



The Art Elements 1

Colour | project brief

Materials + Equipment (when working at home)

A4 pencil, rubber, willow and compressed charcoal, white chalk pastel, coloured chalk pastels, acrylic paints, paper (sketchbook, A2 sized paper)

Still-life of brightly coloured objects (part 1), and neutral monochrome objects (part 2).

Project Brief

Colour vs Tone/value

There are 2 approaches to painting –

1. Tonal/Value-based approach (refer to the image of John Constable's 'Dedham Mill' on my [Pinterest board](#).
 - a. Prefers to develop colour choices determined by seeing tonal values first. The light and darks of a scene.
2. Colour-based approach (refer to Claude Monet's 'Rouen Cathedral' on my [Pinterest board](#).
 - a. Prefer to make full use of colour play – hot/cold, harmony/complementary, warm/cold, colour vibrations, strength of colour effected by its value, etc

Step 1

Aim: To understand the Tonal/Value-based approach to painting, and to understand the tonal quality of colour.

1. See my [photo](#) of an arrangement of colourful shopping bags, or set up a similar still life yourself.
2. Select an area (you can use a viewfinder if you wish) to make a simple yet interesting composition of shapes. You can include some of the background areas as well (don't worry about the details of the bags). [See my example](#).
3. Create a tonal drawing of your composition interpreting each colour area into an exact tonal equivalent. See [an example](#) of a beautiful tonal drawing on my Pinterest board.
 - a. Begin by shading the lightest areas with your white chalk pastel
 - b. Next shade the next lightest area by shading it with a blended mix of white and compressed charcoal – blend with your fingers or cloth)
 - c. Continue to observe all the areas and match the colour of the still life arrangement with the corresponding tone in your drawing, by blending more or less of the white chalk and charcoal.

This will really help you understand

- How artists (like John Constable) who use the tonal value-based approach see colour primarily as tone, before glazing colours on top.

REMEMBER:

The fact that colour has tone/value (as if seen in black/white) is vitally important to create images with a strong composition with emotional power and depth.

TIP: When evaluating your paintings/landscape/still-life arrangement squint with your eyes narrowly closed as this takes away much of the colour and helps you identify tone more accurately (or use your phone camera to change the effect to b/w (Use the camera as a guide only – don't match your drawings tones to the camera image – keep looking at the still life)

Now that you know about the tonal value of colour you can decide if you want either

- A balanced painting with a range of tonal values from dark to light
- A high key painting with mostly light tones/values
- A low key painting with mostly dark tones/values

Step 2

Aim: To understand the Colour-based approach to painting, and to learn about colour relationships.

- Set up a simple neutrally coloured monochromatic still life. Or refer to my [photograph](#).
 - On your A2 paper lightly draw 4 small (about A5 size) boxes using a soft pencil.
 - Draw 4 very simple compositions of simple shapes in the boxes. Don't over complicate it but draw the objects accurately. [See my example](#).
 - Focus on using Hot and Cold colour relationships in each of the 4 drawings (and think about Harmony and Contrasting colours) when painting. Each drawing should give you a chance to experiment with using a range of different colours. Match each colour you use to the corresponding tone/value seen in the still life. See the Tips above!
1. Harmony colours (a colour range that sit next to each other on the colour wheel)
 2. Complimentary colours (a colour range that are found opposite each other on the colour wheel)
 3. Hot + Cool colours (warm colours come forward/cool colours recede)

Your Colour Relationship studies will be a success if the colours you choose are sitting in the correct spatial plane (ie: foreground – middle – background) and support your drawings by making sure that foreground objects also have colours that advance and background shapes are painted in colours that recede.

See the Pinterest board for examples of colour relationship studies

TIP: When you go back to your own painting and drawing projects I would suggest using both the value-based and colour-based approach to achieve best results, especially when starting out and learning about colour.

Step 3

Aim: To extend your understand and use of a colour-based approach to painting, and how colour relationships are used to create form, space, depth, rhythm.

See the images of work by artist **Chuck Close** on my [Pinterest board](#). Part 3 of this project takes inspiration from his work.

Chuck Close

- Notice the grid system he uses across the canvas
 - Notice how he breaks down each square of the grid into a simple pattern of colour relationships. Viewed close up they are simply a collection of shapes.
 - Notice how when viewed from far they blend together to create an effect of space, depth and 3D form.
 - Notice his exemplary use and understanding of both the tone/value-based approach to painting and his mastery of colour relationships (colour-based approach).
1. Prime your paper with gesso or white matt emulsion.
 2. Redraw your small study you did in preparation and enlarge to fill the whole of your A2 paper (draw a border round the edges of the paper)
 3. Start by blocking in the flat areas with flat colour as you did in the 4 small studies. You can see this should be similar to the way Chuck Close started his portrait paintings in the 'detail' image on Pinterest.
 4. Lightly draw a grid over your painting with each square being about 3 x 3cm.
 5. For the rest of the project follow Chuck Close's use of a grid and introduce pattern and colour as he does to give the flat shapes in your painting some form, shape and depth.

REMEMBER: you are going to have to use all your knowledge of colour relationships and how colour reacts against other colours to make this work.

For example:

- Hot colours jump forward / cool colours recede
- Saturated colour jump forward / Greyed off colour recedes
- Light colours jump forwards / dark colours recede
- Harmony colours create calm areas / contrasting colours create dynamic eye catching areas

You will also have to pay close attention to the tone of the colours you are using as you learnt to do in part 1 of this project.



Notes

- If you are working on this project after attending the Art Elements course remember to refer to your notes and remember all that you learnt about colour.
- Remember you need to be thinking and applying all that you have learnt about the Principles of Art to help you create a coherent and visually strong 'finished' painting.
- Use the 'Leave a reply' form on my website to ask me any questions if you are working on this project at home, or sign up to attend the **Art Elements** course if you haven't already.