

# COLOR HARMONY

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## Munsell and Prang Color Systems

Art students must be thoroughly familiar with the use of the Munsell Color System and Prang Color System.<sup>1</sup> Place these two color charts in front of the art class all the time. These color charts may be prepared by the instructor on strong, white drawing paper with either water colors or No. 16 Crayola.

## Colors Have Visual Weights

Color areas have, what artists call, visual weights. Two circles of the same size, for example, are filled with a light red hue and a bright red hue. It will be noticed that the bright red circle looks heavier than the light red circle. If one circle were filled with bright yellow and the other circle with bright purple, the purple circle will look heavier than the yellow circle. Colors, therefore, appear light or heavy depending upon their difference in hue, in value, or in intensity. This is the way designers train their eyes to balance colors. It is by this method that the law of color areas had been determined. According to this law, large areas of color should be quiet in effect, while small areas may show strong contrasts.

## Warm and Cool Colors

There are two large groups of color that every art student should know—the warm colors, including the reds and yellow, and the cool colors, which are around blue. Designers believe that the most beautiful color harmonies are those which give a single impression: an im-

pression of warmth with perhaps a note of coolness for variation; or of coolness with an accent of warmth. It would look less interesting, for example, to display in a store window suits and dresses of cool colors—blues, blue-greens, and greens—unless some accents of warm colors are brought in, like orange and red-orange bandannas, ties, or scarfs.

## Keying the Colors

Another way designers harmonize colors is by "keying" them that is to say to make each color have something in common with every other color. Colors may be keyed to each other by (1) neutralizing them, (2) mixing them to introduce a color in common, (3) glazing, veiling, or topping them, (4) tying them together by means of a neutral color, or (5) using a rough texture.

Let students bring in clippings showing color suggestions. These clippings may be colored covers, illustrations, or advertisements from discarded magazines; colored fabrics such as cretonnes, chintzes, printed linens, and silks; color reproductions of paintings; or colored pictures of flowers, leaves, birds, insects, etc.

## Monochromatic Harmony

This harmony—in different values, intensities, and textures—is effective for a small area, as in a dress, a rug, or even walls and rugs. It is tiresome, however, to use it in an entire room.

Remember that the neutrals—black, white, and gray may be used in any harmony.

## Analogous Harmony

Colors that lie near each other on the color chart are called analogous colors.

<sup>1</sup> Read Chapters Eight and Nine of *Art in Everyday Life* by Harriet and Veta Goldstein, Third revised edition.

Usually the colors between any two primaries are the most agreeable. These colors, like those in the monochromatic, when used in a harmony should always be in different values and intensities. Analogous harmony is sometimes used in decorating a room but a variety of textures is introduced and the colors of materials are of different values and intensities.

### Complementary Harmony

Colors opposite each other in the color circle are called complementary colors. When using this harmony, the two opposite colors are usually neutralized, or one of the complements is made light or dark, or only a small note of the opposite color is introduced. On the Prang chart, red and green are difficult to combine beautifully. Red with blue-green or green with red-purple on the Munsell chart are apt to be more pleasing.

### Double Complementary Harmony

Two neighboring colors and their complements, when used together, form a double complementary harmony. "In using a double complementary harmony, there should be one outstanding hue, which would be the largest amount used, and it should be the duldest of all the colors; the next color may be a little brighter, but should still be dull; the third color, used in only a small amount, ought to be about one-half neutralized; the fourth color, for the

smallest accents, may be in or near its brightest intensity."<sup>2</sup>

### Split Complementary Harmony

Combinations of a primary or an intermediate color with the colors on either side of its complement form a split complementary harmony. One cannot start to plan a split complementary harmony with a secondary color, because its complement is a primary which is impossible to split because it is an element in itself.

### Triads

Of all the harmonies, the triad is the richest but it needs the most careful treatment. A safe guide to follow is to neutralize the two colors for the large areas and to brighten the third color for the smallest area.

On the Prang color chart, the triads are (1) primary triad: red, blue, and yellow; (2) secondary triad: green, orange, and violet; and (3) intermediate triads: (a) yellow-orange, blue-green, and red violet, and (b) yellow-green, blue-violet, and red-orange.

Three triads, containing red-purple in each, on the Munsell color chart are (1) red-purple, yellow, and blue-green; (2) red-purple, green-yellow, and blue; and (3) red-purple, yellow, and blue. Any similar triangles on the chart will locate the other triads.

If the foregoing principles are followed, much jarring color combination may be avoided in situations close to students' lives.

<sup>2</sup> Harriet and Vetta Goldstein, *Art in Everyday Life*, p. 209. The Macmillan Co. New York, 3rd Edition, 1946.



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