

Figurative Drawing

"Speaking of light, colour is exactly that: light! When you see a colour, you are essentially seeing reflected light..."



part 2
& Foundational
Studies Series

Joel Carlo brings us the second section of a 3-part tutorial series, covering certain elements which are fundamental to drawing the human form (Part One: Issue 024)...

Figurative Drawing & Foundational Studies Series Part 2

Introduction

In last month's article (Issue 024) we took a look at three of the seven essential elements of art. Moving right along, we continue with the second instalment of this three-part series by expanding into what could be considered the most complex of all the seven elements: colour.

Colour is of, and in itself, an immense topic and one that can hardly be covered over the scope of this article. However, my aim is to explain the fundamental basics of colour to you in the hopes that you leave with a better understanding of how colour can be used to accentuate what you may (or may not) already know. For the lucky few who have a seemingly innate understanding of the subject, this article will probably seem a bit simple in its presentation, but for those who struggle with colour and its application I believe it will help to shed some light on the matter.

Speaking of light, colour is exactly that: light! When you see a colour, you are essentially seeing reflected light. When light waves fall on the surface of an object, two things happen. Some of these waves are reflected and some of these waves are absorbed. The light we see is what has been reflected. What we don't see is what has been absorbed. Take, for instance, an apple (**Fig01**). As light falls on the surface of an apple, the apple will absorb certain wavelengths and the wavelengths it can not absorb are reflected. If the apple is red, it is reflecting a range of red wavelengths. If the apple is green, it is reflecting a range of green wavelengths. Keep in mind very few objects exist that will reflect only one single wavelength of colour. For the most part, the colour on the objects we see amounts to several reflected ranges of wavelengths.

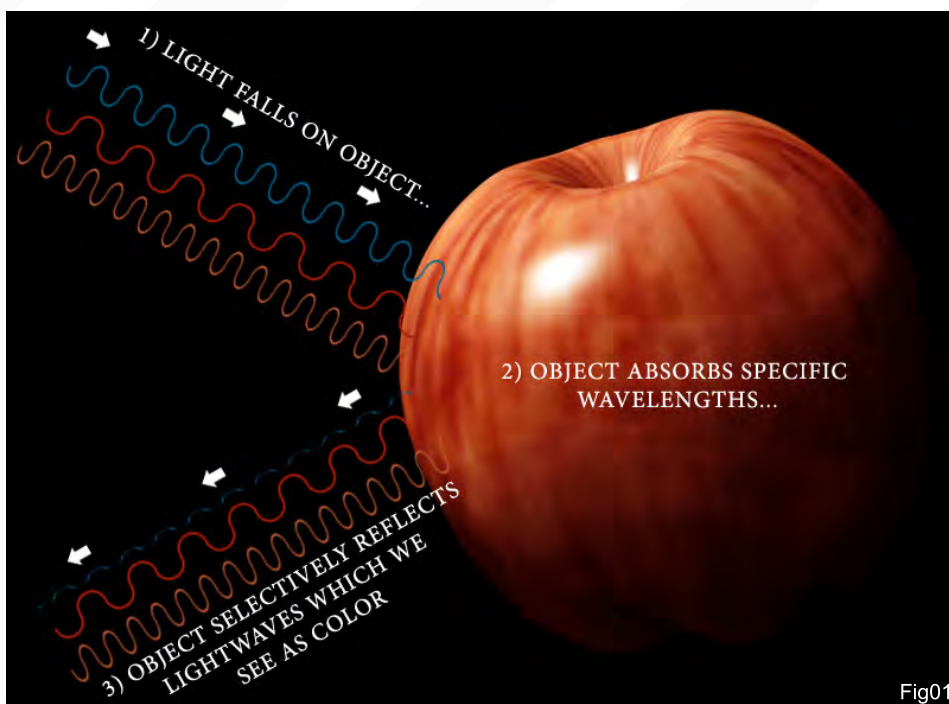


Fig01



Fig02

We can see an object's true colours when visible light represents a complete range of wavelengths. However, colours are perceived differently when luminosity is affected.

Luminosity is the relative quantity of visible light available, and it is how we perceive brightness or darkness within an environment. This is the reason why an object's colour will look different at night than it does during the day. At night,

there are less wavelengths of light available than there are during the day, and an object can only reflect wavelengths that are available within its environment. Think of a forest, for example. During the day, when light from the sun is abundant, we can clearly see a wide spectrum of colours within the forest. At night, when the forest is dimly illuminated by the moon's light, the colours you saw during the day will appear very different. The forest is reflecting a small range of wavelengths because of the scarcity of light surrounding it.

So now that we have an understanding of how and why we see colour, let's take a look at some colour basics...

A colour is described by its hue, brightness, and saturation (**Fig02**). Hue is the property of light by which the colour of an object is classified in reference to the colour spectrum (hue can be any colour, be it red, blue, green, yellow...).

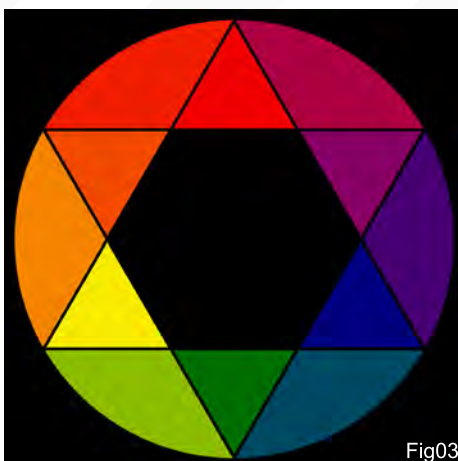


Fig03

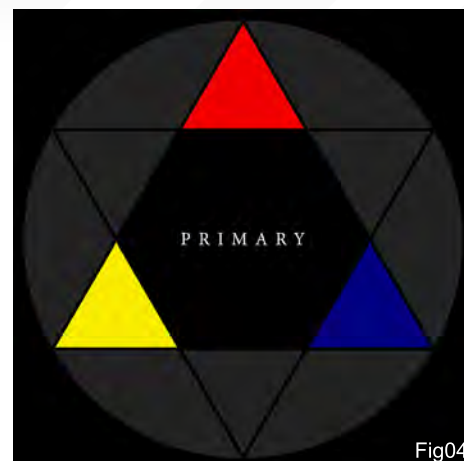


Fig04



Fig05

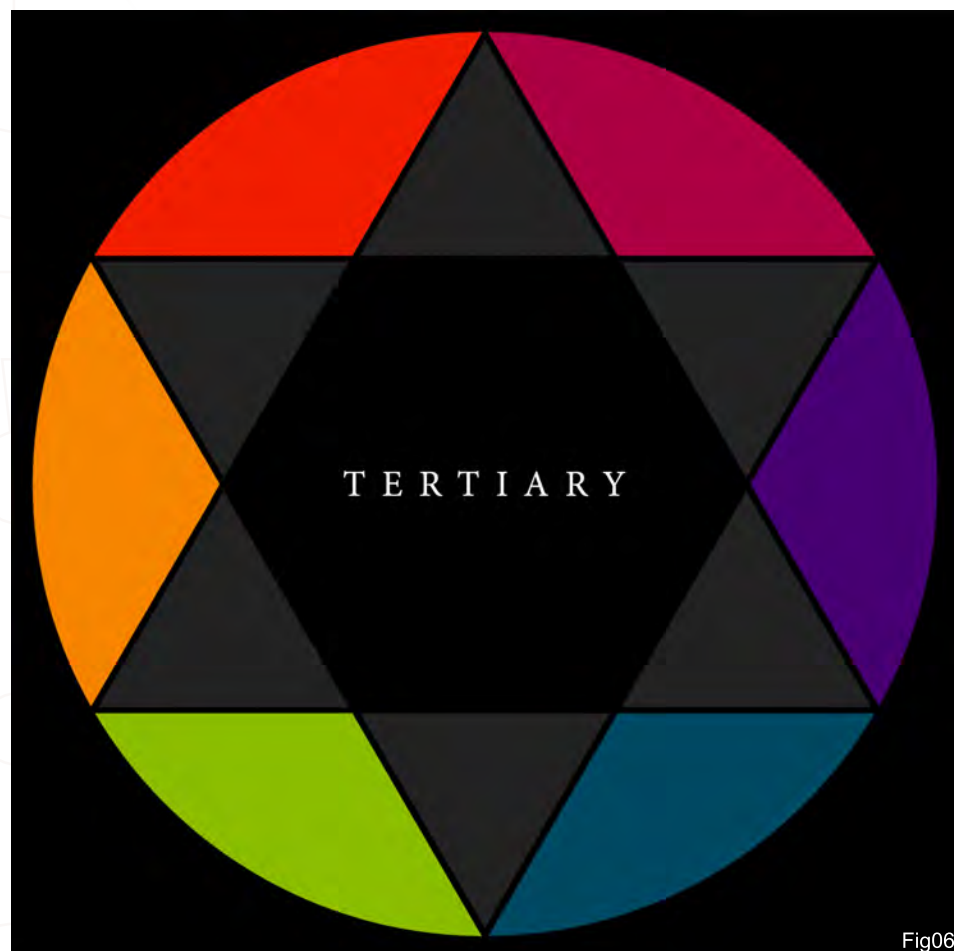


Fig06

Brightness is the degree of lightness or darkness in a colour. The variations of lightness and darkness in a hue are often referred to as shades or tints (adding white to a colour is referred to as tinting, whilst adding black to a colour is referred to as shading). Saturation is the purity of a hue (for example, the colour pink is a less saturated degree of a red hue).

Whilst hue, brightness and saturation are what we use to describe a colour, a colour wheel (**Fig03**) is often used as a representational arrangement of the available colours in the colour spectrum. These colours are broken down into primary, secondary and tertiary relationships. Primary colours are colours which cannot be created by mixing other colours (these are red, yellow and blue) (**Fig04**). Secondary colours are those colours created when two primary colours are mixed (these are orange, green and purple) (**Fig05**). Tertiary colours are those created when a primary and secondary colour is mixed (**Fig06**).

Although a colour wheel can be used to better understand the relationships between colours, it can also help us pick colours that create an overall harmony within a colour scheme. While many colour schemes do exist, the most basic of these schemes are known as complementary, analogous and monochromatic. Complementary colours are colours opposite of each other in the colour wheel (colours that compliment each other can be red and green,



Fig07

blue and orange, or yellow and purple) (Fig07). Analogous colours are adjacent to each other within the colour wheel (think of these as neighbouring colours such as orange, yellow-orange and yellow, or blue, blue-violet and purple) (Fig08). Monochromatic colours are all the tints and shades of a single colour (Fig09).

As I stated earlier, the topic of colour in its entirety would simply be impossible to communicate over the length of this small article. Colour theory in itself is a vast subject and can seem extremely daunting for those who find it hard to comprehend. If you are one of these individuals and are interested in achieving a better understanding of colour, there is a wide variety of literature available which covers the topic extensively. Some recommended reading would be *Vision and Art: The Biology of Seeing* by Margaret Livingstone (ISBN 0-8109-0406-3), which has helped my understanding of colour dramatically and is an invaluable book which I reference regularly. The key to grasping colour is in recognising the relationships and effects colours have amongst themselves. In the next, and final, part of this series I will touch on the last three elements of art: value, texture and space, and will create a figure drawing that incorporates all of these elements. See you next month!

Joel Carlo

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Fig08

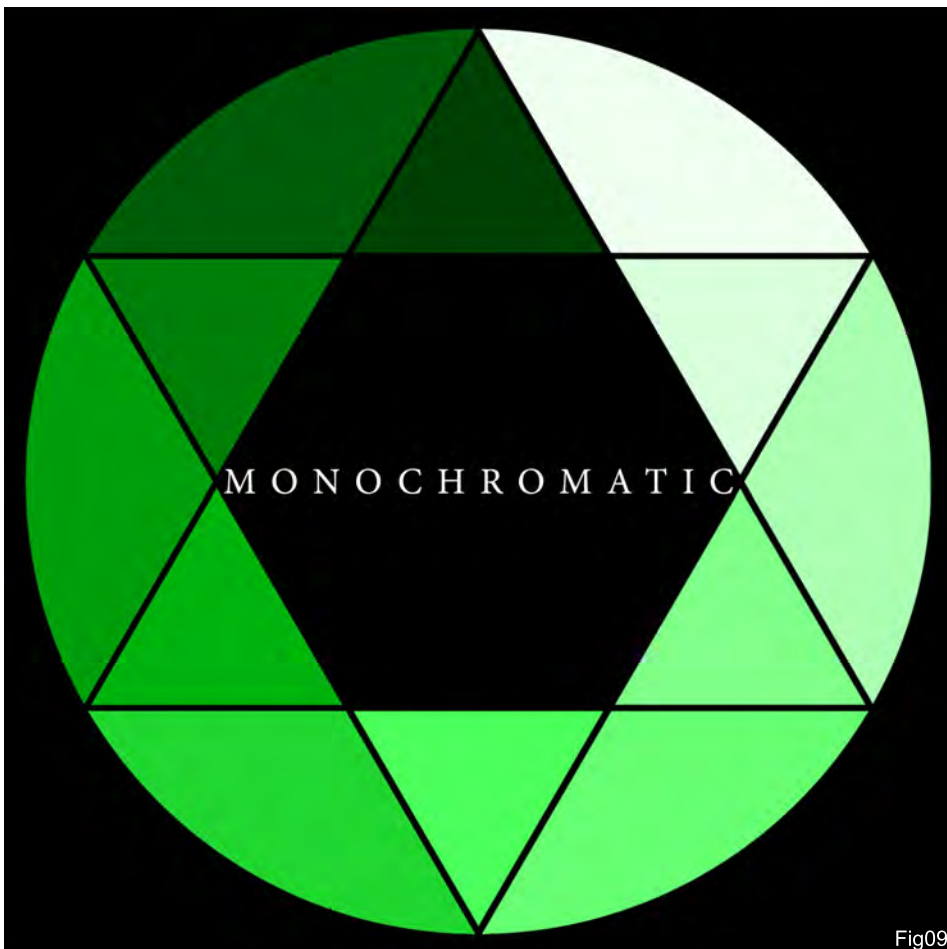


Fig09