

Color Definitions

Color is light. It is either reflected from or transmitted by a colorant, such as a pigment or dye. Colors selectively absorb or reflect certain areas of the light spectrum. A colorant producing the visual sensation of green has the property of absorbing all the colored rays in white light except green. A reflection of white means that all colors are reflected.

A scene in natural daylight is affected by the position of the sun due to the time of day or season of the year and also by atmospheric conditions, while the spectrum range of artificial light is determined by the physical nature of such light (fluorescent, incandescent, etc.)

Primary Colors - Yellow, Red, Blue

Secondary Colors - The mixes between the primaries:

Orange = Yellow + Red **Green** = Yellow + Blue **Purple** = Blue + Red

Intermediate or Tertiary colors- Are made by mixing a primary color with a secondary color. Also the dull hues represented inside the intense ring of the color wheel are sometimes called tertiaries. These inside colors are relatively neutral because they contain a percentage of each of the three primaries and therefore, through a direct physical relationship, tend to harmonize with all other colors.

Double Primaries Palette - Two versions, warm and cool, of each Primary color. Cool (alizarin crimson) and warm red (permanent red, cad. red med., Quin red), cool (Hansa, aureolin) and warm yellow (new gamboge), Cool blue (cobalt blue), warm blue (ultramarine blue). Since watercolors don't have pure pigment primaries, it's helpful to have a warm and cool of each primary color to mix intense secondary and tertiary colors.

Compliments - Opposites on the color Wheel. If you want to find the exact compliment of a particular color, stare it against a neutral gray ground for 20-30 seconds intently, then look away to a white surface. The after image you see for a few seconds is it's compliment. Also note that while staring intently at a color it's compliment seems to bleed off it's edges.

Split Compliments - A color's intermediate/tertiary compliments. Ex.- Green's split compliment is red violet and red orange. The two colors adjacent to it's primary color.

Analogous- Approximately one third of a palette. Ex.- An analogous color range would be, if the key color is green, yellow, yellow green, green, blue green, and blue.

Triadic - A range of colors that approximately form a triangle on the color wheel. A triad of the color green would be green, neutral violet and neutral orange, which are tertiaries.

Local Color - The actual color of the object. A vase may have a blue glaze. The color of the glaze is it's local color.

The three dimensions of color:

Hue - First dimension. identifies a color by name. Red, yellow, green blue etc.

Intensity (chroma) - Second dimension. Colors more fully saturated can be described as being more intense than duller colors of the same hue dimension.

Value - Third dimension. locates a color's approximate position in relation to white and black.

Color notes from
'Color Compass' by M. Grumbacher, Inc.