

Whites, Greys and Blacks: Possibilities in Color Mixing

As painters, we use white and black to modify the values of color. A strong value scheme can carry a composition. After all, value is the one characteristic of color that gives us the most visual information. Beyond black and white, however, navigating the spectrum of greys can be invaluable to providing contrast to colors of greater intensity, expressing the mood of the given subject matter, or creating a unified color harmony throughout a painting.

This Studio Note explores the possibilities and usage of Gamblin colors that were formulated with the sole purpose of helping painters navigate the area close to the neutral core of [Color Space](#) – specifically, our unique Warm and Cool Whites, Portland Greys, Colored Greys and Chromatic Black.

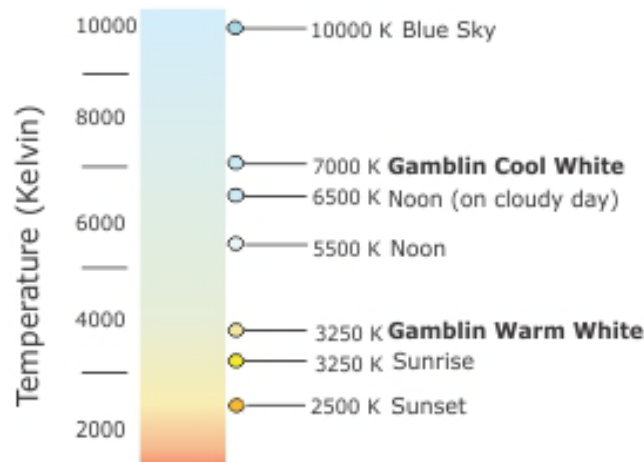
Several colors added to the Gamblin line over the years have come from insights from our studio work and were developed to help painters with issues innate to color mixing. These concepts resulted in colors unique to the Gamblin, such as the Radiant Colors, and the aforementioned Portland Greys, Chromatic Black, and Warm and Cool Whites.

Painting Light

Warm White and Cool White are formulated for painters who want to factor the color of the light into their color mixtures. The color of the light source influences all of the other colors in the painting's subject matter. Using a white that replicates the temperature of your light can create a consistent quality of light and color harmony throughout your painting.



Warm White and Cool White are perfect for painters working in warm and cool light situations, respectively - mimicking the warm light at sunset or the cooler light of mid-day or a north light studio. The graphic below illustrates how the temperature of light changes throughout the day, as well as plots our Warm White and Cool White within this spectrum.



In warm light situations, highlights are warm and shadows become cooler. The opposite happens in cool light situations, where highlights are cool and shadows are warmer by comparison. Below are two paintings, one painted at sunrise, the other at mid-day, which illustrate the value of using Warm and Cool Whites to replicate the quality of light.



Warm White

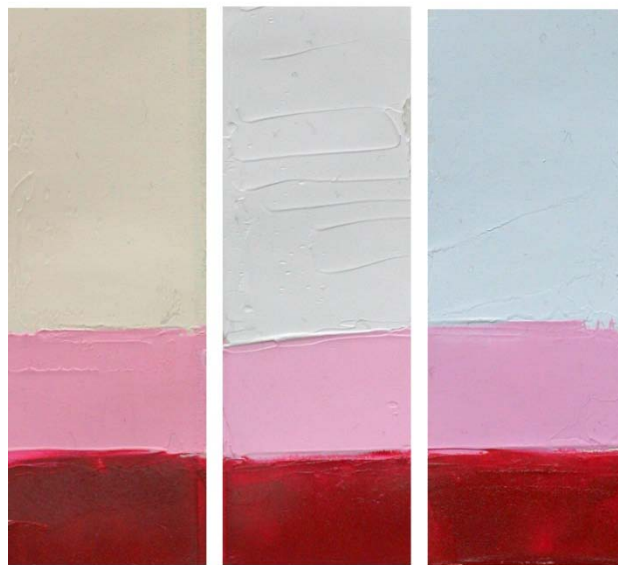


Cool White

Scott Gellatly

Based on our Titanium Zinc White formula, these whites have a perfect balance of yellow, orange and blue pigments to lighten and warm/cool other colors, while maintaining their hue.

Warm White Titanium Zinc White Cool White



Mixed with Quinacridone Red

Florida artist Deborah Elmquist's still life paintings explore the many subtle nuances of white. Objects are placed in fields of white lace and her paintings explore the subtle variations in temperature and value within the limited color range of her subject matter. Deborah lights her studio with warm light, which accentuates the warmth of the aged, yellowed fabric. She uses Gamblin Warm White as her primary white, which perfectly captures the warm highlights in her painting. "It holds the warmth when mixed and does not cool the color or make it chalky like some whites. It glows with a sunlit warmth I'm looking for."

The painting below on the left is dominated by the blue of the vase and similar cool hues weave their way throughout the shadows of the fabric. Deborah balances these cool shadows with warmer areas of light using the Warm White.



Deborah Elmquist

Portland Greys

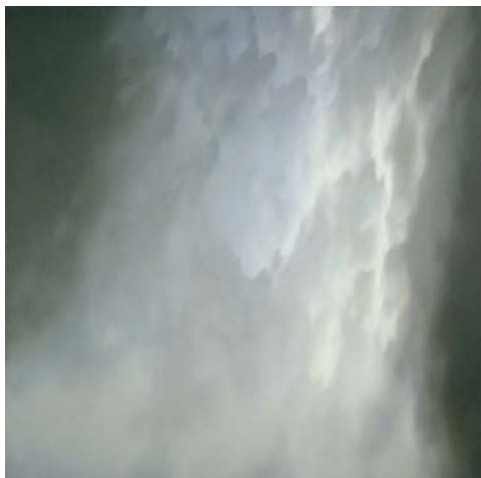
The grey skies of our fair city inspired Robert Gamblin to formulate three Portland Greys – Light, Medium, and Deep. These three neutral greys were developed to help painters quickly adjust the value and chroma of colors.

Portland Grey Light, Medium, and Deep are formulated at Munsell values 8, 6, and 4, respectively. These neutral greys give painters the ability to simultaneously adjust value and reduce the intensity of brighter colors for more naturalistic color mixing. The chart below uses the Portland Greys to complete a full range of values, as well as illustrates their effect on Gamblin Permanent Orange.



Whether mixed into an intense orange, or other high-key colors, using the Portland Greys in color mixing yields predictable, yet very satisfying color mixtures for all genres of painting.

Seattle-based painter and instructor Mitch Albala uses the Portland Greys to neutralize the brighter, purer colors in his palette to create a sense of color harmony and atmosphere in his work. As Albala explains, “colors that might be too dissimilar or discordant in a brighter or more saturated color painting, are calmed down and better able to agree with each other when they are neutralized.”



Mitch Albala

This harmonized, tonal approach to color is evident in Albala's waterfall paintings above, where the subtle shifts in temperature and hue are dictated by the unifying use of grey. Mitch Albala is a prominent blogger and author of the book, [Landscape Painting](#) (Watson-Guipill/Random House, 2009).

Another tip for creating harmony in color mixing: consider using Portland Grey Light in place of white for low-light painting situations.

Beautifully Nuanced, Colored Greys

Our range of Portland Greys is expanded with Portland Warm Grey and Portland Cool Grey, which tilt toward red and blue, respectively.

Over the years, Titanium Buff has been one of the most requested colors from our community of painters. The more Robert and I painted with this color, the more we saw its value as a "yellow-grey." We saw a greater potential for this color as a means to explore the center of the color wheel. As shown below, a triad of muted primary colors is created when Titanium Buff is added to the Portland Warm and Cool Greys. From these three muted primaries, we can mix a range of muted secondaries.



Formulated to work together, these colors give painters a range of "colored greys" for nuanced color mixing. Having a complete range of primary and secondary colored greys can be incredibly valuable for figurative and landscape painting.



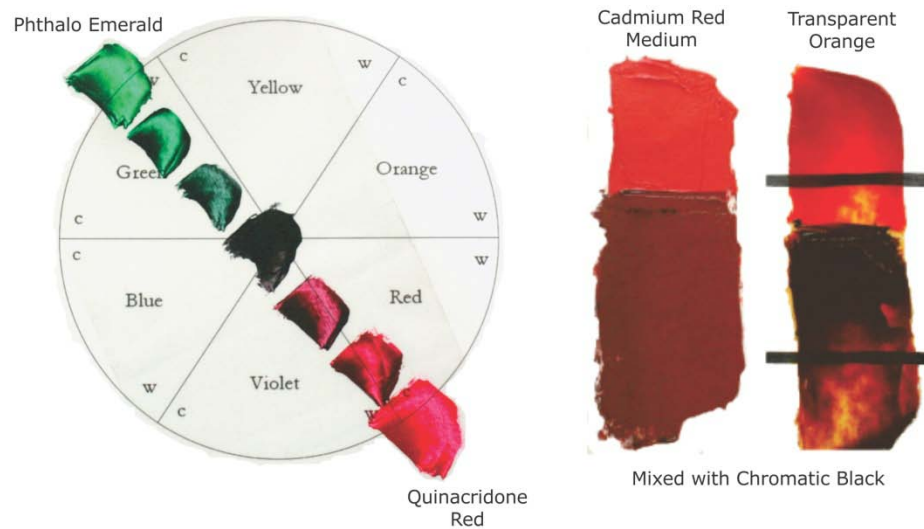
Scott Gellatly

A Unique Black

Many painters choose to mix their own blacks, rather than using black pigments such as Ivory or Mars. Mixed blacks can certainly have more subtle mixing characteristics and relate closer to the rest of the colors in one's palette. Gamblin has taken a very unique approach to the issue of "mixed" blacks.

Gamblin **Chromatic Black** gives painters a neutral, tinting black with energy that doesn't muddy and flatten the colors the way traditional blacks do. Because Chromatic Black is made from two colors that are perfect complements, Quinacridone Red and Phthalo Emerald, it gives painters a dead-center black with life to it and a clean transparency.

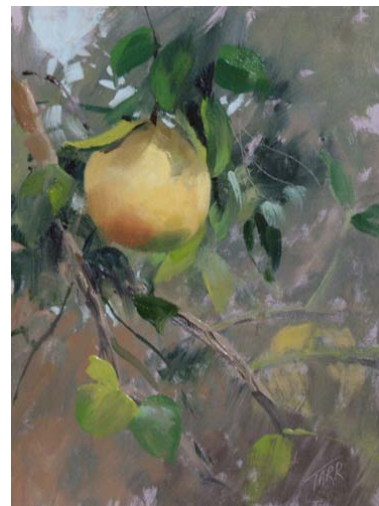
The transparency of Chromatic Black gives it a deep, rich quality and makes it ideal for mixing with other transparent colors for glazing techniques.



Frustrated with the strong tinting strength of other black pigments, Michigan artist Sharon Griffes Tarr sought out a black with greater sensitivity in mixing and mark-making. Not only did she adopt

Chromatic Black for toning her canvases, but she incorporates this unique black throughout her color mixing to control the values and temperature of her color schemes to create a unified mood throughout her compositions.

Sharon explains, "The color tints out to a lovely grayish mauve and is supportive to many of the more vivid color combinations found in nature. I've found that adding Chromatic Black to colors creates beautiful subtle variations that are very pleasing to the eye. It has become a most welcome and frequent addition to my regular palette."



Sharon Griffes Tarr



Marc Hanson

Colorado Plein Air artist Marc Hanson recently added Chromatic Black to his paint box and found it ideal to capture the deep summer greens within the piece, "Corner Light." At a time of year when color and contrast are at their maximum, Marc beautifully deepens the value within the mass of surrounding greens to provide a strong balance to the thin highlight, while maintaining great nuance and vibrancy of color.

We hope that something in this Studio Note is inspiring to you in your own work.

Thank you for supporting an independent and American colorhouse.

Scott

Scott Gellatly
Product Manager
Gamblin Artists Colors

Featured Artists' Websites:

Deborah Elmquist: www.deborahelmquist.com

Mitch Albala: www.mitchalbala.com

Scott Gellatly: www.scottgellatly.com

Sharon Griffes Tarr: www.sgtarr.com

Marc Hanson: www.marchansonart.com