

basic colour concepts

Use the best colours you can afford to be generous with. Good paint is worth the money but not if you leave it in the tube or are skimpy with it. Student quality paint (every colour is the same price) is okay for studies, but not for long. Paints with the word 'hue' on the label signify that they are not actually what they say, usually in an attempt to make the less expensive. Some pigments are toxic. Be sensible. Don't eat them, and don't eat near them. Wash your hands and take fresh air breaks. The word "permanent" on a paint label does not necessarily mean that it will not fade. A sound knowledge of a limited palette is always preferable to thrashing around with a huge palette.

When you mix two colours together the intensity in the resulting colour is diminished. We normally use more white than other paint, but try to pay attention to the amount of white that you use. Too much can make your paintings chalky, i.e. not so good. Start mixing with the weaker colour and add a little of the stronger one to it. Don't over mix. A few streaks make for more interesting paintings. Remember that you can mix colour on the painting as well as on the palette. Try to figure out where you're going before you start mixing. Try not to use more than three colours in any mixture. When you get up to five, start over. Pay attention to the three main colour contrasts, below.

Every bit of colour on your painting influences the other colour areas. It's all relative. The same colour will appear differently on the palette and on the painting. Use a white or neutral toned palette. Don't use metal or tin foil for a palette.

Look for and consider contrasts in three main areas:

- **Tone**, value, light and dark. Separate tone from hue in your thinking. Try to establish unequal masses of light, dark and mid tone areas.
- **Hue**, temperature, red-yellow-blue ness. Try for a main hue for each painting, hopefully not the same one every time.
- **Brilliance, intensity** – for some parts to be brilliant, others need to be subdued and quiet. A quiet painting can sing with a little hit of pure colour strategically placed.

In terms of the paint itself consider:

- The strength of the pigment - how much of it will it take to change the one you're mixing it with? Phthalo (Winsor) colours and other synthetic pigments are very strong. You only need a little bit to influence other less strong pigments.
- Viscosity - the thickness of the paint. How fluid is it? Is it straight from the tube or mixed with thinner or oil? Medium? (oil paint) Retarder? Gel? Other textures?
- The amount you have on your brush at any time. Whether you have two or more colours on the brush and how that will change the stroke as you go along.
- Transparency – pigments have differing degrees of opacity. White can be added to make transparent paint more opaque. Medium, oil (or a little water in acrylic) can be added to make opaque paint more transparent. Think of darks as transparent and lights as opaque. Try working in layers.
- Staining power - The synthetic pigments, especially the phthalos are powerful and can stain your palette and brushes.

A good technical resource on materials is "The Artists Handbook of Materials and Techniques" by Ralph Mayer.

There is the more complex concern of the symbolism of the colours themselves to be considered.