



Frustrating Summer Greens

by Phil Starke

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Everyone has trouble mixing greens in a summer scene or a spring scene. Mainly because there are so many greens in the photo and the camera doesn't give us any variety. We have the same problem painting outside, too many greens that look the same. Like this photo below, no variety in color, just green.



Now we don't have that trouble when there is a little bit of green in a winter scene or a fall scene like this one.



We don't have the same trouble with image 2 mainly because there is a variety of color around the green. But in image 1 we have green on top of green and they blend together. So we have to create variety in summer and spring greens.

Value

The most important thing to remember is that the value of the green will give the most variety and separation between the greens, not the color. Which is surprising because we tend to think that color differences will give variety in our paintings but not as much as value differences.

In this photo below I have a variety of greens in the landscape but the values are too close together, not enough value contrast so the variety of color doesn't look as strong. The trees are a blue green, the mountains are a bluer green and the grass is a yellow green, but the close value relationship flattens the image.



In this image I took the same photo and separated the values of the big shapes, creating strong value contrast which gives us more color variety as well. So you can see the strong contrast of value gives the color more range. I'm using the same colors in each painting, but this second one has more value contrast, so the color differences look sharper.



In landscape we need to make sure there is enough value change between the large shapes, that will give our painting depth and variety. The color choice for the greens is secondary.

Color Temperature

After the value of the greens, color temperature is most important. The temperature will suggest the type of light, whether it's direct light, backlighting, cloudy day or shadow.



painting by Edgar Payne



painting by Carl Moll

In the paintings by Edgar Payne and Carl Moll, you can see the warm and cool contrast of the sunlight and the shadow in both paintings, it creates the suggestion of light and the type of light. In the sunlight my greens will be most effective if they have more yellows, oranges and red-oranges in them, and the shadows will be more effective if they have more cooler colors, blues, violets and blue-greens.

I can add more color variety, but they need the temperature contrast to make the viewer feel a sense of light. Our problems with greens come when we think too much about copying the color of the photograph and not thinking value first then the temperature of the color.

Depth

To suggest distance in my landscape the greens have to appear cooler and lighter as they recede. The key is that they look cooler ***compared*** to the foreground greens. That's what creates depth. I will also make the greens more muted as they recede. The complement of blue-green is red-orange so I will add a little bit of cadmium red light or alizarin crimson and cadmium yellow light (to create a red-orange) and gradually add it to the greens and blue-greens as they recede. You can see the cooler and more muted color in the mountains as they recede in this painting by Edgar Payne. Also notice that the shadows in the foreground are warmer compared to the background shadows. Comparing values and temperatures is really important. If we're not comparing, we're isolating values and temperatures and we won't get the right relationship between different shapes



The painting below is by Willard Metcalf, he has a lot of different greens, but the important thing is the strong value contrast between the big shapes as well as the greens gradually getting cooler as they recede back in the distance. The colors are also more muted in the distance. The differences in this painting are subtle but still there to create depth.



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.

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