

Sample  
Intro to Art (FINE 1001 002)  
Learning to Look  
08/09/2011

Source.

Sherwin Williams Paint. *Real Simple*. January 2010.

Formal Analysis.

The **composition** of this advertisement is relatively simple with a single focal point, which is a two-tiered birthday cake made entirely out of paint samples. The eye travels up the bottom tier and the smaller top tier all the way up through the flames of the five candles that crown the cake. The candles almost seem to point to the three lines of sans serif text at the top of the picture plane. The form of the cake dominates the picture plane that consists of field of mid-tone, dusky purple. There is very little **space** implied in this field, which is almost entirely flat color with the exception of a subtle reflection at the bottom-right portion of the cake, implying a ground line. The **shapes** represented on the cake are overwhelmingly organic with the exception of the squat cylinders that form the tiers and the elongated cylinders of the candles. The larger tier is decorated with a spiral, wave-like pattern at its base and a scallop pattern at the top. The latter motif is repeated at the top of the smaller tier. The entire cake is covered with five-petal flowers of varying sizes and colors. The repeating elements of the flowers and the scallops create a sense of **unity** to the tiers, which varying in both size and color.

Overall, the **color** palette of this advertisement consists of warm, vibrant colors of varying tones. Because of the inherent variation on a paint sample, each color represented in this composition has at least three tones, ranging from saturated to very light. The patterns that decorate the cake as well as the candles' flames are yellow while the top and bottom tiers of the cake are pink and blue, respectively. The flowers are even warmer shades of blue, green and purple. All in all, the colors could be described as fun, friendly, and inviting. Two different types of **line** are utilized in this composition: the line implied by the overlapping paint chips and the crisp, graphic lines that separate the colors on those paint chips. The first type of line subtly reinforces the verticality of the composition; they gently undulate in wide curves up the sides of the tiers and are picked up again in the spiral pattern of the candles' "wax." In contrast, the graphic lines encourage the eye to travel around the cake on a horizontal axis, drawing attention to the cake's form and decoration. This dynamic creates some **balance** in the composition. **Texture** is implied in this advertisement by virtue of the unusual medium of the cake. The overlapping paint chips create an almost rough surface that is in contrast to the soft contours of what one expects from a frosted cake. Despite this roughness, the medium also implies a delicacy because of the often-fragile nature of paper. These elements and principles combine to create an image that embraces variety without succumbing to chaos and is inviting without being boring.

Interpretation.

Because this is an advert for household paint, one may ask, "Why represent a cake?" Nothing about the product or the descriptive text of the advertisement seems to indicate the importance of cake. There are several ways one might attack this question. For example, one might look at the context of the print ad. This ad was placed in a magazine called *Real Simple*, which is a home

and lifestyle publication geared toward women who have families with young children. In those households, birthdays are commonly observed events, which celebrate children, family and home. For children, the highlight of any birthday party, besides presents, is the cake. Cakes represent the birthday wishes of the child and the love and preparation of the parent, in this case the mother. In the way that cakes have a role in creating a home through its traditions, paint—Sherwin Williams paint—has a role in creating a warm home through décor. The colors used on the cake (pink, yellow, and blue) are vibrant, recalling the colors often found in children's rooms.

### Evaluation.

Despite these potential references to family and the home, the emotional appeal of this advertisement is not particularly strong. This is largely due to the absence of the human form, which would encourage the viewer to develop a more direct empathetic relationship with the image. By making the cake the focus of the ad, the appeal becomes more detached. This advertisement is effective in its goal of selling paint due to the cleverness of the advertisement. The cake made entirely of paint samples appeals to the target audience's valuing of creativity and novelty. The magazine *Real Simple* often provides its readers with creative solutions for everyday (especially domestic) challenges. In fact, every issue has a segment dedicated to the repurposing of commonplace items in unexpected ways to solve problems. The readers of this magazine typically delight in the innovative use of a mundane item (here paint samples) as an artistic medium. This along with the bold choices in color and the unifying elements apply to the homespun design savvy of *Real Simple*'s readership.

### Image of Advertisement.

