

Value and Color Temperature

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Color is what entices many of us to buy yarn and weave.

How do you select colors? Many times I have selected yarn colors the same way I shop for fruit and vegetables—on impulse. Ah, a fresh box of strawberries, a pound of bright red cherries, and of course I have to have those lush red raspberries! While the fruit and the colors are enticing, weaving those colors may create a tapestry in which one color merges with the others. The reds are close in value and they visually blend together like a fruit smoothie. Lately I am trying to give more attention to the lightness or darkness of a color. Color values create contrast. Contrast makes it easier to read shapes.



Can We Talk About It?, 28" x 24"

Determining the value of a color can be tricky. It involves squinting until you don't see the color, only the lightness or darkness of the color. Art supply stores sell a small cardboard value chart (less than two dollars cost) that allows you to place it on your yarn and see where it falls on the chart of ten values from black to white. If your colors are too closely related, say all falling in the range of 7 and 8 or in the 3, 4, 5 range, they will blend visually and will not create distinct shapes. If you look at a collection of tapestries often the ones that catch your eye have some areas of strong value contrast, containing values of 1 & 2 and some of 7 & 8. Placing a light color next to a dark color creates contrast and draws the eye to that space. The award winning watercolorist John Salminen has been quoted as saying "Value does all the work but color gets all the credit."

Another consideration is color temperature. Warm colors come forward; cool colors recede. Colors also set the mood or feeling of the subject matter. In my tapestry *Can we talk about it?* I have used color to reflect the mood of a relationship between two people. The colors around the people are warm (yellow and orange), perhaps suggesting some tension between them. This is also the area with the lightest lights and darkest darks, which focuses your attention on the people. The border of prickly plants around them is in the middle value range and is a cooler blueish green indicating a cooling of the relationship.

My final selection of colors is made after the composition is determined and I have made several small copies of the cartoon. I try different color combinations in watercolor because it is easy to adjust the value and temperature of the color in that medium. A problem occurs when all the variations I paint are not available in commercial yarns.

Joan Baxter gave a very good tip in a workshop at Convergence 2008. She suggested that you “paint your yarns”. Work from yarns you have on hand or from a yarn color chart, mixing your paint as close to the sample as possible. This gives you a true sense of the value and temperature of the color your yarns will produce. If it looks good in your painted sketch, then you will not be disappointed when you weave. Good advice!