

All about the colors I keep in my closet and on my palette

Why do I choose the colors I have on my palette?

I choose these colors for their mixing properties. I like to have a wide variety of colors on my palette for each painting. I'm often asked about how my paintings look so luminous and how can students avoid mixing muddy colors.

If you squeeze out yellow ochre, raw Sienna and transparent yellow oxide on your palette they will all look about the same. When you mix each of these colors with cobalt blue and Titanium white, you'll get 3 very different looking color mixtures. In general, transparent colors are easier to mix with than opaque colors. Yellow ochre is very opaque, its made from ground ochre earth. In spite of that it is one of the most popular colors on oil painter's palettes. I prefer to use transparent yellow oxide or raw sienna as they are more transparent. I like for my finished paintings to have a mixture of opaque and transparent areas as they enhance each other's qualities within the work. Using mostly transparent hues simply makes the job of painting easier and you will be less likely to mix muddy colors.

Some other earth colors that I keep in my paint collection are caput mortem violet by Rembrandt paints, this is an unusual color, it doesn't look violet when you squeeze it out onto your palette, rather it looks like a dark brown. You'll find that it is a violet when you mix it with titanium white and ultramarine blue. Transparent oxide red, brown and orange are lovely for painting garden landscapes and portraiture. I enjoy using burnt Sienna but prefer these transparent oxide hues for certain landscapes that require more delicate color passages. They are also good for glazing.

Indian red is one of the most powerful earth colors, a little goes a long way! It also makes a beautiful violet when mixed with ultramarine blue and titanium white.

Why bother with Naples yellow?

I love to have Naples yellow on my palette, it is one of those paints that simply makes painting easier and helps me paint faster. If you don't have it, you can mix a similar color by mixing titanium white and transparent yellow oxide. Naples comes in yellow shade, red shade, deep and light. I prefer Naples yellow deep for most of my paintings.

Why do I use Titanium white?

There are many choices of white paint on the market. titanium white cools and lightens, when you buy an artist grade titanium white you are investing in a good tube of paint that will help extend the use of all of your other colors so it pays to buy a good quality tube of titanium. I have used lead white, zinc white and mixed white. Mixed white is temperature neutral while the other whites warm and lighten. Lead white is the most transparent white, this is good for portraiture but not for landscapes. I have also made the decision that using paints with lead isn't worth the health risk. Another white paint option is titanium buff or nickel titanium. Titanium buff has more tinting strength than nickel titanium therefore I prefer it but I mostly use titanium white because it makes my paintings have more clarity of color and not look too yellow overall.

Which reds do I like and why?

I keep cadmium red light on my palette at all times for my warm red, its warm because it leans towards orange on the color wheel. I also always have permanent madder deep as my go to

cool red, these are my 2 most useful and favorite reds. Permanent madder deep is very similar to alizarin crimson. I think of it as slightly softer in hue and less edgy than alizarin. Some other reds I occasionally use are permanent red medium, carmine which seems to be a lighter version of permanent madder deep and quinacridone rose or permanent red violet. Permanent red violet is a great color when you need a more contemporary looking pink or bright hue of red. It's slightly bluer than quinacridone rose. I occasionally will also use cadmium red purple. This is a powerful color and almost seems like more of an earth color than a cadmium hue.

Which blues do I like and why?

I always have ultramarine blue on my palette. I also often have either Rembrandt turquoise or cobalt turquoise. I also sometimes have cobalt blue and kings blue. Kings blue is a mixture of ultramarine blue and titanium white, its a bright color and an easy to reach color to put some "pops" of fun color for finishing touches at the end of your painting. Cobalt blue and ultramarine are very similar, cobalt is slightly greener than ultramarine. I only use both on my palette when I'm painting a scene that has a lot of different blues in it. Cobalt is more expensive than ultramarine. If I could only choose one it would be ultramarine as its less expensive and more useful.

When do I add greens to my palette?

I adjust the colors I keep on my palette for every painting. If I am painting a scene that has a lot of green pastures or green leaves for instance I will often add permanent green light to my palette. I also sometimes use permanent green deep. Viridian green is a great color for painting ocean water and river water. Thalo greens are beautiful paints but they are very staining and powerful hues making them difficult to work with. When I use thalo greens I will sometimes use them for glazing as I did in my Tide Pool I painting. Other than those few greens I prefer to mix the rest of my green colors using the blues and yellows I keep on my palette. Greens are the hardest color family to master, it takes a lot of practice to get good at mixing greens. One of the secrets to mixing realistic looking greens is adding small amounts of red. This grays and grounds the color as it is the opposite of green on the color wheel. A good way to get good at mixing greens is to go outside and pick some leaves. Mix colors to be exactly like the green in the leaves, mix each one so precisely that you can't tell where the paint ends and the leaf begins. This will give you first hand knowledge of how to accurately mix greens with your own set of paints.

Which yellows are best?

I have a wide range of yellows on my palette, this is one of the more challenging colors to mix with so having more yellows to choose from makes painting easier and capturing light in paintings more precise in terms of temperature. I have a cool yellow which is cadmium yellow lemon, I say its cool because it moves towards green on the color wheel. I also keep cadmium yellow medium on my palette, this is what I prefer over cadmium yellow light. I also like to have cadmium yellow deep and cadmium orange, these are warm yellows as they lean towards orange on the palette. Aureole yellow is also an unusual and useful yellow. I often use this when painting soft green leaves or glazing in seascapes. Its a more popular color for watercolorists than for oil painters.

If the impressionists don't use black then why do I have Ivory black on my palette?

That is a myth. The impressionists do use black. Have a look at the work of Pissaro, Manet and John Singer Sargent. They all used black in their work. J.S. Sargent also used black in his watercolors. Ivory black is actually a warm, dark blue. You'll discover for yourself if you mix it

with any yellow such as cadmium yellow medium or deep or transparent yellow oxide + white. You can make a wide range of lovely greens. Lamp black is another choice but I don't usually use it as its very shiny and plastic looking when its dry. Ivory black has a nice softness to it when it is dry and its another color that is very easy to mix with. You can make lovely violets when you mix ivory black + transparent red violet + titanium white.