

MESSAGE FROM ERIC

- January -

LANDSCAPE VALUE DISTRIBUTION

In photographs, the lights are often overexposed so that the ground and sky plane will appear to be the same value, or the darks are underexposed and reveal no reflected color, only blackness. Understanding the proper value relationships of the planes in a landscape can help you overcome the shortcomings of your reference photos.

In most cases the landscape can be divided into four planes: sky, ground, hill, and trees. In order to preserve their distinct identities, each of these needs to be assigned a different value.

If the sun is overhead, the mass with the lightest value is the sky, regardless of whether it's sunny or overcast. The second lightest value will be assigned to the ground plane because it receives the full impact of the light source from directly overhead. In order for the ground to appear flat and below the sky, the ground must be a darker value than the sky.

The third value is assigned to hills, because an inclined plane does not receive the overhead sun rays as directly as a horizontal plane. The fourth and darkest value is reserved for vertical objects, as they are in shadow and receive reflected light off the ground.

This value distribution—not the details in the painting—is what makes the sky go overhead, the ground lie flat, the hills incline, and the trees and buildings appear vertical.

There are many variations of this model. For example, when the sun is low in the sky, verticals will receive the most light and consequently would be the lightest value mass. Sand, snow, or sometimes water, may be as light or lighter than the sky, as they are highly reflective.

The important thing to remember is that in order to paint a realistic landscape, the value masses need to be in the right relationship to each other.

The fourth DVD in my Painting Loosely from Photographs series, Landscape Theory, covers this topic in depth. It's on special this month. Check out all of our January Store Specials.

Keep your brush wet,

Eric



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