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Giving Your Painting

DEPTH

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Depth in our paintings is really an illusion. Our board or canvas is flat, 2 dimensional, and the only way to make it look 3 dimensional is to use value, color temperature, edges and detail.

VALUE

To show any kind of distance in our painting we have to start with reducing the value and value contrast as objects and planes recede. We tend to get caught up with color when we're painting and lose the value differences. So when your'e mixing color, your focus should still be the value of the color.



Remember also, that we need to compare one value with another.

In the photo above, the mountains in the background are dark only compared to the lighter sky above it and the lighter trees below it.

But the mountains are lighter compared to the shadows in the trees in front. So always compare the value you want to mix with a couple of other values around it. Only then can you get the right value.



Remember to compare values. Values will get lighter as objects recede into the distance. In the painting above, painted in the Teton National Park, the values get lighter as they recede. The darks are still dark, but COMPARED to the values in front they are a little lighter, also the dark accents that we see in the foreground are gone in the background, we lose some of the stronger contrast in the distance and we can see smaller darks in the foreground.

COLOR TEMPERATURE

The contrast of color temperature is what gives our color a sense of depth. As color recedes into the distance they get cooler. So a yellow tree in the foreground can be an intense yellow in front but as they recedes into the background the color gets cooler. The yellow tree in the background is still yellow but not as intense and I would cool it off by adding violet or blue-violet. Depth has a color to it -- blue or violet, so objects in the background are affected by cooler colors.



In the painting above, painted near Dubois, WY, I pushed the mountains in the background with more of a muted blue-violet to make

them recede, compared to the darker and warmer trees. It's the difference between the dark trees and the cooler mountains that gives the painting depth, not just the lighter, cooler mountains.



In this painting of the snake river in Wyoming, I gradually lightened and cooled the colors as they recede. I want to make sure the layers of mountains get cooler, more blue or blue-violet as they recede, and paint what I know, as well as what I see.



This is another painting of the Snake River and I wanted to really push the difference between the foreground trees and the background mountains. The mountains are cooler with less value and temperature changes.



The photograph above has some pretty good color temperature changes as the levels of mountains and trees recede. It doesn't always show up very well in photos so you have to be able to lighten and cool down planes in a photograph as they recede. You can see the shadows really turn a stronger violet as these recede in the photo. The background starts out more of a violet, then turns to a blue-violet in the distance. As artists we need to decide how strong of a color we want to use or if we want to increase the depth more by making the background bluer.

DETAIL



This painting is near the Teton Mountains and I suggest depth by making the darks lighter and the color cooler as they recede but also the brushstrokes get larger and less detailed. With simple shapes and values in the background there will be less detail.

Detail comes forward in a painting so a small amount of detail helps the background to recede.

When working from a photograph, if we can simplify the background and ignore all the detail and small value changes then our painting will have more depth and distance.



This is a larger painting and has much more detail in the foreground. The lack of detail in the background gives the painting more depth, as well as the value and color temperature change.



In this winter scene I also use more detail in front, enough to add some interest. In the background, I wanted to create a really big, simple light and dark pattern, the less detail the better, more detail would only flatten the painting.

Remember, it's not just that objects and planes get lighter and cooler as they recede, it's that they are lighter and cooler COMPARED to the foreground objects.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Phil Starke is an accomplished artist. He also enjoys teaching and sharing his knowledge of painting.

You can see more of his work at

his gallery website: www.philstarke.com.

- LEARN MORE -

You can find more learning opportunities at Phil's teaching website:

www.PhilStarkeStudio.com