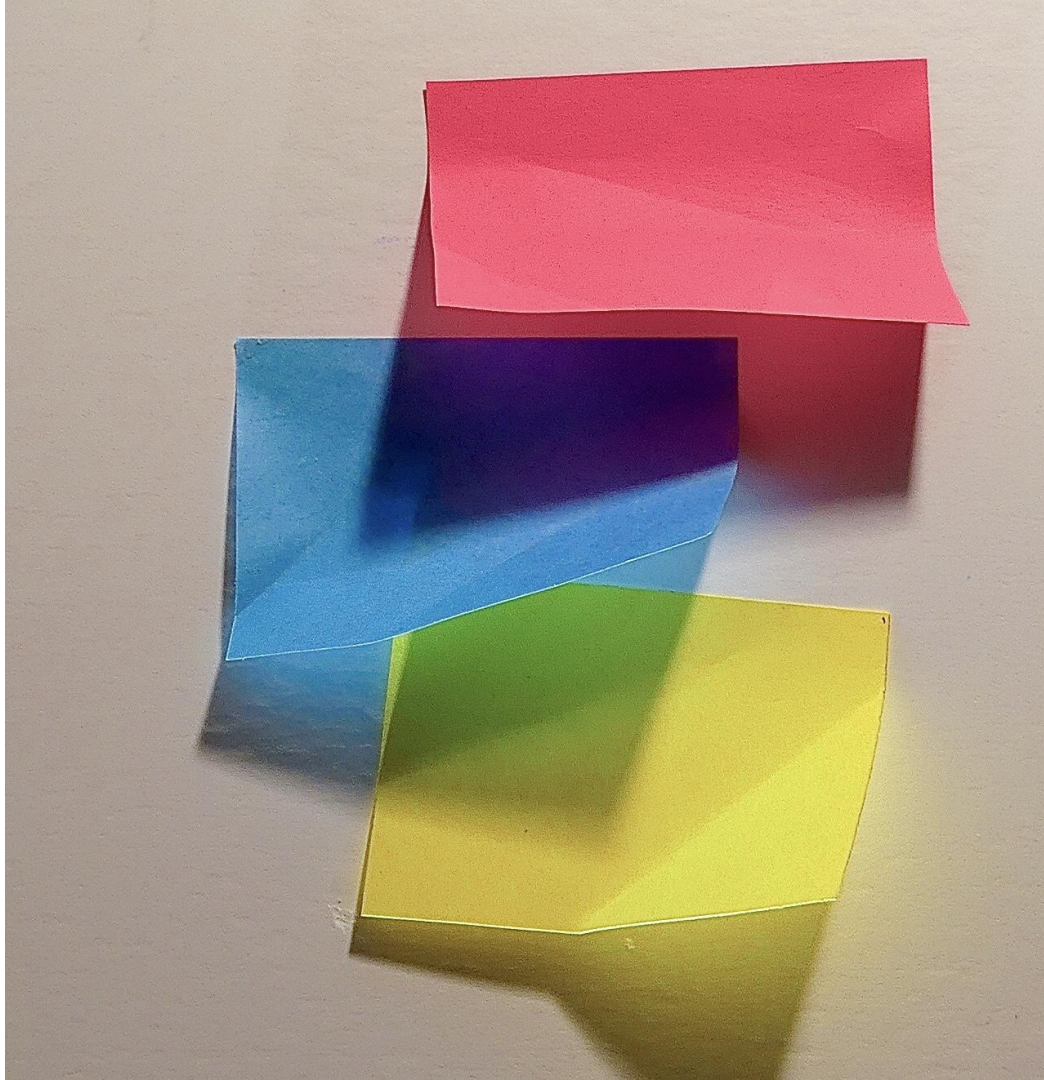


Sticky Notes: An exercise in building a painting

Using a split complementary palette this lesson shows a step-by-step process of building a painting. With this simple subject of sticky notes stuck to a wall, and a defining light source, we have a subject with clear shapes, colours and values that make the structure of this subject easier to see and paint.

Why use this palette?

The split complementary palette has a very wide mixing range from bright and poppy to neutral grey, and with this subject we will use it to the fullest.



Split Complementary Palette

Warm Primaries

Cadmium Yellow Medium

Cadmium Red light (or med)

Phthalo Blue (green shade- if this is an option)

Cool Primaries

Hansa Yellow light (or Lemon Yellow)

Permanent Rose (or Alizarin Crimson)

Ultramarine Blue

Earth Tones

Burnt Sienna

Yellow Ochre

White

Titanium White

Understanding what I am painting and finding my focal point.

This diagram points out some key features that I need to understand before I start, so that I can be strategic in my efforts.

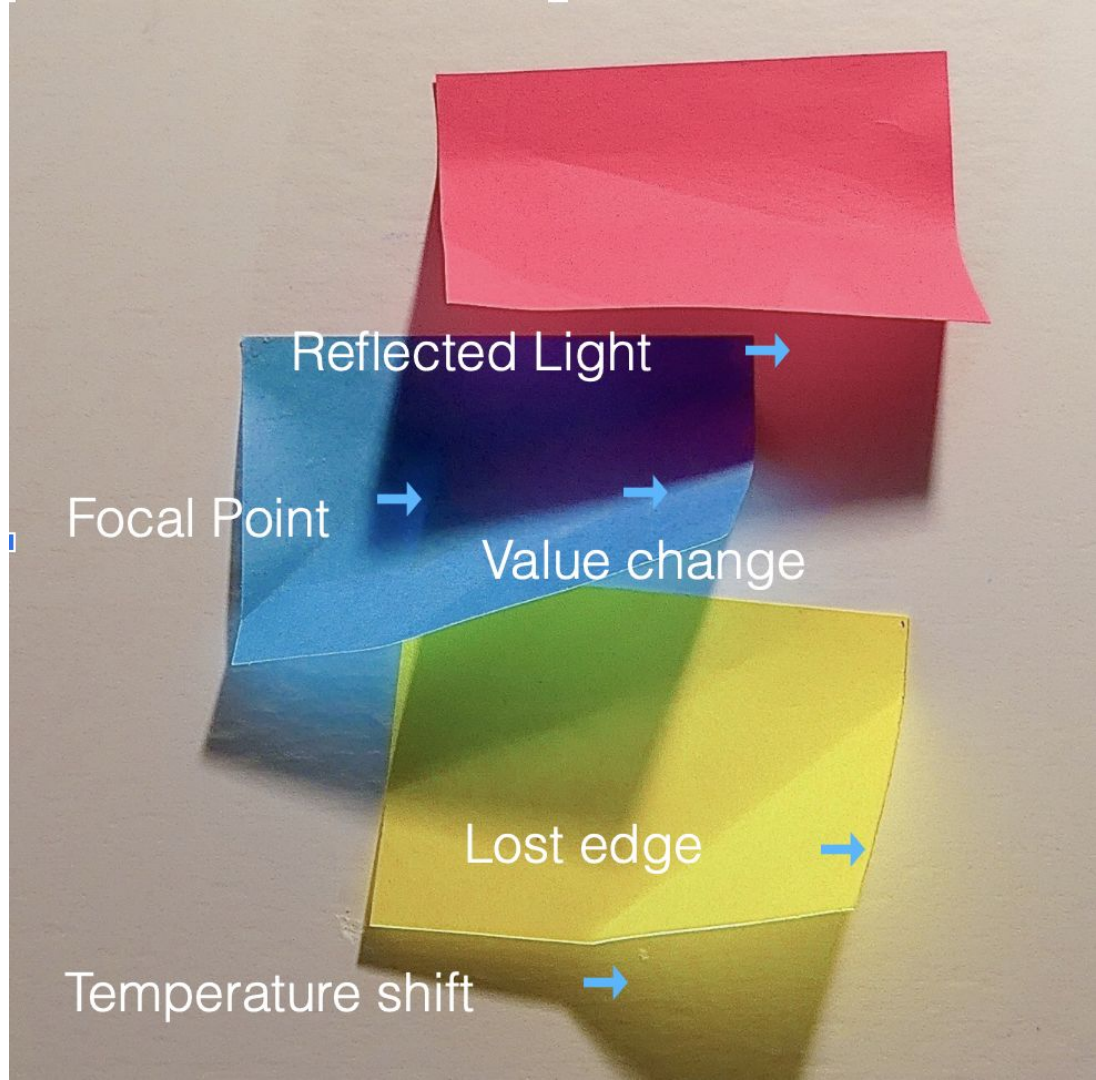
Also consider...

Bracketing your extremes

Before I start I like to identify:

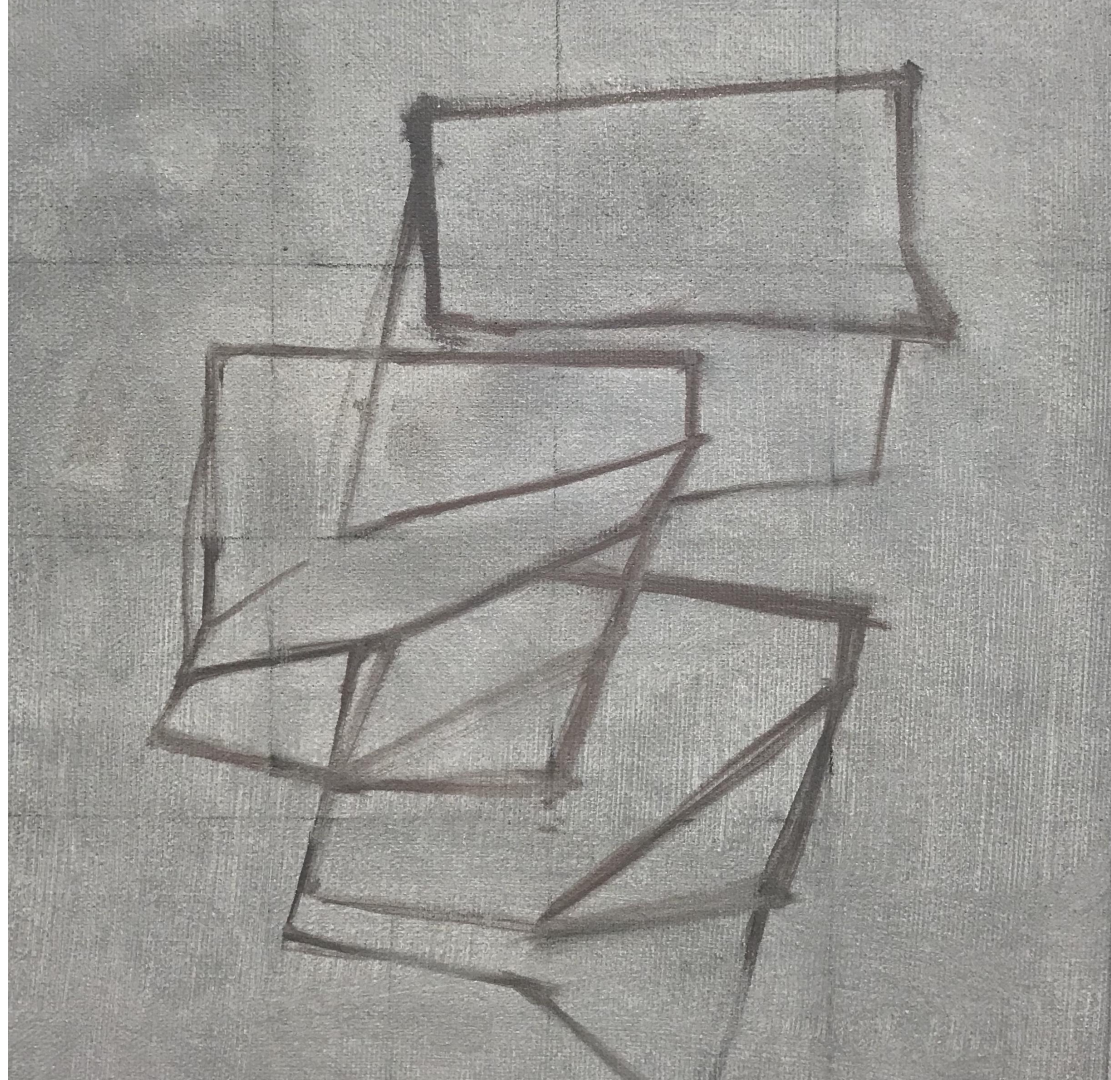
- My lightest light
- Darkest dark
- Most saturated colour
- Dullest colour
- Sharpest edge
- Softest or lost edge

With this knowledge and some preparatory sketches done, I am more confident that I understand this subject



Contour Drawing

- I use a soft grey to **tint my board** which will allow for me to read the colour and values clearly as I paint.
- To **draw in my subject**, I used a deeper grey-violet, that if left, would resemble the colour of a shadow or line edge.
- I begin by drawing in the contour shapes; outer edges and inner shapes defined by the light.
- You can use a **simple grid** for accuracy (see notes on Ratio). When you are done mapping in your contour **remove any unnecessary lines** that are not part of your final drawing and that could be distracting.
- I do not leave this stage until it is **accurate**. Fixing shapes at this stage is much easier than when you have added colour.



Map in your Shadows

- Next I **place in my shadow shapes** which will articulate my lights.
- My shapes are based on the **average colour** of these shapes. It needs to be dark enough to **support smaller shapes** that will further build form.
- Squinting helps me find the average colour, shape and value.
- When mapping in these shapes I make them a little bigger (if possible) and use **negative space** (background) cut them back in achieve a more accurate rendering.
- Before I leave this stage I do another objective look at my **contour drawing** and makes sure that it is still accurate. **Redraw** if you need to.



Blocking in the light shapes

- Next, I block in the simple light shapes; my colours are based on an average of what I see.
- With the simplicity of this subject, and the strong light source, there is clarity in the shapes. We can directly see the changes in colour that come from the light

Notes on Colour Mixing

- The pinks shapes dominate with Permanent Rose in the lights, with french Ultra (cools) added to get the shadowy purples.
- The light shapes of my blue note are mostly Pthalo Blue (warm) and white; french ultra is added to cool off my shadows.
- The yellow lights are Hansa yellow light with Pthalo Blue and white to get the chemical looking yellow. In the shadows, I added Pthalo blue and cad red to deepen and grey out the vibrant yellow (all three primaries).



Setting the Values

- At this point I need to put in the background colour so that I know I am keying the values throughout the subject properly. It's like putting the sky in your landscape
- I will be refining my value shapes; lightening or darkening them as I go, and as I see the relationships more clearly.

More refined colour temperature notes.

- The lightest values are cooler than the midtones; they are affected by a direct, cool light and so I have added white to them (adding white lightens and cools)
- Mid values are warmest- these are the purest versions of each colour.
- Shadow shapes are the darkest values. They are cooler with warm light from reflection bouncing inside.



Brushstrokes

- Keep your brush strokes clean; 1-3 strokes per shape.
- Mix enough of each colour to load your brush properly
- Start adding some medium to make your colour shapes adhere to the early blocked in shapes .
- Name the colour and its' qualities to help with your colour mixing.
- Use the flat of your brush to lay the colour down accurately, and the end of your brush to fill in a shape.



Reflected light

Lighting:

To get the most dramatic effect of reflected light, I took this photo using two light sources; one from the left and one from the lower right.

In this stage I am

- Developing the background (the wall colour) to include the reflected colours around each sticky note.
- The wall behind the each sticky note is influenced by the colour of the note.
- These colours are subtle but add impact and realism to my piece.
- The shadow forms are broken up with reflected light; adding interest to each shape.
- In each shadow shape a secondary colour is create by the colours of the light mixing.



Finishing

Here is the finished piece. In the final stages I went around the subject to do the following:

- Finished the wall and popped in more of the reflected colours from each note
- Used a Rigger brush to paint in the thin lines around the edges of each paper.
- Added the extra layer of cast shadow to the outer edges of the wall shadows.
- Looked for strong edges that would catch the eye and needed to be softened



Technical tips:

- When I paint I make sure I have clean solvent to keep my colours fresh.
- I also make sure that I clean my brushes between each colour, and have a brush for each colour family.
- I used a Bright brush because this subject had a lot of square edges.
- My early layers of brush work are thin and dry - not soupy with solvent. Thin layering allows for later layer to be thickened and adhere properly
- After the early blocked in shapes, I switch from solvent to medium. I use Gamblin's Neo Megilp for a buttery look to my paints.