

How to Use Warm and Cool Colors

Individual colors lean towards cool or warm for color mixing. If you mix two warm colors together, you'll get a warm secondary color. If you mix two cool colors together you'll get a cool secondary color. Example: mixing Cadmium Yellow and Cadmium Red Light creates a warm orange. Mixing Lemon Yellow with Alizarin Crimson will give you a cooler, grayer orange. Mixing secondary colors is not only about the proportions in which you mix two primary colors, but also knowing what different reds, yellows and blues produce. A double primary palette is a good start for this concept. Get two of each of the primary families, (red, yellow and blue, one warm hue and one cool hue of each.) Colors that you will be using in the daylight or sunlight use the warm hue of the color. As you start to get into the shadows start adding the cool hue of the color.

Warm and Cool

The idea of warm and cool colors has many implications for composition. Warm colors usually are red, yellow red, and yellow; cool colors usually are blue, green blue, and purple blue. In the Munsell hue terminology there are additional in-between colors being: green, green yellow, purple and red.

If you reduce the chroma of a warm color, it appears less warm. Raw Umber is less warm than Cadmium

Orange. If you reduce the chroma of a cool color, it appears less cool. The most chromatic warm colors are much higher in chroma than the most chromatic cool colors. For example, Cadmium Yellow Light is a high chroma yellow and Phthalo or Thalo Blue is a high chroma blue. The yellow is much higher in chroma than the blue. The yellow is also much lighter in value than the blue. Warm pigments can be very light; high in value at high chroma. Cool pigments are much darker at their highest chroma. You can't add a lot of white to a cool color to bring the value up near to that of Cadmium Yellow. This will only decrease the chroma still further. It is possible to have a high chroma, high value cool color. High chroma warm colors will have more overall punch than high chroma cool colors. It is said that warm colors advance and cool colors recede. This has some truth, because of the way we see things. We look for contrast in paintings. Chromatic colors have more contrast with their surroundings. Higher value colors also have more contrast. Warm colors are more chromatic and higher in value, thus having more contrast, so they appear to jump forward. If you drop the chroma and value of a warm color to match those of a cool color, they become brownish and don't have much punch.