

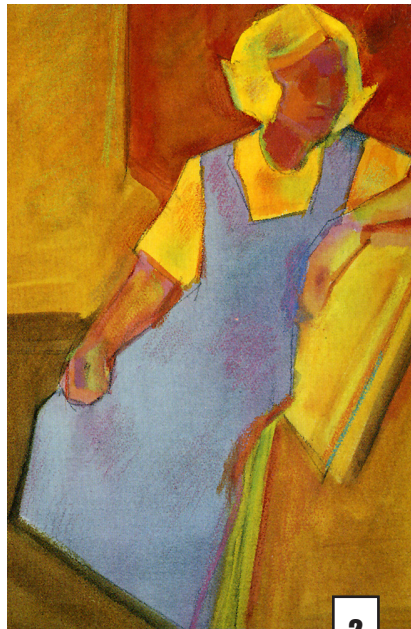
Different Approaches May Still Need Darks

Regardless of your subject matter, you always have a choice of how to approach it. Your choice ultimately will define your “style”. If you always lean toward emphasizing color (hue and intensity contrasts), your work will look different than someone who is more interested in value, pattern, designed shapes or some other aspect of art-making.

In the examples below, artist Christopher Schink takes a figure and treats it in four different ways with very different results.



1



2

Figure 1 depends on value to structure the image. Figure 2 explores color hue and intensity changes, figure 3 is created with “designed” shapes (a nod to Picasso) and figure 4 make use of pattern as a decorative element to enrich the shapes.

In all but the second example, DARKS play an important role both to define a specific shape and to set off the other colors and values.



3



4

Mixing Darks

If you're having trouble getting a good, rich, clean dark, you may not be getting enough paint in your mixture of paint and water. Watercolors all have a drying "shift" and with some pigments, that shift can be dramatic. All watercolors dry lighter than they look when wet, so take that into account when mixing your darks. If you're not sure, test a sample of your mixture on a scrap piece of watercolor paper and let it dry. That will tell you if you need more paint in the mixture or not. Darks need to be put down once and left alone, especially if you are using any of the more opaque pigments (cadmiums, cobalts, ultramarine blue, many earth pigments) in the mix.

Below is a gray mixed from ultramarine blue, nickel azo yellow and carmine. The most saturated sample looks about the same dry, but the other mixtures (with more water added for each sample) undergo a dramatic shift when they dry - more bluer and lighter.

Gray mixtures - wet



Gray mixtures - dry



Why it matters:

If you have no strong dark/light contrasts, the painting may look anemic at worst, and at best, the subject matter lacks the "pop" it may need to stand out from the background or its surroundings. Rich darks make the lights look lighter and the colors brighter.

① ② & ③ ARE VARIOUS PROPORTIONS OF
SCARLET LAKE + THALO BLUE (WINSOR-BLUE)

①



②



③



④ SCARLET LAKE + WINSOR (THALO) BLUE + LEMON YELLOW

④



⑤ PERM. ALIZARIN + THALO GREEN



⑥ PERM. ALIZARIN + THALO GREEN



You could use organic vermilion in place of scarlet lake with your thalo blue for a good dark.

Carmine or quinacridone red would work in place of permanent alizarin in the mix with thalo green (or hooker's green dark/deep).

Just a glance at your palette and you can tell which pigments are candidates for mixing a good, rich dark. They're the ones that are already darker values. I generally don't use the more opaque or the granulating pigments to mix darks - the amount of paint required to saturate the mix enough to make a good dark can end up looking chalky or even shiny. I like the more transparent hues, and the synthetic organics (quinacridones, thalos/phthalos) are always good choices because of their tinting strength as well as their transparency.

Opposites (complementary hues) are your best bet for mixing darks. A red/green mix or a blue/orange mix. Be lenient when you think about what is red and what is green - the magentas and dark red violets also work well with hooker's green or a thalo green (either blue shade or yellow shade) to make a rich dark. The violet/yellow complements don't work well because yellow is so inherently light, and nearly all yellows are also somewhat opaque.