

Henry Hensche Facebook Wall discussion.

you must please forgive my rudeness but what hensche taught has nothing to do with values and everything to do with color relationships. the range and intensity of the colors are not based upon a black and white value scale. they are based upon the level and quality of lighting, the light key. it is this dependence upon values and thinking in values instead of colors that keeps a person from learning what hensche actually had to teach. if a teacher is emphasizing values then they are not teaching what hensche taught.

July 13 at 6:24am

Alfred

i do not know ed's thinking process but yes, if the colors are in true relation the values are automatically correct. while the reverse of this is not true - one can have the values exactly correct and the colors can still be totally wrong. sorry to throw in my 2 cents, but i knew hensche for many years in the mid 1940s until about 1960, the old bolshevik was quite a character and would defend his positions against anyone or anything he felt was contrary to the truth as he had found it in nature. in watching this website it seems that many things have been said that are questionable as to what he taught or held as his position on a topic. this was in no way a criticism of ed's start above, it was simply a statement about hensche's positions as i remember them. once again i am sorry to have bothered you.

July 13 at 2:33pm

Alfred

he did his best not to use the word value. he talked about the depth or clarity of colors and their relationship to the quality of the light. he said that It is the light key which determines a colors purity or what he called its off quality, meaning its variation away from its pure form. he talked about deeper colors and lighter colors but did not do so in terms of their values but in reference to their saturation. students were to determine what color they saw then the depth and intensity of that color. students were taught to think in terms of contrasting colors and not in terms of contrasting values.

July 13 at 7:47pm

Alfred

to try and answer your exact question, the student compared one color to another color. compared each colors depth and saturation in relation to every other color in the study. students were not supposed to think about a colors value but its intensity or lack of intensity. they were supposed to think about the color of the color, the exact color of the color. part of the explanation was that when someone has been trained to see in values first they will usually always make that judgment first. If they do they will short circuit their color vision by forcing their colors to conform to an idea which has nothing to do with the visual properties of colors which make them contrast with one another.

July 13 at 7:49pm

Alfred

for example if you put a blue next to a yellow and they are of the exact same value it will still appear to the eye that the yellow is lighter and the blue deeper. they will still contrast as light and shade even though they are the same value. so the students did not think about a colors value but its depth and saturation. this is my small understanding of it. I am sorry that I can not make that all clearer and may have confused you but I am not a teacher or expert on the matter.

July 13 at 7:49pm

Alfred

the light key is a combination of factors. It is the kind of day [sunny, overcast, fog, rain] and the quality of the lighting on the subject [clear, hazy, bright, atmospheric] and the time of day [morning, afternoon, midday, etc]. you paint on a study only when the light is the same light key as the last time you worked on it and only at the same hour of the day. for example if you worked on a clear morning landscape there will be a certain set of colors that you see. for the colors to be the same in order to further develop your painting you need the same circumstances and time of day for the colors to be the same. every light key is a different grouping of colors in a specific relationship. and they are not interchangeable.

July 13 at 8:53pm

Alfred

Hensche said that to understand color and paint convincing color relationships students had to hold a consistent light key in their study. for example if you are painting on a sunny morning with atmospheric haze and the next morning is really clear light then you must work on another study because the lighting is not correct to reproduce the same set of colors you were developing in your painting. It would be the same thing as if you were working on an indoor model under a regular light bulb and someone changed the bulb to a blue one or a red one, the colors would be totally different. If you continue to work on a painting after the light key has changed you are putting 2 or more unrelated groupings of colors intermingled. this will usually look chaotic or confusing and without harmony.

July 13 at 8:54pm

Alfred

if you make sure to work at the same hour and the lighting is closely similar then most conditions of the previous day will be there. if they are not then you work on a new start. in truth no 2 days are ever identical but they are similar enough not to conflict too much with what one is looking at and working on. If things look really different then they are not similar enough to work and are probably a totally different light key. Hensche told students not to worry too much about the subtle differences at first. He said that until you can paint a convincing difference between a sunny day and a grey day there was no need to quibble about nuances. After one could paint a sunny day and a grey day they were to try and paint the color difference between morning sunlight and afternoon sunlight. only then was the student to go on to those other more nuanced light keys like morning haze or sunset.

July 14 at 7:59pm

Alfred

It takes many years of study to do this well and be as he called it "convincing". Which I think he meant was for the study to look like nature and not like just a lot of bright colors. to further answer your question he also made the point quite often that a painter is not a copyist and the students were never to mistake "copying" for study or for painting. You were supposed to paint what you saw as well as you were capable and then some. He said that you were looking for "visual truth", which would be all the colors in your subject in proper relation and holding in its light key. He said that the student was not looking for the kind of facts that a scientist looks for. what you were to look for was color accuracy in relation, not a mathematical sort of accuracy.

July 14 at 8:01pm

Alfred

Hensche made it clear that a painter is not a copyists but is an interpreter of what they see. how well the painter interprets is based upon how developed their visual perception has become through their observations and their color study. so in the beginning similar days are ok for beginning color studies and making the big overcolored masses of light and shade. It always takes some months of work before these mass colors have much refinement in them. so it takes a while before small variations in the light key really matter since the student cannot really see them anyway. it might be well for all of you to ask the more recent students to explain to you the exact procedure to follow for doing a proper color study. I'm sure that they can be clearer about it all than I have been.

July 14 at 8:14pm

John

I've always thought of it more as a "translation" than an "interpretation". You've got to succesfully translate the swirling, active experience of light into the relatively limited means of expression that is afforded by smearing inert colored mud on a canvas or board. Hensche used to say, "you can't rival the intensity of light found in nature".

July 15 at 1:34pm

Ken

Schmid is popular and a financial success, but his works, which are essentially tonalist/value local object color illustrations of things and scenes, has no relationship to the ideas HH and Hawthorne attempted to

cultivate, unsuccessfully, in the generations of art students that followed them. The color in tonalist paintings is always, typically, lacking in daylight and atmospheric characteristics, because it is not based on color modeling in the light key, which is what HH asked his students to study, both at the school and at home. Schmid models in tones of the local object color, which is the color spot you are referring to in the preceding. If you knew HH, comparing him and his works and ideas to R.Schmid could be taken as an insult to the man, since he was vehemently opposed to the kind of work Schmid deals in.

July 15 at 4:50pm

Alfred

in reference to john ebersbergers statement, yes, hensche said a great many things, some of which seem very contradictory to those who may have never studied with him. his reference to interpretation was in the context of not being a copyist and that a painting is not reality but is an image which has been interpreted from reality in as faithful a manner as possible to the color relationship the student has observed. on occasion he declared that he was the only realist left because he was the only painter who did not "make up" their colors but derived his from a close observation of nature. a bold statement that to my knowledge he never recanted.

July 15 at 5:03pm

Alfred

in reference to ruth beckers statement, i know i may sound somewhat hostile to some of your statements but please let me assure you that this is not the case. i simply want to be clear as to my remembrances of what hensche stated and how that is different from some of yours and other peoples references to people who may use the same words but mean very different things.

July 15 at 5:03pm

Alfred

even though they are long past their prime to my eyes schmid is a commercialist and a pictorialist in the vein of wyeth and some others of the past several decades. he is a value painter and a tonalist and is not a colorist painter as hensche was. that was not a criticism but was an example of the contrasts in these different mens approaches. schmid uses many of the same words as hensche and others but they are applied in a vastly different manner. hensche did not produce sentimental pictures as schmid does. as a matter of fact he often railed against a certain type of sentimentality in painting as actually being anti-realism as much as what he sometimes called the "modernist's pranks," in reference to the ongoing rise of abstraction in painting.

July 15 at 5:04pm

Alfred

my statements are not about our individual likes or dislikes of any one painter or another. all students and painters should follow after whatever teacher inspires their personal interests. but the only way for a student or a painter to understand the differences in what hensche taught and what others teach is to get beyond the words and the semantic variations and so called theories and ideas and get outdoors and study color directly without trying to make a picture. painting just for the development of ones color vision, that is what hensche taught.

July 15 at 5:05pm

Alfred

hensche was not teaching people how to better their picture making skills by matching colors on a formulaic chart as schmid's system does. there was no premixing and no endless color charts and formulas as with schmid. It was all hit or miss, stumble until you fell and then start over again. what he taught was both physically and mentally taxing and required a great deal of strength on both counts. hensche was pushing boundaries and often stated that he did not believe in painting with visual limitations. he was attempting to develop the persons mind, their perception, their ability to see color in the broadest sense of the meaning of that word color.

July 15 at 5:05pm

Alfred

lastly please allow me to say that there is not a Hensche style of painting. for example in your reference to pastel colors, if you look back through all the pictures of Henschel's works displayed on this site (or better yet see a group of his paintings in person) you will see that his color covers the full range of depths and saturations and intensities and even greys and muds. the fact that light is his subject often leaves the impression that the works are high keyed and light but few have a pastel look when closely and thoughtfully compared. people who are mannerists and imitators create watered down versions of a teacher's works.

July 15 at 5:06pm

Alfred

but Hensche cannot be blamed for the failings of some of his followers or those who wish to imitate him for commercial interests or those who look for shortcuts in painting. this is where you find the majority of this pastel effect which you have referenced. please forgive me for sounding like I was making a defense for him. I wasn't, I think his work and teaching speaks for itself. once again I am sorry that I cannot be clearer on the subject, I have not painted in a good while but these are my remembrances and opinions for what they are worth.

July 15 at 5:06pm

Ken

Henry Hensche's teaching method, which I also have studied and still employ, is based upon the relationship of the large masses of color for light and shade. It is possible to read HAWTHORNE ON PAINTING, and not understand this fundamental role of the color masses. Much is made of the term "color spots" by everyone who has ever read that book and used it as reference to their painting. Hawthorne used the term to force painters to think of painting as colors coming together, and not as pictures of things. In practice, no spot of color has any function except as it relates to the large mass of light or shade in which it belongs. This is what Hensche students attempted to study and master. The large masses reveal the light key.

July 16 at 6:47am

Ken

As Alfred has made clear, Hensche's students did not use value or tonal relationships of local object colors as the foundation for masses of light and shade. Hensche would not allow it. Instead, large masses were begun, by beginning students, with pure hues. Over time, if the student made sincere effort, the student's visual awareness could improve, and they would advance from simple pure hues to more complex mixtures of hues for the large masses. But without effort, visual awareness does not improve. Using pure hues throughout the color composition does not a light key make. Hensche attempted to bring students to a visual understanding of what he called "colored neutrals".

July 16 at 7:00am

Alfred

"Isn't just painting color spots as Charles Hawthorne and then Hensche espoused, just too simplistic and in a way mindless?"

that "color spots" is all they taught or did is a popular misconception that has been perpetuated by the little Hawthorne book and an incomplete understanding on the part of many students who have passed this on to others. the little book is charming and has many interesting statements in it but if a person did not study directly with Hawthorne or Hensche then the book is of no use. one could not learn to paint in color as they actually taught from using that book or any other book. the large spots, the large notes of color are not all they taught and were really not even at the heart of their study efforts on color. this idea of a technique of color spots is what people latch on to because they are looking for the "how to" quality of most teachings in painting.

July 16 at 7:28am

Alfred

this is why I stated earlier that until one goes outdoors and struggles with the real study of color relationships through overcolored masses to represent a convincing light key and then through the

refinement of those masses go on to model the form changes through different, distinct and separate color changes as ken massey referenced earlier, until this is done and done well then as hensche used to say all this talking can be pretty useless.

every student hensche ever had asked all these same questions you have asked. all of which are legitimate questions and deserve a serious answer. those who thought that they did not receive a satisfactory answer in words from hensche or did not stay long enough or study hard enough to break through the questions and receive an answer directly from color itself all left pretty quickly.

July 16 at 7:28am

Alfred

please forgive me for what may sound like a rude tone or a flippant answer. It is not at all intentional. It is simply that the depth and character of what hensche taught cannot be put into a few paragraphs or stated as a technique to follow or as a how to method of making a picture. he was not a pictorialist. his work was constructed from a base of knowledge that would stagger most current painters imaginations. having said that I think that the impression has been left by many that it can be watered down and still be useful but it really can not be.

July 16 at 7:29am

Alfred

ruth ann, people who are interested in making pictures and telling stories with their pictures or wish to 'rehash recent clichés from art history' (as the historian john rewald used to say) do not need to learn what hensche had to teach. and this color study he taught is far from being mindless. it is actually this practice in making observations and then making the colors to represent those observations which brings knowledge to the painter, trains the eye and develops their visual perceptual abilities. just as it is practice which brings knowledge to the violinist and educates the ear to a deeper level of auditory perception. what good is a violinists fine technique if his ear is without knowledge of refined sounds?

July 16 at 7:30am

Alfred

the higher the refinement the greater the depth of expression, in sound or in color. what hensche taught was a way for people to develop these higher levels of visual refinement. but until a person can get beyond the sentiment or attraction of subject matter and the facile techniques which they so admire in others they will never develop beyond the stage of elementary picture making. and it has always puzzled me as to why this is all that many students are looking to be able to do.

July 16 at 7:31am

Alfred

"Schmid's later work is rich with light and color."

just as ken massey stated previously it is rich with value contrasts and rich with simplistic local, surface, object color but it does not demonstrate color contrasts or the variety of color found in nature or any other subject, nor does it represent a light key or have forms modeled in color. from a certain standpoint what schmid and most other pictorialists do is represent a narrow concept of vision which has been coupled with an often flashy or facile technique for drawing with the paint.

July 16 at 7:31am

Alfred

this is very different from the in depth construction of forms which hensche produced through his color planes and color masses. I'm sorry that I can not easily show you how they are different. all I can say is that the type of student who is drawn to schmids illustrationary style would never be drawn to hensches form of color study as a lifes calling. It takes too many years to become competent with it and is not easily adapted to pictorialism if the process is followed with any integrity.

July 16 at 7:32am

Alfred

“Wouldn't the Hensche method if it demonstrated light airy colors be sentimental without the rich solid structure?”

this is a really interesting question, part of which you have answered yourself. yes, the structural quality of the color notes, the volumes and solidity of forms modeled in color changes all give a degree of seriousness to the subject and integrity to how the painting was carried out. but whether the color range is deep or light and airy as you have stated is all dependant upon the light key and the painter being able to reproduce that harmony. these colors are observed colors and are not personalized choices.

July 16 at 7:32am

Alfred

the sentimentality you may see in others works is of their own making. it comes from sentimental decisions both in their choice of subject matter and often from sentimentally biased choices in the colors used to represent the sentimental subject. if the painter is truly representing a light key pale colors do not carry any more sentimentality than any other class of colors. nature, light, the landscape, most any substantial subject contains no sentimentality at all. that trait, that characteristic is layered on to the subject by the emotions and sentiments of the painter. they may wish to express that feeling which apparently gives them a certain pleasure but is often nauseating or revolting to many others who do not see the world in such a nostalgic or pollyannaish fashion.

July 16 at 7:33am

Alfred

to me hensche looked forward, to the future and to creating a more substantial art form in painting. he was not interested in sentimentality or these nostalgic rehashes of past painters which often appeal to so many. just as ken massey said, anyone who knew the man well could never mistake what he taught for what is represented or taught by any of these modern day illustrators. hensche often talked about how people make the mistake of thinking all ideas in art are of equal worth, and deserve equal respect. an eclectic blend in which none criticize another.

July 16 at 7:33am

Alfred

. if this were the case then a childs first plinking on the piano would be of equal value to humanity as a refined concert pianists expressions at the keyboard. yes, I am sure that to the childs mother this would be the case, but in truth it would be of little interest to others. hensche proved through his teaching and his work that one cannot be satisfied with so little. I am hoping that some of the more recent students will help explain this with greater clarity than I have tried to do. It is important for people to understand that hensche did not follow the set pattern because he did not believe in visual limitations. so until people understand what these visual limitations are they cannot make a clear judgment about hensche, his work or his teaching.

July 16 at 7:33am

Alfred

i seemed to have overlapped several points which ken massey has previously made. as i have said, i hope that the more recent students will help to clarify the many differences between hensches approach and all others. many people become uneasy at what they feel is a hostile attitude on the part of hensches students when discussing his teaching and work. there is a reason for this stalwart, protective attitude towards hensche. his students through difficult and hard work came to understand that all ideas in art are not of equal worth. those who would put in the many many years of color study required to understand might develop this same attitude. as i remaked earlier my understanding of all this is limited so i have probably made all the useful statements i can make. thank you ruth ann, i hope i did not hurt anyones feelings.

July 16 at 8:04am

Ken

HENSCH ON PAINTING is, in my opinion, a more direct reading of the ideas Hawthorne and Hensche shared. But Hensche, as a painter, went much further in developing those ideas than Hawthorne, and understood them more thoroughly. Hensche's teaching idea, which he learned from Hawthorne, evolved to

what he considered a more direct and practical study method using first the colored blocks then still life objects outdoors, as a means to develop the students' visual awareness.

What has to be accepted, by anyone sincerely interested in learning how to study light keys and color, is that it cannot be taught/learned from reading a book. Nor can it be learned in a workshop of a few days. In reading, and in a workshop of a short duration, the best you can do is come to some basic grasp of the study idea and how to proceed with study.

Hensche always, always, insisted that his serious students go home and continue their studies for the year, because it required a great deal of consistent effort.

July 16 at 4:13pm

Ken

The fundamental thing for any painter to realize, re. 'Hensche's color method/study method', is that your own visual growth and awareness is the study. Ie., each painting/study/effort is a record of your visual comprehension and growth. Hensche could look at my daily efforts and see what my visual limitations were at that time. He knew from my painting if I had advanced beyond the beginner stage of visual awareness. He could see when the student was visually aware of the color relationship of masses in the light key. That awareness only results from continual effort at color mixing, and not from reading a book.

July 16 at 4:26pm

Ken

As an example of how to study and critique a study, let's return to Ed's mudhead effort. What we see in the jpg. is very loose, probably quickly painted. The paint is opaque, or dense enough to cover up the gesso under it. Good so far. The white gesso, where the paint is transparent, can interfere with seeing the mass color relationships.

The area of the shirt or blouse is not stated clearly, ie. which is sunlight and which is shade? No doubt Ed was seeing more than he could paint, but better to make a clear division first. (Ie., make it clear which is direct sunlight or shade).

Head and neck and chest area. Here it seems Ed has begun color modeling, and developed the form more. One problem that ought to be clarified is the color similarity between the top of the head/hair, and the lower neck/chest. They are becoming too similar as colors. The right and left side of the hair area are not going to be the same hues, nor will the upper chest be similar as a hue to the hair.

July 16 at 4:47pm

Ken

So, that is a general way to go about studying. Looking for the areas of color that are becoming too similar as hues, since we know the same color mixture cannot exist all over a painting. Also, look for the shape of the color area, since its shape is also a recognition of its actual color in the composition.

July 16 at 4:50pm

Alfred

"I did read the Charles Hawthorne book like a bible. I have skimmed.....? Is there a current instructor who truly represents what Hensche espouses?"

i am sorry ruth ann, but i have been out of those circles for many years so do not know people who actually teach. i think that some of the more recent students should be able to assist you in getting started properly, ken massey, john ebersberger and probably several others could give you a push especially if they were to set up a page that explained in detail how one goes about actually doing a color study.

hensch's teaching style was very unique. he had insight into each student and their abilities and knew what each needed and when to push them along. he was dedicated to each being their very best and lavished time and effort upon anyone who he thought had even a glimmer of understanding in what they were doing. this is a talent in itself and he was an individual who can never be replaced.

July 16 at 9:06pm

Alfred

Hensche did not advocate the use of any formula for achieving any certain color, mixing compliments is one such formula for making neutrals but he would have said there is no such thing as a neutral color because all colors have a bias or a shift towards some visible quality that is not a nebulous or non descript grey. The word neutral is a word that Hensche refrained from using and would rail on any student he heard using it, there are somber colors and off notes as he called them, colors that are less spectrally colored, less raw or pure in coloration but the idea or concept of neutrals is alien to nature. This idea of neutrals is a convention invented as a short cut in tonal value painting and is not a part of color vision. I am not saying that the off colors do not exist, what I am saying is that they are not an arbitrary concoction used to artificially unify a painting.

July 29 at 2:54pm

Alfred

. Hensche had the student make each color as a specific color in relation to all other colors on the painting, there were to be no generalizations in the colors. this is what the idea of neutrals brings about, broad generalizations that are not specific to ones subject and light key but are simply a short cut to making a picture. They are a limitation when used as most use them today, as schmid or christensen and many others have their premixing formulas for making a picture. But that is drawing with paint and is far from the specifics of color that one sees in nature or in any subject. But then that is the difference in people who see in black and white first and add color as an afterthought. A colorist thinks in terms of colors and color variety and mixing color specifics and unifies the work through a specific relationship in the colors holding in the light key, not by adding greys to the mix to neutralize them.

July 29 at 2:55pm

Alfred

Having said all that I am wondering if what you are actually asking is where are the off notes the less raw, less pure colors in many of the Hensche school painters works, and you are not the first person to ask this question. A few years ago in NY at the babcock galleries there was the hawthorne of a mother and child, the mother with an upraised hand, there are more variations in the flesh colors in that one hand than in the totality of most current portraits, many of them off notes yet they were as luminous as the more colored notes. at the cape museum of fine arts I went in and there was a Hawthorne portrait and a number of former Hensche students I recognized... I thought I saw a couple of Domenic Barbera's but when I got close enough I saw they were Dick Goetz's work.

July 29 at 2:55pm

Alfred

They verged on being abstract. Very mysterious and exquisite, a great depth of knowledge was evident. Many of the later Hensche students and many of their students have lost that exquisite subtlety of color changes and atmosphere and have turned truth into cartoons. I say cartoons because the colors are not related by a complete light key and with this as such the variations cannot be related to the whole but are simply a further array of cartoon colors. Hensche was not a proponent of undeveloped sketches and disney cartoon color and this runs completely counter to his ideas of developing a painting to a high level of color refinement. But refinement does not mean a neutralization of colors through some formula of mixing compliments or premixed greys which are used to dilute the other more colored colors but by mixing the exact color one sees from scratch.

July 29 at 3:08pm

Alfred

In looking at the papus page discussions and several others, as well as some recent statements here at this site people currently seem to celebrate their limitations. That is a certain type of ignorance which I cannot quite grasp. It seems that art is the only field of endeavor where that type of ignorance is celebrated as somehow superior to those who are able to display a much broader intelligence or completeness in their work. This would mean that someone of say turner's abilities would not be understood at all today. This has always appeared to be the case with Hensche also, the breadth of Hensche's knowledge far outstripped



his admirable and sincere but modest abilities. but he pushed himself as far as possible to develop himself as deeply as possible and to express himself as fully as possible.

July 29 at 3:08pm

Alfred

And in that search he taught that each color was to be analyzed and mixed separately in relation to its neighbors and its overall light key, one did not neutralize a color, one mixed it to become the specific note that fit in its specific place, some are more colored than others and some are more off than others yet each is specific to its position in the composition. he did not tolerate generalizations in his advanced students studies. I am not sure if I have answered the question but the idea of neutrals runs counter to color painting, but yes there are many off notes and somber notes in all subject matter. And if a painter is painting with all bright colors it is just as fake as is painting with all neutralized colors, both are formulas, something Hensche was adamant about avoiding.

July 29 at 3:08pm

Ken

Have to concur wholeheartedly Alfred, with these latest comments. When studying with HH, I found he emphasized exactly as you have stated in the preceding. He may have used the term "colored neutrals", but it was another way of saying "colorless colors" which was a more frequently used term. He was very careful with his wording to students, because he did not want to mislead the student into a theory about how to develop the natural visual quality of color. He wanted the student to develop color relationships without relying on the "false" unity of monochromatic value scales, the convention of pictorial design. (Many skilled tonal painters started a color study in value relationships and were skewered very quickly, which saved them wasted efforts.)

The concept of color complements was always dismissed by HH, because it did not solve the visual color relationship problem. It was another version of painting by color formulas, without relying on your visual sensation.

July 29 at 7:22pm

Ken

Agree also that HH has not been understood today, for the reason you cite, viz., the personal mannerisms and limitations of painters who may aspire to describe a visual color realism, as witnessed in HH's works, depart from the visual sensation, either by a kind of tonal reduction, or more often, color saturation where such is not descriptive, or not necessary (due to limitations of pigments), but done for color effect. Even when HH was teaching, the essential idea of color study not well understood, mainly because pictorial color conceptions, (like color complements, or tonal color relationships, or saturated color/ color for color sake) are easy to master, by comparison to actual color relationships in a light key.

July 29 at 8:15pm

Ruth

Alfred and Ken:

Thank you again for your thoughtful responses. This past weekend, I very carefully observed Camille Przewodek, Hensche student from the 80's, painting a street scene for the PleinAir Easton Competition. She seemed to use pure color to paint large shapes, purple and orange for trees etc. The actual roof on the house she was painting had a dark grey local color, which she painted a light orange brown. I asked her why not consider the actual color of the roof. She responded by saying darkest darks in light are lighter than the lighter lights in shadow. It seems Hensche was pretty formulaic! That roof was not in any way light reddish brown from observation! Camille then told me should would add some light blue into the roof because of the light and sky, which she then proceeded to do. Do Hensche followers ignore local color? Do they "tame" pure garrish color by mixing other colors into them to try to achieve local color later on in the process? Still a nice little piece!

July 29 at 9:30pm

Ken

Ruth Ann, what do we mean by "formula" in this context? I think of it as a memorized, habitual, predictable process used as a substitute for visual color observation. HH taught the latter, not a step by step

pictorial process. But also, to some degree, it can become "formulaic" if a painter turns it into a mannerism where color saturation replaces visual color study and development. This is a problem in the visual growth of the particular painter, not the idea that HH taught and demonstrated in his works. Unfortunately for HH's legacy, the idea of color study of light keys is not as emphasized as it needs to be, since that is the only way the painter progresses past over saturation to the realm of "colorless colors", of which HH often spoke.

Local color is important in the development of the color masses. Yet it is not necessarily the dominant hue in a mixture of hues. This can be observed directly, and is not a formula one has to memorize.

July 30 at 5:52am

Ken

The painter is not attempting to "match" any local color, but instead to find the mixtures for the light area and shade area that best express or describe how the local color is changed in the particular light key situation. The problem that many painters fail to address is the degree to which colors may lose saturation. That means color mixtures become more complex mixtures of several hues in most areas of forms. This can be observed. The painter attempts to determine from observation which hue, if any, dominates the mixture.

July 30 at 5:59am

Ken

Painters develop their own "rules of thumb". Re. light and shade, one has to realize there is a fundamental division between light and shade masses which has to be maintained throughout the painting. Generally, the lightest color variations within any shade mass will be darker than the darkest color variations with a light mass. If the painter mixes this relationship up, the visual division between light and shade masses is lost in the painting. The painter is dealing with chromatic value relationships, which are far more difficult to resolve than are monochromatic values. It is the relative brightness of any variation within a mass color that is the difficulty in color painting.

July 30 at 6:18am

Alfred

ruth ann, you have opened a topic of discussion which many are usually unwilling to discuss for fear of offending someone, but it is not about hurting anyones feelings. hensche tried to get students to understand that what he was teaching them was a progressive method of color study. that as ones color perception grows and ones mixing abilities improve then the colors and the relationship of all colors can become much more refined and delicate and mysterious as ones vision is developed to the level of being able to see those less colored colors. he would quote cezannes remark that most colors in nature are somber colors and then he would say well they are but they are only somber in relation to the colors around them. this is a balancing act that is based in ones interpretation of what they are looking at. A value painter sees values first but a colorist sees color first. So the one interprets from a black and white perspective while the other interprets from a chromatic perspective.

July 30 at 8:23am

Alfred

Each is free to paint in any manner they please and develop their own style based upon their personal preferences. but people must never mistake the fact that what hensches students and their students are doing may not be a reflection of what he taught. If one has a problem with a certain painters interpretation they should take it up with that painter and not lay it at hensches feet. In many cases these personal styles are a reflection of what he taught as beginning lessons of over coloring and exaggeration of color to get the impact of light on the eye and break peoples habits of looking at values instead of colors. and these are important lessons and it is a beautiful stage of development but is not the end but is the beginning of color study.

July 30 at 8:24am

Alfred

many have not developed beyond that stage of coloration and have developed a personal style built around that level of bright color and it is not just the recent students who have done this, this goes all the way back to students of the 1930s and every generation since. and that is ok, there are many who do some beautiful

things along that line of work. But once again one must never mistake all this for the totality of what Hensche taught. one of his common remarks was that he knew a student was making real progress when their color was no longer pure or raw or savage but had developed into the stage of "colors which have no name". these are colors which have been refined to a level of delicate relationships, they have not been "neutralized" as in our previous discussion but have been modified and restated as specific colors until the entire relationship holds a consistent light key wherein nothing looks out of place.

July 30 at 8:24am

Alfred

please allow me to say this, those who have not studied color according to Henschel's comparative color approach will always be confused by what they see others doing. most of his former students works reflect only a portion of what he taught, even his individual works reflect only a portion of what he taught, we must be careful not to try and decipher from any single painting some formula or rule because in the very next painting he will break that rule and you will think he has established a new rule which you will see him break in the next painting. Henschel did not believe in limitations, if his students have created formulas and rules for themselves then we cannot lay that at Henschel's feet, this is from their personal choices and not from the main body of his teachings. I apologize once again for my lack of clarity.

July 30 at 10:09am

Ken

As stated by Alfred in the preceding, HH insisted his beginning students use pure tube coloring as a means to break them of the habitual value or tonal seeing in the local object color. Many of his students were already trained as tonal/value painters, and the mindset typical of most is that color is added into the value scales to produce the color of any work. Using pure tube coloring forced the student to begin looking at the sunlight and shade color masses as hues rather than as values of one similar hue mixture.

By opposing several pure hues the work could take on a graphic, bright, two dimensional look, typical of cartoon illustrations. The progressive study was aimed to develop the forms through variations of color within the large, flat masses. If this were followed through to a logical conclusion, the coloring would begin to lose saturation, and appear more consistent with natural daylight coloring. However the student would have to struggle with this problem .

August 1 at 8:14am

Ken

The student would have to study the color modeling of the form in the light key in order to understand the subtle quality of color relationships in vision. It was recommended to study morning sunlight, afternoon sunlight, morning gray day light, afternoon gray day light, morning hazy light, afternoon hazy light, in order to learn, visually, how color relationships varied within the masses and variations in differing light keys.

Without the progressive study of color modeling, and without the study of different light keys, the typical result is works that are all the same in color quality, and in many cases, work that relies mainly on spectral hue saturation for its pictorial effect. One does not have to study HH's idea to paint cartoon coloring,

August 1 at 8:24am

Ken

Saturated hues are not "toned down" by adding grey or other complementary hues to neutralize them. The saturation of any hue is offset by first a visual comparison of adjacent masses and variations, and finding another hue that one sees as a component in the color of the mass or variation. In effect, the painter strives for complex color mixtures, not necessarily mixtures of complements, or near complements. HH stressed this idea over and over and over and over to any sincere student. One had to mix into the pure hues, and change the coloring quickly, in order to develop your color vision.

Yet it seems today that the idea of saturation has been made the entire concept of color painting. Those who did not study with HH may not be getting the lessons of color modeling in the light key, or choose to ignore the most fundamental and essential part of his color ideas.

August 1 at 8:33am

Ernie

This discussion has most of the HH elements covered as I have understood them. Get the light areas in and the shade and shadows to contrast them. thus getting the light effect first. So much is in the first notes.....the light key is the key to the painting. My question is, did HH use pure color(not including white) in the first note, or did he mix? Did he teach the same way he painted?

August 3 at 6:26am

Ken

Simply stated, yes, HH did paint masses starting with unmixed hues. He usually would mix right into these as he compared the light and shade masses. He also did some mixing on the palette as the work developed (talking demo paintings). He emphasized the advantage/necessity to mix right on the panel or canvas since your eye is making a direct comparison of adjacent color note areas.

His palette included spectral hues but also earth colors such as mars violet, burnt sienna. His color masses quickly progressed toward complex color mixtures, as he demonstrated the idea of quickly changing mass notes,(not over analyzing) until the visual relationship looked right.

August 3 at 7:25am

Alfred

i did not become a professional painter myself, after the war i finished school and became a civil engineer and worked all over the world. but what i learned in my own work is that what would matter is results, if a painter has achieved a refinement in color that is in color and not default tonalism then why would it matter how or when they spread or smoothed their paint?

August 10 at 10:51am

Alfred

as i remember hensche would scold people for wasting time cleaning edges and drawing things while at the easel making color notes, he said to take care of that (craftsmanship?) later. his emphasis was on the seeing, if the colors were good i dont think he cared whether the paint was spread to the edge or not. it was only when some tried to draw objects to cover for bad color that he really got on to people. but if the color was going well he would say very little.

August 10 at 10:51am

Gerald

Actually he suggested to me and to others to intentionally leave some of the edge bare, so that one doesn't get a sense of completion too soon, and not pay attention to how transitions occur right along the edge.

I guess there is a reason you are here talking about painting even tho you say you didn't become a painter.

It matters that one arrives at their colors through a system of comparison that can only be done by standing before

the motif while painting. The idea of sitting and mechanically spreading paint to all corners leads to the a sterile outcome.

The painter I know who does this produces colored, yet sterile paintings.

Yesterday at 1:56pm

Ken

Seems to me Alfred has stated, essentially, that HH did not insist on completion of edges, or of "drawing", and the transitions needed for completion. IOW both of the two preceding statements agree with each other. (And I agree that is what HH focused on, ie., mainly the large masses and large variations, saying to work on the drawing later, on your own time.)

Alfred's remembrances are valuable because they enlarge the consistency of HH's teaching idea.

Yesterday at 4:02pm

Other discussions:

Gerald wrote on February 5, 2009 at 11:13am

one of the biggest problem with the classical method is predominate reliance upon value to describe the form of 3-d objects.

Hensche taught students to think in terms of color differences within the mass to describe not only the 3-d form, but also to describe

1. distance from the observer
2. angle of view in relation to the light source.
3. the color temperature of the source of illumination.

The biggest problem (my opinion) for the beginning painter is coming to the realization that our mind is naturally programmed to recognize the "local color" of items in compromising lighting situations, a function of survival in the wild..

If a painter is to paint what nature actually presents, he must realize that the local color of an object is fractured by the direct light and the reflected light sources.

When a painter discovers that he can create the illusion of an object of a particular local color without actually using any of the local

color in his painting, then he is beginning to understand the color modulation. It is as Cezanne explained, "For every plane change is a color change" It can be extended to "For every angle change is a color change. For every distance change is a color change. For every time change there is a color change. For every change in the atmospheric condition there is a color change."

So the student of Hensche has a great descriptive advantage, if he manages to mature past the bias that become imprinted from what it takes to break the habit of seeing local color: deciding colors by first choosing the predominate chromatic (Roy G. Biv), color of a mass.

When a beginning student realizes that he can create the illusion of a white block in sunlight using a light yellow for the light plane, and a cerulean blue for the shadow note, it is a revelation that can easily become formulized. The vigilant student can continue to grow as he/she begins to watch their own mind, making sure their color choices come from what comes from the eye, instead of what the mind may tell them they "should" be seeing.

The painter must be wary of the human inclination toward self hypnosis.

I think Robin Durand came up with this definition of "local" color:

"Local color is the color, that if painted upon the colored object in question, would blend in perfectly. "

Gerald wrote on February 7, 2009 at 6:23am

I think that once the painter breaks free of "object consciousness" and begins to see the motif as a color mosaic, then the transcription of this color mosaic onto a 2-d surface becomes easy. Painting the truth is easier than juggling fabrications from conventions.

However, recording what one sees is not all there is to creating an interesting painting.

Henry spoke of keying the painting high and pushing the color differences so that the painting could be "read" in the dim interior lighting situation. This is why he would have his students bring their work indoors (north light studio) to examine them... to see if they had enough punch to be read under that light.

I think that Henry went through a period in his painting when his

intent was to render color faithfully. Even then he had refined his vision far beyond his contemporaries who were still locked into object consciousness. Because of this period of rendering, Henry learned what aspects to push, and which to subdue in his work in order to direct the eye and focus of any particular painting. He had gained control of his pigments, yet continued to grow by demanding more of himself.