Written narrative\_Color theory

In common sense, there are three primary colors. When we mix them together, we can produce all the subtle colors in a spectrum. But for a traditional artist, color theory is more complex.

~~I have been interested in color theory for a long time. I have an art minor, and studied one year in a French art school, practicing oil painting and printmaking, well but to be honest, college level art class always neglects color theory. I learned about color in my own art practice.~~

For artists, each primary color has two tones: warm and cool. For example, for blue, there are warm blue, and cool blue, if mixing together, we have the neuter primary blue. Same thing for red and yellow. A cool yellow and a cool blue make a cool green, a warm yellow and a warm blue make a warm green, but if a warm yellow mix with a cool blue, the green gets greyish. In practice, warm colors next to each other create less contrast, like the blue and orange on the left, but a warm blue and a cool red can make a stronger contrast, and may need purple to mediate between them. And if you don’t want to think about warm and cool color, you can use mainly earth color, like the one on the right.

For artists who want to develop color sensibility, they always need a cool and a warm color for each primary colors.

Therefore, my motivation to make this video is to see proportion of cool and warm colors in the set of paints sold on current market. I chose the 4 best-selling oil paint sets of approximately ten colors, and one more luxurious set.

As they come with different volumes, I calculated the price per ml. And come up with some hypothesis: First- The best-sellers should have 1:1:1 in three colors, because they are designed for beginners who need a balanced palette

But it doesn’t look like the case. Two of best seller sets have an even proportion in red, yellow and blue, while the other two have clearly more yellow.

My 2nd guess

- The more expensive set should have 1:1:1 in three colors, since they can afford more expensive indigents

Because in the manufacture process, we still use some raw materials like people used hundred years ago, in which the blue is the most expensive, but earth and yellow color are quite cheap. In fact, if you buy a single tube of paint in professional brand, you can still see the price difference in colors. This hypo seems right.

My other observation is that non-US brand have an even proportion in colors, while US brand don’t. I cannot explain the geographical difference.

So let’s go back to price and color again. We talked about how expensive set can afford more blue and red, but we also need to consider the cheapest earth color. Maybe the cheaper set has not only more yellow, but also more earth color (including black and white) to lower the cost. I found out that there seems to be a correlation. When you buy a cheaper set, you will have a higher the proportion of earth color.

Let’s think about warm and cool colors again in the 5 sets. Unsurprisingly, only the most expensive set has all the warm and cool colors in red, yellow and blue.

One other interesting thing is that all these 5 sets choose “yellow ochre” as their warm yellow, and 4 sets choose “ultramarine” as warm blue. So they have some agreement despite the price difference.

For your set doesn’t have all the colors, my recommendation would be to buy individual tubes to make sure you have both warm and cool in each color – if you don’t know which color to buy, you can refer to this list.