

Color Theory and the Venetian School

Lesson Plan
College Level



Summary

Painters of the Venetian school were known for their understanding and manipulation of color. Structural analysis of paintings by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, El Greco, and Tintoretto reveal layers of colors that were glazed, scumbled, balanced, and juxtaposed to achieve a variety of effects. Apply the principles of color theory to works of the Venetian school by observing the relative contrast of various paint mixtures applied over colored grounds and copying a portion of a painting. This lesson teaches the technical art history and theory of color to college students interested in studio art, art conservation, and art history.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Identify Venetian school painters, methods, and techniques
- Gain an overview of color theory
- Observe and articulate types of color contrasts
- Copy a painting based on an understanding of color theory

Lesson Outline

- Powerpoint introduction to history, methods and materials of the Venetian school of painters
- Lecture on the properties of color and color theory
- Interaction of color activity
- Painting activity
- Discussion/presentation

Activities

- Cut several small squares of acetate for each student. Ask students to mix several colors that vary by hue, value, and intensity and paint swatches on each piece of acetate. Invite them to try open brushwork, dry brushing, and other techniques to simulate the methods of the Venetian painters. Using these custom-made swatches, allow students to experiment overlaying color onto various grounds and ask them to note how their perceptions of the swatches change in the context of different grounds and other swatches.
- Ask the students to copy a portion of a Venetian School painting, keeping in mind that the ground and surrounding colors influence each area of color that they attempt to imitate.
- Invite students to share paint/ground combinations and copies of paintings and articulate the types of contrasts and variations that they observed.

Materials

Color-aid® paper

Precision knives

Rubber cement glue

Oil paint

Paper palettes

Paintbrushes

Acetate pad

Canvas paper pre-primed with a red ochre, yellow ochre, and neutral dark mixture

Printed reproductions of paintings by Tiepolo, El Greco, and Tintoretto

Resources

Internet Resources:

[Video: Capturing the Relativity of Color](#)

[Color Theory Overview and Tutorials by Worqx.com](#)

["El Greco Historical Reconstruction" on the Kress Reconstruction Website](#)

["Domenico Tintoretto Virtual Reconstruction" on the Kress Reconstruction Website](#)

Books and Articles:

Albers, Josef. *Interaction of Color*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963.

———. *Interaction of Color*. Revised and expanded edition. New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2006.

Kuehni, Rolf. *Color Space and Its Divisions: Color Order from Antiquity to the Present*. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley-Interscience, 2003.

Kuniej Berry, Cynthia, Francesca Casadio, Inge Fiedler, Richard Mann, Ana Sánchez-Lassa, and José Luis Merino Gorospe. "Multiplicity, authorship and chronology: an integrated evaluation of four images of *Saint Francis* by El Greco." In *Studying Old Master Paintings: Technology and Practice. The National Gallery Technical Bulletin 30th anniversary conference postprints*, edited by Marika Spring, 125-135. London: Archetype Publications in association with The National Gallery, 2011.

Lazzarini, Lorenzo. "The Use of Color by Venetian Painters, 1488-1580: Materials and Technique." In *Color and Technique in Renaissance Painting: Italy and the North*, edited by Marcia Hall, 115-136. Locust Valley, NY: J.J. Augustin, 1987.

Longyear, Teresa. "Giambattista Tiepolo: The Energetic and Fluent Brush." In *Giambattista Tiepolo: Master of the Oil Sketch*, Beverly Louise Brown, 64-78. Milan and New York: Electa and Abbeville, 1993.

Plesters, Joyce, and Lorenzo Lazzarini. "Preliminary Observations on the Technique and Materials of Tintoretto." In *Conservation of Paintings and the Graphic Arts: Preprints of Contributions to the Lisbon Congress, 9-14 October 1972*, 153-180. London: International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, 1972.