

THE #1 WAY To Improve Your Artwork

Watercolour

Edition

**TRANSFORM YOUR
WATERCOLOUR PAINTINGS**
by discovering the single, most common
mistake made by struggling artists.



ArtTutor.com

by *Bob Davies* and
Glynis Barnes-Mellish

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Bob Davies

Bob has been teaching drawing and painting for more than 20 years. He passionately believes that anyone can create pleasing artwork when they're shown certain fundamental techniques – something that the schooling system sadly fails to do.



Bob is the creator of what is now the number one selling watercolour instruction DVD series in the world, *Watercolour Secrets*, and the accompanying e-book has been downloaded by more than a quarter of a million people worldwide. He now helps to run ArtTutor.

Glynis Barnes-Mellish

Glynis is one of the UK's leading watercolour portrait artists. Winner of the Daler-Rowney Watercolour Award in 1988 she is also the author of two Search Press books on watercolour painting.



You may have seen Glynis in the BBC series 'Star Portraits' presented by Rolf Harris, in which Glynis was commissioned to paint a celebrity portrait on camera. Glynis spends much of her time lecturing, running painting holidays and demonstrating extensively throughout the U.K. and Europe.

You can find out more about Glynis at www.barnesmellish.com

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INTRODUCTION

Over many years, I've seen students looking ruefully at their latest painting, wondering why it hasn't turned out as they expected. They've mixed nice colours (not muddy), the perspective has been pretty good and there may have been very little wrong with the composition.

Yet invariably there follows a comment along the lines of:

"...Well, it's OK, but something's missing and I don't know what is or even if I did, how I go about fixing it..."

Now lots of skills and techniques go into making a good painting but there is one that stands out. Most of our art tutors and experienced artists agree it's the number one reason why a piece of art looks poor.

This e-book outlines what that is. More importantly, it shows you how to overcome the problem so you'll never be trapped by it again.

You've probably heard of it already but I'd be willing to suggest that you don't have a real **practical** understanding of how it can affect your paintings and drawings.

Don't under-estimate or dismiss the simplicity of what it is. Without it, your pictures will always remain a tantalizing step away from being the minor masterpieces you strive to achieve.

Read and apply the techniques and exercises in this e-book and you will get to understand:

- Why your pictures lack depth
- Why they look flat, dull and lifeless
- Why an otherwise good composition doesn't seem to work
- Why just using brighter colours seems to have no great effect

And you'll discover:

- How to give your picture punch, vibrancy and impact
- How to create depth and that 3D look that jumps off the page
- Simple ways to plan your picture to avoid problems in the future

This e-book will teach you not just techniques but a state of mind.

So what is this number one mistake?

It's something called tonal or value contrast.

And if your artwork doesn't make proper use of it, it will have no life, no real form or shape, no punch, and certainly no oomph that's going to make you want to eagerly show it off to family and friends.

You can read this e-book from cover-to-cover in under an hour. A lot of people will do just that... and then never actually work through the exercises. Please don't be one of those people! Follow along. Get your pencils and brushes out and work with these techniques. You'll be delighted with the results!



Image 1

This painting has punch! You might think it's the vibrant use of colour and that helps. But more important are the contrasting values and where they've been placed – something you're about to learn all about!

SECTION 1 – IT’S ABOUT CREATING VALUE

1.1 What is value?

You’ll often hear professional artists and art tutors use various terms when they talk about producing a painting, terms like: hues, tone, value, shades, tints, chroma. All of these relate to the wider subject of colour theory.

Don’t worry, the purpose of this e-book *isn’t* to convert you into an expert in colour theory! The goal is to have you producing much more pleasing and impactful artwork by fully understanding a few key principles on a practical level.

Yep, we need to cover a little bit of theory but it won’t be heavy going and we’ll use plenty of real-world examples and exercises so that it really sinks in.

So let’s begin with one of the terms above – ‘**value**’...

Value refers to the lightness or darkness of a colour. So a dark blue has greater value than a light blue. If you imagine a scale of value, black would be at one end of the extreme and white at the other.

1.2 And what is value contrast?

As you know, artists work on a flat 2-dimensional piece of paper or canvas. They have to use *illusion* in order to make objects in their pictures look 3-dimensional and jump off the surface.

They achieve this, to a large extent, through **value contrast**.

We already know that value refers to how light or dark a colour is, so let’s get clear on what ‘contrast’ means...

Contrast, in the wider sense, simply refers to the difference or similarity between two or more things we compare. High contrast means there’s a lot of difference. Low contrast means there’s very little difference.

If you’ve ever played around with the contrast button on your TV set, you’ll know the sort of effect it can have...

Image 2 – the effect of changing the contrast control on your TV from low, to normal, to high contrast



In your artwork, all that value contrast refers to is the difference in lightness and darkness between various parts of the picture. Look at the two boxes I've drawn below:



Image 3

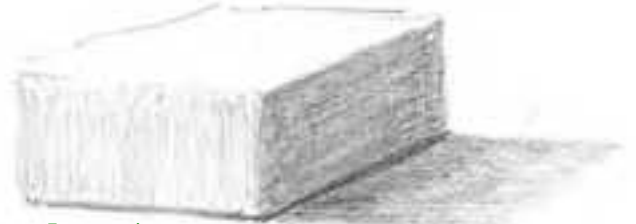


Image 4

The top and sides of the box in Image 3 are similar in value (they're about the same darkness or lightness as each other). So we can say that Image 3 has low value contrast overall.

In Image 4, the sides of the box are obviously very different in their value. We can say that this box has high value contrast.

It probably doesn't need me to point it out, but can you see how Image 4 looks much more 3-dimensional and solid? It jumps off the page.

The number one reason why poor-looking artwork looks, well, less than inspiring is because it makes poor use of value contrast. Poor use of value contrast will make an image look flat and 2-dimensional instead of punchy and solid.

1.3 Value contrast applies to colour too

Most newcomers can grasp this concept of value contrast when producing a black and white picture - such as a pencil or charcoal drawing for example. It's obvious that using lighter and darker values is the only way to separate different shapes in a picture that has no colour.

However, in my experience, struggling artists aren't nearly bold enough in the *range* of values they use – their darkest darks aren't dark enough and their lightest lights aren't light enough. The result is often a flat-looking pencil sketch.

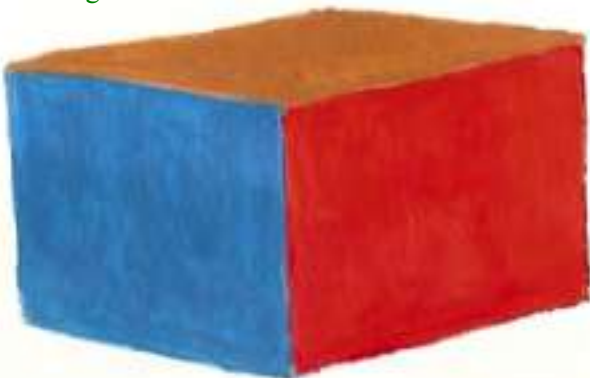
We'll address this problem with practical examples and exercises in Section 3 so that it's never an issue in your artwork again.

But to finish this section, I want to briefly address what happens when you add colour into the mix – because that's when I think problems really start to occur.

By now you know that a dark blue has greater value than, say, a light yellow. But (and this is crucial) did you know that two completely different colours that you might *think* will clearly stand out from each other could actually have the same value?

Let's look at an example...

Image 5



In terms of value, you would say blue is usually darker than red, and red is certainly darker than yellow. The sides of this box in Image 5 are obviously easily distinguishable from one another.

But there seems to be something not quite right here. The colours are bold but despite that, it seems a bit dull and lifeless.

In Image 6, let's strip away the colour to reveal the value in greyscale...

Image 6



Straight away, you can see the value of the three colours – Cadmium Red, Cerulean Blue and Yellow Ochre in this case – are identical.

The eye can be fooled by a variety of colours being the same, or a very similar, value. Sure, a Pthalo or Ultramarine

Blue is going to be stronger and darker than a Lemon Yellow, no matter how strong you paint the latter...

But when you start mixing your colours on the palette to create new ones or to make them lighter or darker, this is when you need to take into account how their value will fit into the overall picture, rather than merely concentrating on what sort of colour you create.

Let's have another go at our coloured box and the same three colours in Image 7...

Image 7



This time I've darkened the red, slightly lightened the blue and significantly lightened the yellow.

Now the shapes look like a box, with form and light and shade, even without any shadow being cast.

You get the impression that strong light is falling on the top, with a bit less light on the blue side and the red side being in deep shadow. This happens irrespective of the colours I've used because I've adjusted their value to 'create' the shape of the box. To confirm this, look at the new box in greyscale in Image 8...

Image 8



Notice how this box looks much more 3-dimensional?

If you don't understand or check the value of the colours you place on your painting (and where you're placing them), the result is likely to be a flat, lifeless image that you won't be inspired to show off to friends

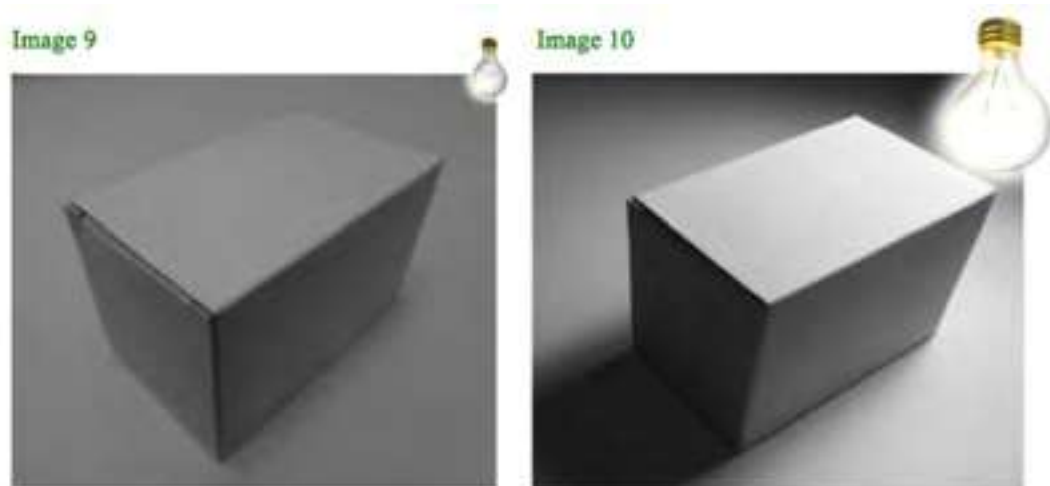
or family.

1.4 Form and viewing distance

In our example of a box with high value contrast above, the different values we used for the three sides of the box reflect the light source -

the way light strikes one side of the box and puts the others in relative shadow.

The stronger the light source, the starker the contrast will be between the lights and darks. Compare these two photos (Images 9 & 10) of a simple white box...



In this sense, we are using value contrast to create form and give an object on a flat piece of paper a 3-dimensional look. Incidentally, a really wide range between the lightest lights and darkest darks, gives the impression of a stronger light source – something we'll look at later on.

Aside from creating form, we also use contrasting values to give an image a sense of **depth and distance**. Landscapes illustrate this point really well...

As an object moves farther into the distance it will have increasingly less value, in other words it becomes lighter. Even a very dark element (like a slate roof on a cottage) will appear relatively light when it's far enough away.

You can show this in a representational form by looking at the following two photos (Images 11 & 12)...



Image 11



Image 12

If you painted a landscape, you'd probably have these three elements of sky, middle distance and foreground. In this case they're represented by streaks of blue, green and brown.

However, they're all a pretty similar value (look at the greyscale version next to it).

Now let's adjust them, in Images 13 and 14, to better represent distant sky, middle distance trees and a foreground field...



Image 13



Image 14

See how the adjustment of the sky and the tree colours has given, even in this abstract example, a much greater degree of depth and distance. It's even more apparent when you compare the two black and white versions.

Moving on to something more realistic, take a look at the two sketch paintings below in Images 15 and 16...



Image 15



Image 16

Image 15 - The values of the near hills are actually lighter compared to the distant hills. It's hard to distinguish between the middle distance hills because they are the same value.

Image 16 - The values become progressively lighter into the distance. The edges of the middle distance hills are darker than the hills behind them to create contrast and separation.

With that bit of theory under our hat, let's look at 3 simple tools you can use to help you see values within a painting much more easily...

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SECTION 2 – TOOLS TO CHECK VALUE

2.1 Squint and defocus your eyes

People often squint slightly when they struggle to read something because it's slightly out of focus for them. Subtle squinting reduces the extraneous light and can make a point of focus sharper and clearer.

However, if you squint a bit harder and let your eyes defocus slightly, you'll notice that your picture of the world becomes less detailed. Stripping out the detail allows you to see masses of colour and value (those light and dark areas) much more easily.

Here's what squinting and defocusing your eyes should make things look like...

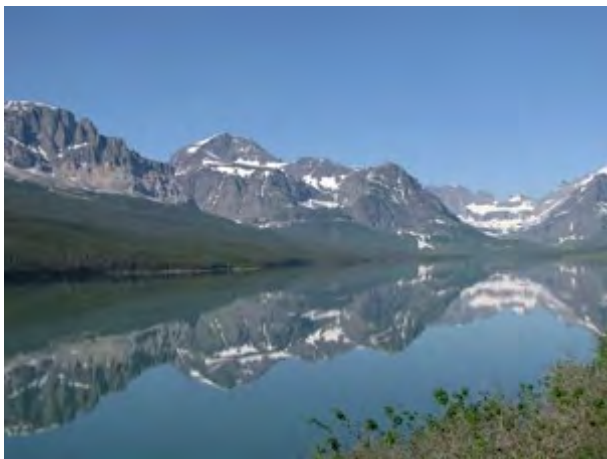


Image 17 – before squinting



Image 18 – after squinting (less detail, darks are darker, lights are lighter)

Squinting and checking for values (both in your own artwork as it progresses and your reference material) is something you should make a habit of. You really can't do too much of it during the painting process.

Let's move on to tool number 2...

2.2 Use a grey scale



If you find squinting / defocusing your eyes doesn't make the various values of an image clear enough for you, you should try using a grey scale.

In fact, even if squinting works well for you, a grey scale is so easy to make and so useful it's well worth having one by your side whenever you paint.

What is a grey scale?

For our purposes, it's simply a strip of card or paper with 5-7 values of grey that range from very light grey to a very dark grey.

I created the one on the left with acrylic paint but you can use any paint medium or a graphite pencil using varying degrees of pressure. It's roughly 8" x 1.5".

We're going to use this grey scale to examine a reference photo of Stalker Castle (Image 19) in Scotland and then create a small sketch of the castle itself.

Image 19



We're not going to work from colour just yet, but I want to draw your attention to a couple of things in the colour photo to the left...

Notice the distant hills, how pale they appear. This occurs quite naturally with

dust particles in the atmosphere and makes features paler and less distinct the further away they are.

Notice also how you can clearly see one side of the roof is lighter than the other because of the way the light is hitting the castle.

Exercise: How To Use A Grey Scale

Print this page out and cut out the grey scale. Use a 'good' or 'best' quality print settings rather than 'draft'.



Image 20



Image 21

Instructions

Place your grey scale (Image 20) at the side of the black and white print out of the castle (Image 21). You're not allowed to pick it up yet though.

Look at the black and white photograph, screwing up your eyes to defocus them, and try to gauge which value on your grey scale most closely matches the following parts of the picture:

- The blue patch of sky above the castle
- The distant hills
- The promontory (darker land mass just below the distant hills)

- The main castle walls (both sides)
- The water by the canoeist
- The grassy area to the bottom left of the castle
- The castle doors and windows
- The floating seaweed

You won't get perfect matches – just choose the number on the scale you think looks about right. There are probably about 20 or 30 subtly different values even in this photo but you can simplify them down to the seven on the grey scale.

Once you've tried to gauge the value by eye, pick up your grey scale and hold it next the various elements of the image. Here's my attempt...

Image 22



Image 23



Image 24

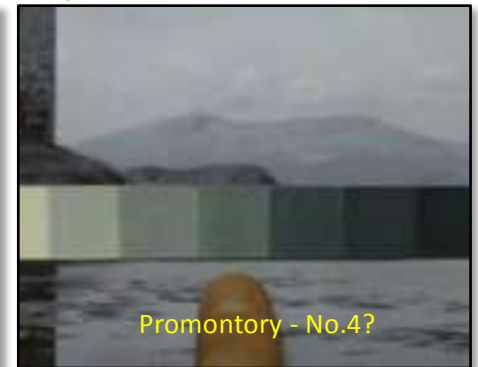


Image 25



Image 26

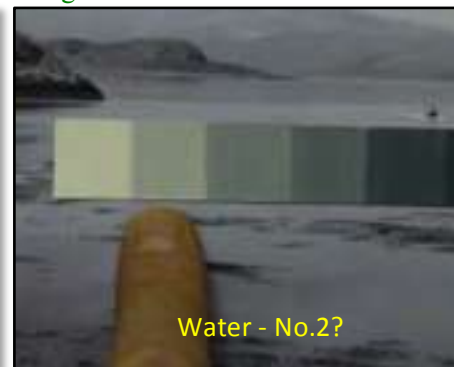


Image 27

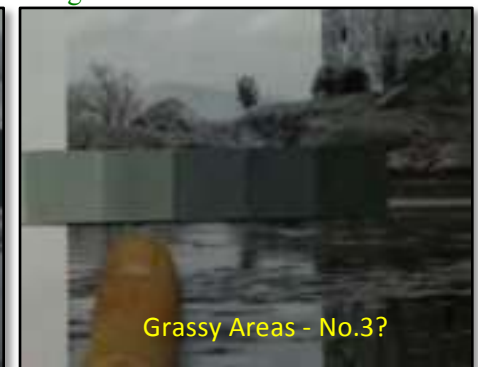


Image 28

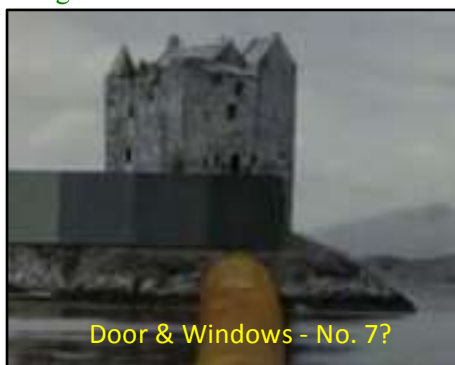


Image 29

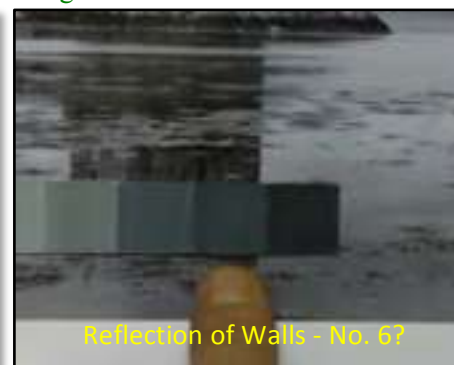


Image 30



So how did you fare? Were there elements of the picture that you found difficult to gauge until you used the scale? Here's one thing you may have noticed...

Note the castle walls

The two main aspects of the castle walls are quite similar in tone (Image 31). Even when you screw your eyes up, there doesn't appear to be a great deal of difference.

This is where you, as an artist, have a big advantage over a photographer. You have the opportunity to strengthen or lighten one aspect of the castle to create a greater sense of dimension (Image 32).

If it's a bright, summer's scene you want to recreate, you can go to town on this and literally turn on the sunlight. If you're capturing a moodier, more overcast atmosphere you can be more subtle.

Image 31

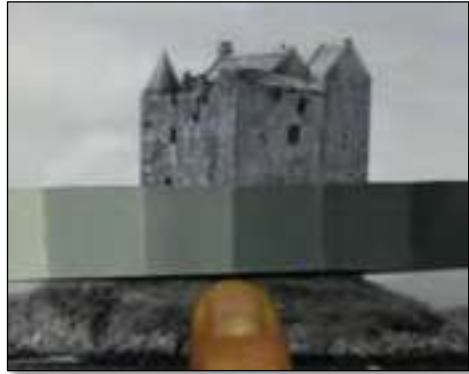


Image 32



A grey scale is a very handy little tool to have by your side – whether it's in your studio or out in the field. Keep several of them handy. Use one at every opportunity. Very soon, you'll hone an expert eye for picking out subtle (and stark) differences in value that give your artwork that master quality.

2.3 Make your own 'redeye' filter

Even if you find that squinting and the grey scale allows you to easily see blocks of value, I highly recommend you out try this low-tech tool. I call it my 'redeye filter'.

What you need

A piece of red cellophane - the sort of thing you find in a florist or a sheet of red acetate or even a clear, red file cover. You only need a few square inches.

If it's quite sturdy (like a sheet of acetate) it will work as it is. If it's flimsy like cellophane, make a simple frame out of card and tape the red plastic sheet to it.

If you struggle to find anything local, do a Google or Amazon search for 'red cellophane' or 'red acetate'. You'll be able to pick up something for next to nothing.

How it works

Hold your Redeye Checker over various parts of a painting or reference photograph. The transparent red will 'lose' most of the colour but will immediately highlight contrast values. Adjacent parts of the picture with similar values will blend into one mass.

This is the equivalent of screwing up your eyes but is easier to check specific parts of your picture. Try it on your existing artwork. If you still have a reference photo you used for a particular piece of art, try it on that too. Is there a difference between the photo and your rendition?

Image 33



Image 34



SECTION 3 – MONOCHROME EXERCISES

3.1 Exercise 1 – Castle drawing

In this first exercise, you're going to produce a pencil drawing of the castle photograph we examined earlier.

What we are NOT aiming for is a detailed, life-like drawing. The entire purpose of this exercise is to get you to 'look past' the details and see overall values.

You're going to make meticulous use of both the grey scale and squinting or defocusing your eyes. If you don't I can almost guarantee what will happen (answer at the end of this exercise!).

You won't have to be this meticulous with your grey scale for future drawings or paintings, but I strongly encourage you to take lots of time checking the strength of light and dark areas for this one. Doing so will really help this habit and skill to sink in.

I'll be creating the drawing along with you and I'll provide plenty of guidance along the way. So grab yourself a beverage of choice and let's make a start...

What you'll need:

- A sheet of drawing paper, A5 is big enough. Printer paper is okay, but a heavier weight, smooth drawing paper is better.
- An HB, B and 3B or 4B pencil.
- A putty eraser. Nothing like being optimistic hey!
- A print-out of the next page of this e-book, which contains the line drawing and reference photo.

Line drawing, reference photograph and grey scale

You'll find these on the next page. The line drawing will print on to half a sheet of A4 printer paper. Trace your printed line drawing on to your drawing paper.

You'll want to then cut out the grey scale strip.

And you're good to go!

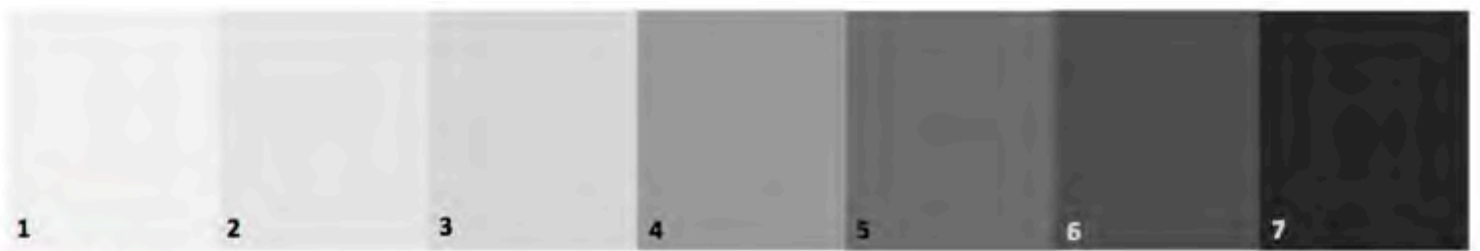
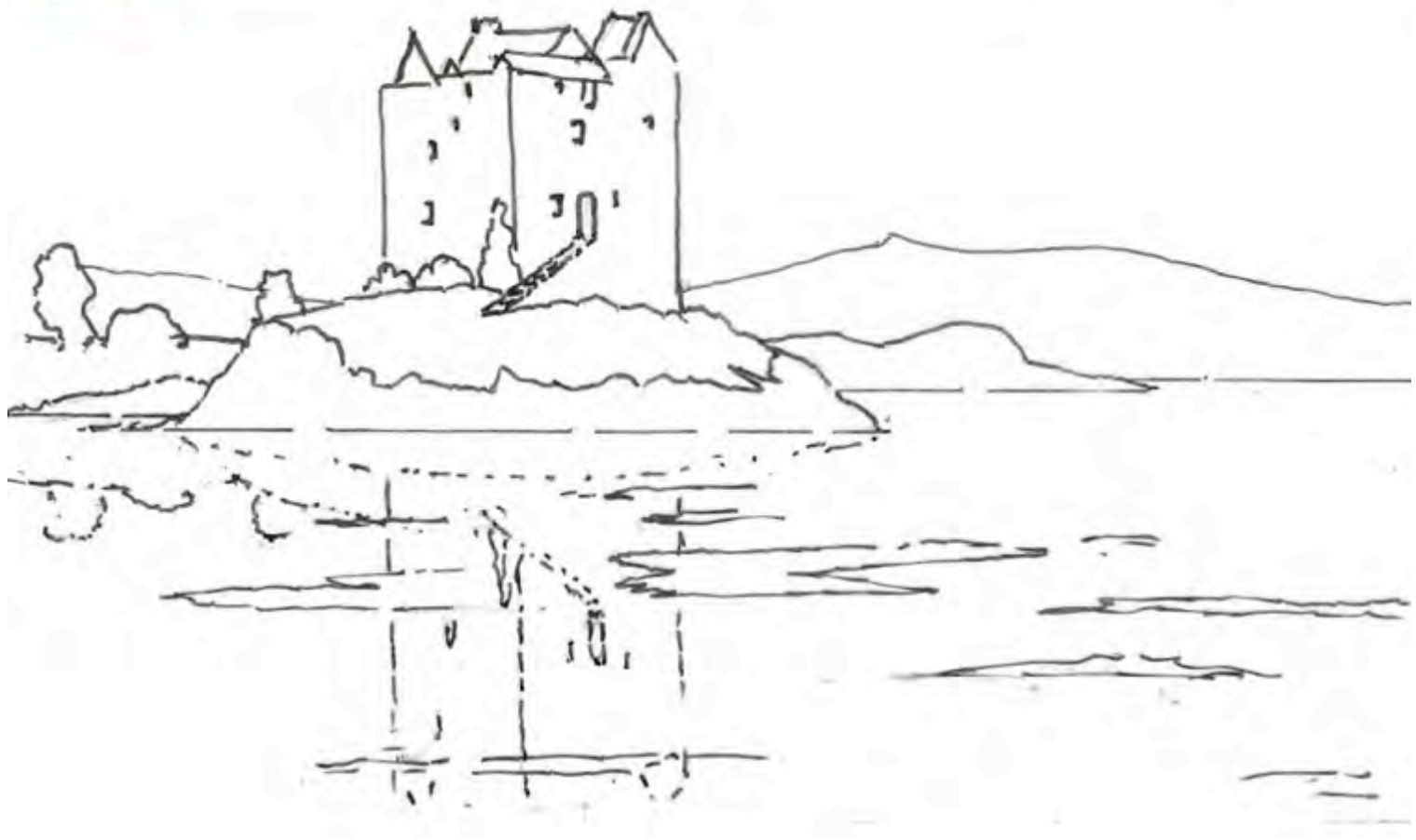


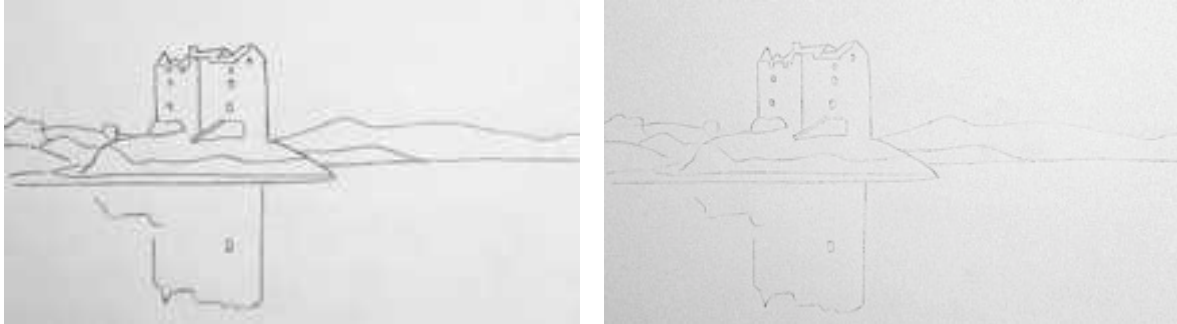
Image 35



Preparation

The first thing I've done is lightened off my line drawing using a putty eraser. It probably won't matter for the castle walls, but the distant mountains will look like they have an outline and this can distort your judgement of the correct value in this area. You'll want to do this whenever you trace a line drawing for a watercolour painting.

Image 36



Sky & Water Area

Look at your reference photo and really defocus / squint your eyes. What value on our grey scale would you say the sky is **overall**?

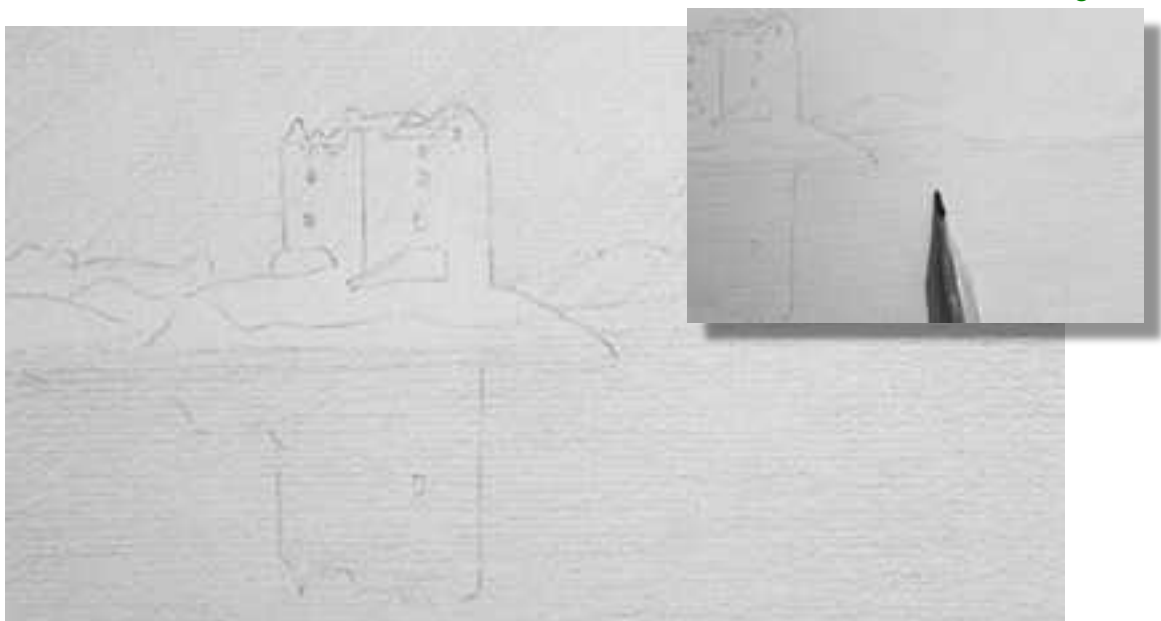
Overall is the key word here – yes there are patches of cloud and darker areas but if you squint enough and step back from the photo, you should be able to choose a single value that roughly represents the entire area.

I'm going to choose a value #2 and using my HB pencil. I'm holding the pencil almost parallel to the paper and using the side edge of the graphite with the lightest of diagonal strokes to lay down the minimum amount of tone I can. I'll do the same for the water using horizontal strokes.

Image 37



Image 38

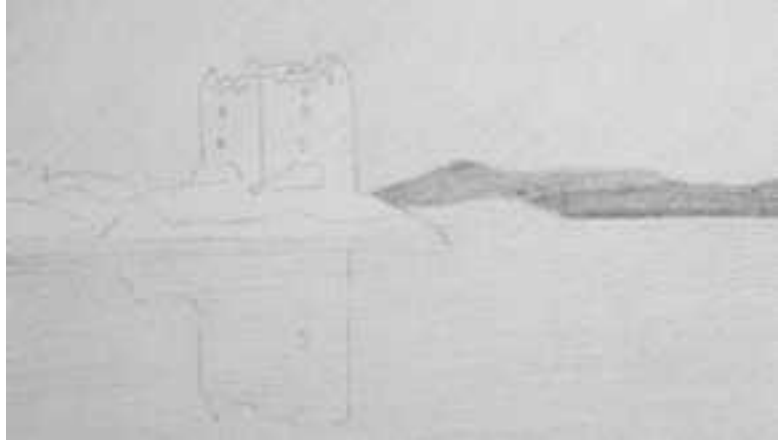


Notice how the water is a slightly darker value than the sky? Again, ignore the details of the seaweed and ripples and cloud reflections. Stand back from the photo, defocus your eyes and compare the area by the canoeist to the sky above her.

Distant Hills and Promontory

Image 39

What value would you choose for the distant hills as a whole? They are slightly darker to the right but I'm going for #3 with my HB.

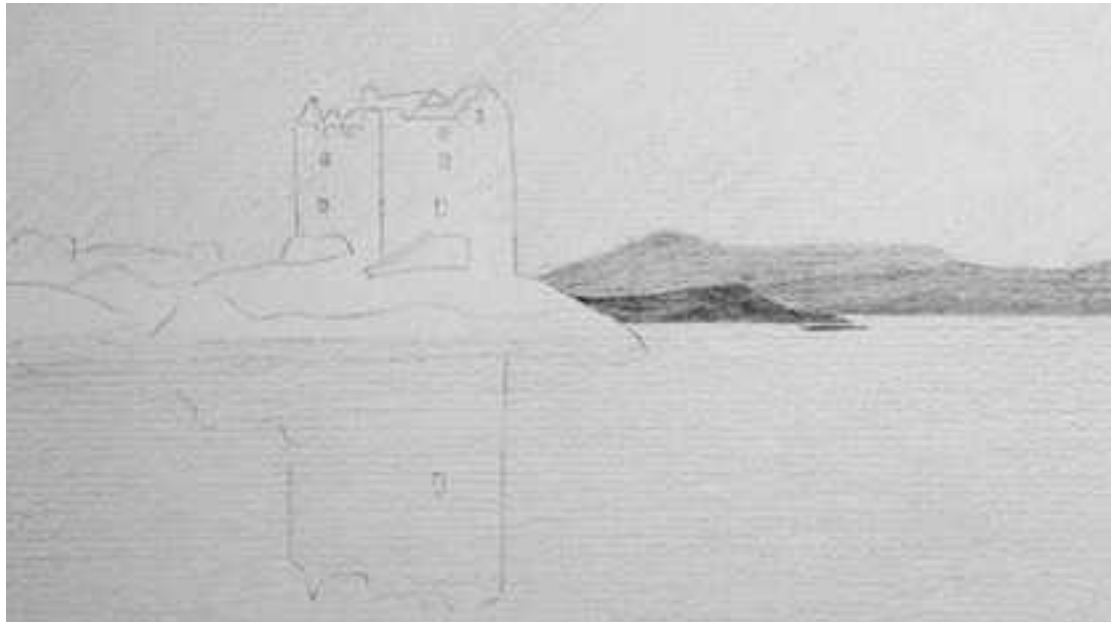


Place your grey scale on a bit of scrap paper and shade a small swatch of graphite directly below the value #3 square. Learn how much pressure and how much graphite you need to apply to create value #3.

Now add this to your distant hills.

For the smaller promontory I'm using value #4. Again, ignore any rocky undulations and details. Just block the area in with your HB. Oh, and while you're doing that make a mental note of whether the promontory is a stronger or weaker value than the grassy bank of the castle.

Image 40



Castle Walls

This is where almost everyone (in fact, everyone) makes the same mistake. Here's what I'd like you to do (and please don't cheat!)...

On a scrap of paper, WITHOUT using your grey scale or squinting your eyes, lay down a block of tone with your pencil that you think is about the correct value for the left hand castle wall.



Image 41

Blur your eyes. Look at the right hand edge of the castle wall in particular. Look at the contrast with the sky. My castle drawing on the top needs to be at least a value darker.

Again, ignore the details of brickwork and weathering and just lay down an overall value on your paper.

Now measure both the wall in the photo and your block of tone with your grey scale (and squint your eyes). Literally everyone sees the wall much lighter than it is. Why?

Because you can't help but seeing the details – the light bricks in particular. But details come later. The overall value for the castle walls is about a #4.5 on my scale.



Image 42

Do my walls in Image 42 look too dark to you? I think most people would say so...

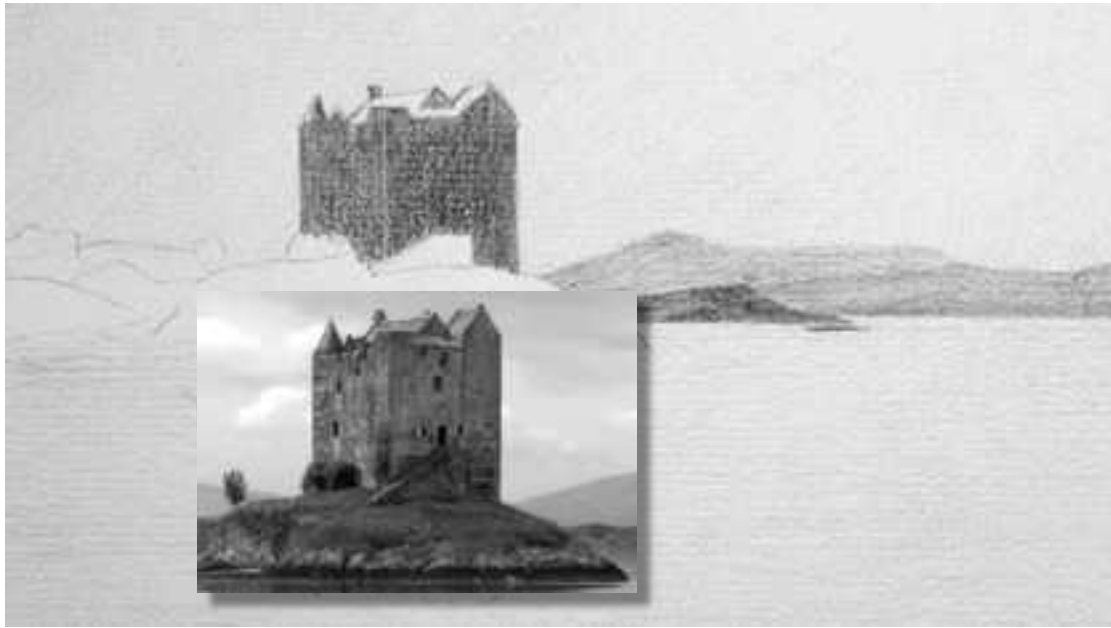


Image 43

You can clearly see here they're not! I used a B pencil for this.

Grassy Banks, Rocky Area and Reflection

By now you should be getting the idea, so I'll move quickly through the next few sections...

The grassy banks are slightly darker than the castle. Let's go with a value #5 using the B pencil. What about the white rocky area just above the water?

This is another area I can see where my students *assume* rather than *observe*. You know they're a chalky white colour in real life so the temptation is to keep them quite light.

Blur your eyes to meld the lights and darks of the rocks into more of a single value. Darker than the sky? Absolutely. Darker than the water beneath the canoeist? Maybe about the same so let's go with value #3. Just block in the area for now – we can pick out lights with our eraser and add in some shadow detail later.



Image 44

For dark area at the bottom of the rocks, I'm pressing very firmly with a B pencil.

The castle reflection is an interesting one. I hope you can see it's a noticeably darker value than the castle itself. Reflections tend to mute value contrast – in other words there is less distinction between lights and darks.

You can see a clear example of this by comparing the very dark doorway. See how it's less distinguishable in the reflection? It's slightly lighter and the brick wall is slightly darker.

Windows & Other Darks

Using the 4B pencil we can now add the darkest darks – value #7.

I actually erased back some of the graphite I'd laid down previously over the window and doorway areas because this allows me to achieve a darker dark with a bit more of a tooth underneath.

Image 45



At this stage the exercise is complete. Not a particularly impressive piece of artwork but it's given me plenty of practice looking for and gauging values.

I'm happy that the values are reasonably accurate and now it's time to have a bit of fun...

Finishing Touches (optional)

Using my putty eraser and moulding it to a point, I'm going to pick out some subtle lights on the distant hills, grassy bank, rocks and castle walls. I'll accentuate these and bring back the overall value by adding some darks.

I'll also knead the eraser into a fine 'strip' (Image 46) and pull out some ripples on the water. Again, I'll define these with some darks and add a few more bits and pieces of interest.



Image 46

And here's the finished drawing in Image 47.



Image 47

One last thing

I chose this photograph because unless you really do squint your eyes and use your grey scale, it will catch you out. However, from an artistic point of view we can improve on the photo...

The two aspects of the castle walls are very similar in value. By adjusting one side darker or lighter we can create greater form and a bit more interest (something that would be difficult for the photographer to do).

Let's see what difference creating some contrast between the two walls makes in Image 48...



Image 48

Please do have a go at this exercise. Remember, it's not about producing a highly refined drawing - it's a practical way for you to train your eye to see values relative to one another.

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3.2 Exercise 2 – Monochrome painting: Lake Garda

Using graphite pencil is a great way to start honing your eye to really see the various values in an image. All you need to do is increase or decrease the pressure you apply and you have an infinite number of values at your disposal.

Now, let's progress to the next stage and begin to apply this to watercolour painting...

Image 49



In the next exercise, you're going to produce a monochrome painting of Lake Garda in Italy (Image 49), demonstrated by one of our ArtTutor instructors, Glynis Barnes-Mellish. You'll be using just one colour.

Now invariably, students think of monochrome as black and white with various shades of grey in between. However, you could use red, blue, purple, brown, green or any colour, as long as it is capable of giving you several variations of value from dark to light.

The beauty of this process is that, with a little practice, it becomes second nature to select or adjust the values in monochrome and mentally translate them into colours.

In fact, many professional artists will produce a monochromatic painting and use it as a reference when producing their final piece. The painting below (Images 50 & 51) are from one of our ArtTutor video lessons and you can see how instructor Joanne Thomas has used her monochromatic study to great effect!

Image 50



Image 51



What you'll need:

- A sheet of watercolour paper, approximately A4. I am using a cold pressed surface, 180lbs/300gsm weight)
- One colour. Glynis is using Paynes grey but other suitable colours include ultramarine blue, cobalt blue, alizarin crimson, burnt umber or any colour that can achieve a dark value.
- A selection of brushes. I use a 1 inch flat, ½ inch flat, No. 10 round, No. 6 round.
- A printout of the next 2 pages of this e-book, which contains the line drawing and reference photo.

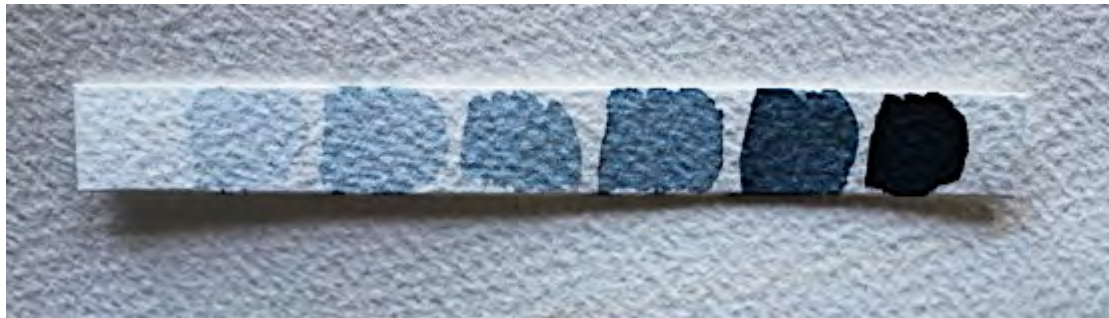
Line drawing, reference photograph

You'll find these on the next two pages. The line drawing will print on to a sheet of A4 printer paper. Shade over the back of this line drawing and then trace down on to your watercolour paper.

Monochrome Scale

Image 52 is the monochromatic scale that I used. Do NOT print this out. It's important you create your own scale in the colour you're going to be using. Create your scale on a scrap of watercolour paper that ranges from blank paper (white) to an almost undiluted, neat mix.

Image 52



A Point About Colour Shift

Remember that watercolour paint dries lighter (up to 30-50% lighter depending on the strength of wash). Creating your monochrome scale ahead of your painting has the added benefit of showing you whether your values (at the dark end) are strong enough even after they have dried.

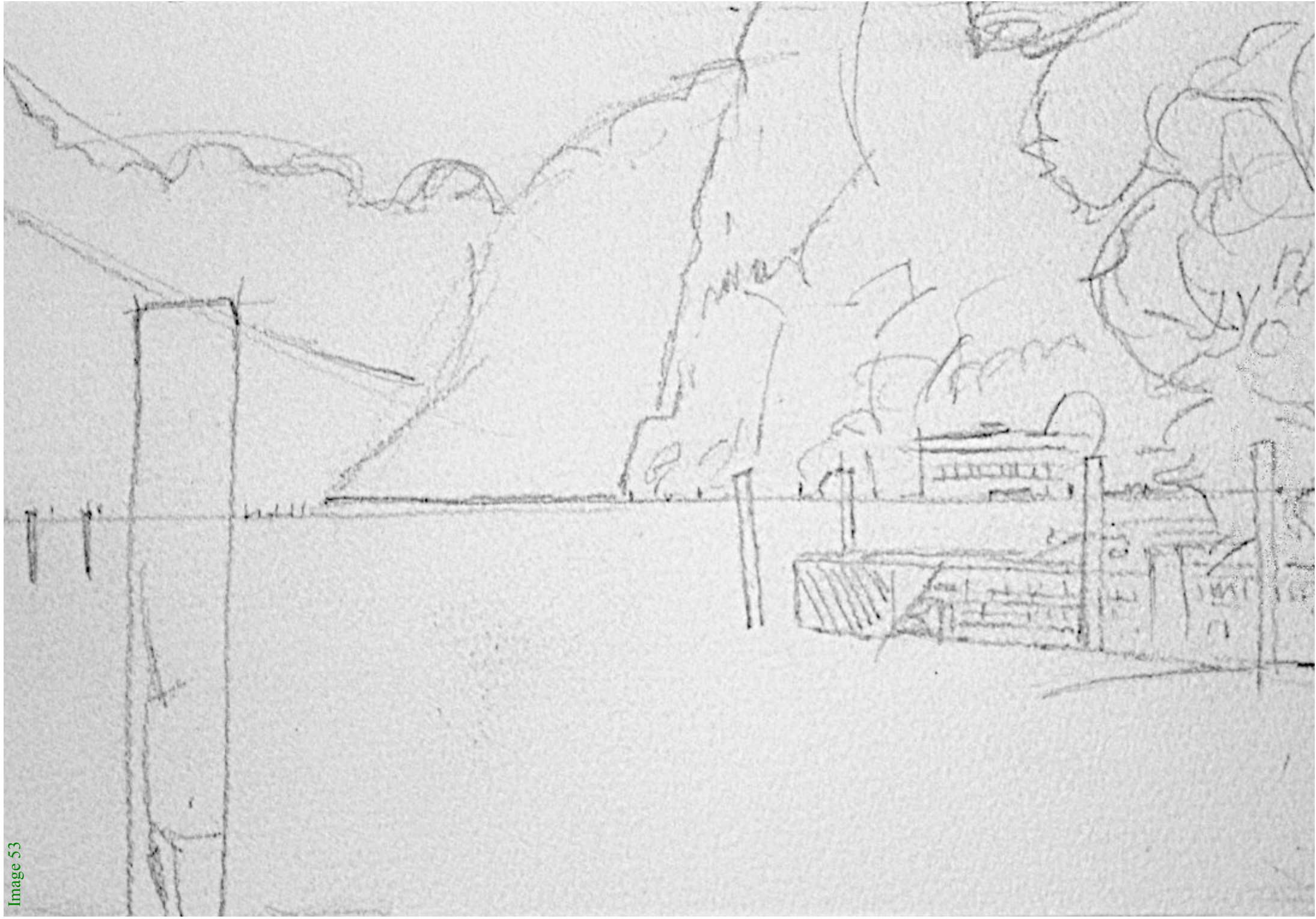


Image 53



Image 54

[Riva del Garda](#). Used with kind permission from [Geomangio](#).

Image 55

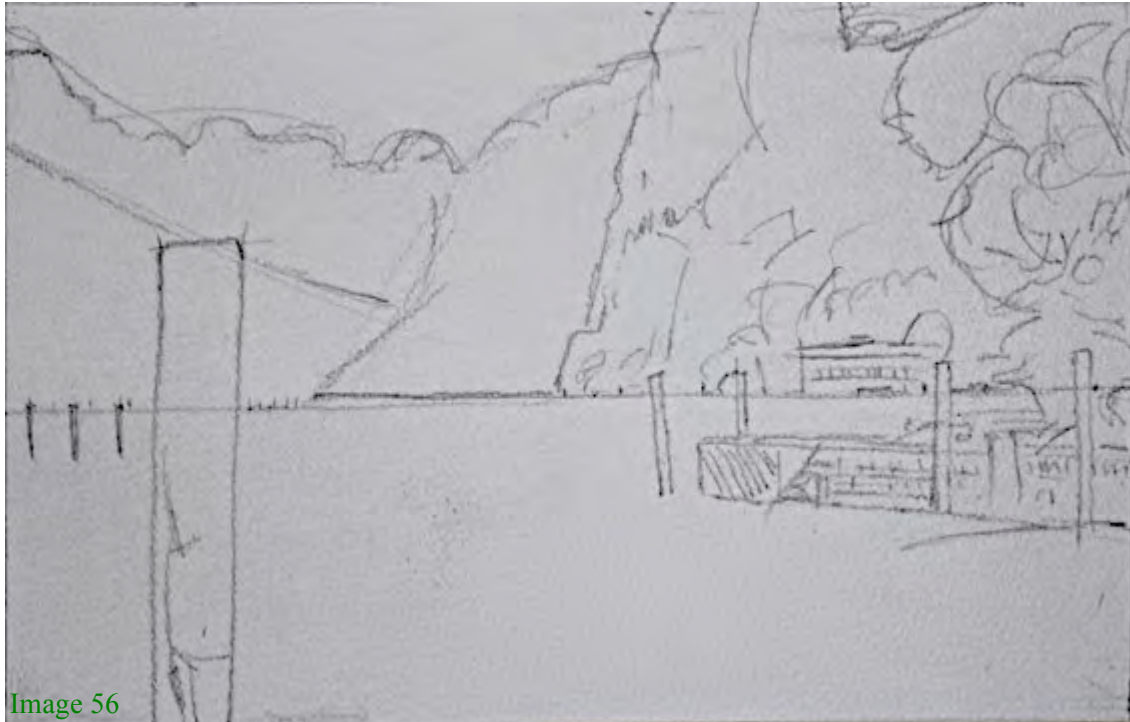
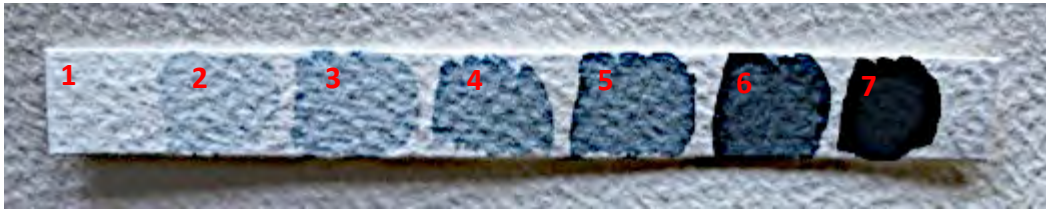


Image 56

Value 1 is the bare paper. Before you begin painting, it's important to think about which areas you want to keep unpainted, to act as your lightest value.

The lightest values in my painting will be the clouds and sparkles on the water. For the clouds, we'll be lifting paint out with a paper towel to get back towards value 1, so we don't need to worry about those. For the reflections, I could use masking fluid but for the purposes of this demonstration, I'm going to try leaving areas unpainted.

2. Adding Value No. 2

Image 57



Using the lightest value of Paynes grey (value no. 2), start at the top-left of the sky. I'm using my 1 inch flat brush here.

Image 58



While the wash in the sky is still damp, lift out the clouds with a soft paper towel. You can watch a video lesson on lifting out in the [Watercolour Foundation Course](#) – available 24/7 to all ArtTutor members.

Image 59



I've covered all areas of the picture with value no. 2, not just the sky. See how this instantly sets up the impact of the reserved paper? I used a dry brush effect to leave these areas unpainted.

It is worth taking time with this step, as although it's a simple stage, once the whites are carefully established, they will be easier to see and preserve later on.

3. Adding Value No. 3



Using a stronger mix of Paynes grey (around value no.3) paint over the sky preserving the white of the clouds. Don't cover the entire sky with this allow some areas of value no.2 to show through.



Image 61

Again, bring this wash of value no.3 all the way down through the painting. You can use a dry brush technique again, to further enhance the sparkle on the water. Don't cover all those areas of blank paper though!

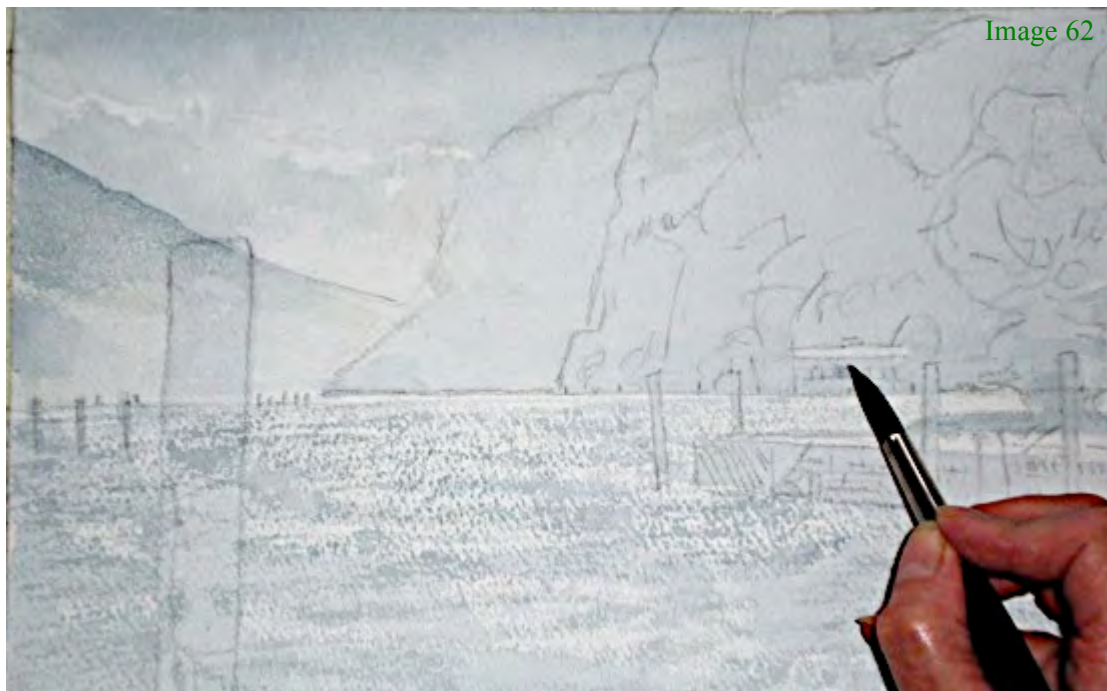


Image 62

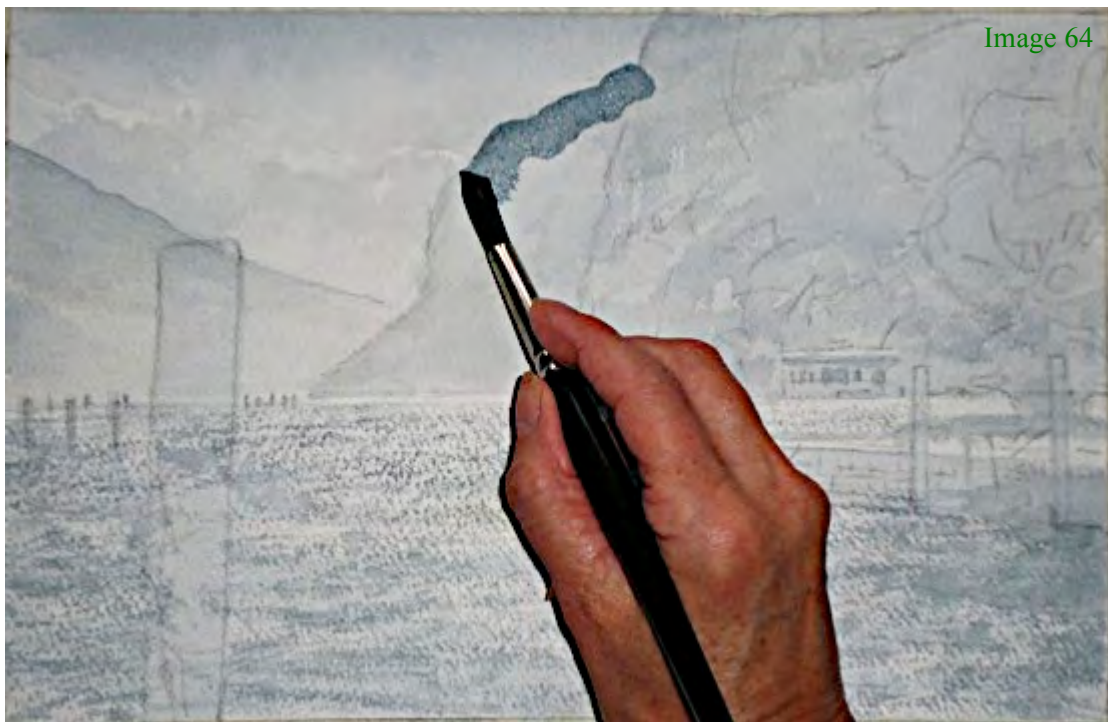
The painting looks very messy at this stage. But don't worry! Everything will come together when we begin to add the darker values.

4. Adding Value No. 4



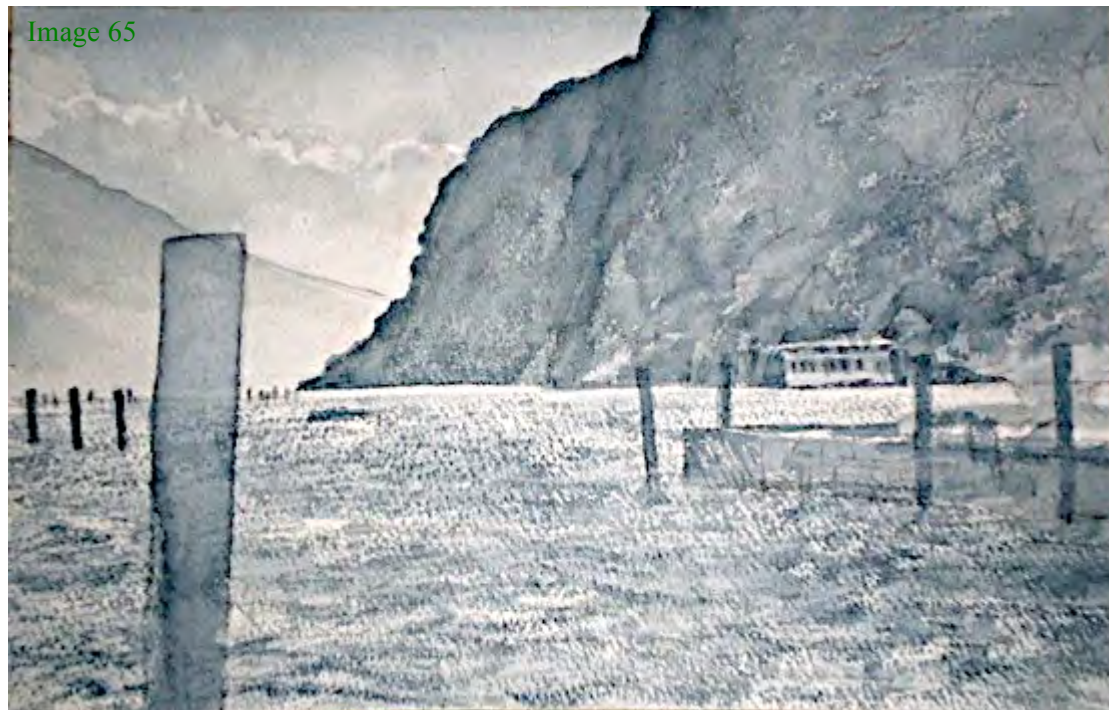
I've repeated step 3 with a darker value, about no. 4. The painting looks quite dark here but this photograph was taken while the paint was still quite damp. Remember, watercolour will dry back quite lightly, as you'll see in the next photo...

5. Adding Value No. 5



Now the paint mix is about half way in value between our lightest and darkest values. This is the time to paint the middle mount in the mid-distance, which will push back the furthest mountain.

This value has also been used to paint the building, jetty, middle-distance poles and smoothed down the water in the foreground.



6. Adding Value No. 6



Starting with the foreground pole, a rich mix of the Paynes grey and a little water is used to paint the deep values and also bring up small details. It isn't until this stage that everything starts coming together, and previous values that looked messy start to make sense.

7. Adding Value No. 7

As we are working only with Paynes grey and water, the strongest mix possible is going to act as our black. I'm using it almost neat here, with just enough water to make the paint workable.

Image 67



Notice again how the painting has dried considerably lighter than in stage 6.

Value 7 is used over everything that is really dark and the time to refine the small areas, breaking up shapes that have been blocked together by their common tonal value.

Let's see the final the image...



You can see in the final painting that all the values from the white of the paper to the strongest darks have layered the landscape to produce depth and distance. The dominance of the darks and the scale of the poles have created a scene of great drama and beauty.

Lake Garda by Glynis Barnes-Mellish

If you've completed this monochrome study by Glynis and my Stalker Castle exercise from earlier, you should start to feel really comfortable identifying and reproducing solid value contrast. Just as importantly...

Actually *doing* these exercises will help the concept sink in and become second nature. Reading about it isn't enough; I really encourage you to go through these two exercises before moving on to colour. Which is what we'll look at next...

SECTION 4 – COLOUR EXERCISES

Look at this image of a red and yellow square next to each other...

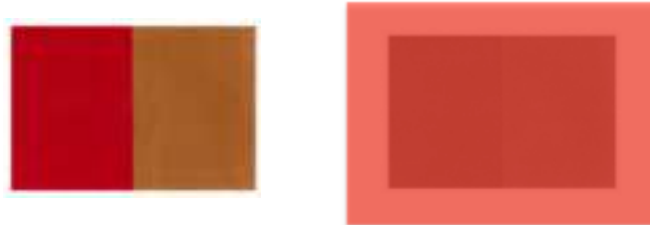


Image 70

In colour, these two squares are easily distinguished from one another. However, if I hold a red piece of acetate over them (my redevye filter) you can see how they merge into one solid block almost.

You might ask the question “*when would I ever view a painting through a red piece of plastic*” and you wouldn’t. But even though an observer’s eye might be able to distinguish between the various shapes in your picture, it will look flat and anaemic.

Moreover, standing at even a moderate distance from a painting has an effect of muting the colours and I’ll guarantee that a picture made up of similar values will look uninspiring at best, from any sort of viewing distance!

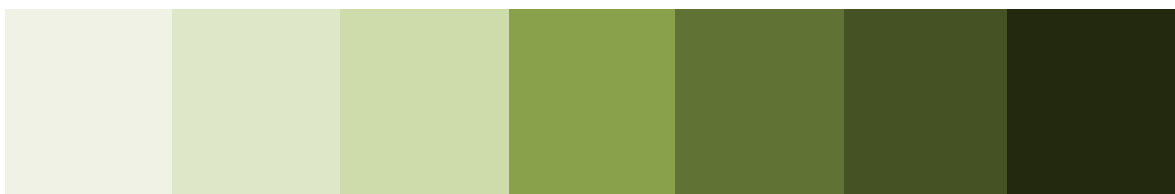
4.1 Exercise 1 – Value match real objects

This is a simple and fun exercise and also very useful at training your eye to see the tonal value in colour.

What you’ll need:

- 3 everyday objects. Anything small that you can place on the desk in front of you. In my example I’m using a lemon, a tea cup and a golf tee peg.
- Your chosen painting surface, paints and brush of choice.
- A grey or monochrome scale (a colour scale will provide more of a challenge than a grey scale, so give that a go!)

Image 71



Step 1

- Place one of the objects in front of you.
- Look at the object and squint / defocus your eyes.
- Notice the values of various parts of the object – the shadow areas, any creases or folds, highlights, indentations, details etc.
- Identify in your mind the darkest value and the lightest value.
- Hold your grey / monochrome scale against various parts of the object to confirm the values.
- Repeat this for each of your 3 objects.

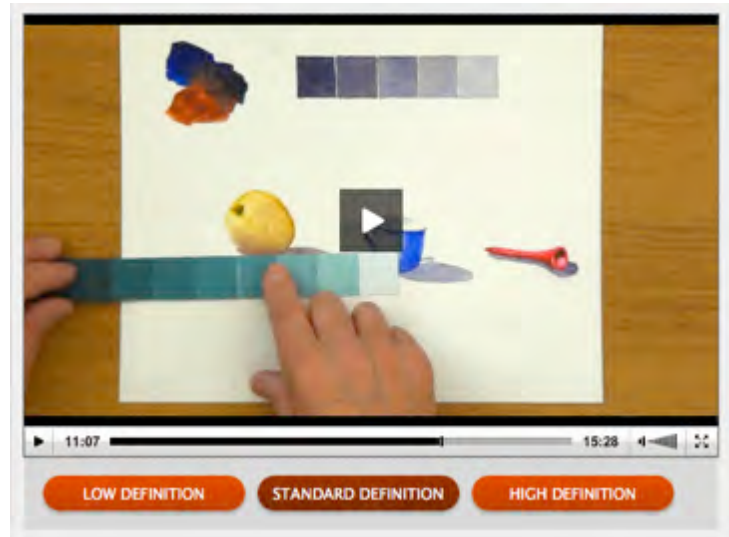


Image 72

Step 2

- Pick the darkest part of one of the objects. For example, I'm looking at the pith at the end of the lemon.
- Mix a colour that you think is the correct value for this darkest area. Don't worry about getting a perfect colour match; your aim is to get an accurate value match.
- Add a swatch of your mixed colour to your paper or canvas (if you're using watercolours, allows this to dry fully).
- Now use your grey / monochrome scale to see how accurate you were.
- Repeat this for the lightest part of the object.
- Repeat a third time for a mid value.
- Finally, repeat the process for the remaining two objects.

This is a great exercise for quickly honing your eye to see the strength of value in various colours. Don't paint the objects in full - there's a danger you'll get caught up in the detail and it's time consuming. Just paint 3-4 patches of colour on your painting surface for each object, and measure. This way, you get cram in lots of learning experiences in a short period of time!

4.2 Exercise 2 – Full colour painting: Bullring at Lucca

It's time to move on to a full watercolour painting!

If you've diligently followed the exercises so far, this could be one of the most vibrant, striking watercolours you've ever painted.

Image 73



We've deliberately chosen a scene that gives you plenty of opportunity to use strong value – the Bullring in Lucca in the height of summer. If the range between the darkest dark and lightest light is too narrow, you won't capture that sense of intense sunlight.

So let me hand you over once again to Glynis Barnes-Mellish, who'll take you through this painting step-by-step.

What you'll need:

- A sheet of watercolour paper, approximately A3. I'm using a cold pressed surface, 200lbs/320gsm weight).
- Cerulean blue, cobalt blue, cadmium red, yellow ochre, alizarin crimson, cadmium yellow, burnt sienna, burnt umber.
- A selection of brushes. I'm using a 1 inch flat, $\frac{3}{4}$ inch, $\frac{1}{2}$ inch flat, $\frac{1}{4}$ inch flat, No. 14 round, No. 8 round.
- A scrap piece of watercolour paper to test the value of washes.
- A printout of the next 4 pages of this e-book, which contains the line drawing (split over 2 pages) and reference photos.
- A monochrome scale.

Final painting and reference photograph

The final painting is split over 2 pages and will fit on to an A3 piece of watercolour paper. You can trace this on to your watercolour paper or use a grid method to scale up or down.

Monochrome Scale

Create your scale on a scrap of watercolour paper, which ranges from blank paper (white) to an almost undiluted, neat mix in 7 steps.

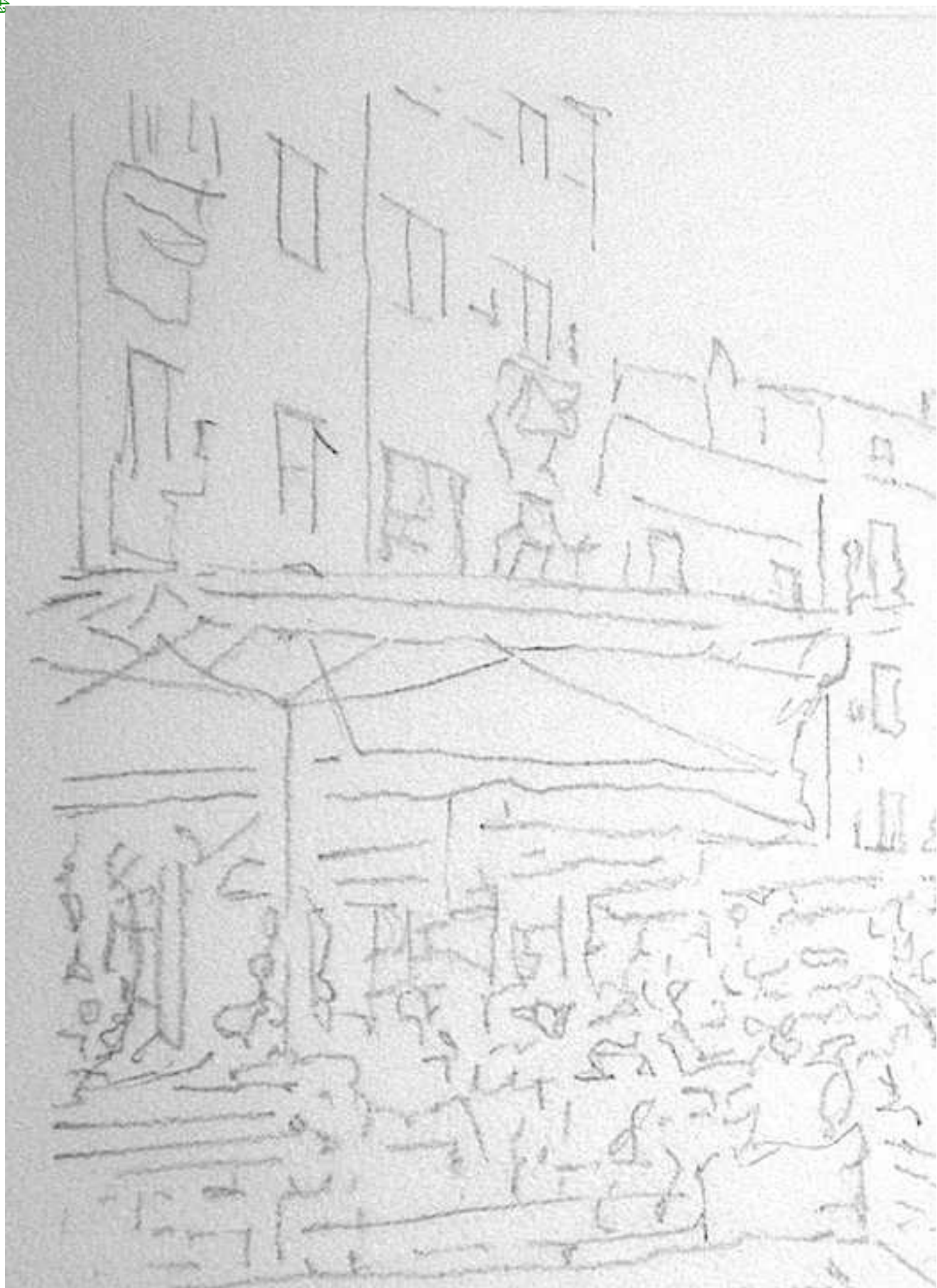




Image 75



Image 76



Mix a wash of pure cerulean blue for the sky area...



It's important to test your wash on a scrap of watercolour paper before you apply to your painting. Measure the value using your monochrome scale and compare it to the value on the reference photograph or my final painting (I'd prefer you use only the reference photograph as that will help better train your eye).

Don't forget colour shift!

Remember that watercolour paint dries lighter (up to 30-50% lighter depending on the strength of wash). If your wash, when it's still wet on the paper, looks the correct value when it's wet, it's going to dry too light.

Image 78



I've taken this first sky wash right across the right-hand buildings that will be in shadow. Now the sky is given a second level value using cobalt blue. This darker value will help bring the tall building forward...

Image 79



Use a mix of yellow ochre & a touch of alizarin to give the buildings warmth in the sunlight...

Image 80



Image 81



This wash goes over all the buildings and areas that are in shadow. The white of the paper is left as value 1...

Image 82



With a stronger mix of yellow ochre and cadmium yellow, value 2 is used to push back the buildings that are in shadow...

Image 83



Image 84



Mix together alizarin crimson and cobalt blue to make a soft mauve for under the umbrella – about a value 2 on my scale...

Image 85



A similar tonal value (no. 2) can be used to start adding some of the oranges and greens in the foreground...

Image 86



Now the bright colours can go in mixed to a level 3 value. I'm starting by strengthening the yellow ochre mix on the right and I'll look to balance this value with brighter, stronger colours in the near foreground to the left...

Image 87



Image 88



In the next photograph, notice how the values have dried lighter. I'm now to add a stronger value (about no. 4) for the shutters and some bright cadmium yellows under the umbrella. The shutter colour is made by mixing cadmium yellow and cerulean blue...

Image 89



Continuing with value 4, I use cadmium red, cadmium yellow and cobalt blue to describe the details of the cafes...

Image 90



Image 91



Moving on to value 5, use burnt sienna to paint the roofs and the mid tones in the seating areas on the street...



Image 92

Now we can see the need to strengthen the shadows on the buildings with a wash of cadmium yellow & alizarin crimson...



Image 93

We are now at value 6. Mix burnt umber with cobalt blue to darken it sufficiently. This is used to paint the darker parts of the roofs and all the details that are not nearly black in value...

Image 94



Value 7, the darkest value, is a mix of burnt umber and cobalt blue. Use it to paint the umbrella spokes, doorways & window shutter detail...

Image 95



Image 96



The Bullring at Lucca by Glynis Barnes-Mellish.

So there you have it. Notice how it's not until the very final application of the darkest darks that the painting comes to life.

Please do give this painting by Glynis a go. If you're a member of ArtTutor.com, why not add your attempt to the watercolour forum? We'd love to see it and you'll be sure to get plenty of encouraging feedback from like-minded artists who've followed this e-book like you.

SECTION 5 – BONUS VALUE TIPS

If you've read this far (and followed along), you'll have a greater practical understanding of tonal value than 99% of all leisure artists!

There are just a couple of principles remaining that I'd like to cover, to complete your understanding.

5.1 Abrupt and transitional value contrast

Let's go back to our grey scale for a moment...

The range of values is wide – one end is white, the other end is almost black. If we take a square close to one end and place it next to a square close to the other end, the contrast between those two is very strong and abrupt (Image 97). In other words, one value finishes and the other starts.



Image 97

This abrupt value contrast is useful for describing angular shapes, with definite sides and strong lines - like a box for example. Stalker Castle in our earlier exercise is a good example.

But not all objects are so angular. Take the obvious example of a ball or sphere.

We still need to make good use of contrasting values to make the sphere look 3-dimensional and solid. The underside of the sphere and cast shadow will be quite a strong value, whilst the highlight will be a very light value.

However, you can see that there needs to be a subtle transition from darks to mid-tones to lights. If any of the steps up or down in value are obvious to the eye or abrupt (as they are with a grey scale for example), the effect of a smooth, round object will be lost.



Image 98

Don't mistake this soft transition for a narrow range of values. The range from darkest dark to lightest light still needs to be adequate to make the object look solid.

Image 99



Spheres aren't the only objects that require a soft transition of values. One of the everyday items I see a lot of hobby artists struggle with is clothing and fabric...

Rendering Fabric

When I see a pencil drawing of fabric that a student isn't happy with, it's either because the folds in the material don't have strong enough lights and darks (good value contrast), or the transition (blending) isn't gradual and subtle enough – it looks like a series of shapes rather than soft folds.

Look at this photo of a coat sleeve (Image 100). Note the subtle transition from lights to darks and how the shadows and the lights in the folds - especially next to the stitching – help to tell the viewer that the material is soft and undulating.



Image 100

Now look at Image 101 of this sleeve. Yes, the general shape and perspective is fine and some lights and darks exist, but limited use of value contrast means the image is insipid and flat looking. The weak attempt at shadows actually looks more like abstract shapes printed on the material than folds in the cloth.



Now in Image 102 we have made more use of value contrast with some better light and shade, especially around the cuff and the stitching.

However, we're still left with those abstract, meaningless shapes that are supposed to represent folds in the material, defined by light and shadows. To make the folds and creases in the cloth look believable, the trick is to create a much more subtle and gradual transition from light to dark, which will immediately suggest soft cloth.



In Image 103, I've started to blend those light and dark areas on the top left of the sleeve to achieve the **gentle transitions**, using a putty eraser and a torchon. See how the initial blending of shades and lifting out of highlights has already improved things considerably?

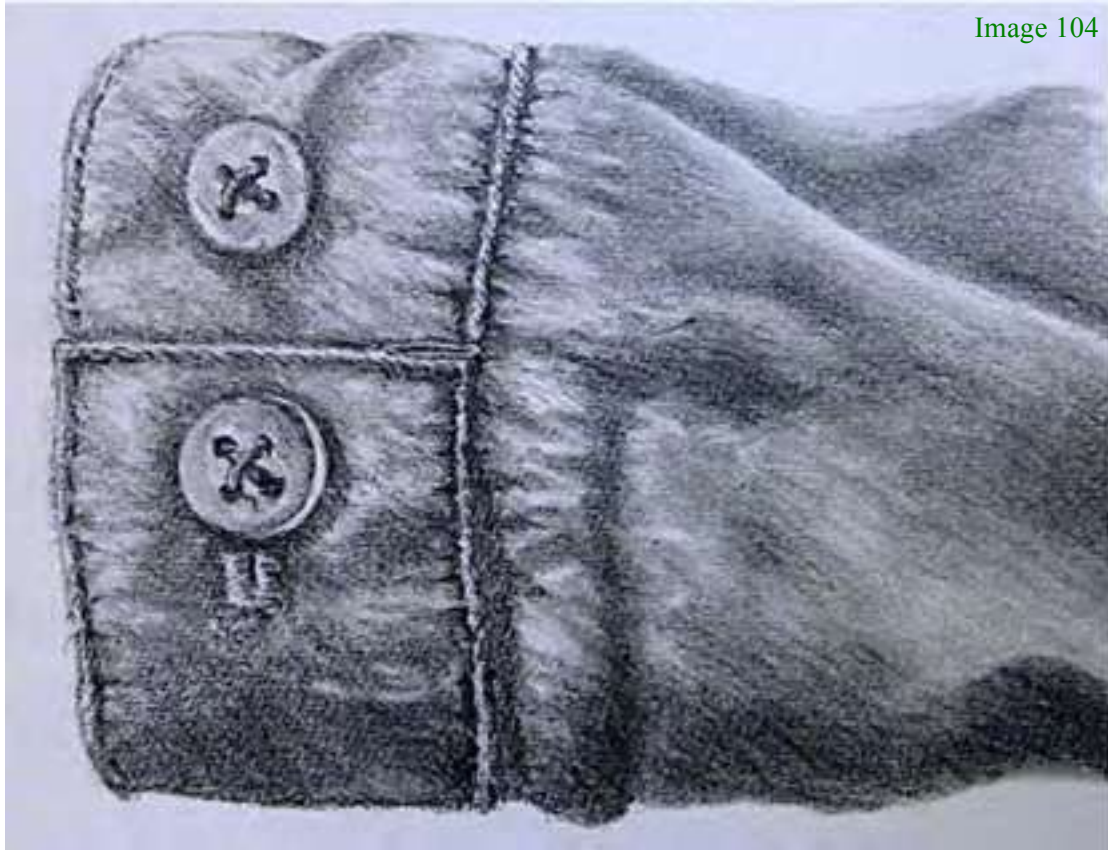


If you haven't got a torchon, use a cotton bud or the corner of a folded tissue. You can use any sort of eraser but the putty version allows you to tear small pieces from it and shape them into fine wedges or points.

Remember, the simple rule with value contrast is that, normally, soft transitions mean round and/or soft material. Sharp, well-defined changes from light to dark generally mean angular and/or hard surfaces.

Finally, in Image 104 we've completed this exercise and even though it's a relatively quick example, you can see the difference compared to Images 101 and 102.

Image 104



At first it'll probably take you time to create a pleasing blend of lights and darks as you develop the skill in getting these transitions just right. However, do keep going. It's enormously satisfying re-creating even a simple subject like this with all the subtle value changes.

So whatever your chosen medium, think about how either abrupt or transitional value contrast will help to create a believable rendition of the object you're capturing.

5.2 Counter change

Understanding what counterchange is and then how to use it in your picture, really is a significant key to a successful painting or drawing.

Simply put, counterchange in art means placing a dark value object or area next to a lighter one, or vice versa, so that they both stand out against each other.

Look at these photos of Bamburgh Castle in Northumberland, England...

Image 105



In Image 105 above we have a very stark example of counterchange – or dark against light – with the castle in silhouette against a bright evening sky. There's no doubt where the castle ends and the sky starts, is there?

Now look at the Image 106 (below) of the same scene. Still pretty good counterchange between the castle and sky because the light stone is still darker than the sky area.

However, look at the walls and grassy slopes on the left of the castle. Because they're all in shadow, their definition is much less clear and if you screw your eyes up, it's not as easy to see where the walls finish and the slopes begin. This is because the tonal strength of these areas is quite similar, even though they're different colours.

Image 106



If you were painting this picture you may want to adjust the values to the left of the castle, to make sure that the relevant areas stand out where necessary. Or, perhaps not...

You could leave the value strength as it is, if you decide that you want this area of the picture to be less obvious - quieter if you like - to put the focus on the main part of the castle. And that's so important.

Of course, you'll want to paint more than just silhouettes of castles and inevitably, most parts of any picture do not want or need a high contrast throughout. So counterchange needs to be thought of rather like the grey scale. It's light against dark, sure, but it can be subtle or fierce.

Image 107



Remember, strong counterchange, i.e. the darkest dark next to the lightest light (say Value 1 next to Value 7 on our grey scale) will immediately draw the viewer's eye to that area and artists over the centuries have used this knowledge to create their focal points with this high contrast technique.

Gentler counterchange (say a Value 2 next to a Value 4) still defines adjacent shapes but might be used near the edge of a picture or anywhere where you don't want high contrast.

Think of a picture as the cast in a theatre. You have the leading man and lady as the focal point and the supporting cast who, whilst not the centre of attention, play a vital role by their relative anonymity, in highlighting the main players. Important as the leading actors are, without that supporting cast, they would make no impact at all.

So in a painting, the high value counterchange (the star of the show) is going to give you a strong focal point with real impact – but only if the supporting cast, i.e. the more mundane, quieter areas of the picture are thought through and in their proper place as well.



Image 108

In Image 108 of a bi-plane, we have both strong and gentle counterchange. The strong, red colour of the plane, broken by the white stripes, gives us intense counterchange - the darkest dark against lightest light - and leaves us in no doubt that it is the star of the show. However, the light but varied colours in the clouds provide a much gentler counterchange, especially when set against the slightly stronger blue sky behind the plane.

Let's look at one or two more examples of simple counterchange...

In Image 109 below, a monochrome watercolour of Cockley Beck in the English Lake District, notice how the tree *trunk* is quite light against the dark background immediately above the bridge...



Image 109

Yet the upper branches have been painted quite dark so they stand out against the moonlit sky. You wouldn't see a tree in nature that has a light bottom half and a dark top half! But until it's pointed out, most viewers won't even notice the change – it *looks* natural. As with the tree, you can do exactly the same with fence posts, telegraph poles, ships masts and so on.

Other areas in this picture worth noting are the snow-covered roof against the darker hillside, the snowy area helping the two walkers to stand out, and the dark stone bridge against the snowy banks. It's also interesting to point out that the bridge, though dark underneath, has a snow covering along the top layer of stones to help define it against the dark trees in the background.

Now what happens when you have adjacent areas where two or more of them are the same value? How do you define them without it looking contrived?

Well, this is where the benefit of being an artist as opposed to a photographer kicks in! As the artist you have the freedom to adjust things to make the picture work, where a photographer might have to resort to filters and other devices to create counterchange.

Image 110



In Image 110 of a stag in the Scottish Highlands, you can see if you screw up your eyes that his coat is, tonally, a similar value to the background hills, especially around the centre of his body. However, I've 'invented' a muted light from the left as an excuse to lighten off the rear end and top of his body, thus making it considerably paler against the distant Glen.

At the same time I've added shadow to his chest so now the front of his body is much darker than the hills, not only defining him against the background, but pushing the hills into their proper place in the distance. More importantly it gives him a foreground impact and clearly, the focal point of the picture.

But do you see that even though the rear, middle and front of his body are very different values, he 'looks' right and the light and shade have given him that vital three-dimensional form.

However, let me re-emphasise the really important bit here...

Using value contrast and counterchange shouldn't be regarded as merely a technique. It's as important to apply value judgments to all areas of your pictures as it is to know what the subject of your painting is going to be before you start.

Applying value judgments to every part of your picture must become second nature to you. Ideally, you will plan this before you pick up the brush, but more often than not, you need to adjust value and counterchange slightly as you progress through the painting.

Without developing this state of mind, your pictures will always lack that impact, that ‘punch’, that certain ‘something’ that lifts it from ‘OK’ to a minor masterpiece you can justifiably be proud of.

Remember, you’re the artist. It’s your picture and you decide how much emphasis you put on each part of the picture, using as much or as little counterchange - value judgment - light against dark - call it what you will - as you want or need.

It doesn’t matter *how* you do it – as long as you do!

Bob.

P.s. we put lots of tips, inspiring images and short videos on our Facebook page and elsewhere. If you’d like to follow us here’s how...

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