

Light and Variation

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Not long ago, I was looking for new glasses. Trying on frames while not being able to see is a challenge in itself, let alone finding a frame that fit my face and then staying objective, while trying to see what I look like.

My sister, who was with me, had chosen a darker green frame with an almost bright lime green color on the inside. They looked great on her. I tried them on, and they made me look quite sickly. Then why was that? It was not the shape of the frame, but the color. On my sister's darker skin, they looked a bit exotic. On my pale skin, however, they gave a green shine to my face that did not compliment me.



Nesting #2, 43" x 45"

Understand that there is no bad color. All colors are beautiful. But it is how we use them and what colors we pair together that dictates their aesthetic success.

In 1666 Sir Isaac Newton developed the first valuable theory on color. He admitted sunlight through a prism and found seven basic colors in the spectrum, red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. So there we have the rainbow. Leonardo Da Vinci suggested four primary colors; red, blue, green and yellow. As late as 1914, William Ostwald eliminated the green as being a product of blue and yellow. (Linda Clark. *The Ancient Art of Color Therapy*.)

That is actually the true way of seeing it, I think. All colors can be made from those three colors plus black and white. In the color wheel, each color has an opposite. So red and green are across from each other. That means that if we mix them we will end up with a grayish color. In fact, they will negate each other if they are of the same light value. Up against each other, they appear as a seemingly gray blurry line, they fight. We could use that if we want to create tension. If we choose to change the value and pair a light green

with a dark red, it will be calmer.

Many years ago, I spent a month sketching and weaving on the Faro Islands with a friend. For part of that time we ended up with a roommate, a painter from the Orkney Islands. He was out sketching and painting all the time, and came back with the most wonderful oil pastels every evening. Strong colors and lots of energy. He used the colors more as energy, taking the starting point from the actual color and then going with it. His belief was, do not try to copy nature, but capture it.

What I took from these early trips was that it takes a lot of time actually seeing and knowing the colors. When drawing and painting, I was taught that you are supposed to look 9 seconds at what you want to draw and one second at the paper drawing it. We tend to do the opposite. Looking at the paper most of the time and putting down, what we think we see. I can sit for hours, just looking. Often not even drawing, just letting the image imprint itself in my brain.

If you look at a waterfall, you can see how a clear substance like water can have colors. The force and energy when tumbling down make it look white. Then when the sun hits it just right, there can appear blue, violets and yellow colors in it as well. The colors of the ocean change to a brilliant white, just by the way the sunlight reflects on its surface. It is always restless and changing, from shimmering white to the very dark. If we reach the shores of the tropics, this same clear body of water will be yellow, merging into green, and turquoise before turning into various blues. The tropical light is bright and strong and we end up with a very different color spectrum. So color is a lot of things. It is surface and light, and how it plays. It gets created through a prism effect. Don't underestimate light. It affects everything.

In my nesting tapestries I was sketching the actual nests. I found that the brown twigs and branches were mostly various colors of brown. At a closer look, some browns were more yellow, others golden or dark red. So taking most of the brown out of the equation, and playing with the secondary tones freed me to be more playful. Then I could prioritize with the colors of the outer twigs compared with the ones further away. That gave me a lot of freedom, while still capturing the nests. This was on a blue sky with lots of clarity.

Then what would happen if I wanted to do a nest in the evening, while the sun was setting? A different thing was happening. Look as I might, the sky's color was peach, but the nest was, and continued to be brown. No tonalities to play with. The light came low and from behind, casting my twigs and branches in shadows. A peach sky, with my nest in silhouette. That moved me in a different direction. I had to think in more graphic terms and I chose to use very few colors.



Nesting #3, 43" x 45"

Still life is different. It is not so affected by the changes of light and movement. I am sure you have seen different variations of still life with bottles, vases or bowls in the colors of blues and grays and various shades in between. If you try to recall some of those images, you probably also have seen some with a bright yellow lemon added.

Lemon is a pop of energy, contained in a nice roundish form, which counter weights the vertical lines and cool colors. A different color, however small it might be, can change the balance in the picture. That is a great thing to use.

And what color glasses did you choose, you might ask. Tortoiseshell my friend, the color of the nest in sunset!
