

## Navigating Perceived Colour - Ian Rowlands

A workshop with the aim of developing an understanding of the key functions or attributes of colours within the palette. The workshop, through a hands-on experience, explores, tone, hue, saturation, and colour unity

In my own practice, when painting from appearances, there has been an ongoing, fascinating battle to understand and articulate colour. Teaching painting and the necessary research involved has helped me formalise and develop working strategies.

One such strategy of restricting colour to a primary triad has been a positive experience allowing an intuitive or heartfelt approach to defining and translating observed colour. Working with primaries is a great habit breaker, encouraging an unprejudiced eye when looking. The journey becomes more interesting; the notion of grey or brown is turned on its head when one questions how to reach the objective from pure colours. Another likely outcome is that the observer will understand the relativity of colour in both the subject and their painting. As many mixtures contain all three primaries, commonalities within the mixes create a great sense of unity on both the palette and painting, a phenomenon that has been appropriately referred to as family resemblance.

The colours Winsor lemon, Cadmium red, and French ultramarine sit equidistantly on the colour wheel creating great balance and ensuring that no hue dominates the palette. If, however, Alizarin crimson were to replace Cadmium red in the triad, its violet undertone and that of French ultramarine would dominate the palette and attempts at producing a neutral grey would see-saw between green or violet; so, it is a very particular selection that makes up the triad.

Using a palette knife and adding colours sparingly, begin by mixing an equivalent to black. In doing so, the seemingly raw prismatic colours are tamed and a starting point for experiment reached. Check the mixtures' neutrality by taking a small portion and adding Titanium white; this will expose any bias towards colour in the mixture. Such bias can be nullified by adding its complimentary (opposite) colour. Within the triad any primary's complimentary is a secondary mixture of the other two and this is a two-way relationship. So, should the grey lean towards blue, both red and yellow would be added to achieve a more neutral result. It is worth making a decent quantity of the black.

One of the primaries and a small amount of white can now be added to some of the black to create a chromatic grey. A swatch can be transferred to paper before adding more of the same primary and repeating until an evolving scale of chromatic greys is achieved. This process can be repeated with each primary. Adding Titanium white expands the value range and cools the mixtures to a surprising degree. Further experiment, or 'colour play' can focus on adding combinations of two or all of the primaries and by doing so a huge range of beautifully harmonious mixtures will result. Many of these will arrive at equivalents of familiar colours such as yellow ochre and the umbers and will help to develop an understanding of precisely where they sit in the spectrum.

A further structured set of mixtures can help explain the key shifts or attributes from the prismatic (or unaltered) colour.

For instance, by taking Cadmium red and adding Titanium white in five increments, or tints, the value is altered upwards and becomes lighter. Similarly, add the mixed black in five increments, or shades, and the value or tone is altered downwards and becomes darker.

By adding Winsor lemon in 5 increments it is possible to shift the red hue to orange as the influence of the yellow gains weight. With 5 more increments a total shift to lemon could result. This process could be repeated by intermixing any of the triad with another.

The final set of mixtures explores saturation. Mix the black and Titanium white to achieve a neutral grey, aiming for the same tonal value as the cadmium red. The grey is added in 5 increments which will desaturate the red without altering its tonal value.

Each of the triad can and should be selected for these experiments to give a balanced view of their behavior. It is worth noting that tonal shifts also tend to desaturate the chosen colour and saturation shifts tend to alter hue. For instance, Winsor lemon will shift towards green when tone and saturation are explored. Being a dark toned colour, French ultramarine can be lightened in value only.

The beauty of the triad aside from its huge learning potential is that its limitations help to understand the qualities that the omitted co-primaries can bring to the palette.