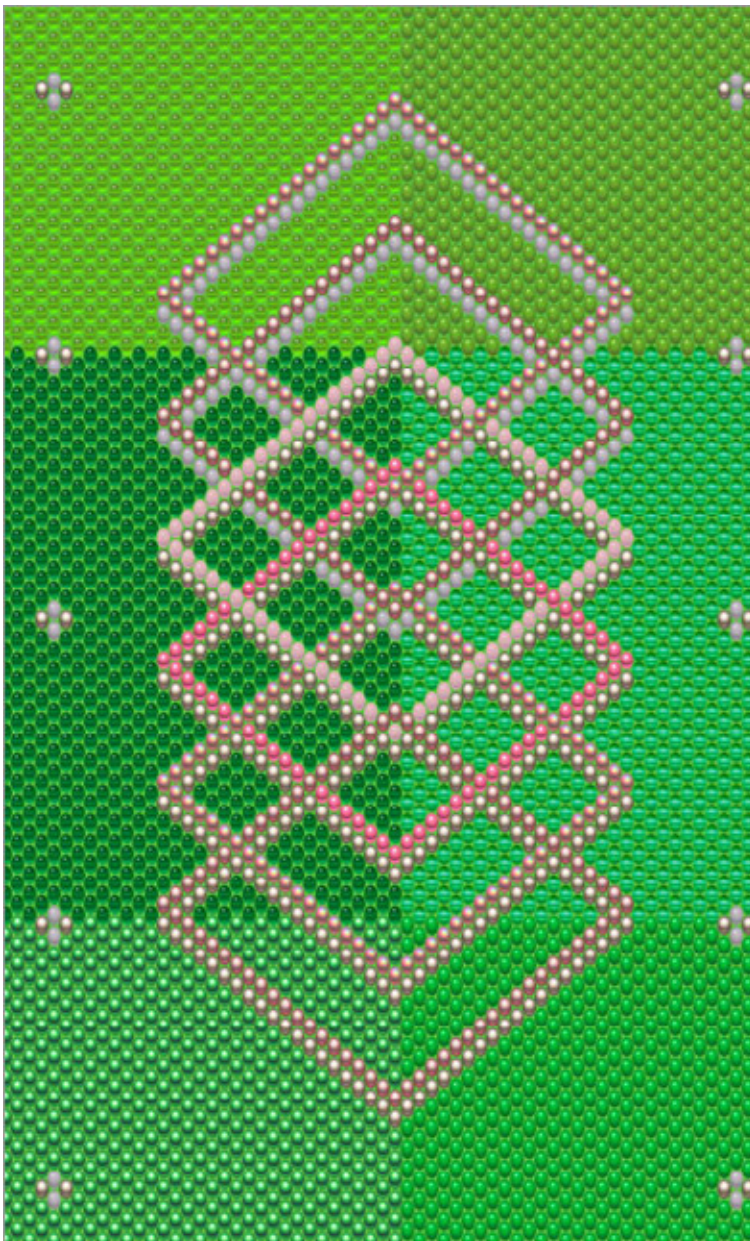


Carefully inspect the inner circles to the left. At first glance they seem all the same color, a totally neutral with no color lean. The longer you look, the more these small circles change color. So much green has the power to make them shift to varying reddish shades. Which inner circle becomes more red or pink? For me, #2 changes the most and the fastest.



When designing with color, pay attention to simultaneous contrast when you have a lot of one color and small accents of another, as in the illustrations below. Accents of pinks and neutral grays are peppered among all that green, but it's difficult to distinguish between the two. It almost looks like all accent colors are a shade of pink.

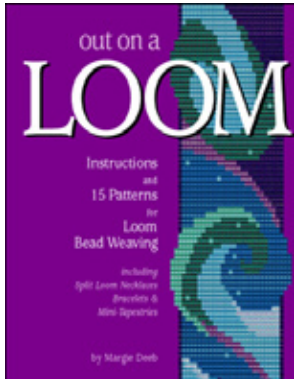
Such is the power of the mind. And the mind's eye.



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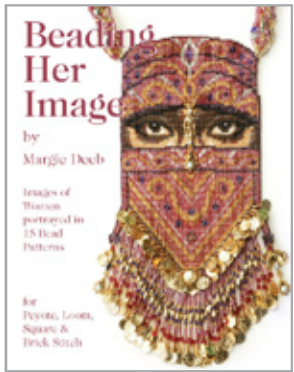
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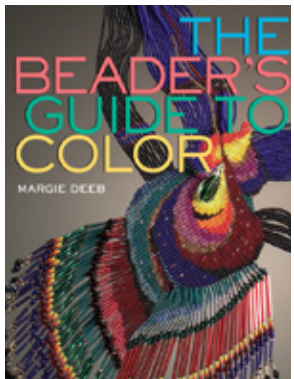
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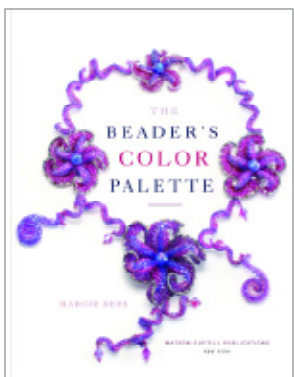
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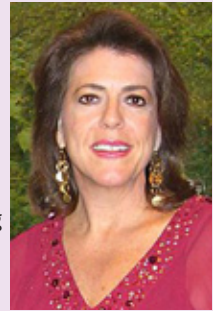


The Beader's Color Palette: 20 Creative Projects and 220 Inspired Combinations for Beaded and Gemstone Jewelry opens the door to worlds of color inspiration. Gather colors from around the planet to create stunning color schemes for beaded creations. Gorgeous beaded jewelry illustrating 220 specific palettes for glass and gemstone beads make *The Beader's Color Palette* a coffee table book of inspiration for color lovers working in every medium. Includes detailed instructions for stringing, finishing, looming, and off-loom stitches. (Paperback, 192 pages)

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Artist, designer, musician, and color expert

Margie Deeb is the author of several beading books, including the popular *The Beader's Guide to Color* and *The Beader's Color Palette* (Watson-Guptill, 2008).



She teaches color courses for artists, interior designers, and bead-ers and her free monthly color column, "Margie's Muse," is available on her website. She produces a free graphically enhanced podcast, "Margie Deeb's Color Celebration," available on iTunes.

Her articles have appeared in *Bead & Button* and *Beadwork* magazines, and she writes a regular color column in *Step-by-Step Beads*. Visit Margie's website for her books, patterns, jewelry, inspiration, and more:

www.MargieDeeb.com

Also available at MargieDeeb.com:

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