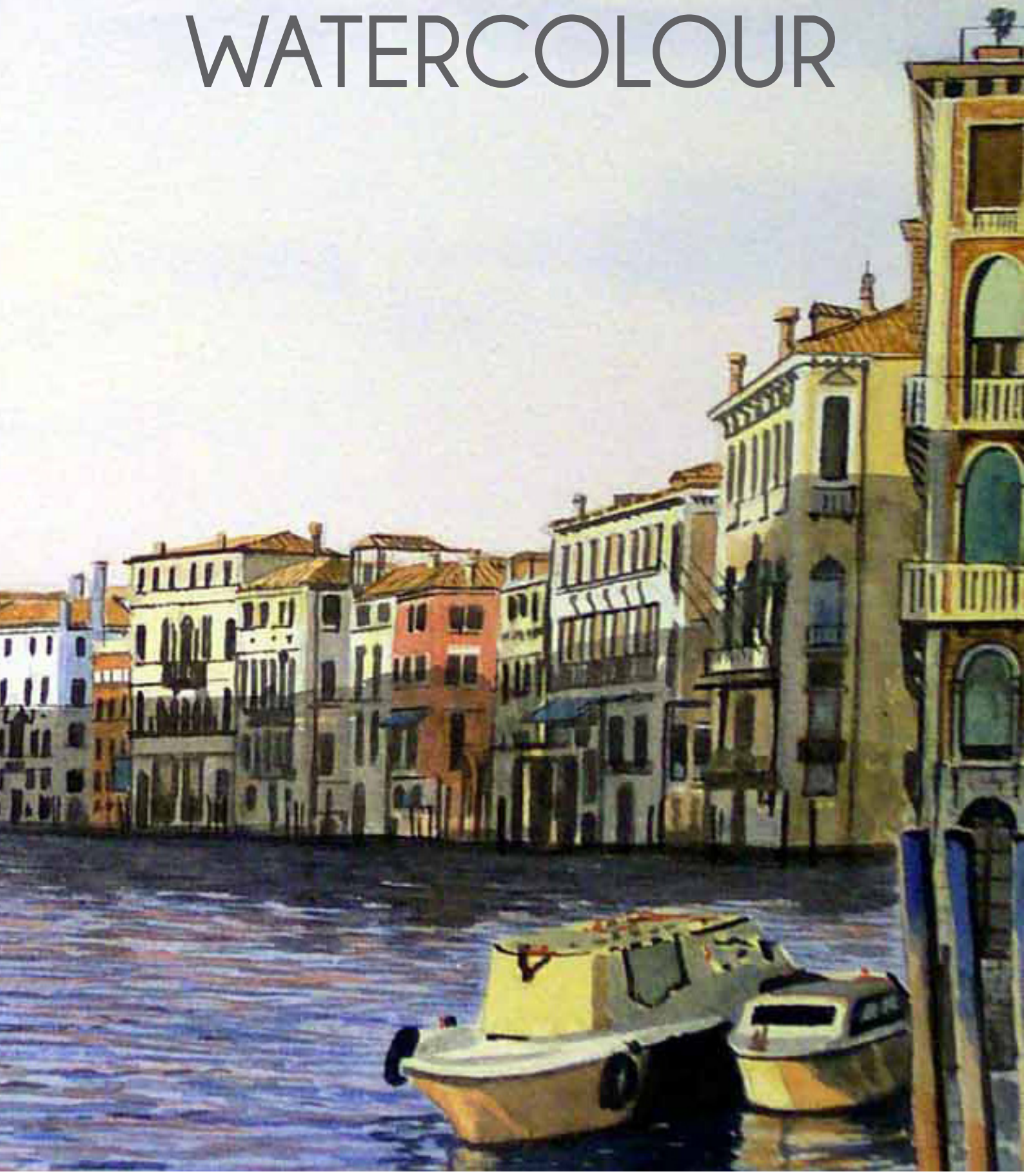


A (very) Brief

INTRODUCTION TO WATERCOLOUR



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INTRODUCTION TO WATERCOLOUR



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Introduction 7

Material and Techniques 9

Paint and other materials 10

Paper 12

Brushes 14

Color 17

Vibrant colors 18

Color mixing 20

Light and dark 22

Perspective 25

Creating depth with color 26

Focal point 28

Focal point 30

Glossary and Index 33

Glossary 34

Index 36

Acknowledgment and sources 36



Introduction

Used in the past by the Egyptians on papyrus and by the Chinese on silk, it gradually evolved to become an important medium on paper. Its original use on paper was to elaborate upon line drawings with monochromatic washes. Color followed, with the line still used for drawing and modeling of form. It was not until Winslow Homer appeared, that watercolors became a medium to be handled directly on the spot in a broad manner. While these early water colors were used as a means of study from nature for subsequent oils, they came to have all the power contained in the heavier oil medium. Water color continues to be a medium that lends itself readily to painting on the spot, and working directly from nature is the most vital part of learning to handle it, aside from the original intention of studying the various aspects of nature. It is only after a long period of outdoor study that a reasonably convincing watercolor can be made in the studio. If you have worked in oils, you will find the knowledge you have acquired painting with this heavier medium very helpful in watercolor painting. Experience in drawing and composition, and the training of your eye to see color, will all stand you in good stead. Now all you have to do is master the technique of handling watercolors!





Material and Techniques



Paint and other materials

You can buy watercolor paints in a vast array of colors, which can vary in form and quality. The two main forms of watercolor paint are tubes of fluid pigment and solid blocks called pans. “Artists’ colors” are the highest quality watercolor paints. These contain greater quantities of fine pigment than “Students’ colors” and are more transparent so create more luminous paintings. It is a good idea to limit the range of colors that you buy to start off with and invest in the more expensive Artists’ colors.

RECOMMENDED COLORS

The ten paints below make up a good basic starter palette. You do not need to buy a larger selection because these paints can be successfully mixed together to create a wide range of colors.



Types of paint

Tubes of paint are usually stronger than pans. They squeeze easily onto a palette and are quick to mix, making them good for large washes.



Half-pans, and the larger pans, can be bought individually or in paintboxes. They are small and portable, so useful for painting outdoors

Paintboxes are a convenient way of storing and transporting half-pans or pans. The lids can be used as palettes.



OTHER MATERIALS

There is no need to buy a huge number of brushes to paint with; the range below will enable you to create a wide variety of effects. Aside from paints, paper, and brushes, keep paper towels on hand for mopping up spills and blotting out mistakes, and jars of water for mixing paints and cleaning brushes. You may also find some of the additional equipment below useful.



Additional equipment



From left to right:

Soft B pencils are useful for preliminary drawings.

Well palettes have several compartments so that you can mix different colors without them running into each other.

Masking tape is used to attach paper to a drawing board and give a painting a crisp edge.

Putty erasers are soft and don't damage the surface of paper.

Masking fluid covers areas of paper to keep them white. Once it is removed, the paper can be painted as normal.

Natural sponges are useful for mopping up excess paint and for creating textural effects.




Paper

Paper is made from linen or cotton fibers or wood pulp. To make paper less absorbent and create a surface that can hold washes and brushstrokes, size is added. Lighter weight papers have less size so may need to be stretched first to keep them from buckling. You can buy paper with a variety of surfaces and in a range of weights, so try to buy single sheets of paper until you have decided which type suits you.

TYPES OF PAPER


There are three main types of paper surface: hot-pressed paper has a hard, smooth surface; cold-pressed, or NOT, paper has a slight texture; and rough paper has been allowed to dry without pressing. Paper weights are given in lbs (pounds per ream) or gsm (grams per square meter). The choice ranges from light paper, which weighs 90 lb (190 gsm), to heavy 300 lb (638 gsm) paper.




Rough paper has a heavy texture. It is very versatile and good for a wide range of effects.

Cold-pressed paper is smoother than rough paper but is still textured. It is the best paper for general use.

Hot-pressed paper is very smooth. It is good for detail but is best avoided by beginners.



Toned papers As watercolors are transparent, they work best on white paper, although most papers have a slight tint. Toned papers affect the color of the paint.



Watercolor blocks. Blocks of paper are good for using on location, as you do not need a drawing board. They are glued on all four sides, so do not require stretching.

PAINT ON PAPER

The type of paper you use has a marked effect on a painting. These three sunset paintings were all created using the same techniques, but were painted on the three different types of paper: hot-pressed, cold-pressed, and rough. As a result, the finished paintings look quite different from each other.

Hot-pressed paper Washes are difficult to control on this paper and tend to dry with hard edges on the top of the slippery surface. This paper is better for a more linear subject.



Cold-pressed paper This is the easiest paper to use as the surface is good for broad, even washes. This type of paper is also suitable for paintings with fine detail and brushwork



Rough paper This paper can be quite difficult to use but reacts well to a bold approach. Washes are often broken by the paper's surface, which is useful when a textured effect is desired.

STRETCHING PAPER



Lay the paper, right side up, on a strong wooden board. Squeeze clean water from a sponge onto the paper so that it is thoroughly wet. Tip the board to let any excess water run off.



Stick each side of the paper down with damp gummed tape, overlapping it at the corners. Smooth the tape with a sponge. Let the paper dry naturally so it becomes flat. Keep the paper on the board until your painting is finished.

Brushes

Traditional watercolor brushes are made from soft hair and those made from sable are considered the best. Sable brushes are expensive, however, so when buying a first set of brushes, look for synthetic and synthetic/sable blends, which have been developed to mimic pure sable. Whatever a brush is made from, it should point well and hold its shape, be able to hold a generous amount of paint, and be supple and springy.

ROUNDS AND FLATS

Round brushes are conical and can be shaped into a fine point. They are numbered: the larger the brush, the higher its number. Flat brushes are wide and have straight ends. Their size is given by an imperial or metric measurement. Use the rounds and flats in the recommended brush selection to enable you to create a wide range of strokes from fine lines to broad washes, as below.



No. 9 round is suitable for both general use and detail.



No. 9 round with squirrel hair is useful for softening edges.



No. 14 round is good for general use; it holds more paint than a No. 9.



No. 15 round is good for general use; it holds more paint than a No. 9.



1/2 in (12.5 mm) flat is handy for creating sharp edges and lines.



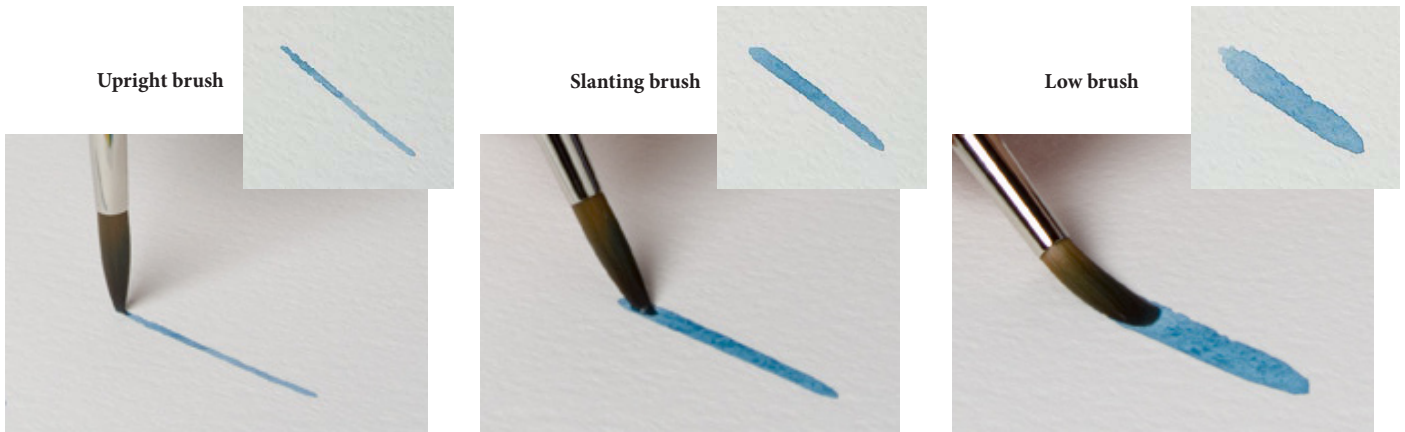
1 in (25 mm) flat is ideal for making a single stroke across the paper, useful when laying washes.



2 in (50 mm) hake, made from goat's hair, is excellent for broad washes and for covering large areas quickly.

BRUSHSTROKES

Try holding your brushes at different angles and varying the speed and pressure of your brushstrokes to create a variety of marks, as below. This will improve your brush control so that you become more relaxed and confident when painting. Trying out different brushstrokes will also help you to discover the range of effects you can make using round or flat brushes.



Try holding your brushes at different angles and varying the speed and pressure of your brushstrokes to create a variety of marks, as below. This will improve your brush control so that you become more relaxed and confident when painting. Trying out different brushstrokes will also help you to discover the range of effects you can make using round or flat brushes.





Color

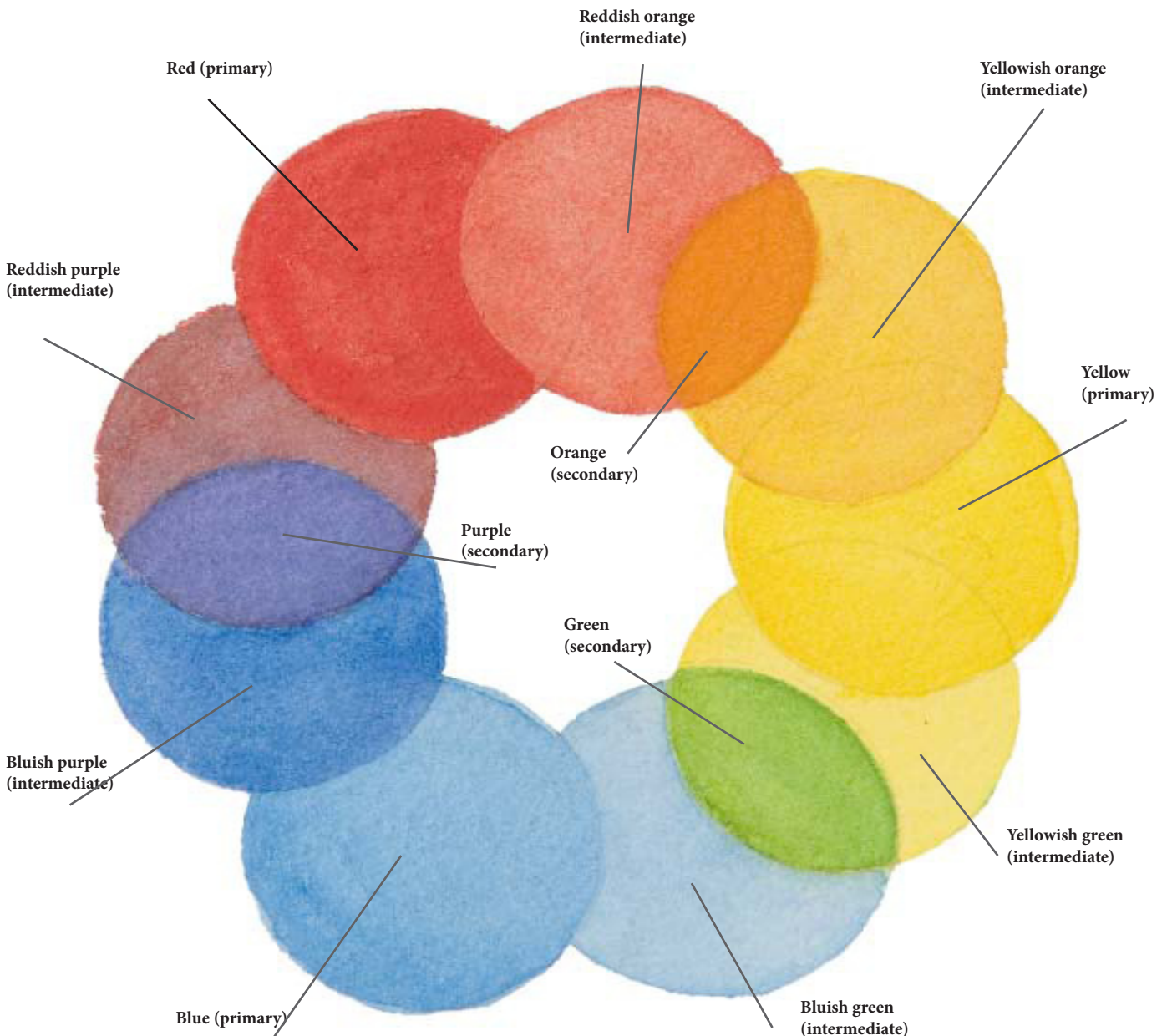


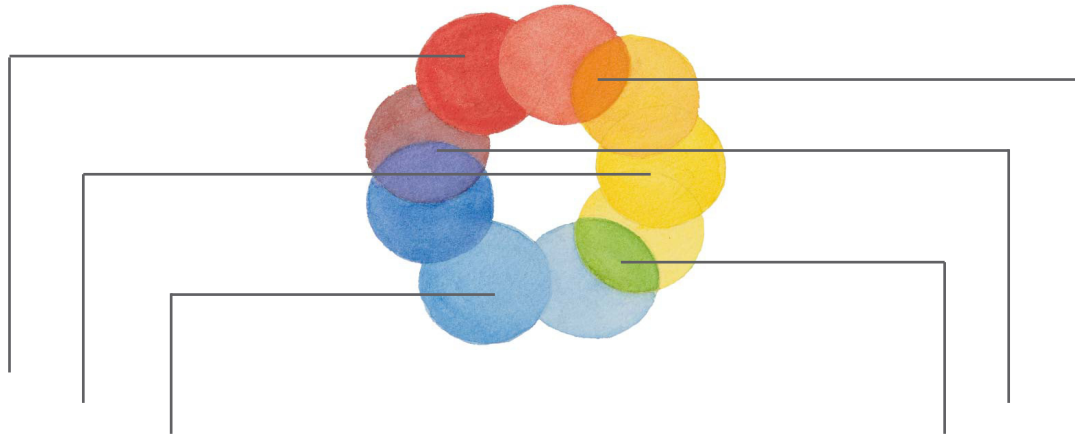
Vibrant colors

To create a really vibrant painting, you need to plan which colors to use. If you try to reproduce all the colors you see in front of you, they end up vying with each other, a bit like all the instruments in an orchestra playing at once. If, on the other hand, you try limiting the colors you use in a painting to complementary opposites, such as red and green, you will find that the colors make each other appear more vibrant. The reds will look much more red and the greens will appear more intensely green.

COLOR WHEEL

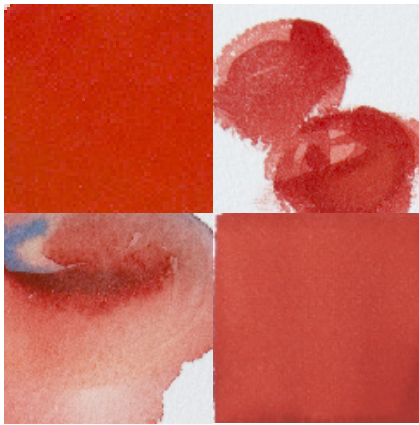
The color wheel is a classic device that shows how the six main colors—red, purple, blue, orange, green, and yellow—relate to one another. The color wheel contains the three primary colors and three secondary colors. Primary colors—red, yellow, and blue—cannot be mixed from any other colors. Secondary colors—orange, purple, and green—are mixed from two primary colors. The colors between the primary and secondary colors on the wheel are known as intermediate colors.



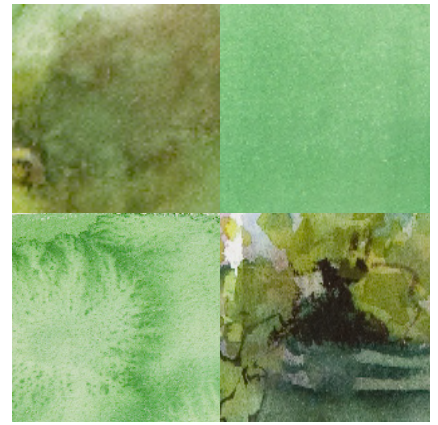


PRIMARY COLORS

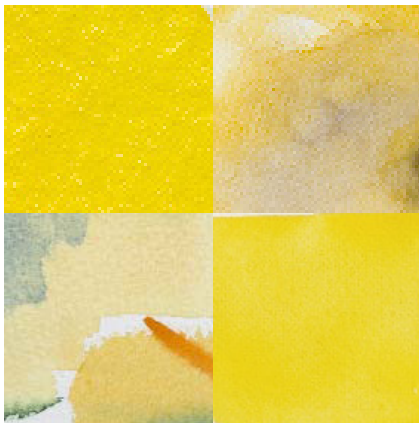
SECONDARY COLORS



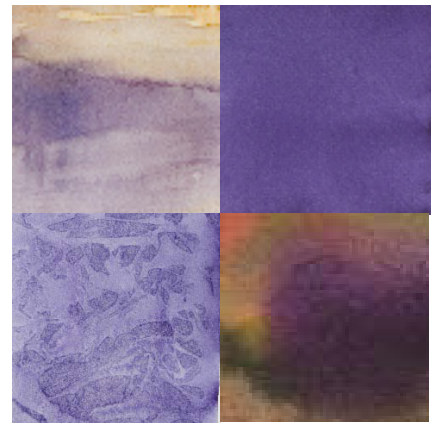
Red is one of the strongest hues and can easily overpower other colors.



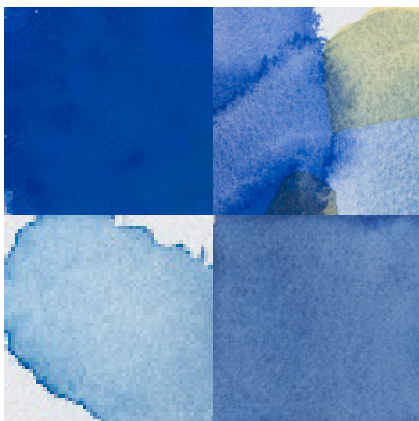
Green is made from yellow and blue, so it neither appears to dominate or recede.



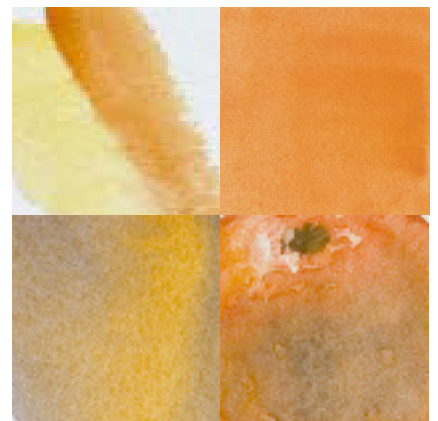
Yellow is the lightest tone, so appears to recede when placed next to other colors.



Purple is made from red and blue, so is strong but doesn't overpower other colors.



Blue is a very dominant color and will not be overpowered.



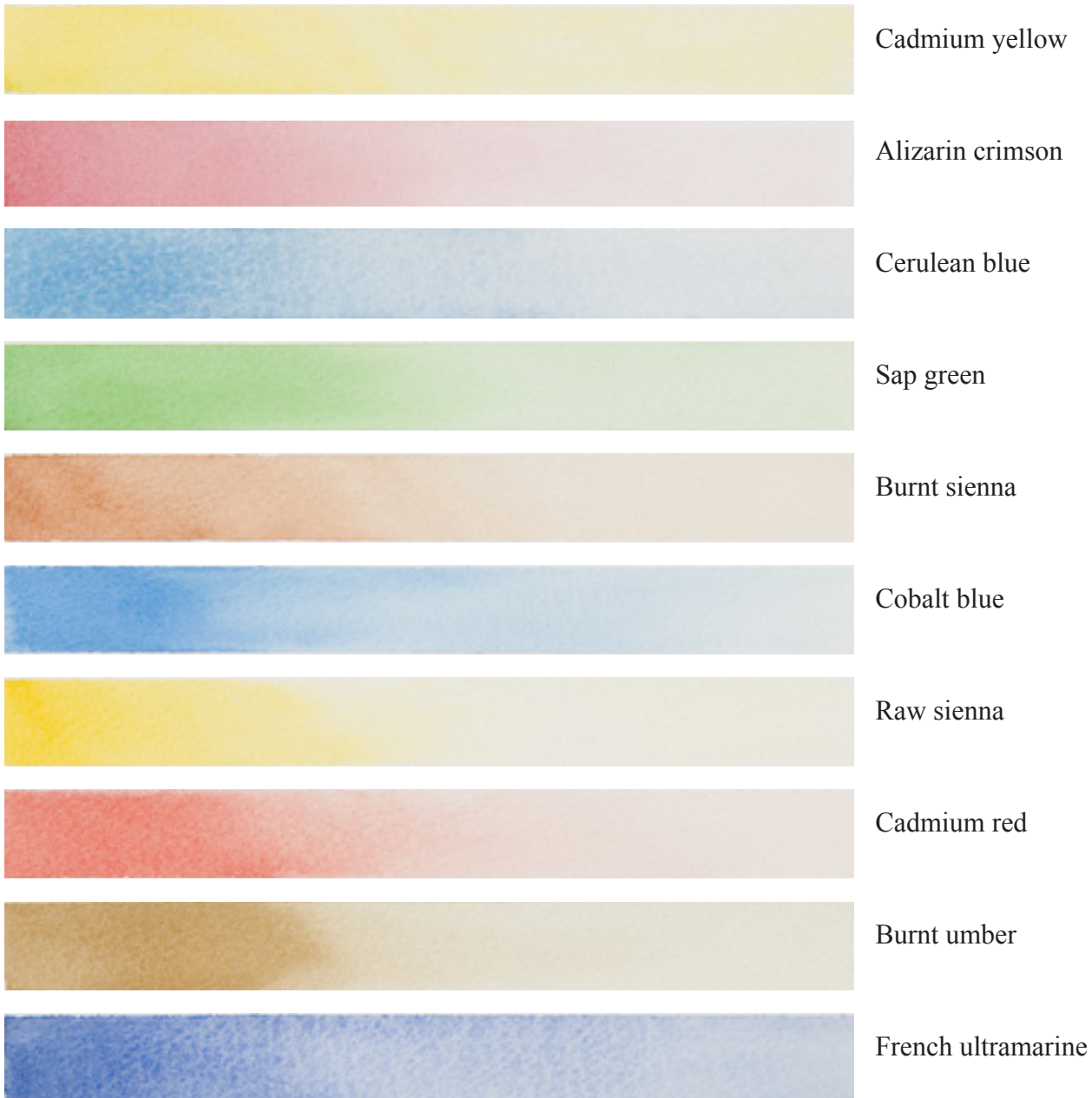
Orange is made from red and yellow, so will lighten any color it is mixed with.

Color mixing

It is easy to mix watercolor paints to make new colors, both in a palette and on paper. The recommended basic palette of ten colors includes the three primary colors, green, and browns, so you will be able to mix a wide range of colors. There are several shades of some colors; for example, there are two reds: cadmium red and the bluer alizarin crimson. The different shades of a color react differently when mixed with other colors, increasing the range of colors you can create.

LIGHTENING COLORS

By varying the amount of water you add to paint, you can create a range of different shades from light to dark. If you want the paint to retain its translucency, you should always make colors lighter by adding water rather than white paint, which makes colors opaque.



MIXING COLORS ON A PALETTE

Squeeze a small amount of paint from a tube onto your palette. Dip a brush into a jar of clean water, then mix the water with the paint. Add more water until you have the color you want. Rinse your brush after mixing each new color and keep the water in your mixing jar clean. To blend two colors, mix the dominant color with water, then gradually add the second color.



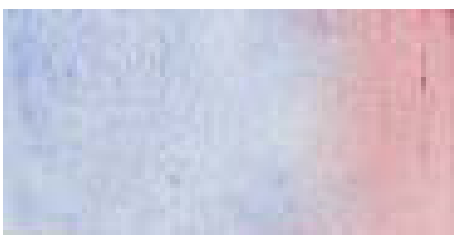
Watercolors look lighter when dry, so it is a good idea to test colors on a spare piece of paper, or around the edge of your color test sheet, before using them in a painting.



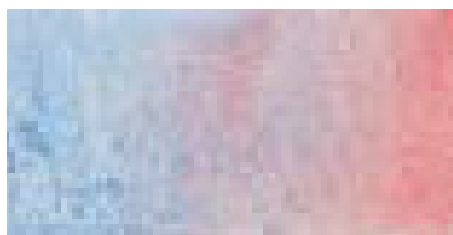
MIXING COLORS ON PAPER

Mix two different colors with water in separate wells in your palette. Paint the first color onto your paper with a clean brush. While this is still wet, add the second color and it will mix on the paper to create a new color. Sometimes when you mix two colors, they will look grainy. This granulation occurs when the paints mixed have different weight pigments from each other. Try mixing colors to see which ones granulate. The effect is good for creating textures.

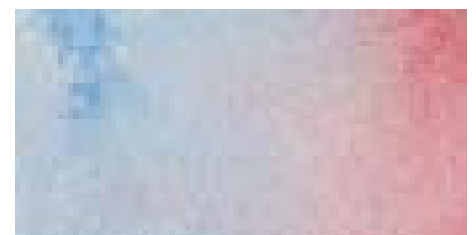
GRANULATION



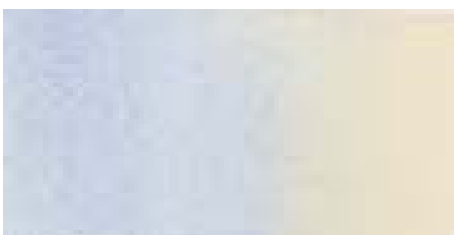
French ultramarine mixed with alizarin crimson granulates a little.



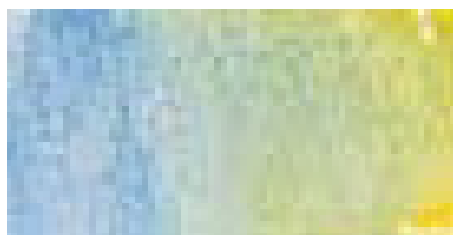
Cerulean blue mixed with alizarin crimson granulates a lot.



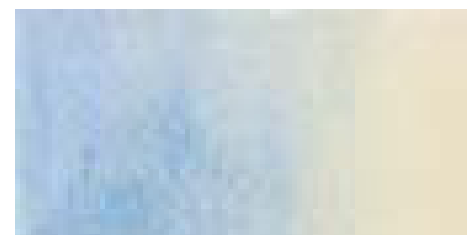
Cobalt blue mixed with alizarin crimson does not granulate.



French ultramarine mixed with raw sienna granulates a little



Cerulean blue mixed with raw sienna granulates a lot.



Cobalt blue mixed with raw sienna does not granulate.

Light and dark

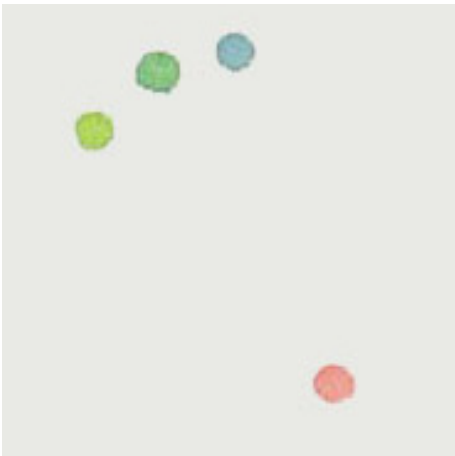
Tone—the relative lightness or darkness of colors—is the most important building block for all painting. It creates pattern and shape, movement and design. Color, depth, and focus are all diminished without good, clear use of tone. A painting in which all the colors are of a similar tone looks dull because there are no high notes or low notes—nothing stands out. To create subtle paintings full of energy and interest, it is best to limit the colors you choose and to use neutrals to create a varied range and depth of tone.

LIMIT YOUR PALETTE

Working with a limited range of colors that are close together on the color wheel holds a painting together and gives it unity. The colors can be based around any one of the primary colors and will each contain a certain amount of that color. Including one complementary color in your selection will enable you to create a range of harmonious neutrals and semineutrals that also unify the painting. Using a very small amount of the pure complementary color in your painting will give emphasis to the composition and make the colors sparkle.



In the color wheel, all the colors are equal in tone, so no one color stands out.



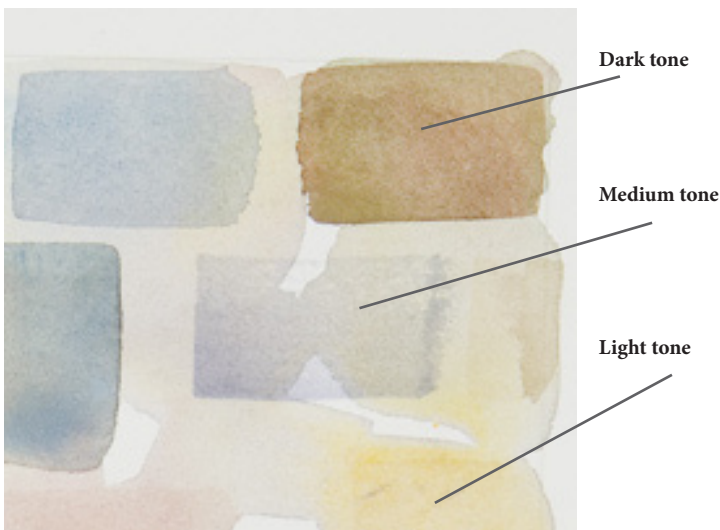
Limited palette of yellow-green, green, bluegreen, and complementary red.



Limited palette of blue-green, blue, blue-purple, and complementary orange.



Limited palette of blue-purple, purple, and red-purple, and complementary yellow.



SELECTING TONES

Using a simple range of close tones in your painting will help to hold all the different elements of your composition together. Most paintings only need a range of three close tones, accented by a few very dark tones and the white of the paper to create drama and focus. Make sure that you have identified all the tones in a scene before you decide where to simplify them. To help you see the tone of an object, compare it with the colors surrounding it. You may also find it useful to hold a piece of white paper next to the tone to see how light or dark it is when compared with white.

PAINTING WITH A LIMITED PALETTE

Before beginning a painting, try making a preliminary sketch of your subject. Use this sketch to help you work out which range of colors and tones to use to create a strong composition. The simple watercolor sketch on the right was made in preparation for the painting below and many of the tones used were corrected, to create a more dynamic painting. In the finished painting, the palette is limited, with green as the dominant color. Using a range of greens has made the foliage interesting even though it is not very detailed. The tonal range of the neutral colors gives the painting structure, and the small amount of complementary red makes the painting more vibrant.

Preliminary sketch

Range of greens needs to widen to balance the barn roof.

Tonal value too light, it blocks the view of the barn's side.

The mid-ground area is too colorful and distracting.



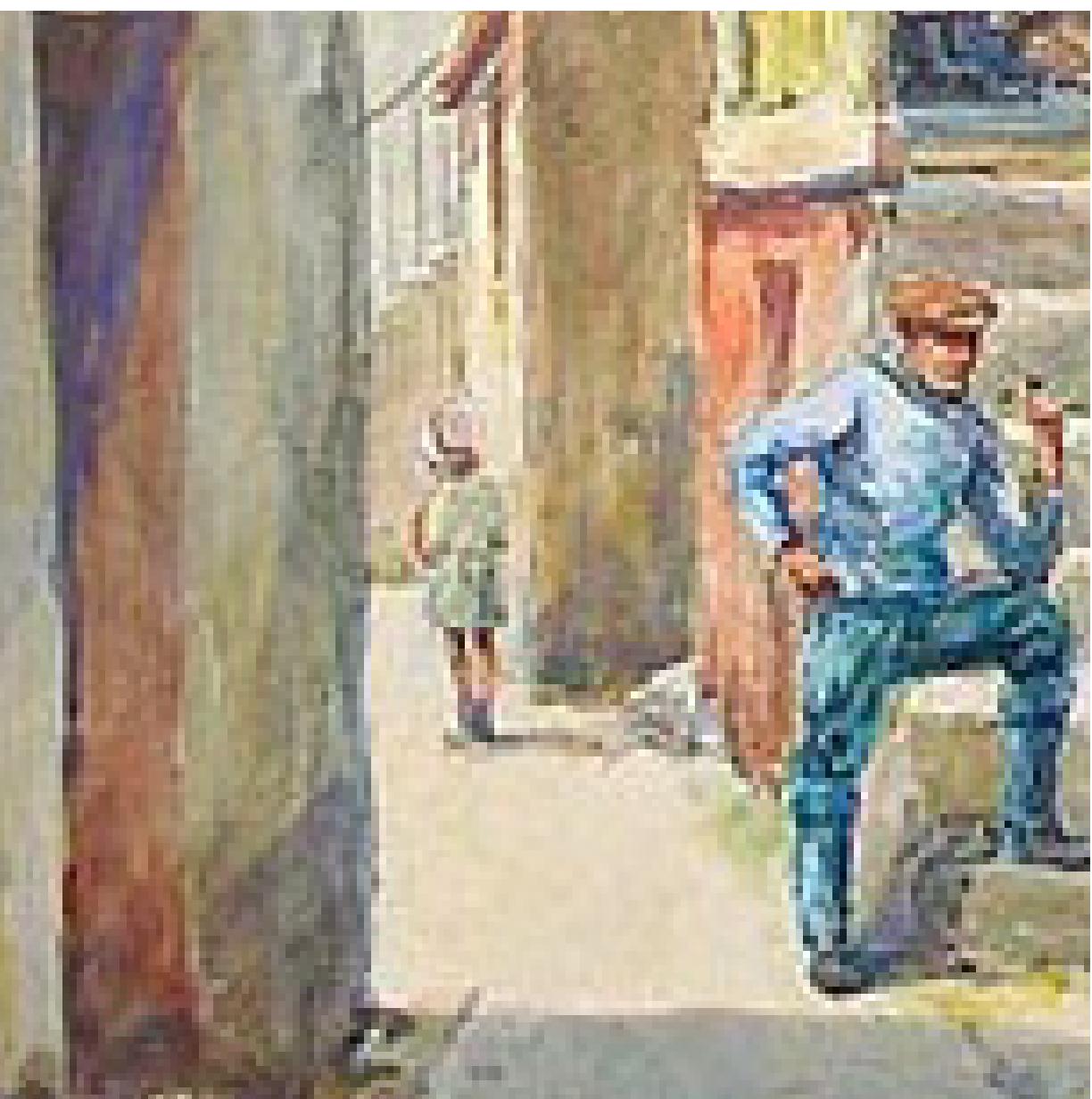
Finished painting





F. J. M. 1880

Perspective

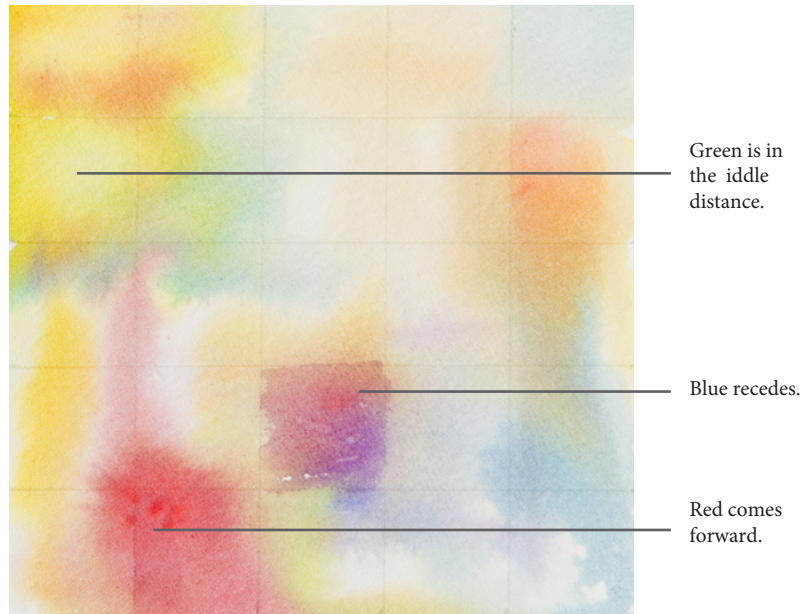


Creating depth with color

The colors of objects appear to change depending on how near or far they are from you, because of atmospheric conditions. In the foreground, colors are at their warmest and strongest and have the widest range of tones. With distance, colors lose their intensity, becoming bluer and lighter with less tonal variation. To create a sense of perspective in your paintings, forget what color you think an object is and paint it the color you actually see. This will be determined by how near or far away the object is.

RED COMES FORWARD

The colored grid on the right shows how the warmth, or lack of warmth, of a color affects where it sits in a painting. Warm colors such as reds and oranges appear to come forward, cool blue colors seem to recede, and greens sit in the middle distance. By positioning warm and cool colors carefully, you can create a sense of depth in the scenes you paint. A simple landscape of green fields with red poppies in the foreground and a distant blue sky immediately has a sense of perspective. On a smaller scale, you can make individual objects look more solid if you paint the part of the object closest to you with warm colors and use cooler colors on the sides of the object, as these are further away from you.



WARM AND COOL PALETTES

Paints are described as warm or cool depending on whether they have a reddish or bluish tone. This varies according to the pigment used to make them. A warm color such as red, for example, can appear in the cool palette if the pigment used to make it has a bluish tone, as with alizarin crimson. Selecting colors from both palettes in your paintings will help you create perspective.

WARM COLOR PALETTE



1. cadmium yellow 2. burnt sienna 3. cadmium red
4. emerald green 5. cadmium orange 6. raw sienna
7. burnt umber 8. sap green 9. French ultramarine
10–18. neutral mixes.

COOL COLOR PALETTE



1. cobalt blue 2. raw umber 3. alizarin crimson 4.
lemon yellow 5. Windsor violet 6. yellow ochre
7. permanent mauve 8. viridian 9. cerulean blue
10–18. neutral mixes.

CREATING DEPTH

All paintings, regardless of subject matter, rely on the use of warm and cool colors to create a sense of depth. By understanding how distance and atmosphere change colors and tones, you can control the sense of depth in your paintings.



The final painting has the colors carefully positioned and decreasing in intensity toward the horizon, so has a sense of depth.



The initial sketch has the warm and cool colors accurately placed, but it lacks a sense of depth because the colors are all of the same intensity.

The use of warm and cool colors on the face helps to make it look three-dimensional.

The warm color of the vest comes forward to give bulk to the figure

Warm tones in the jacket complement the skin tones.



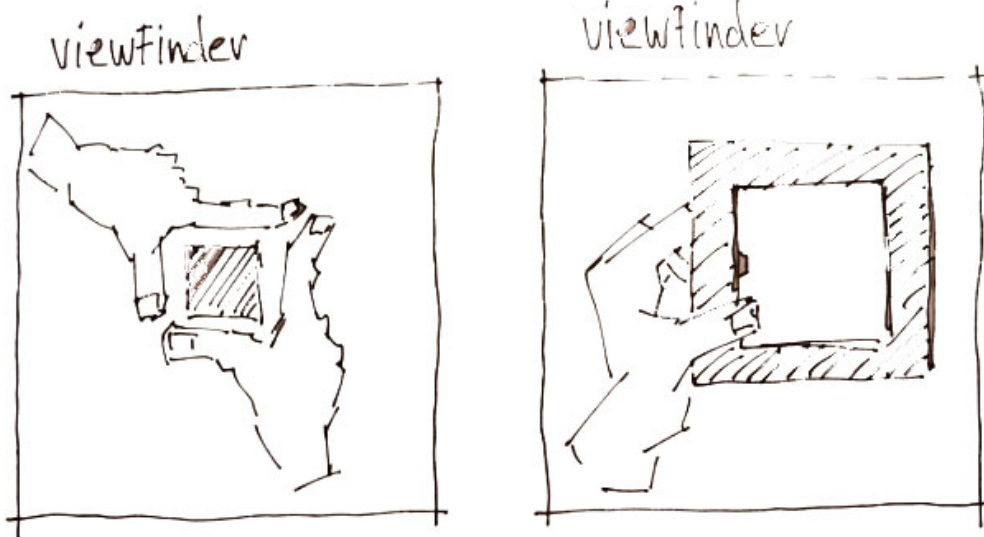
In this portrait colors have been chosen from both the warm and cool palette. The vest, for example, is a warm yellow, but the background yellows are cool. It is this careful use of color that creates the sense of depth.

Focal point

A good painting has a strong focal point that immediately draws your eye to the main area of interest. The focal point of any image is the point where the lightest and darkest marks meet. You can use these tones elsewhere in your painting, but they should only be next to each other where you want your viewer to focus. To emphasize the focal point even more, it is a good idea to restrict the range of tones you use for the details around it so that these areas are less defined and do not vie for attention.

VIEWFINDER

Use a viewfinder as a framing device that you can move in front of your subject to help you visualize how it will look in a variety of compositions. You can make a simple viewfinder by holding a square piece of tagboard to make a rectangle, as shown on the right. You can change the shape and size of the rectangle by moving the pieces of board closer to each other or further apart.



FORMAT

Deciding what format—shape of paper—to use is an important part of planning a composition. The three paintings below show how the choice of format can direct attention to different focal points. The formats used for this study are: portrait (a vertical rectangle, higher than it is wide), landscape (a horizontal rectangle, wider than it is high), and square.



Portrait format

The large amount of space given to the foreground in this design leads the eye along the road and into the picture.

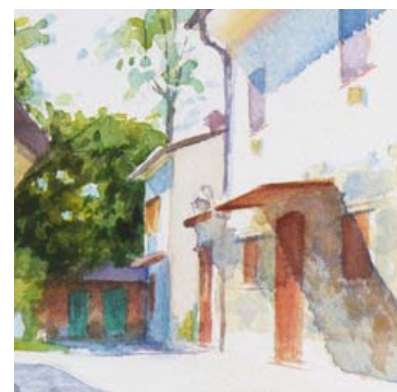


Landscape format

The horizontal nature of this picture draws attention to the colorful shed doors and angles of the trees. The building on the left directs the eye to the center of the composition.

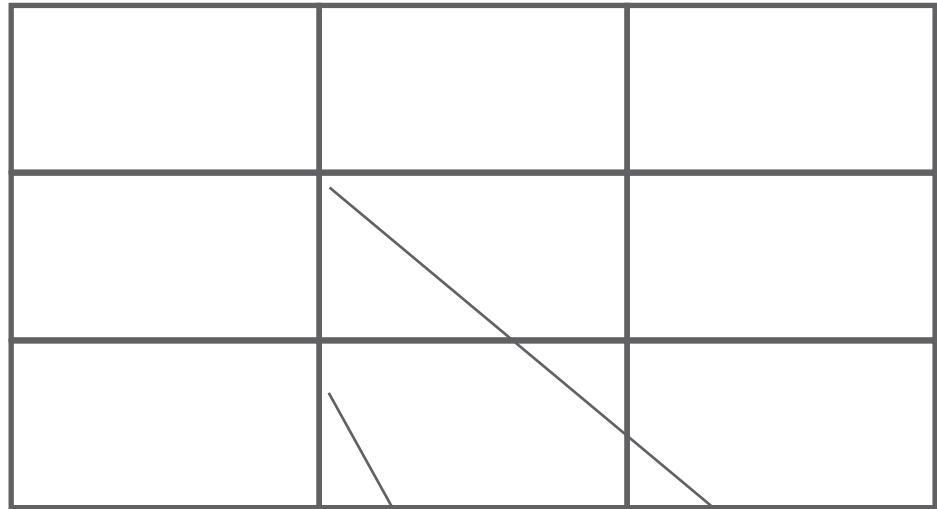
Square format

Here the roofs and doorways have been included. The trees on the left act as a counterpoint to this detail on the right and help to create a balanced composition.



USING THE RULE OF THIRDS

To help you plan your composition and give it visual impact, try using the rule of thirds. Divide your paper into thirds both vertically and horizontally to make a nine-box grid. At first you may want to draw these lines on the paper with a pencil, but with practice, the grid can be imaginary. For maximum effect, position the main elements of your design on the lines. Place the horizon line, for example, a third up from the bottom or a third down, and use the points where the lines intersect for your areas of interest.



Put objects on the vertical lines rather than in the center of the picture.

Put your focal point where two lines cross.

The focal point, the face, has been placed where two lines intersect.



The Rafter This painting of a figure in a clutter of objects and colors could have looked quite chaotic, but because the areas of interest have been placed according to the rule of thirds, the composition is well balanced and pleasing to the eye.

Focal point

A good painting has a strong focal point that immediately draws your eye to the main area of interest. The focal point of any image is the point where the lightest and darkest marks meet. You can use these tones elsewhere in your painting, but they should only be next to each other where you want your viewer to focus. To emphasize the focal point even more, it is a good idea to restrict the range of tones you use for the details around it so that these areas are less defined and do not vie for attention.

LIGHT TO DARK

It is important to decide what your main point of interest is before you begin painting so that you can create a strong composition. Start by identifying the lightest colors in your composition. These colors lie underneath all the subsequent layers of color, unifying your picture. Block in these large areas of color first, then begin building up the mid-tones to give your painting structure. Next paint smaller, darker details, and finally, add tiny amounts of pure, bright color and the darkest tones of all to bring the main area of interest into focus.



Farm buildings The buildings have been brought into focus in this picture as dark foliage has been painted next to their light stonework. Flicking a small amount of complementary red paint in the foreground creates further interest.

BUILDING LAYER

This painting of a flower pot has been built up in layers, starting with the lightest colors and then adding progressively smaller and darker areas of color so that detail and focus are established.

Light Tones



For this painting, a mix of raw sienna and cadmium red was used first for the lightest tone.

Mid-Tones



The mid-tones were then added. These create contrasts between objects and give them edges.

Dark Tones



Mid dark details were painted, then dark accents added next to the lightest tones to create focus.

EMPHASIZING THE FOCAL POINT

The focal point of this painting of a gymnast is her legs and neck, and this is where the lightest and darkest marks have been placed next to each other. To emphasize this focal point, the distracting detail of the gymnasium has been replaced with a soft background wash. The gymnast's leotard merges into this wash, which also helps to keep attention on the legs.



The lightest and darkest tones meet to focus attention on the feet.

The light areas on the face are set against mid-tones to limit attention.

The body blends into the background to keep your focus on the legs.



Glossary and Index



Glossary



ARTISTS' COLORS

The highest quality watercolor paints, these contain more fine pigment than students' colors, so produce the most permanent results. They are also more transparent, which means they create more luminous paintings.

BACKRUNS

Irregular shapes, sometimes called blooms, caused when paint in one color flows into another color that hasn't fully dried. The marks produced have dark outer edges.

BROKEN WASH

A wash produced by letting a loaded brush glance over the top of the paper as it is drawn across it, so that areas of white paper show through.

COLD-PRESSED PAPER

Paper with a slightly textured surface that has been pressed by cold rather than hot rollers during its manufacture. It is sometimes called NOT paper.

COLOR MIX

Paint that has completely dissolved in water to make a pool of color.

COLOR WHEEL

A visual device for showing the relationship between primary, secondary, and intermediate colors.



COMPLEMENTARY COLORS

Colors that are located directly opposite each other on the color wheel. The complementary of any secondary color is the primary color that it does not contain. Green, for example, is mixed from blue and yellow so its complementary is red.

COMPOSITION

The design of a painting, which takes into account the main areas of focus and the balance of interest.

COOL COLORS

Colors with a bluish tone. Cool colors appear to recede in a painting, so can be used to help create perspective.

DRY BRUSHWORK

Loading a brush with very little paint and dragging it over the dry paper's surface to produce broken marks. The method is useful for creating texture.

FORMAT

The shape of the paper. Commonly used formats are landscape, portrait, and square.

GLAZING

Painting one transparent color over another that has been allowed to dry completely. The first color shows through the second to create a new color.



GRANULATION

The separation of paints when they are mixed together in a palette or on paper that occurs if the pigments they contain are of different weights. The resulting granulated mix is speckled and pitted.

HOT-PRESSED PAPER

Paper with a very smooth surface that has been pressed between hot rollers.

INTERMEDIATE COLORS

The colors that appear between the primary and secondary colors on a color wheel. Intermediate colors are made by mixing primary colors and secondary colors together.

LANDSCAPE FORMAT

Paper that is rectangular in shape and is wider than it is high. It was traditionally used for painting large-scale landscapes.

LAYERING

Painting one color over another color that has been allowed to dry. Unlike with glazing, the colors used can be dark and opaque, so that the under layer of paint does not show through the layer of paint that covers it.



MASKING FLUID

A latex fluid that is painted onto paper and resists any watercolor paint put over it. Once the paint is dry, the masking fluid can be rubbed away to reveal the paper or layer of paint it covered.

NEUTRALS

Colors produced by mixing two complementary colors in equal proportions. By varying the proportions of the complementary colors, a range of semineutral grays and browns, which are more luminous than ready-made grays and browns, can be created.

OPAQUE PAINTS

Dense, nontransparent paints that obscure the colors they are painted over. When opaque paints are mixed together, the results are dull.

PERSPECTIVE

The method of creating a sense of depth on a flat surface. Perspective can be created in a painting by using warm, strong colors in the foreground, and cool, pale colors in the distance.

ROUGH PAPER

Paper with a highly textured surface that has been left to dry naturally, without pressing.



RULE OF THIRDS

An aid to composition, which divides a picture into thirds horizontally and vertically to make a grid of nine squares. Points of interest are placed on the “third” lines and the focal point is positioned where two lines intersect.

SECONDARY COLORS

Colors made by mixing two primary colors together. The secondary colors are green (mixed from blue and yellow), orange (mixed from red and yellow), and purple (mixed from blue and red).



SIZING

Sealing a paper’s fibers with glue to prevent paint from soaking into the paper. Blotting paper is un-sized and therefore very absorbent.

SPLATTERING

Flicking paint from a loaded paintbrush onto a picture to produce blots and patterns useful for texture.

SPONGING

Pressing a sponge dipped in paint onto paper to create a mottled mark that is good for creating texture.



SQUIRREL BRUSH

A very soft brush made from squirrel hair. Squirrel brushes do not hold much paint but are good for softening and blending colors.

TONED PAPER

Paper that has a colored surface. White paint has to be added to colored paints to make the lightest tones on such paper.

tone

The relative lightness or darkness of a color. The tone of a color can be altered by diluting it with water or mixing it with a darker pigment.

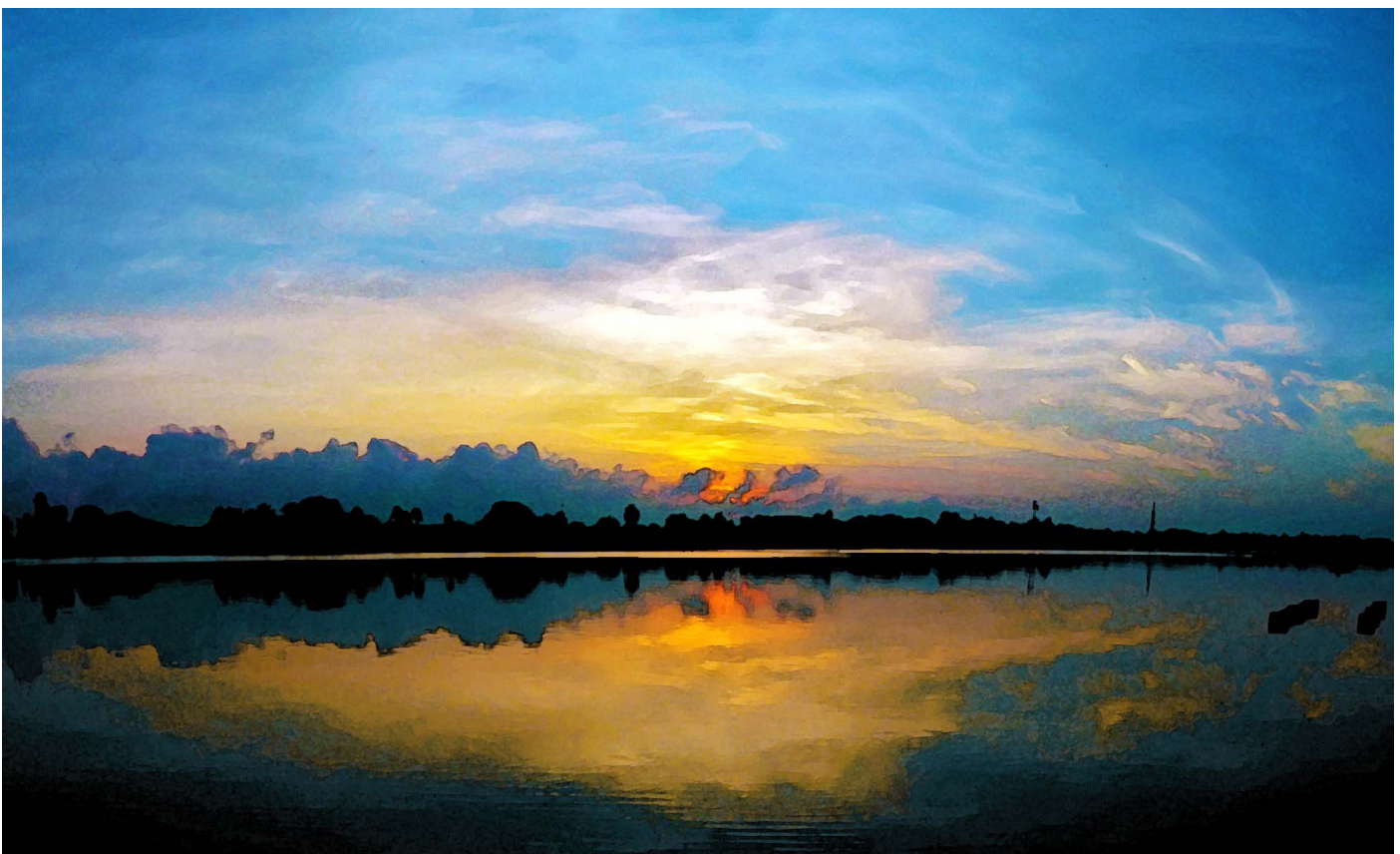


WAX RESIST

Method of using candle wax to prevent the surface of the paper from accepting paint. Once applied, the wax cannot be removed.

WET ON DRY

Adding layers of paint on top of color that has already dried. Painting in this way produces vivid colors with strong edges, so the method can be used to build up a painting with a high level of accuracy.



Index

- A
 artist 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
- B
 black 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
 blue 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
 brushstroke 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
- C
 colors 8, 9, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 27, 28, 32, 33
 Color wheel 16, 32
 cool 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
- D
 depth 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
 dry 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
- E
 effects 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
 eraser 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
- F
 flat 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
 format 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
- G
 gallery 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
 granulation 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
 green 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
- H
 half-pans 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
- I
 intermediate 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
- L
 landscape 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
 luminosity 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
- M
 mix 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
- N
 neutrals 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
- P
 paint effects 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
 painting 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
 paper 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
 pencils 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
 perspective 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
 portrait 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
 primary 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
 purple 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
- R
 red 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
 round 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
- S
 secondary 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
 sketch 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
 softening 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
 sponge 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
 stretching 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
- T
 techniques 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33
 tone 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24,
 28, 32, 33
- Y
 yellow 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28, 32, 33



Acknowledgment and sources

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Pr Finley
 Professor of fine arts
 Kingston University London

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