

COLOR

Tonal vs. Impressionistic Painting

Tonal Painting – This style of painting is rendered using local color (the natural color of an object, without the changing condition of light), and value.

Impressionistic Painting – This style of painting is rendered using light/color relationships. It is NOT expressionistic in nature (contrary to some beliefs). It is based on heightened and developed visual acuity to see light/color relationships; not an interpretation of color.

Life vs. Photo Reference (and how it relates to color and painting)

Both life and photo reference have their benefits. In terms of growth as an artist, painting from life is the best method for building your skills as a painter, as you will see below. Don't let this deter you from using photographs if necessary, because there are things you can do to enhance what they have to offer.

Life Reference

This refers to subjects that are painted from any form of 3D reference. This can be either in a studio set-up with controlled lighting, or plein-air (outdoor) with natural light.

Pros: Artist interpretation as opposed to digital; actual values/colors, not distorted; constantly increasing perceptual skills which is **the path to mastery in painting**.

Cons: Difficult to master; changing light if outdoors; difficult conditions if outdoors.

Photo Reference

This refers to subject that are painted from any form of 2D reference.

Pros: Convenient; constant/consistent; can digitally manipulate.

Cons: Flattens and distorts perspective; flattens value; alters and dulls color relationships; does not assist in developing perceptual skills.

Ideally if you must use photo reference:

- learn to take photo reference in a manner that will assist you in obtaining as much visual information as possible
- work at developing perceptual skills through life exercises and use your acquired knowledge and heightened ability to observe color information to enhance what you obtain by photograph
- make color sketches and/or notes to use in addition to your photo reference

3 Aspects of Color – TIV

Color of an object will appear to be different under various lighting conditions. Different lighting conditions that may impact the color of an object: Colors surrounding the object, angle of light, time of day, season, viewer's distance from object, and artificial lighting.

When comparing color of forms to one another, ask these three questions to establish your relationships:

1. **Temperature** – Is it warmer, or is it cooler?
NOTE: A Basic Rule Affecting Color Temperature... surfaces in direct light are warm in color (relative), surfaces in shadow are cool in color (relative); REGARDLESS of the LOCAL COLOR.
2. **Intensity** – Is it a pure and intense color, or is it grayer and dull?
3. **Value** – Is it lighter or is it darker?

TIV = Temperature, Intensity, Value

Life Studies – Color Using Blocks

The purpose of these studies is to train yourself to accurately see and record your subject in terms of color, which is interdependent with light. Color can vary if your light source is not constant. You should therefore work with both unchanging and changing light sources so that you may experience this for yourselves.

You will require a full color palette (at least a warm and cool of each primary and secondary color – NO black). You will mix your colors whenever possible, directly on the canvas. Wipe your brush after mixing to ensure you don't muddy your pure pigments on your palette.

This painting process is similar to blocking in with value, except when looking at color the value is not necessarily determined by what is in the light and what is in the shadow. For example... a yellow block in the light will read as a light, but a dark blue block in the light may read as a dark.

Impressionistic Color – Four Stages

Stage One

- Pick out DARKEST and LIGHTEST COLOR VALUES (lightest/brightest color value usually occurs in your center of interest).
- Keep values SIMPLE in ESTABLISHING FORMS (or color value areas).
- Keep forms (or value areas) SEPARATE.
- Start off with 3 – 6 value areas, no more than 12.

Stage Two

- REFINE the FORMS (or value areas).
- Compare value, intensity, and temperature of forms in relationship to one another.
- Maintain SEPARATION between the forms.
- IGNORE detail, reflections, texture, etc.
- Look at forms/values that are SIMILAR and PULL APART.
- Go over forms 3 – 4 times.

Stage Three

- Establish VARIATIONS in forms, in temperature, intensity, and value.
- 2 – 4 variations in forms bring in dimensionality (modeling).
- Edges start to disappear.

Stage Four

- DETAIL and REFINEMENT stage.
- Completely LOSE EDGES.
- Work on CENTER of INTEREST.

Ask yourself the **TIV** questions when establishing color:

- Is it warm(er) or cool(er)?
- Is it bright(er) or dull(er)?
- Is it light(er) or dark(er)?

“The artist cannot copy a sunlit lawn, but he can suggest it. Exactly how he does it in any particular instance is his secret, but the *word of power* which makes this magic possible, is known to all artists ...it is **RELATIONSHIPS.**”

- E. H. Gombrich, Art and Illusion