

30 - COLOR PORTRAIT OF UMBERTO ECO



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Color is not an easy matter. James Gibson, in *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems*, says that the meaning of the term color is one of the worst muddles in the history of science. If one uses the term “color” to mean the pigmentation of substances in the environment, one has not said anything about our chromatic perception. Johannes Itten, in his *Kunst der Farbe*, distinguishes between pigments as chromatic reality and our perceptual response as chromatic effect. The chromatic effect, it seems, depends on many factors: the nature of surfaces, light, contrast between objects, previous knowledge, and so on.

I do not have any competence about pigments and I have very confused ideas about the laws governing chromatic effect; moreover I am neither a painter, nor an art critic. My personal relationship with the colored world is a private affair as much as my sexual activity, and I am not supposed to entertain my readers with my personal reactivity towards the polychromatic theater of the world. Thus, as far as colors are concerned, I take the privilege of considering myself a blind man.

– “The Colors We See,” Umberto Eco, *Bulletins of The Serving Library* #11, 2016

Steve Double,  
Color portrait of Umberto Eco, 1997,  
photographic print, 70 x 52.2 cm