

# Mixing Colors

Mixing color with colored pencils is a quick, almost instant procedure that requires very little equipment. Artists who work with these pencils often report experiencing an intensity of concentration—a total absorption—which takes them by surprise. The medium's speed and directness of handling usually spurs these colorists on to further experimentation, which is excellent, since an active pursuit of color often brings fresh and unfamiliar results.

This is a good time to think about starting a personal workbook for your colored pencil drawings, if you don't have one already. This book should be separate from your regular pencil workbook. The most useful kind for your colored pencil drawings is one with pages of a medium-grained surface very similar to that of your everyday drawing paper. For example, the Strathmore 400 Series drawing paper is inexpensive and comes in a 5½" × 8½" notebook, and also in small spiral-bound tablets. Either version would make a good workbook.

## THE DIMENSIONS OF COLOR

Color mixing involves the three dimensions of every color: hue, value, and intensity. The varying, or mixing, of a color is actually a varying of one or more of these dimensions. The meanings of the three dimensions of color are discussed below.

**Hue.** A color's *hue* is its name: red, yellow, blue-green, etc. It also denotes a color's place on the spectrum. Hues are said to have "temperature"—those approaching red are warm and aggressive, those nearer blue are cool and reticent. To visualize other relationships among hues—to show which are complementary (opposite), for example, and which are adjacent (neighboring)—colors are often arranged in their spectrum order on a color wheel. Black, white, and the various grays are not considered hues, but neutrals.

**Value.** The lightness and darkness of a hue is its *value*, as if on a scale from white to black. Gradations of value are critical when describing form in art, building a composition, and evoking mood.

Scales of value, often presented in chart form, can contain anywhere from a few to several distinct gradations. You can assess values easily with grays or with a single hue. Determining value gradations becomes more difficult when several different hues are involved as a group, but this becomes easier with practice.

**Intensity** (also called *chroma*). This describes the purity of a color in terms of its brightness or dullness. A hue of strong or high *intensity* appears vivid and saturated. It also has a simple and straightforward quality and is usually unmixed. A hue of weak or low intensity appears dull and unaggressive. Remember that, in a color sense, "dull" is not a pejorative—it is merely the opposite of "bright."

## ALTERING COLOR'S DIMENSIONS

Color mixing is done by deliberately altering one or more of color's three dimensions. You can manage these color alterations in a variety of ways—many of them unique to the colored pencil medium.

The *hue* of a color is changed by mixing another hue with it. You can do this in two basic ways:

1. *Combine two or more pencil hues by superimposing or layering one color on top of another.* You might use this method to express the rapid hue changes of a sky at sunset.
2. *Combine two or more pencil hues by placing them side by side.* The energetic hue changes in a blooming garden might be shown in this way.

The *value* of one color is changed by adding another color or a neutral that is

lighter or darker to the first color. There are three basic methods for accomplishing this with colored pencils:

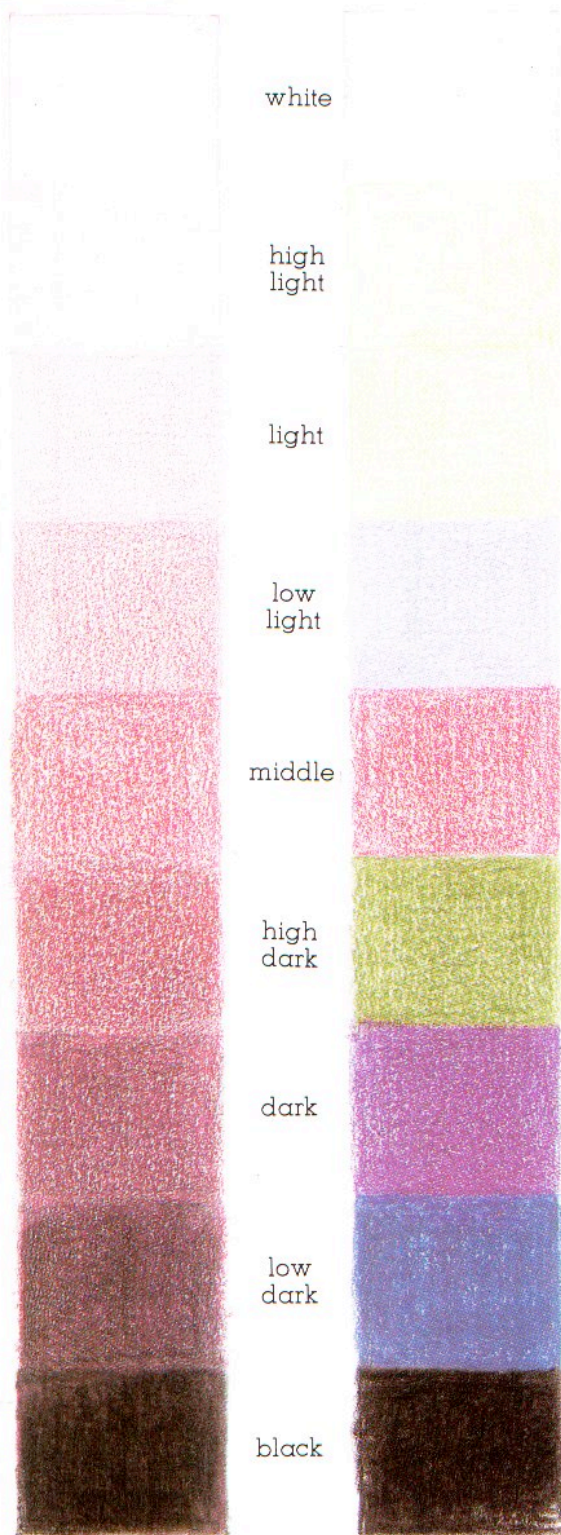
1. *Change the pencil pressure.* When you look at a colored pencil lead, you see that pencil's color at its darkest value. By changing pencil pressure, you are in effect combining more or less of the paper's whiteness with the pencil's color. Moderate to heavy pressure will transfer a deeper value to the paper; lighter values will be expressed by lightening the pencil pressure. This method is useful for gradating values on a flower petal without changing the petal's original brilliance or hue.

2. *Overlay a color with a white or black pencil.* A white pencil overlayed on a dark color will raise or lighten that color's value, but overlaying has little effect on colors that are already of a medium to light value. White pencil excels as an overlay when rendering the effects of glazed surfaces, such as those found on porcelain or stoneware.

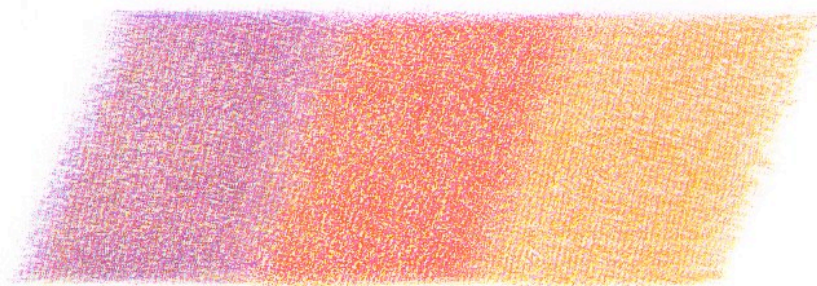
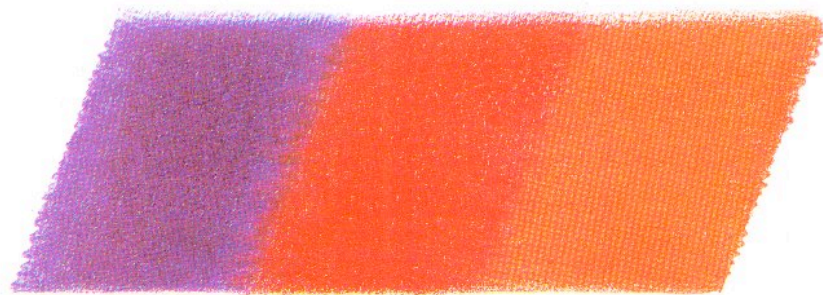
Overlaying black pencil on a color of any value will lower or darken that color's value. Because black also deadens hue and affects the intensity of a color, overlaying with black pigment must be done very carefully. For a city street at dusk, where hue and intensity are intended to be dimly expressed, overlaying with black can be an excellent method of changing value. But used too much or inappropriately, black-altered values can produce a sameness that is tiresome.

3. *Overlay a pencil's color with a lighter or darker color.* Although this method also changes a color's original hue and intensity, it is the colored pencil medium's liveliest way of changing values. The new values arrived at seem crisp and decisive and filled with a richness of hue. This method works well for a portrait's pattern of light and dark values, accompanied as they are by subtle hue changes.

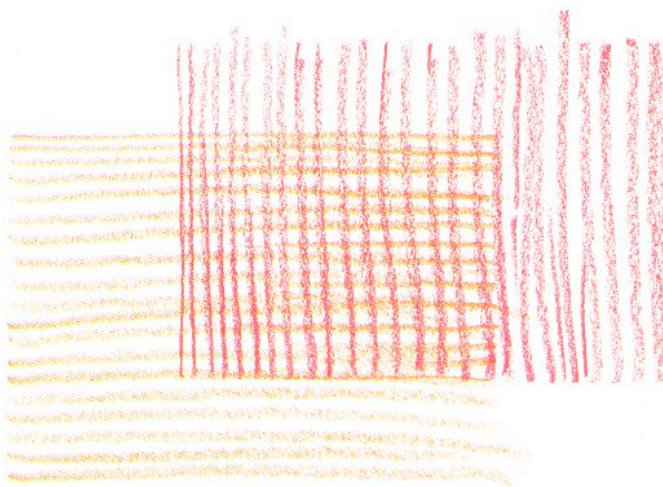
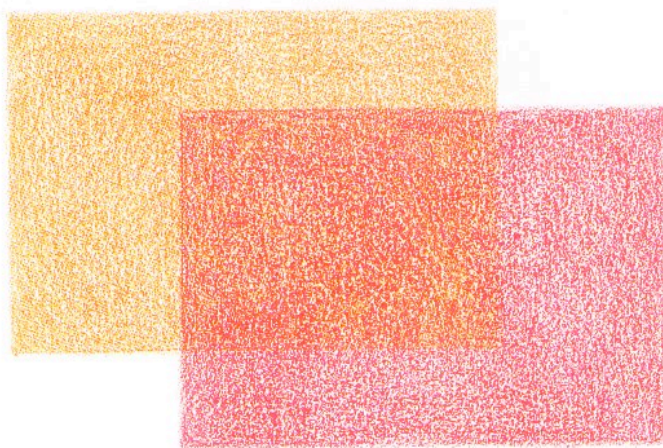




As you see from this pair of charts, the values of a single color (left) are easy to assess and arrange in a progressive order of darkness to lightness. It becomes more difficult to assemble a similar scale of values when colors of differing hues and intensities are used (right).



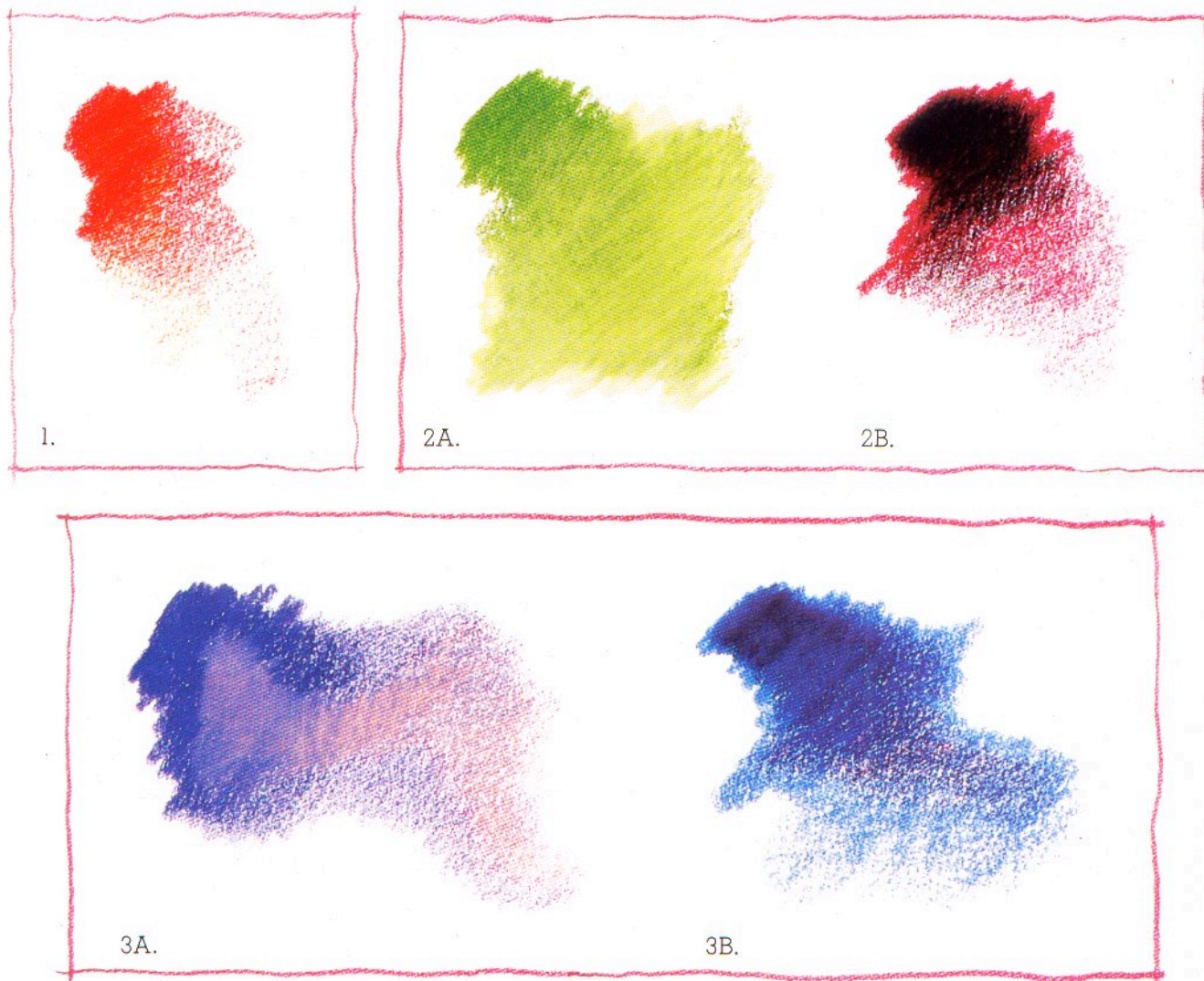
Color can be bright in intensity (top) or dull in intensity (bottom). "Dull" is not a pejorative in terms of color but is merely opposed to "bright" and can often serve as a useful variation.



Colored pencil offers two basic methods of altering a color's hue: by tonally overlaying or superimposing separate hues to construct a new hue (top); and by the juxtaposition of separate hues (in this example with a linear technique) for the visual illusion of a new hue (bottom).



# Changing Value



There are three basic ways of changing the value of a colored pencil's color:

1. Changes in pencil pressure. As more or less whiteness of paper is allowed to show through, the value of a color will appear darker or lighter.

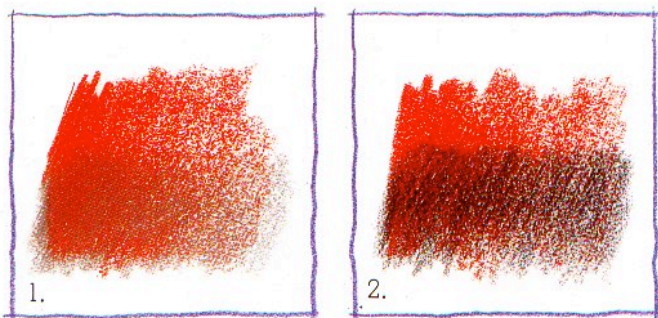
2A. Overlaying a medium-to-dark color with a white pencil. This lightens value.

2B. Overlaying any color with black will darken its value.

3A & B. Overlaying a color with another color, lighter or darker than itself. This method also causes changes in hue and intensity.



# Changing Intensity



A colored pencil's color can be lowered or raised in intensity by various methods.

Intensity is decreased by:

1. Overlaying with a neutral gray.

2. Overlaying a color with black.

3A. Overlaying a color with that of a complementary hue. Using a second color exactly complementary to the original should yield little or no hue change.

3B. Using a near-complementary over the original hue.

4. Thoroughly combining a pencil's color with the two colors adjoining it on the color spectrum. This method tends to subdue intensity more than actually reduce it. In this example, 917 yellow orange was subdued by mixing 918 orange and 916 canary yellow with it.

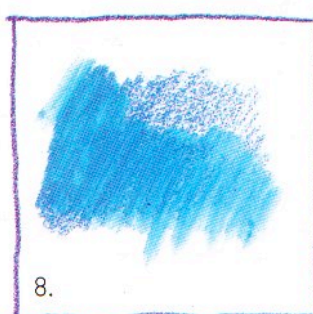
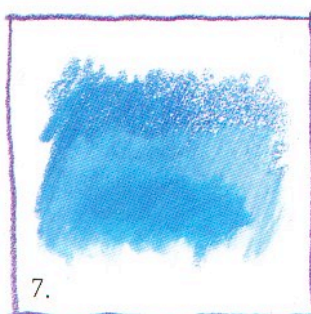
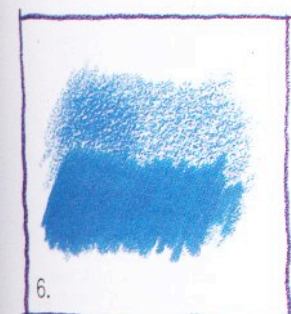
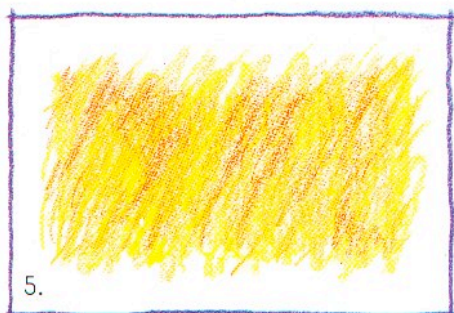
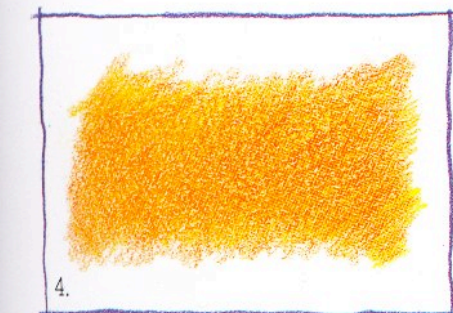
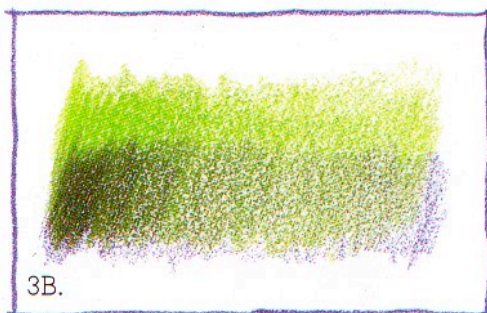
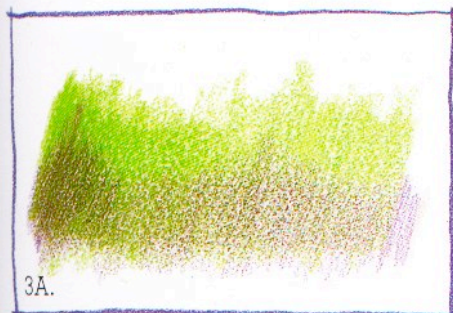
Intensity is increased by:

5. Loosely combining a color with the two colors adjoining it on the spectrum. This is more an optical than a physical effect, related to how we perceive juxtaposed colors. This time, the 917 yellow orange was made more intense with the same 918 orange and 916 canary yellow that was previously used to reduce its intensity.

6. Increasing pencil pressure. Raising intensity in this way also greatly darkens a color's value.

7. Overlaying a color with white pencil, then adding more original color to this mixture.

8. Combining a pencil's color with solvent. The result visually resembles that of heavy pencil pressure. However, using a solvent can also intensify color of light value without darkening it.





# Developing a Discerning Eye

A good eye for color is worth striving for. Sometimes this ability seems intuitive, but in more cases than not, it has been patiently learned. Two areas of skill are involved in developing a good eye for color. One is an ability to recognize and describe a color, whatever its surroundings, in terms of its three dimensions. With this ability, you can make rapid judgments about an existing color mixture's relevance or usefulness. The second area of skill, which grows out of the first, is an equally sure knowledge of how to alter color appropriately by making changes in its dimensions.

A color's temperature is also a factor in how you see color. Warm colors appear warmer and cool colors appear cooler when they are seen against their opposites in temperature. Color temperature also plays a strong part in color's seeming ability to advance or recede in space; warm colors often appear to come forward, and cool colors appear to retreat. A color of more brilliant intensity or of lighter value than its neighbors also seems to come forward in space.

Color also has a profound effect on our emotions and on how we perceive spatially. To better understand how this pertains to drawing with colored pencils, consider what color can offer a drawing's mood and structure:

## MOOD

While most people don't completely understand how sensations of color affect the emotions, it is pretty apparent that they do. People are drawn to color, and they react to it. Memories and associations with certain colors of life bear this out. Most people have special feelings for particular hues.

For many, warm hues suggest activity and vitality. Red, among these hues, may seem particularly compelling. But in great quantity, this same red may bring a shift in mood from vitality to something nearer paralysis. Moods can also be swayed by a color's value or intensity. Light values may seem cheery and open, dark values gloomy. High intensity of color may seem to promote excitement, but low intensity brings a feeling of calm.

A good beginning toward evoking mood in your drawings can be made by observing the colors in your life. Try asking yourself, in environments that set a mood, what part color plays in the

setting. Look for the dominant color, and define it by its value and intensity as well as its hue. Look for contrasts among these things. Note how the location and amount of color can affect mood.

As a practical experiment, make a few small thumbnail drawings with your colored pencils. Use as few drawn clues as possible to suggest mood, except those of color—its placement and its quantity.

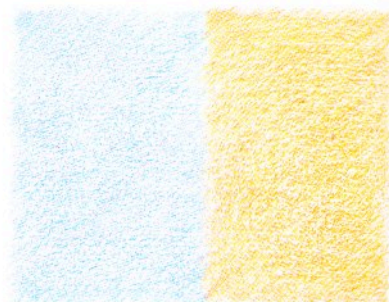
## STRUCTURE

Color also can work its effects on a drawing's structure, which refers to all the elements in a drawing that contribute to the illusions of form and space. You will find as you work with colored pencils that color alone can build some of structure's illusions. It was, incidentally, to work with this premise that the colorist Paul Cézanne devoted much of his painting life.

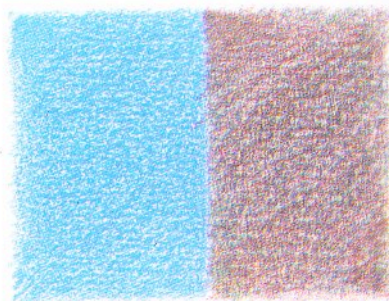
The capacities of color alone to achieve effects of distance, perspective, solidity, and changes in plane, hinge largely on its ability to visually advance or recede. In practical terms, this "action" of color can be utilized when a shape—a table, for instance, or an object on the table—needs to be brought forward or pushed deeper into a picture's space.

A color's hue—aside from its relative warmth or coolness—can also be used to enhance the modeling of form. Because colors under different degrees of light appear to shift toward adjacent hues, an increase in illumination makes blue, for example, become more blue-green. Red, under this condition, becomes nearer red-orange. With decreasing illumination, blue becomes more blue-violet, and red more red-violet.

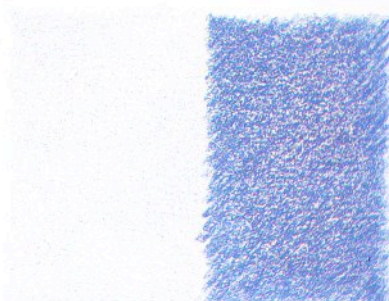
Finally, perhaps the single most important thing to know—for gaining adeptness at mixing colors as well as for sharpening an eye for color—is that all colors have equal status in art. None is by definition useless or ugly. Each, given proper circumstances, can be beautiful and hard-working. What you're really looking for, when you mix color, is appropriateness. The great advantage of colored pencils, as a medium for learning about as well as for drawing with color, is the speed and ease with which you can put color ideas to practical tests.



A



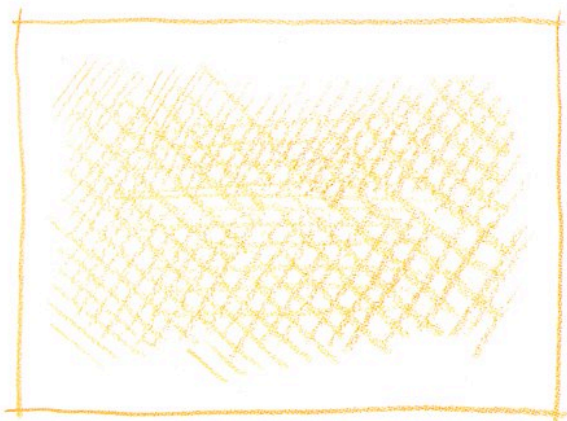
B



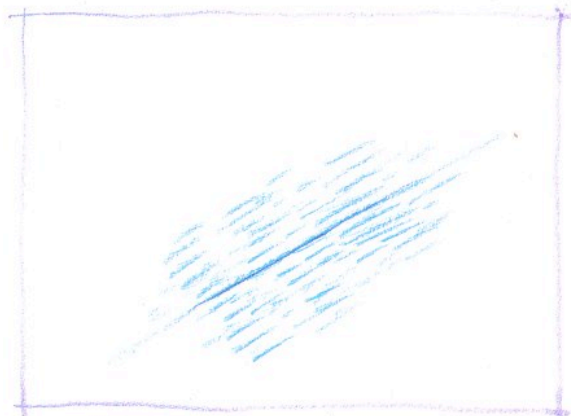
C

A truism of color perception that is not always true is that warm colors invariably advance and cool colors recede. With no other visual clues than the colors themselves, the second two of these three combinations can be seen to advance or recede for different reasons. In A, the warm orange appears to come forward from the cooler blue at its side. But in B, the cool blue also comes forward because it is brighter in intensity than the warm but dulled red. And in C, a light value of blue seems to advance from a darker value of the same hue.





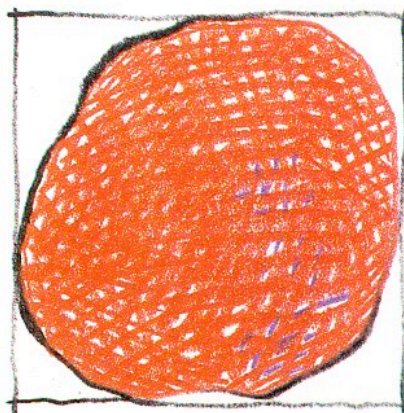
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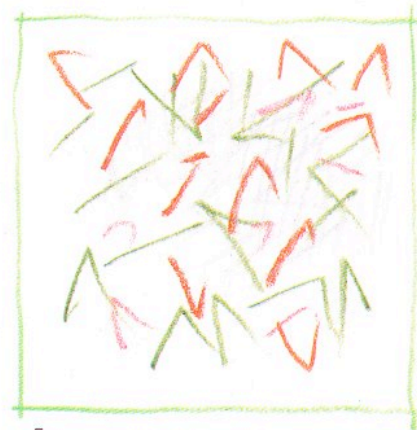
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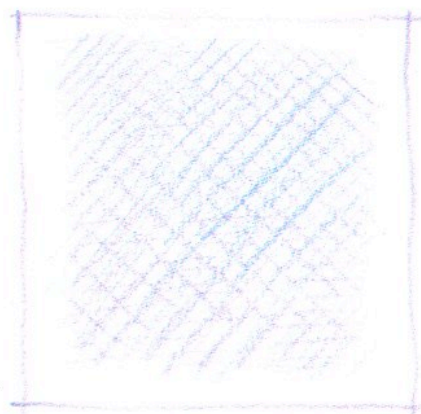
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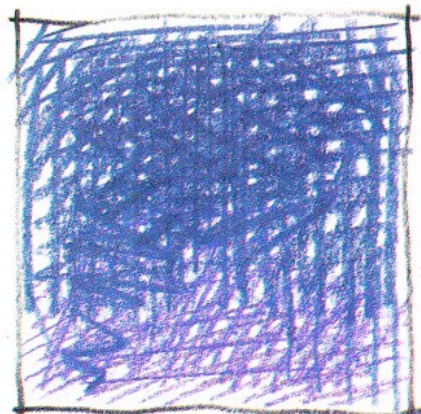
4.



5.



6.



7.

In drawing, as in life, color—depending upon its quantity, quality and placement—can have a major effect on mood. What mood is suggested to you as you isolate each thumbnail drawing from its neighbors? Compare your feelings with these:

1. Warmth, pleasantness 2. Uneasiness 3. Frivolity 4. Anxiety, maybe absurdity  
5. Confusion 6. Serenity 7. Foreboding



# Creating Structure with Color

Try this simple experiment, which contains a key to how color can be used in creating a drawing's structure.

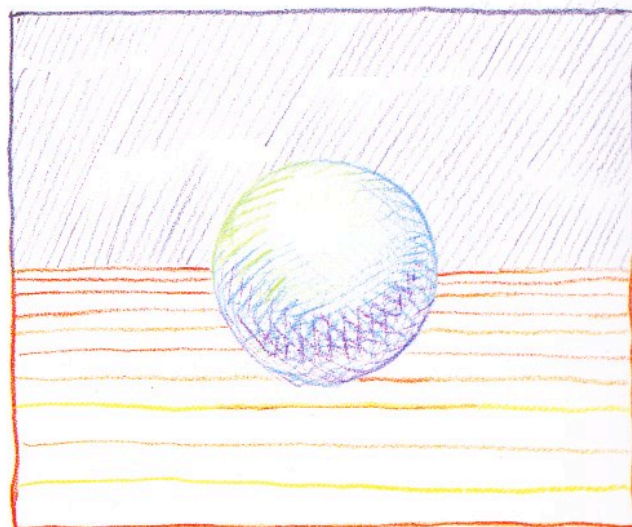
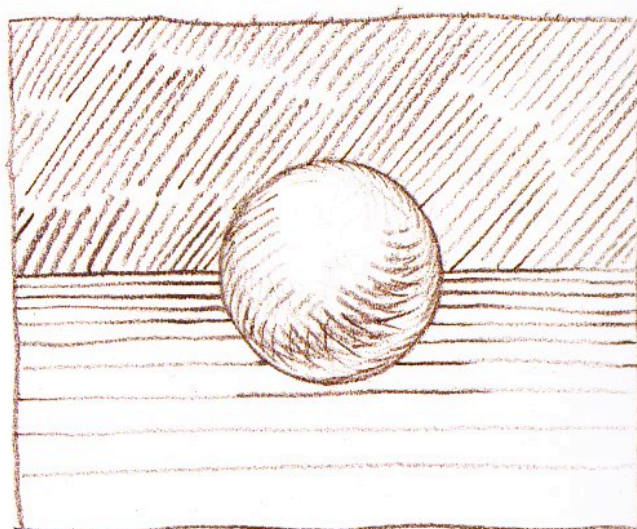
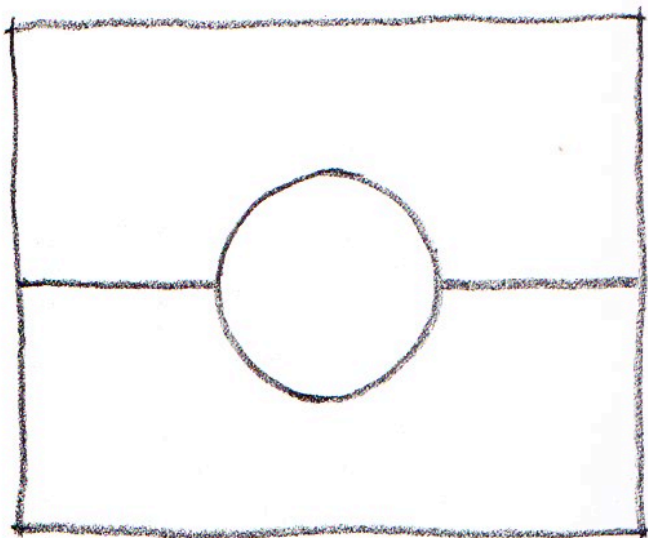
With a black pencil, draw the schematic shown of a circle within a rectangle, and the rectangle divided lengthwise by a line. The elements of this little drawing appear flat, with no feeling of dimensionality. Still using a black pencil, add an illusion of form and space by diagonally hatching the area above the bisecting "horizon" line, and by adding some light horizontal strokes to symbolize a lighter foreground. Add some additional hatching lines as a core shadow to the circle, making it seem a sphere. With these changes in value you have constructed a linear drawing that contains a credible illusion of form and space.

Adding a few appealing colors to this drawing might now seem the logical way to convert to color—and it is often the kind of approach made to color drawing. However, the only truly satisfactory way to accomplish structure in drawing with color is to begin with color. To see how color creates form by itself, outline the rectangle of the schematic with a 922 scarlet red pencil (or combined with a 901 indigo blue). Draw a circle with a 903 true blue and the bisecting line with a 922 scarlet red. These colors—chosen for their particular abilities to advance and recede—will serve as the basis for creating form and structure.

Because the background above the horizon is meant to recede, a 901 indigo blue (a cool hue of low intensity) is a good choice for the diagonal hatching in this area. To bring the foreground forward, begin with a 922 scarlet red near the horizon, warming it with 918 orange as it comes forward, and ending with a 916 canary yellow where it is to read as farthest forward.

Because color also has the ability to suggest form by its shifts in hue under different degrees of illumination, this sphere, which is blue, ought to appear more green where it is most illuminated, and nearer violet where it is least illuminated. To utilize this aspect of color, draw the sphere's core shadow this time with a 903 true blue crosshatched with its adjacent hue of 932 violet. Further restate the bottom of the sphere with a 932 violet, and the top contour—where most light hits it—with the blue's other adjacent, a 910 true green.

You now have a second drawing that contains an illusion of form and space. But note how this second structural illusion, built with a combination of line and color, seems to more clearly state its feeling of form and depth, and also to evoke its own mood.





# Tonal Techniques

In the sense that graphite pencils work best with the linear form of expression, colored pencils work best with the tonal form.

Tonal drawing refers to the effect produced by pencil strokes applied so closely together and so compactly that they appear to merge. This is done without smudging or rubbing, and the tones achieved in this way lose almost all suggestion of line.

## HOW TONE IS ACHIEVED WITH COLORED PENCILS

Tones are made with a colored pencil's point (sharp, dull, or blunt) or with its shaft (the side of the lead). The quality of tone produced can be strongly or subtly influenced by the shape of the pencil's point, as well as by the method in which the pencil is used. A slow and

careful stroking with a very fine point or the pencil's shaft, will yield a much coarser effect.

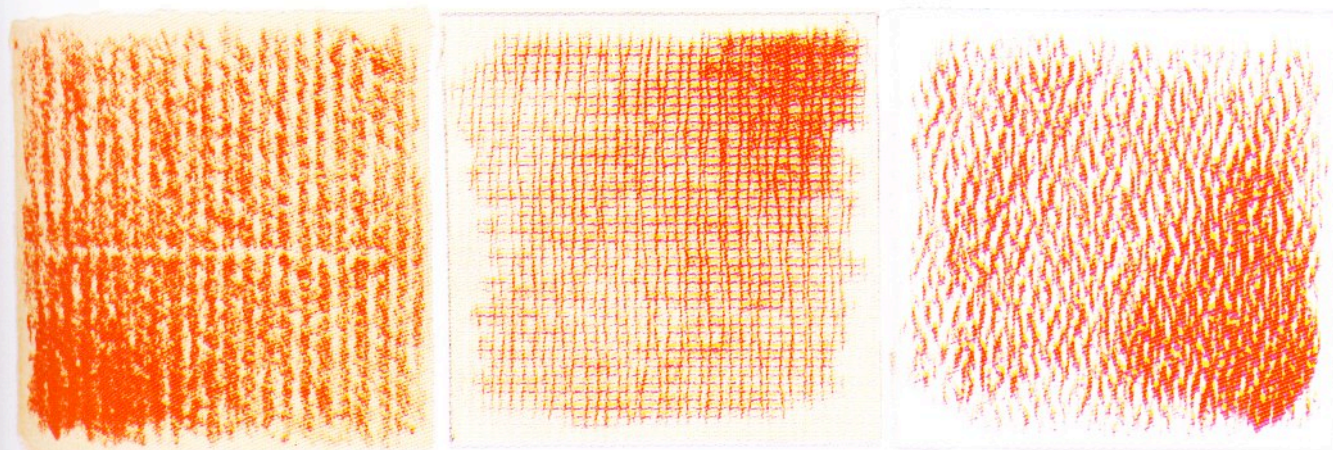
Individual temperament also influences color pencil tones. The same pencil in different hands may produce very different tones, with a range in appearance from loosely vigorous to machinelike.

## PENCIL PRESSURE AND PAPER SURFACE

As stated earlier, the pressure with which a colored pencil is applied has a great effect on that color's value. A wide scale of tonal values can be expressed for each color by varying your pencil pressure. The only limitation is that each pencil has its own inherent value, which is what you see when you look at the lead; and it is what deter-

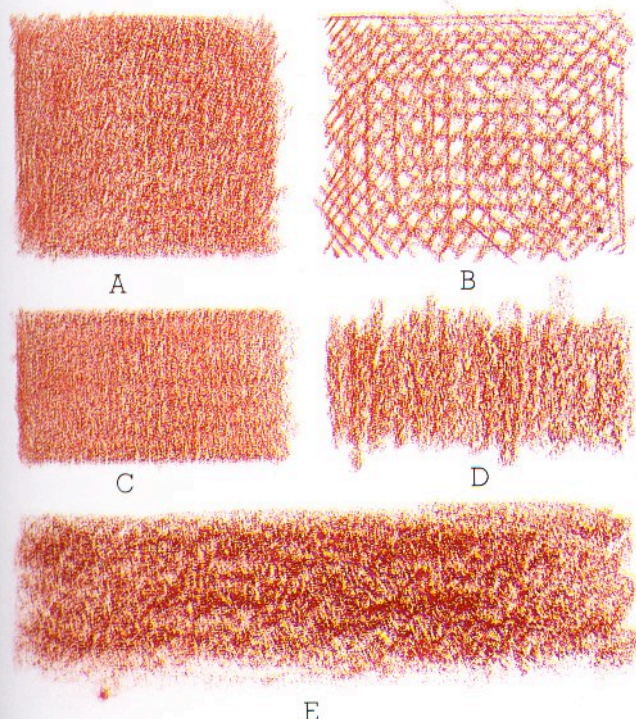
mines the maximum dark value available in that pencil.

A paper's surface also plays a critical part in the achievement of colored pencil tones. We have seen how particles of a colored pencil's lead are "filed off" by a medium-grained paper's tooth. This is desirable; it is in fact what makes the unique results of this medium possible. When working with tone, the texture and pattern of a paper or drawing surface become strong factors that must be taken into account. These surfaces are readily apparent underneath medium-to-dark tones, and similarly, a repeating or obviously patterned surface can become an unexpected and unwanted element in a drawing. On the other hand, a particular surface might be exactly what you want. So before launching out full-

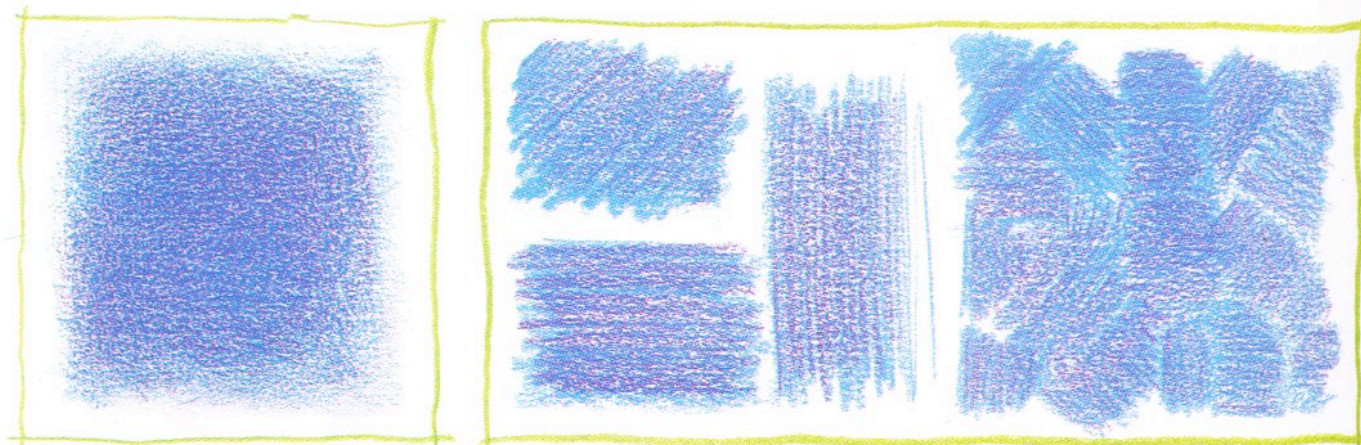


The three tones (above) were made on textured surfaces and show how a pattern is discernible through the colored pencil tone.

The difference between colored pencil tones achieved (left) with a tonal technique and those made with a linear technique can be seen at A and B. The following three variations of tonal technique are made using: C—a sharp pointed pencil, D—a dull pointed pencil, and E—the pencil's shaft.







Colored pencil tones can be directional or non-directional. Compare the nondirectional tone at left with those at right, which are diagonal, horizontal, vertical, and "bundled." In directional tones, a slight linear quality is allowed to remain.

scale on a new or untried paper surface, it is always wise to experiment with the paper surface first and find out what effect it will have on your tonal work.

### LAYERED TONES

Because colored pencils are semi-opaque—what we perceive as transparent—the tones made with them are often achieved by layering, the superimposition of one pencil color over another. This technique can result in more subtle and more complex tones.

Layering tones with combinations of pencil colors is an exciting and very efficient method of color mixing. For example, choose a particular pencil color at random and then lay down a row of six good-sized patches of tone. Then choose five additional pencil colors, also at random. Lay down a layer of color over five of the color patches, using a different pencil color for each and leaving one patch of color untouched. You are likely to be surprised at how much your constructed tonal colors differ from the unlayered one and at how many ways in which they differ. There is much to discover by experimenting with random changes.

To make your results more predictable, start again with another six patches of the same tone, this time using one of the primary or secondary hues of the spectrum. Leaving one patch unlayered, add a complementary color to a second patch, and a near-complementary to a third. To a fourth and a fifth patch add the patch color's adjacent hue on each side, and to the last patch add both these adjacents. Now compare the unlayered patch with the first two layered patches—those with complementary and near-complementary colors added—and you will find hues of lessened intensity. The

three remaining patches that are layered with analogous colors will look brighter than the unlayered original, or possibly slightly subdued but no duller. Your experiments here should convince you that color is dependable.

### DIRECTION IN TONES

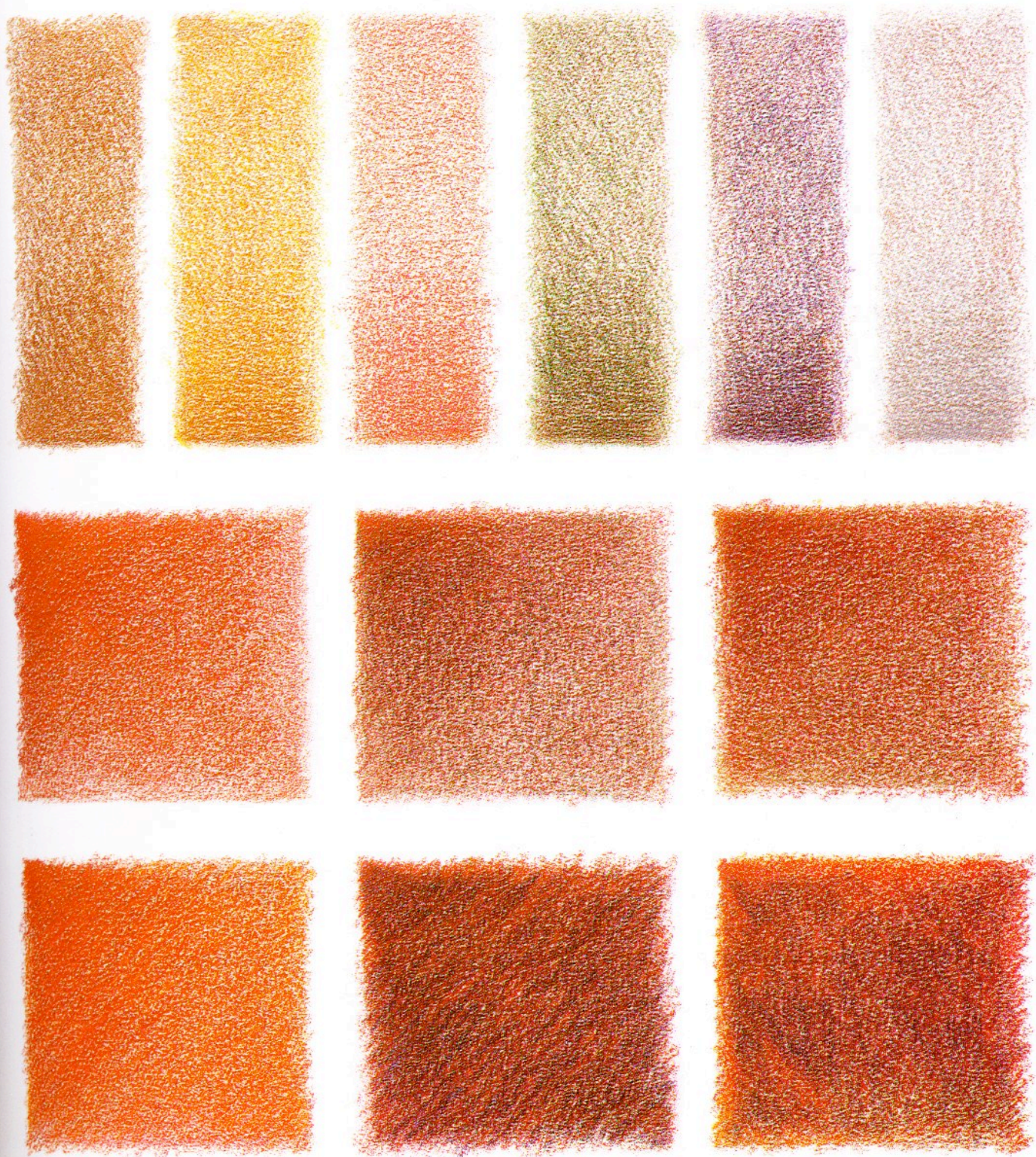
Sometimes a colored pencil tone shows no trace of line or direction. It appears to blossom of its own volition, with delicate gradations and a look of quiet granularity. It is a tone with an air of elegance. This nondirectional kind of tone is achieved by careful pencil stroking with a fine point, and by changing the direction of these strokes so frequently that you develop no linear quality. For these changes in direction, shift your hand angle often, or shift the paper itself as needed.

However, some colored pencil tones are directional; they reveal an energetic, almost linear thrust. This effect is produced by laying the tones down in a pattern that is consistently diagonal, horizontal, or vertical. This kind of tone can also be characterized by seemingly random changes in direction, or by being organized into "bundles" suggesting a woven texture. A spirited directional tone sometimes gives way to line, resulting in a fusing of linear and tonal techniques.

### HANDLING TONAL EDGES

The handling of edges with colored pencils—whether edges of contours or edges of neighboring colors—can be extremely expressive. In art, the edges we see are compelling elements and are probably fundamental to all our visual perceptions. How we handle our edges in drawing not only delineates shape, it imparts to our work a flavor and mood, and ultimately becomes a telling characteristic of our style.





### COMBINING COLORS

How colors combine can quickly be seen when they are tonally layered over one another. In the top row, six patches were made with a 943 burnt ochre. The first patch was left unchanged, and to each of the other five patches a second, randomly chosen hue was applied. These added hues are (reading from left); 916 canary yellow, 929 pink, 911 olive green, 932 violet, and 949

silver.

In the six larger patches, a 924 crimson red was applied first to the patch at left center. This patch remains unaltered. To the first patch at its right was added its complementary hue, a 910 true green; and to the right-hand patch, a near-complementary, 913 green bice. These additions of color appear to reduce the intensity of the

original color.

In the bottom row, the original color's two adjacent colors were added—a 918 orange at bottom left, and a 931 purple at bottom center—and to the last patch, both adjacent colors were added. Mixing together adjacent hues will usually subdue an initial color without dulling it.