

# Why does the palette matter?



There are dozens of palettes available to artists; paper, all types of plastics, peelable, wood, kidney shaped, rectangular, square, traditional with a counter balance, stationary table top, all types of surfaces as well as colors, AND, dare I say it, the cardinal sin... paper plates. With so many options, what palette is right for you?

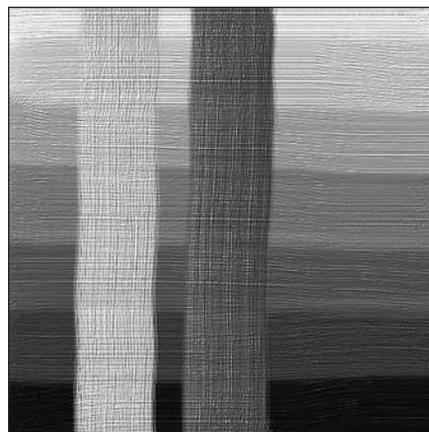
First and foremost, why should you care about the palette? Color is not a natural quality of objects around us. Color is a construct. Color is an illusion created by our brains networking with the properties of shadow, reflectivity and luminescence. For instance, let's put an apple under white light. What color is it? Red of course! Now let's put the same apple under a green light. What color is it? Black!

Pure white light contains all the colors of the rainbow. So when white light illuminates the apple, the apple absorbs all the colors of the rainbow with the exception of the color you see. When using a green light we are not illuminating the apple with any of the colors that the surface of the apple innately reflects, and therefore we see a black apple!

So what does this have to do with your artist palette? Everything! The artist palette is where it all begins. When you are mixing

paint this is where your senses begin to collect information that is instantaneously interpreted by your brain, then relayed to the conscious as a color. And the information is very easily altered by the color of your palette or the lighting around you.

To understand why the surface matters it is important to know that value is relative to other values.



Value is the lightness or darkness of a color. In the image above, the vertical lines are the same from top to bottom, however the values of the vertical lines change depending upon the value behind them.

At the bottom, the vertical lines look lighter because they are against a dark background, but on the top, the vertical lines look darker against a light background. This is an illusion due to more or less light reflectivity.

When using an artist palette the relationship between the surface color and the paint are no different. For instance value of a single opaque color will be darker on a lighter surface, yet seem to have a lighter value on a darker surface. In tandem, translucent paints will be perceived to have greater chroma (saturation) on a lighter surface vs. a darker surface.

Many oil painters appreciate a mid-toned value such as a neutral brown or neutral grey on their palette and as the ground on their canvas, to see the true value. The key is to work with the same value on your palette and canvas ground so the values mixed on your palette are the same values to the eye when applied to your canvas. However, there is no right or wrong surface. Some artists prefer a white surface, which has different effects with different types of paint. Using a palette with a surface that is correct for your goals can help you achieve the desired value and effects much quicker and easier.

For more information about palettes, palette surfaces and **New Wave Fine Art Products**, please visit [www.NewWaveArt.com](http://www.NewWaveArt.com).