

G . F Smith sets out to find the Colour of the Future World's largest colour survey launches in New York



- 12-month research project seeks to define the colour that represents our collective future
- Survey responds to widespread trend towards duller, muted shades
- International campaign launches in New York on 9 October, 6:30pm EST
- Findings will reveal regional choices as well as overall international selection

The leading supplier of specialist papers to the creative and packaging industries, G . F Smith, has embarked upon a hugely ambitious international project to determine the Colour of the Future.

For the next 12 months, people around the world are invited to participate in G . F Smith's online survey, and select their own personal vision for the colour of the future from a near-limitless palette, and explain in a single word what that colour represents to them.

In a year's time, G . F Smith will publish the results, working closely with a futures expert analysing potentially hundreds of thousands of responses from all over the world to identify any patterns in colour choice, determining whether there is a clear international winner, and consider what that choice might say about our shared hopes for the world of tomorrow.

Why colour? Why now?

Colour touches our lives in countless ways. It has long been known to influence our moods, our energy levels, and even our buying decisions. The colours we surround ourselves with send out messages about who we are – or who we want people to think we are. Whether we're feeling blue or seeing red, our lives are shaped by colour.

However, recent years have seen a plethora of reports that the Western world is losing colour. From the muted neutral palettes of the average home¹ to the grey car in its garage², from the slate clothes of our corporate wardrobes³ to the bland beige buildings⁴ of our cityscapes, it can sometimes seem like colour is leaching out of our everyday lives. Last year, a study reported that one of the effects of climate crisis has been to render European blue tits less colourful than they were 15 years ago⁵. Even our birds are going grey.

Perhaps climate crisis, global unrest and all the other forms of existential uncertainty led to this desaturated world. Or perhaps, the dullness of our environments has led to the existential threat which we are faced with today? When we look to the future, do we see the world as bright and vibrant, or dull and drained? Does the future look different to different parts of the world? Or is it unique to the individual?

These are the bold questions that G . F Smith is setting out to answer.

"If we all take time to think about the future, and that's a big subject, does it look muted to people or do some people see the future in a completely different way? We want to test and challenge the idea that the world is trending towards colourlessness. The future is an exciting, intimidating and, for some people, scary thing to consider – what might that mean in terms of colour and how does that change globally?"

– Ben Watkinson, global brand director, G . F Smith

¹ www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2022/may/25/greige-color-paint-popular-interior-decorating

² www.topgear.com/car-news/business/these-were-10-most-popular-car-colours-uk-2022

³ www.vogue.com/article/milan-fashion-week-fall-2023-gray-outfits

⁴ www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2023/sep/06/britain-best-new-buildings-riba-stirling-prize-shortlist

⁵ www.independent.co.uk/climate-change/news/birds-colour-change-climate-change-b2137877.html

A colourful history

As a leading collaborator with the UK's creative industries and the company behind the iconic Colorplan paper range launched in 1936 and now encompassing 55 colours, the history of G . F Smith and the history of colour are closely intertwined.

Six years ago, in 2017, G . F Smith asked more than 20,000 people around the world what their favourite colour was. This extensive survey concluded that the most representative colour of global tastes was Marrs Green (#008c8c), a beautiful dark teal, which became Colorplan's 51st colour.

Another and perhaps more significant find, however, was the powerful emotional and conceptual resonances that colours held for different people, and the overarching patterns of meaning that the survey made clear. Yellow was overwhelmingly associated with happiness, blue with calm, red with passion, and so on. For many of the respondents, favoured colours were overwhelmingly associated with happy memories and nostalgia – the colour of a beloved grandmother's roses. Rather than looking back to the past, however, some respondents looked forward with their choices, choosing colours that represented the future, new beginnings, or the unknown.

This became the starting point for a new, much more ambitious survey, aiming to determine how people's thoughts, hopes and expectations about the future influence their views about colour. Will their colour choices reflect pessimism and anxiety in shades of grey? Or might they reach for bolder, more vibrant shades as a source of comfort?

From New York to Sydney, and everywhere in between

Working with creative partner Made Thought, G . F Smith has created a dedicated digital platform for the colour survey, which takes less than two minutes to complete. People are invited to select their individual Colour of the Future from a vast palette of shades, to summarise in a single word, what that colour means to them.

After launching with a major event in New York on Monday 9 October with Parsons and AIGA, the Colour of the Future campaign continues with events in Sydney, Melbourne and Wellington, New Zealand in November, and more events in the UK and Europe in the months to come. Supported by G . F Smith's network of partners around the world, the research programme will engage tens of thousands of people across countries and backgrounds in what will be the biggest global colour survey ever conducted.

Designed by Made Thought

From paper sculptures and immersive exhibitions to the first colour study of 2017, Made Thought has worked with G . F Smith to challenge the conventions of how it connects with its community and the creative industries for over a decade.

The Colour of the Future was conceived to reach out to G . F Smith's wide global audience – and beyond – in order to truly understand the role colour plays in our daily lives and how it can shape our visions of the future.

'When it came to the design of the Colour of the Future campaign, we wanted to create something that felt like a blank canvas, something that allowed people to apply their own vision to the study. It was less about influencing perception but instead about inspiring a dialogue with everyone's vision of the future.'

– Alistair Webb, creative director, Made Thought

The final report

In autumn 2024, G . F Smith will publish the results of the survey, making its findings fully and freely available to anyone and everyone interested in the colour(s) of our shared future.

Working with colour specialists and futures analysts, G . F Smith will identify and underline key findings from the survey in order to draw up a picture of how our visions of the future might differ across age, location and even season, and to answer the question 'Will the world of tomorrow be less colourful than today?'

Complete the survey at colourofthefuture.com

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For more information about the Colour of the Future Survey and G . F Smith, contact gsmith@zetteler.co.uk.

About G . F Smith

Obsessed with the beauty and possibility of paper, G . F Smith is the UK's largest specialist paper company, one of the biggest employers in Hull, and the dedicated supplier of creative papers to the creative industries. The company was founded in London in 1885 by globe-trotting stationery salesman George Frederick Smith. Over the following century, George's paper merchants built a reputation for quality and service, and became renowned as passionate pioneers of the paper industry.

With the launch of Colorplan, G . F Smith was well on the way to becoming Britain's foremost supplier of specialist papers to the creative industries – a position secured with the launch of Colorplan Bespoke, which allows global brands and businesses to create their own specific shades. G . F Smith became a certified B Corp in June 2023. gfsmith.com

About Made Thought

Made Thought is a creative studio that works with some of the world's most progressive brands, including Pinterest, Stella McCartney, Adidas and MoMA. Based in London and New York, they specialise in creative strategy, visual identities, activations and campaigns for brands both big and small. Working across a intentionally diverse set of sectors, their teams think beyond category to create unique brands and experiences that stand out. Founded in 2000 by Paul Austin and Ben Parker, the studio has been awarded a number of awards including a D&AD Black Pencil and being voted the UK's Best Creative Studio. madethought.com