



Colour Decisions

Very often, when painting a landscape (from real life or a photograph) artists find themselves confronted with areas of 'undecided' colour. A distant hill may appear to be a greeny, purply brown..!

What colour to paint it?

Surely not greeny, purply brown...?

Well, we see just that colour in many paintings. That, not-too-sure-of-itself, undecided colour. And it speaks for itself, it tells the viewer that the artist wasn't certain what colour to put down, and when unsure of a colour, one tends to dab at it lightly and without confidence, hoping no one will notice it. This applies to all subjects, still life, portraits and landscapes etc.

How to avoid it? Study the area in question, whether it be a photograph or in real life, and come to a decision as to what colour you are going to make it. Does it lean toward blue, yellow or red? Orange, purple or green? If it is not easy to decide, **push** it into a colour family. Is it warm or cool? What tone is it? When you have come to a definite decision you will be able to apply the colour confidently and your brushstrokes will tell the viewer that you have put down a colour you were happy with. This 'undecided' colour crops up a lot in dark shadows. We see it in paintings

as a lifeless, unrecognisable dark tone of something-or-other. Much better to add life to your shadows and always try to have your colour lean toward blue or purple.

Once an area of your painting starts to say - **"Hey, I don't know what colour I am"**. - then you are looking at mud. You should be able to look at every colour on your finished painting and know exactly what you used to mix it.

The thing to remember is, when you're unsure of the colour to put down, your brushwork becomes timid and the paint is applied very gently in the hope that no-one will notice it. Certainly there is a place for 'greyed off' colours, they are the backbone of all paintings but even though they are not bright and strong, they should still have a **feeling** of colour. They might be in the red family, green, orange, blue, purple or yellow and they might be very weak but the colour family should still be recognisable.

Think of a lovely red hibiscus flower and imagine putting it into a painting. Picture it against bright green foliage and vivid blue background. Does that red flower stand out? Now 'see' it against more subdued colours and the red will glow.

Sometimes when you think a colour is causing trouble, it's not **that** colour but the one NEXT to it that is at fault. Each colour you put on the canvas will only be as good as the neighbouring colour allows it to be.

An undecided colour will be weak and thin but a confident colour will be thick and boastful.