

A CRASH COURSE IN COMPOSITION: 11 TIPS FOR DESIGNING BETTER PAINTINGS

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**En Plein Air: Practical Tips
for Painting on the Road**

**Portrait Palettes: 6 Setups
for a Variety of Skin Tones**



SKILL BUILDERS

BY ALAIN J. PICARD

Fleshing It Out

Use this well-tested method to tackle the challenge of painting skin tones in pastel.



I'm able to achieve an expressive aesthetic in portraits such as *Peering Into the Future* (12x9) because of the orderly approach I take to painting the skin tone.

AS A PORTRAIT ARTIST, I'M FOREVER INSPIRED by the beauty and diversity of humanity—the vitality and range of emotion in each individual, unique personality, and how these are expressed in the human face. Painting this vast diversity in pastel, however, is a challenge.

One characteristic a portrait painter must address is skin tone. I find it can be helpful to group faces into six basic skin types, based on skin color or pigmentation: pale; fair; medium; olive; brown; and very dark brown or black (see the chart, opposite). This allows me to paint virtually any skin color in pastel using a simple, orderly approach. But before ever putting pastel to paper, it's necessary to understand the basics of color in relation to skin tones.

Color Overview

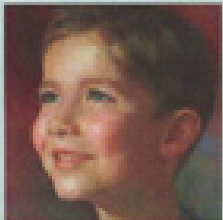
Colors are organized by *hue*, such as red, orange, yellow, green or blue. Looking at a basic color wheel (page 18), you'll see that there are three **primary colors**: red, yellow and blue. Mixing two primary colors together creates the **secondary colors**: orange, green and violet. **Tertiary colors** are a mixture of a primary and the adjacent secondary color, creating both a warm and a cool side of each primary color (yellow-green, blue-violet, etc.).

THE 6 BASIC SKIN TYPES

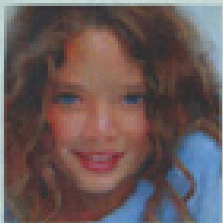
In each chart, the rows (top to bottom) indicate tints, tones and shades found in the skin; the columns (left to right) show cool to warm colors.



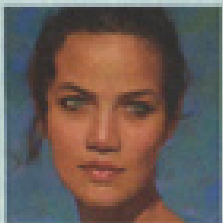
Type 1
Pale skin



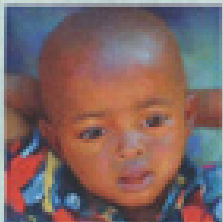
Type 2
Fair skin



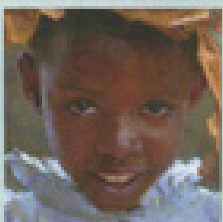
Type 3
Medium skin



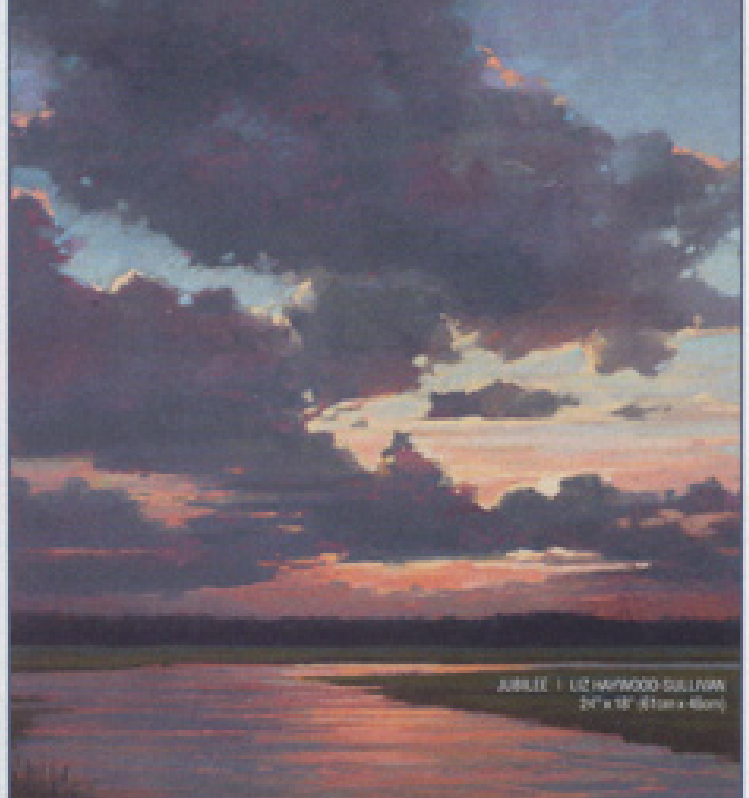
Type 4
Olive skin



Type 5
Brown skin

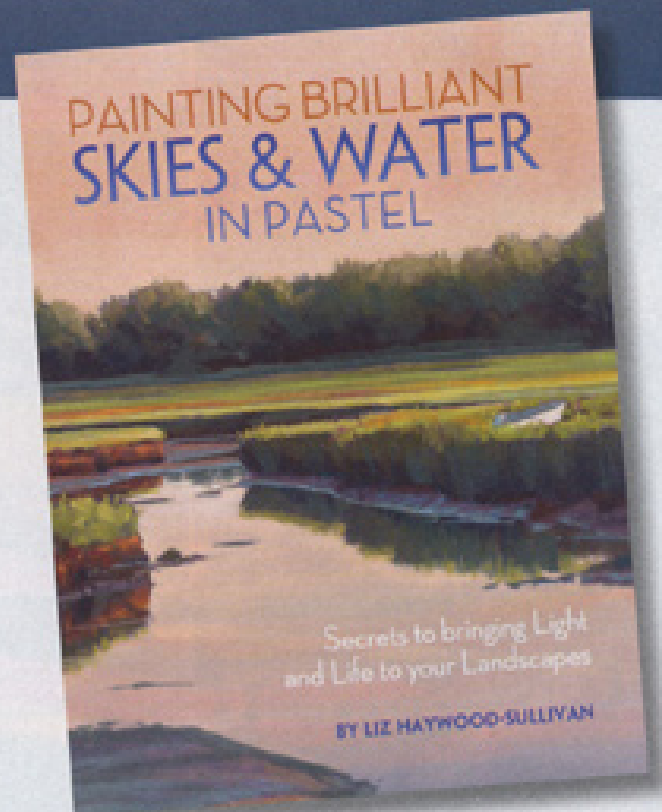


Type 6
Very dark brown or black skin



JANUARY | LIZ HAYWOOD-SULLIVAN
24" x 18" (61cm x 46cm)

TAKE AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT PAINTING
SKIES & WATER
IN LANDSCAPES
WITH THIS
NORTH LIGHT SHOP FAVORITE!



Painting Brilliant Skies & Water in Pastel: Secrets to bringing Light and Life to your Landscapes by Liz Haywood-Sullivan

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KEYWORDS **BRILLIANT SKIES**

SKILL BUILDERS



An understanding of the color wheel (above) and basic color theory helps when organizing a portrait palette (at right).

Each color has a corresponding **value**. Value is the relative lightness or darkness of the color. Asking the question, "Is this color lighter or darker than the one next to it?" can help you assess its value. A grayscale is useful for judging the relative value of a color.

In addition to value, each color has a relative **intensity**. Asking yourself, "How bright or dull is this color?" can help you assess the color's intensity, also known as the *saturation* or *chroma*. Both color intensity and value are affected by adding white or black to a color, as well as by mixing a color with its complement to neutralize it.

- **Tints** are created by adding white to a color.
- **Shades** are created by adding black to a color.
- **Tones** are created by adding gray to a color.
- **Neutrals** are created by mixing black and white, or by mixing two complementary colors.

Skin Tone Considerations

Skin tones are generally represented by tints, tones and shades. Rarely are they pure bursts of intense color. If you



look at the six basic skin types, you'll notice that Types 1 through 3 are lighter in value, while Types 4 through 6 are darker in value. Having said that, we also must take into account the light falling on each subject, creating a pattern of light and shadow on the face, along with cooler and warmer lighting effects. Portrait artists must be prepared for such variables in their pastel portrait setup.

A color's temperature is very important to consider in relation to skin tones. Referring back to the tertiary colors, we know that some are warm, others cool. **Warm colors** are typically red (primary), orange (secondary) and yellow (primary), while **cool colors** are typically blue (primary), green (secondary) and violet (secondary). Much like value, temperature is a relational language. Just as you can assess whether one value is lighter or darker than another, you can also assess a color's temperature. Ask yourself: "Is this color warmer or cooler than the color next to it?" The implication is that there

will be cooler reds (closer to violet) and warmer reds (closer to orange), cooler blues (closer to green) and warmer blues (closer to violet). When portraying skin types, this ability to discern warm and cool changes is critical.

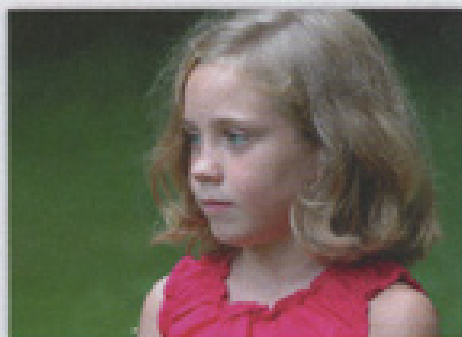
The **mid-tones** or **halftones** are the areas in which more intense, saturated skin colors are found. Be careful not to overly lighten the overall value of your painting, lest you lose the mid-tones. "Chalking out the portrait" will cost your painting the rich beauty of the mid-tone skin color, resulting in an anemic, lifeless work.

The Pastel Portrait Palette

As you know, the pastelist doesn't "mix" color on a palette like an oil painter does to create various tints, tones and shades. We must have an organized assortment of pastels to represent these tints, tones and shades prepared and ready to use during a portrait session.

I've organized my portrait palette box (above) to represent all six of the basic skin types, so that I'm prepared

VIEW MORE OF ALAIN J. PICARD'S PORTRAITURE FEATURING VARIOUS SKIN TONES AT WWW.ARTISTSNETWORK.COM/MEDIUM/PASTEL/PICARD-PASTEL-PORTRAITS.



for any model I may encounter. I've arranged my palette by color and value, with light values (or tints) at the top, and dark values (or shades) at the bottom. Neutral tones are located to the right. This portrait palette reflects skin tones in color families such as red-pink, orange-sienna, yellow-ochre, gray-neutral and violet.

As you can see in the palette photo, I unwrap and break my soft pastels into a variety of useful sizes for painterly application. I also have an assortment of hard pastels in small batches which have been sharpened to a point with a single-edge razor blade and organized in groups of earth flesh tones in row 1 (on the left), warm reds (row 4), cooler flesh tones (row 5) and neutral grays (row 6). I find these hard pastels to be effective for the smaller shapes and details of the face. I don't work the way many pastelists do, applying hard pastels first and soft pastels second: I use soft pastels



I've applied my understanding of skin types to my painting of a pale-skinned subject in *Portrait of Katarina* (15x22). The sample color chart at left represents (from top row to bottom) the tints, tones and shades used in the skin; and (from the left to right columns) the cool to warm colors.

for larger strokes and hard pastels for smaller ones interchangeably throughout the portrait.

Demonstration: Pale Skin

The above portrait of Katarina is a perfect example of Type 1 or pale skin. I posed the subject outdoors in the shade, which created a cool lighting effect on her face with warmer shadows. The reference photo reveals how soft the lighting is, how most of the values in the face are light, and how gradual the transitions between light and shadow are.

Type 1 Color Chart

Based on Katarina's Type 1 pale skin, I've produced a sample color chart (pictured above) representing nine skin colors visible within her face. The top row of the chart, from left to right, represents **tints**, the middle row records **tones**, and the bottom row contains **shades**. The left column from

top to bottom represents **cool colors**, the middle column is **neutrals**, and the right column **warm colors** within this skin type. As you can see, the value scale of pale skin is quite light with an emphasis on cool and neutral tints within the face. Even within this pale skin type, notice the presence of blues, violets, grays and warm reds in addition to the fleshtones that one would expect.

Painting skin tones is an absolute joy when your palette is organized with colors prepared for every skin type you may encounter. ■

ALAIN J. PICARD (<http://picardstudio.com>) is a signature member of the Pastel Society of America and Connecticut Pastel Society, for which he serves as president. His new instructional DVDs, *Painting Skin Tones in Pastel*, *Pastel Techniques for Painterly Portraits* and *Essential Techniques for Pastel Portraits*, are available at www.northlightshop.com/art-dvds.