

Tip #63

Exploring Your Watercolor Pigments



"What colors should I buy?" That's one of the first questions people ask me when getting ready for my classes. The choices can be a bit daunting, I'll admit! Look at any good art supply catalog and you're faced with a dizzying (and tempting!) array of choices-the newest Daniel Smith catalog over a dozen blues, and nearly 2 dozen reds, not to mention the yellows, greens, oranges, violets, browns and neutrals.

The best answer is to start with only a few colors-some variation on the primaries-and learn their attributes, then add a few more if you choose, till you have a palette you're familiar enough with that you know which to pick for a specific effect or need.

Some colors will stain your paper, and some sit on top so you can lift almost back to white paper. Some granulate and make interesting patterns in mixtures or alone, and others are very smooth and completely transparent. There are wonderful uses for all of these, so enjoy the exploration! You may find that you *prefer* to keep it simple, no matter how experienced you are.

Art 63-1, Primary colors, just like we learned in grade school...

I learned from my old mentor, John Pike, to use a warm and a cool of each of the primaries for the best range of secondary colors (orange, purple, green) as well as the tertiaries. To that end, my basic palette includes Phtalo and Ultramarine Blue, Permanent Alizarin Crimson and Cadmium Red (though some avoid the cadmiums for safety reasons), and Hansa Yellow Light (or Cadmium Yellow Light) and Hansa Yellow Medium. I can get a lovely range of colors, just from these six, though I usually add a few earth colors (Raw and Burnt Sienna, Yellow Ochre, Burnt Umber) and Payne's Gray.



Even a few paints on your palette will make an unlimited rainbow of colors.



Art 63-2, REALLY keep it simple, if you like!

You *can* get by with just three basic colors, as shown here - these are M. Graham watercolors, and I've done whole paintings with only these three pigments.



Art 63-2

Art 63-3

I was going for the subtle shades in this painting of my long-haired cat, Rags - but it was with only the colors above, Azo Yellow, Naphthol Red, and Ultramarine Blue.

The Next time we'll explore the staining colors, as well as the relative opacity and some of the granulating pigments, and you'll know much better which ones you want as permanent residents of your OWN palette!



Art 63-3



There is much, much more on the basics on my new CD, *Watercolor Basics*, from pigments to paper and brushes to washes and more -- available in my Café Press store, http://www.cafepress.com/cathy_johnson, and on my website, <http://www.cathyjohnson.info/cdfolder/cd-2.html>.

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