

Color Chords: A Bridge to Painting

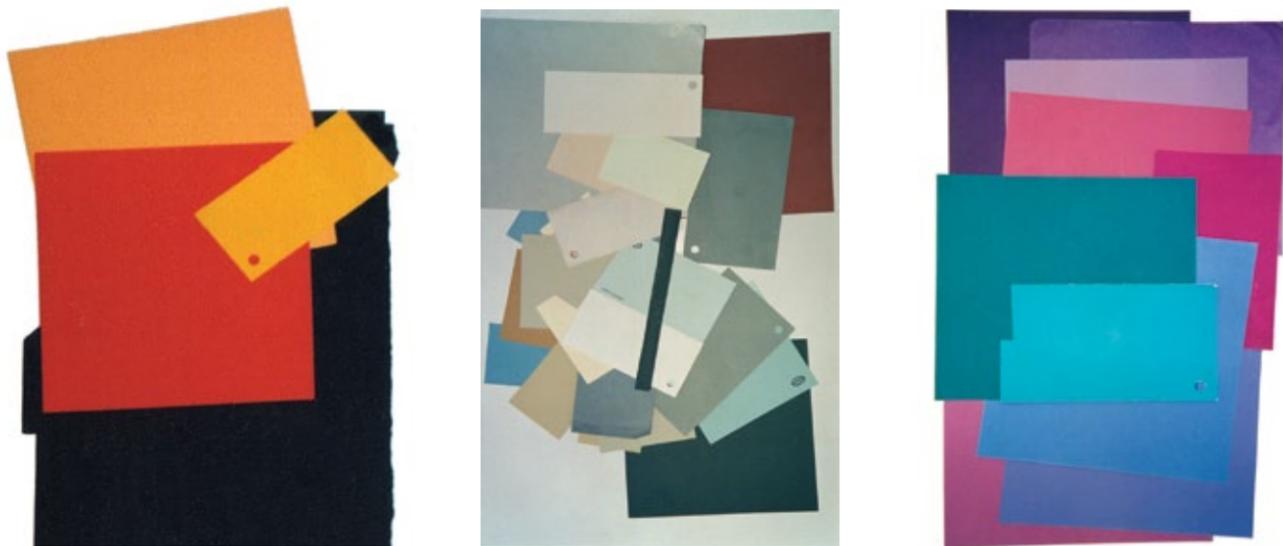
The energetic quality of spontaneous color chords can be the inspiration for a drawing or painting, which can be developed in any medium, in any style. Free from the pressure to create a product, we can use the immediacy of the paper swatches or checkerboard squares to clarify the felt sense of our experience. The color harmonies that are revealed can be a bridge between the intuitive, elemental world and the techniques and requirements of specific media.

Color as a Healing Language

The color chords also bridge the world of art to the world of healing and spiritual awareness. Making these chords is a form of meditation in which we can experience the mysterious forces of the elemental world. In the simple act of placing one color next to another, we are both expressing and balancing these forces. This balancing is apparent in the series of color chords by Aenea Keyes (below) chosen in a healing process. The first-choice colors of fire and earth, expressing anger, gave way to the quiet poignancy of her second-choice neutral grays. A reassuring chord of purple and blue, her third choice and resolution, followed these grays, evoking the luminous element of water. The instinctive movement of these elemental qualities eventually led to a release of tension and anxiety.

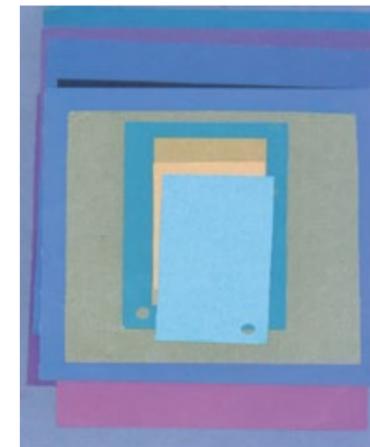
Although the color chords in this series express very personal feelings, they also reflect elemental archetypes used universally by other artists. Aenea's more assertive red and black squares are reflected in Lynelle's *Persimmon Landscape* (opposite top). The cooler tones of her other color chords are echoed in my landscape, *Tomales Bay* (opposite bottom).

A full spectrum of human emotion can be seen in this personal healing process by violinist, Aenea Keyes. The paper colors evolve like movements in a sonata—the assertive red and black followed by subtle grays, and ending with a peaceful blue and purple harmony.



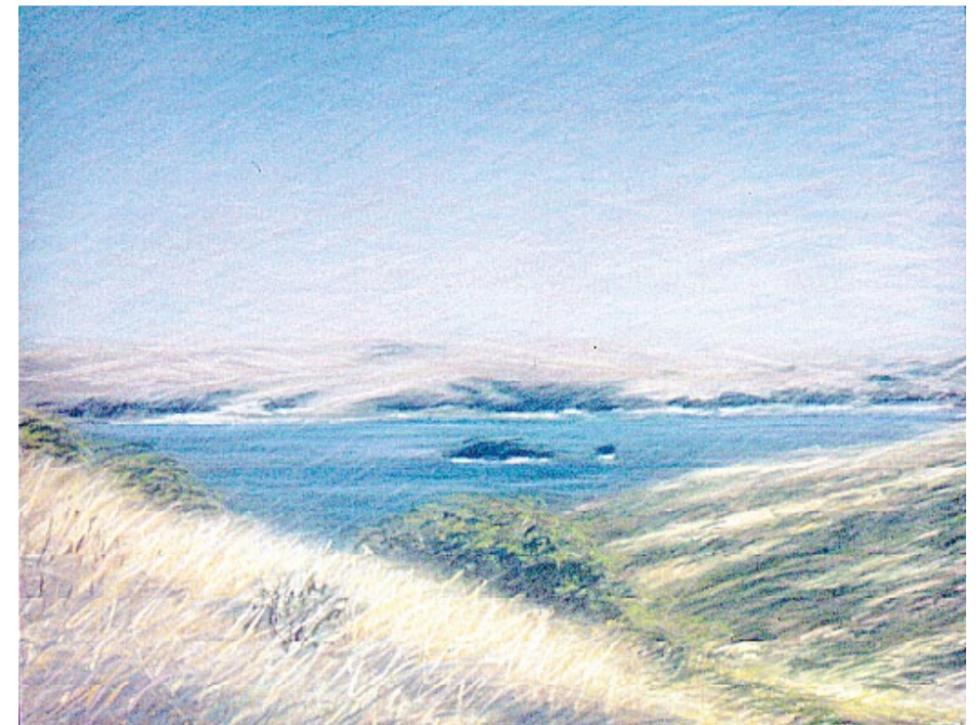
Lynelle, pastel on paper, 12 x 12 in. (above);
Persimmon Landscape, acrylic on canvas, 54 x 48 in., 1986 (right).

A checkerboard harmony of orange and red against black finds a fuller expression in the large painting, *Persimmon Landscape*.



Connie Smith Siegel, Color-Aid paper (above);
Tomales Bay, pastel, 19 x 23 in. (right)

A close harmony of blues is the foundation of an ocean landscape.



The Element of Water

The element of water can be felt as a sense of fluidity, of continuous wavelike movement, often calming and circular. It can be expressed in greens, blues, and purples, sometimes in deep tones closer to earth, sometimes lighter, closer to air (left). Although each expression is unique, the archetypal forms of water—circle and wave—remain constant in these individual variations. Notice the famous archetypal wave of the nineteenth-century Japanese master Hokusai unconsciously echoed in a student water improvisation (opposite top). Experiment with the element of water as you did with air and earth, noticing inner sensations, colors, and drawings that spontaneously come.



Margaret. Linsey, the element of water, pastel.



Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849), The Great Wave at Kanagawa (from a Series of Thirty-six View of Mount Fuji). Ca. 1830-1832. Japan Edo Period. Polychrome woodblock print; ink and color on paper, 10^{1/8} x 14^{15/16} in. (25.7 x 37.9 cm). Published by Eiudo. H. O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mr. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929 (JP1847). © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, USA
The tactile detail of Hokusai's well-known wave (above) is combined with the archetypal power of the abstract forms. These same forms occur spontaneously in student improvisations on water, from Lindsey's airy version (top) to the two more definite versions on the opposite page.



The fierce power of Kathleen Watson's element of water resembles the wave of Hokusai.

*The laws of the stars descend
and through the mediating
elements of air and water
impress themselves on the earth.*

Theodor Schwenk
The Sensitive Chaos



The wavelike forms of water are clearly defined by Kristina Arroyo Muhic.



Emilio Lanier, *Fire*, oil pastel, 1998.

The Four Elements: Two Interpretations

As much as we share a language of elemental archetypes, we each speak that language in different ways. Most people are drawn to some elements over others. Some people, such as Emilio Lanier (left, below, and opposite), never lose the sense of bright colors and strong value contrast, even when expressing air and water. Others, such as Audrey Wallace Taylor (see pages 52-53), choose more complex combinations that often include the subtler tones. The differences among people are especially clear when all four elements are present.

In *The Art of Color*, Johannes Itten describes these distinctive tendencies as a "color aura," which each person is born with and which is modified by the events in his or her life. As we choose colored papers and draw from inner sensation, we cannot help expressing who we are.

But nothing is ever totally constant. Even though each of us has a home base in one or more of the elements, we move from this base in unpredictable ways, and we can always be surprised by the forms we produce. In spite of our reasonable assumptions or expectations, our nature has its own agenda, which moves us inexorably as the magnetic forces under the earth, the great patterns of wind and rain, and the mysterious movements of river, ocean, moon, and stars. As creative expression gives color and form to the movement of our own natural forces, we come closer to our own mystery.



Emilio Lanier, *Water*, oil pastel, 1998.



Emilio Lanier, *Air*, oil pastel, 1998.



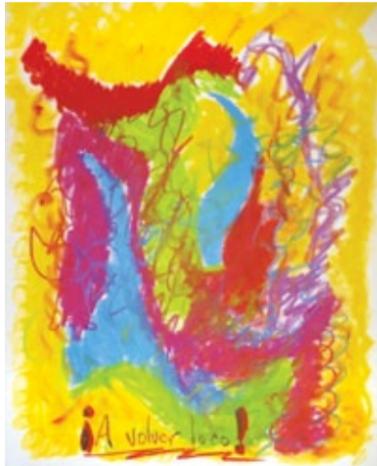
Emilio Lanier, *Earth*, oil pastel, 1998.



Emilio Lanier, *Trees*, oil pastel, 18 x 24 in.

The strong shapes and value contrasts in Emilio's elements emphasize the qualities of earth and fire.

contrast of hue: the element of fire



Rosie Echelmeir, improvisation, oil crayon (top);
David Miller, improvisation, oil crayon (bottom).
Salsa music inspires primary colors.

Color is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand that plays...
Wassily Kandinsky

Wassily Kandinsky, *Improvisation 26*, (Rowing), oil, 38 x 42, 1912. Stadtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich. © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP Paris.

Kandinsky's brilliant improvisations reflect the colors and rhythms inherent in music. Coming from inner sensations, they pioneered nonobjective painting.

When we express the element of fire, hear the sounds of folk dance or salsa music, the characteristic colors of contrast of hue emerge naturally. Neutral colors and subtle transitions disappear, and the colors become pure, undiluted, and close to their original source in the rainbow.

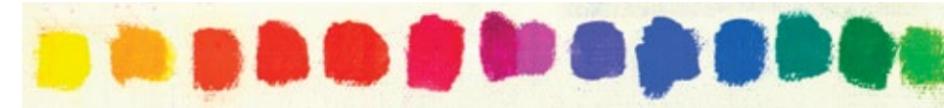
There are at least three or more hues that can be identified clearly on the twelve-hue color wheel (often the primaries, red, yellow and blue), and they interact strongly with each other. All these intense qualities match Itten's description of contrast of hue. In the next experiments we will go more deeply into these characteristic colors.

EXPERIMENT: Experiencing Each Color

As a preparation for the vigorous interaction of colors inherent in contrast of hue, take some time to experience the identity of each color on the color wheel by itself. Begin with your eyes closed, or resting on a neutral surface. Then bring a single color—for example, yellow—into your consciousness. As you visualize a yellow, let it fill you inside. Then extend it to the space right around you, and even beyond. What sensations do you feel as your world is permeated with yellow? After a while, let yellow go. Then notice what happens when you visualize the next color on the wheel, yellow-orange. Proceed around the color wheel in the same way: orange, red-orange, red, red-violet, violet, blue-violet, blue, blue-green, green, yellow-green, and back again to yellow. Feel the energetic quality of each of these colors inside.



When you complete your meditation on all twelve colors, find them in your box of crayons or pastels, getting the clearest version of each you can find, matching it to the color wheel. If you are using paint, make sure you have all the colors on the wheel, using the mixing instructions in chapter 9, Media (see pages 170-173). Line up the colors alongside the paper (or canvas), like actors preparing to enter a stage.



Connie Smith Siegel, paint mixtures.
The twelve hues of the color wheel lined up in their color-wheel order.

EXPERIMENT: Interaction Between Colors

What would happen if these twelve colors met one another? In the color wheel each color has a proper place, like the members of a family in a family portrait. Now let the twelve colors move out of their proper order and interact with each other in a kind of dramatic improvisation—as if they're playing a game together or getting into a conversation, or even an argument.

Before you begin, establish the borders of a square or rectangle, either the edges of your paper or smaller divisions drawn within it. As you see the space within the borders, does it invite a color? When you put a color down, what color would be most vibrant against it? Let the colors themselves decide where they want to go, never losing the intensity, accepting anything that happens. The vigorous interaction among colors (especially the three primaries, red, yellow and blue), might feel unfamiliar, even garish, but instead of restraining the effect, make it even more intense.

When the space is filled, notice how the colors have arranged themselves and the kind of forms they have created. You may be exhilarated with the process and delighted by the bright results. Or you may be uncomfortable, even embarrassed, if your work looks childlike, primitive, or too geometric.

There is no denying the strong agenda these pure colors have. They bring us back to a powerful, primal place with a heightened sense of order and balance. This sense of order often moves us toward the simplicity of geometric forms and demands that each color find its rightful place within the composition. The stronger the dynamic force of the color, the stronger the need to balance it with another. This balancing of forces can continue even as we draw in the world, creating powerful and original compositions that can echo the modern masters such as Kandinski and Matisse.



Alisa Klaus, contrast of hue study, oil crayon, 18 x 24.
Let the colors themselves decide where they want to go, like a dance improvisation.

I always wanted my colors to work themselves out on the canvas as consistently as nature produces her own creations.
Emile Nolde



EXPERIMENT: Working With a Partner

We can experiment with the balancing principle of color even more by working with a partner. As in the previous experiment, establish the borders and then take turns with your partner filling the rectangular space with color, allowing anything to happen. Although you may have different, individual styles of working, the strong dynamic of the colors themselves generate their own, often unexpected, compositions. Responding to the unexpected with a partner can be a preparation for the next experiment, in which we find a "partner" in the world we see.



EXPERIMENT: Drawing the World With the Rainbow

Using the rainbow of colors you have gathered from the last two experiments, what would happen if you were to draw from what you are seeing in the world? To use the words of Gauguin, as he instructed his student Serusier, "How do you see those trees? They're yellow, you say? Well, put on some yellow. That shadow is rather blue, paint in pure ultramarine. Those red leaves, put them on in vermilion."

In this way Gauguin instructed Serusier to ignore the subtleties of the natural scene he was painting, using only the strongest hues, straight out of the tube. You can try this experiment with any subject—a landscape, the person next to you, everyday objects. If you have exaggerated the colors, then reverse them into complements, making the skies orange, the grass purple, etc. Your drawing or painting may or may not resemble visual reality.

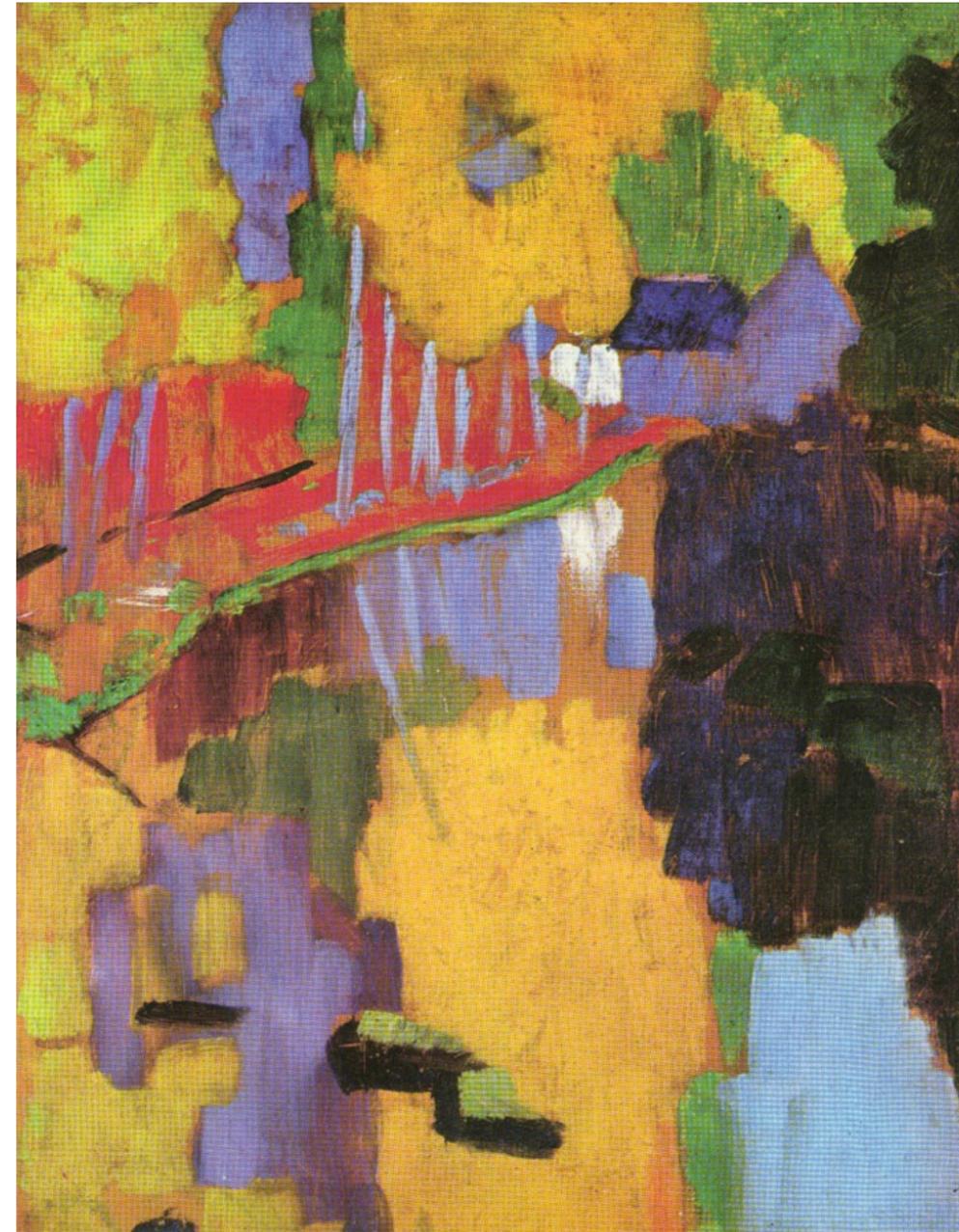
The rainbow experiment above places the primary emphasis on the life of the painting, challenging the necessity for visual exactitude. We are not obligated to duplicate the subtle colors and forms of the natural world but instead can be carried into the simpler elemental rhythms and patterns that underlie all forms, bringing the chaos of the world into order.

Holly Hammond, oil pastels, 18 x 24 in. Intense colors create their own composition (top) and are used later to draw a tree (bottom).



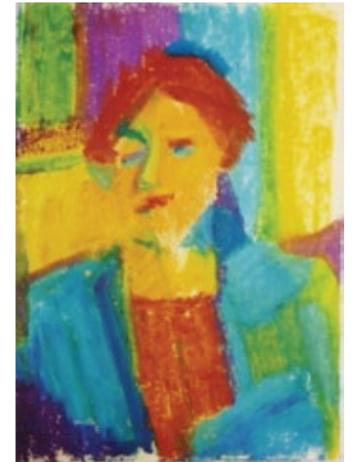
Ann Faught, hue study, pastel (above). Woodacre Truck, pastel (right).

The full spectrum of color interacts (above) and transform a neighborhood truck (right).



Paul Serusier, (1865-1927). *The Talisman*, October 1888. Oil on wood, 21 x 27 cm. RF1985-13. Photo: Jean Schormans. Photo Credit: Reunion des Musees Nationaux / Art Resource, NY. Musee d'Orsay, Paris, France.

The result of Serusier's lesson from Gauguin is called *The Talisman*. It clearly demonstrates his epoch-making definition of the picture as "a flat surface covered with colors arranged in a certain order." This definition opened the world of painting to the abundance of color expression, which flourishes in the works of modern masters such as Kandinsky, Matisse, and Nolde.

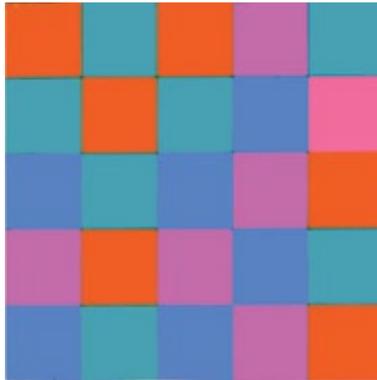


Two friends draw each other at the same time. Gail Robertson draws Gin (top), while Gin Fauvre draws Gail (bottom).

Before it is anything else, a picture is a flat surface covered with colors arranged in a certain order.

Maurice Denis
(speaking as Gauguin's student)

contrast of warm and cool



Checkerboard of cold and warm colors, Johannes Itten, *The Art of Color*, © 1961 Otto Maier Verlag Ravensburg, Revised Edition / 0471289280, Reprinted with permission of John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

The spatial excitement of red-orange, blue-green, and purple of the same value is expressed in a checkerboard format.



Christof Diermann, improvisation, *Mystic Splendor*, pastel

Geometric blocks of color have given way to softer layers of shimmery color, evoking light.

Contrast of Warm and Cool is perhaps the most distinctive and electric of all the complementary pairs, containing perhaps the strongest polarity. Red-orange is the warmest of all the colors, and we perceive it as being closer. Blue-green is the coolest and we perceive it as farther away. When these two complements are juxtaposed, it creates a spatial excitement in the eye that vibrates with light, as in Itten's checkerboard (left). The effect can be stunning, but to produce it we need to have the right range of colors in our palette of crayons and pastels, and/or an exactitude in mixing paint.

Evoking the mystic

Before we go further into the special requirements of warm and cool contrast, we will first explore its elemental, emotional quality. I invite you now to read the following paragraph taken from Itten's book describing an important example of warm-cool contrast. As you read it, notice any sensations, feeling states, and colors that came to you.

These works were...created so that the material sense of man may be directed to that which is beyond matter....They were...“flashing hieroglyphs,” intelligible to all. Their mystic splendor gave the faithful an experience of radiant transcendence. This visual experience was a direct invitation to higher spirituality.

EXPERIMENT: Color Improvisation

As you read this description, what inner sensations do the terms “mystic splendor” and “radiant transcendence” evoke? What colors come to you? When you have chosen a color chord, draw or paint spontaneously with those colors, allowing the movements and shapes to emerge naturally. When your work feels complete, take time to see the forms and colors that have emerged, noticing their effect on you.

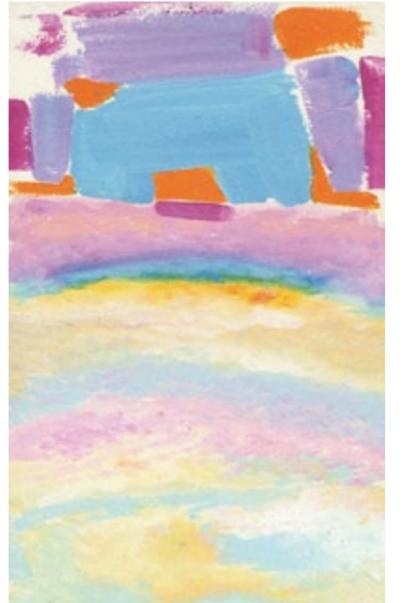
The intuitive color chords and drawing improvisations inspired by Itten's description of warm-cool contrast often move spontaneously toward the inherent qualities of the warm and cool contrast. The geometry of the primary colors of contrast of hue shift to more flowing, circular forms. Layers of secondary colors: green, purple, orange—close in value—emerge in response to the term “mystic splendor,” evoking the immaterial, “shimmery” effect of air, light, and water. These characteristic qualities of warm-cool contrast grow naturally from an intuitive knowing, not from conceptual learning.

EXPERIMENT: Exploring Warm and Cool

Although you may have expressed the qualities of the warm and cool contrast in an intuitive way, to intensify and sustain the visual effects it is helpful to explore them more objectively. Begin by finding the colors at the heart of this contrast: the complements red-orange and blue-green. Also include the color purple (from

blue-violet to red-violet), as it is an important ingredient in warm and cool, acting as a cool to the orange, and warm to blue-green. Notice this action in the checkerboard (opposite, top), and match the colors, creating a similar pattern. If you are using pastels or crayons, buy a set that includes these core colors, along with their lighter versions, or buy them individually. If you are using paint, take the time to mix red-orange, blue-green and purple, using the mixing instructions in the chapter 9, Media (see pages 170-173). As you play these colors against one another, you will discover the electricity created when they are the same value. Like striking a match, they can generate their own sense of light.

We can see an example of this spontaneous development (right) in which blocks of core colors break into wider bands even closer in value, which dissolve into smaller, overlapping strokes. These strokes create a whole field of light, which becomes more important than the action of individual colors. We move from the rugged individualism of contrast of hue into a more harmonic community, in which individual cooler colors (blue, green, purple) give up their intensity in order to vibrate with the lighter oranges and yellows. This vibrating field of “broken” color is the basis of the Impressionist technique utilized by Monet in capturing the ineffable shimmer of light on a haystack in *Haystack at Sunset* (below).



David Newell, mixing warm and cool, casein



Claude Monet, *Grainstack (Sunset)*, oil on canvas, 28^{7/8} x 36^{1/2} in., 1891. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Juliana Cheney Edwards Collection, 25.112. Photograph © 2008 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Blocks of red-orange, blue-green, and purple dissolve into a field of light (above). We can see the same dynamic in Monet (left), in which every color is distributed throughout. Notice especially the purple, which is layered on everything—darker in shadow, lighter in the light.

personal forms: individual and archetypal

Although the unique qualities of your light and dark forms are the source of personal style, they are also part of a more universal, archetypal language, shared by all artists, no matter what their cultural orientation or place in history.

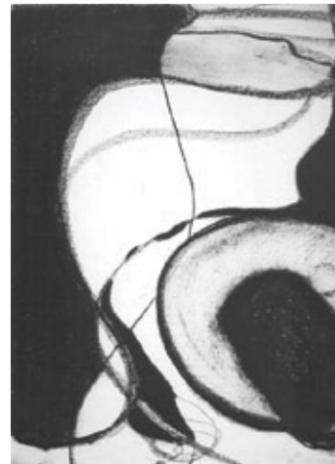


Gail Robertson, improvisation with closed-eye value scale (above); Shesshu (Japanese, 1429-1507), detail of mountain landscape, brush/ink. Tokyo National Museum. Image: TNM Image Archives (right).

Gail's spontaneous work, drawn with eyes closed (above), is the source of her style. This immediacy is paralleled in the meditative work of Japanese calligrapher and painter Shesshu (right), whose strokes reflect the chi, or life force, of the artist. Both play the lower horizontal archetype of ground against the upward movement of growth.



*If the empty spaces are right,
the whole body is alive, and
the more such places there are,
the less boring the whole thing
becomes.*
Ch'ing master



Danya Willard's shapes parallel the organic forms of Hokusai's *Waterfall*.

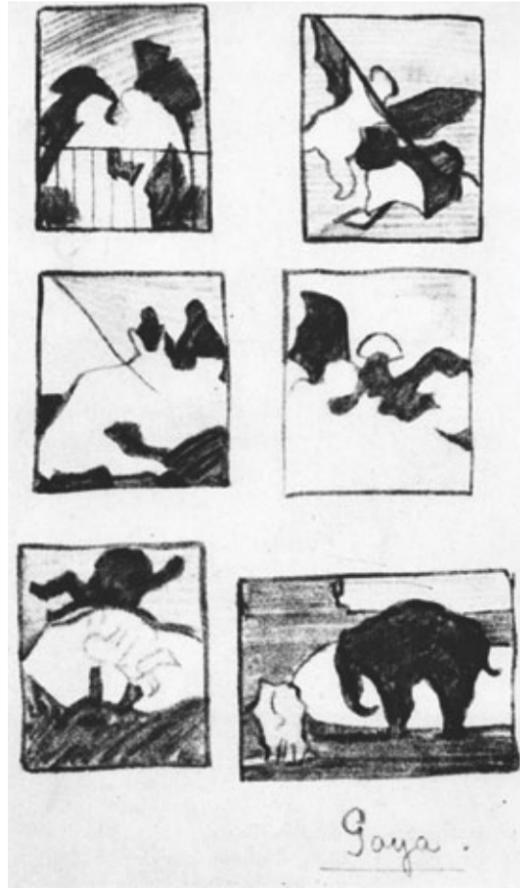


Hokusai, *The Amida Waterfall on the Kiso Road*, woodblock, 38^{3/4} x 26 in., 1834-1835, private collection

Hokusai combines the archetypal shapes of notan with specific detail, holding dual forces in unity.

Expressive Lineage of Notan

The artists who have endured in our Western tradition of art have the same power and simplicity of composition that we see in the Chinese and Japanese masters. This power does not come from realistic detail but from the relationship of lights and darks in the whole picture, which the nineteenth-century painter Corot describes as “the mass, the ensemble which has struck you...that first impression by which you were moved.” European masters such as Rembrandt, Caravaggio, and Goya have passed this unwritten language of abstract form from one generation to the next.



Emil Nolde, *Studies in Composition After Goya*, 1899. © The Ada and Emil Nolde Foundation, Seebull, Germany (above); Francisco de Goya y Lucientes (1746-1828), *Majas on a Balcony*, oil on canvas 76^{3/4} x 49^{1/2} in. (194.9 x 125.7 cm). H. O. Havemeyer Collection, bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929 (29.100.10). Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY (right).

In this rare set of drawings (above), German Expressionist Emile Nolde is studying the light and dark composition of Goya (right), in the same way Beethoven studied the composition of Haydn, thus carrying on a lineage of musical form. Nolde has found the distinctive shapes and spaces that pervade Goya's work, no matter what the narrative content.



Pat Kriegler, notan study of Goya's *Majas* (far left); *Rock*, charcoal, 1998 (left).

Notice Pat Kriegler's notan study of Goya's *Majas* and the way in which she found these forms in a large rock.

EXPERIMENT: Study of Master Painters

Study the light/dark composition of master painters and printmakers for yourself. Beneath the realism, find the primal shapes that are distinctive to different artists and that unify the whole painting. Then, in the same way as Nolde, make a value study of these abstract relationships, using black, white, and gray shapes.

Just as Nolde continues the expressive power of Goya's compositions, you can also find affinities with master artists. As you discover and use their hidden structure, you continue a lineage of light and dark composition that goes back to prehistoric painting. Contained in your own unique shapes are the same elemental forms that convey magic and life in the caves of Lascaux and in contemporary art as well.

Whatever the inward darkness may have been to which the shamans of those caves descended in their trances, the same must lie within us, nightly visited in sleep.

Joseph Campbell

The Way of the Animal Powers



Robert Motherwell, American (1915-1991), *Africa*, acrylic on Belgian linen 81 x 222^{1/2} in., 1965. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Gift of the Artist BMA 1965.12

Motherwell's light and dark shapes echo the primal power we see in the Lascaux caves (see page 83), carrying magic and life.

moving into realism



Jo Jackson, leaf study, colored pencil.
Match the color of your found objects exactly, using any medium.

Georgia O'Keeffe, *Pattern of Leaves*, oil on canvas, 22¹/₈ x 18¹/₈ in., 1923. Acquired 1926. The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC

When seen as flat shapes and patterns, the colors of ordinary life become harmonies of subtle tones, an invitation to a visual meditation.

After seeing and abstracting the world, now we will add the nuances and variety of specific details, continuing our meditative approach.

EXPERIMENT: Matching Color

To further explore this subtle world of color you are seeing, choose a simple object and match the color exactly with paint or pastels. Mute the colors with gray or the complement until you arrive at that one particular color you are seeing, like no other. If you paint objects arranged together, make a notan study first, to establish the composition. Notice the specific detail combined with light and dark structure in Georgia O'Keeffe's *Pattern of Leaves*. The leaves have been enlarged until the shapes fill the whole canvas in a unified composition.



EXPERIMENT: Using Notan Study

As you include more of the visual details in your work, you move closer to realism. In preparation for this intention, first create a notan (light and dark) study of the place or objects you are interested in painting. Then block it in on a larger painting, using pastel or paint. Whether you are working indoors or outside, lay out the basic composition of your notan study on a toned paper or canvas of middle gray value. Block in the dark shapes and add a lighter color for the light shapes. After the light and dark composition is clear on your painting, then bring in the detail and the specific colors you are seeing. When you are held by the composition you can give yourself over to the beauty of the visual world and linger on all its subtle nuances. Painting becomes a meditation, with each detail deepening your connection with what you are seeing.

The power to bring forth images from imagination or direct observation has long captured artists, from the evocative power of the early cave paintings to the minute observations of Leonardo da Vinci and Albrecht Durer. But this potential power can bring frustration. We can become critical, even unforgiving, when our work doesn't match what we are seeing. We long for more drawing ability and skill with the medium. Although there are many books that offer valuable techniques, few address the main challenge of realism—that in the process of matching the details of what we see, we often forget our inner forms, our own identity. Paradoxically, the most effective way to achieve a more convincing sense of the real is to reconnect with your abstract forms through the use of notan. I have found this out for myself when painting in the tangled redwood forest near my home; value studies help me find satisfying light and dark forms. These places call me back, year after year.



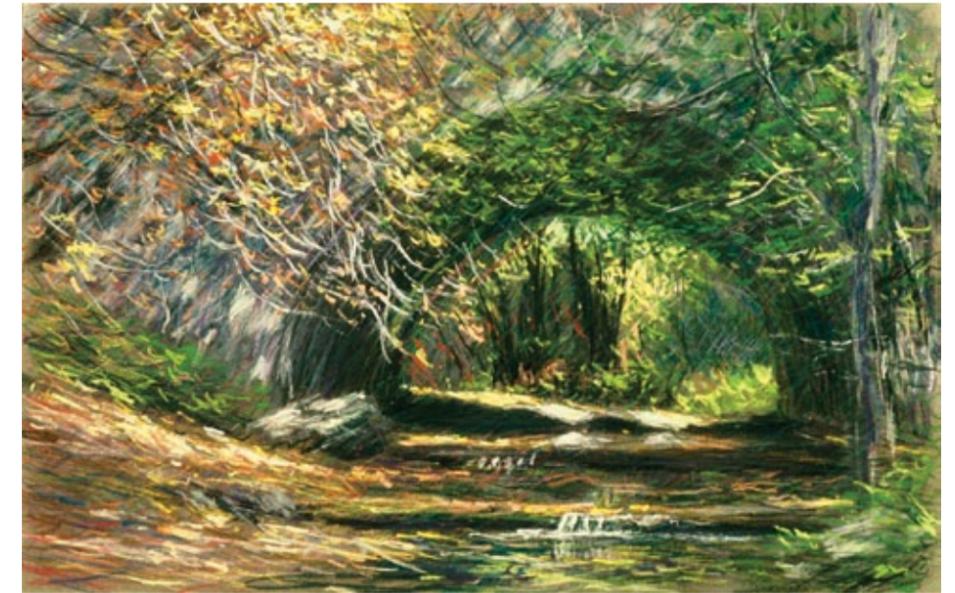
Mila Mitchell, notan study, pen and ink, 8 x 9 in. (top); Justin Mitchell, oil, 45 x 45 in. (bottom)

A large painting grows from a small notan study.



Connie Smith Siegel, value study for *Autumn Buckeye*, 6 x 9 in. (above); *Autumn Buckeye*, pastel, 16 x 19 in., 1997 (right).

Held by the light and dark of a notan study, we can linger on the specific details of a particular place, each detail strengthening the composition.



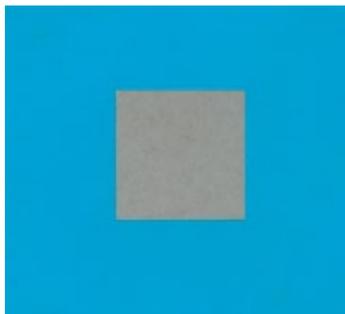
the simultaneous vibration

Two colors that are not precisely complementary will tend to shift the other towards its own complement... both will lose their intrinsic character and move in an individual field or action of an unreal kind, as if in a new dimension.

Johannes Itten, *The Art of Color*



The same neutral gray turns blue-green on orange and orange-tan on blue paper.



In this color chord and pastel improvisation by Leila Joslyn, the simultaneous colors of air and water are shimmery, with a subtle presence of earth.

Itten's description of simultaneous contrast, "as if in a new dimension," may sound more like science fiction than color theory, but his words clearly distinguish simultaneous contrast from the more stable contrast of saturation. Contrast of saturation plays a little bit of color against a lot of neutrals. Simultaneous contrast plays a small amount of neutrals against a lot of color, creating a vibration closer to the shimmery quality of warm and cool.

EXPERIMENT: Seeing Simultaneous Effect

You can see the vibration of simultaneous contrast in the example (left) in which a small piece of gray paper was centered on a larger piece of red-orange. As you look at the red-orange your eye will tire, and to balance itself, will simultaneously supply the complement, making the gray square in the middle tend toward blue-green. When you try the same experiment, with the blue-green paper (center left), this same gray will turn tan-orange against blue. To experience this balancing action in another way, stare intently at the square of orange, then close your eyes or look at white. The afterimage will be blue-green, the complement of orange. In all three experiments, when the cones in your eyes that perceive a color became tired, they spontaneously generated the opposite, balancing color. Try this afterimage experiment with any strong color.

This mysterious process of the eye balancing itself occurs in the other contrasts but becomes predominant in the simultaneous contrast, whose "changeable oscillations [create] a constantly shifting state of unknowing." (Itten). We have already seen the spontaneous emergence of this quality in the tentative rondo movement of the Beethoven sonata described on page 60 that seems to be asking a question. This uncertainty in itself points to a quality inherent in the element of air.



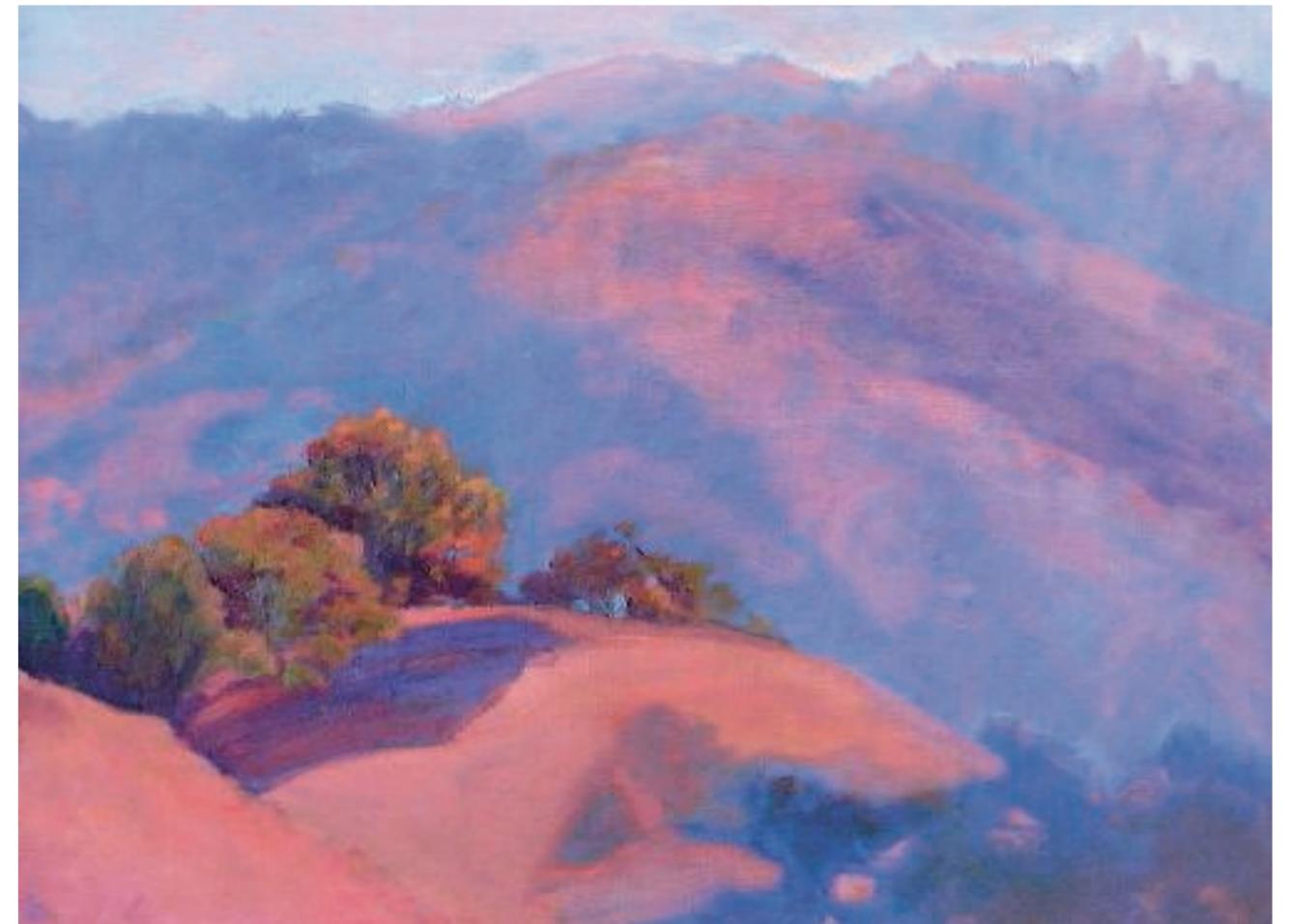
EXPERIMENT: Evoking Air and Water

To evoke the element of air, close your eyes and focus on it, feeling any sensation inside, noticing any color or colors that spontaneously come to you. These colors could arise from your immediate sensations or be associated with an occasion or place. Pick a color chord for this element and let a drawing grow from it. Use a colored drawing paper that is resonant with the feeling. Try this same experiment with the element of water.

Although your response may be different, the evocation of air often brings forth pink, light blue, turquoise, played against a few grays and tans. These colors have a shimmery quality inherent in the warm and cool contrast, but with a subtle presence of earth. The element of water can evoke blues and greens, and purples, often muted or played against neutral colors. The elements of air and water come together in simultaneous glow in the painting of a twilight hill (*Indian Tree*, below) by Linda Larsen. This simultaneous effect emerged naturally from a specific light condition, but creating it objectively in the studio can be more elusive, like catching a trout with your hands.



Linda Larsen, *Indian Tree*, oil, 12 x 16 in. 2000 (below)
A small amount of subtle warm tones becomes more orange against blue (above). The simultaneous glow in this painting was originally inspired by a specific light condition—California hills near sunset.



personal characteristics of the itten contrasts

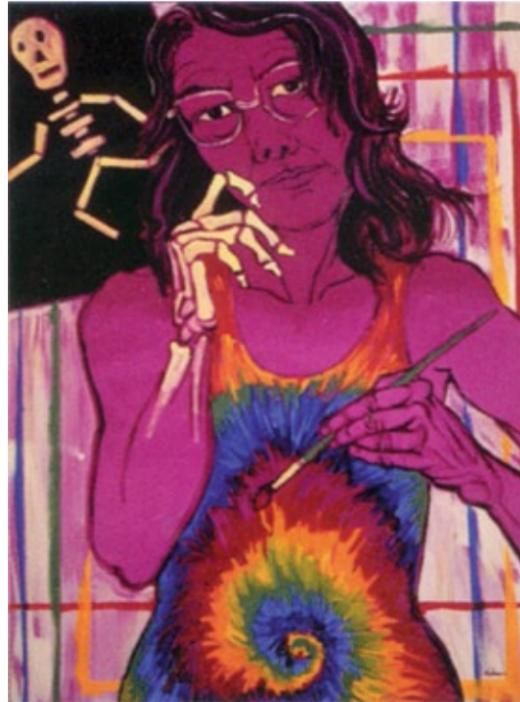
The different value systems in the Itten color contrasts can reflect personal characteristics that parallel the sun signs of the zodiac,

Contrast of Hue Characteristics

I have observed that artists who favor the fiery contrast of hue tend to be more independent. They do not like to follow light and dark studies but prefer to let their intense color create its own composition. Like Kandinsky, whose brilliant improvisations pioneered non-objective painting, Helen Redman has pushed the limits of color in her portraits. Both artists have been creative leaders, and have started their own organizations rather than work for others. People in contrast of hue often have a strong personal presence—and, like the sun itself, they are often outgoing, embracing all aspects of the world.

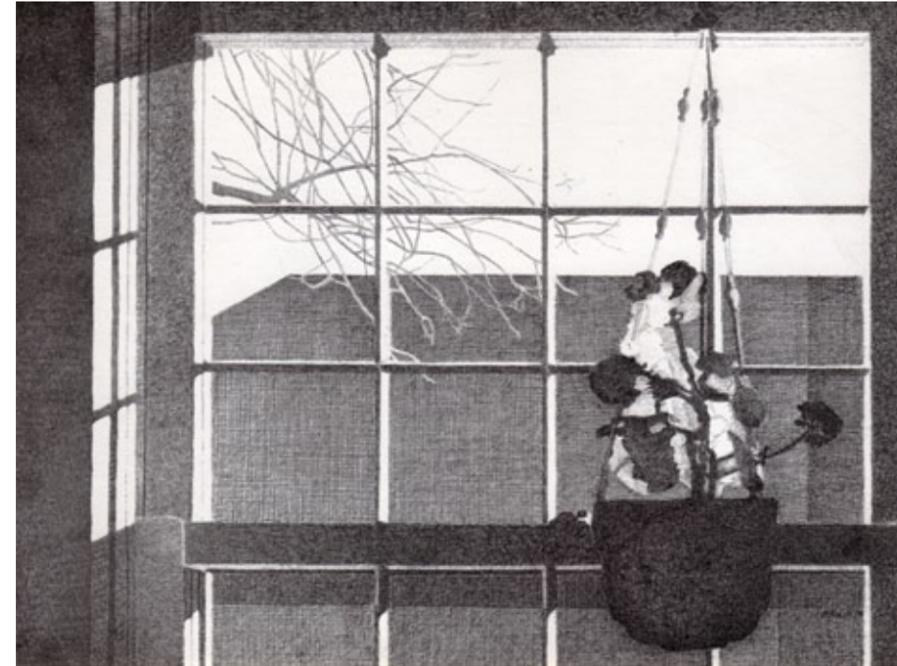
Contrast of Warm and Cool Characteristics

By contrast, I have noticed that people drawn to the iridescent colors of warm and cool contrast tend to be more introspective, and focused on the world of light. They can work effectively with astrology and psychic counseling, trusting unseen reality as much as facts and figures. In solving



Helen Redman, *The Change*, (Self Portrait, above), acrylic, 48 x 30, 1993. Art Holman, *Nebula II* (right), oil, 44 x 64 in., #400 - 1982

Helen Redman's personal presence (above) radiates outward. Art Holman combines his observations of light in nature and the universe with a sense of inner light.



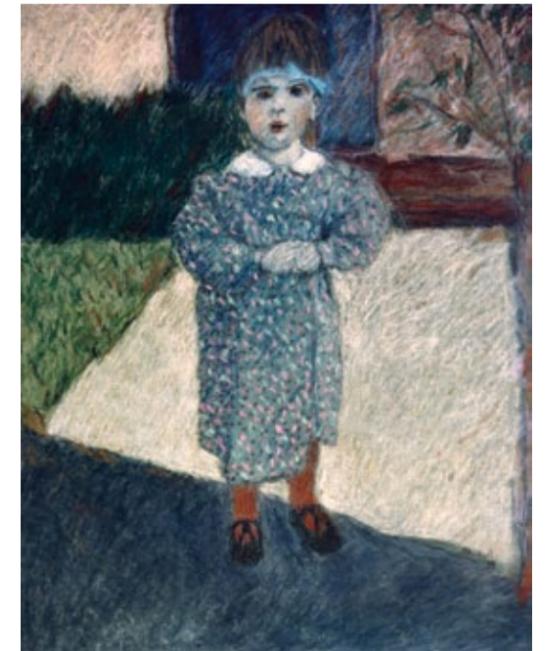
A Black Geranium
O, sweet geranium!
Hung high
like a heavy prize
burned black
'gainst the sun's lapsed
meridian.
Mila Mitchell

problems they more often look for spiritual, mystical guidelines, trusting the power of intuition and imagination rather than more pragmatic solutions. For example, Art Holman's spiritual connections are sustained by intuitive studies and the mystical traditions of Egypt and Scotland.

Contrast of Light and Dark Characteristics

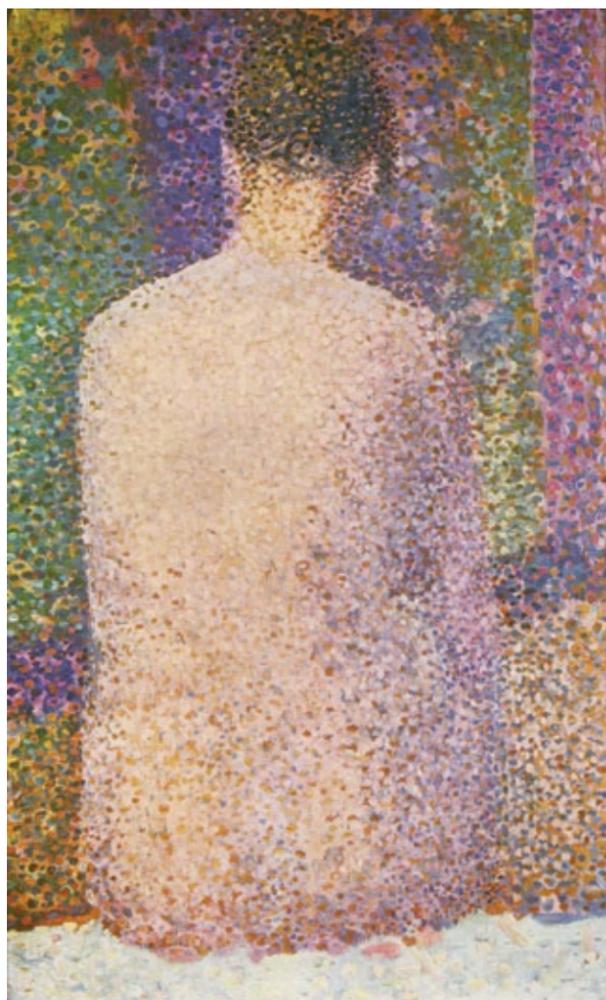
People with a strong affinity for contrast of light and dark tend to trust more pragmatic solutions to problems. These can come from cultural or family traditions, in the same way that compositional form through value has been carried by generations of painters such as Rembrandt and Corot. Structural integrity and honesty are important in both painting and in life.

Through the simplicity of value contrast, Mila Mitchell found meaning and order in a world of emotional turmoil. Finding the balance of light and dark in her still life drawing (above) was centering, giving stability to her life. This balance is not so much a geometric equation as a passionate prayer to earth. The compelling need for clarity becomes softer in the later pastel of a child (right), with larger strokes and subtle color. The dark shapes of modulated grays surrounding the strong patch of light in the center support the delicate figure, vulnerable, yet self-assured. The small white collar, red stockings, and the constellation of pink and purple dots accent the muted colors—a masterful expression of contrast of saturation.



Mila Mitchell, *A Black Geranium*, pen/ink, 22 x 29 in., 1976 (top). *Child in Light*, pastel, 24 x 20 in., 1990 (above)

Emotion is contained in the balanced security of light and dark shapes (top). Dark areas support the delicate color of a painting done in later years (above).



Georges-Pierre Seurat, *Study for Les Poseuses*, oil, 24 x 16 cm., 1887-1888
Seurat creates a sense of light with small strokes, described as Pointillism.

EXPERIMENT: Exploring Broken Color

After you experiment with the electricity possible with the core colors, experiment as well with application. In the experiment exploring warm and cool, you may have noticed a tendency for the colors to break into smaller strokes. Now, consciously experiment with this tendency, letting the strokes become more distinct from one another. Let these strokes build into layers so that colors are not only vibrating next to one another, but overlaying each other as well. This resembles the “broken color” of the Impressionists, or even the Postimpressionist technique of Pointillism, exemplified by Seurat. This is not so much a technique to be mastered as a possibility to be explored. Smaller strokes leave no resting place for the eye, allowing the full action of the warm and cool palette.

After you have a sense of this possibility, experiment with matching all the values to the lighter yellows and oranges. Then try the darker end of the spectrum and the vibrant action between the different blues, greens and purples. You can see the lighter range expressed in Art Holman's *Yin Tree* and the darker range in his *Under the Pond* (see page 78).

EXPERIMENT: Working With Images

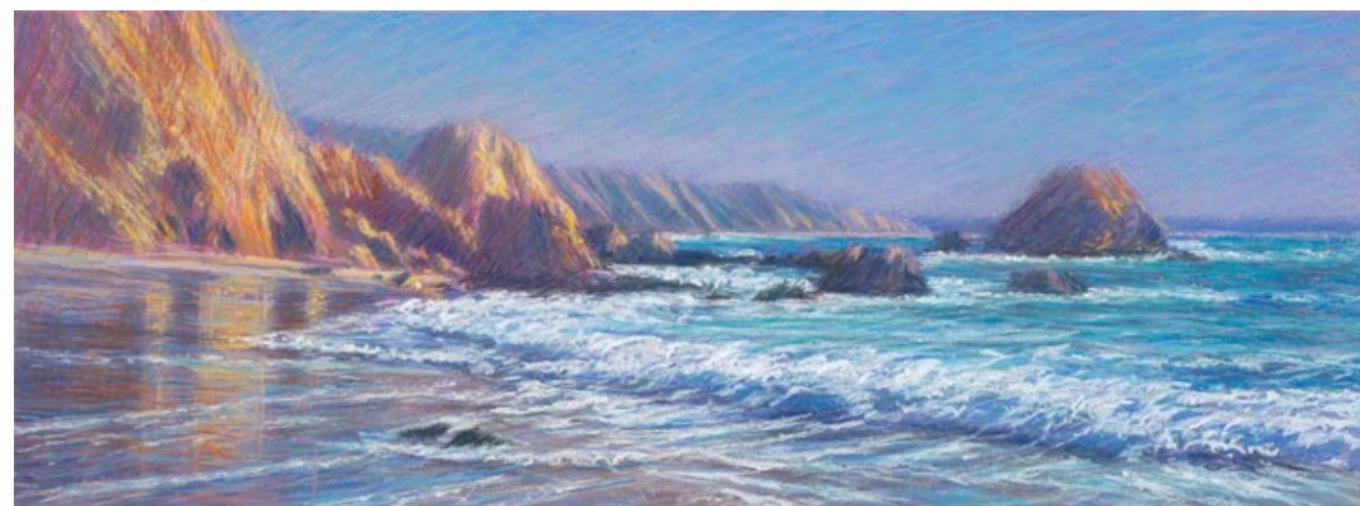
As you explore the range and natural tendencies of the warm and cool palette, allow images to emerge from these colors and strokes, either from your imagination or from the world around you. As you draw or paint from landscape, figures, flowers, etc., convert everything you see into vibrating light, no matter what neutral colors or definite forms you are actually seeing.

The interaction of colors in the extended abstract study (opposite, top left), inspired by listening to Indian Raga Music, can be seen in the landscape painting done later on location (opposite, top right). Painted on a purple ground, this pastel is built up from many strokes of blue, orange and purple, vibrating next to each other. Although the landscape was started on location, it needed more layering in the studio to match the sense of October light in a magical canyon in the eastern Sierras.



Connie Smith Siegel, extended warm-cool study, casein (above); *Aspens and Stream, Lundy Canyon*, pastel, 19 x 19 in., 2000 (right).

The many layers of blue, orange and purple pastel in the landscape create a sense of October light.



Connie Smith Siegel, *Late Afternoon McClure's Beach*, pastel, 12 x 30, 2005

The orange glow on the cliffs contrasts with the blue-green of the water, built up with many layers.

... [By] the exclusive use of the optical mixture of pure colors, ... the neoimpressionist insures a maximum of luminosity, of color intensity, and of harmony ...

Paul Signac

the principle of notan: personal form as composition

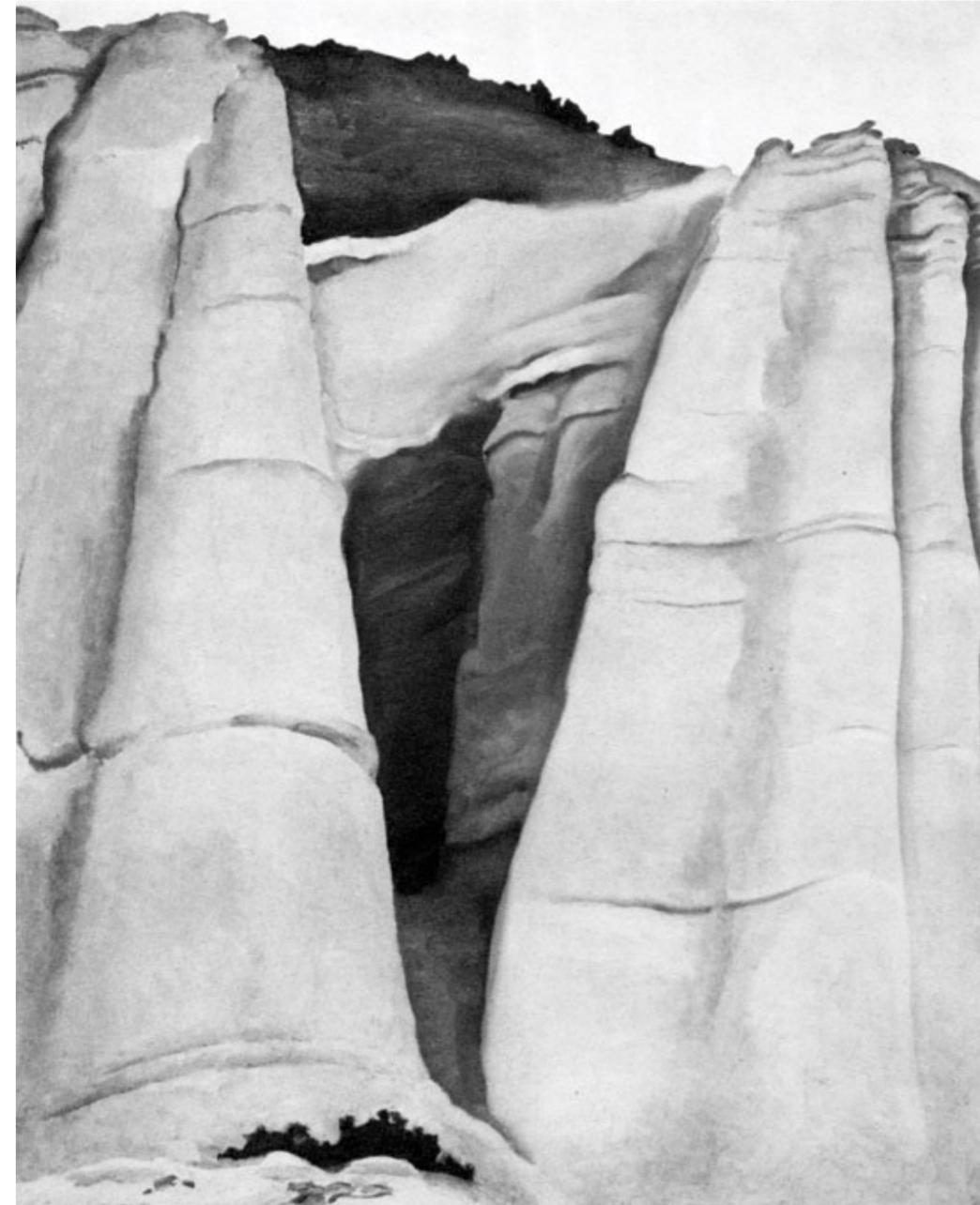
Inspired by the use of value in Japanese painting, American educator Arthur Dow defined the expressive use of light and dark we have been practicing as "notan," a Japanese term that describes the harmonic distribution of light and dark within a picture. Notan is based on the yin/yang principle of dual forces held in unity, each force having equal importance. Instead of a three-dimensional figure against a passive background, we have the interaction between positive and negative space, as we can see in Hokusai's Waterfall and in Dow's use of notan in his Bend of a River variations. Dow's philosophy and his book *Composition* strongly influenced the work of Georgia O'Keeffe, as evident in the integration of personal form with compositional structure (the unifying principle of notan) in *From the White Place* (opposite).

Arthur W. Dow, *Bend of a River*, color woodblocks on paper two variations, 4^{3/8} x 7 in., circa 1898. Mr. and Mrs. George N. Wright.

Dow changes the season in these two woodblocks from summer to winter, using similar forms, but different notan decisions. These choices carry the essential message of the prints.

Flat relations of tone and color are of first importance; they are the structural frame while gradation and shading are the finish.

Arthur Dow
Composition



Georgia O'Keeffe, *From the White Place*, oil, 30 x 24 in. (76.2 x 60.96 cm), 1940. Acquired 1941. The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

Under O'Keeffe's convincing three-dimensional shading of the cliffs, the light and dark shapes of notan create compositional unity, the source of her personal style.

This man had one dominating idea: to fill a space in a beautiful way—and that interested me. After all, everyone has to do just this—make choices—in his daily life, even when only buying a cup and saucer. By this time I had a technique for handling oil and watercolor easily; Dow gave me something to do with it.

Georgia O'Keeffe

the tangible world of media

Although the medium we use will enhance or inhibit the effect of any color contrast, it is especially important in the subtle ranges we have been exploring here.

When I first stare into the eyes of the people whose portraits I paint, I feel struck by what being human really is.

Jackie Kirk

EXPERIMENT: Exploring Media

Try some of the media used in the art in this chapter: acrylic, pastel, oil crayon, colored pencil, watercolor, and tempera, adding textures, natural pigments, or the tactile element of collage. The surface, or ground you use—paper, canvas, wood or metal—will affect the media, as well. If a specific medium or combination attracts you, then go more deeply into it, but for now forget the rules and just explore.

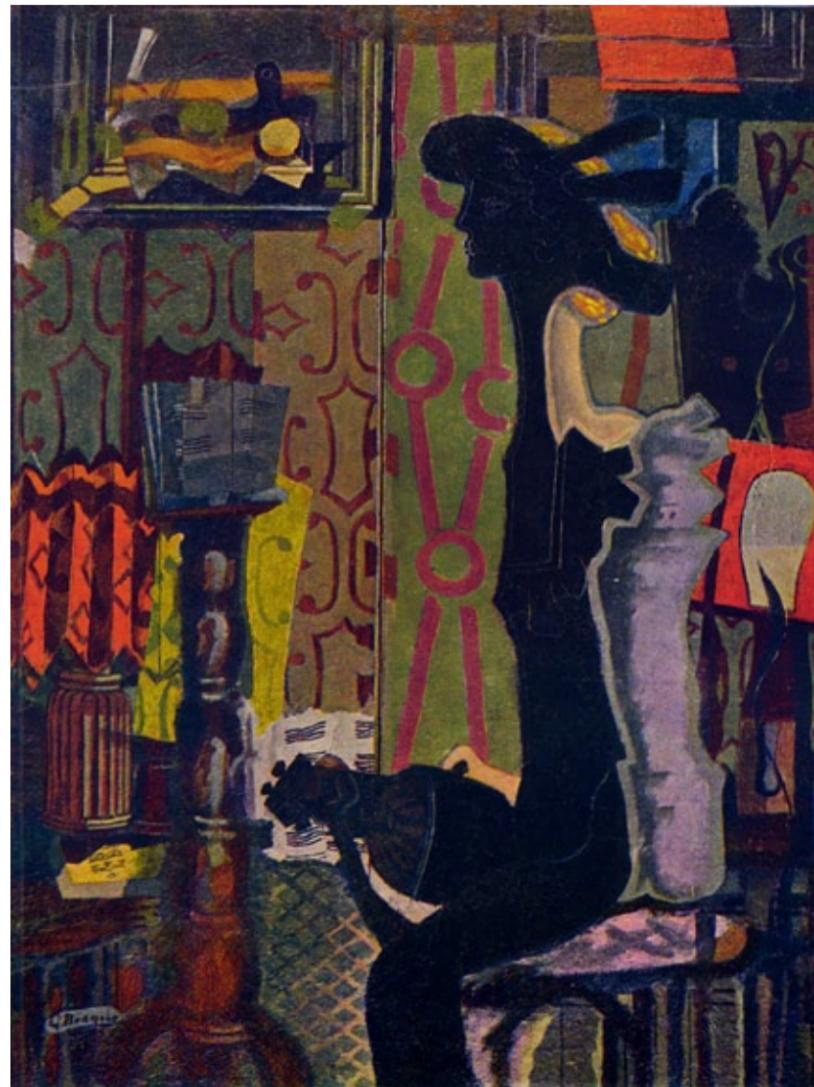


Jackie Kirk, *Ben*, from the *Face of AIDS Series*, acrylic on black paper, 22 x 30 in., 1994.

The immediacy of acrylic and crayon captures the essence of a person.

Objects don't exist for me except in so far as a rapport exists between them, and between them and myself. When one attains this harmony, one reaches a sort of intellectual nonexistence—what I can only describe as a state of peace—which makes everything possible and right.

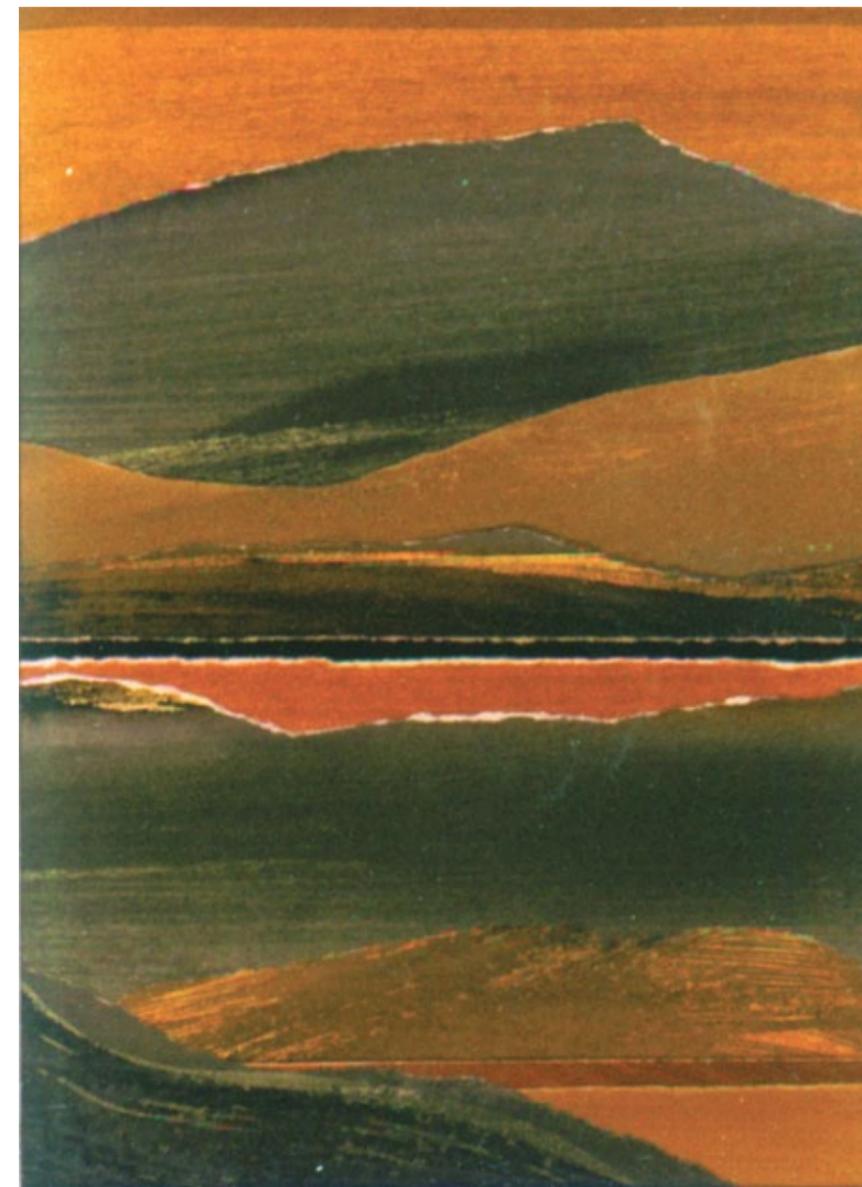
Georges Braque



Georges Braque (1882-1963), *Woman with a Mandolin*, oil on canvas, 51¹/₄ x 38¹/₄, 1937. © ARS, NY. Mrs. Simon Guggenheim Fund (2.1948). Digital image © The Museum of Modern Art / Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY. The Museum of Modern Art, NY. © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

Braque celebrates organic shapes and the tactile beauty of everyday objects.

Contrast of saturation can bring us into the sensibility of touching and the sacredness of handmade objects. From the impeccably designed Japanese rock gardens to the baskets, weaving, and pottery of Native Americans, the arts of everyday life are universally cherished. Influenced by native traditions, Linda Fries paints with pigments she has gathered herself from the land, often allowing the abstract shapes to evolve into landforms, found in a collage process. The small painting of pears reminds us of the intimate beauty of the world, when we take the time to see it. Whether in painting or craft, nonobjective or realistic, contrast of saturation communicates a quiet reassurance and an enduring love of the earth in all its manifestations.



Above: Cooking basket, Artist Unknown (Pomo), split sedgeroot, split winter redbud shoots, 9¹/₂ x 15 in., c. 1865. State of Calif. Dept. of Parks and Recreation. © Heyday Books.

Art moves into everyday life.

Left: Linda Fries, *Land 8-2000*, earth pigment/paper, 2000. Linda paints with the earth itself, finding her pigments locally.



Kathy Sullivan, *Pears*, colored pencil, 1998.

Everyday objects are quietly reassuring.

structure and emotion integrated

The forms you create in response to the space of the paper reflect an urge toward balance as ordinary as the sense that keeps you upright as you stand. This sense of equilibrium underlies the composition of all painting, no matter how sophisticated. Although light and dark composition always depends on the force of gravity, it is not always architectural. Forms of growth that seem to defy gravity have come to be associated with a style of painting we call Romantic. We can feel this defiance in the trees of Corot's *Windswept Landscape*, held by the earth but wildly thrown by the wind.

Whether classical or romantic, improvised or planned, the interaction of light and dark shapes brings our inner life into the world. The abstract principle of notan reveals our feeling states, bringing us to the present, carrying the real emotional message. Although emotion is masterfully portrayed in the facial expressions and gestures of Baroque and German Expressionist paintings. It is the abstract movements that carry us into drama and hold us there.

Whether working abstractly or figuratively, we are always searching for our own particular, unique forms. And yet these personal forms are part of larger archetypes that can connect us deeply to other master artists.

Distinctive shapes are inherent within us, reflecting our most intimate feeling states, reminding us of what it is to be alive. When these personal forms are missing from our work, it is lifeless. No matter what skills or techniques we learn, without these inner forms we are never fully satisfied with our creations.

The principles of light and dark we have defined as notan are especially important in giving definition and structure to the world of subtle color—the earth tones of contrast of saturation and the luminous, muted harmonies of the simultaneous contrast. The use of notan will help you keep your center as you move into representational painting. It will remind you that even when you are depicting the detailed forms and colors of the visible world, you are always making an abstraction, always reflecting your inner world.



Linda Larsen, sensing drawing (left); *Under the Bay Tree*, notan study, crayon on toned paper (right).

The diagonal forms of Linda's sensing drawing (left), arising from direct feeling, are echoed in an earlier drawing of a forest tree (right). Linda's forms are parallel to Corot's trees (opposite), bending in response to natural forces, but firmly held by the earth.

*(Always keep in mind)...the mass,
the ensemble which has struck you...
that first impression by which you were moved....*

Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot

*Be guided by feeling alone...follow only
what you understand and can unite
in your own feeling....*

Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot



Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, *Remembrance of Lake Nemi*, drawing, 7 x 10 in., 1865-70



Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, *Le coup de vent*, (*Windswept Landscape*), 18 x 23, oil, 1865. © Musée des Beaux-arts de la Ville de Reims. Photographer: C. Devleeschauwer.