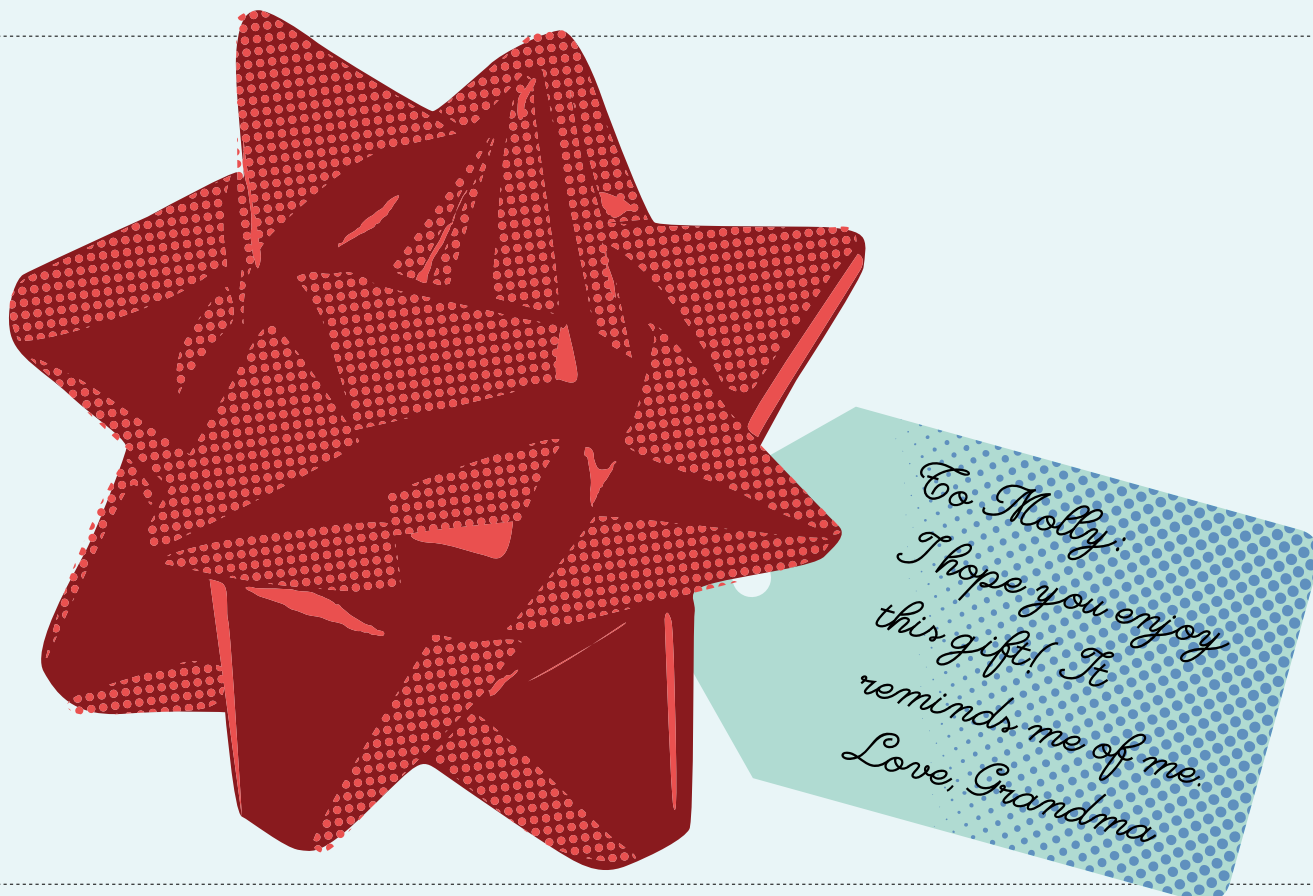


IMAGE, STYLE, DESIGN

The Gift of Perception

The real reason why you end up getting gifts that miss the mark



Someone once told me that you never give a person art as a present. It's a presumptuous gift that forces your style onto others, he claims. And he has a point.

Although the gift giver believes a certain style of art to be worth sharing with someone, it *is* rather presumptuous to assume that the recipient feels the same way. What if he or she only enjoys modern art, and you just gave him or her a still life oil painting as a present? Is the recipient now required to display this in their home out of courtesy for you, even though it isn't a reflection of their tastes?

It's a slippery etiquette slope. But at some point in all of our lives, we have all received a gift from someone that doesn't jibe with our tastes, despite the giver's best intentions.

Why do people continue to give gifts that are just *wrong*? Can't they tell that this just isn't

your style? The difference lies in perception. A gift giver bestows upon a person a present that matches their perception of the recipient. It is how they view us, and the gift they are giving is (hopefully) something they believe will enhance the person's life. But other peoples' perceptions of us don't necessarily match our own self-perception, which results in a gift missing the mark. And although well-intentioned, when a gift doesn't match with a person's own self-perception, it ends up being awkward for both the giver and recipient.

How can other people's view of us be so different from our own? It lies in how we present ourselves. Many times we act a certain way with one group of people and differently with another, leaving behind a different perception than what was intended. Think about being at family gatherings. Typically, we are on our best behavior when we are with grandparents and distant

relatives, as that is how we were taught to behave as children.

When it comes time for those people to give us gifts, they provide us with something that they think is nice and reflective of their caring for us, even though it might not be reflective of how we view ourselves. Hence, the gift of bird sweaters at Christmas or the ugly painting. But hey, it's the thought that counts, right?

This holiday season, consider gift giving an opportunity to carefully consider the recipient's self-image. How does your friend, cousin, grandma, or teacher view him- or herself? Will your nice gesture be in line with his or her viewpoint? Giving a gift always feels good, but it feels even better to provide a person with something that is in keeping with his or her own self-perception. After all, do you want to be the one giving an ugly sweater or an out-of-place painting that will wind up in the closet?—STEVEN FISCHER