

USING COLOR IN SCROLL PAINTING

by Stella Silvana

These are some design ideas that I have come across while learning to illuminate award scrolls. I hope this information is helpful to you. Mixing and matching color schemes is a fun part of the painting award scrolls for use in the Society. Trying to simulate medieval colors while painting the devices in a heraldically correct way can be tricky. Creativity is important, but we want to use the same color schemes as the medieval schools of illumination. Also, the heraldic devices and badges need to be painted correctly. Some period colors have subtle tones that must be carefully combined if they are to look good together. It is frustrating to spend two hours painting a scroll and find that some of the colors vibrate unpleasantly when placed side by side, or clash with the heraldic colors. Here are hints for designing with color to take some of the hit or miss experimentation out of putting colors together at random. To talk about color, it helps to know some terminology. If you want to know why colors behave the way they do visually it is important to know the various properties of color. (Since Gouache is the preferred paint used in society scrolls, we are talking about opaque pigments, not projected color, which behaves differently.)

COLOR TERMINOLOGY

Hue: The name of a color (i.e. blue, red, etc.)

Value: The shade of darkness or lightness of a color. It is helpful to imagine the colors as they appear if reduced to a black and white picture and try to visualize what tone of grey they would be.

Intensity: The brightness of a color, a color may have intense tones or subdued tones.

Temperature: We associate some colors with temperature: blue and green are cool colors, red, yellow and orange are warm colors

Primary: Red, yellow and blue; the three colors that you cannot get by mixing other colors.

Secondary: Violet, green and orange; two primaries mixed together.

Tertiary: A primary color plus a secondary color: yellow-green, blue-green, blue-violet, red-violet, red-orange, and yellow-orange

Complementary colors: Colors opposite one another on the color wheel (i.e. blue/orange, green/red, purple/yellow)

Analogous colors: Colors near each other on the color wheel such as neutral colors; some browns and gray

Tint: Modification of a hue by adding another color or by adding white

Tone: Modification of a hue by adding gray

Shade: Modification of a hue by adding black

Monochromatic: Color scheme using values of a single hue

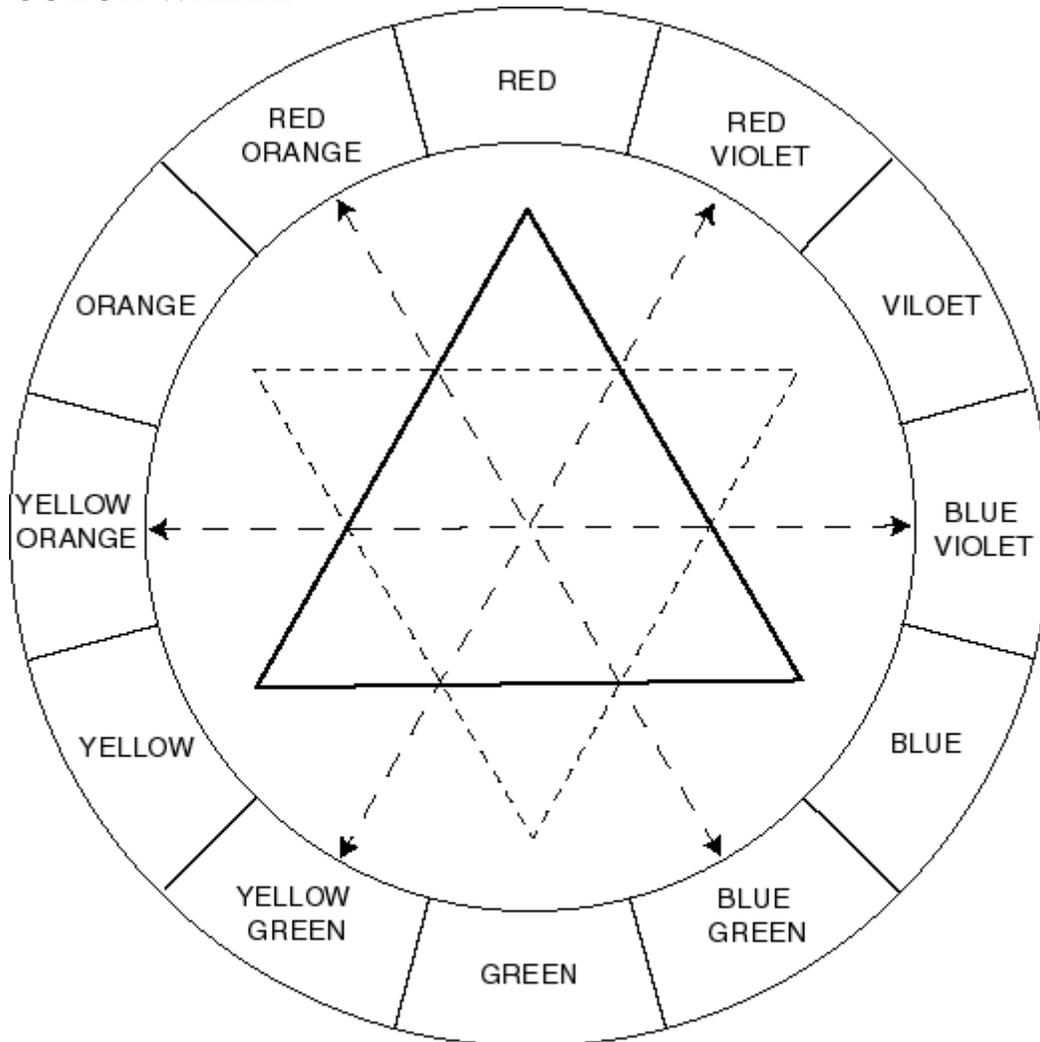
Heraldic colors: Metals: Or (yellow or gold), Argent (white or silver)

Colors: Azure (blue), Gules (red), Purpure (purple), Sable (black), Vert (green)

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COLOR WHEEL



- PRIMARY
- SECONDARY
- . - . TERTIARIES

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Limit your colors so that the design doesn't look cluttered. Make a test swatch of colors, painting a small patch of each color next to one another. The dry color will be slightly different from the wet color. Sometimes colors that seem like they would go together well don't look good once they are close together. Either there is not enough contrast in value so the colors don't stand out from one another, or the intensity or tone of the colors doesn't blend well. Experiment with colors on scrap paper first, not on a scroll that you will spend several hours painting.

To design a harmonious color scheme, choose colors that are related, that appear close to each other on the color wheel. A totally monochromatic scheme, using one color such as all blues, can be monotonous. To keep it from being boring, add contrast with a complimentary color, which will probably look best if it is a subdued tone used on small motifs in the design. Using complimentary colors next to each other makes them appear brighter. Also, using any color next to black will make it jump out at you, so when painting a scroll where there are large black areas, it is important to have a color with a light value, but subdued tone if you don't want that effect. (In other words, if you haven't learned your color terminology yet- if the color is too dark, it will not show up against the black background, but if the brightness or intensity of the color is too great, it will leap off the paper and knock your eyes out. So use a color that has a light shade but subtle tones for illumination styles in which you don't want that effect.)

To subdue a color, mix in a little of its complementary color or try ochre or burnt umber to reduce the intensity. Adding black can sometimes make the color look muddy - it changes the value or shade of a color. Adding a bit of yellow to boost the intensity of the color works with many colors, but not all (i.e. purple, some blues, and yellow will muddy most browns - it all depends on your choice of the manufacture of your paints.). Some styles of manuscript colors are very subtle in tone, heightening the intensity of the color is not generally a problem - toning it down is usually what is necessary.

Relate all areas of a design by using each color in different quadrants of the scroll, especially where there are areas divided off from the main design. When design motifs repeat, use the same color for each motif, or use a repeating color pattern in a border, rather than scattering colors around at random. Otherwise the design may become messy looking.

Heraldic devices and badges need to be in the correct heraldic colors. "Or" may be painted as yellow or gold, but yellow and metallic gold don't always combine well visually. Metallic gold is almost never used in older, insular Celtic designs, while it was used extensively in later period and continental schools.

Pastel color tones are used in medieval illuminations, but (this a major BUT) the colors need to be very closely and carefully related. It can be very difficult to get just the right tones of each pastel mixed so they good together, so we have cautioned that the use of pastels is not a good idea

Another color that is difficult to achieve is orange. The burnt orange of the insular Celtic manuscripts looks great with their pale green, pale blue, deep yellow and mauve, but if the

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tones of color are not subtle enough, the colors will leap off the page and beat you over the head, so watch out.

When using yellow for "Or", I find primary or secondary colors (reds, yellows, greens, blues and browns) work best for me.

If you have a heraldic badge or device with "Gules", pastels don't usually look good, except perhaps green as an analogous color with other greens. I have found that using a dull, olive green and bright green together in a design looks good when the device has red and gold. The red can be used in small accent areas, such as for flowers, to integrate the colors of the device into the rest of the design. Metallic gold, red and blue always work well together.

Fixing boo-boos: the thinner the photocopy lines on a charter scroll, the more carefully you need to paint. Thick photocopy lines will have more of a tendency to repel the gouache paint. If gouache is mixed with just the right amount of water, it will magically pull back from the photocopy - too thick a consistency, and it will cover the lines; too thin and the color will not cover evenly.

Yellow and gold look bad when they get on the photocopy lines. Cadmium yellow has more of a tendency to be repelled by painting the yellow or gold areas first. You can carefully pick up any color that gets onto the lines with a damp brush. Dip the clean brush in water, wipe it on a towel then gently brush the photocopy lines toward the colored side. Rinse the brush after each pair of strokes, soon you will get a feel for sweeping the excess color off the lines. Picking up the excess paint with a brush does not work so well after other colors have been added, invariably a little of the darker color will get into the gold or yellow areas and cause problems.

Small mistakes can be gently scraped off with a hobby knife, then any bare spots touched up with new paint. Try using "Ivory Black" gouache to touch up faint photocopy areas or where you accidentally scraped off some of the photocopy while making a correction. Sometimes this works better than using a pen.

Because gouache is opaque, you can paint over an area to make corrections, however it must be done gingerly; or else the color below will be dissolved into the new layer. If you need to cover a painted area, let the scroll dry overnight. There will be less of a tendency for the paints to mix and bleed through the correction. Carefully paint over the area one time with a minimum of brush strokes, and then let it dry thoroughly before touching it again.

When making white highlights, make only one stroke, then let it dry before touching that mark again. Otherwise, the color below dissolves and gets into the white paint or gets scraped off by the pen or brush. For highlighting, use "Permanent White" rather than "Zinc White". "Permanent White" paints over other colors better, while "Zinc White" should be used for mixing with other colors to make different tints. When mixing lighter colors, try adding the color to the white, rather than the white to the color. It takes more white than color to make up a light tint.

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If you have any doubt about what colors to use, look up the illuminations that inspired the scroll to the original artist's color scheme. Always double-check the proper coloration of badges and devices when they are represented on a scroll. If there are notes on the margins of the scroll, read those, too. I have accidentally painted scrolls incorrectly because there were instructions that I missed along the side margin as well as at the bottom.

Have fun with your colors, while striving for an authentic medieval appearance.