

COLOUR DYNAMICS

Workbook for watercolour painting
and colour theory



Angela Lord



Colour Dynamics: Workbook for watercolour painting and colour theory, text and illustrations copyright ©2010 Angela Lord

First edition published in 2010 by

Hawthorn Press,

Hawthorn House, 1 Lansdown Lane, Stroud, Gloucestershire GL5 1BJ, UK

Tel: (0044) (0) 1453757040 Fax: (0044) (0) 1453 751138

Email: info@hawthornpress.com

Website: www.hawthornpress.com

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means (electronic or mechanical, through reprography, digital transmission, recording or otherwise) without the prior written permission of the publisher

Illustrations and cover image by Angela Lord

Cover design and typesetting by Bookcraft Ltd, Stroud, Gloucestershire

Printed in China by Everbest Printing Company Ltd using FSC approved paper

Reprinted 2013



Illustrations by Rudolf Steiner reproduced with kind permission from Rudolf Steiner Nachlassverwaltung, Dornach, Switzerland; Rudolf Steiner's *Colour* Lecture quotations with permission from Rudolf Steiner Press, Hillside House, The Square, Forest Row, East Sussex, RH18 5ES; Paul Klee quotations with kind permission from *Über die Moderne Kunst*, Paul Klee, Benteli Verlag, Bern, Switzerland, 1945/1979

Every effort has been made to trace ownership of all copyrighted material. If any omission has been made, please bring this to the publisher's attention so that proper acknowledgement may be given in future editions

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data applied for

ISBN 978-1-903458-93-8

CONTENTS

Introduction	4
---------------------	---

Materials	5
Techniques	8

Part One

Chapter One	Exploring Colours	10
Chapter Two	Painting the Rainbow	44
Chapter Three	Combining Colours	53

Part Two

Chapter One	Complementary Colours	56
Chapter Two	After-images	60
Chapter Three	Painting with Complementary Colours	64
Chapter Four	Why do Colours Clash?	70

Part Three

Chapter One	The Colour Circle	74
Chapter Two	Enhancing Colours	77
Chapter Three	The Polarity of Red and Blue – A New Colour Circle	82

Part Four

Chapter One	Sunrises, Sunsets: The Interplay of Light and Darkness	88
Chapter Two	Sunrises and Sunsets as Archetypes: Painting Out of Colour	92
Chapter Three	Colour Dynamics: A New Language of Colour	98

Part Five

Chapter One	Colour Through History: A Brief Overview	108
Chapter Two	Colour Now: Ways to Use this Book	118

About the Author	123
-------------------------	-----

Glossary	124
-----------------	-----

Appendix	125
-----------------	-----

Quotations and References	126
----------------------------------	-----

Credits for Illustrations	127
----------------------------------	-----

Suggestions for Further Reading	127
--	-----

PART FOUR

Chapter Three

COLOUR DYNAMICS: A NEW LANGUAGE OF COLOUR



Colour, in its various aspects, plays an active role in all that we see around us in nature. When we experience the four seasons, for example, we see many changes in nature's forms and colours. When observing flowers, shrubs and trees, we can be astonished at their variety of structures, shapes and colouring.

*"It is a matter of discovering in painting the secret of creating after nature, out of the colours. For a great part of the reality we survey is in fact born out of the creative world of colour. As vegetation sprouted out of the sea, so everything living grows out of the colour world."*²⁹



How do we find our way into nature's secrets?

And how can colours help us do this?

Let us consider one of nature's most familiar sights – the tree.

A tree image can be painted in different ways:

COLOUR DYNAMICS: A NEW LANGUAGE OF COLOUR



Realistically as it appears to us in nature.



Stylistically extricating the essential gestures to indicate 'treeness'.



Symbolically reducing the tree to its archetypal image.



As an impressionist indicating general colour impressions, in particular light and shadow.



As an expressionist exaggerating a colour or gesture to add expression to the tree.

PART FOUR



*"All theory, dear friend, is grey, but the golden tree
of actual life springs ever green."*
Goethe, *Faust* Part I



In carefully observing the natural world around us we can discover various dynamic forces at work in nature's structures, forms and processes. These interacting principles have, in many instances, opposite, contrasting qualities.

Let us consider some of them:

- contracting/closing – expanding/opening
- in-breathing – out-breathing (or spreading out)
- heavy – light
- hard – soft
- large – small
- active – passive
- simple – complex
- light/radiance – dark/dullness
- opaque – transparent
- hot – cold
- wet – dry
- weak – strong
- sturdy – flimsy
- growth/life – decay/death

These are just a few of the many ways in which we can describe the contrasting polarities of organic life.

COLOUR DYNAMICS: A NEW LANGUAGE OF COLOUR

Try making your own list. Your descriptions could also include your sense-impressions, for example:

- loud – quiet
- sweet – sour
- rough – smooth
- warm – cool
- fast – slow
- long – short
- sharp – round

If we wish to take colour as our starting point then we need to find ways in which the inherent processes of nature can be related to colours.

We can ask

- What are nature's processes?
- How do colours share these principles?

Let us consider such polarities in relation to colours.

White can be open, expansive, light, radiant, transparent, pure.

Yellow can be open, expansive, radiant, bright, lively.

Orange can be active, radiant, warm, youthful, enlivening, vibrant.

Red can be active, hot, lively, energetic, stimulating.

Violet can be soft, passive, gentle, delicate.

Indigo can be contracting, closing, firm, dark, opaque.

Blue can be passive, transparent, cool, calm, distant, refreshing.

Green can be passive, opaque, balancing, living, stable.

Brown can be contracting, closing, heavy, firm, dull, warm, old.

Black can be contracting, closing, heavy, hard, dark, old, dying.

PART FOUR

"Colour, the fruit of life, is the foundation of the painters' means of painting – and its language."

Robert Delaunay, Fauvist painter

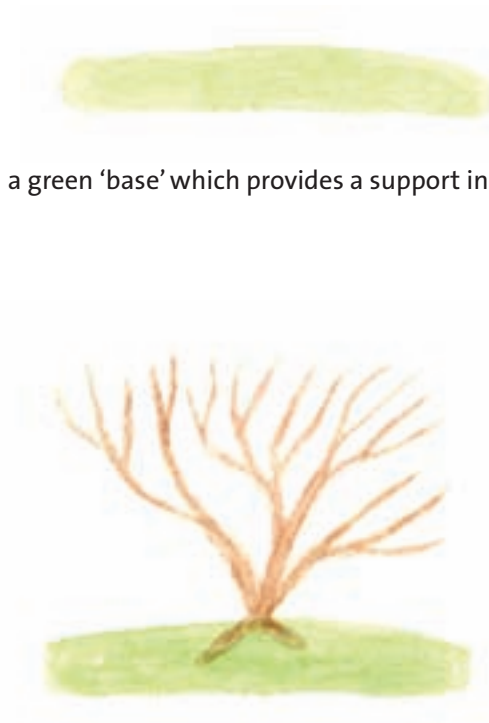
Now we are beginning to build a new colour language. Some colours are complex and can be contradictory; others have definite, relatively straightforward qualities. The main consideration is that we can create structures and forms in our painting, through the contrasts which recreate the organic forms of nature. It is possible to begin to 'paint out of colour' – we can employ colours to perform tasks to which they are intrinsically suited. For example, yellow will create forms which have an open, expansive, bright gesture; red can create active, warm gestures and bring a forwards-moving colour perspective; blue can create coolness, distance, freshness; dark browns and blacks can create 'solid' structures which contract or bring weight to a painting.

We can ask

- Which colours give expression to the actual nature, the dynamic and the form of a tree?

We consider the colours which can create a structure, or which have a structural quality of stability, contraction and strength. From these colours we paint the trunk, or rather colour surfaces which will indicate the trunk – perhaps a dark brown, purple, indigo or reddish-black.

1. Begin with a green 'base' which provides a support in the lower area of the page.



2. Green offers stability below; the white above offers an open space for the brown. Here there is no resistance; the brown can reach out into the upper picture space.

COLOUR DYNAMICS: A NEW LANGUAGE OF COLOUR



3. Next the contracted brown surfaces can be breathed out with another colour: green, orange, red, yellow are all possibilities.

We can consider the different shapes and forms which might develop if the leaves are red, orange, yellow-green, blue-green, or even a blackish green.

We can look for balance in the proportions and ask:

- How much of each colour do I need to balance out the other colours?
- How much of each colour do I need for the sake of the whole painting?
- Do the colours carry, support and balance each other?



For the surroundings we can select colours that harmonise or provide contrast:

PART FOUR

We can also consider the questions:

- Which colours do I need to paint a particular type of tree?
- Which colours suit the seasons of the year?

Such an understanding of colour dynamics enables us to create a bridge between science and art – a journey in which artistic creativity, as a method of research, can reveal the endlessly changing and remarkable world of nature's forms, rhythms, moods and archetypes.

This approach to painting enables us to begin to experiment, research and make new discoveries. Goethe wrote:

“Art is a revelation of secret laws of nature, which, without it, would remain forever hidden.”

Painting onto a toned background

Try toning your paper with a colour-wash, say a pale blue for example. Allow the wash to dry. Bring the tree colour-sequence into this blue background. Next, try a violet wash on a new paper, and repeat your sequence. The coloured backgrounds will influence and modify the motif. The colours will ‘feel’ different, in their differently coloured environments, and will respond to them. Many such experiments can be carried out, using various coloured backgrounds. Some will suggest a season of the year, others a particular climate (cool or warm, wet or dry) or even a time of the day (morning freshness, the heat of midday, the darkening of evening). Let the coloured backgrounds transport you in time or in place, and develop the tree-forms to suit. Try to sense how your colours ‘feel’ using the new colour language.



A cool blue background might make your colours feel cold, so that they contract and condense. A yellow background might influence them to open up, to expand. And so on. We gradually gain an inner sense for these subtle colour reactions, so that the forms which we paint arise from our own inner sensitivity and wakefulness towards the colour.



COLOUR DYNAMICS: A NEW LANGUAGE OF COLOUR



If your trees are painted into a red-toned page how do they 'feel'? How will your colours react to the red? Or to an orange, or green background?

The approach which we have considered in this chapter offers a new basis for understanding colour. To create a colour language requires systematic and methodical experiments which are, at the same time, as lively, varied, and dynamic as colour.



The expression 'to paint out of colour' refers to a painting method which develops motifs and images from the colours themselves. It is a term which expresses a new way of perceiving colours that is both intuitive and rigorous.

When we combine accurate observation with an awakened inner response, painting becomes increasingly creative and purposeful. At the same time we lay a secure foundation to support, enhance and enrich our own imagination through colours. In this way we can become colour-chemists, gaining insights into the creative, formative and transformative powers which colours embody.

PART FOUR

Further your work by

- Exploring themes related to:
fairytales
mythology
the festivals
portraiture
world events
- Painting non-representationally (abstractly) in 'free'
colour arrangements, colour-planes and surfaces.
- Developing and broadening a new approach to aesthetics,
taking into account the polarities of:

instinctive/intuitive preconceived ideas

spontaneous pre-planned

symmetrical asymmetrical

chaotic ordered/rhythmic

random organised

vigorous/active quiet/passive

dramatic lyric

ethereal substantial

universal specific



Contrast of light and dark/levity and gravity.



Contrast of cool and warm.

COLOUR DYNAMICS: A NEW LANGUAGE OF COLOUR



Adding blue to green: the colours contract.



Adding crimson to black: the colours expand.



Contrast of active and passive.