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## Color Compliments

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## Color Compliments

### Abstract

A discussion of the range of use of complimentary colors

### Keywords

Color, Complimentary Colors, Painting, Art

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**Color Compliments**



*New Hope in Snow*

*Jennifer Hansen Rolli*



**30th**

*Jennifer Hansen Rolli*



**East of the Park**

*Jennifer Hansen Rolli*



**Plaza, Late Afternoon**

*Jennifer Hansen Roll*

## **Color Compliments**

*Jennifer Hansen Rolli*

One comment I most often hear from someone looking at a painting of mine is how they feel drawn in and usually they guess that it's the use of light. This is partially true because I am inclined to paint a visual, dynamic in lighting, but more comes into play when laying certain colors next to each other. But, of course, fabulous gallery *lighting* helps to bring out these intricacies, but that's another article altogether. When I first painted I was mostly going by instinct and I believe it worked pretty well, perhaps my design background came into play, which did involve color theory and layout. But, through the years, I've learned to pay more attention to skewing color to support a better outcome.

In almost all of my paintings today, I entertain my favorite color ploy, the use of complimentary colors in all of their values, meaning the lightest to darkest shade of a color. Straight up complimentary colors reside on opposite sides of the color wheel and there are three pairs, red and green, orange and blue, and yellow and purple. The hues in between these six colors offer infinite opportunity in pairing across the color wheel. Visually, it's a beautiful thing when complimentary colors are used together, artists alike have forever used these combinations because it creates excitement, usually unbeknownst to the viewer as to why. A simple example is the red and green buildings playing off of one another in my painting, *New Hope in Snow*. If the red building were blue, that excitement would be lost (and the Playhouse unrecognizable). Taking it one step further, butting the complimentary colors next to each other push and elevate colors off of the canvas visually. This is the light which a viewer feels pulled into. It really isn't light, though, it's the angst fighting between the colors. In my painting of *30th Street Station in Philadelphia*,

pale warm golden light filters in, dazzling the eye when paired with the cool lavender interiors. Yellow and purple in a wide range of values, teeter into cooler and warmer tones, making use of the wide spectrum of compliments. In the interior, Plaza, Late Afternoon, the light is cool blue against a warm, dark orange interior. Table details in hits of intense blue set in deep russet, lift off of the canvas, demonstrating color value does not have to be the same to create this eye-popping effect. It's a matter of trial and error to find the right balance when at the easel. In East of the Park, equally powerful orange and blue dance the eye back and forth between their boldness, but notice the sky as it tapers to the distance and transitions to new compliments, yellow and lavender, paler in value and creating distance.

One may call it an optical illusion, which it is, but there is science behind this phenomena. As explained in Smithsonian Magazine, complementary colors are especially pleasing to the eye because different types of photoreceptor cells, which contribute to color vision, perceive different types of light in the color spectrum, [Apartment Therapy](#) explains. To put this to the test, try staring at a sheet of blue paper for a few minutes. Then, quickly look at a white wall. You'll see a faint orange afterimage—blue's opposite color. That's because the cells in your eyes became fatigued, slightly suppressing the visual spectrum you've been staring at. What you perceive on the wall is the white spectrum of light, minus a tiny bit of blue, which your brain processes as orange.

For the interior decorator or painter, this means complimentary colors are especially dynamic since they play off of one another's intensity. Your eye wants to see that explosive pop of yellow alongside the purple wall; the complementary colors seem to sooth and balance, since they simultaneously stimulate different parts of the eye. It's a natural example of opposites attracting.



So, the next time you find yourself wandering a museum, I bet you won't be able to not see the color play going on within the frames.

## References

Smithsonian Magazine, Smart News.

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SMITHSONIANMAG.COM.