

# Warm and cool colours

## BALANCING COLOUR TEMPERATURE

Colours have qualities that we associate with temperature. Some colours, such as red, are considered to be warm, while other colours, such as blue, are cool. Using these traits can be a powerful way of conveying mood, depth, and harmony in your work.

### ■ Characteristics of colour temperature

Visually, warm colours appear to come forward in paintings whereas cool colours appear to recede. This illusion is very useful for creating a sense of depth. Warm and cool colours are also associated with certain emotions, which you can use to convey mood.



#### Warm colours

Reds, oranges, and yellows are generally grouped in the warm half of the colour wheel (see pp.14–15). A picture painted mostly with warm colours suggests a happy or energetic mood.



#### Cool colours

Violets, blues, and greens are generally grouped in the cool half of the colour wheel. Including a lot of cool colours in a picture suggests a calm or subdued mood.

### ■ Creating colour harmony

Colour harmony helps you to create visually satisfying pictures. Limiting your palette to a small range of colours, or using analogous colours, is one way to achieve a unified scheme. You can also use a common, or “atmosphere”, colour throughout a painting to tie elements together. Balancing colours doesn’t necessarily mean using equal amounts of warm and cool – one can dominate while the other provides a pleasing contrast.

#### Atmosphere colour

You can use one colour as a unifying theme throughout a painting. In this painting, burnt sienna is used in various tones in the background, middle ground, and foreground to create a harmonized colour scheme.



#### Balancing a cool scheme

This snowy scene calls for a cool, blue-toned palette, but the brown-gold trees and building in the background, and the bright pheasant in the foreground, provide some warmth for balance.



#### Balancing a warm scheme

An equal amount of warm and cool is generally unsatisfying, so in this painting the figures are mostly wearing warm yellows, oranges, and reds with only one or two cooler blues and violets.



## PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

In this painting, the cool background colours appear to recede while the warm colours of the foreground objects seem to advance. This creates an overall sense of depth.



### You will need



- No. 5 and no. 2 round soft-hair brushes
- 25 x 30cm (10 x 12in) rough watercolour paper

### 1 Background

Sketch your composition in pencil, then mix a cool, dark blue wash for the background. Paint the wash with a no. 5 round soft-hair brush, turning the paper upside down to make it easier to paint around the bottle and other objects.

### 2 Warm colours

When the background is dry, paint the oranges, basket, and plant in the foreground with warm colours to help them stand out. Allow to dry.

### 3 Cool colours

Paint the bottle, glass tumbler, and cup with cool colours. This helps to indicate that they are behind the fruit and flowers.



### 4 Details

When the warm and cool washes are dry, add details with a no. 2 round soft-hair brush. Add subtle, cool shadows on the warm foreground objects to balance the painting.

