

The GREEN Challenge

by Joanne Cotton MPSA MPAC

As pastel artists, we all enjoy the abundant inspiration offered by the landscape around us at any given time and place. Interpreting trees, fields, flowers, and mountains are often a fundamental part of our painting. This can also mean there is a lot of green in nature and the landscape to deal with on our paper.... In addition, too much green can give a painting an artificial look - perhaps too acidic, flat or too monotone, or what I call, 'a cartoon effect' - all detracting from a poetic impression of the landscape.

When talking about poetic harmony and painting, we can interpret our greens in several ways to keep our work alive and interesting. In order to avoid artificial greens and to steer away from a flat monotone look, we need to step into our imaginations and

stretch our vision towards seeing:

1 - other hues within the greens

2 - the temperature differences between the lights and shadows

3 - the correct value of 'green' and its spatial properties

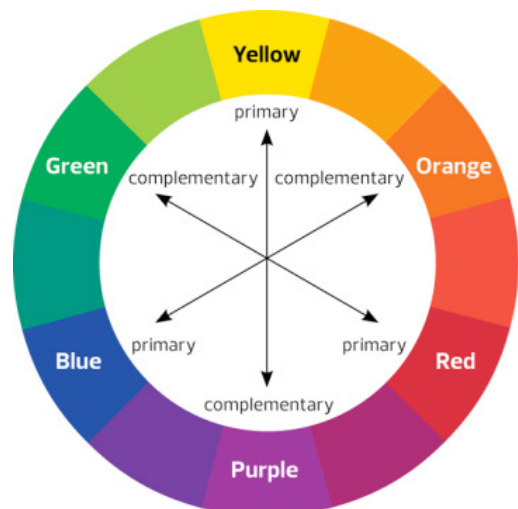
4 - variations in chroma - juxtaposition of intense and dull 'greens'

These are just a few painting tips I will expand upon to help when dealing with greens. BUT, keep in mind, the joy of pastel painting is that pastels can be layered bringing iridescent colour - inviting flamboyance as well as subtleties. It all depends on the artist's purposeful marking or delicate whispering of these little magic sticks, that will make the greens in a painting sing in harmony!

Other Hues Within the Greens

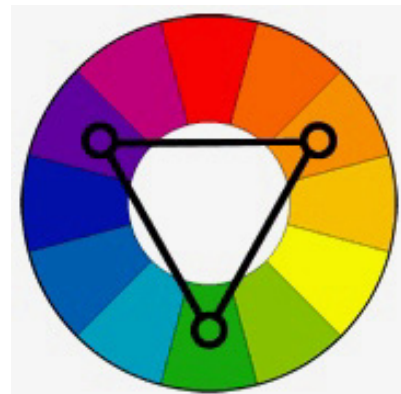
Fundamentally, greens in the landscape and in a still life are seldom only green. When looking at our colour theory, green is a secondary colour made up of yellow and blue. **Yellows (warm colours) and blues (cool colours)** offer variety of colour when communicating the lights and shadows in a green landscape.

Green's natural **complementary colour** (directly opposite on the colour wheel) is red.

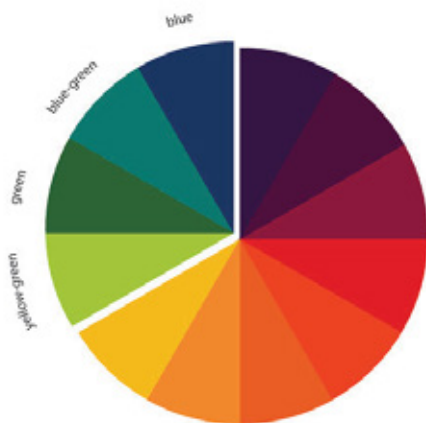


Using red provides striking visual effects when paired together with green.

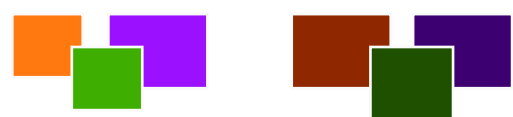
Analogous colours to green (colours that lie either side of green on the colour wheel), and colours in the triadic colour scheme with green (equal distance from each other on the colour wheel - orange and violet) provide colour variety that tends to look more balanced.



Triadic colour scheme with green



Analogous colours to green



Support green with other colours

It is always useful to paint with your colour wheel close at hand. I have attached a reference to complimentary, analogous and triadic colours on the colour wheel at the end of this article so you may print it and have it handy for when you paint.

For starters, underpainting in the complimentary, analogous or triadic colours can be useful to poetically communicate the greens. The underpainting provides a foundation, map and starting point of the sensitive eye.

The choice of hues in the underpainting will support the greens or allow actual greens to be whispered or flamboyantly applied and/or layered on to the underpainting. The chroma and value of chosen colours in the underpainting must allow your actual greens to be communicated appropriately - so similar value to make them vibrate, or lighter, darker or more neutral (greyed) to make the greens stand out.

I cannot stress enough that the sensitive eye is best trained when painting en plein air as a photo often flattens colour. I often go into sensitive eye mode while I am a passenger looking out the window. I ask myself “where are the shadows and what colour are they? Where is the lightest light and how lighter is it compared to other lights? What colours are in those green trees ahead and how do these colours change as I get closer? What hue, what value, what chroma? Where is the source of light coming from and what are the colours when it hits that tree, valley, field, mountain. What colours are in the indirect light, reflected light, bounced light”?

If you train your eye, you can eventually bring your photographs to life with memory of what you have seen when plein air painting, looking out a car window or camping, or sitting in the garden with your sensitive eye switched on!

Below, is an example from a photo of a very green landscape for which I have chosen colours for the underpainting from the green triadic scheme (variations of orange and violet). The colours for the sky are more yellow oranges as the sky is the source of light and the lightest light in the painting.

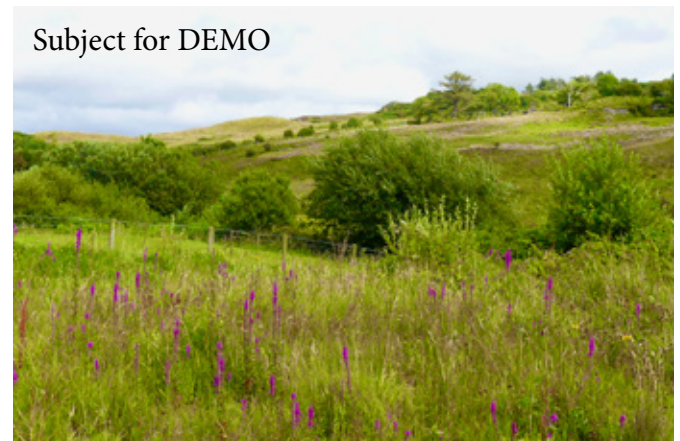


photo of landscape



underpainting - complimentary and triadic colours



watered-in underpainting

Temperature differences between the lights and shadows

How the artists interprets the colours of lights and shadows will also influence which colours the artist sees in the greens. The more sensitive an artist is to temperature differences within green, the more varied those greens will become making a painting more interesting and alive. While green is made up of the component colours yellow and blue, they each have a warm/cool relationship.

Warm sunlight usually casts warm sunlit passages (more yellow) and cool shadows passages (more blue). Cool light usually casts warm shadows. Depending on the time of day and degrees of sunlight, the intensity (chroma) and value differences in the temperature (cool and warm) hues will alter.

Warm sunlight usually casts cool shadows and warm sunlit passages

Direction of Direct Light



Some shadow colours added - dark violet, navy blue, deep magenta, dark cool green in the midground and foreground. Some lights added - golds, soft oranges, lime green in the background and field in the forefront.



Joanne Cotton
Morning has Broken
pastel, 48 x 32 cm

Turning on the sensitive eye to other hues in the shadows and lights creates a more alive and interesting painting

- an example of blues, violets and blue-greens in the shadows; and oranges, golds and bronzes in the sunlit passages

Correct Value of 'Green' and its Spacial Property

Value relationships are paramount in any approach to painting, so the viewer understands perspective and where elements are situated in the space of the painting. It is essential to have a very sensitive eye towards how light or dark an element is to other elements in your scene to provide a readable interpretation of this space. It is also important to relate the lights and darks to one another correctly regardless of the colours you choose to interpret what you are painting.

Value and colour are inextricably woven together. Providing you have the correct value, the colour is not so important. So, when a colour doesn't work in the painting, it is usually because it is the incorrect value. Therefore, the artist still needs the sensitive eye to get the correct value of hues that is seen in the greens to make sense of the subject matter and provide variety to harmonically counterbalance the 'monotoneness' of the greens in the subject.

'Value and colour are inextricably woven together'.

I find it useful to have a grey value scale at my easel to help me determine a colour's value and its relationship to other colours. I work with 5 value variations on the scale. I have attached the grey scale I use to the end of this article.



Here I have added greens to the middle ground trees and I've added blue-violet and greyer blue to the trees in the distance so the value difference to the foreground is more believable.



Joanne Cotton
Vista
pastel, 40 x 30 cm

- an example demonstrating values in the 'greens' lightening in the distance (evening sunlight)

- also the light loses tone (chroma) in the distance (no. 4 sensitive eye)

- other hues in the greens, such as blue and violets in the shade, and red, orange, and gold in the passages of sunlight.

Contrast of Chroma -Juxtaposing intense and dull 'greens'

The contrast of chroma is formed by the juxtaposition of areas of colour and their relative saturation. In other words, the contrast between pure, intense green and diluted green. There are four ways to grey down or neutralise an original pure colour. Add a:

1 - Tint (some white)

2 - Tone (some grey)

3 - Shade (mix some black)

4 - Complementary colour (an opposite colour on the colour wheel. So for green add red).

Pastel painting requires choosing the appropriate colour of actual pastel stick as opposed to mixing a colour, or you can layer colours on top of each other to reach the desired neutral.



More intense chromatic greens on a more neutralized green provides an opportunity to bring your greens alive.

DEMO



I have used the contrast of chroma to create a focal point with the small bush in the foreground. I have also neutralised the trees in the distance by greying them back (adding tone).

DEMO



From the Masters - using the sensitive eye



While this is an oil painting, it is worth showing to point out how Richard Schmidt has poetically executed a green landscape incorporating all aspects of the sensitive eye. I love this one!

Richard Schmidt
Firestone Church
Oil, 12" x 24"
Waterhouse Gallery, Santa
Barbara California, United
States

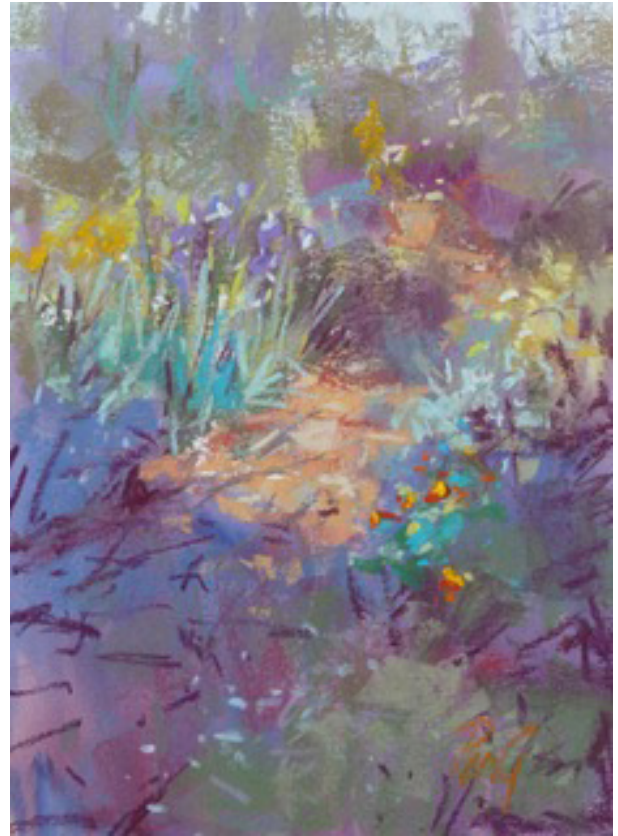
Engaging the sensitive eye



Edgar Degas
Wheatfield and green hill, 1892
Monotype and pastel on paper, 26 x
34 cm
Pasadena, California, Norton Simon
Museum
of Art

Degas uses a dark monotype underpainting and takes advantage of chromatic contrast with his application of pastels in blue-green, yellows, golds and oranges. Simple, but effective.

The pastel painting *The Path*, by Penelope Gilbert-Ng is a wonderful example of seeing other hues in green. Penelope has embraced subtleties and flamboyance communicating a 'green' landscape by using an underpainting of blues, violets, oranges and magenta. Her greens are sensitive to temperature, with cool greens in the shade and warm yellow green and yellow blues in the light. Her deep violet-magenta mark making for grasses brings forth the foreground and gives vitality and vibrancy that pastels are so good at providing. The subtle soft greyed green and violet application in the distance further contributes to a poetic landscape with readable spacial truth.



Penelope Gilbert Ng
The Path
pastel, 22 x 30 cm

Penelope has noted that, “the variety of hues an artist see in the ‘greens’ is all part of their own particular artistic style”.

So, how you interpret your greens is really up to you! As long as you engage your sensitive eye, your painting will come alive!

I hope the 4 points I have discussed will assist you to achieve your true interpretation of a green landscape....

Go on, take the GREEN Challenge...

The **GREEN** Challenge

Sensitive eye to:

1 - other hues within the greens

2 - the temperature differences between the lights and shadows

3 - the correct value of 'green' and its spatial properties

4 – Variations in chroma – juxtaposing intense and dull 'greens'

COMPLEMENTARY

Colors



Complementary colors are those which are directly opposite each other on the color wheel. Due to the powerful contrast of complementary colors, web designers can choose one dominant color (usually the background) and another to highlight the most important elements of the page (the content).

ANALOGOUS

Colors



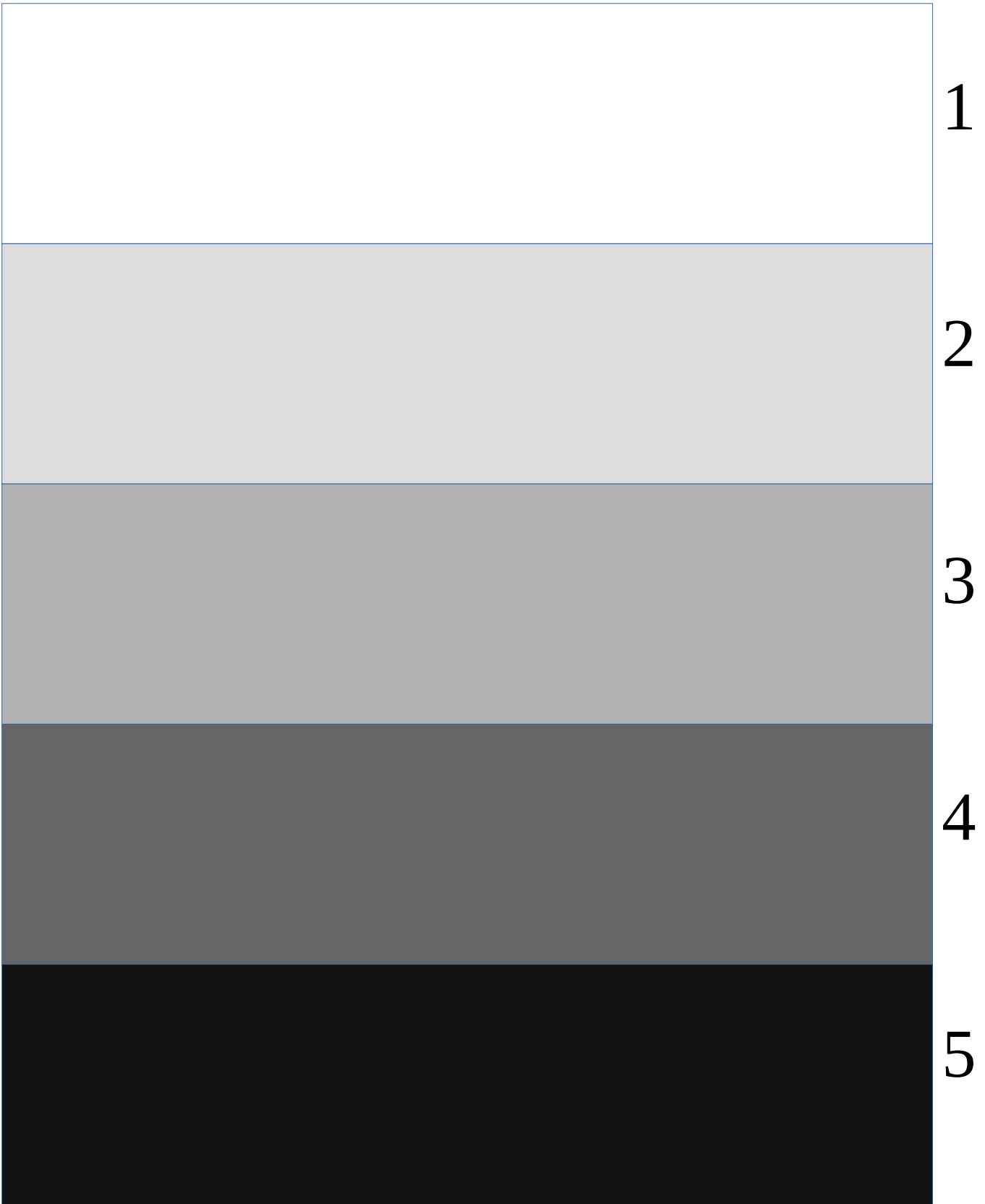
Analogous colors are those which lie on either side of any given color. Analogous color schemes are often found in nature and are harmonious and pleasing to the eye. They usually match well and create serene and comfortable designs.

TRIADIC

Colors



The triadic color scheme uses the power of three colors which are situated at 120 degrees from each other (as determined by an equilateral triangle) on the color wheel. Triadic color harmony is considered by some to be the best color scheme. You could use one color for a background and the two remaining for content and the highlighted areas.



Match pastel colours to the 5 values