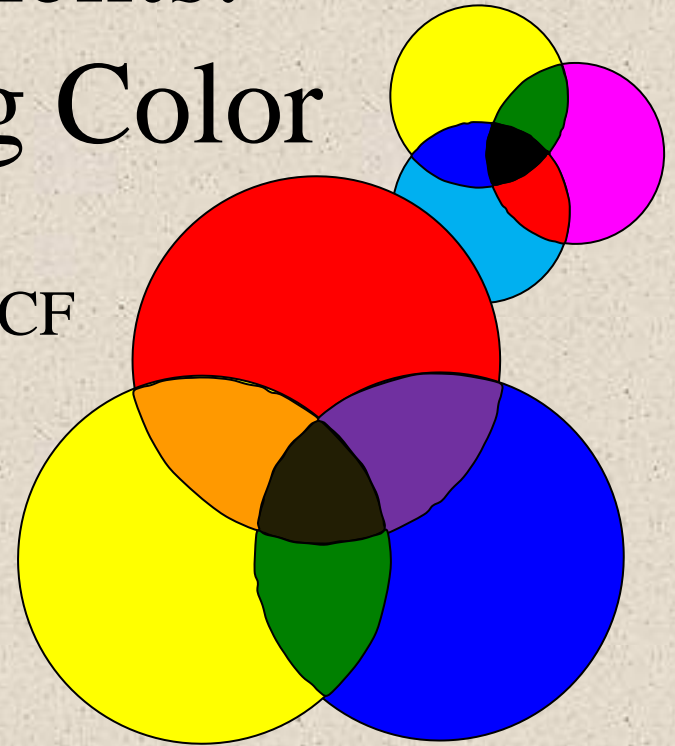


# Design Elements: Understanding Color

Chris A. Paschke, CPF, GCF



West Coast Art & Frame Expo, Las Vegas 2025

# Color

is the most emotional and  
expressive element in design.

# Principles of Design

**Elements**  
are the easily identifiable  
building blocks

**Line**

*Balance*

**Color**

**Texture**

*Emphasis*

**Space**

**Intensity**

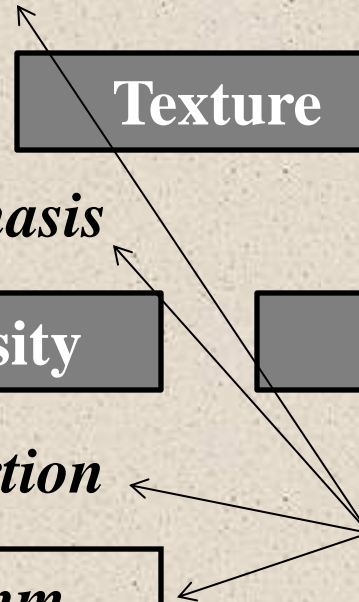
**Shape**

*Proportion*

**Rhythm**

**Fundamentals**  
are mortar that  
hold the blocks  
together

*UNITY*



# Definition of Color

“Color is the character of a surface which is the result of vision sensitivity to reflected wavelengths of light.”

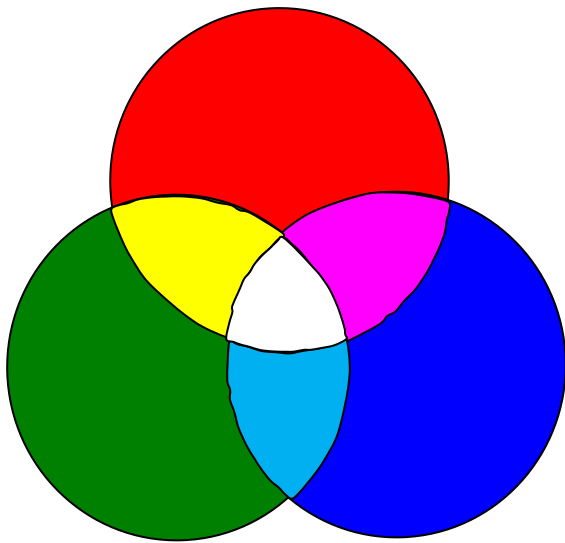
In other words...in order to see green all other wavelengths are absorbed and green is reflected back to the eye

# Color Theories

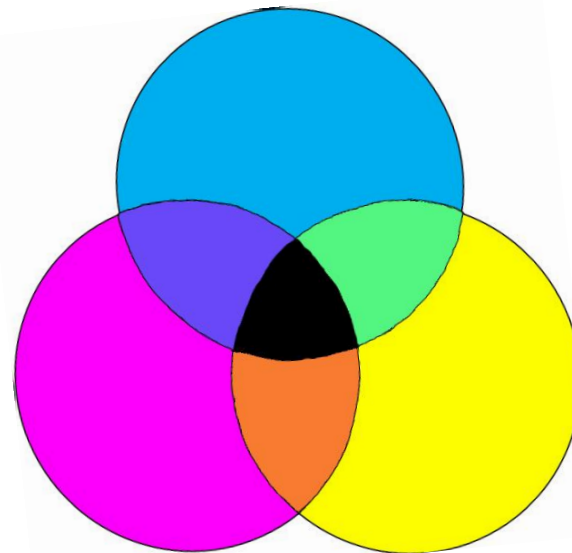
Additive  
Light

Subtractive  
Digital Inks

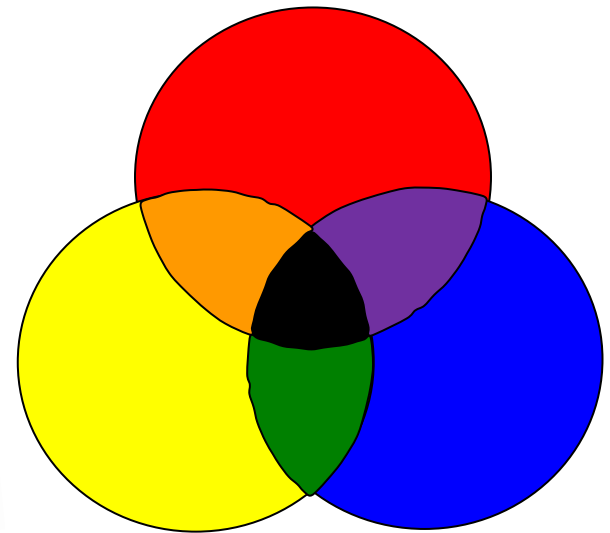
Subtractive  
Artist Pigment



Lighting

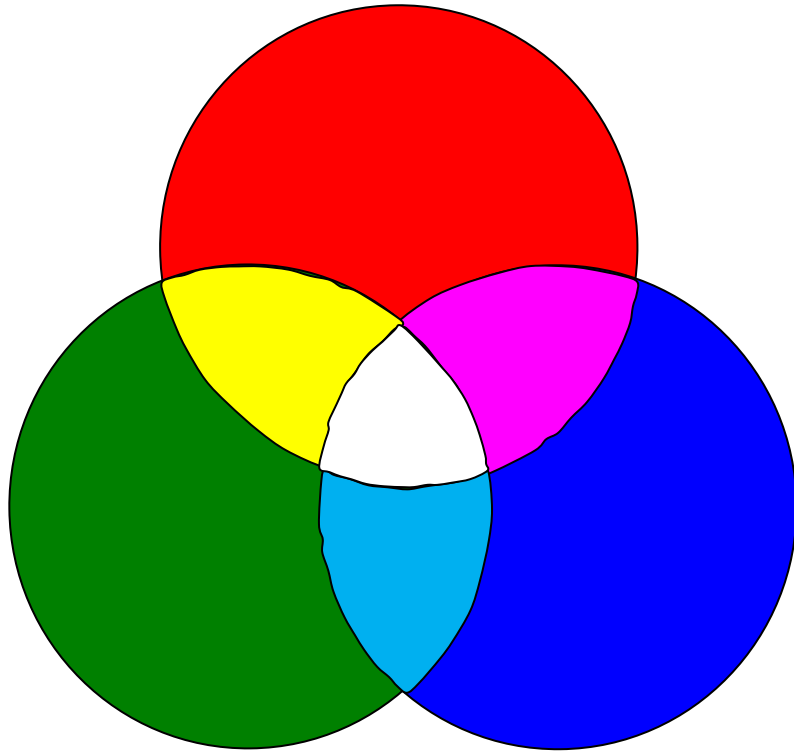


Printers



Framing

# Additive Color Theory (LIGHT)

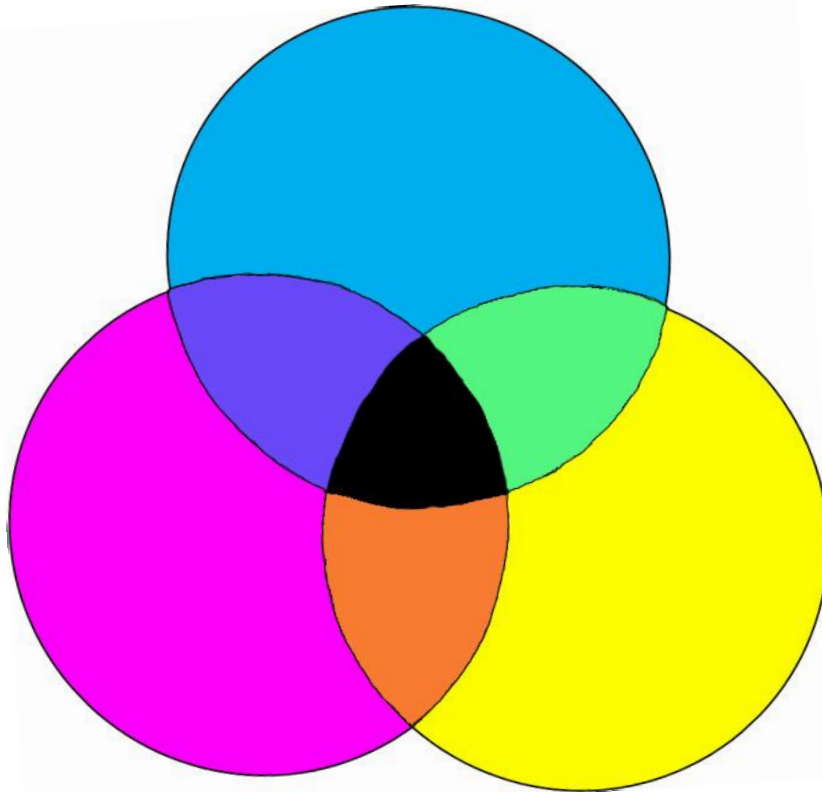


Additive RGB theory begins with black. No light, no color. All three combined create white, as all the colors in light are present and absorbed. To see a red apple, all other wavelengths are absorbed, reflecting only the red waves, allowing us to see it as red.

Primaries of red, green, blue create secondaries of yellow, cyan, magenta.

# Subtractive Color Theory

## (DIGITAL/PRINT)

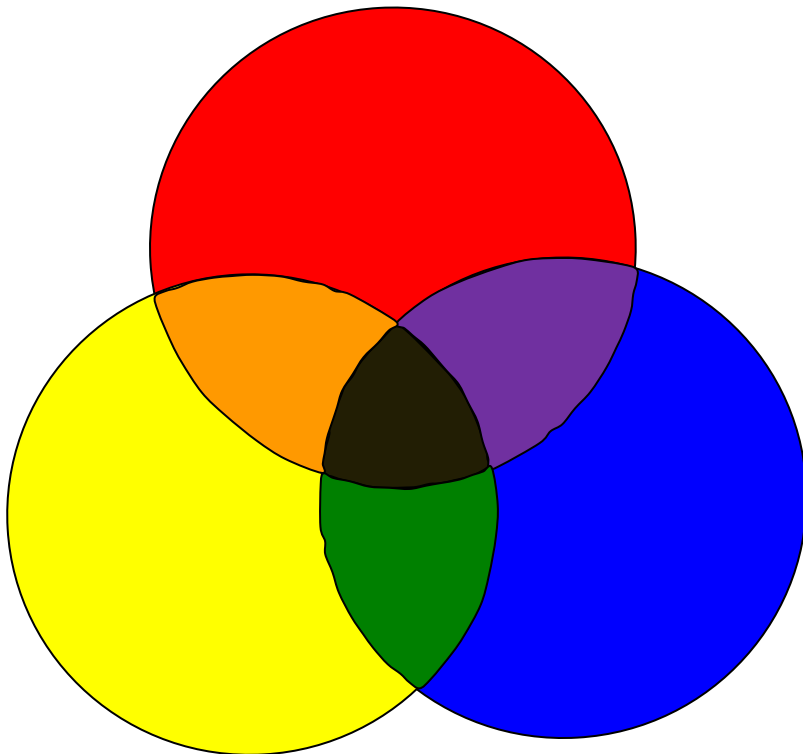


Primaries are cyan, magenta, yellow, black (CMYK). These blend to create secondary colors violet, orange, and green. The presence of all colors creates black.

Subtractive colors begin as white and are created by absorbing (or subtracting) some the light wavelengths and reflecting others.

# Subtractive Color Theory

## (ARTIST PIGMENT)



Subtractive pigment theory begins with white (nothing), as colors are added the result gets darker to brown, gray or black.

Pure pigmented primaries of red, yellow, blue are mixed to create secondaries of orange, green, purple.

Unlike light waves, no amount of color mixing will ever produce white.



# Glossary of Color Terms

Primary Colors - Pure colors (Hues) that cannot be mixed

Red, Yellow and Blue on wheel

Secondary Colors - Orange, Yellow, Purple

Mixed from Primaries

Complimentary Colors - Opposites

Tint – Color plus white, lighter than normal value

Tone – Color plus Grey

Shade – Color plus black, darker than normal value

Monochromatic – Shades and Tints of same color

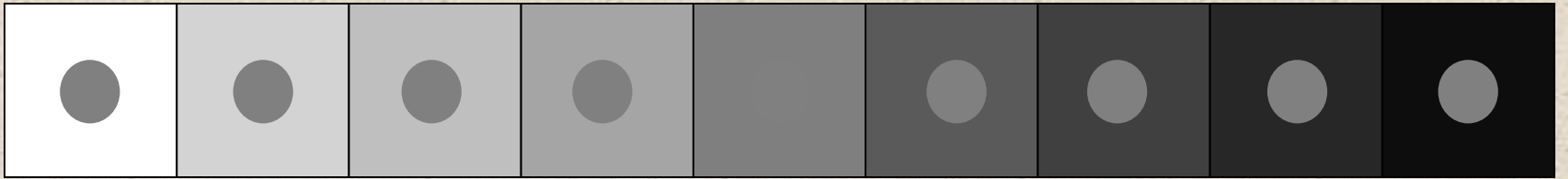
# Color Properties

Every color has three basic color properties: *hue, value, chroma*

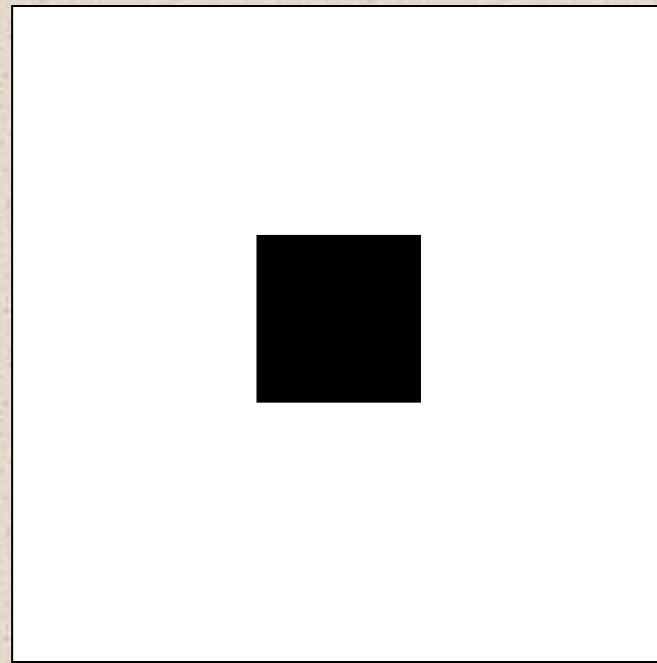
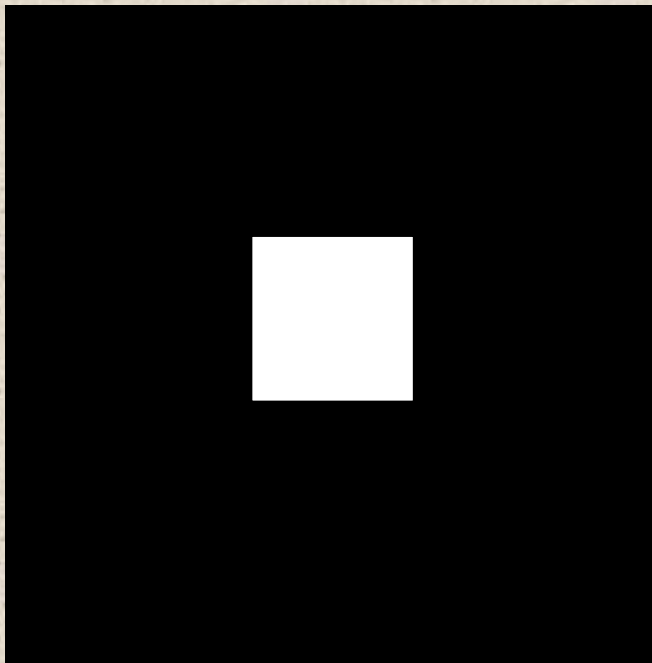
**Hue** - A pure color in the spectrum that has not been dulled or diluted, no white, black or color added

**Value** - lightness or darkness of a color in relation to a scale ranging from white to black

**Chroma** - (saturation, intensity) Brightness or purity  
Cannot change value without changing chroma



Value Scale



Liner warm white  
expands image

Bevel wrap brings  
eye into tree

Top picks up  
neutral tan





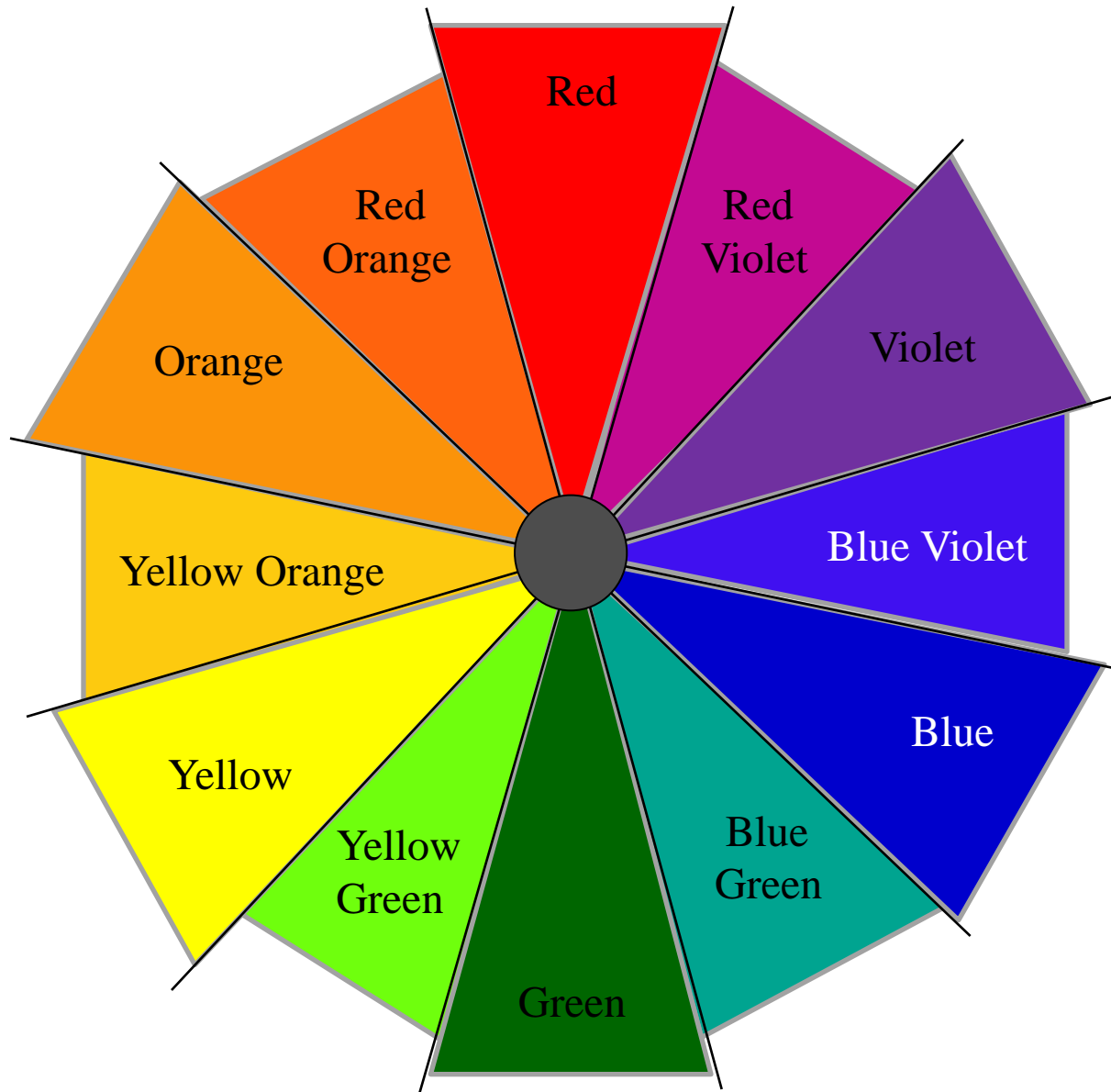
Warm white  
expands image

Spacer adds  
depth and  
shadows

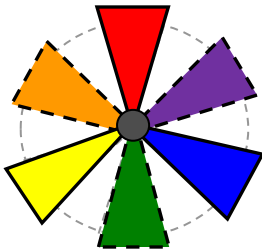
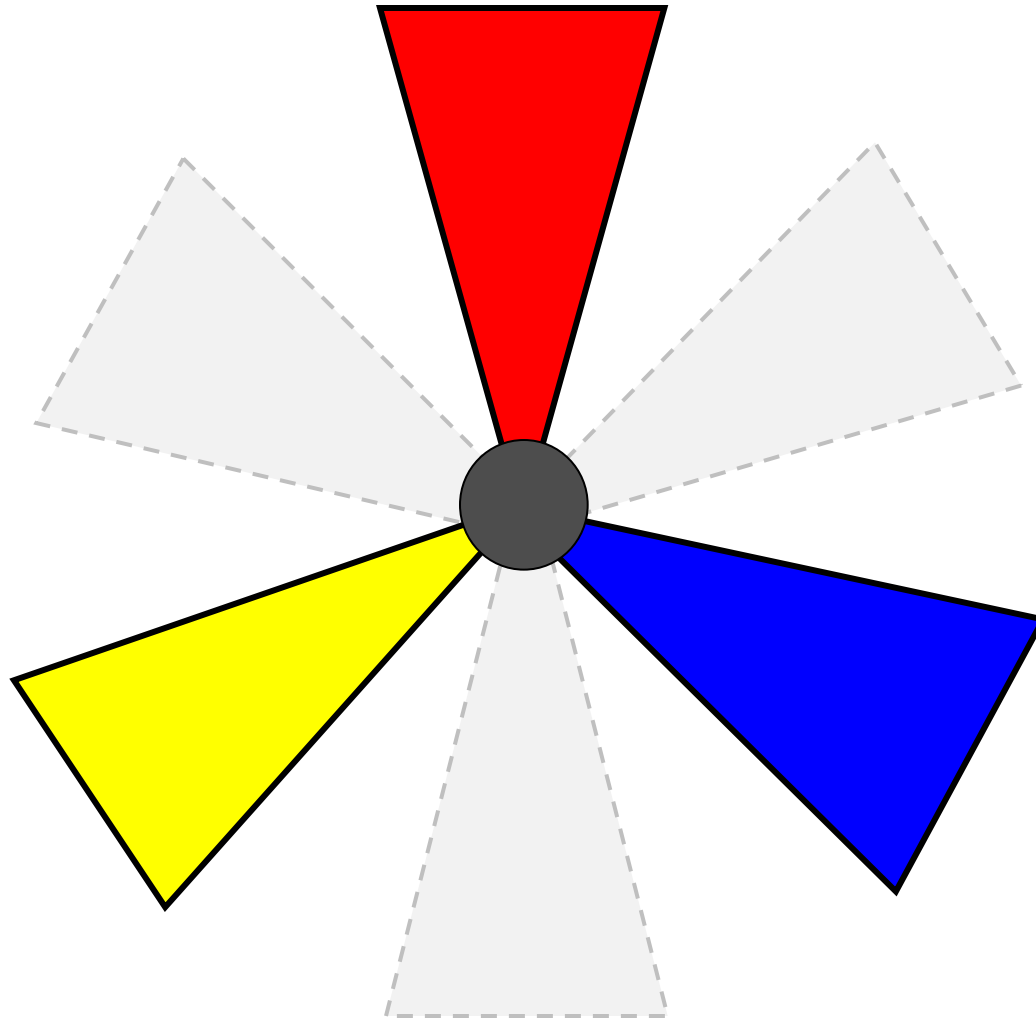
Top warm gray  
Draws the eye  
into the leaves



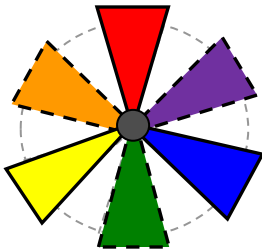
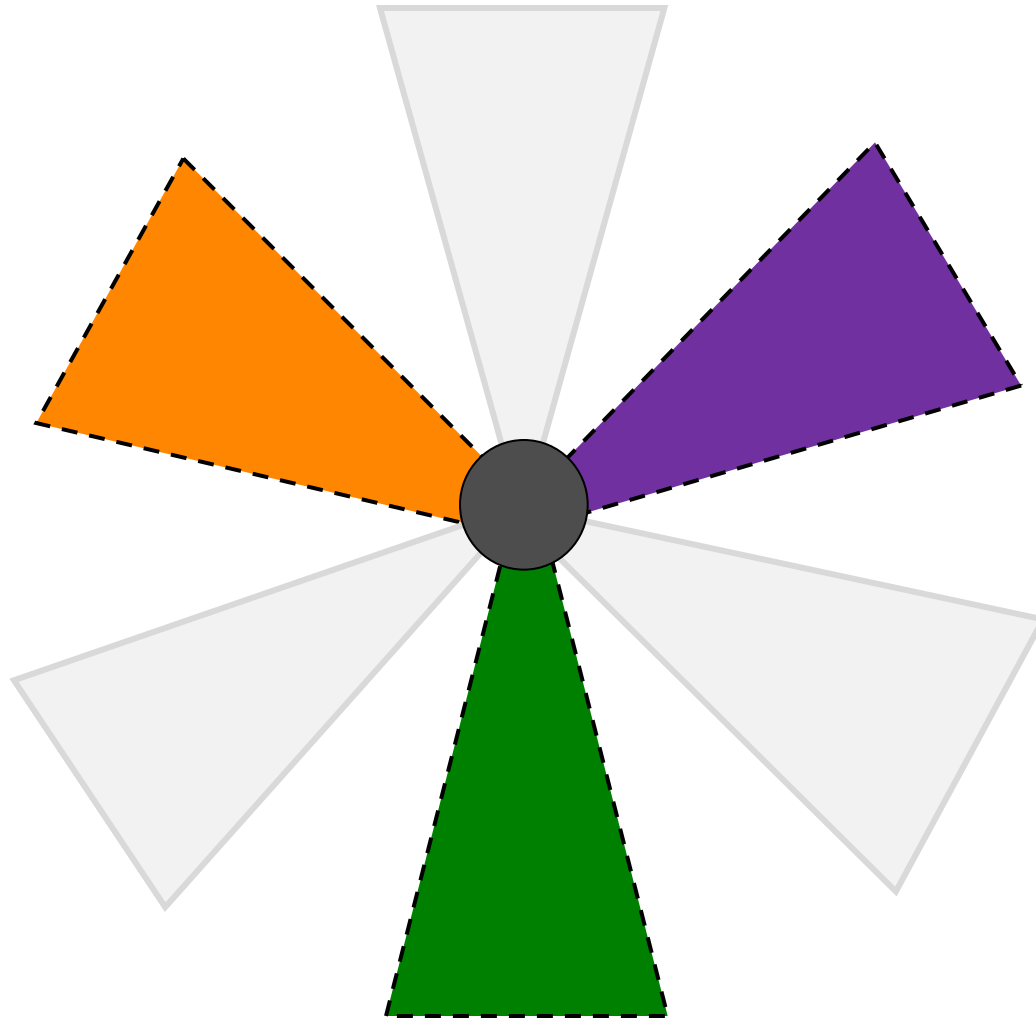
# Color Wheel



# Primary Colors

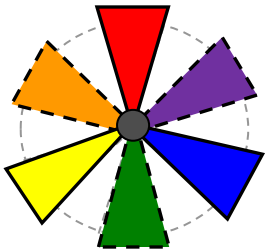
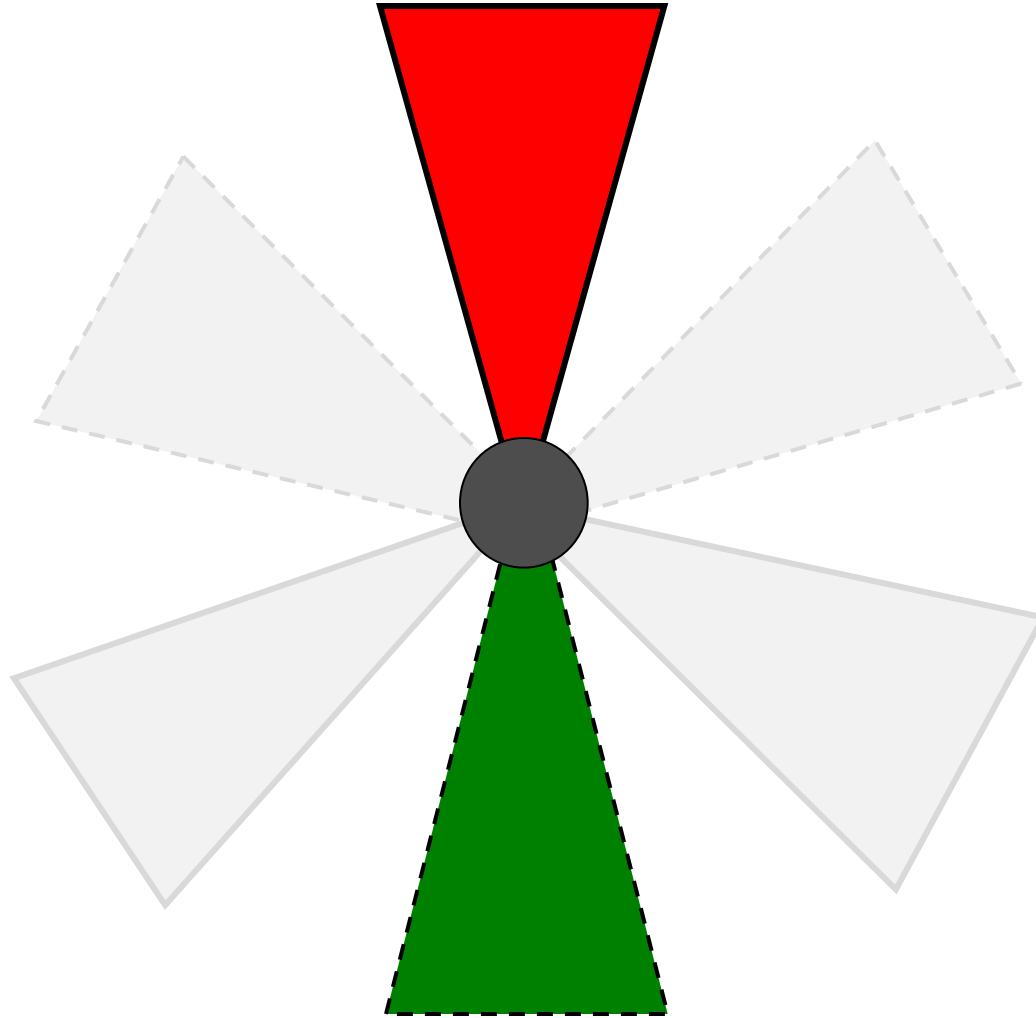


# Secondary Colors

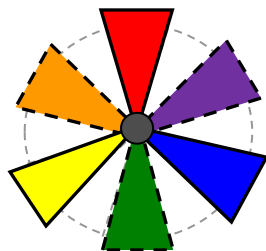
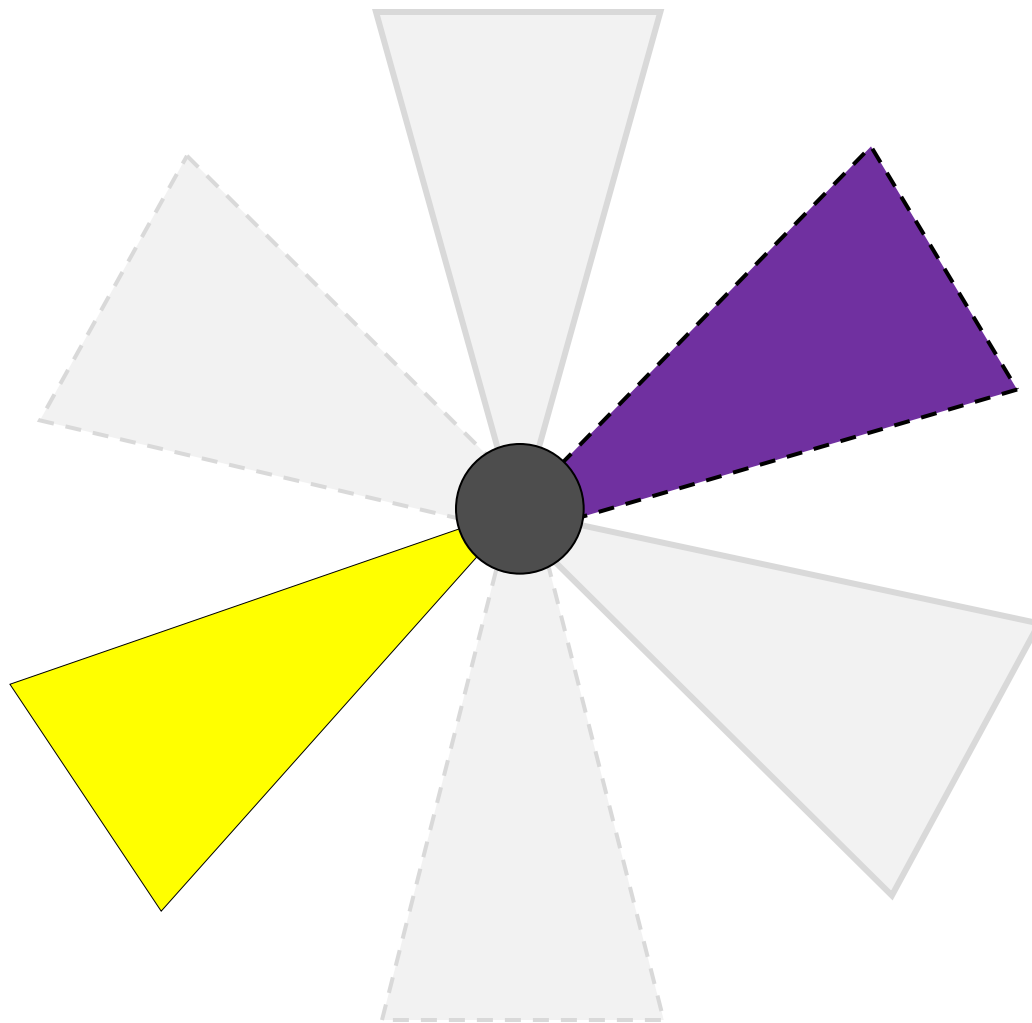




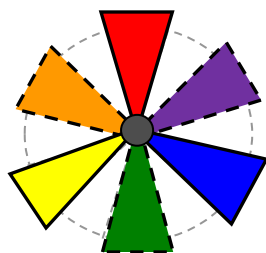
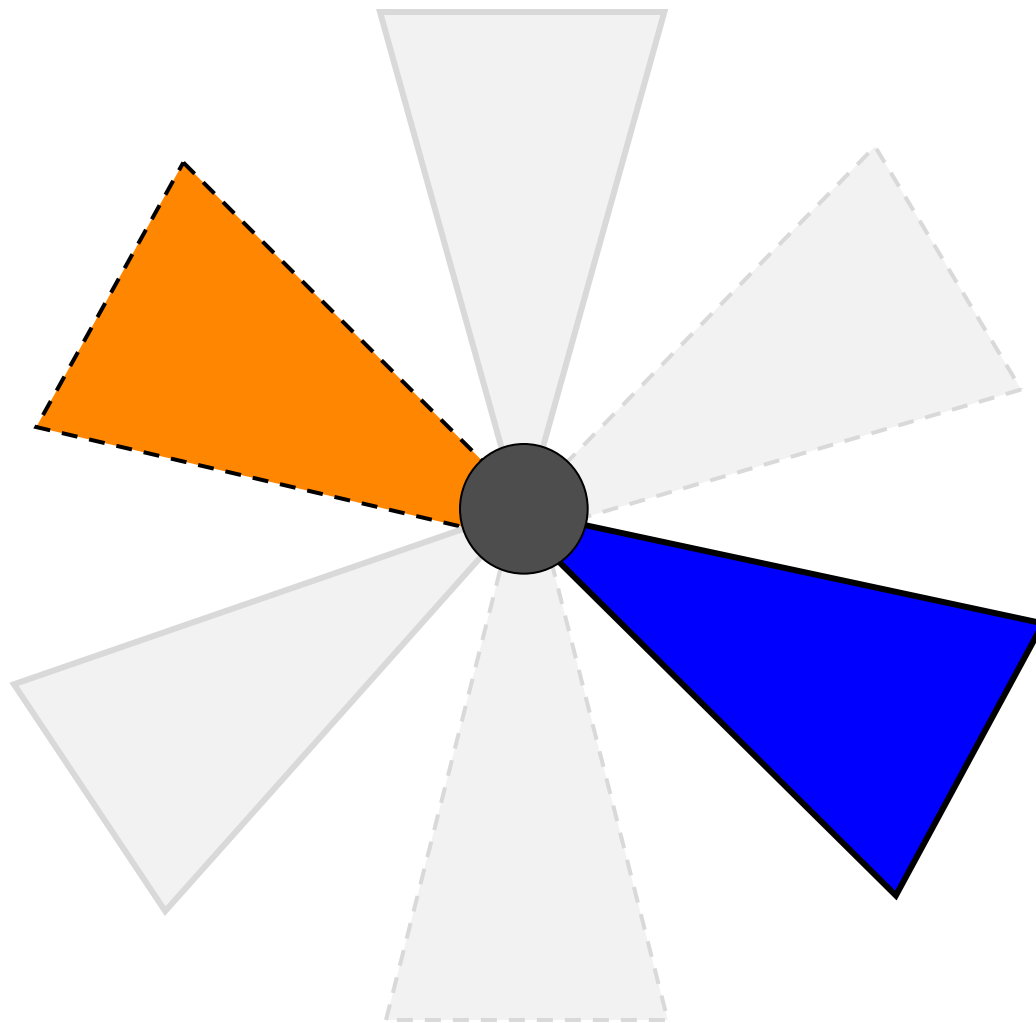
# Complementary Colors



# Complementary Colors



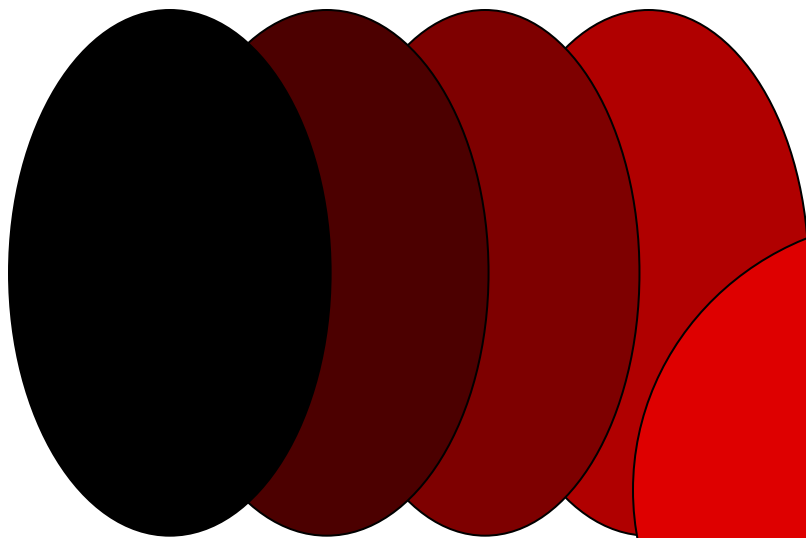
# Complementary Colors





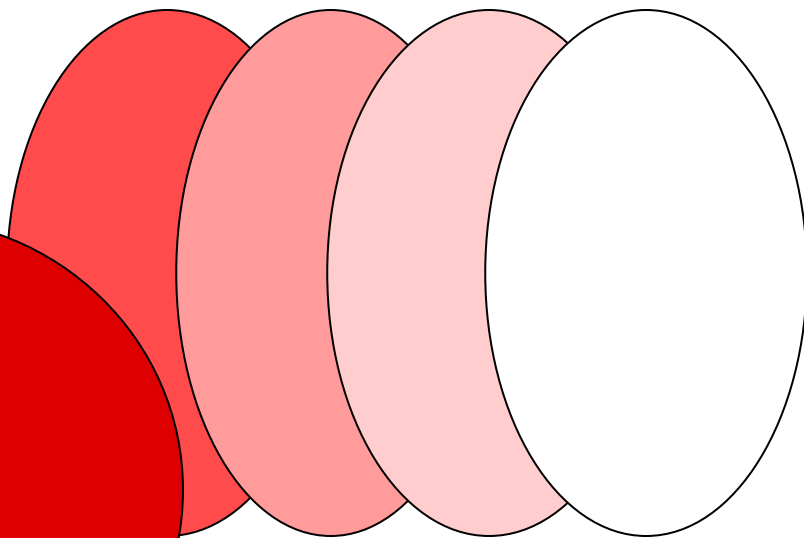
# Shade

hue plus black



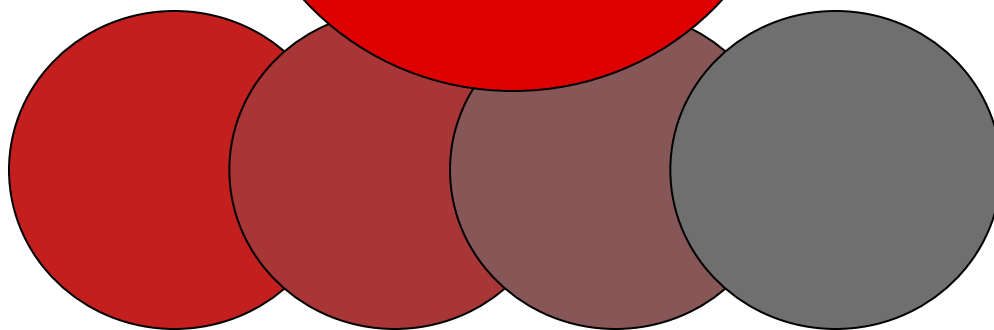
# Tint

hue plus white

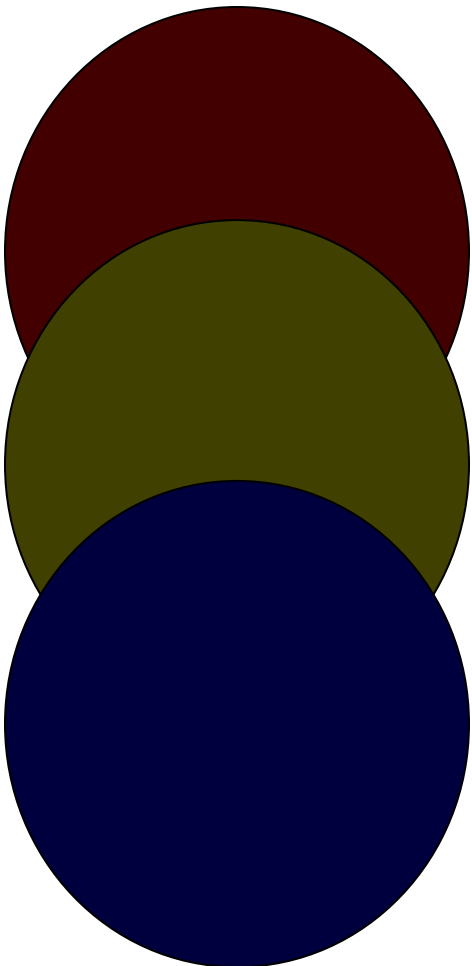


# Tone

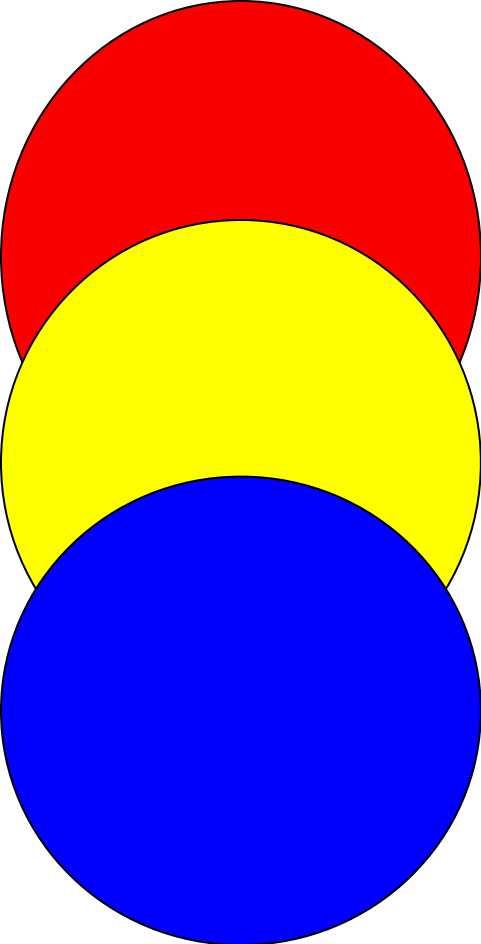
hue plus gray



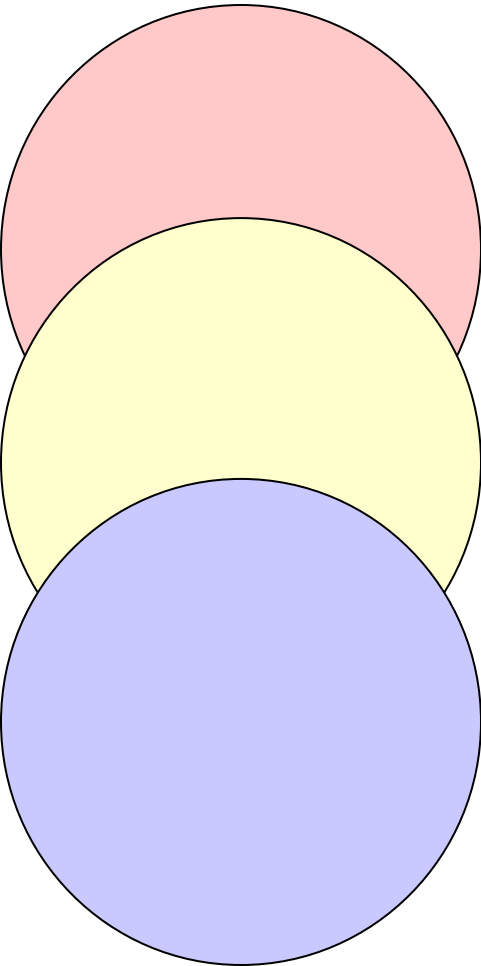
Primary  
as Shade



Primary  
Colors



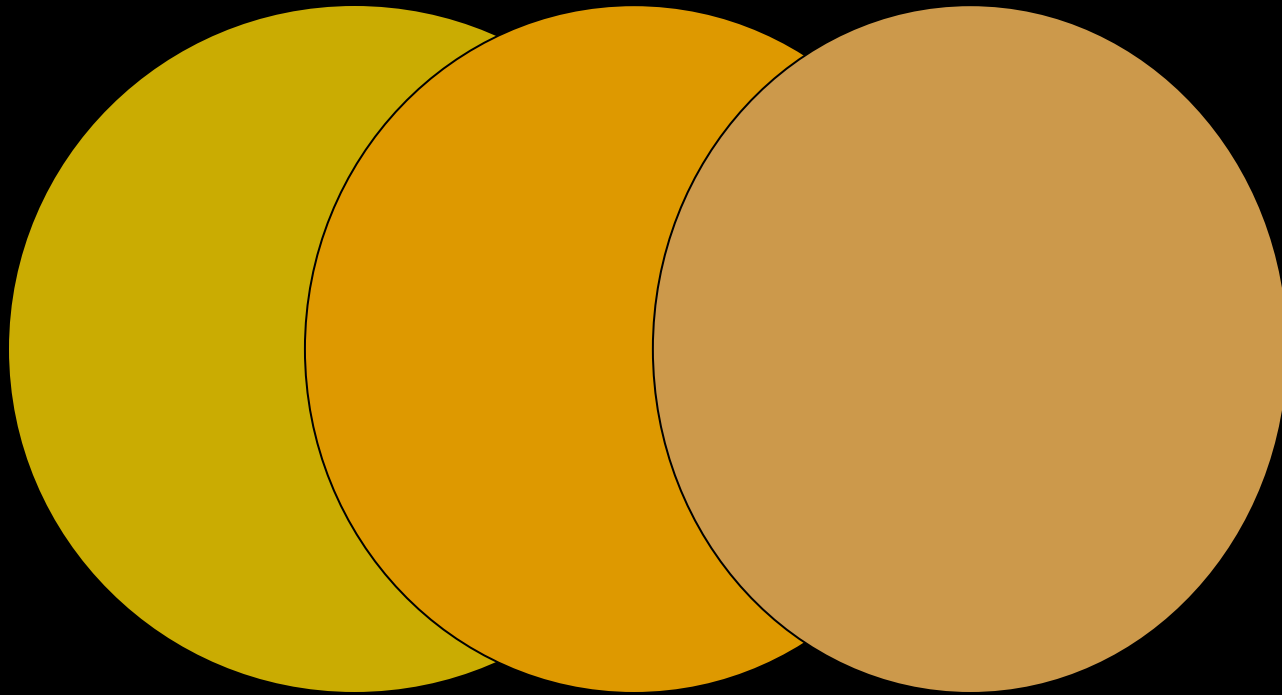
Primary  
as Tint



# Metallics



# Metallic Bases



Yellow Base

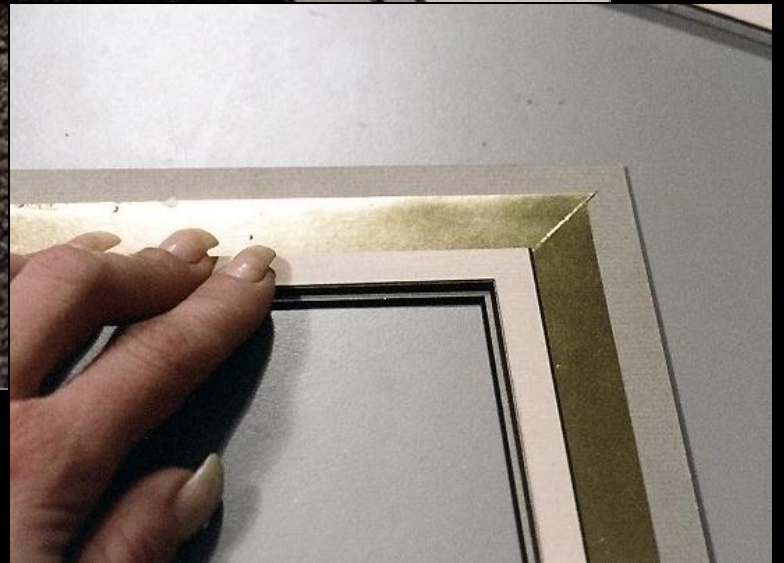
Red Base

Blue Base



# NORIS Gold Leaf (Germany)

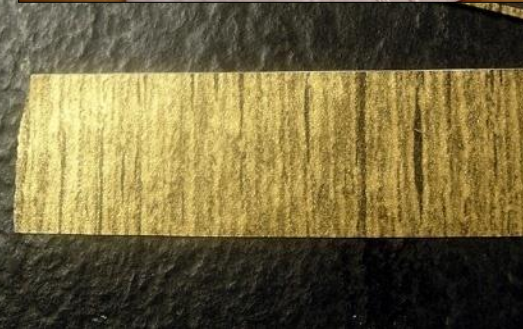
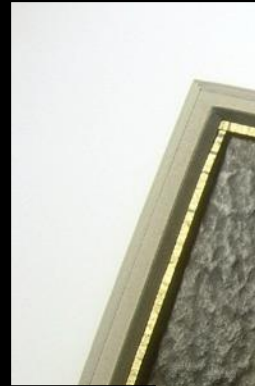


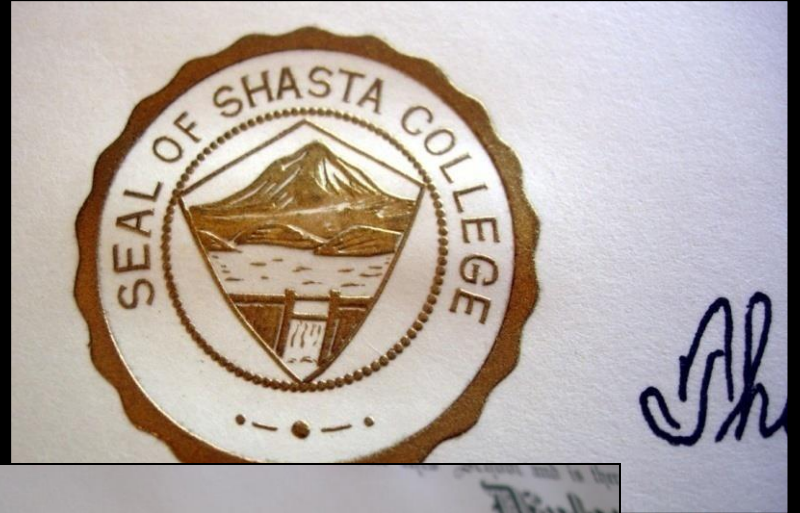




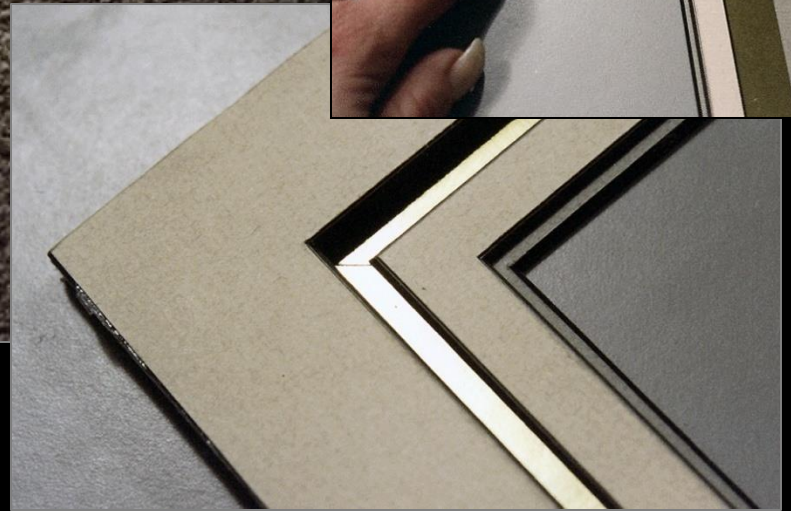
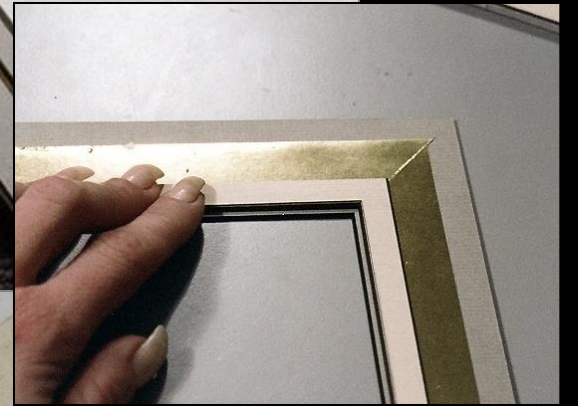
# Metallic Bases

Must match frame,  
mat, fillet and gold  
used within art  
or document





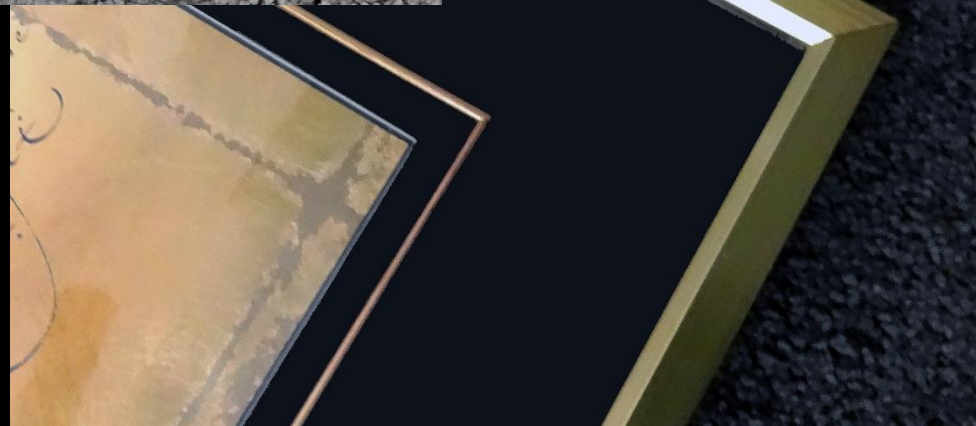
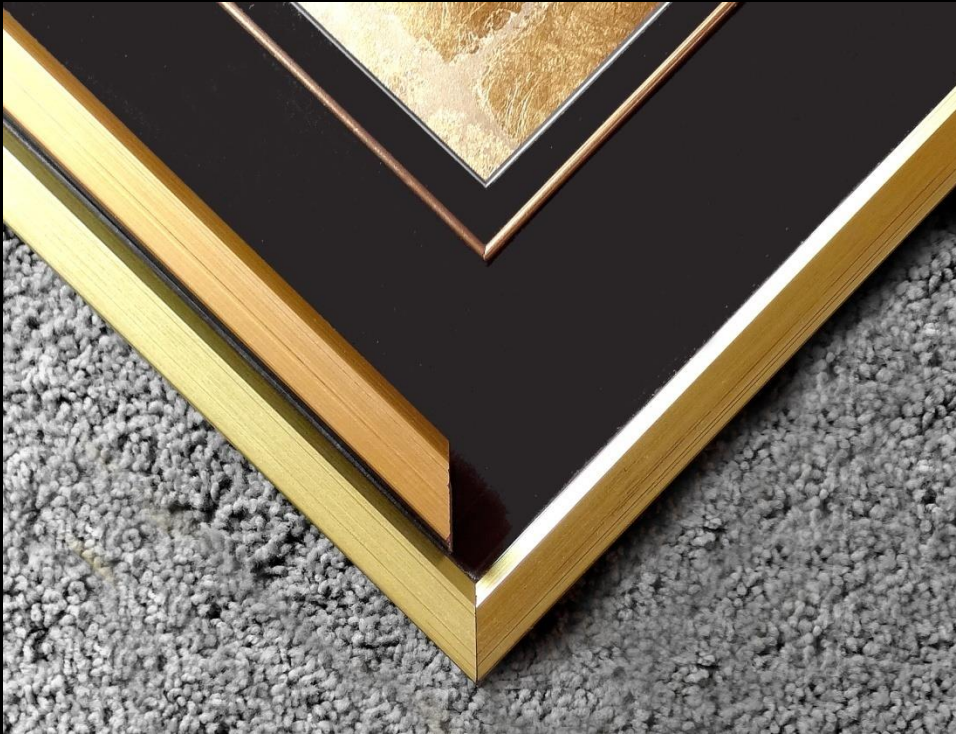








# Faded Gold Moulding



Gold matches  
tones and warmth  
in painting







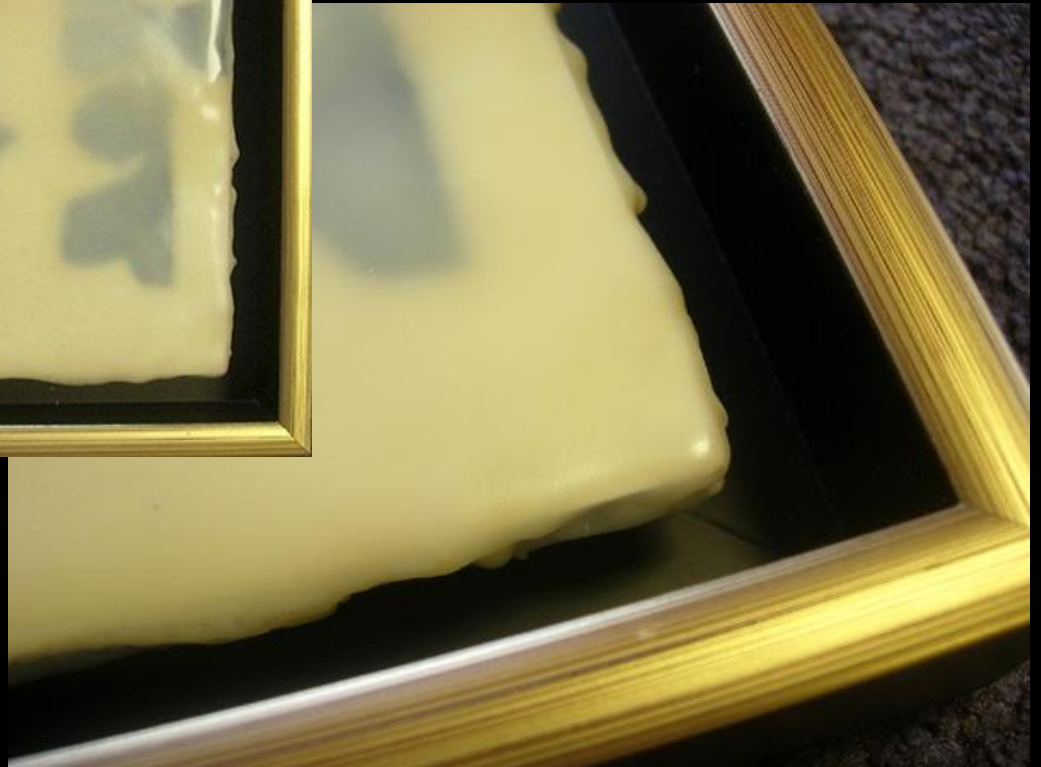
Common plein air profile  
Good color match to cooler tones in art







Soft brushed gold  
tones harmonize  
with the encaustic  
medium



Soft brushed  
antique silver  
works with melted  
opaque waxes





Crème rag top mat

Wrapped textured  
bevel for rhythm

Liner white to  
match background





Torn paper  
accents







Mat color vs. Wide frame color

# Mat Color Selection – Rules of Thumb

1. Dominant art color = top mat color selection

There are exceptions to every rule

Consider textures and contrasts

2. Secondary art color = middle mat or first accent

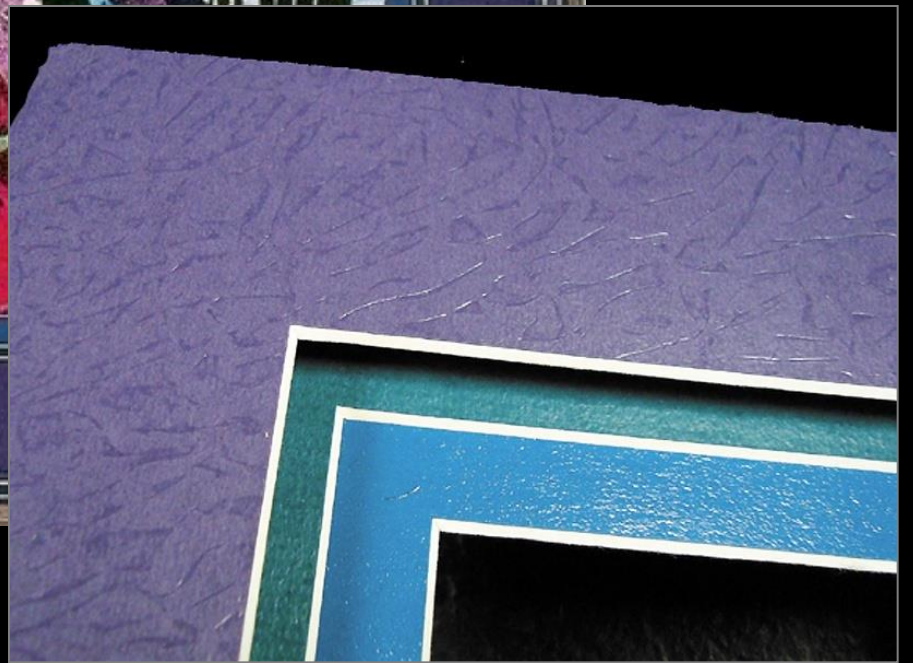
Second mat width does not have to be middle

3. Third art color = third mat or second accent

Can be as simple as red line on frame edge

Or under tiered mat



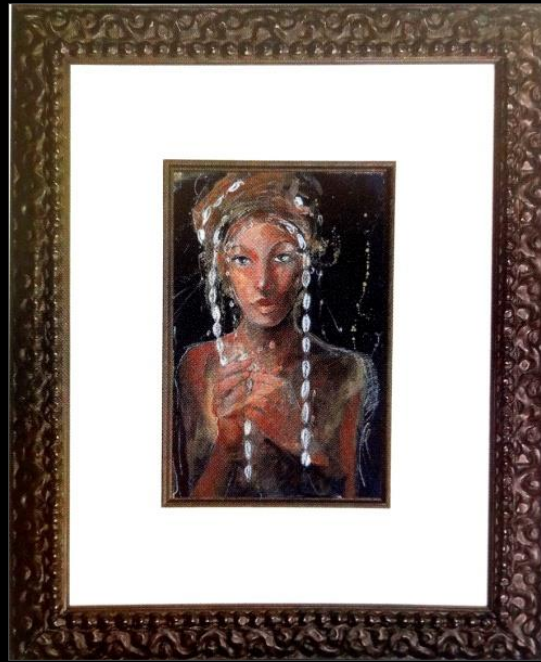
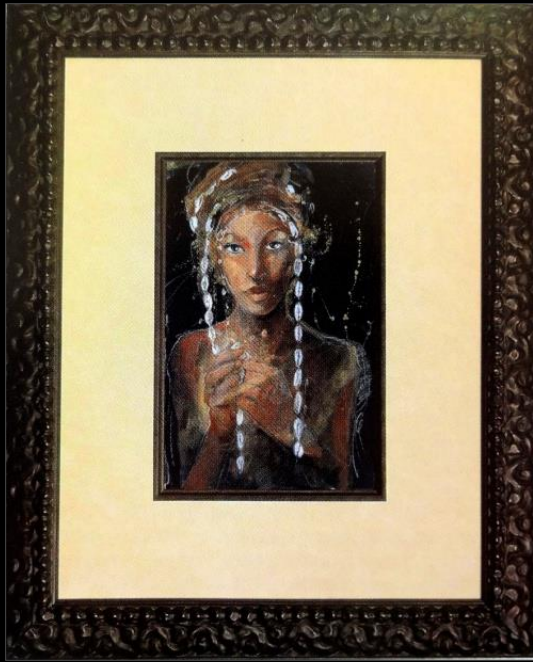




Visual emphasis through color







## Color and Visual Focus

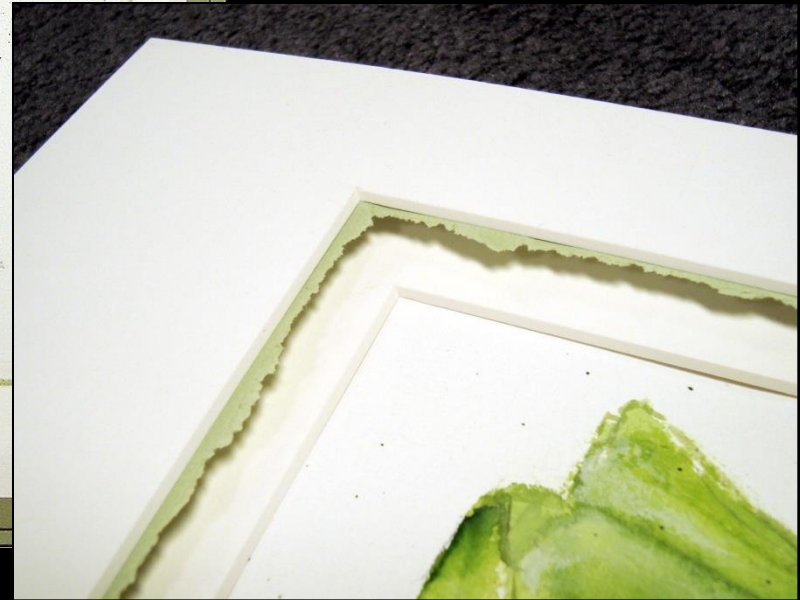


Grey Ansley stem frame pulls into the ink washes  
Soft gold Cintra draws into the warmer yellows

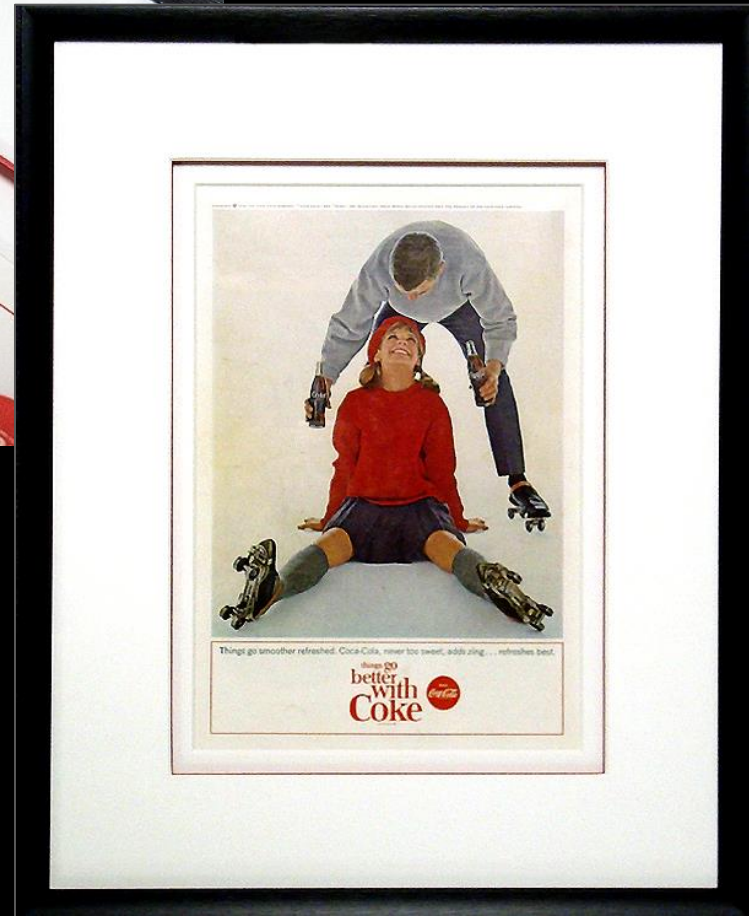




White background  
Green frame & deckle  
Grey edge highlight



Under tiered top mat  
Liner mat varied to  
match aged ad







Dominant blue is too dark for top mat.  
Brushed aluminum accents the airplane.  
Deep bevel wrap and gray help integrate.



The traditional pastel concept of using white mats to allow the art to showcase itself

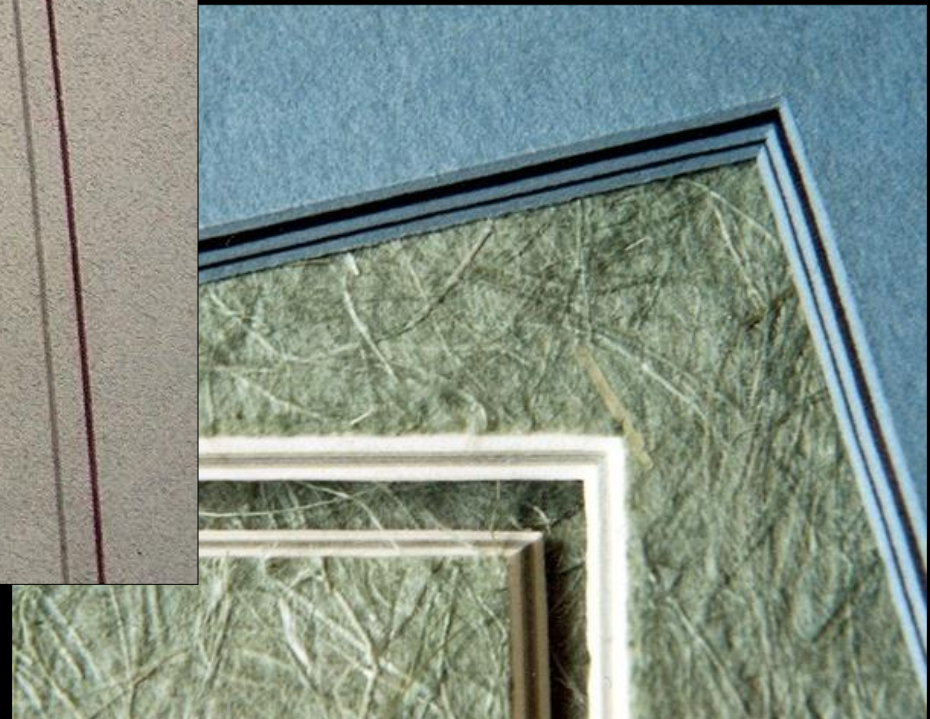




Softened transition  
of antique whites,  
brightest on top,  
using a copper  
frame to unify  
with color



# Color & Line





# Color, Line & Repetition





# Color, Line & Texture













Color & Rhythm







Surface tiered (T)  
Matte laminated (B)









## Color + Shape, Space

Shape = positive, object use  
Space = void or negative use



## Little Birds

Double deep wrapped  
bevel freeform window  
mats of 3/16"  
AF foamboard, spacers,  
topped with white rag  
paper shaped to break up  
the textured bark paper.



# Color & Style (Era/Period)

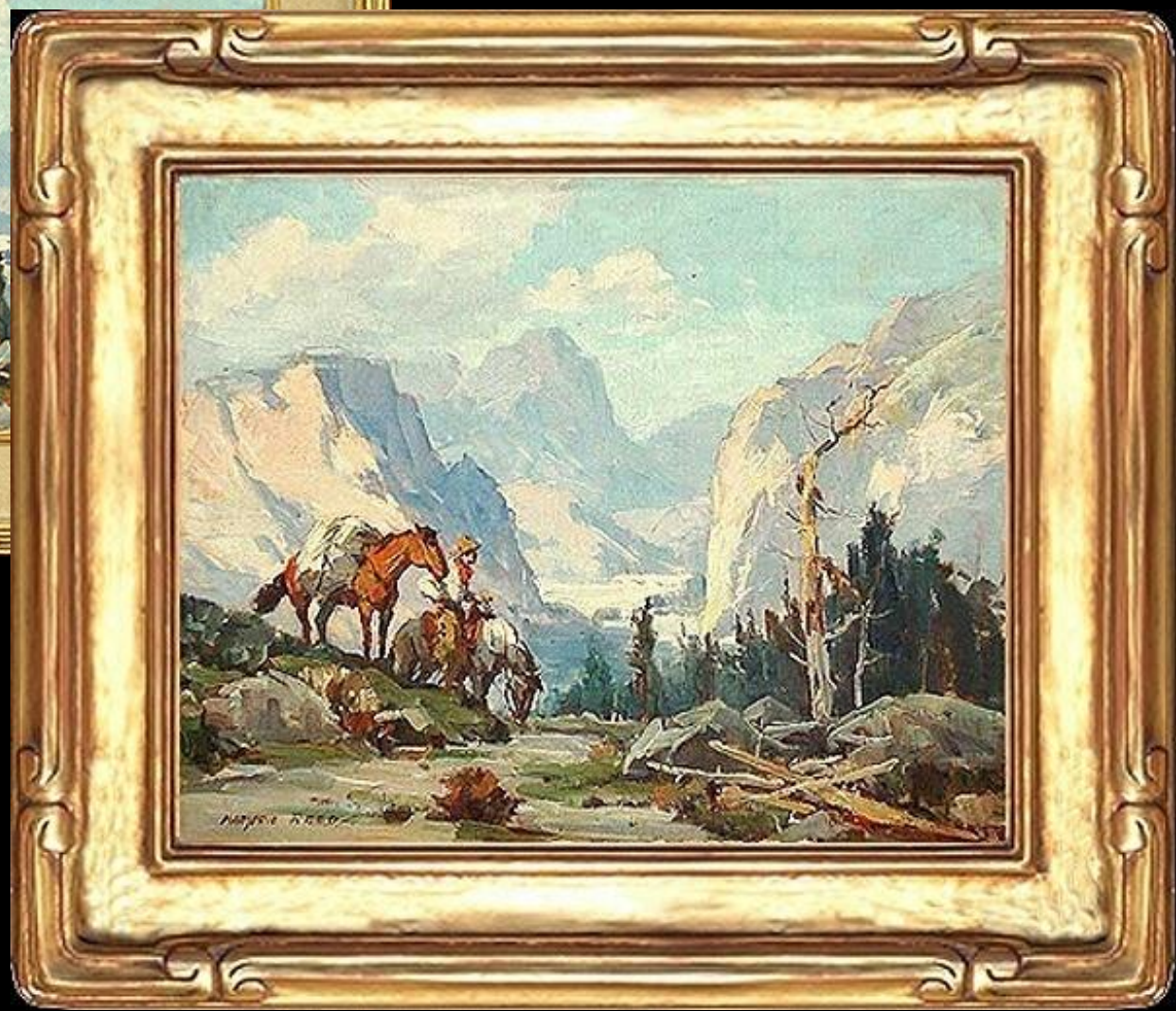
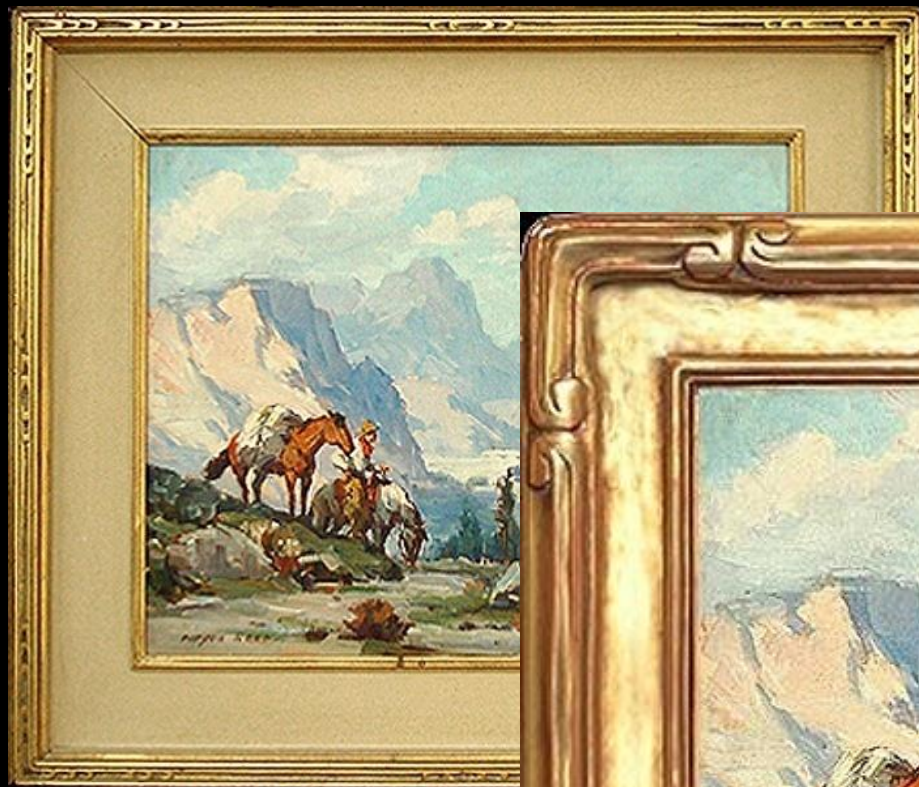














## European

Black = Grief, death, void, nothingness

White = Purity, innocence

Yellow/Orange = Warmth, newness

Pink = Tenderness, poetry

Red = Love, passion, desire, fire

Violet = Meditation, mystery, occult, exotic

Purple = Aristocratic, royal, worldly

Blue = Loyalty, isolation, honesty, sadness

Green/Blue-green = Earth, naturalism, Zen

Brown = Earthiness, solidity, firmness

## Asian

Black = Immortality, knowledge, power

Grey = Dullness, indefinite

White = Death, mourning, spirits, ghosts

Yellow = Clarity, reliability, royalty

Orange = Change, spontaneity

Pink = Love

Red = Wedding, luck, happiness, joy, life

Purple = Spiritual healing, strength,

Blue = Healing, calmness, immortality

Blue/Green = Vigor, vitality, longevity,

Green = Calm, healing, health, harmony

Brown = Industriousness, grounded

# Science of Color

Physicists tell us about the make-up of color composition and explain how the human eye perceives a given color.

# Science of Color

Physicists tell us about the make-up of color composition and explain how the human eye perceives a given color.

Psychologists tell us how color affects us physically and emotionally.



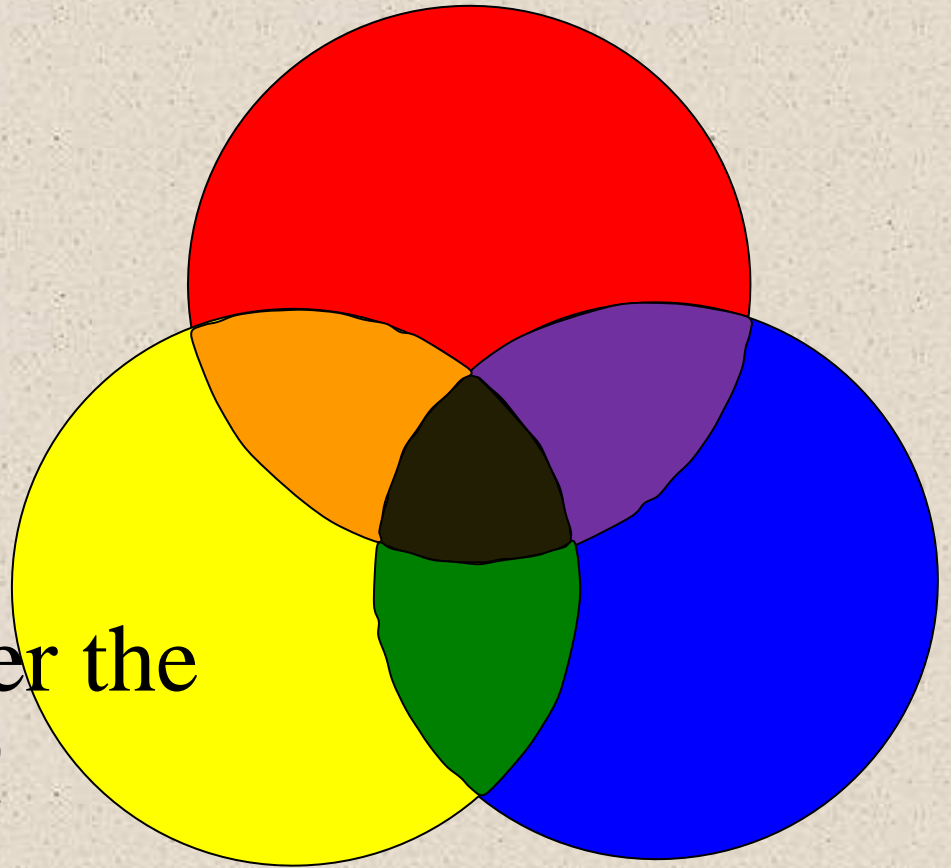
# Science of Color

Physicists tell us about the make-up of color composition and explain how the human eye perceives a given color.

Psychologists tell us how color affects us physically and emotionally.

It is up to the frame designer to assimilate all of this information and sell it to the client as the most dynamic solution possible.

Color...consider the possibilities!



## **Additional Resources**

Bevlin, Marjorie Elliott. DESIGN THROUGH DISCOVERY.

New York: Holt Rinehart Winston, 1984.

Graves, Maitland. ART OF COLOR DESIGN. 1951.

Itten, Johannes. THE ELEMENTS OF COLOR. New York: Reinhold, 1970.

Leland, Nita. THE CREATIVE ARTIST. Cincinnati: North Light Books, 1990.

Mayer, Ralph. A DICTIONARY OF TERMS AND TECHNIQUES.

New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1969.

**Perkins, Greg. GREAT FRAME DESIGNS. New Jersey: PFM Books, 2009.**

Wong, Wucius. PRINCIPLES OF COLOR DESIGN.

New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1987.

**Paschke, Chris A., Designs Ink, <http://www.designsinkart.com/library.htm>**

***"The Design Process"*, PFM, 12 part series, 1994.**

***"Design And Critique"*, PFM series, 1997.**

***"The Essence of Design"*, PFM, 12 part series, 2000-2001.**



# Other Paschke classes WCAF 2025

## **Mastering Mounting: Sensitive Items**

Saturday, 9:00-11:00pm

## **Design Elements: Tints, Tones & Shades**

Saturday, 1:00-3:00pm

## **Mastering Mounting: Creative Mounting**

Sunday, 8:30-11:00am

## **Mastering Mounting: Handling Digitals**

Tuesday, 12:30-2:30pm

Paschke Online  
Article Archive and Reference Library

<https://designsinkart.com/library.shtml>

Articles by Subject:  
West Coast Art & Frame  
PowerPoint and Outline PDFs



Chris A Paschke, CPF GCF

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