

COLOUR CONFIDENCE WEEK THREE



COMPLEMENTARY COLOURS: Opposites That Create Magic

Complements are colour opposites—and they have a special power. Place them side-by-side and they practically vibrate with energy. Mix them together and they neutralize into beautiful, sophisticated greys and browns.

Art History

Unsurprisingly for a week about complementary colour, all of the artists featured here are from the impressionists onwards. When the idea of creating light and dark with opposites on the colour wheel really started to take hold.



Impression Sunrise by Monet, 1872



The Turning Road L'Estaque by
Derain, 1906



Oscillating by Joseph Albers, 1940



Saturn by Helen Frankenthaler,
1963



The Open Window by Roger Muhl,
2000



Pembrokeshire Blue by Paul Bailey,
2022

The Complementary Mindset

Every colour has an opposite that can either intensify it or calm it down. When you are in control of this, you have power over your painting... and your viewer!

| Side by Side = Energy | Mixed Together = Sophistication |
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| Complements intensify each other | Complements mixed neutralize one another |
| Create visual vibration and excitement | Create beautiful greys, browns and earth tones |
| Draw the eye immediately | Make subtle colours not available from the tube |
| Use for focal points and maximum impact | Natural shadows - think impressionists |
| Nature often creates these pairings - think the autumn reds contrasting with green fields | This is the secret to sophisticated colours |

Top Tip : Want to make a colour pop? Place its complement nearby for instant energy! Want to tone down a too-bright colour? Add a tiny bit of its complement—instant sophistication. Complements are your best friends for both drama and subtlety!

Last Word

The impressionists suggested that shadows aren't black or grey - that they are the complement of the light colour. Orange sunlight creates blue-violet shadows. Warm yellow light creates cool purple shadows. An idea that continues to dominate landscape painting and colour theory to this day. Here is how your colour wheel can help.

