

Inksmith

INFORMATION FOR ARTISTS FROM DANIEL SMITH

Some Thoughts on Color: Working with a Split Primary Color Palette

By Susie Short

Painting in watercolor is fun and exciting even if you don't have a clue what you are doing. Many of us are instantly hooked by the seductive medium and start by jumping right into painting pretty pictures. So if that's where you are, you are in good company.

A word you will probably hear again and again on your artistic journey through watercolor painting is "Practice, practice, practice." The truth is you really do learn to paint by painting. My Split Primaries Lessons are meant to acquaint you with the fundamentals of mixing colors

Some thoughts on color as it applies to learning to paint with watercolor

Color sets a mood and gives an artist unlimited means of expression. Color can be magical. Where composition and technique connects with our intellect, color touches our heart. It's been said that color is the heart and soul of watercolor.

Is studying and understanding basic color theory instead of simply relying on color formulas worth the effort? Each of you will have to answer that question for yourselves. Learning about color relationships can be liberating, allowing you to focus on other aspects of painting, which opens the door to greater freedom of expression.

Although watercolors obey the same color laws as other mediums, there is one very

important difference: Watercolor is transparent. It's the unique transparency of the paints and the translucent quality of the colors that make watercolor so popular.

Being able to mix the colors you want is considered to be a basis for successful watercolor painting. Even though experienced watercolor painters seem to be able to make color mixing look extremely easy, most of their skill and confidence comes from knowledge and practice.

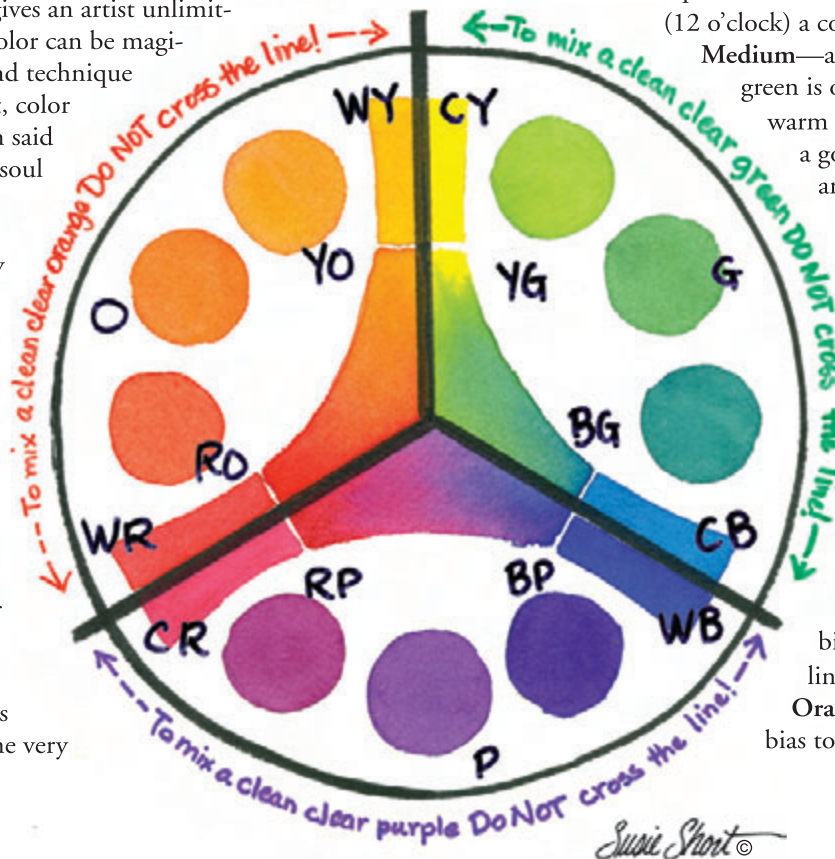
Once you learn the basic principles and how they apply to the Split Primary Palette, color mixing will become simple and automatic. And yes, mixing muddy colors will only be by choice!

Let's start with a color wheel arranged like a clock and divided into three equal sections. At the top of the wheel

(12 o'clock) a cool yellow, ● **Hansa Yellow Medium**—a lemony, slight bias to blue-green is on the right of the line; a warm yellow, ● **New Gamboge**—a golden, slight bias to red-orange is on the left of the line.

Going clockwise around the circle (at 4 o'clock) there is a cool blue, ● **Phthalo Blue (GS)**—an icy, slight bias to blue-green is above the line; a warm blue, ● **French Ultramarine**—a purplish blue, slight bias to violet is below the line. Continuing clockwise, (at 8 o'clock)

a cool red, ● **Quinacridone Rose**—a rosy, slight bias to red-violet is below the line; a warm red, ● **Pyrrrol Orange**—a tomatoey red, slight bias to red-orange is above the line.



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Here's how it works

Use a warm and a cool of each primary hue (a warm red and a cool red; a warm yellow and a cool yellow; a warm blue and a cool blue) to mix bright, high-intensity secondary called a **Mixed Primary Hue**. The secret is in using the right split primary colors and not crossing over the lines into another section!

Primaries

Secondaries

Select the red and yellow that "look" orange.

Select the yellow and blue that "look" green.

Select the blue and red that "look" purple.

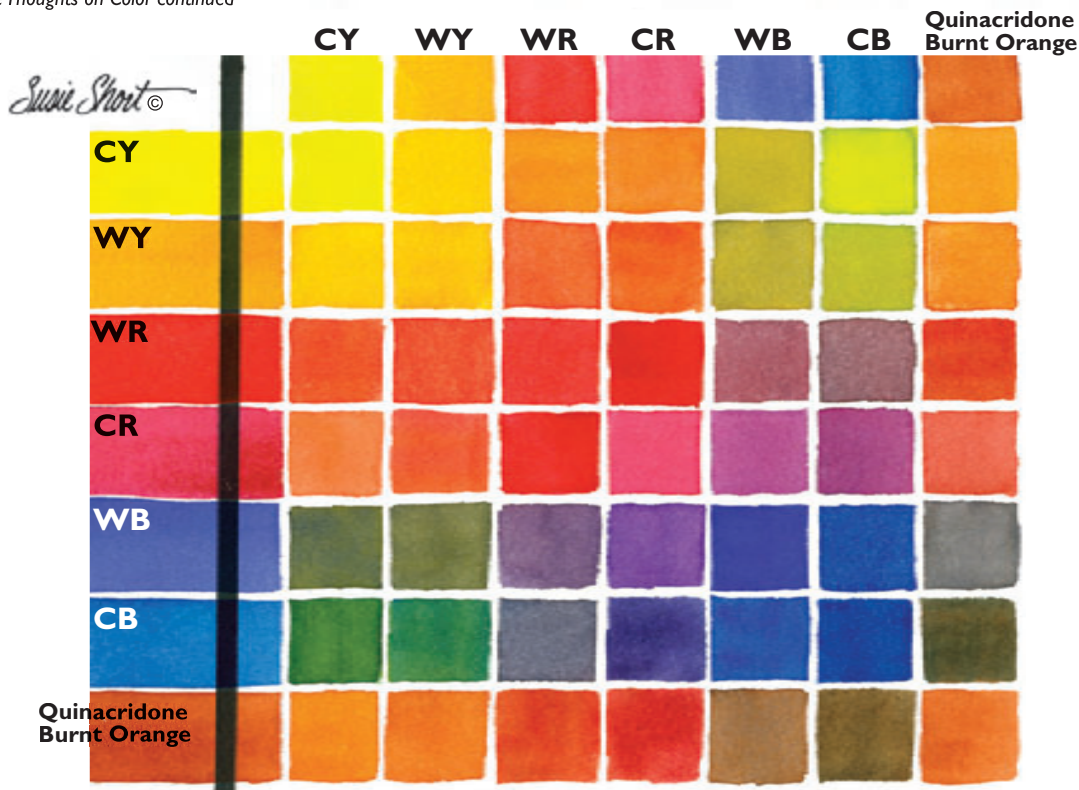
- To mix the oranges, mix the red and yellow within the lines to the left of the circle. First mix orange, and then add more yellow for yellow-orange and more red for red-orange.
- To mix the greens, mix the blue and yellow within the lines to the right of the circle. First mix green (2 o'clock), and then add more yellow for yellow-green (1 o'clock) and more blue for blue-green (3 o'clock).
- To mix the purples or violets, mix the pink or rose with the blue within the lines at the bottom of the circle. First mix purple (6 o'clock), and then add more blue for blue-violet (5 o'clock) and red for red-violet (7 o'clock).

Now here's the rule that makes this work: When mixing two colors on the wheel to achieve high-intensity color, don't cross over the line—stay in each section. Just imagine, no more muddy colors!

Crossing over the lines and mixing the colors on either side of the line causes the mixtures to become less intense and slightly grayer. Cross two lines and even more graying occurs. This graying is called neutralizing. It is the result of a slight touch of that third color being added to the mix. To mix earth colors, you simply cross over the lines or add a warm neutral to your mixtures.

That's where **Quinacridone Burnt Orange**—the seventh color of our essential 7 basics—enters the scene...it's a versatile warm neutral.

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“Essential 7”

“Essential 7” Basic Color Chart-Mixed Hues

To create your own color mixing chart using the “Essential 7” Basic Colors of the Split Primary Palette, use a pencil to draw eight rows and columns as shown above. To show how transparent or opaque each pigment is, make a black line using a permanent marker before you apply the colors.

Each **ROW** is about the color/hue in that row and what the other colors in the palette do when mixed with the dominant row color.

Each **COLUMN** contains the same colors placed in the same order as in the rows. Mix less of the column color and more of the row color for the best results.

NOTE: Each color will be mixed with itself during this process.

This chart shows the secondary and tertiary color combinations that are possible by mixing only two tube colors. It’s possible to create many more neutral hues by combining three or more tube colors in the basic split primary palette.

Color Basics in a Nutshell

Definitions of terms as they relate to watercolor

- **Hue**—The name of a color, such as red, blue, yellow, green, orange, etc.
- **Intensity**—The strength, brightness, or purity of a color; its chroma.
- **Saturation**—The measure of brilliance or purity of a color.
- **Value**—The lightness or darkness of a color; pure colors will vary greatly in value.
- **Temperature**—The warmth or coolness of a color; also relative terms in comparison to other colors in context.
- **Primary Colors** are those hues that cannot be mixed from any

other colors-- red, yellow, and blue. From these primaries, most other colors can be mixed.

- **Secondary Colors** are the resulting hues of mixing two primaries in equal amounts. (R+Y =Orange, Y+B=Green, B+R=Purple)
- **Intermediate Colors** are products of mixing one primary and a secondary. (R+O=Red-Orange, Y+O=Yellow-Orange, etc.)
- **Tertiary Colors** are products of mixing two secondary colors. (O+G, O+P, G+P, etc)
- **Complementary Colors** are two hues directly opposite each other on the color wheel. Complement to a primary color is the combination of other two primaries. Complement to Red is Green (Y+B), to Yellow is Purple (R+B), to Blue is Orange (R+Y).
- **Neutral Hues** are the results of combining all three primaries in various amounts, thus neutralizing the intensity and saturation of a hue. Combining a primary with its complement results in a neutral hue.

Temperature

“The warmth or coolness of a color; also relative terms in comparison to other colors in context.”

Both red and yellow are commonly considered warm, while blue is unquestionably cool. More specifically, warm and cool colors are relative to where a color falls on the color wheel. The warmest color is red-orange and the coolest color is blue-green. Everything between those two points has a slightly warmer color on one side of it and a slightly cooler one on the other. Its neighbor is either warmer or cooler depending on the direction you go around the color wheel. Using a split primary palette, you will be working with a warm and a cool of each primary color. All secondary hues are mixed from these carefully selected primary colors. ■