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ARTIST NEWSLETTER

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2024 Online Workshops
Workshop 2, Watercolor
with Tin Bejar available now

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by Layne Johnson

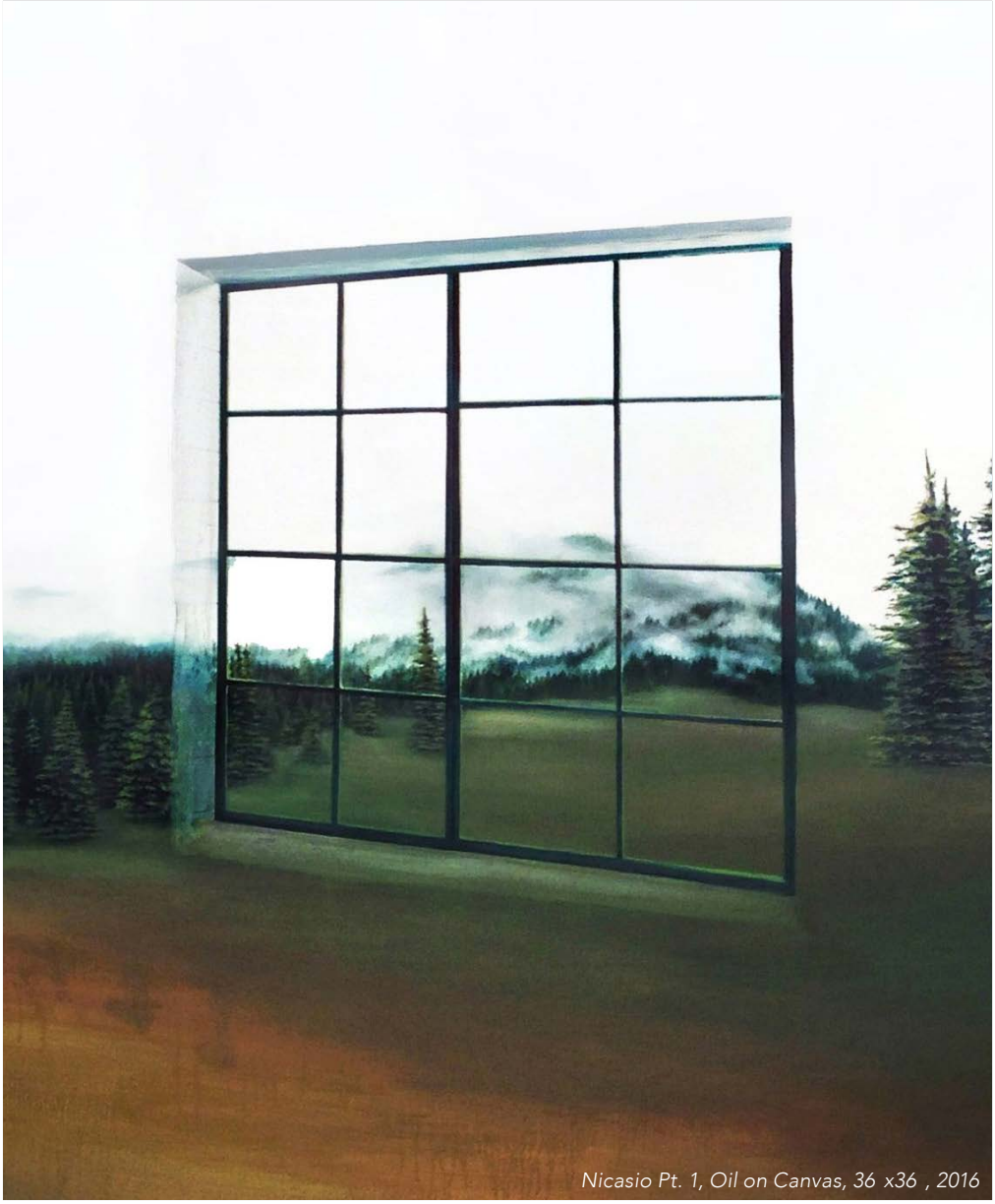
Artist Spotlight
Strathmore Ambassador
Sofia Pavan Macias

Limited Color Palettes
By Sarah Becktel

MAIN FEATURE

Finding Your Hand

By Sara Gallagher



Nicasio Pt. 1, Oil on Canvas, 36 x36 , 2016

You know that unique quality in someone's work that allows you to instantly recognize that it was made by a particular artist? Some may call it style, a focus, or even a brand… but I like to call it the artist's "hand". It embodies a certain consistency, clear and felt, channeling an inner sensibility unique to that artist alone. In their work, there is an inherent knowing, a clear fact that all of that art was made from the same place. The same artist. The same hands.

Now, how does one's artistic hand come to be? In my experience, the discovery of my hand came through three key practices: self-guided exploration; finding mentorship; and deeply clarifying my artistic mission, my "why".

continued

Phase 1: Self-Guided Exploration

The first step to refining one's hand is exploration. Self-guided, ongoing education is key for anyone experiencing a little artistic uncertainty (often showing up as inconsistency), feeling completely stuck in the mud, or simply lit up by the spark of curiosity - an inner pull for something more. Playing with new mediums or techniques alone in your studio along with participation in group art classes feels critical in this phase. These two environments - the solo and the communal - tend to feed off one another, serving as both inspiration and key indicators about what does and does not work for you - and your hand - in the studio.

Nicasio Pt. 2, Oil on Canvas, 20"x20", 2018

October 2017, Oil on Canvas, 40"x20", 2017

In a group studio environment, you get to see how individualized everyone's art truly is. You get to learn what excites you, what doesn't really do it for you, and experience the impact your work is having on others in real-time. Receiving thoughtful critique (from trusted sources) is essential. Collecting all of this information and bringing that back into the studio is often where magic can really start to happen. This is where you first start to hone in on what makes your art yours. This is the launching point in refining your hand.

Phase 2: Hone it by Finding Yourself a Mentor

Once you've narrowed the scope of your artistic focus in either a technical or conceptual way, you have a real opportunity. From here you can refine your craft and truly shape it into something that embodies you, speaks to your values, and sets the stage for creative expression you can truly stand behind and be proud of. It's in this secondary phase, after you've identified how you'd like to refine your art practice, that it's time to invest in your craft in pointed ways. For me, this took shape in the form of becoming a mentee. Finding a well-established professional in my chosen field to work with one-on-one was hands down the single most impactful moment in developing my hand. This, in turn, created a foundation for my own professional art career. *(Quick shout out to Dirk Dzimirsky, my mentor, for supporting me in this way – THANK YOU!)*

continued

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Working with a mentor, to me, felt like my own version of grad school. (Without the student loans or painfully long reading lists…) I was able to be incredibly specific about the technical questions I had, the conceptual ideas I wanted to explore, and discuss the unending complexity that is the landscape of our beloved, ever-elusive Fine Art World. Beyond the time I had with my mentor, it was all the hours surrounding our sessions together that orchestrated my hand. Experts can talk to you all day long, but if you don't put in the time to actually do the hard work yourself, it won't translate to much in the long run. The time and practice that one invests into their work (practical, technical, emotional, and mental) to learn, explore, and then implement within their artistic practice is monumental. It's the game-changer.

Dzimirksy Workshop Drawing, Graphite on Paper, 11"x15", 2019

*Important side note: if at this point in time, you are unable to afford private mentorship but are truly ready to hone your craft, I have a two-step suggestion that I promise will still make a difference:

1. Find a couple of individuals you would love to work with as a mentee - and maybe you will when you have the funds! - but in the meantime: study their career. Do a deep dive into their website, their social media, residencies they've attended, their past publications, etc. There is so much one can learn about researching the path of someone who has successfully made it to a place you yourself are hoping to reach. Respect the hard work and effort they've done, and note if there is anywhere along their journey that speaks to you and is feasible to start with yourself. Then, go for it. Enter the shows. Submit the grant requests. Do the online tutorial videos. Put yourself out there. Do the work.

> *"Make time for this. Stick to it. Start with an easy commitment to yourself, and grow it over time."*

2. Carve out the time. Studio time includes technical practice as well as: thinking; moving your body; navigating your concepts big or small; and/or doing whatever you need to do to explore the important areas of yourself and use your medium as your excavator. Make time for this. Stick to it. Start with an easy commitment to yourself, and grow it over time. Finding your hand requires action. It's challenging and rewarding at the exact same time. You've got this!

Inside, Graphite on Paper, 5"x4.5", 2019

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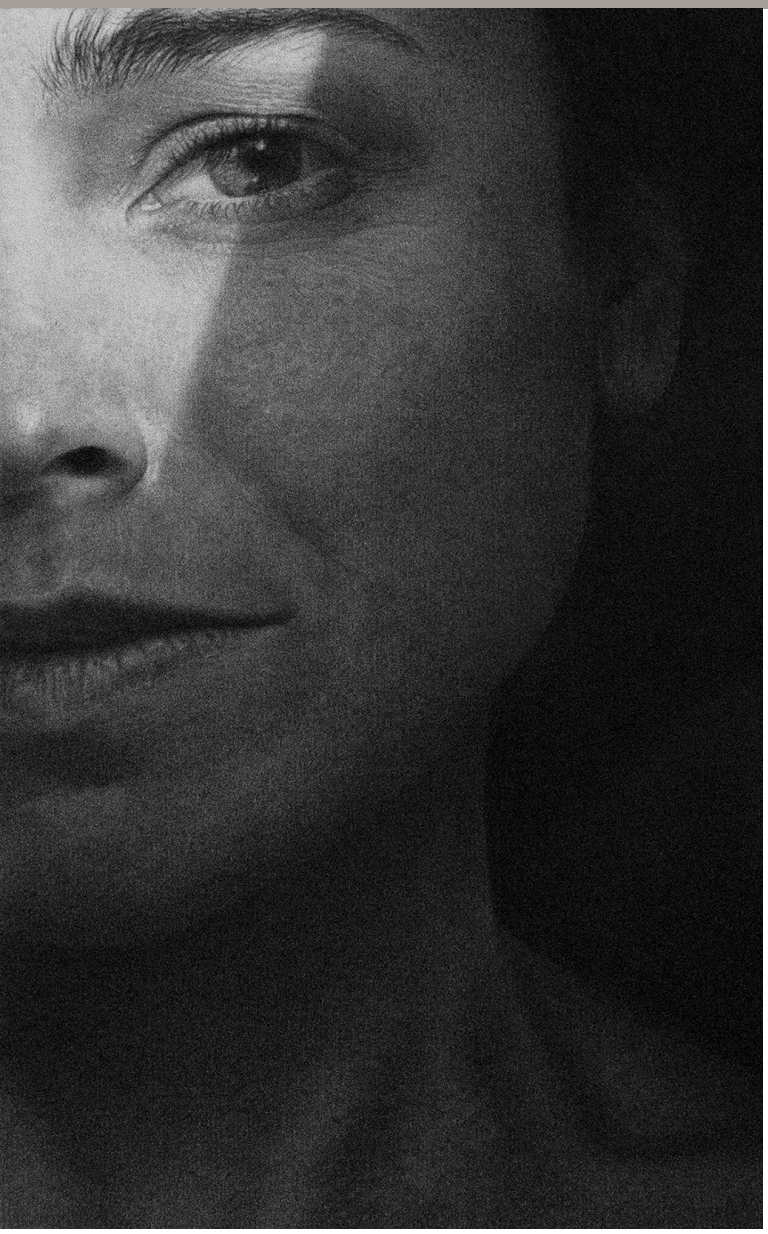

Shadowed, Graphite on Paper, 7.5"x12", 2019

Now With You, Graphite on Paper, 13"x16", 2020

Phase 3: Identifying Your Artistic Mission

Here comes the really fun part, folks! In reaching this phase of the process, you have already achieved some incredible milestones. You've identified the medium you love to work in within your art practice. You've spent time with it, refining your technique via expert guidance and understanding your commitment to the work. Now, we get to let it all fall into place.

Your artistic mission is where your hand gets to sing. It's what separates strong technical work from someone with a clear voice, a clear pathway between themselves and the artwork that they produce. It's where you create your work consistently from a place of groundedness and integrity.

> *"So long as you are connected to yourself and the work, it will speak volumes."*

Beginning to Bare, Graphite on Paper, 20"x16", 2020

Just because that sounds lofty, it doesn't have to be. An artistic mission can be something simple. So long as you are connected to yourself and the work, it will speak volumes. Going back to Phase 1, it's not coming from a place of uncertainty (read: disjointed). An artistic mission can be very, very simple - so long as it is true to who you are and brings you fulfillment. Tie that with your technical understanding of your medium, and there it is. Your hand, it's singing. (Can you hear it?!)

For me personally, my artistic mission came about when I realized that I wanted my work to directly involve other people. I am a community-oriented individual who is impassioned by a generally isolating career as a studio artist. So, I found a way to bring community into my studio practice. Rooted in my genuine curiosity and empathy for other people, my artistic mission is to help break social taboos around mental and emotional health. I do that by inviting individuals to come and share their emotional experiences with me. To discuss, connect, heal - and actively break those taboos together one conversation at a time. These individuals then pose for me in my reference photos, centralizing them in the compositions of my larger narrative works. When the drawing has been completed, it is released to the world paired with a statement and a question directed back to the viewers inviting them to engage in the conversation again, essentially perpetuating the healing work we started with that first conversation in the studio.

Outside, Graphite on Paper, 22"x24", 2020

This clear mission and method of working is the thread that ties all of my work together. It gives my technically advanced drawings a spark beyond the surface of the paper. It's across these narratives that my hand truly shines.

A Night Out, Graphite and Pastel on Paper, 20"x28", 2022

Phase 4: Return to the Phases at any Point in Time

Phase four is less of a phase and more of a simple yet very important reminder to have grace for yourself while navigating your own artistic journey. Just like our creativity, there is no true stopping point.

For instance, a couple of years after I honed my graphite skills and developed my artistic mission, I went back to Phase 1 to explore how I could incorporate color into my otherwise grayscale drawings. After exploring for months, I finally developed my unique graphite and pastel technique, moving then into Phase 2 to really hone it in.

What Once Was Yours, Graphite an Pastel on Paper, 20"x25", 2022

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This included identifying something as seemingly simple as what kind of cloth to blend with, to the critical choice paper for this unique application in particular (*Strathmore 500 Series Bristol Vellum*, by the way - it has the perfect amount of tooth).

All of this exploration and clarification was done under my same artistic mission and just made my hand stronger. The trifecta of phases was still intact.

Let Them Fall, Graphite and Pastel on Paper, 23"x30", 2023

So, if at any point in time you are feeling curious about exploring a new medium, perhaps you should hop on back to Phase 1. If you are no longer feeling inspired or impassioned by your mission, revisit Phase 3 and see what feels most aligned with you today. Creativity is fluid. Allow it to be, just remember to stay engaged with the process. Keep doing the work.

Conclusion:

Making art is an extremely courageous thing to do. We dare to enter our inner worlds, be playful in the exploration of external mediums, and are bold enough to share our discoveries with others. If you are reading this as an artist - you are doing absolutely incredible work. Keep at it. Explore, learn, hone it in, share your voice, and let your hand sing. The world needs you.

I can't wait to see what you all are making. If you would like to share what phase you see yourself in today, or what's in your studio currently, please send me an email at inquiries@ *saragallagherartwork.com* - I'd love to hear from you!

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Sara Gallagher is an impassioned artist, musician, and advocate for mental health awareness. Utilizing a mixed media technique that she developed, her drawings are velvety as paint and precise as a sharpened pencil. Her figurative, ethereal, and subtly surreal drawings fall under a genre she calls "Emotional Realism". Each drawing embodies various emotional experiences and aims to provoke reflection, conversations, and ultimately, connection. An internationally acclaimed artist, Sara has received numerous awards, is included in esteemed publications, and is in collections such as the Bennett Collection of Women Realists and the Lunar Codex (where her artwork exists in a time capsule on the Moon). She is represented by CK Contemporary in San Francisco, CA. Sara lives, works, and teaches her mixed media technique out of her home in a redwood grove in the North Bay hills of the SF Bay Area.

Instagram: @saragallagherartwork
Website: saragallagherartwork.com

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Strathmore® ONLINE WORKSHOP SERIES

Join us for Strathmore's **FREE** 2024 Online Workshops!

Strathmore's Online Workshops feature free video lessons and downloadable instructions created by experienced artists. Follow along in the online classroom as instructors guide you through various art topics. After a lesson is released, it remains on the site for viewing the rest of the year.

Share all the fun on *Instagram* and *Facebook* using #StrathmoreWorkshops

Workshops start March 4 and continue through December 31, 2024

NOW OPEN!

WORKSHOP 2

Tropical Botanicals in Watercolor

Instructor: Tin Bejar

This workshop is packed with easy-to-learn techniques perfect for painting tropical botanicals. We'll learn watercolor skills like how to create graded washes in a monochromatic palette, glazing, variegated washes, wet-on-wet, and adding gouache backgrounds.

LEARN MORE & FOLLOW ALONG

WORKSHOP 1

The Beauty and Power of Mixed Media

Instructor:
Georgina Kreutzer

NOW OPEN!

Using a single medium can be limiting, but diversify your toolbox and you have a powerful array of options to render your subjects. This four-part workshop touches on the beauty and power of mixed media to create small, captivating works.

LEARN MORE about Workshop 1

WORKSHOP 3

Drawing Imaginary Scenes in Ink + Color

Instructor:
Sam Gillette

Start Date: August 5, 2024

Using pens, markers, acrylic inks & watercolor washes, you'll learn how to draw 4 magical scenes showcasing misty castles, a cozy greenhouse and more. Sam will detail how he uses perspective, simple line techniques, shading and details to make ink illustrations pop on paper.

LEARN MORE about Workshop 3

WORKSHOP 4

Painting the Seasons with Gouache

Instructor:
Tiinasdiary

Start Date: November 4, 2024

We'll create 4 different gouache paintings through the seasons; spring, summer, autumn, and winter. The most important goal is to have fun painting landscapes, but also learn new techniques, use vibrant colors, and get inspired by the beautiful nature that surrounds us!

LEARN MORE about Workshop 4

Join us for our free workshops at: **strathmoreartiststudio.com**

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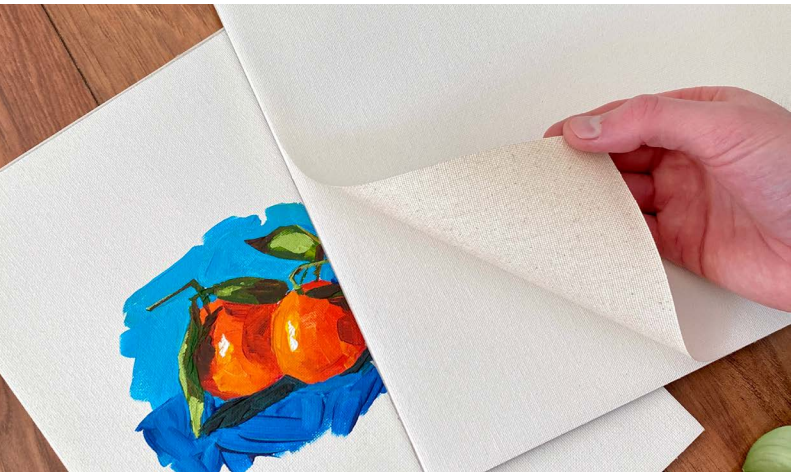
300 SERIES **CANVAS PADS**



Strathmore 300 Series Canvas Pads are a convenient alternative to traditional stretched canvases and panels. Created with plein air painters in mind, these canvas-material sheets are designed to meet the needs of on-location artwork. The compact pads make for easy storage and portability. Excellent for use with acrylic, oil, and water mixable oil paints.

300 Series Canvas Sheet Pads are available in these sizes:

9 x 12"	12 x 16"	16 x 20"	18 x 24"

• 100% cotton canvas • triple primed • medium grain texture • acid free
• 8 oz primed weight • ready-to-use painting surface

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ARTIST how-to series

OIL PAINTING ON CANVAS

With Layne Johnson

Join Artist Layne Johnson in a step-by-step guide to creating realistic landscape oil paintings. Layne starts with the basics, showing you how to use an underpainting to create a foundation for the landscape. The following tutorials cover essential techniques for painting beautiful clouds, creating depth, and adding finishing touches.

SUPPLIES:

Strathmore *300 Series Stretched Canvas*, 36"x36" Gallery Profile

Maimeri Puro Oil Paints

Princeton Oil Painting Brushes: *Catalyst*, *Imperial* and *Aspen*

Lyra Polycrayons Soft

CLICK HERE TO WATCH THE FULL TUTORIAL SERIES & GIVE IT A TRY!

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT
WITH STRATHMORE AMBASSADOR
SOFIA PAVAN MACIAS
ON USING GOUACHE

It's all about the layering. When I started painting with gouache, I quickly gravitated towards layering and I've always loved the process, even when it goes through that 'ugly' stage of looking flat!

Gouache became my fave medium because of its versatility (you can reactivate it with water) but also because of the final matte finish. I just love how with a flat, matte medium you can actually create so much depth and dimension.

Paper: *Strathmore Toned Tan Mixed Media Art Journals, 184lb/300gsm*

What is Goauche?

Gouache is often described as opaque watercolor. While these two mediums have many similarities, gouache differs from watercolor in its quick dry-time and matte finish.

Goauche has a higher pigment content that is ground into larger particles than watercolor. This prevents it from granulating, causing opacity and a matte finish versus the translucent finish of watercolor. The bold, flat, poster-like finish makes it a versatile medium that is excellent for illustration, fine art and lettering.

See more gouache paintings from Sofia:

- *@sofiapavanmacias*
- *sofiapavanmacias.com*
- *sofiapavanmacias*

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USING LIMITED COLOR PALETTES IN WATERCOLOR PAINTING

by Artist Sarah Becktel

What is a Limited Color Palette?

A "limited color palette" means the artist is only using a specific selection of colors; they are "limiting" their color options. There is no set definition for which colors or how many colors constitute a limited palette, but if you're interested in experimenting with limited color palettes in your watercolor painting, a great starting point might be choosing the primary colors: red, yellow, and blue. This is commonly referred to as a primary limited palette.

What are the Advantages of a Primary Limited Palette?

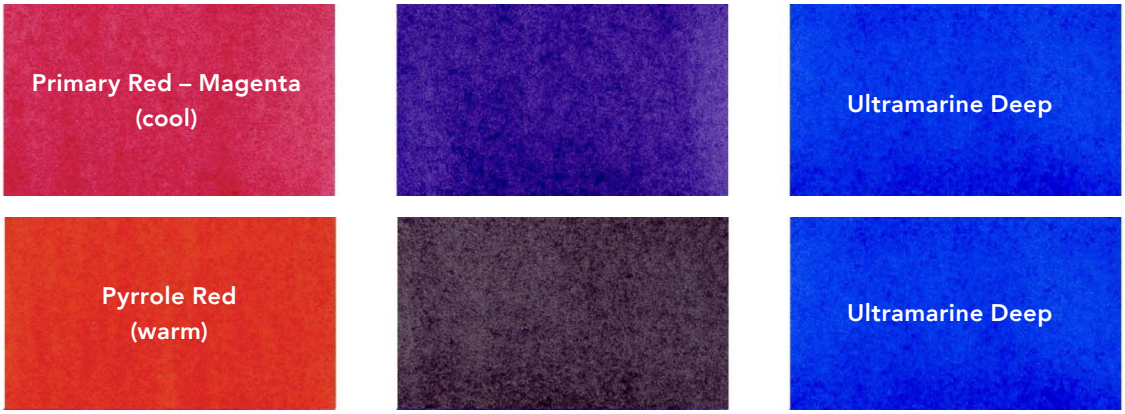
With a primary palette of red, yellow, and blue, artists can mix the secondary colors of orange, green, and purple. Even though your color palette is small, you can still mix all the major color families.

A limited primary palette means all the color mixtures in your painting will come from the same starting point- your red, yellow, and blue. This will give your painting a sense of cohesiveness and unity; all the colors throughout the whole painting will look like they belong together.

How Do I Choose my Primary Colors?

There are so many options of red, yellow and blue to choose from! One important characteristic to consider is the temperature of the primary color: is it "warm" or "cool." A color's temperature is going to have a huge impact on the resulting color mixtures, so it's important to consider whether you want a warm or cool shade of each primary. Below, we have 2 reds: one is "warmer" meaning it has more of a yellow/orange undertone. The other is "cooler," meaning it has more of a blue/purple undertone.

Each of these reds were mixed with the same ultramarine blue, but look how different the resulting purple mixtures are:



READ THE FULL ARTICLE HERE

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