

Obituary: John Gage (1938-2012)

Roy Osborne

Email: art.school@virgin.net

Art historian John Stephen Gage died on February 10th, 2012. He was (and will be) best known for his admirable *Colour and Culture* (1993), one of the most important books in the history of colour literature. It didn't necessarily break new ground but did bring together and place in context an enormous number of visual and documentary sources from art and science history, from antiquity to Minimalism, in a way no single volume had done before. Though the internet was unavailable, Gage had access to the several hundred specialist books in the RCA's Colour Reference Library, brought together in the late 1970s by Stuart Durant and Hans Brill. Histories of colour had been written, for example by Robert Byron (1930), Faber Birren (1941, 1963, 1965) and Don Pavey (1956, published 2003), but no one else sustained such a single-minded effort in finding and cross-referencing the myriad of systems of exploring, interpreting and ordering colours. His volume has 2,400 bibliographical references. Gage had previously studied at the Courtauld Institute of Art, eventually completing a PhD on Turner, and publishing his insights in *Colour in Turner* (1969) shortly thereafter. In addition to the Mitchell and Sikkens Prizes, he was aptly awarded the Turner Medal of the Colour Group (Great Britain) at the RCA in 2009. His principal teaching was at the University of East Anglia (1967-79) and the University of Cambridge (1979-2000), though (despite a stammer) he was frequently in demand elsewhere as an erudite and charming speaker. (My last lecture with him, in Sherborne in 2006, was at a symposium organised by Ros Marchant and Andrew Hanson.) In the wake of his publishing success, Thames & Hudson issued 21 of his essays as *Colour and Meaning* (1999), before inviting him to write *Colour in Art* (2006) for its prestigious 'World of Art' series. Unexpectedly, this starts with Albers and ends with aboriginal art, but emphasizes artists' viewpoints and includes usually neglected references to theatrical colour. Two of his exhibition catalogues should also be noted: *George Field and His Circle* (1989), on early Victorian art, and *Masters of Colour: Derain to Kandinsky*, with Stephanie Rachum (2002), published to accompany the Royal Academy of Arts presentation of the Merzbacher Collection.

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