

# Watercolor: Hue/Chroma vs. Value

## Week 4: Color Temperature

### TOPIC: Describing space and form using color temperature changes

If you are a value painter, and if you paint “naturalistically” or representationally, then you are probably used to using aerial perspective in your work. As opposed to linear perspective with its vanishing points and precise angles, aerial perspective uses what happens to color and value in the three dimensional world as a model for how to paint these effects on a two dimensional surface.

Various factors (air, curvature of the earth, time of year) all bend light rays, affecting the color we see. Generally, object colors get lighter, bluer and less intense as they get further away from us, and most of us are used to treating our subject matter in this way. If we are value painters, what we may not be doing is using warmer darker colors in the foreground, and then “integrating” the warmer darker areas with the cooler, lighter ones. In other words, using some cool in the foreground and some warm in the background. The photo of the old wagon below, which I took out in Avra Valley, is an example of this. Where could you use some cool color in the foreground? Where could you introduce warm hues into the background?

#### Exercise 1:

Paint a simple interpretation of the landscape photo of the wagon using aerial perspective (warmer darker foreground colors, and cooler lighter background colors. ) If you’d rather work from a sketch or photo of your own, do so.



The “norm” in naturalistic painting is to use aerial perspective, with warmer, more intense colors in the foreground and cooler, duller ones in the background [above].

When we reverse this temperature pattern, [below] it has the effect of flattening out the space somewhat, because the warm colors want to come forward, and the cool ones want to recede.



#### Exercise 2:

Do the same painting you did in exercise 1, only this time, reverse the aerial perspective by using mostly warm, dark hues in the background and mostly cool light ones in the foreground. [See the second sketch above].

How does this affect the overall feeling of the painting? What does it do spacially?

The principle that applies to aerial perspective also helps to model form more “colorfully” and often more convincingly than simply using value changes. In the illustration at the right, the tree on the right is modelled by using three different values of the same green, from light to dark. The tree on the left has been modelled using a warmer brighter lighter yellow green that transitions to a cooler duller darker blue green. Notice that though they are both drawn on the same plane, the tree modelled with changes in temperature (warm to cool) seems to be forward of the tree modelled simply with changes in value (light to dark).



*Tree modelled with temperature changes*

*Tree modelled with value changes*

be forward of the tree modelled simply with changes in value (light to dark).



*Temperature changes from warm to cool helps turn the corner on this boat, and “shape” the trees*

*Value changes from light to dark suggest distance*

Can you use both approaches? Of course. Take a look at the painting by Constantine Churkas at the left. He is working semi-abstractly, but this approach that uses both temperature change to model forms, and value change to suggest distance would work in any style of painting.

### Assignment:

Either redo a previous painting, or start from scratch.

The goal for this assignment is to

(1) Use temperature changes (warm to cool) to model the three dimensional form of the objects in your painting.

(2) Use temperature and value changes to suggest depth or distance where appropriate.

*Tom Berg, “Two Chairs”  
Oil on Canvas*

*Notice how he changes the chair backs from an orange-y, intense bright red to a cooler, less intense red-violet. The arm and leg rests evolve from a light, bright cyan to a neutral and then to a mid value, duller red orange where they rest on the ground.*

*The value changes occur obviously in the curving arm/leg rests, but also more subtly in the blue ground and the deep magenta background.*

*P.S.— the cast shadow isn't black!*

