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Autor: R.C.
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Phone your colour orders!

Colour is a gift of nature, and modern man, the city-dweller who lives in a world dominated more and more by technical uniformity, is gradually losing the habit of seeing and « thinking » colours. The coloured phenomena of life are losing their significance for him, and he no longer discerns their subtleties. Painters alone still pay any attention to experiments with colour, which are often enough either badly understood or not understood at all by their fellow men. It is for this reason that certain theorists are now trying to re-educate the eye of modern man and give him back his feeling and taste for colour.

It was the ambition of a Swiss silk manufacturer to put within the reach of the many professionals called upon to solve questions regarding colour a *key*, a *code* making it possible to classify colours systematically, to number them, designate them and denote them without all the paraphernalia of a painter, all this in the simplest, quickest, most convenient and reliable manner. His research led him to believe that the solution to the problem was to be found in the use of a fabric in which the optical mixture of warp and weft threads in different colours would give the shades of colour required. Only pure uncharged silk answered the various technical requirements: use of threads fine enough to permit the optical mixture of the different tones of the warp and weft, durability, uncrushable quality in the natural state, regularity of dyes and consequent possibility of repeating these year after year to ensure the regularity of subsequent manufacture, fastness of the colours thanks to the chemical stability of the basic material, etc. It was therefore a question of making the different shades of colour by intermingling different colours in the warp and weft, using a limited number of basic colours, whereas by using printing processes *all* the different colours required, several thousands of them, would have had to be prepared separately.

Using Ostwald's diagram in corrected form as a basis, the inventor of the « Silor » Color Code decided on 19 basic colours; in addition, for every basic colour there were to be three lighter and three darker shades of the same colour. This scale he completed with 10 shades of grey, from jet black to pure white, as well as with a scale of browns, to take the place of the optical mixture of greys and golds which does not give good results. To a certain number of colours, he added a further three

intermediate colours containing 50% grey and 50% colour, in three shades from dark to light. This arrangement gave some 200 different colours to be used in the warp and in the weft. The Silor Color Card or Code is therefore presented in the form of a large, natural, uncharged silk square, with a taffeta weave, and containing several tens of thousands of differently coloured squares with sides measuring about 6 mm. The colours being arranged in the same order in both the weft and the warp, that is along the axes of abscissae and ordinates (x- and y-axes), it follows that the squares following the diagonal up from left to right are all pure colours, formed in each case by the crossing of the same basic colour in the two directions. Furthermore, the two large triangles formed by this diagonal are symmetric, that is to say they each have the same colours arranged in the same order on either side of the diagonal, and the nearer they get to this diagonal, the purer the colours become, while the further away they go, the more mixed the colours become. Very practically, the coordinates are represented by numbered scales in which there is one three figure number for each square. The number of colours arrived at in this way is very high and since the figures of the scales are made up of series of consecutive even numbers, it is very easy to denote any existing colour, with an accuracy sufficient for all practical purposes, by a six figure number — the combination of the two numbers given by the coordinates — whether this colour is actually shown on the code or whether it is visualised between two given shades. In this way it is possible merely to transmit a simple number, by letter, telephone or telegram, without a sample of any kind, for a correspondent possessing the same code to find the colour in question in a matter of a few seconds, even if he happens to be at the other end of the world.

In order to facilitate and promote the spreading of the « Silor » Code — for the more widespread it is, the greater will be the advantages of its use — its inventor plans to set up agencies in the principal textile centres of the world, where owners of a copy of the code will be able to obtain a sample of any of the colours contained in it to serve, for example, as a sample for any particular work, especially for the dyeing and printing of fabrics, but also in other fields (interior decorating, etc.).

The distribution of the « Silor » Color Code is handled by the firm Studio-Color in Zurich. R. C.

Let us now give a brief idea of the variety of the fabrics shown by listing here the main categories into which they were placed: Ancient Civilisations (fabrics of the pre-Columbian era from Peru, Polynesian fabrics, etc.); India and Persia; Coptic fabrics (dating back to the first centuries of our era and found in the tombs of Upper Egypt); From the Middle Ages to the Renaissance (Rhine prints from the 11th century, the celebrated « Sion Tapestry » (Sion in Switzerland) possibly of Venetian origin and dating back to the 14th century, the property of the Historical Museum in Basle); Rustic prints of the Baroque period; 18th and 19th centuries (French and Swiss calicoes etc.); Modern prints (among which we would like to draw attention to the most recent achievements of technical progress, machine printing from colour photographs of the most extraordinary fidelity, which has long been attempted everywhere and is at

the present moment being carried out in Switzerland). Finally, let us add that the holding of this exhibition was only made possible by the good will and collaboration of many people and institutions of different lands, which have thus given striking proof of the possibilities for international understanding that exist in the spheres of art and trade. Abroad, we would mention in particular the Industrial Society and Museum of Printing at Mülhausen, the German National Museum at Nürnberg and the collection of fabrics from the School of Textile Engineering at Crefeld; and in Switzerland, among others, the Museum of Applied Art in Basle, the Ethnological and Historical Museums in Basle, the Swiss National Museum in Zurich, the Historical Museum at Neuchâtel, the Friends of the Castle of Colombier, as well as numerous Swiss and foreign collectors and manufacturers. R. C.