

SCHALLER

Thomas W Schaller: The Vibration of Complementary Colors



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Like all artists – of course I love color (I often say that I can't even broach the doorway of an art supply store without "adult supervision" - I'll want most every tube of paint and every brush I see!). But in truth, color in my paintings – while crucial - is secondary in importance to value and both of those factors must take a backseat to an overall compelling idea, story, or vision. Value and color alone are ways of helping the artist to make art, but are rarely art in themselves.

Thomas Schaller's Palette:

[New Gamboge](#)
[Mars Yellow](#)
[Permanent Orange](#)
[Perylene Scarlet](#)
[Permanent Alizarin Crimson](#)
[Venetian Red](#)
[Burnt Sienna](#)
[Sap Green](#)
[Cobalt Teal Blue](#)
[Verditer Blue](#)
[Cobalt Blue](#)
[French Ultramarine](#)
[Imperial Purple](#)
[Lunar Violet](#)

As for wanting every color on the shelf – compelling as it can seem - it just isn't necessary. One of the qualities I love most about painting in watercolor is its immediacy and the fact that so few "tools" are needed to create something truly good. Paper, pigment, a few brushes and of course water – and you're good to go! But because the tools required are so few in number, the quality of those tools takes on added importance. You may not need many, but what paper, what brushes, and which pigments you choose to spend your hard-earned money are very important.

So often in my teaching and online, I am asked a version of this question: "What blue, (or red or yellow) did you use?" It's an understandable question - and not an invalid one - but a clear answer is almost never to be had. I rarely pre-mix colors in my palette, preferring to allow them to "mix themselves" on the surface – and within the fibers – of the paper itself . So for example, the blue you might be seeing in any one of my paintings is unique – tempered as it is with other tones with which it has blended on the paper.

But probably the most characteristic quality of my painting style is my tendency to work almost solely with complementary colors which – strongly or in more subtle ways – help tell the story of light that I hope characterizes much of my work . Naturally when any two complements meet (any variation of the primaries blue, yellow, or red) - a gray or an off-tone will be created . An infinite variety of unique mid-tones just wait to be discovered. But it is the power of these grays and mid-tones - juxtaposed with the vibrancy of more pure colors - that can give a work so much life. The way blues vibrate and sing as they blend with oranges on the paper can be very potent and high key. Violets allowed to blend with various shades of yellow can transmit other and very different vibrations - often at a lower key. And warm earth tones and reds melting into various greens can create an infinity of amazing lively and transparent mid-tones that never cease to amaze me .

Over time, I have tinkered a lot with my palette – trying to minimize the number of "essential" pigments - trying to find the most trust-worthy and versatile colors that allow for the widest range of creative and expressive possibilities. I've come to prefer pigments that are a bit more sediment-based than stain-based. This is because – for me – they tend to create value more convincingly and they tend (because of the more textured papers that I prefer) to result in washes that float the pigment over the "peaks" in the paper's surface while allowing it to sink into the "valleys". The result can often be a painting that - when dry - seems more shimmering and alive than one I would do on a smoother surface. Such washes also appear to have more depth and transparency, and have that "still wet" look that I strive to achieve .

The DANIEL SMITH Company has been incredible. They have made for me a palette of essential pigments – all with an eye for the complementary tones I love and with all the light-fastness, sedimentary qualities, and transparency I could hope to find . As with all their pigments, these are top-shelf in quality and consistency. Their intensity and ability to blend on the paper's surface are just amazing, and are such a joy to use. With only a few of these pigments, your paintings can really begin to vibrate and resonate and – in the words of the great Jeanne Dobie (my first watercolor instructor and likely the best colorist I ever met) - really start to sing.



"Fog on the Tiber - Rome"

Thomas W Schaller - Watercolor 2014

30x22 inches

In this painting, I used violets/yellows to vibrate more softly in the background as well as a bit of pale green/reddish brown to suggest the castle and landscape beyond. But it is the strength of the blue/orange used in the foreground that help give this work depth and illusion of perspective .

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Mr. Schaller is a Signature Member of the AWS, NWWS, Artist Member of the California Art Club, and President Emeritus of the American Society of Architectural Illustrators. Tom is a member of a great many other professional arts organizations as well as a founding member of the group; North American Watercolor Artists. To see more of his work please see his website:

<http://thomasschaller.com/>.

