

Glossary of Color Terms

achromatic Having no color or *hue*; without identifiable hue. Most blacks, whites, grays, and browns are achromatic.

advancing colors Colors that appear to come towards you (warm colors).

analogous colors Closely related *hues*, especially those in which we can see a common hue; hues that are neighbors on the color wheel, such as blue, blue-green, and green.

chroma The purity or degree of saturation of a color; relative absence of white or gray in a color. See *intensity*.

color field painting A movement that grew out of *Abstract Expressionism*, in which large stained or painted areas or “fields of color” evoke aesthetic and emotional responses.

color wheel A circular arrangement of contiguous spectral *hues* used in some color systems. Also called a color circle.

complementary colors Two *hues* directly opposite one another on a *color wheel* (for example, red and green, yellow and purple) which, when mixed together in proper proportions, produce a neutral gray. These color combinations create the strongest possible contrast of color, and when placed close together, intensify the appearance of the other. The true complement of a color can be seen in its *afterimage*.

cool colors Colors whose relative visual temperatures make them seem cool. Cool colors generally include green, blue-green, blue, blue-violet, and violet. The quality of warmness or coolness is relative to adjacent hues. See also *warm colors*.

hue The pure state of any color or a pure pigment that has not had white or black added to it.

intensity The relative purity or saturation of a *hue* (color), on a scale from bright (pure) to dull (mixed with another hue or a *neutral*.) Also called chroma.

intermediate color A *hue* between a primary and a secondary on the color wheel, such as yellow-green, a mixture of yellow and green.

local color The actual color as distinguished from the apparent color of objects and surfaces; true color, without shadows or reflections.

low key Consistent use of dark *values* within a given area or surface.

monochromatic A single color (*hue*) and its *tints* and *shades*.

neutrals Not associated with any single *hue*. Blacks, whites, grays, and dull gray-browns. A neutral can be made by mixing complementary hues.

optical color mixture Apparent rather than actual color mixture, produced by interspersing brush strokes or dots of color instead of physically mixing them. The implied mixing occurs in the eye of the viewer and produces a lively color sensation.

palette The selection of colors an artist chooses to work with or the board or surface on which a painter mixes his or her colors.

pigment Any coloring agent, made from natural or synthetic substances, used with a binder in paints or drawing materials. Pigments are derived from both natural and artificial sources. The earliest pigments were mined from colored clays of earth (ochers and umbers), but minerals and plants were also early sources for pigments.

polychromatic Poly = many, chrome or chroma = colors. Having many colors; random or intuitive use of color combinations as opposed to color selection based on a specific color scheme.

primary colors One of the three colors (red, yellow, and blue) that are the basis for all other color combinations. *Pigment* primaries are red, yellow, and blue; *light* primaries are red, green, and blue. Theoretically, pigment primaries can be mixed together to form all the other hues in the spectrum.

process colors Cyan, yellow, magenta and black. Used for photographic reproduction.

receding color Colors that appear to be in the background.

saturation See *intensity*.

secondary colors One of three colors created by mixing equal parts of two primary colors (red, blue, and yellow); the secondary colors are violet, orange, and green.

shade A *hue* with black added.

simultaneous contrast An optical effect caused by the tendency of contrasting forms and colors to emphasize their difference when they are placed together.

spectrum All the colors in the color wheel.

subtractive color mixture Combining of colored *pigments* in the form of paints, inks, pastels, and so on. Called subtractive because reflected light is reduced as pigment colors are combined. See *additive color mixture*.

tertiary (intermediate) color Red-orange, yellow-orange, blue green, etc.

tint A *hue* with white added.

tone A *hue* with gray added.

value The lightness or darkness of tones or colors. White is the lightest value; black is the darkest. The value halfway between these extremes is called middle gray.

warm colors Colors whose relative visual temperature makes them seem warm. In color theory, warm colors are those that contain a large amount of yellow, as opposed to cool colors, which contain more blue. See also *cool colors*.