

Design with a Focus on Color

CASA Presentation by Francheskaa

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The eye registers the Significant Forms of the Basic Elements of Design: Color; Line; Texture; and Form. There is an emotional response to these elements. For those who prefer Representational art, the response is to reality. For the artistic, the response is to that beyond reality. Art is the response to what the eye sees. To learn to see, study the Masters. Study their various approaches to composition and to color.

The Composition or Organization of the painting directs how the eye will move through the painting: how the eye tracks forms and shapes. The Elements of Art are Line, Shape, Value, Texture and Color. The Principles of Organization are Balance, Proportion, Dominance, Movement and Economy. They are influenced by Harmony in the form of Repetition and Rhythm and by Variety in the form of Contrast and Elaboration (or exaggeration). All should contribute to the Unity of the composition.

Beginning to Paint:

Initially, abandon all preconceptions about how the painting should look. Wet the watercolor paper. Cover the paper loosely with warm Analogous colors (Yellow, Orange and Red). Allow the colors to run. This loose painting should create elements which can then be developed or reacted to with subsequent layers of painting. The Rhythms created in the painting may be Alternating/Static (with dark and light and elements pushing a pulling), Progressive, Flowing or Kinetic.

Select a few brushes and learn to use those rather than acquiring a large number of brushes. Use a 1" and 2" flat wash brush along with a couple of round brushes. Old brushes can make more texture in the painting.

Intense or warm colors advance in the painting and cool and dull colors recede. As the painting progresses, concentrate on values. Focus on lights and darks rather than middle values. Prior to painting, do color value charts for the colors in the painting. These samples from light to dark can help make color and value choices easier. Using multiple values of each color creates movement in the painting. For Low Key paintings, principally in the darker values, spots of light color create contrast as well as movement. Use one dominant color. Select a color scheme using a color wheel.

Paint for short periods on a painting and then evaluate carefully before continuing. Look at changes in color values; at the quality of line from thick to thin; for continuous eye movement.

All sections of the painting should work to create a whole (Unity). If you like something, do not think about it for 20 minutes, just do it. Try new approaches and keep adding new things. One cannot be certain what will happen when trying the new. Mat the painting to isolate and thus evaluate each area of the painting as well as the over all painting.

Compositions:

Paintings must have compositional structure particularly abstract designs. There are many choices for arranging the painting. Experiment with several of these arrangements rather than focusing on one over-used or comfortable arrangement such as Cruciform. The focal area can have one main element or be made up of several up to four. Use one large, one medium and a couple of small forms in the Center of Interest.

Geometric compositions divide the painting in various shapes and/or sections. Meandering compositions have movement developed from line and color. Cantilever compositions have a support with a contrasting arm. Or try Right Angle (triangular) compositions.

Use collage papers to add shapes and color particularly darks into the painting. Mix Red-Yellow-Blue together for accent and for black colors. Paint the papers with a variety of values. Apply papers with Nova Gel #207 or #209 (www.nova.com). Wear plastic gloves to apply the medium and to smooth out the papers. Using the hand gets air bubbles out much better and there is no brush to clean. Wipe off excess medium with a rag.

Framing Options:

Formal framing utilizes a white mat with a frame under glass or Plexiglass®. Informal framing omits the glazing. Mount the watercolor paper to a stretched canvas to Foamcore® using Nova Gel and add weight. Spray with Golden Clear Spray or brush on varnish. Eliminating the glazing reduces the reflections that occur when the painting is framed with glass or Plexiglass®. Frame the mounted painting in a narrow frame.