

Values in your Painting

Value refers to the quality and intensity of light in a painting. It is about the lights, darks, and middle tones. Value is created by the effects of sunlight, moonlight, reflected light and atmosphere. Interesting paintings have an appealing arrangement of these values.

Here are some combinations:

1. Small lights, large darks in midtones.
2. Large lights, small darks in midtones.
3. Small lights and small darks in larger midtones
4. Large lights and large darks in small midtones
5. Gradation
6. Checkerboard or all over: lights, darks, and midtones all over.

Value is relative, darks in one painting may be midtones in another.

In a landscape painting, the lightest light is usually the sky, unless you are painting snow or a thundercloud. The next lightest value will be the horizontal surface that reflects the sky. The darkest darks are the vertical objects: shadow sides of trees and the shadow walls of structures for example.

A painting that is mostly light in value is called high- key, like a beach scene in summer sun. A low- key painting has predominantly dark values, like a painting under the canopy of a forest, a nocturne, or a sunset.

For our purposes, we will use a value scale to talk about the amount of light being reflected or absorbed by an object. A one (1) will = white, a 10 will = black. We have all the values in between that we can mix on our palette. The sun is always much more intense than we can paint it. When looking at shapes in the landscape, compare their value to your premixed greys.

Exercise:

You will be using the 3 values of Gamblin gray I provide to paint a value study. I will project an image or you can work with one of your own. Paint that image in a quick value sketch only, using these 3 values. Leave the lightest value the white of the canvas.

Exercise:

Using your color palette, mix 3 grays that match the 3 Gamblin grays.

Exercise:

Create 3 colors for each of the values that would be appropriate for the subject. E.g. subject is grass, mix 3 colors of the same value that will represent the grass.