

Raga, Rasa and Raqs: Synesthesia and the multisensory architecture of artistic creativity across cultures.

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This study examines artistic creativity from the multisensory perspective, through the lens of synesthesia. It is based on the qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews of 30 synesthetic visual artists, dancers, musicians, and composers, from various cultural and geographic backgrounds.

Questionnaires were specially tailored for each artist depending on their artistic practice, years of experience, synesthetic influence on their artistic practice, the number of forms of synesthesia they experience and their primary artistic medium.

The participant group included artists of various artistic practices aged 18-90, with equal representation of men and women, representing a wide geographical spread, including India, China, multiple European countries, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, regions across Africa, and other parts of Asia, offering rich cross-cultural insights.

Overview of synesthetic artists from beyond the conventional WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, Democratic), allows the research to provide a more inclusive and global understanding of how artistic perception and creative practices emerge through cross-modal integration in different cultures.

The findings indicate that, in 90% of the synesthetes, synesthesia is not an incidental trait but a central driving force of the creative process. Synesthetic experiences provide unique insight into the artwork and the artist's perceptual world across artistic media, shaping how sound, colour, movement, form and emotion come together during its creation. Analysis of the intersections between Music (Raga), Emotion (Rasa) and Dance/ Movement (Raqs) reveals a common perceptual architecture operating across artistic disciplines and spatial-cultural settings.

This study further places these insights in relation to Indian artistic theory. Classical texts like the *Natyashastra* and *Abhinaya Darpana* are exemplary of an implicitly synesthetic logic, wherein ragas are linked with particular rasas and seasons and temporal moments, and where mudras, abhinaya, tala, and raga interact as interdependent channels of expression. It is an ancient cross-modal system, wherein sound, gesture, narrative and rhythm integrate, just like contemporary synesthetic artists conceptualize their multisensory experiences.

Overall, the research shows that artistic creativity is the result of a constellation of interlinked sensory and conceptual processes rather than of a unitary modality. Synesthetic creativity shows how these layers coexist, resulting in holistic multisensory expression. Importantly, the study further identifies certain artistic strategies such as sensory cross-mapping, embodied rhythm, soundscapes visualised, emotional and tonal correspondences-that non-synesthetic practitioners may adopt to enhance their creative process.

These findings contribute to larger debates on the application of synesthetic perception and cognition into mainstream arts.