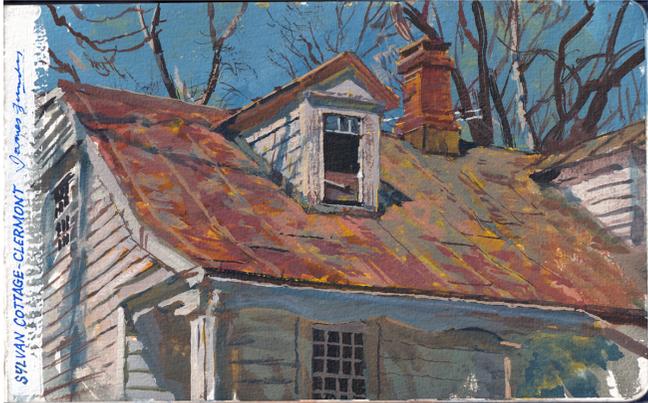


1. Which mediums do you paint in? Do different mediums have different color palettes that you prefer?

- I paint mainly in gouache, watercolor, casein, and oil. You can get most of the popular pigments in each of those mediums. Manufacturers offer dozens of the familiar colors, such as ultramarine blue, pyrrole red, yellow ochre, and viridian green. I like to try out various color palettes for each of these mediums.



- For example, in gouache lately I've been trying out a three-color combination of light red, yellow ochre, and Prussian blue. Each of these colors includes iron, so I call them the "Iron Triad." The red and yellow have that rusty color, weaker than full-chroma colors, and they provide a contrast to the clear tints of the Prussian blue. I use that combination in two paintings that I demonstrate on my recent Gumroad tutorial "Triads." (<https://gumroad.com/l/color2>)

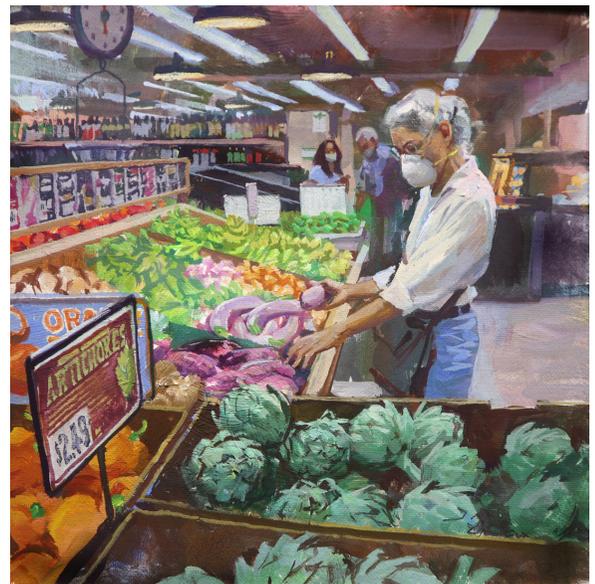
Sylvan Cottage, 5 x 8 inches, gouache

2. How do you choose the images to depict?

- It depends what sort of painting I'm doing. If I'm looking for a subject to paint from observation, I often want a particular lighting situation or a color combination.

Supermarket Portrait, 10 x 10 inches, casein

- I don't usually get inspired by the familiar "artistic" motifs such as fishing boats, Italian villas, nude models, or bouquets of flowers. Instead I look for mundane subjects that artists often overlook, such as parking lots, supermarket interiors, gas stations and back alleys. Recently I painted my wife shopping for vegetables in the produce section of a local



market: (https://youtu.be/yludQY_rvdw). I painted her with a coronavirus mask on because that's how she looks when she's shopping.

- Blockbuster, 10 x 18 inches, oil



- About 20 years ago I painted a Blockbuster video store, and when I showed that painting to art students, I said, I'm painting this because one day it will pass away like the dinosaurs. Sure enough, that has happened.

3. Are you drawn to certain themes? Does color influence which images speak to you?

- I like any subject that hints at the passage of time. So I tend to prefer old houses to new ones, and worn-out shoes to polished ones. Lately I've sought out familiar subjects close to home rather than wanting to paint in a faraway country.

But I also paint fantastical scenes of impossible worlds, such as cities built on waterfalls and dinosaur parades.

- Color has a big effect on whether something speaks to me, and that's true of light effects, too. I can look at something that comes alive on a rainy day and it may not inspire me on a sunny day. Sometimes when I paint a subject I record the colors as I see them, but other times I change the lighting for a theatrical, weird, or magical effect.

4. In your book "Color and Light," you have several sections on using a limited palette. Would you explain why that's a powerful strategy?

- When we were in grade school we all envied the other kid who owned the giant-size Crayola set. In the art store we still ogle all the delicious colors.

But it's a good idea to limit the range of color pigments or the "palette" that you use on any particular painting. There are at least four good reasons to limit your palette.

1. If you have all the colors squeezed out around the edges of your mixing surface, you might be tempted to use them all in a single picture, which can lead to a kind of visual cacophony.
2. If you create a picture out of fewer colors, the resulting mixtures are more likely to be unified and harmonious—and more interesting. Every color you mix is automatically related. It's easier to convey a mood or to explore strange realms you wouldn't normally choose.



3. The third reason to limit the palette is to force yourself away of color mixing habits. If you have colors called “flesh tone” and “grass green,” you’ll probably reach for them when you’re painting skin or a lawn.

It's a good idea every once in a while to leave off all your browns and greens in the cabinet and mix them from the primary colors instead. Some artists never use browns or black because they want to keep their mixtures more pure. There's nothing wrong with black or brown or green, but you should know how to mix color without them, too.

4. The final reason to consider limited palettes is that they're portable and you can save money. In fact you can paint almost anything in nature with just four or five colors. There are a lot of limited palettes that still give you a full range of mixtures.

5. I was particularly interested in your use of color schemes using gamut masks. Would you explain this technique for choosing a color palette and why you recommend using it?

For those who don't know, a gamut is a geometric shape (usually a triangle) superimposed or "mapped" over the color wheel. What's inside the gamut are the colors you've chosen for your painting. What's outside the gamut are the colors you want to leave out.

The gamut will contain the full range of color notes that can be mixed from a given set of starting colors. Those starting colors could be the paint pigments you choose for a limited palette. Or they might be a set of custom starting colors, called color strings, which you premix with a palette knife.



Any triangular gamut has three primaries, one in each corner of the triangle. These are called subjective primaries, because they may not correspond at all with the full-intensity colors we may think of as primary colors. Yet they are the purest and most extreme colors within the gamut you've selected.

Premixing is the key to staying within the gamut you want. You define the range of colors, then you mix those colors and use no others. That way, you'll get exactly the range you want.

Gamut planning becomes especially important for sequential artists, such as book illustrators or comic artists, or for concept artists or game designers. It's a tremendous aid for painting color ranges like those above.



This method is also a good tool for gallery painters. You can bring plein air paintings home and develop them into studio compositions with interesting moods. By placing a gamut mask over the color wheel, you can define a very specific range of color for your painting. Of course, all this is covered more fully in my book "Color and Light." <http://jamesgurney.com/site/213/color-and-light-a-guide-for-the-realist-painter>

6. You also write about the use of a pop of color or color accent. When do you recommend using this technique and how do you choose which color(s) to use?

A color accent is any small area of color that is noticeably different from the rest of the colors in the composition. Color accents are usually a complement (opposite on the color wheel) or near complement, and usually more highly chromatic than the rest of the picture. If you restrict the entire image to something close to a monochromatic scheme, anything different will jump out and grab the viewer's attention. In the context of a forest scene, for example, a red shirt will rivet our attention.

Color accents don't have to be used only for the main focus of interest. They can also be added as a seasoning throughout a picture, to provide relief from large areas of unrelieved hues. If you have a picture with a strong purple cast, it can help to sneak in a little yellow or orange here and there—just a set of floating dots or an outline, or a weird

reflection in a window. This becomes a matter of taste and of momentary inspiration, keeping your color scheme from being too mechanical or predictable.



8. Your work has an incredible sense of light. Do you have a standard way of creating that sense of light pouring into a wooded space? Or for creating a sense of bleached out color in a more arid landscape?

• Thank you. Artists who reference only photographs are missing out on a lot. As useful as photos are, they

typically capture only a fraction of what the eye can see. This is especially true with forest interiors. In a typical photo, the camera interprets the green as a single monochromatic color. The tree trunks sink to black.

Typically in photos, the layers of leaves compress into a jumble of shapes. The blue sky bleaches to white and burns out the openings of the leaves. Such a scene would look different to an observer. With our stereoscopic vision, our focal accommodation to depth, and our incredible tolerance of differences in brightness, our eyes interpret the scene with far more nuance.

9. Do you always think first in terms of color schemes, or does the composition drive the color choices?

It can go both ways. Sometimes I have a specific color idea and look for a subject to give it form, and sometimes I have a subject or a feeling that seems to call out for a certain color mood. My definition of composition is broader than most people's. For me it begins with the feeling or the story, and all the tools of design, placement, perspective, and cropping are how you express this idea. I don't subscribe to the Golden Mean or Rule of Thirds principles as starting points because it depends first on what I want to say.



10. What advice would you give to someone who was first attempting to create color that was visually engaging?

When it comes to color, less is more. It's fun to own a lot of tube colors, but squeezing them all out on your palette doesn't guarantee a good color scheme. Too many pigments can lead to "fruit salad disease," a malady where unrelated bright colors

compete for attention.

Hannaford Parking Lot, gouache, 5 x 8 inches.

A limited or restricted palette results in a painting with a more harmonious effect. Sometimes I just do a painting with two colors, blue and brownish orange.

The knitter Alice Starmore demonstrated the same principles in her colorways when she sampled colors from natural elements like stones, leaves, and lichen.

You can grab a semi-random color from each of the color families (yellow, red and blue) and ensure that one color is high-chroma and the other colors are low-chroma. For example, I might head out for the day with only Yellow Ochre, Maroon Perylene, and Ultramarine Blue, plus Titanium White.

Best wishes to all my friends out there in the art quilt community,
James Gurney