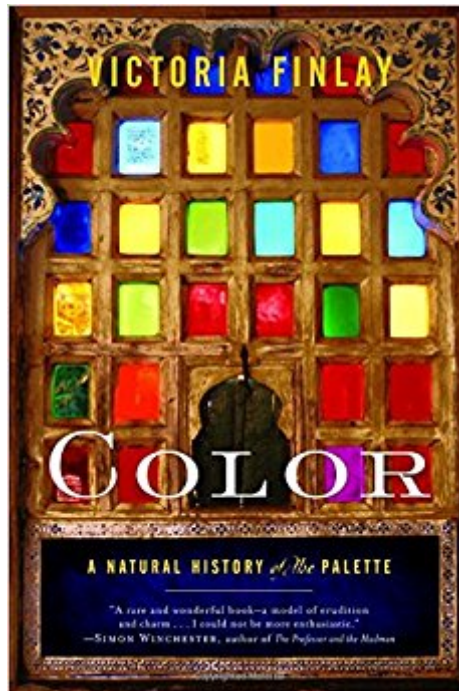




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# Color: A Natural History Of The Palette



## Synopsis

Discover the tantalizing true stories behind your favorite colors. For example: Cleopatra used saffron—a source of the color yellow—for seduction. Extracted from an Afghan mine, the blue “ultramarine” paint used by Michelangelo was so expensive he couldn’t afford to buy it himself. Since ancient times, carmine red is still found in lipsticks and Cherry Coke today has come from the blood of insects.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Defining color is a simple matter-visible light of a particular wavelength. Or is it? It turns out that the pigments and dyes responsible for hues have many remarkable characteristics, most of which we rarely ponder. Journalist Finlay’s first book is a blend of travelogue and historical exploration about the myriad ways color takes on meaning for us, whether as a matter of aesthetics, economics, war or culture. The book has no overarching theme-it’s all byways, an approach that works. Insofar as there is a thesis, it is that visual expression falls just behind procreation and the search for food and shelter as a fundamental human activity; countless peoples, Finlay reports, rank color and art among their primary concerns. During her journey, both literal and literary, Finlay learns of many little-known tribes and historical curiosities: too-trusting Puritans purchasing cheaply dyed black clothes destined to turn orange in a matter of weeks; the rise and heartbreaking fall of the art of the Pintupi tribe in barren central Australia during the 1970s; and the once-supreme economic clout of indigo from Bengal-to take just three examples among dozens. To delve into this book is to see the experimental, scientific side of the old masters and the artistic qualities of inventors and explorers.

This is not a scientific work-those interested in rods and cones should look elsewhere. Thanks to Finlay's impeccable reportorial skills and a remarkable degree of engagement, this is an utterly unique and fascinating read. Illus., maps. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Journalist Finlay travels the world in search of ancient sources of natural colors, recounting along the way the surprising chemical processes by which everything from stones to insects to mummies have been transformed into precious pigments for paint, dyes, and varnish. In pursuit of art's first color, ochre, Finlay goes to Australia, offering, as she does in each location, an agile and entertaining then-and-now look at a place, a people, and a color and its uses and acquired meaning. Explication of red made from cochineal beetles inspires a compelling tale that stretches from Central America to Scotland, and wry humor abounds in her search for a yellow allegedly once made in India from the urine of mango-leaf-eating cows and coverage of sundry poisonous pigments. Her quest for blue brought Finlay to Afghanistan in 2000, where she was the first woman ever to tour a 7,000-year-old lapis lazuli mine, and one of the last Westerners to see the giant Buddhas of Bamiyan. Curious social mores, serendipitous science, and lots of skulduggery are all part of the rich spectrum Finlay so cheerfully illuminates. Donna Seaman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This review pertains ONLY to the kindle edition. This is cheap but very defective! NO ILLUSTRATIONS. The notes are not linked from the text, and in the Notes section, the numbers are omitted. So figuring out which note goes with which part of the text is your challenge.

I love art history books but am aware that many have better use, curing insomnia. Although this book was more and two hundred pages, it was a wonderful, well researched, attention grabbing narrative about the history of color, the difference between pigment and dye, the search for "forgotten" recipes and human sentiment around the globe to color. Even the epilogue and bibliography are useful and easy to follow.

Beyond fascinating. If you ever had a box of crayolas, love art, or just want a fascinating read - this is the book. She even had a section on the Stradivarius violin and by pure happenstance, within a week of reading the section was at a live performance with a Strad. I was sitting 3 feet from the

Strad and got to see the back of it - which looks just like the photos in the book. Oh - wait a minute - the physical book had the photos, but the Kindle edition did not - although they are listed in there. Bummer!!! Demand the photos - there are about 8 of them missing from the Kindle edition.

A surprisingly fun read, this is the history of colored paints and dyes. These days, artists buy their paints in tubes from the art supply store, but the old masters had to mix their own. This book talks about finding lapis lazuli from a single mining town in Afghanistan, and crushing that blue stone to create the most wondrous shade of blue, first found 7,000 years ago on Buddhist statues. Green celadon was a seaweed green porcelain that only Chinese emperors could own. When an ancient temple collapsed in modern China, secret treasure vaults were discovered that yielded the unusual tableware. Finlay describes her many trips to the subcontinent in search of Indian Yellow, supposedly made from the urine of cows that are fed mangoes. And, of course, let's not forget the purple vomit of sea mollusks, the deep red blood of crushed beetles, the demanding work of separating saffron from crocuses, and the many trials and tribulations of those artists who worked with mercury, lead, cobalt and arsenic. This is as much a travelogue as it is a vibrant history of color throughout the ages, and the great lengths that artists would go in search of the perfect color.

Awesome book. Scholarly, yet written in a conversational style. There is nothing dry or textbook-ish about this read. Victoria Finlay manages to trace the history of color in a very personal way, and she takes the reader with her on her journey of discovery. The book is well researched and documented -- with index and bibliography. The footnotes are a fascinating book unto themselves. This was a huge undertaking -- and very successful. If you paint, color, sew, photograph, or just love the brilliance of nature, you need to read this book. If you are curious about the origin of things, the "whys" and "hows" -- and/or you're fascinated by history, this book is for you, too.

A history of many famous dyes and pigments, as you'd expect. The individual stories are organized by dye and often involve the author's personal trips to places like Afghanistan, just in time to experience the weird period when the Taliban tolerated outsiders and hadn't yet made the news for destroying ancient statues. I found the storytelling a little disjointed sometimes, and the author even admits having felt pressured to write herself into the book to make it into a narrative. Still, the book is pretty interesting and entertaining. The interspersed narrative isn't all bad, either; I liked reading for instance about modern dye-makers trying to recreate ancient favorites like Tyrian purple and cochineal red, and the industrial processes behind them. There's also definitely a fiction story to be

told in the adventures of some of the people Finlay talks about, like the adventurer who risked death to steal some beetle-infested cactus chunks. I like reading about the development of technologies and how those interact with the larger historical picture, and this book provides that kind of info. Even little details like the story of Napoleon's arsenic-green wallpaper help make this book worthwhile.

As a painter using oil paint, actually any media, one needs to know the intensity of the mineral used; colors depict distance, coolness, heat even depth, combined with perspective one achieves a visual composition. "Color: A Natural History of the Palette" is an inside look, a visual compass an artist needs to speak their language. Chemistry of a colorful nature, a text of great importance.

I don't normally read one book over three months... At least, not a book I give four stars. But this was an unusual book, and I read it unusually (for me). It is, literally, what the title says it is: a history of color. Going through the spectrum color by color, Ms. Finlay tracks down the origins of artistic iterations of each. Her travels take the reader through history, geography, and culture in a way that provides great (but not excessive) detail and brings the palette into vivid detail. It is not a quick read (obviously). I found it, at times, to be a book that I needed to put down. It's a weighty tome, and some of the historical anecdotes are easier (and more engaging) to read through than others. I found myself needing a break for more traditional stories from time to time, which is why it took me so long to read it. But make no mistake - that time was well spent, and I thoroughly enjoyed this journey. There is much more history to color than I would have ever imagined, and Finlay's book delivers it in a well-written and fascinating package.

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