

Plein Air Painting Glossary

Alla Prima: “All at once”; paintings using this method are completed wet-on-wet, in a single session. Also called Direct Painting, as opposed to the Indirect Method, where artists wait for layers to dry in between sessions.

Atmospheric Perspective: In a landscape, the effect of moisture or particles in the air scatters light, making objects in distance appear bluer or purpler, softer/less distinct and closer together in value.

Color Temperature: Perceived warmth or coolness of a color. Color temperature is relative and judged in context of surrounding colors. Warm colors—red, orange, and yellow—appear to project forward; cool colors—blue, green and violet—tend to recede. Color temperature affects where hues are perceived to be located in the implied space of a painting.

Warm Colors: Red, orange, and yellow. Colors that are perceived as warm and appear to project forward in space.

Cool Colors: Blue, green, and violet. Colors that are perceived as cool and appear to recede in space.

Complementary Colors: Contrasting colors that appear across from each other on the color wheel. Ex. Red & Green; Blue & Orange; Red-Violet & Yellow-Green.

Composition: The arrangement of elements, principles, and materials in a painting. Think of it in a similar fashion to a musical composition: the parts are arranged into a whole.

Co-Primary Colors: The warm and cool versions of a primary color. Cadmium Red and Alizarin Crimson could be co-primaries—they are both red, but when mixed with other colors, give different results.

Depth Cues: Overlap, relative size, texture, value contrast, vertical position on picture plane, perspective.

Easel: An upright stand for supporting a canvas.

Elements of Art & Design: Line, shape, mass or form, space, color, texture, value. Light and movement are sometimes included as well.

French Easel: Often made of wood, this is a combination field easel and paint box. This type of portable easel folds up and can be carried to your painting location. It also has a drawer for transporting painting materials.

Gesso: Mixture of a binder, chalk and typically white pigment. Traditionally gesso was used to create a *ground* to paint upon and functions to protect a surface or substrate from oil paint, which will corrode canvas or cotton over time, weakening the support.

Gesture Drawing: A quick drawing that is a basic statement of forms. In gesture drawing, the hand duplicates the movement of the eyes, quickly defining the subject’s general characteristics.

Linear Perspective: The impression on our eye that receding edges (for instance, a fence or the edges of a building) seem to recede to a point or points on our eye level.

Local Color: The known color of an object, as opposed to the perceived color. For instance, the local color of an apple may be red, but the perceived colors in the apple will vary depending on the kind and quality of light illuminating the apple, and the colors in the apple's surroundings.

Medium: 1. Materials and processes in art ("my medium is watercolor" or "this composition is mixed media") or 2. Mixtures added to oil paint to change the viscosity and/or drying time.

Negative Space: The space around your positive shape(s), sometimes background or "unfilled" areas of a design, but not always.

Oil Paint: Pigment particles bound together and suspended in an oil medium. As the oil dries, it creates a flexible and luminescent paint film. Linseed (flax), poppy, safflower and walnut are all oils used in making oil paint. Linseed is more likely to yellow with age but remains flexible; poppy, safflower and walnut remain clearer but are more likely to crack with age.

Palette: A surface for mixing paint OR a range of colors used in a particular painting.

Parts of Color: Hue, Value, and Intensity

Hue: The predominant wavelength of a color. Ex. Blue.

Value: The relative lightness or darkness of a color. Tone and value are often used interchangeably. Ex. Light Blue or Dark Blue.

Intensity: The saturation of a color. (Brightness or dullness. For example, Bright Blue or Dull Blue.)

Perceived Color: The color an object appears based on the color of light and its surroundings.

Plein Air Painting: Painting outside, on site. A french term, "en plein air" means in the open air. Historically, painters have often painted or drawn landscape studies outside, but it became more practical to complete entire paintings outdoors with the invention of tubes for oil paint in the mid 19th century.

Pochade: Small loose paintings or color sketches aimed at capturing the color and quality of light in a setting.

Pochade Box: A portable, lightweight box with a hinged lid that can hold a small canvas or panel.

Positive Shape: The shape of your subject(s). Sometimes the "filled" areas of a design.

Primary Colors: Red, Blue, and Yellow. In subtractive color or paint mixing, you cannot mix primaries but combine them to create secondary and tertiary colors.

Principles of Art & Design: Balance, Emphasis and Subordination, Unity and Variety, Repetition and Rhythm, Scale and Proportion, Directional Forces. Sometimes Economy, Harmony and Dissonance are included.

Secondary Colors: Orange, Green, and Violet. Mixtures of primary colors.

Sighting Angles: Lining your pencil or a straight edge up to an angle that you see in three-dimensional space, then transferring that angle to your two-dimensional picture-plane.

Tertiary Colors: Intermediate colors. Colors that result when a primary and a secondary color are mixed. Red-Violet, Yellow-Green, Blue-Green, Red-Orange, Yellow-Orange, Blue-Violet.

Thumbnail Sketches: Reduced size, loose experimental sketches used to explore possible compositions.

Value: Relative lightness or darkness of a color or a surface. A **local value** refers to the inherent or known lightness or darkness of an object (for example, an egg has a light local value, a piece of charcoal has a dark local value). **Perceived value** is the value you see with your eyes--based on lighting conditions and surrounding values.