

On Choosing Colors

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Alternative Energy, 28" x 38"

I've never met a color that I didn't like. Maybe I wouldn't want to wear them all or put them all in my house but they intrigue me as an expression of an emotion or mood or just for how they look. The challenge comes in putting them in context. How do several colors work together and influence each other? How much of each? Where do they belong in the image?

I define my design with a black marker on white paper. Once it is completed, I start working on color. This is a challenge because my compositions have no reference points in the real world. Each shape can be any color. Finding the right ones is a real struggle for me and I never think that I am completely successful. Usually, I start with one yarn, selecting a color that attracts me. Then I try to find other options that will go well with the first yarn. I try to stick with three or four main hues other than black and white but additional hues often slip in.

I use commercially dyed yarns. With a large collection of both cotton and wool I have the opportunity to try close color cousins. I gather the choices together on my worktable to see if the overall visual impression is harmonious and pleasing. I don't think a lot about color theory at this point but I do try to find a variety of values. If all the yarns are too close in value, they will not sufficiently differentiate the shapes in my design.

Without considering proportion or placement, I put the skeins side-by-side to see if they look right together. This is an intense and time-consuming process. It involves looking at the yarns in different lights during the day and at night to make sure they all work together. If one is not right, I replace it with another until they combine successfully or I get tired of the process.



Current Events, 18" x 12"

I think it is important to start with yarns rather than paint because, ultimately, the tapestry will be made of yarn. If I start with paint, I will never find the exact color of yarn to match it and the finished piece will not look like the painted design. However, after choosing the colors, I mix acrylic paint to simulate the yarn colors in order to experiment with the placement of the colors and usually make several copies of a small version of my design so that I can try variations. At this stage, I think about the amount of each color, contrast, and value. I try to achieve balance. One bright color may stand out so I would use less of it. However, if I use several equally bright colors, I can use a larger quantity of each because one doesn't overpower another. I try to have a full range of dark to light values. I particularly like black because it intensifies adjacent colors.

I strive to achieve the illusion of depth in the picture plane with color as well as design. I think about using darker or lighter versions of a color to depict shadows and light. Greyed colors may appear to be more distant. Often blue or grey or black will appear to recede because our eyes are used to the sky being in the background. Bright colors come forward. Yellow and white can look like light. I play with these properties.

Most importantly, I try to have fun!