

American Contemporary Art (Mary Younakoff)
By Nikki Sapp
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With a physical life span of 343 days, Los Angeles-based artist Mary Younakof's Chromatic Convergence Project color-blocks the city's streets.

In an act of interactive speculation, this project incorporates several artistic mediums in a plot that unveils a human response to color. With 49 hues for each tone of ROYGBIV (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet), Mary Younakof has designed and created 343 dresses that she will wear throughout the year. Kicking off on January 23, 2011, the project will come to a close on the final day of 2011. The artist takes to the streets of LA in a new color each day to find the given hue's presence in our urban community. After two long years of prep work, she has scouted every nook and cranny of the million mile radius that makes up LA, and has been documenting the vibrance of color that is often overlooked by on-the-go, car-encapsulated urbanites.

The Project is organized mathematically. It was carefully designed around the number seven in order to present 343 dresses in 343 colors, with each dress being worn over a period of 343 consecutive days. Repetition is a key factor here. Breaking it down further, the pattern of the dress is composed of seven pieces of fabric, which are linked to the seven-hued color palette. These colors will extend into 49 different tones exponentially equating to a total of 343 individual colors.

The star of the show is Color, and it's everywhere once she's wearing it. Mary has described the experience as wearing "rose colored glasses." As she goes through the phases of each hue, its presence in her surroundings jumps out and catches the eye, which cues a worthy color relationship with the environment. Her senses are heightened towards everything that matches her dress, and the world becomes pleasantly, yet unexpectedly tinted.

It all sounds very sweet, surreal, and simplistic; but there is much more to it than one would imagine. In an effort to challenge viewers to acknowledge the basic presence of colored life, an emotional reaction takes place. With the moving mass of color that is Mary, we find that feelings are shifted and a universal magnetism draws people in to a place in which color theory provokes visceral perception. Not only does the shade affect the artist's own attitude and daily feeling, but it also generates an emotional reception from the public.

From the artist's personal experience over the past six months, she has noticed a consistent behavioral response: Color prompts memory. Mary recalls instances where people in the market or on the street would come up to her, only to share a story of an event involving a red dress or a yellow childhood toy. Besides evoking memories, Mary also noticed a less forward emotional connect - non verbal body language. Maybe it's just a coincidence that more men stop to stare at (perhaps flirt with) a woman walking down the street with a pink dress on, and maybe it just so happens that more people do the cheesy-smile-with-a-thumbs-up-thing when a lady in yellow moseys on by. And orange? There is something funny about orange that makes people want to touch. It is of no surprise, as pink/red is most commonly associated with love, yellow with happiness, and orange with physical energy.

Nevertheless, while the dress appears to be the center of attention, it really serves as a tool that activates a much larger art venture, which incorporates a plethora of creative channels. The project is jam-packed with artistic mediums that highlight the artist's versatility. The exploration of color is documented through means of fashion, installation, photography, sculpture, performance, video, and social networking sites. While Mary appears at predetermined, color-relevant locations, chance encounters with pedestrians occur and provide unscripted results. Such chance happenings and social reactions are recorded and promoted via the internet. As the project unfolds, the worn dresses go into a public vault at the Pacific Design Center, where aficionados can find clips from previous community interventions. Social involvement is an integral aspect of the artist's plot, and thus the typical outsider receives a silent invitation to be a part of what may be an otherwise foreign art world. With such a publicly played out project, Mary Younakof has succeeded in including the every-day

person in her work, and in a sense, she has brought the gallery to us.