

COLOUR PROPERTIES AND PRACTICAL TIPS

ON YOUR PALETTE - (Oil or Acrylics)

Theoretically you need the three primary colours; red, blue and yellow plus white and occasionally black. BUT from any single choice of the various primaries available you will not, in practice, be able to mix all colours. You can choose the cool primaries - Alizarin Crimson, Cobalt Blue and lemon yellow. Or the warm primaries - Cadmium red, French Ultramarine and Cadmium yellow. Whether the cool or warm primaries dominate your palette is a matter of personal choice developed from experiment and practice but the others will always be a useful addition.

Titanium white is the most common colour you will use and can be bought in bulk!

Other useful colours are yellow ochre, burnt sienna, burnt umber and viridian green.

Do not bother with 'flesh tint' you will never find anybody that colour!

How you arrange the colours on your palette is up to you but grouping warm and cool colours separately works well with white on the opposite side. Organize your mixes in the middle.

You will nearly always paint using colours you have mixed rather than the colours straight from the tube.

Over time you will develop your own colour preferences in your paintings and this will determine the choice of colours on your palette but the above provides a sound basis.

COLOUR MIXING -

Restrict mixes to no more than three colours to avoid 'muddying'.

Adding white to colours can sometimes change the hue quite dramatically eg. white + red produces pink.

You will use more white than any other colour. When mixing pale colours always start with white and add the other colour otherwise you can mix far too much paint.

Similarly many colours you are trying to make will involve an unequal mix of base colours so always start with the colour closest to the one you want and avoid mixing too much paint.

The power of pigments vary in strength when mixing eg. raw umber and terre verte very quickly become pale when mixed with white. On the other hand alizarin crimson and prussian blue remain very strong and produce very vivid tints when added to white.

Adding black can make some colours flat or 'muddy' and with yellow actually produce an olive green. A more natural and useful natural black can be mixed by adding red and blue together to make a dark purple and then add a small amount of yellow. To test the mix separate a little and add white. If the quality of the paint is good and the mix is balanced it will produce a neutral grey. Another useful mix is burnt sienna with French ultramarine or cobalt blue.

It is always a useful exercise to choose a colour in a subject and try to determine its constituent colours. Better still mix it! Knowledge of the colour circle will help you do this and practice will help you remember.

In the early stages it can be frustrating trying to mix colours but the only answer is to experiment and practice. It is experience that makes it work.

COLOUR PROPERTIES

Warm colours advance and cool colours recede.

Red appears more brilliant against a black background and somewhat duller against the white background. In contrast with orange, the red appears lifeless; in contrast with blue-green, it exhibits brilliance.

Colour and distance - Generally the further colour is away from you it becomes weaker and is also affected the light and blue of the atmosphere. A good example is grass. Immediately in front of you grass is a rich vivid

green. 500 metres away the same type of grass loses its colour intensity; the hue and tone become paler. The same grass 5 km away on a hillside appears as an even paler blue/grey/green. The brain expects to see this in landscape so it is a very effective element in creating a feeling of depth in a painting.

It is variation in tone (tints and shades) that help describe shape and form however you also find that shades are not just darker but also cooler. Adding small amounts of blue or alizarin crimson can achieve this. Similarly adding small amounts of warm colour to tints can help. Edward Hopper the American painter exploited this to great effect.

Confronted by most landscapes you are overwhelmed by a sea of green yet surprisingly most artists avoid a green colour scheme. You will find in many old paintings a preference for Sienna and ochres even taking into account the tendency for colours to yellow with age. In some 19th and even more 20th century landscapes you will find a broadening or even exaggerated interpretation of natural colour. This can be for a number of reasons such as establishing a mood, a purposeful choice of colour for the sake of the painted image or maybe a passionate and expressive interpretation of the subject. The main emphasis here being on the freedom to choose colours that work in the painting and not just slavishly copying the colours you see in the subject.