

Workshop in Tonal Value

This is a workshop in monochrome painting: painting with one color. In the following exercises you'll discover how contrasting tones of the same color can help you achieve dramatic effects.

The chart on this page is a value scale from one to eight, with one always representing white and eight representing the highest or deepest value of the color. It doesn't matter how many levels a scale has; it merely illustrates the idea that every color has a range of values from light to dark.

I've used Sepia in this chart but any color's value can be adjusted in exactly the same way. And how is that? If you want to reduce the value (or intensity) of a color, add more water; if you want to increase the value (or intensity), add more pigment. It's that simple. But remember: This takes place in either a mixing bowl or on your palette. Never attempt to add water or squeeze raw pigment directly into your painting.

Keep Your Value Chart at Hand

You will be painting a number of pictures in this chapter, and I'll be making plenty of references to value. I'll tell you when to add water or paint to adjust the values. Keep the value chart at right in the front of your mind. Throughout the book I'll periodically say to mix a color or colors to a value of, for example, three. By referring to the value scale above, you'll know approxi-

mately what shade of mixture I'm asking for. You can also make a simple black-and-white photocopy of the value chart and pin it up in your painting room for quick reference.

How to Adjust Value

We will use two methods of value adjustment: (1) adding extra pigment to our mix; and (2) glazing. Glazing, or laying one coat or wash of paint over another wash after it has dried, is the most common method of increasing value.

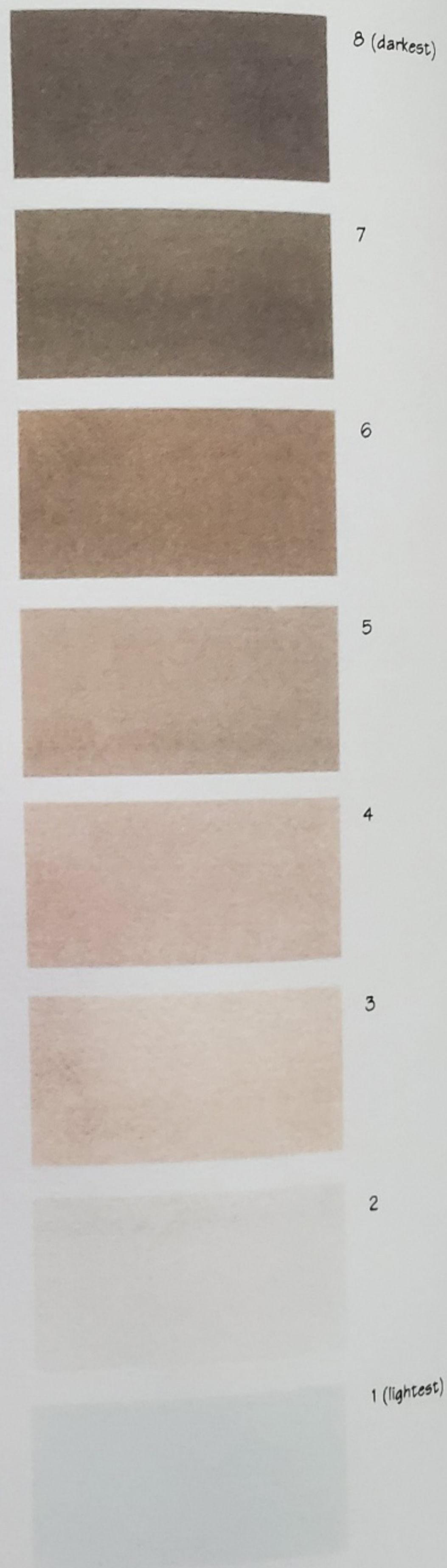
Keep in mind that you use only one color, Sepia, in all the following exercises. The only difference is the value of Sepia. All illustrations are approximately 5" x 7" (13cm x 18cm). I've tried to keep these exercises as simple—and fun—as possible. The subjects are all things I have seen.

Time to Start

Enough theory! I've learned that excessive analysis produces artistic paralysis. See for yourself how the following series of illustrations come to life simply by adjusting the values in the monochrome paintings.

Practice

Pick a color, any color, and practice adding water to it until you can control the values.



Value scale in Sepia.

Exercise One: Church Window



Step 1: Pencil Sketch



Step 2: First Value Wash
With a value of about three, paint the window and frame, some detail around the flowers and the shadow of the flower box. When dry, use the same value and glaze in the shadow of the building along the top and the shadow of the clapboard.



Step 3: Glazing for Detail
Still using the same value, add detail to the flowers with a pointed brush, again by glazing. Notice how this bumps the value up to approximately four or five on our scale. We all know flowers come in different colors; that's why we're painting them with different values—to suggest this color contrast.



Step 4: Final Glaze
Using a value of about five, paint over the window again with a 1/2-inch (12mm) square brush, being careful not to paint over the other church window showing inside. By not painting over the second window it stays at a lower value, and this contrast suggests light is coming through it. Glaze again to add a little more detail to the flower leaves. And that's it—a simple exercise in tonal values!