

Art-Post #6



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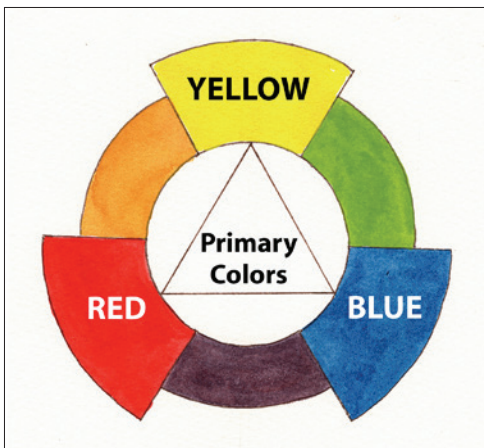
A Beginning Watercolor Lesson

Color Theory Lesson – Primary Colors

In my earlier posts, I recommended that you paint with only three colors:

- Cobalt Blue
- Winsor Red, Naphthol Red or Pyrrol Red
- Transparent Yellow, Winsor Yellow or Cadmium Lemon

Red, yellow, and blue are called primary colors because, theoretically, we can mix all other colors by using these three. This lesson will examine what we mean by primary colors and will explain how to use them. Working with primary colors is the first basic lesson in color theory and it is important to learn as much as you can about color theory in order to create successful paintings.



In the color wheel, notice how the primaries were used to mix the secondary colors: orange, green and purple. Although the prima-

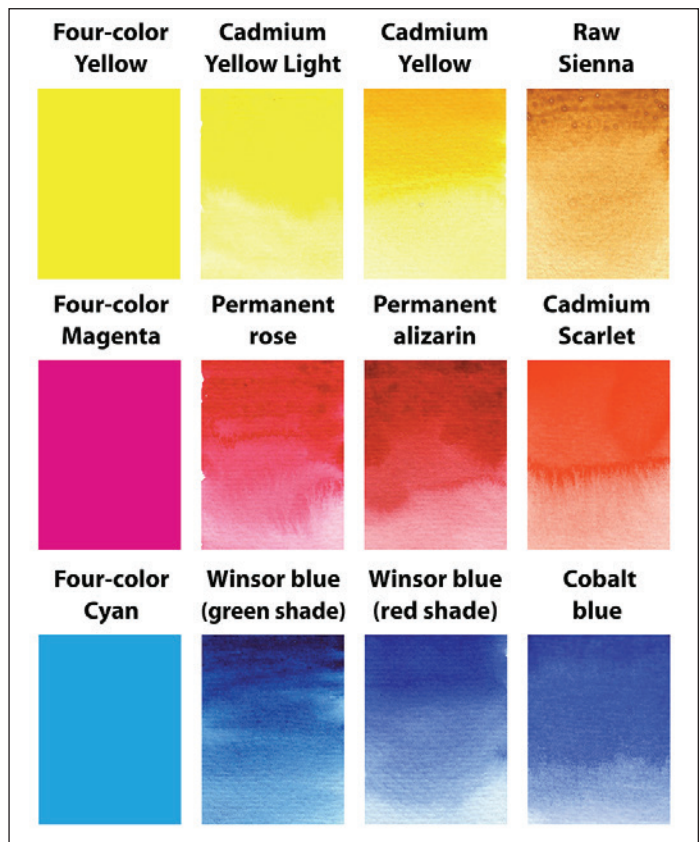
ries, with white and black, are used to mix all the other colors, the main problem is finding pigments that are true, pure, basic primary colors. This type of purity only exists as light and paint pigments and inks can never be true primaries. It creates problems for both the commercial printing process

and for painting. Because of impurities, individual pigments behave and interact with each other in unique ways. Our computers can display over 16 million colors, but our eyes can recognize even more colors than our computers. We can see this as frustrating, or as exciting, and it forces us to make choices in the colors we use in our artwork.

WHAT IS FOUR-COLOR PRINTING?

When we buy a book or magazine that has color images, the technique used to print the color images is “four-color” printing. Four inks are used and they are lemon yellow, magenta (a purplish red), cyan (a blue that is almost turquoise), and black. The best matches that we have on our palette for these colors are a lemon yellow (cadmium lemon, cadmium yellow light, or azo yellow), a purplish red (permanent rose or permanent alizarin crimson), and a phthalo blue like Winsor blue (green shade). In our paintings, we do not need a black pigment because we can easily will mix a dark, almost black color.

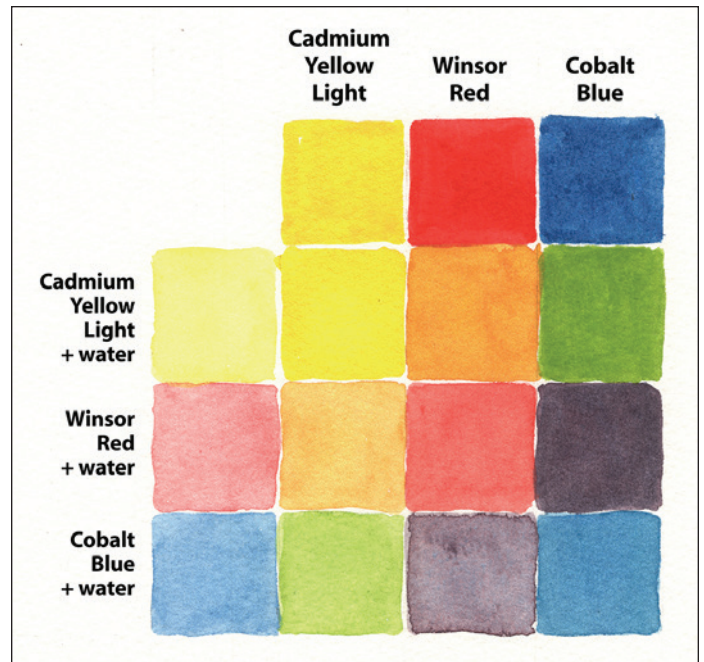
Look at the color chart below. On the left are the primary ink colors used to print color reproductions in books or magazines. The other colors shown are



our watercolor pigments and you can easily see how difficult it is to match those inks. So you have just learned that yellow is not yellow, red is not red, and blue is not blue. That is because our pigments have what are called “hidden compliments” and another lesson will discuss what that means.

PAINTING USING PRIMARY COLORS

I highly recommend that painters, all levels, use limited palettes because it teaches us how to see and mix color. The colors won't always be perfect matches to what you are painting, but limiting your palette helps you achieve color harmony in your painting. I also recommend that you do color charts so that you have an idea of how the paints will mix. The color chart on the left uses three of the pigments I recommended in earlier lessons.



PAINTING TIP

When painting with a limited palette, choose your pigments carefully. Ask, what are the dominant colors in my painting? What color is my focal point? For the painting of the sunflowers, I only used three paints.

- Cadmium Yellow Light
- Cadmium Scarlet
- Winsor Blue (red shade)

I chose cadmium yellow light because I wanted to be able to mix bright light greens. Cadmium scarlet is a warm yellow-red. I used it instead of a magenta red because I wanted the sunflowers to be warm and bright. For a cool background, Winsor blue (red shade) is perfect because it is a cool blue and a very strong pigment. I mixed it with the cadmium scarlet to make it darker.

I have attached a drawing of a sunflower for you to experiment with. Have fun and experiment with different yellows, reds, and blues!



