



# Colour and Technique

Newsletter of the School of Colour - September 2023



## Should We Bother With Colour Theory?

To become a noted 'colourist' it pays to be described as such in the media. If a journalist covering an art exhibition is looking for work to comment on and spots a painting composed of bright splashes of colour, applied with or without thought, the originator will often be described as a 'colourist'.

If the term is repeated enough times it can stick and the prices for new work can go up accordingly. The guiding 'judge' and public 'advisor', the journalist, joined later by gallery owners looking for sales and public word of mouth, are usually simply attracted by strong, bright colours. Such colours attract even if applied by an 'artist' who is not sure if its raining or Wednesday.

Of course, the contrast of hue has a very important part to play. However, I would suggest that a basic understanding of colour theory is essential if the power and subtly of colour is to be realised.

We tend to think that colour is somehow fixed and unchangeable, that an orange-red such as (for example) Cadmium Red Light, remains the same regardless. But this is not the case.

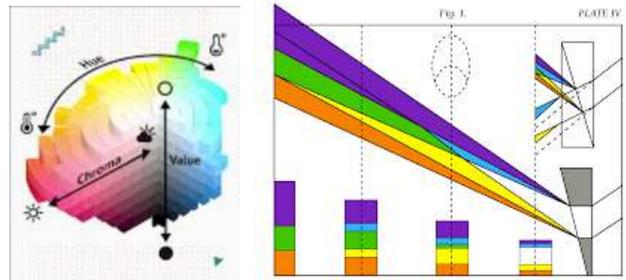
Although to most, if not all of your followers, colour will seem static and unmovable, in fact it holds many surprises. Surprises that the knowledgeable artist will add to their work.

Colour theory started off simply:



Having discovered that colour was an energy that could be split into separate colours the theorists stepped into the new science.

'We could easily complicate this' seemed the approach taken up by all manner of experts.



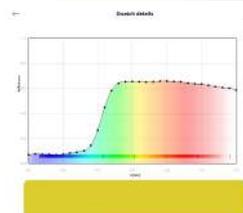
The arrows, numbers, and complex diagrams so beloved of academics and colour scientists seldom seem to consider the needs of the practicing artist. A vast number of explanatory diagrams are presented alongside simpler explanations. I suggest that you follow the simpler guidance and avoid the over complex.

The three primary system.



You will, I'm sure, have come across many diagrams such as the above. The three primary system has been around for over 200 years. Although it is still followed and taught world wide, new thinking replaced it in the mid 1980's (or should have done by now). As many have found, the above promises that the three central colours, yellow, red, and blue give rise to *bright* secondaries and tertiaries. A promise unfulfilled.

Spectrophotometry.

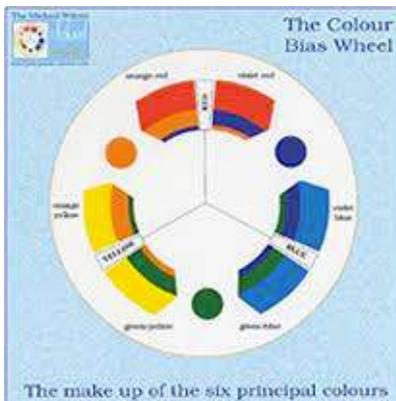


Invented in 1940, the spectrophotometer has enabled colour to be studied in detail and brought under control at the printing press.

It also enabled further research into the complex world of colour mixing.

# Should We Bother With Colour Theory? (con't)

The split primary system.



By allowing the detailed examination of individual colour types the spectrophotometer enabled, for the first time, clear research into accurate and predictable colour mixing.

The paints to select.



By keeping the paint range to around 12, the sensible artist gets to know the characteristics of each; their transparency, strength, etc. The fewer colours in a piece very often being the better they have an enhanced opportunity to produce harmonious work. They also save a small fortune.

The after image.



Klimt - Danae

That one colour can be enhanced by first looking at another, either on a fleeting or permanent basis, led to an entire art movement. Another indication that the painter will benefit from realising the changing nature of colour.

Colour constancy.



We have the in-built ability to take into account the light conditions when looking at any colour. Our mind will then adjust the colour to keep it as 'constant' as possible. Whereas a regular camera would depict the above rather differently on an overcast or stormy day our mind will adjust it to what it 'should be'.



Raoul Dufy - The harvest

A range of contrasts are available for the artist to explore, warm and cool (as above), light and dark, the complementaries, etc. However, although widely touted, the contrast of warm and cool, or temperature, has no place as a guide to colour mixing. A violet-red will look cool when against an orange red to many but that same violet-red will look warm next to a blue.

To go back to the title of this article - *Should we bother with colour theory?*

I think we should consider that the various elements of colour understanding have come about through the careful observations of others. The science of the day often playing an important part.

Once the artist of today has learnt how to separate the valuable from the nonsense and have added their own observations we could be in for change. **So yes, we should bother.**

## Our Registered Teachers

We are extremely proud of the caliber of our Registered Teachers at the School of Colour! Over the next several newsletters, we plan to introduce you to them so those of you who are searching for instructors can readily find one.

*Kathy Harker-Fiander*



Born and raised in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Kathy Harker-Fiander studied Classical Animation at Sheridan College, in Oakville Ontario.

After her 25 year career in the animation industry working on Saturday morning cartoons such as "The Care Bears", "The Raccoons", and countless other productions from around the globe, she expanded into the Fine Art world of watercolour and oil painting.



Reading Michael Wilcox's books on colour theory unlocked the mystery of colour mixing for her. Colour mixing was not just intuitive, it was also logical.



She teaches drawing and watercolour classes at Canterbury Community Centre in Ottawa Canada with a unique passion for the art of drawing and colour theory.

Learn more about her classes here:

<https://cca-acc.ca/program/watercolour-painting-tuesdays-fall-2023/>

<https://cca-acc.ca/program/watercolour-painting-thursday-fall-2023/>

Canterbury Community Center: [www.cca-acc.ca](http://www.cca-acc.ca)



Kathy's artwork is represented year-round at the Rothwell Gallery and Framing Ottawa.

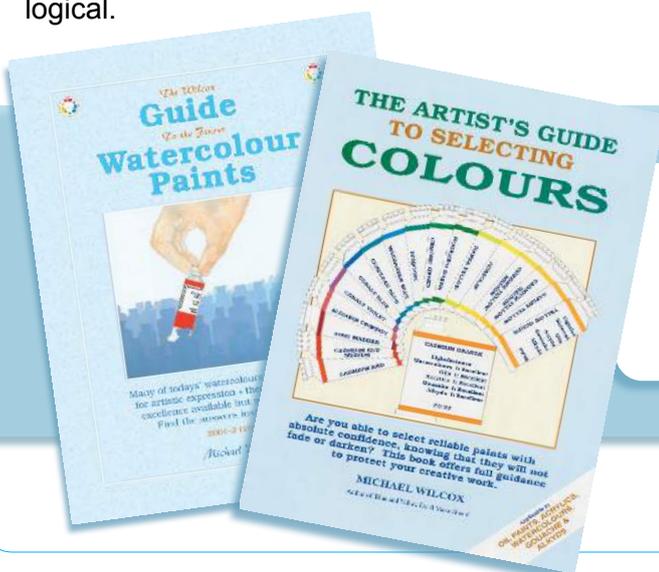
[www.rothwellgalleryottawa.com](http://www.rothwellgalleryottawa.com)

Kathy's Website: [www.kathysartwork.com](http://www.kathysartwork.com)

Email address: [kathy@kathysartwork.com](mailto:kathy@kathysartwork.com)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/kathysartworkdotcom>

Instagram: [Kathysartworkdotcom](https://www.instagram.com/kathysartworkdotcom)



Learn more about pigments and which paints to choose for your palette in "The Wilcox Guide to the Finest Watercolour Paints" and "The Artist's Guide to Selecting Colours".  
**Both are currently on sale!**

[schoolofcolour.com](http://schoolofcolour.com)

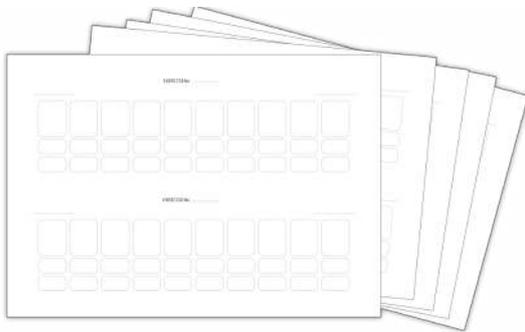
*In case you missed it...*

## Our first online course is now available!! **PRACTICAL COLOUR MIXING**



The course includes over sixty pages of instruction including video clips. A laminated Practice Palette™ and Colour Bias Wheel™ will be mailed to you for use

- Work at your own pace;
- Take as much time as you need;
- Lifetime access to the course;
- Certificate of Completion when finished.



Exercise sheets, pre-printed on acid-free, fine quality artist papers are available to purchase separately. They are currently available only in the US and Canada, but will be available in all regions soon.

Take advantage of the  
Introductory price: **\$39.95**

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where you can download a preview PDF of the course.

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*all in-stock, regularly priced books!*

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<https://michaelwilcoxschoolofcolour-eu.com/>

**Visit the US website:**

<https://michaelwilcoxschoolofcolour-usa.com/>  
(includes CANADA)

**Books Brushes Palettes DVDs Paints**